HOBBES IN THE USA

PANIC JAMESON

TOTALITARIAN LIBERALISM

Japan at escape velocity

The last intellectuals

Canadian Journal of
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THEORY

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory
Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale

Subscription information should be addressed to:
CJPST
Concordia University
7141 Sherbrooke St. West
Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6

The Journal acknowledges with gratitude the generous assistance of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada/Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines au Canada.

Publication of the Journal has been facilitated by the generous assistance of Concordia University, and in particular by the Department of Political Science, by the Office of the Dean of Social Science, and by the Fonds F.C.A.R.

Indexed in/indexée au: International Political Science Abstracts/Documentation politique internationale; Sociological Abstracts Inc., Advance Bibliography of Contents: Political Science and Government; Canadian Periodical Index; and Alternative Press Index.

Member of the Canadian Periodical Publisher's Association.

Cover Design: Marilouise Kroker

ISSN 0380-9420 Printed in Canada

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory

Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale

Volume 12, Numbers 3, 1988

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Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, no. 3 (Fall 1988)

HOBBES AND/OR NORTH: THE RHETORIC OF AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY

Frederick M. Dolan

Thus Satan, talking to his nearest mate,
With head uplift above the wave and eyes
That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
Lay floating may a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
Briareos or Typhon, whom the den
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream.
Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind,
Moors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays.

— Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I

1

Paradise Lost, completed little more than a decade after the publication of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), reasserts the sea-beast's sinful deceptiveness. For Hobbes, the dissolution of the metaphysical underpinnings of rule by divine right occasioned the construction of an "Artificiall Man . . . of greater stature and strength than the Naturall . . . ."[1]

Although the breakup of the *ancien régime* appeared to cast man out of his Christian, eschatological "paradise" and into a world bereft of sure moorings, man might build a landing of his own, if only he rid himself of the scholastic fantasies that kept him ignorant of his powers as a God-like *artificer*. *Leviathan* performs this task in part by ironically inverting the story of Genesis: Eden, in Hobbes's optic, is the harsh and unruly state of nature, of which to be cast out is a blessing; and "that sea — beast/Leviathan," classic symbol of Satan, becomes man's true and only Savior. In Milton's epic, the shifting, unreliable leviathan is mistaken for "some island" — literally *land*, or a *ground* — to which a sailor adrift might anchor himself, escaping the turbulent winds and the dangers of the night. Man's attempt to anchor himself in the ground — in matter, that is, rather than spirit — binds him intimately, Milton suggests, to Satan's revolt against God, and so in reality to a perpetual de — anchoring, a permanent *méconnaissance* of the profane for the sacred. Hobbes aims to show that the Satanic revolt was well — considered, for what man left behind when dismissed from paradise was nothing other than God's "natural" world ("Nature . . . the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World" (81)), in which, as Hobbes tells us, man's life was in fact solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. The state — man's artificially created ground — is the truly limitless power, greater, potentially, than God's nature.

The leviathan-state cannot *simply* replace the anchor of God, however, because Hobbes's attempt to *invent* a new anchor and a new ground relies upon the privileging of capacities that are adrift owing to qualities inherent in the ground-creating, world — interpreting being, Hobbes's "natural" individual. With the same gesture that liberates man's creativity, Hobbes takes it back by insisting on total obedience to his self-created state, reinvesting in the notion of sin and the baleful consequences of revolt — not against God, now, but against the state. Despite their chronological order, *Leviathan* might profitably be read as a Satanic backward masking of *Paradise Lost* — a kind of black mass in which the punishment for disobedience is being cast out of the paradise of a well-ordered society and into God's stateless, indeed hellish, "Nature." With the grounding of the only possible paradise in the deceptive sea-beast of human art, the ground is no longer a ground. Like Milton's Satan, man with his artificial leviathan has been driven into the deep, into Nietzsche's "darkly chopping sea" of uncertainty.[2] Sea changes in this groundless ground are to be expected; the covenants out of which human societies are made will respond to the

constant seductions of man's own nature, or what Hobbes calls his "passions." Obedience to state authority emerges as both absolutely necessary and absolutely impossible to guarantee: the artificer that makes the leviathan can always undo it. Hobbes's solution to this politico-metaphysical problem is an elaborate and delicately balanced network of disciplines, constraints, and controls as the condition of man's "freedom" and "power."

Hobbesian man, then, is like the "doublet empirico-transcendental" of Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*: absolutely sovereign and utterly disciplined. An analogous "undecidability" is central, I shall suggest, to the vocabulary of "containment," which has dominated American discussion of foreign affairs since World War Two. Although said to be a Lockean society devoted to maximizing individual freedom, American public and quasi-public figures have promulgated a discourse that tacitly specifies the conditions under which the United States must put aside its Lockean commitments. Ronald Reagan, Oliver L. North and his cabal, and anonymous Pentagon planners have built a discursive bridge leading back behind Locke to Hobbes. They have disclosed — in a Heideggerian sense — an America in which Lockean categories of thought and action are indiscernible, but, as we shall see, they have not fixed the groundless ground that haunts Hobbes's project. Instead, they have pushed to the limit the American anxiety over our schizophrenic coupling of radical freedom with subjection to nature, or what North calls our "dangerous world." For what must strike anyone who followed the debates surrounding the Iran-contra affair was their enigmatic incoherency. Watching Congress's passionate defense of the public's right to know, coupled with careful avoidance of any leads suggesting improper actions by the Central Intelligence Agency, it was difficult not to conclude that most members of the committees investigating the Iran-contra affair sensed that their world no longer reflected, and could not reflect, the theory of constitutionally limited representative democracy they all-too-hesitantly invoked. It was as if the rhetoric of democracy itself had been placed *sous rature*: the committee members could not *not* speak of democracy, but neither could they fully convince themselves of the contemporary relevance of democratic principles. What haunts America now is a political identity crisis: Are we a Lockean or an Hobbesian society?

2

Hobbes's "natural" subject of knowledge and power poses a curious (though for the postmodern sensibility, familiar) dilemma: it can ground itself only in what it creates out of its own resources, yet the world that it thereby discloses, if it is to be compelling, must appear to it as the discovery of a privileged natural object, sign, or kind. To be sure, Hobbes's attempt at epistemological recovery cannot simply be assimilated to "Platonism." For Hobbes, whose model of inquiry derives from Euclidean geometry rather than Platonic dialectic, "*truth* consisteth in the right

ordering of names" (105) and not in the direct mirroring of an uninterpreted reality. The very idea of an uninterpreted reality is, for Hobbes, a legacy of the "Vain Philosophy, and Fabulous Traditions" that he attacks in Chapter 46 of *Leviathan*. "Vain Philosophy" teaches that from a statement such as "Man is a living body" we must infer the existence of three ontologically distinct essences: man, living body, and being itself. In fact, terms such as "*Entity, Essence, Essentiall, Essentiality*" are "no Names of Things; but Signes, by which wee make known, that wee conceive the Consequence of one name or Attribute to another" (691). Nonetheless, Hobbes is very far from putting all discourse on the same level: the doctrine of separated essences, for example, involves taking literally what are in fact only "empty names," as opposed to Hobbes's nominalism which attends scrupulously to the *nature* of language. Making good the Hobbesian critique of separated essences depends upon constituting a subject of knowledge who can "remember what every name he uses stands for," and who can "place it accordingly" (105); it depends, that is, upon fixed definitions and unambiguous distinctions purged of figural language. In constructing his rigorously unambiguous and logically consistent system, however, Hobbes relies upon the suppressed figural dimension of terms that are crucial to his discussion of man and society. Attention to Hobbes's rhetoric — in particular, the tropes with which he appears to mobilize the authority of nature to compel obedience to discourse — reveals the shifting ground of Hobbesian politico-linguistic authority.

As a subject of scientific knowledge that transcends that of the "Schoolemen," Hobbes's natural man needs a long memory to support his "Knowledge of Consequences." Nevertheless, as a subject capable of abandoning the state of nature and entering into political covenants, such a subject must be able to reinterpret political meanings effortlessly. The subject whose memory of nature is long demands a correspondingly short *political* memory. How can these epistemological figures be combined in one subject? Hobbes reconciles the two by founding knowledge on what he calls "fancy," a word that can refer both to an accurate mental representation of an external object, and an invention, caprice, delusion, or fictional image. As an *ambiguous* sign, "fancy" performs essential functions in Hobbes's science of politics, despite the latter's alleged dependence upon words "purged from ambiguity." To avert the impotence of "Insignificant Speech," the subject must avoid the "Absurdity" of words severed from their "*Definitions*" — the dark vocabulary of scholastic fantasy that, for Hobbes, has affinities to immaturity and madness. This is no mere epistemological problem, for it is the regulation of the passions by thought, as refined, ideally, into a *method*, that enables individuals to perceive their long-term interest in security and therefore sacrifice the unlimited exercise of natural rights to the stability of a social contract.

Consider first Hobbes's evocation of the mechanics of "Sense," which in turn explain the origin of "Thoughts." Thoughts, he writes, are "every

one a Representation or Apparance." A representation designates an "Object, ... a body without us." The relation of thought to its object, then, initially appears as the classical epistemological puzzle concerning the possibility of knowledge of the external world. Hobbes proposes, of course, a mechanical solution: the movement of objects in space produces a corresponding movement in the senses. The "cause of Sense," Hobbes tells us,

> is the Externall Body, or Object, which presseth the organ proper to each Sense . . . which pressure, by the mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the Brain, and Heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself: which endeavour because *Outward*, seemeth to be some matter without. And this *seeming*, or *fancy*, is that which men call *Sense* (85).

Although this theory shows the method by which the subject can have thoughts of the "body without," it cannot account for the possibility of *reflection* upon objects that are not immediately present to the senses. If representations are caused by "pressure" on the sense organs from the "body without," how is memory possible? How can the object be present in the imagination when it is not exerting pressure on the senses?

Hobbes's answer is that the "counter-pressure," or the movement of the sensory organ, reverberates for some time after the original pressure of the object has ceased, though not indefinitely; the reverberation gradually "decays." Since the movement of the sensory organ outlasts the movement of the object, without, however, outlasting it indefinitely, a kind of thought not under the immediate sway of desire becomes possible, namely deliberation. The mechanism of "decay" ensures that the subject may entertain, in the imagination, a "fancy" or "relique" of the object's impact, thus establishing the possibility of knowledge of the connections between past events and, therefore, of instrumental action oriented towards the future.[3] This foundation has been secured, however, at the cost of constituting the knowledge of events as "fancy." The mental representation of a thing, a fancy, can also be an invention or caprice, and as such tends to blur the distinctions between the names that Hobbes strives to keep carefully "placed." The depiction of knowledge of the past as the remains of an originally fully present (but now decaying) "fancy" necessarily renders knowledge opaque, vague, and ambiguous.

This becomes clearer if we consider that for Hobbes, the mechanism of decay is not only the dwindling of sensory motions set off by the pressure of an object, but rather the interference of *other* objects, nearer in time, which obscure, muffle, and cover over the previous movement. If fancies did not decay and could not be pushed aside by the pressure of other objects, the subject would, after all, be confined to a perpetual present — or past. Ironically, the mechanism that makes possible the *growth* of knowledge is a continuous layering process that might equally well be

said to yield a *loss* of knowledge, as the apprehension of the "body without" is complicated by a continually revised mass of experience that has the status of an ambiguous fancy, caprice, or invention. Such a view of experience is crucial, of course, to Hobbes's vision of an unconditioned invention of the political order: the subject of political action must be free of past contingencies and traditional values, viewing the accumulation of knowledge as raw material for creative manipulation. At the same time, however, knowledge of the connections between past events is essential to a scientific subject who abandons scholastic fantasy in favor of exact knowledge of causal relations. "Fancy" is a term whose dual meanings are equally necessary to Hobbes's derivation of sovereign power.

The contradictory character of "decay" appears again in Hobbes's discussion of how rational speech wards off the error threatened by the unavoidable layering of fancy in knowledge. In Hobbes's genesis of the natural individual, a crucial property of speech is its capacity to offset the unreliability and insubstantiality of ambiguous sensory phenomena. The signs of language, Hobbes says, attenuate or "delay" the decay of signs long enough to enable these "reliques" of external motion to perform as the objects of an intelligible discourse of deliberation and explanation. Decay cannot and must not be eliminated, but thanks to rightly ordered speech it can be postponed long enough for the accumulation of "Knowledge of Consequences," or memory. This stable language of consequences, in turn, provides the foundation in the natural individual for those effects of power specific to Hobbes's "Artificiall Man": for without this faculty of knowledge, as Hobbes puts it, "there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears, and Wolves" (100). If, however, the delay afforded by linguistic signs is the mechanism that lends stability to a self-invalidating sensory apparatus, Hobbesian language itself raises, albeit in a different form, the very difficulties bound up in the ambiguities of fancy. For Hobbes, the horizon of clear and distinct ideas is populated by dream-like visions, absurdity, giddiness, and finally madness. Speech, which enables memory and the knowledge of consequences, is in itself no guarantee of reason. Hobbes's vivid examples of intellectual error are governed by the figure of a subject who has lost control over speech, trapped in a meaningless show of vain images that are incapable of reaching the real world. The discourse of the "Schoole-men" aptly symbolizes this mad speech in which words are juggled for purely ornamental effect. Far from having mastered language to escape the uncertainty of fancy, the subject of dogmatic fantasy is literally dissolved into the signs of language themselves, a plaything of discourse rather than an agent who orders the world by "settling on . . . definitions." So radically impotent a subject, absorbed not in the strict calculation of consequences but by the contemplation of a display of representations, is in no respect the stuff of the "Artificiall Man."

The emergence of a Hobbesian subject of power is linked to the invention of a language "purged from ambiguity," but how does one move from the aesthetic play of signs to a discourse of empirical causes and effects, when the very condition of thought and representation is the permanent possibility of decay, layering, and substitution? Hobbes deals with the ambiguities that arise here by referring them to other domains, via the textual strategies that Jacques Derrida has isolated under the rubric of "supplementation."[4]

We have noted how the gradual decay of sensory motion establishes both the possibility of thought and the layering over of its object. Hobbes insists that "There is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense" (94). Mental representations are derived from the pressure of bodies upon the senses, as we have seen, but since the latter persist as "reliques" and "fancies," representations can be linked together by the mind in a virtually unlimited variety of combinations. An event can be mentally attached to any other event, therefore becoming imaginatively tied together; and, as Hobbes notes, they can as easily be untied, dissolved, and recombined. If this vertiginous option is extended, it "comes to pass in time," Hobbes says, "that in the imagining of anything, there is no certainty what we shall imagine next."[5] The terror of unregulated thought is articulated through images of variance and eccentricity: persons friendless and alone, wills empty of desire, disharmonious, and caught in the "wild ranging of the mind." This "uncertainty about what we shall imagine next," Hobbes says, is delirium. Sanity, of course, consists in experiencing ourselves as enduring subjects acting in time. Since, on Hobbes's account, it is in the nature of human beings as speakers that delirium remains a constant possibility — that thought might become "*unguided, without Designe*, and inconstant" — some principle is required to establish how the subject avoids falling prey to the anarchic play of imagination. Speech, whose resources were introduced to correct the ambiguities of sense, is now itself felt to require similar treatment.

"Passion," "desire, and designe" are the figures that Hobbes now introduces to discipline the paralyzing chaos of memory, imagination, and fancy unleashed by a disorderly language. Desire accomplishes this task by positing some aim for the subject, lending direction to the associative spontaneity of thought by organizing it according to a teleological movement towards the real world of consequences. "Thoughts," when ordered by desires, become organized as "Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things desired." Not only does desire supply direction and coherency to the imagination, it also increases the sense of substantiality attached to its representations: "The impression made by such things as wee desire," in Hobbes's pithy phrase, "is strong and permanent" (95). Desire and speech reinforce one another, prolonging the life of a given impression despite the constant intrusion of fresh experience. Yet in a sense,

Hobbes is exploiting still another meaning of the metaphor with which he began his genealogy of the natural individual: "fancy" can mean not only a mental representation, but also something desired by an individual. In appealing to passion to regulate the chaos of sense and thought, Hobbes is relying upon the multiple significations of his original metaphor.

Desire allows for the creation of a kind of subjective ontology, singling out and investing with special significance a particular class of impression. More importantly, it is what provokes the subject to make connections between the desired object and the performances required to attain it, as well as to collect in memory and recall all the effects associated with such objects. At this point, the term "power" acquires some concreteness, for it is by proceeding backwards in the chain of means towards some desired end that one arrives at a "beginning within our own power" (96) and can construct a practical syllogism relevant to the subject's actual situation. With this concept, Hobbes links thought and power by constituting thought as a tool for attaining the end desired by a concrete, situated subject, as opposed to fancies divorced from practice.

Yet Hobbes's vocabulary of desire, no less than that of sense and speech, generates multiple meanings whose effects must be taken into account. As a regulator of errant signs, the figure of desire we have just isolated plays a positive role in Hobbes's project, bringing order to the "wild ranging" of the mind and constituting a necessary step in the genealogy of a subject of power. Nevertheless, *Leviathan* offers a different picture of desire, emerging as Hobbes looks more closely at the nature of the passions and which again engenders ambiguities it was designed to foreclose. Passion too, it seems, contains its own principles of disharmony and excess, so that the same disability — the failure to master a discourse of causes and effects — and the same problem — how can this excess be limited or regulated? — emerge again. The discipline of instrumental thinking can be upset by what Hobbes calls "the more or lesse Desire of Power," marking passion too with an inconstancy that once again culminates in madness:

> For as to have no Desire, is to be Dead: so to have weak Passions, is Dulnesse; and to have Passions indifferently for every thing, GIDDINESSE, and *Distraction*; and to have stronger, and more vehement Passions for any thing, than is normally seen in others, is that which men call MADNESSE (139).

Hobbes comes full circle by linking to madness the "Insignificant Speech" of the "Schoole-men," who "speak such words, as put together, have in them no signification at all" (146). The category of passion, whose unity, it was hoped, would temper the Hobbesian mind's "wild ranging," emerges as an ambiguous new source of error.

To the dangerous entanglement of desire and language, Hobbes envisages a radical solution: replace the common vocabulary with one "purged from ambiguity" that allows the deduction of complex passions from simpler,

self-evident elements, as demanded by Hobbes's conception of scientific method. With passion disciplined by an unambiguous language — that is, with an impersonal *method* — the subject can hope to ward off the aesthetic pull of fanciful representations, invent a true discourse of causes, and enjoy the effects of power. The hazards of this project reach their zenith, of course, in Hobbes's vision of a body politic. An association of acquisitive individuals requires a sovereign power that can never quite be guaranteed, because the fabrication of the "Artificiall Man" relies upon an "Inconstancy" that persists in haunting it. What is striking about the state of nature is less the fear engendered by the unrestrained exercise of natural rights than the relative absence of *logos*. Life is not only "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short," but also it is unintelligible: "In such condition, there is . . . no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society" (186). The absence of speech disciplined by *logos* means that individuals in the state of nature are "dissociate(d)" from one another, so that their actions are "governed" only by the antilogic of the passions. The individual delirium that Hobbes forecasts when passion overcomes thought re-emerges at the level of collective life as the "war of each against all." The state of nature is a state of generalized "madnesse."[6]

To overcome this pandemic madness, an undivided sovereign power must coordinate the anarchic play of desire-cum-delirium. Even though covenants without the sword are meaningless, this is to be accomplished not only by force of arms, but by supplying the *logos* that the state of nature lacks: the sovereign power discharges its duties by pronouncing *laws* to regulate and regiment the passionate pursuit of individual interests. The sovereign power, as "Judge of what is Commodious, or Incommodious to the Common-wealth," must, as Hobbes puts it, promulgate "*good* Lawes"[7] (327), i.e., regulations that ensure commodious living. While subjects, then, have a duty of "simple obedience," the sovereign's duties are more subtle and demanding. The Hobbesian sovereign must *teach* obedience, and learn the arts that Foucault studies under the name of "discipline."

While the sovereign's injunctions aim to endow society with certainty and predictability, the capacity of the sovereign power to do so depends in turn on its "constancy." The figure of the sovereign, however, opens the door to the same problem of *inconstancy* that we saw in the delirium of passions and the chaos of the state of nature. If the sovereign power takes the form of an assembly, it will be threatened, Hobbes fears, by disagreement among those who comprise it (accordingly, Hobbes advises against democracy and aristocracy). Even when vested in an individual, inconstancy may spring from human nature, i.e., from the passions: the sovereign power might fail to perform its duties owing to excessive timidity or arrogance. The sovereign is, after all, a "*mortal* god,"[8] "compounded of the power of all *men*" (227), and thus fully subject to the dialectic

of desire and language we have already adopted. Here again, the invention of an impersonal discourse is necessary to correct for this excess of desire, in this case the knowledge of how to govern and be governed: educating subjects to adhere to the prevailing form of government, to dismiss competing claims of authority, to obey established authority, to memorize the duties of citizenship, to respect parental authority, to nurture the habits of compliance, and to adjust their "designes and intentions" to the law. Knowledge of how to rule is an all-embracing pedagogy of obedience in which "thought" is removed from the world of airy abstraction and concretized as a mechanism of political control.

The system of concepts organized by the sovereign's laws are subject, however, to a chaos of their own. The sovereign, as we have noted, performs its duties "by a generall Providence, ... and in the making, and executing of good Lawes. . . ," but laws may be misunderstood. The need to interpret the sovereign's commands is another source of inconstancy, threatening the commonwealth. Neither brevity nor verbosity are of any use:

> The written Laws, if they be short, are easily mis-interpreted, from the divers significations of a word, or two: if long, they be more obscure by the divers significations of many words (322).

By multiplying the senses of a text, interpretation creates more problems than it resolves:

> For Commentaries are commonly more subject to cavill, than the Text; and therefore need other Commentaries; and so there will be no end of such Interpretation (326).

Misunderstanding the sovereign can be mitigated, for Hobbes, only by insisting on the "literal" sense of the law: "that, which the Legislator intended, should by the letter of the Law be signified." Disputes over the scope and meaning of laws, of course, are to be settled by the sovereign power alone. More than brute force, however, lies behind the sovereign's authority over the meaning of its words. It is not simply the sheer power of sovereign intention that adjudicates disputes over interpretation, but his "perfect understanding of the finall causes, for which the Law was made" (322). The sovereign's intention, obscured by the "divers significations" of his words, can be saved, once more, only by a political science "purged from ambiguity" and embodying a "perfect understanding." The problem of interpreting the commonwealth's laws, then, is referred to sovereign intention as the content of the law, while the problem of interpreting sovereign intention is referred to the "laws" of a new political science. The mainspring of the civil order remains as fragile as the ever-threatened line between passion and delirium — no more, finally, than a "*Fiat*," as Hobbes puts it in the Introduction to *Leviathan*.

Leviathan attempts to establish an unambiguous political vocabulary on the basis of figures whose multiple meanings necessarily thwart any such project. At each stage, the hoped-for "constancy" — political, psychological, metaphysical — appears compromised by the resources of the figures in which Hobbes chooses to state it, and must be guaranteed by supplementary measures. Political action is concentrated as much as possible into the sovereign's law-making duties; law-making, to circumnavigate the passions, must attain the status of a science; and finally, the imperative of guaranteeing a "felicitous" sphere of individual action necessitates a comprehensive education for obedience. This route, however, merely returns us to the passions, and to Hobbes's recognition that the artificiality of covenants among self-sufficient individuals requires that these be enforced by the sword, by a power able to "keep them in awe."

That the indispensable unity of the sovereign rests on a delicate weave, easily unraveled, helps to explain Hobbes's hostile reaction to the suggestion that the sovereign be subject to the law. This idea is "repugnant," he says, because it would lead to an infinite chain of equivocation, "continually without end, to the Confusion, and Dissolution of the Commonwealth" (367). This properly Hobbesian repugnance towards executive power being subject to law is now voiced with increasing shrillness in what is commonly supposed to be the most authentically Lockean political culture, the United States.

3

America was promises . . .

Archibald MacLeish

The conundrums following Hobbes's demand that individuals make an almost *unconditional* grant of authority to the state appear less problematical for Locke, for whom the people's power is held conditionally, on trust. Hobbes's unholy coupling of human power with the despotic state, we like to think, is simply an expression of bourgeois pessimism that more reasonable thinkers, upon whom we rely for our political identity, saw through. But Lockean liberalism encounters its own problems of undecidability. At the center of both Hobbesian and Lockean accounts of politics, of course, is the contract, the *promise* — the individual's promise not to use his unlimited natural right to invade others as long as all other individuals make the similar promise. Accordingly, the great fear of contractarian experience is that one or more of the parties to the contract might make a *lying promise*, a circumstance that pushes hermeneutics close to the center of politics: now, political life demands ways of discerning sincerity, and liberalism demands a political semiotic that can tabulate the reliable signs of the sincere promise.

Precisely this riddle of promising and keeping promises, in fact, was encountered early in the history of semiotics by Umberto Eco, who defined the field as "a theory of the lie."[9] Semiotics, which treats "sign-functions" abstracted away from their referential dimension, is the study of whatever can be used to *depart* from the real. Eco's paradoxical definition of a discipline devoted to telling the truth about lies captures the character of modern political theory as Hobbes sees it. For Hobbes, sheer human artifice could fashion a simulacrum of the "natural" ruler, but the cooperation upon which this art depended relied in turn on promises that were likely to be overwhelmed by the passions. Since promises are so thin, ontologically speaking, the necessary partner of consent is state coercion, which at its roots is that which moors us to the deceptive sea-beast, Leviathan, the only ground for which we may hope. This dialectic of consent and coercion was analyzed by Nietzsche in his early draft "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," where he emphasizes the conformity implied by the notion of a social contract.[10] Individuals "by themselves," Nietzsche writes, will in the ordinary course of events rely on subterfuge, camouflage, and the lie for survival. Through "boredom and necessity," however, they might contract to live according to certain rules, i.e., promises. The essence of the social contract is to tell the truth, but also to define truth as the conformity to the conventions of the group, to "lie according to fixed conventions." Later, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and elsewhere, Nietzsche detailed the forms of discipline required to produce a creature — the modern, guilt-ridden individual — with a memory capable of keeping promises. Like Hobbes, Nietzsche emphasizes the paradox of the promiser: the language of commitment, stability, and trust most lends itself to deception and ruses. Contractarian societies, therefore, encourage ambivalence towards the promise, alternately grounding it in a dangerously unmanageable human will and in a nature that can overcome the hazards of the former. The founding document of the American polity, Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, conforms to this pattern: it celebrates the capacity of individuals acting with others to alter, invent, and establish new forms of political association, but it is careful to ground these capacities in "the Laws of Nature" and "Nature's God," consistent with a theory of the individual's natural right to be against and control nature.[11]

The most vivid recent expression of liberal anxiety over the promise is the discourse of Ronald Reagan. Indeed, for Reagan our enemies are those who cannot keep their promises. Referring to the leaders of the Soviet Union, Reagan claims that "they reserved these rights to break a promise, to change their ways, to be dishonest, and so forth if it furthered the cause of socialism. . . . (P)romises are like pie crusts, made to be broken."[12] Accordingly, Reagan's objections to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua center not on the government's human rights violations, but on the claim that the Sandinistas *broke a promise*: they, Reagan alleges, "literally made

a contract" with the Organization of American States for support in return for "true democracy."[13] In such statements, the emphasis is less on the absence of true democracy in Nicaragua than on the alleged fact that the Sandinistas broke a promise — that is, that they violated a principle that is central to legitimate government as we understand it. At the same time, the state over which this Lockean liberal presides relies overwhelmingly on what one of his operatives calls "great deceit":

> I think it is very important for the American people to understand that this is a dangerous world; that we live at risk and that this nation is at risk in a dangerous world. And that they ought not to be led to believe ... that this nation cannot or should not conduct covert operations. By their very nature covert operations or special operations are a lie. There is great deceit, deception practiced in the conduct of covert operations. They are at essence a lie.[14]

For Lt. Col. Oliver North, its is imperative that Americans understand that this nation can and should engage in "great deceit," even though such action violates the principles of legitimate government embodied in the U.S. constitution. The "dangerous world" in which we live demands that we resort to "covert actions" or "special operations" that "are at essence a lie." The covert action, however, has the epistemological and moral status of a noble lie, forced upon the liberal democracies by the difficult choice between "lives and lies" and by the fact that those, such as North, who possess an esoteric knowledge of the nature of the threat to American freedom, are hampered by an unwieldy bureaucracy, a misinformed Congress, and an apathetic public.[15]

Still, North's testimony, taken by itself, leaves unclear the basis upon which the representative of a polity dedicated to open contracts and serious promises can instead devote himself to "great . . . deception." A complete answer to this question would require a study of the rhetoric of the great documents of containment, such as George Kennan's "Mr. X" essay, National Security Council Memorandum #68, Henry Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, and the Pentagon Papers. Some insights, however, can be gained from a close reading of one of those hundreds of ignored government planning documents: "Prospects for Containment of Nicaragua's Communist Government," dated May 1986 and issued by the U.S. Department of Defense. Read not as a prosaic planning study but as political allegory, the Defense Department document bridges the gap between Locke and Hobbes, showing *why* the character of our "dangerous world" is such that our principles of legitimacy no longer apply. It provides the theory that North did not explicitly pronounce, but upon which he acted.

"Containment" refers broadly to the postwar commitment of the United States to prevent the spread of Communism.[16] In the debate, however, over how to accomplish this goal, two camps quickly emerged. The docu-

ment's title refers to the debate between proponents of "rollback" and a less extreme variant that became known simply as "containment." In this sense, containment envisaged a political deal in which the Soviet Union and the United States enjoyed tacitly recognized spheres of influence, and it assumed that both parties were capable of honoring treaties, i.e., making contracts and keeping promises. Proponents of rollback understood the Soviet Union as incapable of such behavior — in Reagan's terms, it reserves the right to lie, cheat, and steal in pursuit of Communist expansion. In addition, rollback, by its nature, involves military conflict because an adversary that does not recognize the sanctity of contracts cannot be a party to a political solution. In arguing that the prospects for merely *containing* Nicaragua's communist government are bleak, the study is an implicit call for a military solution: rollback.

The document begins by noting differences of opinion in Congress over U.S. policy towards the Sandinista regime, differences that came to the fore after Reagan's lurid speech in March of 1986 about Nicaragua as a "safe haven" for terrorists from around the world caused some to call for political compromise rather than military conflict:

> The President's request to Congress on aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance has led to an extensive debate in Congress. There is a difference of views as to how effective an agreement would be in providing the needed security for Central America.

The document begins, in other words, by stressing the liberal, democratic context of U.S. policymaking: the "difference of views"; but it subsequently emphasizes that despite differences over policy, all parties to the debate agree that the Sandinistas are a threat to be combated, and that while some in Congress "maintain that a greater effort should be made to secure a political agreement which would serve to contain Communism in Nicaragua," "Many . . . recall the failure of previous treaties and agreements with the Communists." "Prospects for Containment," then, will jog the short political memories of those who forget that treaties with "the Communists" are mere scraps of paper.

This is accomplished in a section misleadingly entitled "Historical Perspective." The title is misleading not because the accounts historically inaccurate (they are, in fact, grotesquely oversimplified), but because the study purports to deal with U.S. policy towards Nicaragua, but not a word is devoted to relations between these two countries. Rather, "Historical Perspective" means reviewing situations in which the United States entered into political agreements with "the Communists," who, in the vernacular of the document, are a kind of Jungian archetype that everywhere and always remains the same. (I can recall childhood memories of TV news broadcasts about the "Viet Cong," which I dimly imagined must be an ethnic group different from the Vietnamese we were defending.) Since "the Communists" are always the same, it follows that the behavior of any one Com-

munist entity is entirely predictable. If the further assumption that the Sandinistas are Communists is also made, no further inquiry is necessary into the historical peculiarities of U.S.-Nicaragua relations: Sandinista policy is determined by their being part of "the Communists," and not as Nicaraguans.

The document then contains discussions on violations of treaties with Communists entered into by the United States, which amount, of course, to Communists' breaking their promises, just as, according to Reagan, they affirm their right to do. In the case of Vietnam, for example, North Vietnam "began illegal subversive operations in South Vietnam immediately after signing the 1954 Geneva Accords," although "Communist military violations of the Geneva Agreement began to escalate sharply only in the late 1950's, when Hanoi started to infiltrate armed cadres and supplies into Vietnam." The same is true, according to the document, of "communist belligerents" in Korea, other Indochinese countries, and Cuba. True to form, the Nicaraguan Communists "literally made a contract," in Reagan's words, with the Organization of American States to establish "true democracy," only to violate it after assuming power. The Communists, then, are *hoi barbaroi*, a group that cannot keep promises and hence is not fit to enter into the sort of contractual arrangements familiar to Lockean liberals.

Not only do Communists fail to keep promises, they actively, intentionally utilize the rhetoric of promising — likely persuasive for liberal polities — to pursue the expansion of Communist power. As Reagan has it, for Communists promises are made *in order to be broken*. Equally alien to liberal sensibilities is the fact that the Communists *plan* to break their promises: the Nicaraguans "never intended to honor the pledge" they made to the Organization of American States, and the Vietnamese and Korean Communists "were planning the infringements even as they were negotiating." The mere fact that the Communists *plan* is a mark of their difference from us. Strictly speaking, a liberal polity cannot plan; it only creates a framework of order within which individuals contract with one another and thus determine their fates. Planning in a liberal polity is possible only on an individual, not on a collective, basis. The Communists, with their Five Year Plans and historical inevitabilities, even plan to break promises.

The Communists, then, plan with no regard for past promises, and use promises only as a rhetorical device with which to manipulate liberal polities. The Sandinistas, therefore, can be expected to violate a Central American peace treaty. The questions then become: What would a Central American treaty call for, and what Sandinista violations are likely to occur? The key element of any such treaty, the Pentagon emphasizes, is the stipulation that the governments of the region refuse to allow foreign troops or military advisors on their soil, and refrain from supporting insurgencies in neighboring countries. This entails that Soviet and Cuban advisors leave Nicaragua, and that the United States discontinue its support for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. On the theory that the Communists

plan to break promises, there can be only one reason for the Sandinistas to agree to such an arrangement: to induce the United States to withdraw from the region while they secretly pursue a military build-up that would enable them to become master of the region. As the Pentagon imagines it:

> The Nicaraguan government would sign a Contadora agreement . . . the Nicaraguans would circumvent and violate the agreement in order to maintain or increase their military strength and to . . . support . . . Communist insurgencies throughout Central America. Nicaragua would seek to conceal its violations as long as possible. The U.S. and other Central American nations would fully abide by the agreement. . . .

Constrained by contractarian principles, the United States would abide by its promises while the Nicaraguans secretly break theirs, resulting ultimately in the Communist conquest of Central America. What, under the circumstances, can a liberal polity do? The United States could not simply announce its refusal to abide by a treaty supported by the governments of the region. Yet to abide by the agreement while the Communists secretly subvert it is to accept Communist rule over Central America, in the long run. Although the Pentagon stops short of drawing this consequence explicitly, the rhetorical context of the document encourages the conclusion that the United States must, like the Communists, secretly violate the agreement by supporting what it calls the "Democratic Resistance Forces" (the contras) covertly with the methods developed by North. Faced with an entity incapable of participating in contractarian life, the United States has no choice but to resort to "great deceit."

The rhetorical strategy that North adopted in his testimony to the Congressional committees investigating the Iran-contra affair was to present the great deceit as natural, realistic, and self-evidently justified. Although the U.S. Constitution grants the executive branch limited powers in foreign affairs, North speaks as if it were self-evident that the president is "in charge" of foreign policy. Congress need not be informed of government action in that area, according to North, because the president is accountable directly to "the people."[17] North makes it clear that the great deceit is not limited to the Communist enemy, but includes all elements of the liberal polity (e.g., the press and Congress) that threaten the implementation of the covert policy: the deceit was staged in part, according to North, "to limit the political embarrassment."[18] North asserts that to prevent political embarrassment, members of the executive branch can destroy official documents or fail to inform Congress of current policy ("deceit by omission"). All of this is, by definition, legal, because it is done at the behest of the "Commander-in-Chief," who, once again, acts in the interests of the nation as a whole and not in the parochial interests represented in Congress.

HOBBES AND/OR NORTH

The logic of containment, as expressed both in North's testimony and the Pentagon study, specifies the conditions under which the United States moves from Lockean commitments of limited, open government to an Hobbesian state of near-total authority and detailed administration of citizenship, for what were North's slide shows — and indeed his testimony — other than an exercise in "nurturing the habits of compliance"? Yet a nagging politico-epistemological question remains: If state policy must be secret, how can it be ratified by the people? Senator Mitchell raised this issue in the course of his questioning of North: "if, by definition, covert action is secret and (the president) doesn't tell them about it, there's no way the American people can know about it to be able to vote him out of office. . . ."[19] Covert action emerges as a vulgar Platonism in which a system of hierarchical, Hobbesian state authority is masked for the multitude by a display of images staged for the purposes of ratifying the people's sense of living in a Lockean society of maximum individual freedom and government on trust. Thus, the inescapable duplicity of North's presentations, emphasizing Soviet designs on Central America while at the same time implying that the United States was doing no more for the "Democratic Resistance" than allowing them to die for their country. In public, North offered a rhetoric in which the citizen of a liberal polity might comfortably dwell, making arguments in favor of a particular policy; while privately carrying out a war his "intelligence" told him was necessary but towards which the public remained unsupportive.

Containment depicts a "dangerous world" in which liberal principles are put "at risk" to the precise extent that liberal polities adhere to them. Containment — in both its moderate and extreme versions — sees the postmodern political condition as demanding private Hobbesian action coupled with public Lockean rhetoric. At the limit, containment even threatens to dissolve the difference between public and private upon which liberalism thrives. Many of North's associates, such as Richard V. Secord and Albert Hakim, were private individuals implementing state policy, which resorted to private funding and operatives because what it wanted to do was illegal. The implosion of the private into the public enabled all to claim a lack of responsibility: government officials could say that no appropriated funds were going to support the contras, even though the policy of support was worked out in the White House; while citizens, violating the law at the behest of the executive branch, could say they were doing so as patriots coming to the aid of their president. Perhaps North, Secord, Hakim, and even Reagan are neither private nor public figures, but an undecidable, postmodern amalgamation of these terms, figures capable of simulating the public and the private according to necessity. In a complementary way, containment gives us a new American state that is neither Lockean nor Hobbesian, but both in the sense that it is committed to staging itself in either mode according to the demands of state power. In the last analysis, the Iran-contra affair (like the affair of Gary Hart, which con-

densed similar confusions over the difference between public and private) is but a symptom of an American identity crisis — a crisis, precisely, *of* identity: the repressed Hobbesian identity of freedom and control.

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Notes

Several individuals read and responded to earlier versions of this essay. I would like in particular to acknowledge the generous comments, criticisms, and leads supplied by: Philip Kuberski; the faculty and graduate students of the Department of Rhetoric, University of California, Berkeley; and two anonymous readers for the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*

1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 81. Further quotations from this text will be parenthetically referenced in the main body of the essay.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979).

3. Hobbes's use of "relique" to refer to sensory experience may be innovative. The word normally refers to the physical objects of a saint, and more generally to the physical tokens of a past civilization, practice, or experience. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, however, its reference seems to have been restricted to external physical or material objects. By naming ideas and sensory experiences as "reliques" (traces, remnants, residue) of past motion, Hobbes extends the word's range and ironically harnesses its honorific connotations to his project. Just as a relic provides a link with venerated persons or practices, and is considered especially valuable owing to the connection it establishes between a physical, temporal entity and a spiritual one, the depiction of sense as a relic of actual movement provides a firm ontological foundation for the "seemings" of the imagination, allowing Hobbes to combine in one figure the laws of mechanics and the preservation of the sacred.

4. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Spivak, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 150ff.

5. Ibid. Hobbes notes that the course of apparently undisciplined "fancies" in the imagination is in fact determined by the *original* succession "made in the Sense."

6. It might be objected that this characterization overstates the absence of a *logos* in the state of nature, without which it is difficult to imagine how its inhabitants could ever contract to make over their rights to a sovereign power. On the other hand, the transition from the state of nature to political society has always presented problems for contractarians, who have generally taken the position that the idea of an original contract does not describe an historical event at all.

7. Emphasis added.

8. Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, (London: Bohn, 1839-1845), Vol. 6, p. 251. Emphasis added.

9. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 6-7.

10. Nietzsche, Section 1. See also *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), Second Essay, Sections 5, 19, *et passim*.

11. "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled," in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 19.

12. Ronald Reagan, speech of January 20, 1983, quoted in *Reagan's Reign of Error*, ed. Mark Green and Gail MacColl, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 41.

13. Ronald Reagan, speech of July, 1983, quoted in Roy Gutman, "America's Diplomatic Charade," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1984. For a discussion of the substance of Reagan's claims, see the above essay and Noam Chomsky, "Nicaragua," *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 352.

14. Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, quoted in *Taking the Stand: The Testimony of Lt. Col. Oliver L. North*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), p. 12.

15. For documentation of North's views, see the section entitled "Reasons for the Deception" in the *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), p. 150, et passim.

16. Primary documents relating to the containment and rollback doctrines can be found in *Containment*, ed. Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

17. On the significance, in this context, of the president's direct accountability to the people, see Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy and the Welfare State: The Political and Theoretical Connections Between *Staatsrason* and *Wohlfahrtsstaatsrason*," *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (November 1987). Wolin argues that Locke's defense of "Prerogative," or "the power to act . . . for the Publick good, without the prescription of Law, and sometimes even against it," provides the means whereby Lockean political leaders can "inherit the same right of Reason of State to summon the full power of society, but now it is not for simple defense or domination but for the good of all" (p. 488). The result is that the overwhelming need to control disorder that is characteristic of the state of nature is imported into domestic society in the person of the executive. The bridge between Locke and Hobbes, in Wolin's reading, is provided by Locke himself.

18. *Taking the Stand*, p. 525.

19. Ibid., pp. 674-680.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, no. 3 (Fall 1988)

ON THE RISE AND DECLINE OF TOTALITARIAN LIBERALISM: SCHLESINGER, BELL, LAROUCHE

Larry Portis

In the view of the nascent New Left, "totalitarian liberalism" is a doctrine of social and political consensus that expounds the ideas of the "open society" and "pluralism" in such a way that, paradoxically, critical thought is regarded as subversive and fearful. In particular, totalitarian liberalism has produced a general aversion to the ideas of social class division and class conflict. The post-World War II formulation of the doctrine of totalitarian liberalism, was converted into a set of norms and values and became part of a political culture that excluded the idea of social class and precluded the perception of social class. In the 1960s, the "liberal" political perspective, which then dominated public discourse, began to be considered as an authoritarian doctrine by a significant number of people. The theoretical critique of totalitarian liberalism made by Norman Mailer, Herbert Marcuse, Carl Ogelsby, and others in the turbulent 1960s[1] has lessened in intensity over the past decade and a half; however, it remains relevant. The continuing disintegration of the cultural matrix that now best represents "liberalism" is an outstanding fact of political life in the United States today, but how did the Right, seemingly excluded from serious ideological debate when the New Left focused its arguments against the liberals, come to dominate the political scene early in the 1970s? The leading premise of this essay is that knowing the method by which totalitarian liberalism was able to impose its hegemony over political discourse in the United States is essential to understanding how new authoritarian movements profited from the decline of liberal consensus.

The Rise of Totalitarian Liberalism

The liberal "consensus" that has dominated political culture in the United states since World War II emerged in response to the ideological polarization of American political life in the 1930s. We have only to note the emergence or rapid growth of radical organizations and social movements such as the Communist and Socialist parties, the Liberty League, the Silver Shirts, the Black Legion, Huey Long's "Share-Our-Wealth" movement, and Charles Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, for example, to understand that the nihilism and resignation that overtook so much of American society in the 1920s had come to a definite end. The relative quiescence of the population was radically disturbed as the structural weaknesses of the domestic economy undermined respect for national political leaders, thus increasing the appeal of "radical" explanations of the crisis. The policies of the New Deal brought only temporary respite from the worse effects of the economic crisis. During the last years of the 1930s, the labor movement grew more and more militant, Roosevelt lost support from the business community, and the "radical" organizations gained strength. Only the advent of World War II curtailed an increase of social conflict.

After the war, a new outbreak of ideological struggle was expected by political and business "leaders," since economic production declined as returning soldiers swelled the ranks of the unemployed and the "radical" organizations were no longer constrained to the support of the national government in the face of foreign aggression. Yet, how could the wartime "consensus" be preserved in this new situation? The answer was simple: wartime conditions must be created. This was especially necessary in light of the Republican-dominated Congress's provocation of the Left and the labor unions. Most dramatically, the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 was a challenge which dared workers and radicals to break the law prohibiting spontaneous strike activity — the kinds of strikes that had led to the creation of the CIO only a decade before. Such strikes had been repressed during the last years of Roosevelt's government, but now it was no longer possible to justify such repression by the war effort.

The Taft-Hartley Act was part of a policy which combined international and domestic concerns. First, the Marshall Plan, the Bretton Woods conference, and the "cold war" strategies of the "containment" of Communism throughout the world required the continuation of the war economy. Second, a policy of the domestic "containment" of "un-American" elements was also carried out in order to reduce social and political criticism to a minimum. The spiritual justification for the wartime sacred union was "anti-fascism"; the consensus would form around the issue of "anti-totalitarianism." Having helped to vanquish Nazi imperialist expansion, the Soviet Union became associated with its mortal enemy in the amalgam that the "totalitarian" category was designed to create. The Soviet Union, some claimed, represented a kind of "red fascism" that necessitated an indefinite

prolongation of the crusade to preserve the free world. This effort was all the more urgent, given the alleged presence of totalitarians in key areas of American government.

The rapidity with which the American political landscape was changed was remarkable. Only two years after the great strike wave of 1946 and a year after the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, the president of the CIO was claiming that "we have no classes in this country," thus implying that those believing contrariwise were un-American in some way.[2] Simultaneously, the creation of a consensus designed to reinforce "pluralist" institutions in the "free world" was immeasurably facilitated by the patriotic activities of individuals like Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Joseph McCarthy as they strove instinctively to expose totalitarians and bring them to justice. Exemplary punishments such as those meted-out to Alger Hiss, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, and others less celebrated were a sober warning to all who would aid the totalitarians by criticizing the "American system" or the "American way of life." The social and cultural conformism and relative lack of ideological debate during the 1950s was striking then and is still a source of nostalgia. So successful was the creation of the consensus, that many intellectuals of the period believed it expressed the very essence of American culture. Historians and other social scientists sought to demonstrate that all of North-American history led to the creation of the crowning consensus. The social conflicts of the past were only birth pangs in the emergence of a conflict-free nation that, in Louis Hartz's terms, was "born free."[3]

If any single work can be said to be a manifesto linking anti-totalitariansim to the idea of democratic consensus, it is Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1949). As advertized on the book's dust-jacket, Schlesinger opposed "the totalitarian state — whether Fascist or Communist" and advocated "a revitalization of our faith in Freedom, a resurgence of the middle way." Above all, Schlesinger wished for a stabilization in American political life, or rather he wished to avoid a return to the passionate ideological debates of the 1930s. Son of a member of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal "brain trust," his allegiences were to the "liberal establishment," the corporate and financial interests of the North-East of the United States. His essential message was simple: the only stable government is one that does not attempt to remake society in light of a utopian vision. The conflicts of the 1930s involving the violent interaction of opposed utopian schemes — fascism and communism — inevitably degenerated into "totalitarianism." The lessons of those years have led to "an unconditional rejection of totalitarianism and a reassertion of the ultimate integrity of the individual" which "constitutes the unique experience and fundamental faith of contemporary liberalism."[4]

A key concept in the new ideology of liberal consensus is a view of the "political spectrum" that graphically shows how the "extremes meet." "Left" and "Right" should not be considered as opposite points on a

straight line, but rather as the opposed sides of a circle, and this became the political "spectrum" that structured the thinking of a generation during the post-war period. Through the use of this heuristic, the further left one goes, the closer one approaches the right, and vice-versa. Thus, in order to retain a maximum degree of stabilty, it was vital to remain in the center. The idea that "extremes meet" was offered as an explanation for the similarities exhibited by the fascist regimes and Stalinist Communism. The essence of these systems was "totalitarianism." More than a question of the form of government, it was maintained, there was evidently a psychological factor, an impulse that relegated the specific content of ideology to a secondary position. There was, explained Schlesinger, an "essential kinship among all totalitarians" that was revealed by the fact that "the passage from the extreme left to the extreme right and back has been fast and easy."[5] This was, he continued, a "fear of isolation," a "flight from anxiety."[6] An inability to deal with complicated situations, for which there was perhaps no elegant or completely just solution, was the psychological pulsion that may have led some people to adopt extreme ideas. They simply could not accept reality.

By reducing his opponents' ideas to a question of individual psychopathology, Schlesinger was able to amalgamate the Left and the Right and justify the dismissal of any real consideration of the content of "extremist" social philosophy. A certain number of reflections must be made in relation to this approach, however. First, Schlesinger's dismissal of social claims and the content of anti-capitalist theory, by characterizing them as simply tributary to psychopathology on an individual level, was nothing new. The uniqueness of his approach was to virtually deny any difference between the "pathologies" of the two political "extremes." Second, and more importantly, the success of Schlesinger's simplistic and reductionist arguments in crystallizing support for the emerging post-war "consensus" indicates that conditions existed that were condusive to its acceptance.

What were these conditions? Why did alternative visions of the social environment, focused upon relations of domination and exploitation, suddenly cease to find a receptive audience? Schlesinger's arguments were compelling, not because of their intrinsic logic, but because of the political climate of the immediate post-war period. The "sacred union," adherred to so devotedly by the Communist Party of the United States and wartime controls over strike activity muted social criticism. Concurrently, in reaction to the progressive tendencies manifest during the New Deal period, the reactionary Right had already succeeded in setting-up the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1938, followed by the Smith Act in 1940. Thus, the repressive atmosphere which flourished during the immediate post-war years was carefully nurtured during the pre-war period and reinforced during the "anti-fascist crusade." In addition, many of the intellectuals who either had or would have had played an affirmative role in the

New Deal, participated in the national war effort as officers in the newly organized intelligence corps, the Office of Strategic Services, that would evolve into the Central Intelligence Agency by 1947. If, therefore, the leading academic intellectuals were primarily concerned with social and economic questions during the 1930s, after World War II they became more oriented towards questions of international hegemony abroad and ideological consensus in the US. The feeling of omnipotence that accompanied the successful intervention of the US in the world war was manifest, on the popular level, as a reinforced national-chauvinism and, on the elite level, as a will to secure positions of power and to reject challenges to their ascendancy.

The new "liberals" were not at all distressed by the red-baiting and persecutions of the Left in general. Long before *The Vital Center* was published, and three months before Schlesinger published the newspaper article that preceded it,[7] prominent liberals had drawn the lines of the new ideological offensive. In January 1948, William O. Douglas, former Wall Street lawyer and the most "liberal" of Supreme Court Justices throughout most of the post-war period, articulated the new liberalism in language that George Lipsitz has called "chilling." "While the aim of European political parties has been to draw men of different ideologies into separate groups," Douglas explained before a CIO convention, "the aim of our parties has been to unite divergent groups into one. That means compromise of various ideas and ideologies and the doctrinaire acceptance of none. It means the elimination of extremists both Right and Left, and the development of middle of the road policies."[8] The only question remaining, apparently, was how the so-called "extremists" would be eliminated.

In spite of Schlesinger's apparent equanimity about spurning the Left and the Right in favor of the "vital center," it was the Left that he wished eliminated from the picture. For him, and regardless of the meeting of the "extremes" in the shadow world of psychopathology, the Left represented the greatest danger to the established power structure. If the business-oriented Right was simply too incompetent to govern alone, the "progressives" of the Left were the dangerous dupes of the totalitarians, as he indicates in the following passage:

> In this book I have deliberately given more space to the problem of protecting the liberal faith from Communism than from reaction, not because reaction is the less threat, but because it is the enemy we know, whose features are clearly delineated for us, against who our efforts have always been oriented. It is perhaps our very absorption in this age-old foe which has made us fatally slow to recognise the danger on what we carelessly thought was our left — forgetting in our enthusiasm that the totalitarian left and the totalitarian right meet at last on the murky grounds of tyranny and terror. I am persuaded that the restoration of business to political power in this country would have the calamitous results that have gener-

> ally accompanied business control of the government; that this time we might be delivered through the incompetence of the right into the hands of the totalitarians of the left. But I am persuaded too that liberals have values in common with most members of the business community — in particular, a belief in a free society — which they do not have in common with the totalitarians.[9]

This statement effectively summarizes Schlesinger's political perspective. In fact, the "totalitarian right" posed no danger in the US ("...our social situation makes the rise of fascism unlikely")[10] and the business community was merely incompetent. The Republican administrations of presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover were obviously the foremost examples in Schlesinger's mind. Was not the Great Depression brought-on by their lack of economic foresight? His was not, in fact, a serious criticism of "business." On the one hand, charges of incompetence are the most standard and inoffensive political fare. On the other hand, "business" is not only represented politically by the "right," but equally by "liberals" of Schlesinger's orientation. In reality, Schlesinger was cutting-off any remaining ties between the "liberals" of the New Deal and those socialists and communists who had lent such valuable support to the Roosevelt administration and who supported Henry Wallace's progressive third party in the elections of 1948.

The rapid taming of the CIO and the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act successfully contained the labor movement in an institutional straitjacket; now was the time to purge the political community of all those whose social idealism would leave the "liberals" open to the charge that they were socialist stalking horses. The transformation of liberalism was indeed characterized by hypocrisy and disloyalty, and certainly more on the part of the witch-hunters than on that of their victims. At the time, Dalton Trumbo, member of the persecuted "Hollywood Ten," explained clearly that, while numerous New Deal liberals retained their principles intact, "most of the late president's companions, deprived of courage and even of identity by his death, h[u]ng on in a pitiable state of suspension, 'half indoors, half out of doors,' sniffing every breeze that blows and unwilling to fight for anything but their share of the load."[11] Trumbo clearly considered Schlesinger, this "inflamed grenadier of the cold war," as a bad leading actor in the unfolding drama that broke so many careers and lives. As he remarked ironically, "From the chilly heights of three years at Harvard, where he holds an associate professorship in the department in which his father occupies, the Francis Lee Higginson chair of history, Mr. Schlesinger hurled the epithet 'wretched nonentities' at three University of Washington professors who, combining sixty-six years of university teaching in their total experience, had been discharged — two for stating they were Communists, one for saying he had been."[12] In effect, Schlesinger served notice to the reactionaries that the "liberals" would not interfere in the witch-hunts that furthered so well the ambitions of numerous post-war

politicians. The elimination of socialists and left-liberals from the political landscape would, from every perspective, reinforce the authority of the ruling elites.

Enforcing "Consensus"

Between the appearance of Schlesinger's book in 1949 and the successful conclusion of Senator Joseph McCarthy's dirty work in 1954, totalitarian liberalism had effectively established its ideological hegemony. Alger Hiss and many others were in jail because of their dubious "associations" or opinions. Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were dead. Social idealists, unwilling to be intimidated into silence, lost their jobs, and the Communist Party of the USA was at times outlawed. This was the primary work of consensus-building. Political debate had not ceased, however, the variety of opinions that could be expressed was seriously reduced. The essence of consensus was not that virtually all parties agreed on basic principles, but that only certain parties had the right to express an opinion. The "liberal consensus" did not express the "open society," but rather the closed mind.

Restructuring political culture and social consciousness was not only an affair of political theory. It was performed in a wide variety of cultural areas and at all levels of the social structure. For example, Serge Guilbaut has documented in convincing detail how the rapid emergence of New York in the late 1940s as the center of a new aesthetic movment, abstract expressionism, was in great part the consequence of a politically motivated plan to lay the foundations of American hegemony in the art world, and over cultural attitudes in general. The connivance of wealthy contributors, museum directors, artists, politicians, and diplomats successfully created the illusion that the United States was a veritable crucible of avant-garde creativity when, in fact, artists who did not conform to the new orthodoxy, especially those who continued the socially engaged art of the Depression years, were quickly excluded from the scene. By 1951, Guilbaut concluded: "an art that saw itself as stubbornly apolitical came to be used as a powerful political instrument."[13] Consequently, the United States was able to maintain its reputation for openness and modernity as it moved into the open repression of the McCarthy years.

For the general public, a complicated infrastructure of state propaganda was constructed. In the late 1930s, committees on foreign relations were formed in order to influence local elites on issues of foreign policy, and these committees were particulary active in the immediate post-war years. The Advertising Council was formed during World War II in order to promote a positive image of corporate business; it intervened whenever there seemed to be a danger of public outcry against business or industrial practices. Since 1949 government and industry have collaborated in the establishment and funding of "information" agencies such as the Joint Council on Economic Education, founded to educate teachers in the teaching of

economics. G. William Domhoff has painstakingly documented this complicated network of agencies, foundations, and "think tanks" and the different levels on which such organizations operate in their efforts to indoctrinate the population.[14]

The tenor of political life in the 1950s is well known, therefore a detailed description of the conformism and de-politicization that resulted from repression and intimidation during the immediate post-war period is, in this context, unnecessary. The outstanding characteristic of the period is the rupture that was effected between the "Old Left" and the "New Left" of the 1960s. By the late 1950s, Daniel Bell had concluded that the "ideologies" that impassioned people in the 1930s and before were simply "exhausted." He maintained that, from 1930 to 1950, events put an end "to chiliastic hopes, to millenarianism, to apocalyptic thinking — and to ideology. For ideology, once a road to action, ha[d] become a dead end."[15]

Schlesinger's manifesto had at that point become dogma. Ideological struggle had become a thing of the past. The only dissenters seemed to be the ineffectual, comical "beatniks," who had recently found their mass-media figure in the person of Jack Kerouac — as unstable and as a-political a spokesman as could be desired by the advocates of consensus. Among all serious commentators on political affairs there was little questioning of social relations or the political power structure: there was "a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism. In that sense, too, the ideological age has ended."[16]

The enormous success of Bell's book must be understood within the context of conformity and intellectual repression created by the "containment" of the anti-capitalist left and underwritten by the rising industrial productivity of the early post-war period. Political conflicts were effectively resolved by formal and informal means of repression, while social conflicts were attenuated by the cooptation and institutionalization of labor unions and the reinforcement of "consumerism" allowed by US world economic hegemony. The "McCarthyist" repression was, however, a bit embarrassing for the ideologues of the "open society." How could legal intimidation, blacklists, and the generalized persecution of social critics be explained if the "consensual" society was indeed the best of all political worlds? Daniel Bell offered an explanation of the phenomenon based upon the idea that class differences were disappearing in the United States. As the "middle class" continued to expand, incorporating hitherto marginalized groups, the nation experienced temporary social tensions. The excesses of the immediate post-war period were due to the "status anxieties" of new groups that were being assimilated into active political life. McCarthy and others represented the small towns, small farmers, the little men in general, who lacked the political and philosophical sophistication

of the Eastern intellectuals. Once again, the "birth pangs" of the American Dream! As he explained:

> The new divisions, created by the status anxieties of new middle-class groups, pose a new threat. The rancors of McCarthyism were one of its ugly excesses. However, the United States, so large and complex that no single political boss or any single political group has ever been able to dominate it, will in time undoubtedly diminish these divisions, too. This is an open society, and these anxieties are part of the price we pay for that openness.[17]

The use of the pronoun "we" might have seemed somewhat cavalier to Alger Hiss, the Rosenbergs, and the others who were broken in one way or another by the "excesses" of the post-war repression.

Particularly striking in the pronouncements of the ideologues of consensus, is the ease with which they maintained a tone of reasoned moderation while advancing the most outrageous lies. Can it be stated otherwise when we read that the years of outright political persecution revealed the existence of an "open society," that a political class working assiduously to eliminate the expression of certain opinions were the foremost champions of "pluralism," and that the act of tarring all varieties of socialist expression with the "totalitarian" brush was the best way to achieve an enlightened polity?

Daniel Bell was aware of such objections. He made clear that, in spite of certain contradictions, a "liberal society must indeed tolerate dissent." As proof that the political class in the United States was tolerant of criticism, Bell referred to the existence of a radical, social-democratic magazine called *Dissent*. Was it not tolerated? For him, the presence of such a periodical revealed both the openness and the integrative power of American society. Not only were the contributors of *Dissent* consistently critical of American institutions, but they were generally former marxists who had moderated their views. In addition, many of them were professors at the elite universities which represented liberal university culture in the US: "To that extent, and this is the final paradox, even *Dissent* is an accredited member of that culture, and a welcome one." Indeed, these "dissenters," "the generation of the thirties, [were] prodigal sons who, in terms of American culture, had returned home." Bell was quick to add, somewhat vaguely, that "this may well have been the last radical generation for a time."[18]

Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* appeared eleven years before the publication of Bell's *End of Ideology*. The former was a manifesto for the new ideology of consensus, while the latter was the celebration of its imagined success. Although the tones of the books were different, they shared the same assumptions and political intent: to discredit "un-American" varieties of social criticism by positing the existence of totalitarianism, a concept which combined the external threat with the enemy within. The argument ran as follows: the basis of the totalitarian impulse was a lack

of psychological equilibrium in the individual, a fear of ambiguity, and an irrational desire for social perfection. Political pluralism and the democratic consensus that expressed it reflected a sober and sophisticated political culture that was contrary to the extremist, utopian impulse. "Extremism" was the individual symptom of political malaise. Bell made a particular effort to reveal how extremism and personal instability were linked, especially in the intellectual. Since "the intellectual takes his *self* as a starting point and relates the world to his own sensibilities," he is always in danger of a subite change of orientation.[19] In Bell's estimation, the whole "generation of the thirties" revealed this syndrome, as did numerous European social thinkers.

The emergence of the ideology of consensus was primarily the expression of a profound rupture in the evolution of political culture in the United States. Nevertheless, the development cannot be said to have been merely the sudden elevation of a new class of intellectuals. Certainly an identifiable group of intellectuals were responsible for the formulation and the propagandizing of the myth of consensus, but this work had to be done in opposition to other intellectuals who were also formed politically during the 1930s. Generational considerations cannot be ignored, but generations should not be considered as a "block." The form and content of political articulation is structured by the complex of social forces at a given historical moment. During the years of economic crisis, social conflict was so acute as to create profound divisions with the ruling elites, on the one hand, while on the other, force concessions from the more reactionary and uncomproming of these elites. The eventual containment of the revitalized socialist Left and the renewed elan of the labor movement caused a rapid shift to the Right. This was explained, by those intellectuals willing to modify their orientations, more as a maturation of the society as a whole rather than as a change in their own ideas. The elimination of the socialist Left was thus presented as a natural stabilization of the polity, the withering away of the extremes of the political spectrum. In reality, only the socialist Left was weakened in this process. The reactionary Right was reinforced by institutional innovations (the Smith Act, Taft-Hartley Act, etc.), by electoral shifts (the 1946 legislative elections which resulted in a Republican-dominated Congress), and by a change in the political climate created by the wartime "sacred union."

This process was accelerated by the disenchantment of communist intellectuals with the CPUSA and the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. Even before the Nazi-Stalin Pact of 1939, the conspiratorial and authoritarian methods of the CP and the increasing volume of revelations about the actual conditions in the USSR disillusioned a growing number of formerly idealistic intellectuals. Many of these people became ideologues of the reactionary right. If the "neo-liberal" ideologues of consensus benignly tolerated the "excesses" of "McCarthyism," the new "conservative" ideologues, many of them former trotskyists or members of the CPUSA, were active

supporters and collaborators of the witch-hunters. This dramatic conversion of a significant number of left, "marxist" intellectuals into virulent "anti-communists" gave credence to the idea of "extremism" after the war, and to the idea that a certain psychological disposition made the extremes meet if political ideologies are pursued to their logical limits and realized in the concrete world of human affairs. "The rise of the New American Right out of the ashes of the Old American Left," according to John Diggins, "was one of the great political surprises of our time."[20]

Obviously, it was more useful to the ideologues of consensus to be surprised by the dramatic conversions of some leftist intellectuals to reactionary political opinions than to take notice of the leftist intellectuals who, despite defeat and disillusionment, remained critical of American capitalism and its institutions. In spite of formal and informal repression, there was a regrouping of independant socialist thinkers which led not only to the creation of the social democratic magazine, *Dissent*, in the early 1950s, but also to the revolutionary socialist, and anti-stalinist *Monthly Review* in 1949. As Diggins states, "there were many veterans of the thirties . . . who experienced the same betrayals and disenchantments of the era and yet continued to sustain a radically critical stance toward American society and American culture."[21] The constancy of *this* Left, however, was precisely the problem for the ideologues of consensus. The Left had to be eliminated. Ideological struggle was necessary, but on what terms?

As indicated, the chosen terms did not concern either the reformation or qualitative transformation of social relations in the US; they concerned the psycho-pathological impulses behind any essential challenge to the "American system," the central argument being that the *only* alternative was a form of totalitarianism. The rational world of political choice was thereby reduced to an early version of Ronald Reagan's "free world" versus the "evil empire." The emerging consensual newspeak cast all opponents of the "the American way of life" as either active agents or unwitting dupes of totalitarian terror. Indeed, the real "consensus" which emerged after World War II was the tacit accord that existed between the New Deal "liberals" of the Roosevelt years and the reactionaries of the moment (whether traditional members of the business community or leftist intellectuals converted to virulent anti-communism). This was the consensual basis of the "pluralist," "open society" which emerged in the United States after the war. Political idealism was spurned in favor of a certain rationality which had as its major characteristic the systematic elimination of the thinking that did not fit the prevailing "consensus." It was thus absolutely necessary for Daniel Bell to claim that ideologies were "exhausted," that they were, in fact, no longer *worthy* of practical consideration. Himself converted from "marxism" to "neo-liberalism," Bell attempted to reinforce the myth of consensus and avoid a confrontation with the intellectual ghosts of the recent past. His attempt was only partially successful for, when

his book was published in 1960, the spectre of anti-capitalist "ideology" began to reveal itself again, and with increasing frequency.

Class Consciousness and Cultural Despair

Since the 1960s, the United States has experienced the breakdown of the post-war ideology of consensus. Totalitarian liberalism has had to cope with a real and incompatible pluralism. The emergence of a "New Left" from the ruins of the Old Left and the germination of a New Right occurring between the discrediting of Joseph McCarthy (July 1954) and the presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater (1964) shattered the consensus and stranded the politicians whose careers were anchored to the Vital Center.

A major element of this political process has been the increased awareness of social class differences and divisions, this consciousness, however, has not assumed the form or content preconceived by those smitten by a vulgar marxism. While it is true that the new class consciousness has participated in a radicalization of the electorate and of the working classes, the greatest number of workers have as yet only experienced a confusion of social perceptions. Their insecurities and dissatisfactions have led to an increasingly critical disposition towards the social and political environment, but not to a coherent understanding of it. Part of this confusion is due to the defunct liberal consensus itself. The work of discrediting the marxian Left has been so thoroughly accomplished that any usage of socialist terminology immediately conjures images of the Red State, the "marxist society," the "Russian Bear" that has become a nightmare image continually surging forth from the subconsciouses of many North Americans. Such conditioning cannot be overcome in a single generation. As events in recent years have demonstrated, "cold war" rhetoric remains as useful in securing the interests of political and business elites now, as it was in the late 1940s.

The radicalization of two broad groups has occurred in opposition to this legacy. First, the working masses have gradually reassumed a propensity for collective organization and direct action. Emulation of the tactics of the Civil Rights movements and of the student protests against the war in Vietnam has, in fact, revalorized what can only be called "extra-parliamentary" actions. On a popular basis, the meaning of what was called "participatory democracy" in the late 1960s was that you *could* confront city hall. The so-called new social movements and the rank-and-file union movements of the 1970s and 80s express this rejection of "professional" politics. Second, a significant number of intellectuals have firmly rejected the tenets of totalitarian liberalism and now assert the necessity of qualitative social change. It is the combined forces of these two groups which have recreated a political Left in the United States.

Part of any political class consciousness is a deep sense of injustice, of inequities deemed unnatural and unacceptable. The "hidden injuries of class," however, can be expressed without a clear understanding of the hidden *interests* of class. In the 1970s, the Right was able to coopt class resentments by directing them against the "liberal establishment" that came under such deserved fire in the 1960s. Riding the back of the cold-war tiger, the "brightest and the best" of the liberals found that, once they repented for their sins committed in Vietnam, their own anti-communist rhetoric could be turned against them. Similar to Harry Truman, George Marshall, and Dean Acheson, who found themselves on the defensive when faced with a right wing populist named Joseph McCarthy, the arrogant liberals of Camelot, with Arthur Schlesinger as their leader, quickly became the "pin-headed intellectuals" of George Wallace and the "nattering ninnies of negativism" of Spiro Agnew. As advocates of a non-existant consensus, regardless of their academic and corporate connections, the liberals became class enemy number one: agents of a corporate-liberal establishment dedicated to busing children out of their neighborhoods, sending sons to slaughter while continuing to lose the war, and transferring power from the people to the federal bureaucracy. Using these themes, the New Right was able to channel class resentments into a direction supportive of its own projects. In doing so, however, the Right was obliged to reinforce its populist rhetoric and thus contribute to a resurgence of class language. Such a development, incompatible with the ideology of consensus, has the long-term potential of stimulating the development of labor and socialist organization. Consequently, the liberals will continue to be squeezed in their vital center.

The difficulty that liberals have in facing the issue of class has been dramatically revealed in presidential elections over the past twenty years. Hubert Humphrey banked on liberal consensus in 1968, whereas George Wallace spoiled his chances with his populist "blue-collar" and "redneck" campaign. In 1972, George McGovern sought to create a political force out of a coalition of disaffected groups — blacks and civil rights activists, anti-war protestors, a revitalized intellectual Left — but he had no broad class or ideological appeal. In 1976 Jimmy Carter ran an opportunistic campaign that capitalized on the mistakes of the arrogant and reckless Richard Nixon, only to lose in 1980 to the professional populism of his folksy opponent. Carter, of course, was folksy in his own right, but he had just lost another war, this one in Iran, humiliating the United States for the second time in less than a decade. In 1984, a spiritual son of Hubert Humphrey tested the balloon of corporate-liberal consensus once again; its quick deflation was considered merciful by all concerned. No one, however, revealed the bankruptcy of liberalism more brilliantly than Gary Hart. Attempting a diluted version of George McGovern's disastrous campaign (Hart was McGovern's campaign manager), Hart lacked the sincerity that had won respect for McGovern, if not votes. Disregarding the role of class values entirely, he revealed such a total contempt for his intended constituents

that his campaign was first aborted early in 1987, revived, and then suffocated by voters in the primary elections.

At the present time, only a political appeal based on a consideration of the realities of social class can elicit a positive response from the population as a whole. This situation does not mean that a class-based politics dominates in the United States, but that a growing sense of class, and a growing potential for the emergence of class consciousness on a significantly broader level, has transformed American political life. One of the consequences of this change has been the decline of totalitarian liberalism and the rise of a different authoritarian movement.

The results of totalitarian liberalism has been the rise of neo-fascists like the former trotskyist and New Leftist Lyndon LaRouche. In fact, LaRouche's career is symbolic of a United States careening towards a new kind of authoritarianism. Both LaRouche and the US share elements of consistency and volatility that are perhaps keys to understanding North-American political culture. What we find when we go beneath the surface of the idea of "consensus" is not the active concordance of politically aware individuals, but an absence of political awareness which allows the population to be dominated by relatively small groups of "decision-makers" and "image-makers." That which is to be believed a homogeneity of opinion actually reflects an overwhelming apathy towards civic and world affairs. There has never been a real consensus in the US, only a de-politicization which, far from contributing to civil stability, has created a confused, frustrated, frightened populace. The "individualism," "narcissism," and violence of the population, so often commented upon, are the cultural and characterological consequences of this depoliticization.

The special appeal of totalitarian liberalism was its undauntable optimism — its ability to reinforce a blind faith in the best of all possible worlds where the Spirit of Liberty has been realised in Pure Reason and where all negativity has disappreared. It is equally true, however, that doubts were and continue to be expressed, if only in intuitive ways. David Lynch's recent film, *Blue Velvet*, expresses implicitly such a doubt. The theme of Lynch's film is the rot which has eaten at the core of American culture. He contrasts the empty banality of the American Dream with the raging underworld it conceals. Indeed, the corruption steaming beneath the surface of the middle-class American Dream has been systematically contained by the liberal "consensus" of the post-war period. Not only has the ideology of consensus been the means by which outstanding social problems have been ignored, but it has been the formative agent in the creation of the "one-dimensionality" of the American mind discussed by Herbert Marcuse in the 1960s. An inability to contextualize, an abhorrance of critical thought, an aversion to programmatic responses to social questions, an absense of cultural relativism, a defensiveness born of a profound sense of inferiority, all belonging to the American mentality, were reinforced by the post-war imposition of totalitarian liberalism.

In attempting to understand this phenomenon we refer logically to the rise of the consumer society with all its variants of commodity fetichism, in other words to the cultural configuration of the materially prosperous "market-oriented," capitalist society that fortune erected on a temperate continent provided with resources capable of sustaining myths. The cultural consequences of consumerism, the sophistication of marketing "persuasions," and the oligopolistic control of sources of information are also prime factors in the deadening of critical faculties in the US. In the presence of these phenomena, there often appears to be no political salvation. Regardless of the degree of "political consciousness" possessed by indigenous critics of American culture and institutions, they invariably run into a wall of consensual non-consciousness, a will-not-to-know that is a veritable breeding ground of nihilism, narcissism and sado-masochistic violence. The liberal consensus, which has been *the* political ideology in the US, was consciously fashioned and propagated so as to eliminate any notion of an alternative to the "American way" and any propensity to critical thought in general.

What is generally taken as "extremism" in the U.S., is the opposite of the collective state of political apathy that is maintained by those in positions of power. There are two ways of understanding the phenonomen. First, the relative quiescence and political ignorance of the American population represents an opportunity, a field of action, for "activists." The lack of political consciousness is fertile ground for manipulation based upon the most exaggerated claims. In this sense, apathy tends to encourage "extremism." Second, the presence of "extremists" works to the benefit of those in positions of power and authority who are quick to explain that any deviation from the political orthodoxy of the moment will degenerate into "irrationality" and violence. Social criticism is thus a sign of irresponsibility. In other words, the myth of "consensus" implies the creation of scapegoats. Over the past twenty years individuals like Joseph McCarthy, Lyndon LaRouche, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, etc. have succeeded in imposing themselves upon the public by profiting from the civil apathy and political ignorance of the North-American population through the process of scapegoating. Products of the myth of "consensus," these men have also contributed to its destruction.

What can be expected in the future? It is difficult to be optimistic. To date, the new populism has largely been a purely political response to a population that has been partially disillusioned and has experienced insecurities resulting from rapid industrial mutation, a long-term decline in real income, and an overall increase in unemployment over the past two decades. The class perceptions and tensions which have accompanied these trends have been effectively manipulated through the use of prevailing political structures and the electronic media. The right wing, television evangelicalism is the best example of this manipulation, and it should not be forgotten that the Moral Majority was created out of secular, political mo-

tives. When recent corporate mergers are taken into consideration, the role of the communications media can be expected to become even more reactionary. There has been a radicalization of American political life in which a recognition of the realities of social class and class divisions has gained increased importance, but, at the present time, the potential for native-grown fascism appears far greater than for any conceivable form of socialism.

Such explanations and prognostications, however, are not complete, and taken alone they may even contribute to cultural despair and to the politics of cultural despair. The situation appears far less hopeless when we take into account the historical specificity of contemporary political culture in the US and the element of political will which contributed to the present situation. What can be done, can be undone. Totalitarian liberalism was not simply secreted by the structural evolution of the American economy and society. It emerged only after an ideological struggle involving a concerted phase of theory-building and political repression. Since World War II, North-American liberals have contributed more than any single group to the creation of these conditions. Their imposition of totalitarian liberalism, primarily involving a rupture in the development of the socialist Left, laid a firm foundation for the rise of more pronounced fascist tendencies in the United States. That class appeals will be made more frequently in American political life, there is little doubt. It is also certain that liberalism of the corporate or "New Deal" order offers no long-lasting solutions to contemporary problems of social existence. Alternatively, it is possible to understand the divisions that perpetuate social inequities, without succumbing to the pitfalls of this specious ideology. The era of consensus is past, and the only civilized alternative is to combat the forces of reaction, whether totalitarian liberalism or fascist authoritarianism, with a class appeal which is not based upon scapegoating of any kind.

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Notes

1. For discussions of how, in the 1960s, post-war liberalism came to be seen as a conservative and authoritarian doctrine see: Ronald Berman, *America in the Sixties : An Intellectual History*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 110-118; Christopher Brookeman, *American Culture and Society since the 1930s*, (London, Macmillian, 1984), pp. 150-170.

2. Philip Murray, American Magazine, June 1948, p. 136, cited by George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight,"* (New York: Praeger, 1981), p. 143. Such affirmations were reinforced by scholarly studies such as the in-

fluential classic, W. Lloyd Warner *Social Class in America: The Evaluation of Status*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), by W. Lloyd Warner, first published in 1949.

3. See Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, (New York: Harcourt, 1955).

4. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), p. ix.

5. Ibid., p. 60.

6. Ibid., p. 58.

7. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Not Left, Not Right, but a Vital Center," *New York Times Magazine*, April 4, 1948.

8. William O. Douglas, *Monthy Labor Review*, January 1949, cited in Lipsitz, *Class and Culture*, p. 143.

9. Schlesinger, "Not Left, Not Right," pp. ix-x.

10. Ibid., p. 33.

11. Dalton Trumbo, *The Time of the Toad: A Study of Inquisition in America*, (London & West Nyack: The Journeyman Press, 1982 [1949]), p. 59.

12. Ibid., p. 43

13. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Mordern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 190.

14. See G. William Domhoff, "The Ideology Process," in *The Powers That Be, Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America*, (New York: Random House, 1978).

15. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, (Glencoe, The Free Press,1960), p. 370.

16. Ibid., p. 373.

17. Ibid., p. 112.

18. Ibid., pp. 289-299.

19. Ibid., p. 293.

20. John P. Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1975,) p. 4. Diggins analyzes how "four gifted but diverse men (Max Eastman, John Dos Passos, Will Herberg, and James Burnham) made the peculiar odyssey from the revolutionary Left to the militant Right, even without pausing in the 'Vital Center'." See p. 14.

21. Ibid., p. 430.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de theorie politiqe et sociale, Volume 12, no. 3 (1988).

INTELLECTUALS: PUBLIC AND PROLETARIAN

Michael A. Weinstein

Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe, New York: Basic Books, 1987.

More than a generation ago, in the 1950s, modern Western culture reached one of its turning points and since then has never been the same. At that time, for a brief moment, the hopes of modern progressivism were expressed for the last time with sincerity, while simultaneously the rising technological corporatism, which would supplant progressive public morality, began to confidently absorb its ascendant power. In the United States the dissenting tradition of mature liberalism, radical pragmatism, would have one more attempt at creating a genuine public situation through the New Left. That effort would however demonstrate its irrelevance and its irrevocable failure when billy clubs were used in the streets of Chicago and the guns went off at Kent State and Jackson State. The generation whose myth was that it could "change the world, rearrange the world" proved to be an afterthought of a dead liberal fantasy. The real protagonist of the 1960s was state and corporate power, which proved to itself how easily it could subdue protest. The children of abundance voted for rock concerts over revolution, unable or unwilling to spill their blood for their ideals. The state progressed, forcing liberation movements into official channels and using administration to conceal a deadlocked and divided society.

Part of the great transformation that occurred from the 1950s through the 1960s was the migration of intellectuals into the bureaucratized universities, which became integral components of the power complexes of technological corporatism. That migration and its implications in cultural politics is the theme of Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*, which documents the demise of the free-floating intellectual in North America and the rise of the corporatized mind that has leased itself to a specialized body

of professional learning. To say that Jacoby stands at the end of the radical pragmatist tradition would be inaccurate, because that tradition is extinct, as his own argument demonstrates. He stands beyond radical pragmatism, using its values to lament the absence of public intellectuals who might be sustained by those values. In effect, he does for democratic dissent what George Grant, in *Lament for a Nation*, did for Canadian conservatism: he sings a dirge, but Jacoby would deny this. He still nurses hope for the authentic public of radical pragmatism and somehow still adheres to the myth structure of the social democratic John Dewey and the populist C. Wright Mills. Unfortunately, his only audience is composed of the bureaucratized intellectuals in the academy, his own friends who have betrayed the progressive cause. He cannot offer them a refreshed definition of that cause but only a documentation of their failure to commit themselves to it. No wonder he is so tentative, guarded, and reserved in his moral judgments. He speaks from the height of an extinct ideal to those who are mired in the technical wash of the real.

The term "radical pragmatism" does not enter into Jacoby's text, which remains strangely clear of any explicit political or philosophical focus. The lack of any overt standpoint in the work is in great part a result of the standpoint that tacitly informs it. American radical democracy in the twentieth century has always harbored an uneasy equivocation between form and content. In one respect it is strongly committed to civil liberties and social pluralism, which means that it must welcome or at least allow conservative and even reactionary tendencies into its imagined public space. In another respect, however, it supports the popular forces against the vested interests and their apologists, tacking toward socialism in its moments of struggle.

The pluralist-libertarian side of radical pragmatism and its social-democratic camp were harmonized in John Dewey's generation by the *deus ex machina* of a spontaneous and automatic historical drift toward social democracy, only if the public space were kept open for inquiry, criticism, and social experimentation. By the time C. Wright Mills arrived on the scene, the optimism of the "common faith" had been overwhelmed by the "great celebration" of American imperial power: the radical pragmatist speaking to incipient publics, had become the marginal dissenter who could scarcely look to history for support. Now enter Jacoby, who understands that history is against him. He does not dare make a forthright commitment to the tradition of which he lies beyond but seeks to defend. He wants radical pragmatists but settles for lamenting the dearth of public intellectuals of whatever persuasion. John Dewey believed that a genuine public space could be created, C. Wright Mills was marginal to a vanishing public space, and Russell Jacoby speaks across a public void into the sanctum of academic bureaucracy.

The mix of socialism, populism, social welfare, pragmatic experimentation, and civil libertarianism that fueled radical democratic protest and dis-

sent through the first half of the twentieth century, and that allowed independent thinkers the possibility of synthesizing unique positions and of remaking those positions as circumstances changed, has decomposed. All of these elements are present in Jacoby's text at one point or another, but they are never synthesized into a vision, which is not Jacoby's fault, since it is not possible to be a public intellectual in a public void. If Jacoby can be called to account it is only for failing to take seriously the consequences of his central thesis: that the intellectuals of the "war baby" and "baby boom" generations migrated into the university. The public space imploded and was replaced by the externalized mind of the mass electronic media, manipulated by state and capitalist conglomerates. The freelance intellectual wholesalers of ideas to "opinion leaders" gave way to the direct marketing of images by such mind factories as think tanks, advertising agencies, and public relations complexes. The swamping of public opinion by organizational opinion was not caused by the migration of the intellectuals but was one of the causes of that migration. Where else could those who wanted to think for themselves and to express their thought to others go, except to the university, even if they would encounter there a constraining disciplinary system that might bid fair to turn them into timorous intellectual proletarians?

Russell Jacoby introduces a deliberate equivocation into the title of his work. The idea of "last intellectuals" might refer to the extinction of a social type, but it might also denote the most recent group of specimens in a continuing line. It is surely impossible to predict what the future might hold in the way of renewed progressivism, but Jacoby's own rhetorical strategy shows how far he is from considering the second possibility seriously. When, in the later sections of his work, he discusses the contemporary academic mind in the humanities, he delivers some of his choicest polemics against the Marxist critics who have adopted poststructuralism and deconstruction. Noting that the "new Marxism converges with, indeed partly promotes, a 'poststructuralism' that concentrates on texts, signs, and signifiers as the stuff of interpretation" (172), he then declares that "(t)he theory of fetishism, which Marx set forth, turns into its opposite, the fetishism of theory" (173). One can agree wholeheartedly with those remarks and with the observation that "literary theory expands as literature dwindles" (173), and then acknowledge that Jacoby is just as trapped as his adversaries are in the meta-theory of discourses. What is he doing but showing how one sort of discourse, which was promoted by small groups of relatively independent intellectuals during the first half of the twentieth century, has been replaced by another sort of discourse, which is furthered by bands of turf-conscious academic bureaucrats? The point is not that Jacoby's intentions are the same as those whom he criticizes — he is not, as they are, engaged in a corrupt form of thought, academic thinking, which invents theoretical movements as a means to the institutional promotion of academic cliques; the best that he has done is to present a discourse

on discourses, albeit a refreshing and heterodox one. Language, rhetoric, communication, text, discourse, semiology, and narratology have become such central terms in the humanities because the possibility of shared culture has become so problematic. If the imagined public space of progressivism has been effaced by the externalization of the organized mind in the mass media, it is intelligible that the progressives should retreat into the hyper-space of texts where they still may exercise the right of free interpretation. Jacoby joins them in their hyper-space, an intruder reminding them that there once might have been a public space or at least the hope for one, in which discourses were about great issues and events, and not about canonical texts.

In his "Preface" Jacoby remarks that he "will employ, but not exhaustively define, various categories — bohemia, intellectuals, generations, cultural life," because "(t)oo many definitions, too much caution, kill thought" (xii). The lack of definitions in his text makes it open for interpretation, sending the reader on a hunt for some conceptual clarification that would make an internal reading and analysis possible. Fortunately, late in the work, he provides a fragment of a definition that reveals the structure of his argument: "Yet the decisive category here is not intellectuals, those who cherish thinking and ideas, but public intellectuals, who contribute to open discussions" (221). The binary opposition of open and closed discussion is the hermeneutical key to unlocking Jacoby's text. More than anything else, he is concerned with the character of discourse, just as the other leaders of his cultural generation are, and his text tells the story, through a series of strategic and striking vignettes, of how the open discussion of public affairs by intellectuals courting an enlightened public opinion gave way to the closed discussion of academic bureaucrats deploying jargons to gain peer acceptance and preferment. It is a sorry tale, as Jacoby knows, and he relates it engagingly by devoting the first half of the work to the demise of the public intellectual, and its second half to the rise of the academic bureaucrat or, if one likes, professional. The following comments will trace the two moments of Jacoby's tale, retelling some aspects and also amplifying and amending others.

The Closure of Discussion

Russell Jacoby dwells on that borderland between philosophy, sociology, and politics that Georg Simmel called cultural history, a field that has today become the meeting ground for all of those intellectuals who want to speak to the general and significant aspects of the human condition without becoming caught in the toils of over-specialization. Since the 1960s that cultural history has gained such an importance as the last redoubt for embattled humanists and symbolizes the problem of public vacancy that Jacoby addresses. As human affairs have been distributed for study among an ever proliferating array of technical specialties, and as comprehensive

interpretation of human affairs has been submitted to the mass media, generalists have encountered an inability to find a language adequate to characterize their circumstances and to communicate their insights to a wider audience. They have been thrust back into the past, particularly to the era of high modernism, to discover a proper vocabulary and idiom. It is still possible to specialize in the generalities of past thinkers and to use their words as battering rams against the fortresses of jargon erected by the coteries of academic bureaucrats. Interpretation of aging texts has become the key weapon in the emerging battle of the books, and is the shadow play in which combative intellectuals engage it as their substitute for direct involvement with issues. Old texts display a coherence that is no longer possible to achieve through a direct reflection on the public situation. It is comforting and expedient to immerse oneself in discourses that were intended to give a sense of completion, even if their deconstruction is the only goal.

As a cultural historian, Jacoby belongs to the line of thought that was initiated after World War I by Karl Mannheim and Jose Ortega y Gasset, each of whom independently discovered the generation as a central concept in sociological inquiry. For Mannheim and Ortega, the generation was a specially privileged concept because, unlike the more static and structural ideas of classical sociology, it incorporated the notion of change, that is, what Mannheim called "the dynamic insight," into itself. Jacoby's theorization of the transformation from open to closed discussion in North American intellectual life depends upon the distinction between three generations. The intellectuals who were born at the turn of the century were nurtured in urban bohemias, wrote in independent magazines for an educated public, and were marked by a critical independence from established concentrations of institutional power, especially the universities. Such thinkers as Lewis Mumford and Edmund Wilson are, for Jacoby, the paradigmatic public intellectuals, free from dogmatism, fresh in their critical approach, and unencumbered by the constraints of academic professionalism. He recurs to them as his standard-bearers in the battle of the books. The generation of 1900, the high watermark of the public intellectual, was succeeded by the generation of 1920, which carried through the transition from the public to the academic intellectual. Its members, for example, Daniel Bell and Alfred Kazin, often began their careers outside the university but became attached to it in the crucial decade of the 1950s when the social conditions for public intellectual life disappeared. The shift was completed by the generation born in the 1940s, nearly none of whose members failed to heed the academic siren song, thereby abandoning the public space for the seminar room and the conference hall.

The basic outline of Jacoby's thesis is unexceptionable and is recounted with verve and precision. Indeed, he has identified a phenomenon that cannot fail to absorb the interest of any thoughtful person who is perplexed by an inability to think adequate thoughts about the contemporary cir-

cumstance. Russell Jacoby is deeply correct when he documents and laments the loss of public intellectuals. His point is amply demonstrated by the fact that anyone who seeks ideas that might nourish life, sharpen perception, and enrich thought must be driven back to the generation of 1900 and to those preceding it. Has there been any philosopher, for example since John Dewey, who has been able to crystallize debate on public affairs and to contextualize that debate in the terms of a provocative metaphysics, the categories of which refer to direct experience? Asking such a question reveals the poverty of the contemporary North American intellect. Ambitious and confident thought about human existence, expressed in a clear and intelligible vocabulary, has been replaced, at best, by the bricolage of postmodernism, poking among the detritus of high modernism; normally, by hermeneutical studies of canonized thinkers; and, at worst, by the abstracted empiricism of exegesis and the preparation of "critical editions." The generation of 1940 can do nothing better than to recur to the writings of the generations of 1900 and before, forming endless study circles devoted to the memories of the intellectual heroes of the past, those who comprised what Nikos Kazantzakis called "the international of the spirit," the republic of letters. The generation of 1920, which prepared the way for the present, gains little respect or attention for good reason. That group of intellectuals, with such notable exceptions as C. Wright Mills and Marshall McLuhan, was characterized by an unseemly lust for wealth, status, and power, and an ugly preoccupation with the Cold War.

There is, however, another perspective. While much of Jacoby's argument rests upon the temptations of security, if nothing else, that an expanding academia availed to the intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s, he also provides the beginnings of a sociological analysis of the erosion of public space. Public intellectuals had, prior to World War II, the common meeting and training grounds of the bohemian sections of major cities, ecological niches of low rents and cheap restaurants where aspiring writers and critics, and the politically concerned could exchange ideas, mount publishing projects, and find markets for their productions. The bohemian seedbed for public intellectuals vanished in the 1950s under the impact of suburbanization, "redevelopment," gentrification, and the encroachment of the slum. There was no longer any material basis for the sustenance of the independent spirit. The public intellectual was simultaneously driven out of nurturant urban haunts by consumer capitalism and drawn into the universities by the carrots of tenure, a modicum of academic freedom, and the possibility, for the best, brightest, and most compliant of a dazzling array of "perks" such as grants, fellowships, institutes, international travel, and status honor.

One cannot, indeed should not, quarrel with Jacoby's account. How else is it possible to understand sympathetically why the ardent members of the generation born in the 1940s rebelled so strenuously against the corrupt professionalism that they saw as undergraduates and even more as

graduate students? It was corrupt, the guilty corruption of elders who either knew or should have known that they had betrayed the public function of the intellect to disclose society to itself, not to apologize for its major concentrations of power. The generation born in the 1920s failed to anticipate the protest movements of the 1960s because it did not want to: it had found a new niche. Nevertheless, the reasons for which the generation of 1940 followed its forebears, with far more willingness and docility than they had evinced, into the academic padded cell calls for a deeper analysis than Jacoby provides.

The disappearance of bohemia, which is the major social occurrence upon which Jacoby grounds his sociological account of the demise of the public intellectual, is far too flimsy a base on which to build the cultural history of our times. The conditions for an open public discourse, in which free spirits adopt positions on public affairs from independent analysis and personal commitment, what Robert Michels called "scientific conviction," and then alter them in response to changing events and the play of debate, include the existence of public intellectuals but are not exhausted by their presence. Indeed, public intellectuals are not primarily the consequence of low rents and cheap restaurants, but of a culture which is both diverse enough to permit a variety of opinions about the possibilities for social betterment, and coherent enough to allow those possibilities to refer to a general situation which those who promote opinions acknowledge that they share. That is, public intellectuals can only appear and function in a public situation, a general human context which is not so rigidly defined that it prohibits the serious entertainment of fresh possibilities for its transformation and reorganization.

Open public discourse requires that society be made a shared object by the parties to discussion and that it is amenable to change by what John Dewey called "publics," groups which respond to the effects of organized activities in ever novel ways. Public intellectuals speak for publics in a common situation, but the big story of recent generations has been the relentless bureaucratization of life, which has limited the genuine possibilities for change, and the disappearance of a common situation, which has led to the fragmentation of society into hermetic masses unable to communicate with one another in a common idiom. Bureaucracy eliminates adaptability as it simultaneously fragments publics and reduces them to organized interest groups. There is a public void. Even if low rents and cheap restaurants in relatively safe neighborhoods were somehow to reappear miraculously, there would be nowhere else to go than the university for intellectuals who wanted to retain any vestige of independence. Technological corporatism is bureaucratized feudalism — feudalism on a functional rather than a territorial basis. That is our circumstance.

MICHAEL WEINSTEIN

The Opening Of Externalized Mind

The classical sociology and political science of the turn of the century traced the transition from traditional to modern society across the main dimensions of human activity. Now, as the end of the twentieth century approaches, the effort to think comprehensively about human affairs is once again challenged to describe, account for, and foresee the consequences of another decisive change. The great theme of present times is the problematicity of modernity, the question about whether modern life is the terminus of the human process, now revealed for just what it must be in all of its significant aspects, or whether it has already been supplanted by another era, which for lack of any apparent essential structure, has to be denominated as postmodern. One thing within the confusion of the current culture wars does seem to be clear: the various myths that provided modern social life with hope for the future, with a final cause, have been exhausted. The question is whether a new myth structure is emerging to inform and inspire life, or whether human beings must at last confront all their frailty, unredeemed by saving thoughts.

The Last Intellectuals occupies an important position in the debate and discussion about the meaning of modernity. Despite his reluctance to make a forthright philosophical and political commitment Russell Jacoby sides with the modernists. His essential contribution to contemporary thought is to have demonstrated the exhaustion of one of the powerful modern myths, the progressive democratic myth of open discussion in a genuine public situation. The public intellectual is the ideal citizen in the democratic polity — Thomas Jefferson's natural aristocrat who takes upon himself, with a fully self-conscious responsibility, the office of leavening and leading an enlightened public opinion. In this sense Jacoby should be placed among thinkers like Jurgen Habermas and Richard Rorty, who in different ways continue the line of liberal and radical democratic ideas proceeding from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The ongoing "conversation," which is promoted by Rorty as the essence of bourgeois democracy, and the "ideal speech situation" that is defended by Habermas as the telos of emancipation, find their counterpart in Jacoby's ideal of "open discussions." Jacoby, however, is not confident that the modern democratic idea is still viable. Just a small shift in attitude would allow him to declare the exhaustion of democracy, but he clings to that terribly delusive liberal hope that the end of fundamental human transformation has not arrived, that there still might be some happy surprises for us beyond the horizon. His self-imposed task is to push the academic intellectuals out of the closet and into the public void, but one cannot expect them to budge: The "age of discussion" has ended, although democracy remains the only verbal formula available for political rhetoric, not only in the West but throughout the world. The great change in the process of political communication

that must now be described and understood is the replacement of personal opinion and group ideology by organizational opinion.

The strength of Jacoby's account of the academic intellectual resides in his ability to show how the discussion of human affairs in the university has been captured in inaccessible technical jargons which, for the most part, take cultural artifacts such as texts for their objects and avoid any direct encounter with common or personal life. Jacoby seems to believe, although as always he is elusive about such matters, that open discussions might be renewed if intellectuals once again adopted a lucid and accessible idiom. The bare facts of the matter, however, show that he is searching for regeneration in the wrong place. There is no doubt that the preponderance of academic output today in the humanities and the social sciences is worth reading only by those who hope to use it for their professional profit, that is, to insert themselves into some micro-discourse promoted by one of the dizzying array of cliques fighting to entrench themselves in the academic hierarchy. That, nevertheless, is not the whole picture. There are probably more intellectuals practicing today than there have been in the history of the world and many of them, academic and otherwise, are writing in the vernacular. The opinion magazines still exist along with an outpouring of position papers and monographs from the vigorous industry of think tanks and institutes. The prestige papers have opened their columns to op-ed pieces, every interest group and circle has a newsletter, and every organization has a public information department. Indeed, it is not possible even to comprehend, much less absorb, the products of contemporary discussion, which do not merely form the midden heap of an information explosion, rather an opinion explosion. There is a plenitude of open discussions, but there has been a closure or implosion of a coherent public space and an opening out of the externalized organizational mind, a collective mind, divided within itself into thousands of fragments.

There are, largely, three major forms of opinion about political affairs in contemporary society. Jacoby has admirably documented one of them, the opinion generated by academic coteries for their own internal consumption, but he has neglected the other two, both of which help to explain why the public intellectual has been pushed out of the scene. Mass opinion, merchandised through the electronic media, by-passes any conceptual content in favor of images that, as Murray Edelman has long pointed out, function mainly to provide a sense of symbolic security to anxious populations, but which, under special circumstances of institutional need or crisis, may also be contrived to panic or mobilize. Mass opinion exists in a twilight zone between cognition and emotion, fostering favorable or unfavorable attitudes and dispositions toward political and cultural objects. It is not unitary, except in its overriding tendency to induce complacency and a brittle substitute for confidence — the mass must feel secure but not so secure that it cannot be readily panicked or mobilized — but or-

dinarily reflects the confusion bred by the conflicts of adjustments among major organizations and leading institutions. Mass opinion itself has little theoretical or political interest because it is derived from another form of opinion that stands behind and generates it.

What might be called "responsible opinion" is the floating mediation between the interests of the great competing organizations of contemporary technological corporatism, each of which is directed to secure its short-term survival and advantage, and all of which have a general concern for maintaining the institutional environment in which they operate. Responsible opinion is coordinated by the powerful concentrations of national print media, such as the prestige papers and major news magazines, that perform the perpetual function of achieving a transient coalescence of judgments about the methods by which to manage the political, social, and economic tensions that continually recur as organizations clash and, in the process, disturb less mobilized social groups. Public opinion has vanished, having been split into the manipulativeness of mass opinion and the struggle by intellectuals in the hire of bureaucratic complexes to form responsible opinion.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of responsible opinion in the light of Jacoby's analysis is the fact that it is a tangled web of open discussions, the simulacrum of a genuine public discourse. Indeed, it can be nothing other than nakedly exposed because the world of technological corporatism has no coordinating center that might harbor secret designs, but is composed of massive disarticulated and specialized bureaucratic complexes that must bid against one another for resources and somehow control heterogeneous masses, some of which nurse chronic resentment because of structural disadvantage. The bureaucratic complexes do their bargaining and fight their battles in the light of day through the offices of the media, which provide them with an externalized social mind. Open discussions, indeed, are ubiquitous, but they entirely lack guidance from the principles of public good which are the substance of democratic myth. Appeals to principle are the staple of responsible opinion, but they are merely rhetorical devices that are adopted and rejected in accordance with the requirements of short-term adjustment. Responsible opinion is determined by a strict prohibition on ever problematizing the public as a coherent object upon which to project totalizing possibility, and by an easy permission to deploy past convictions as rhetoric. This deprived spiritual environment forecloses the appearance of public intellectuals and encourages, indeed necessitates, the advocate intellectual, the policy analyst, the bureaucratic ethicist, the arts advisor, and the artist of public relations, all of whom represent the worldly counterparts of the closeted academician.

The public intellectual has vanished permanently, elbowed out by the overgrowth of complex organization that has found its own way of thinking through political life, poorly, even disastrously, to be sure, but still its

own indispensable way. Can one expect the bureaucracies to surrender the control that they have gained over the opinion phase of political activity? Who might wrest it from them, an aroused citizenry led by people of scientific conviction? The intellectuals of the generation born in the 1940s are the first intellectual cohorts to completely become an intellectual proletariat. Nothing prohibits a young or middle-aged intellectual from doing everything that public intellectuals once did. Indeed, many still do, if only part-time. Nevertheless, one who enters the combat of open discussions armed only with the vernacular must, if he could ward off madness, entertains a sense of the ridiculous. At best his words will find their place in the mix of responsible opinion, appropriated by one or another vested interest or interest aspiring to be vested. He will know himself as proletarian, not as the inspiration of the proletariat.

Political Science
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Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de theorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, no. 3 (Fall 1988)

JAMESON'S STRATEGIES OF CONTAINMENT

Haynes Horne

Committed to the humanistic tradition of the Enlightenment and its unfinished utopian project, Fredric Jameson's attempts to post-modernize Marxism have generated a great deal of excitement,without, however, effecting requisite passage out of nineteenth century history of philosophy. Enlightenment: this epithet of Marxism — perhaps one of the most fruitful 'discoveries' of post-structuralism — is only beginning to be appreciated and its implications explored. That the most recent defense of enlightenment humanism has come from Marxism, a political creed that has for more than a century been successfully vilified as its arch-enemy, is far more than irony; for with the belief in the immanence of reason and the adequacy of communication, Fredric Jameson continues the profession of faith in legitimating principles as a basis for historical intervention. That such faith has justified every revolution, counter-revolution, and coup d'etat since 1789 passes unremarked in his writing.

Puzzling enough, in the face of the extensive and knowledgeable synthesis of poststructuralist elements in Jameson's writing, this faith is both the goal and the wreck of his mission: the desire to retain the enlightenment heritage of a totalizing philosophy of history, within which commitment to principle can be universalized, blinds him to the results of such a desire "to seize reality" as it instances itself in praxis. The pre-critical allegiance to what Lyotard calls "metanarratives of emancipation" obscures all paths leading out of the modern tradition in which these metanarratives take their pseudo-secular, bourgeois form; for the avoidance of epistemological questions — by postulating the retreat of the "effectivity" of metanarratives into the political unconscious — in favor of ethical

expression necessarily leaves the status quo, out of which any ethic arises, perfectly intact. As a result, Jameson's work stands as a fascinating instance of a late modernism: where it can no longer be avoided, it incorporates poststructuralist elements piecemeal and strategically, but it posits, finally, the same modernist philosophy of history with the same commitment to the totality of an enlightenment project. Jameson's work remains squarely within the modern, the millenarian, manifesting the desire to represent as whole that which we now realize can only be known in shards. This desire to represent the totality instantiates itself as terror in the moment in which its wholeness of form is made constitutive. This sleight of hand occults the socially determined status of the theories upon which the whole itself rests.

However desirable the passage of Marx's writings into the postmodern may be, it cannot be effected within an enlightenment philosophy of history or any other, for that matter, which refuses to acknowledge both principled limitations to its own authority and the giveness of equally authoritative alternate legends. When it will be possible to speak of Marxist *philosophies of histories* and be understood, that is without being accused of some liberal pluralism, Marxism will have emerged from hegemonic claims of enlightenment and offered itself anew as a vehicle for transforming — not reproducing — the given social order!

The Siren Call of *The Political Unconscious*

Despite Jameson's encyclopedic knowledge of the terms and techniques of poststructuralist analysis, a well-known modernist design motivates his work: the desire, in the face of the epistemological break defining postmodernism, to legitimate political involvement in mass movements. This desire is the unconscious of *The Political Unconscious* — unconscious, however, in the weak sense that it avoids offering itself up to critique; for the reader must go outside of *The Political Unconscious* to find its wellsprings. This work satisfies itself with laying the groundwork for legitimation: the (re-) establishment of the preconditions of a collective which can act as the political consciousness of a new (proletarian) class struggling against the monolithic hegemony of multinational capitalism. Such a desire is to be secured by a doctrine of the absolute horizon of history, which doubles as the guarantor of both interpretational and communicational adequacy. History becomes the referential bound of language and thus the essential guarantor of a potential consensus on aesthetic norms and ethical maxims.

This program of the "political," which, along with the notion of a philosophy of history, grounds Jameson in the tradition of moderns, forms the desire, the interest, behind *The Political Unconscious*; however, this interest scarcely figures in that text. It is rather in his foreword to Lyotard's

The Postmodern Condition that this desire materializes when Jameson writes:

> The great master-narratives here are those that suggest that something beyond capitalism is possible, something radically different; and they also "legitimate" the praxis whereby political militants seek to bring that radically different future social order into being.[1]

This motivation for which the "absent cause" of history is tended is only political in that modern sense which has dominated from the Convention of 1789 through the Popular Front to the communal alternatives of the 60s and which still finds loud support today around academic conference tables: the political as a totalized agglomeration of disparate fields of discourse: among them the ethical, aesthetic, economic, judicial, all circumscribed by an absolute horizon of history, a philosophy of history, providing a potential basis for legitimate revolutionary praxis. Such a work as Jameson undertakes in *The Political Unconscious* constitutes the founding of a new epic — or the revision of an old one: that epic of the community's struggle for bread, peace, and work. If this is the unstated desire of *The Political Unconscious*, to consider the text of Lyotard, which provokes its full statement in the preceeding quotation, may prove instructive.

Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* describes the dissolution of, and argues against any reestablishment of foundational myths, or "metanarratives", by positing postmodernity as a position from which such integral myths of modernity can be "re-cognized":

> Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives ... To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements — narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valences specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.

In condensed form this passage could be said to contain the bulk of the poststructuralist program Jameson argues against and hopes to contain. First and foremost, Jameson propounds the utopian ideal or promise, which provides his project with its telos, its meaning, and its justification. The path toward this utopia is linear and narrative, taking such forms as the history of productive forces, and the story of necessity and class struggle. Narrative is, indeed, the privileged form of knowledge since the scientific

field eschews any consideration of the ethical. Although Jameson does not acknowledge the fact, having once posited the contours of a history within which a single narrative of liberation arises, he simultaneously gets along with the narrative, its subject of elocution — the heroic revolutionary subject — which remains capable of "dangerous voyages" and heroic action. Lyotard, on the other hand, envisions the writing of these narratives out of the script of the "new" modernity we presently stand before. Indeed, the postmodern, for Lyotard, is exactly that moment of the continual renewal of modernity itself in which we are called to intervene, not with a new program, which would merely rewrite the terror inscribed on us by the last two centuries, but with a new toleration for the incommensurability of language games and their contestants. Such an endorsement of diversity could inscribe an entirely new modernity, one in which utopian visions, as well as final solutions, would be consigned to a now demythologized past, a modernity in which the fact of agonistics replaces the sentiment for consensus, a modernity in which the indefinite postponement of meaning allows for a proliferation of stories.

Jameson assumes that such radical programs of dissolution as Lyotard discusses with respect to metanarratives, can only be endorsed when these programs serve as a merely strategic component of a politically conscious telos operating within the movement of history. How such a position as Lyotard describes — aleatory and non-programmatic — could be itself of interpretive value and political utility cannot occur to him, for in the modernist sense of the term it cannot be recognized as political. Indeed Jameson seems to hold to the 'with me or agin me' idea, thinking that the only alternative to a markedly oppositional role is co-optation. This thought excludes the capacity of institutions to thrive on oppositional movements which remain trapped in an identity logic which can only reaffirm the status quo. This can be readily seen within the academy: if a professor publishes a particularly powerful critique of the system, he most often gets a pay increase for his labors; and the more powerful the critique, the larger the raise! This is the dilemma accounted for in the postmodernism of Lyotard, himself no stranger to political activism.

Jameson's commitment, however, to a modernist totalizing program, one he thinks securely grounded in a history of philosophy, blinds him to the postmodern condition as Lyotard describes it. Yet Lyotard has mobilized a powerful and unexpected ally for his attack on totality in the Kant of the Third Critique, a text lying close not only to the surface of Lyotard's work but to the conception of modernity as known in the West as "enlightenment." Lyotard chooses his allies carefully, for what he shows us with Kant is that the critique of totality is by no means merely a postmodern fashion, as Jameson has a way of suggesting. Jameson writes as if he can construct a non-cognitive framework, i.e., "the absolute horizon of history," within which a specific ethic, i.e., "the praxis whereby political militants seek to bring *that* radically different social order into being," can

derive its legitimation. In other words "the great master narratives" — translate: the history of class struggle — which have, for the present at least, gone into hiding in the political unconscious can secure us an "is" from which, at our hour of need, an "ought" can be derived.

It is disturbing that such an argument as this for tending the master narratives is hardly present at all in *The Political Unconscious*, for we ought to expect rigor from modernist political theories; they should at least try to ground their fundamental narratives. Instead, as Sam Weber has pointed out, Jameson aims at a notoriously apolitical audience of professional academicians, and Weber has argued convincingly that Jameson's arguments for his methodology can be reduced in part to what amounts to an appeal for upholding the status quo of the institutional framework of intellectual life.[2] Before examining these points further in Jameson's texts, I would like to continue with his "misreading" of Lyotard and Kant, a misreading which causes him to rely on history as the "absent" referent that is nonetheless capable of anchoring the signification required for the revolutionary praxis prescribed by modernist millenarian versions of Marxist theory.

The following quotation is from an essay by Lyotard appended to *The Postmodern Condition*, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism," which contains a striking denouncement of enlightenment humanism, whether of the Jameson or E.D. Hirsch flavors:

> Finally, it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented. And it is not to be expected that this task will effect the last reconciliation between language games (which, under the name of faculties, Kant knew to be separated by a chasm), and that only the transcendental illusion (that of Hegel) can hope to totalize them into a real unity. But Kant also knew that the price to pay for such an illusion is terror. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witness to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.[3]

There is hardly room in such an account of "the postmodern condition" for a doctrine of a master narrative, wrapped in the guise of an "absent cause" or not, and it is unfortunate that Jameson does not address these remarks in his introduction. Jameson approaches this theme, which accuses totality *qua* totality of leading to terror, only very indirectly by referring to it as "instinctive" and somehow vaguely fashionable.[4] This,

however, is a theme which is by no means confined to Lyotard's short essay quoted above. It is a realization fundamental to Lyotard's postmodernism that any theory or concept capable of justifying "the praxis whereby political militants seek to bring that radically different future social order into being" is equally capable of bringing a reign of terror — indeed, that the two may not even be objectively distinguishable; and Lyotard is insistent on reminding us of what has happened before in the name of reason. He recalls for us the Kantian distinction between knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics in order to support his argument against any totalizing system which lays claim to be the final adjudicator of conflicts between the faculties of the mind, or, as could be said, language games. Lyotard's interest in postmodernism is very close to the surface in this final statement; he sees in the fractured and fracturing activity of postmodernism — a reflection of the unbridgeable chasms between the faculties of the Kantian subject — a form of resistance to any totalizing system under which "the fantasy to seize reality" might become an instance of a maxim of practical action.

Jameson realizes that in the absence of such maxims, and in the absence of communities which make general agreement about them possible, there can be no class or class organ capable of legitimate revolutionary praxis. Nevertheless, this position takes into account only half of the problem of justifying political praxis, the empirical absence of a community of shared values — which in any case is and was almost certainly only a mythical community. Jameson ignores the problem to which the Kant of the third Critique points: the logical chasm which separates ethical maxims from knowledge. This omission must account for the modernist's single-minded drive to reestablish a binding connection between "is" and "ought."

Jameson ignores the possibility that revolutionary praxis is not necessarily weakened by the acknowledgement that its justification resides solely in the local actions of those who are moved to revolt in a certain place and time. Yet how much more successful might revolutionary praxis have shown itself to be if the banners under which its supporters marched had been more modest than to read FREEDOM, TRUTH, HUMANITY? To move incrementally toward such goals is, as Kant suggests, a requirement of the faculty of reason which he calls *streben*; but to act in the name of them, as if they were secured and contained within some set of principles written by some world-historical subject in a declaration, betrays the very "fantasy to seize reality" of which Lyotard warns.

While in the introduction to Lyotard's work discussed above this overt emphasis on a political program manifests itself openly, in *The Political Unconscious* the totalizing system Jameson describes is presented with little emphasis on this form of modernist politicism, which is only subtly present. Instead, Jameson's goal seems to be to convince his readers of the utility of such a comprehensive system for literary interpretation and for the communicational adequacy of the larger social body. His work, he says, "seeks to argue the perspectives of Marxism as necessary precondi-

tions for adequate literary comprehension. Marxist critical insights will therefore here be defended as something like an ultimate *semantic* precondition for the intelli-ad-gibility of literary and cultural texts".[5] Marxism, according to Jameson, offers the necessary perspective from which "the inert givens and materials of a particular text" can be semantically enriched, and this semantic enrichment of inert givens becomes the "adequate literary interpretation" provided by the Marxist perspective he offers.

Only the Marxian method can offer an "untranscendable horizon" because, says Jameson, the plethora of alternative critical approaches are merely "local" (should we read anarchic?) in their claims and are involved in rhetorical strategies which make them seem more comprehensive than they really are. In *The Political Unconscious* he proposes to demonstrate by comparison the absolute strength of the Marxist approach:

> Their [the alternative approaches'] juxtaposition with a dialectical or totalizing, properly Marxist ideal of understanding will be used to demonstrate the structural limitations of the other interpretive codes, and in particular to show the 'local' ways in which they construct their objects of study and the 'strategies of containment' whereby they are able to project the illusion that their readings are somehow complete and self sufficient.[6]

As Weber has pointed out, Jameson, however, is quick to say that the "local" operations of the myth-critical or psychoanalytic interpretive methods, to cite two of his examples, do not warrant being discarded, and thus no threat is implied to their professors. Indeed the variety of methods current "in the 'pluralism' of the intellectual marketplace today" are of at least sociological interest, Jameson implies, even if their actual interpretive utility can be shown to be limited, for "the authority of such methods springs from their faithful consonance with this or that fragmented law of social life, this or that subsystem of a complex and mushrooming cultural superstructure."[7]

Thus these competing interpretive codes, Jameson argues, have a local utility and need not fear acknowledging the Master Narrative of Marxism since each will be assigned "an undoubted sectoral validity" within it, "thus at once cancelling and preserving them." Paradoxically then, Jameson argues for the adoption of Marxist interpretive methods as a kind of guarantor of the institutional status quo which can insulate the "local" operations of various critical schools from the cutthroat competition of the "intellectual marketplace today." It remains to be discussed, however, how Jameson argues for such an interpretive master narrative.

Jameson proposes what he calls a "social hermeneutic," a term which clearly displays the link between interpretive adequacy in the cultural sphere and the restoration of an organic character to the body politic. Repeating the gesture of an earlier phase of *Weltmüdigkeit*, Jameson fol-

lows the movement well-represented by T.S. Eliot when he takes the purported wholeness of a mythic medieval society as his model:

> A social hermeneutic will . . . wish to keep faith with its medieval precursor . . . and must necessarily restore a perspective in which the imagery of libidinal revolution and of bodily transfiguration once again becomes a figure for the perfected community. The unity of the body must once again prefigure the renewed organic identity of associative or collective life . . . Only the community, indeed, can dramatize that self-sufficient intelligible unity (or "structure") of which the individual body, like the individual "subject" is a decentered "effect," and to which the individual organism, caught in the ceaseless chain of the generations and the species, cannot, even in the most desperate Renaissance or Neoplatonic visions of hermaphroditism (or in their contemporary counterpart, the Deleuze-Guattari "bachelor machine"), lay claim.[8]

This statement is part of an acknowledgement of debt Jameson says he owes "to the great pioneers of narrative analysis."[9] Indeed the medieval interpretive model and its political counterpart are intended by Jameson to parallel his own proposals, and in this acknowledgement of debt the continued reliance on the classical understanding of the individual's subjectivity is maintained and restored to the extent that the possibility of a perfected individual is rendered again as a function of the possibility of a "perfected" polis or Utopia.

In Jameson's striking renewal of the analogy of the social as the organic form of the body, the recollection of the price paid for such a harmonious "organic identity of associative or collective life," the inflexibility of the caste-like system of guilds, the ineluctable demand for conformity to custom, and the principled barbarism of the Inquisition which terrorized both the high and the low when the strains within the system could no longer be contained, go without mention. These are the terrors, even if quaint by the standards of our own experience, of which such thinkers as Lyotard warn in their resistance to closed systems, and Jameson misses an opportunity to address the issue which he himself brings to the surface of his argument.

Its problematic aspects left unmentioned, Jameson gains a great deal from the analogy, however. As God functioned for medieval theologians as the "untranscendable" but benign other, an horizon of biblical hermeneutics that guarantees the limits within which meaning can be collectively established, is construed so that now History acts in the same way as the untranscendable horizon which had previously served that same purpose. For a thinker whose slogan is "Always historicize!" this call for a social hermeneutic that promises a renewal of "organic identity of associative or collective life" remains strangely isolated from any resonance with its fascist

and fascistic analogues. Yet this analogue is exactly the one Lyotard would remind us of.

Having proposed this ideal of a "social hermeneutic," Jameson continues with an overview of his method of literary interpretation which assumes:

> three concentric frameworks, which mark a widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chronicle-like sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us.[10]

On this third level, we are invited to entertain the "sequence of the modes of production" and the "succession and destiny of social formations" moving purposefully toward that which the "far future history has in store for us" as the "absent cause": History. Transcending the tendentious plurality of discourses, history only reveals itself to us as the "mystery" in a master narrative which becomes textualized in the Homo sapiens' experience of necessity.[11] The phrases "the sequence of modes... and the succession and destiny" strikes a totalizing note, for this phrase excludes the possibility of multiple *sequences* of modes of production or the *successions* and *destinies* of the various human social formations. Beneath the surface of this apparent stylistic quibble lie four hundred years of Western nationalism and imperialism, resident now even in the discursive structures of theory. Jameson describes our contact with this mysterious master narrative not in terms which could be construed as themselves referentially elliptical, for example in terms of explanation, where 'explicans' and 'explicandum' do not occult their status as linguistic operations — marked by Jameson as "the prison house." Rather, in keeping with his rhetoric of restoration, he tells us that by means of the adequacy of Marxist interpretation "this mystery can be reenacted [. . .]." Safely contained within such an absolute referential boundary in which all truth value returns to apparent simplicity on the model of an oral culture — indeed explicitly on the model of a cult practice — all interpretation can be grounded in sense by an interpretive process of "semantic enrichment."

Apparently untroubled by the mythic resonance of his proposal, Jameson argues for the necessity of a conception of the movements within history "conceived in its vastest sense" to provide the "ultimate" boundary of interpretation which can act therefore as guarantor of the interpretive validity and communicational adequacy. The reader is not alone at fault if s/he hears the sound of a palliative offered to an age grown weary of the permanent indeterminacy of meaning. Jameson's attempt to recuper-

ate meaning follows an ill-chosen path however, and its exploitation of the medieval as a model for the wholeness of the body politic aligns it directly the Southern Agrarians, for example, who ought to be very disagreeable bedpartners for him.[12]

Like the Agrarians Jameson hopes to secure the recognition of an outer limit of meaning, beyond which we may not pass, in order to establish communicational adequacy under the paradigm of literary interpretation. Unlike the Agrarians, and with a more liberal gesture, Jameson would reconstruct "the renewed organic identity of associative or collective life" within which individual schools of interpretation maintain their utility and their local autonomy without threatening the collective with a disruptive divergence of meanings or an unbounded agonistics which would threaten the contours of the collective itself. These outer limits, furthermore, securely anchor the sense and reference of the texts themselves by establishing in them a symbolic reenactment of the movement of productive forces, a movement which then acts as a common fundament for the various interpretive schools. Without this common fundament, Jameson apparently fears the reign of anarchy over the interpretive community and thinks this must necessarily bring in train the further splintering of schools of interpretation into irreconcilable camps, making community in the sense of communicational adequacy impossible.

For the loss of this transparency of meaning which disrupts (re-) building a collective goes hand in hand with the loss of "the imagery of libidinal revolution." This in turn entails the loss of a community which can be construed as a revolutionary subject of history, a problem Jameson points to in the foreword to *The Postmodern Condition* when he writes "More orthodox Marxists will agree with the most radical post- or anti-Marxist position in at least this, that Marxism as a coherent philosophy (or better still, a 'unity of theory and praxis') stands or falls with the matter of social class".[13] By stipulating the mythic history which is to serve *in potentia* as the bound of sense, Jameson is simultaneously stipulating the possibility of a subject of that history, one which remains theoretically capable of, and capable of justifying, revolutionary praxis. The effort to construct a socially organic whole within which communication can be, as Habermas has said, "noisefree," finds here its own telos "within the unity of a single great collective story."

Thus, while Jameson claims to be following the path of the subject and its modes of interpretation through his method of historicizing, this path turns out to be derivative and dependant on the establishment of a history capable of comprising the object.[14] The fact that he locates the object in the political unconscious is a necessity of the current critical climate, and it is a climate which he argues forcefully to change. Yet the direction of the change must be viewed with skepticism; all the more so given the tenor of Jameson's remarks and examples.

In the closing section of his introductory chapter, Jameson characterizes the "final horizon" of history in the same categorical terms he has been using up till now:

> With this final horizon, then, we emerge into a space in which History itself becomes the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular.[15]

While such a passage no longer arouses dismay, the juxtaposition of this Marxist absolutism with the very insights of postmodernist critique — though in the form of mere alternative absolutisms of Eco and Habermas — must give cause to wonder how Jameson manages to avoid the conclusions that could be drawn from his own juxtaposition. He is very well aware that some "practitioners of alternate or rival interpretive codes — far from having been persuaded that History is an interpretive code that includes and transcends all others — will again assert 'History' as simply one more code among others, with no particularly privileged status." The concept of "practitioners of alternate codes" is not really the issue; rather there is a less academic question Jameson utterly fails to ask, namely, "*Whose* history?" Africa's or China's? No, Euramerika's! Black's history or Oriental's? No, Caucasian's! Women's History? No, Men's! What Jameson reduces to 'practitioners of alternate codes' are more properly in his own terms "livers of alternate histories". As such they have every reason to expect that their histories will be taken seriously by Jameson, which, however, will not be possible under the regime of a master narrative.

Dismissing such a possible avenue of interrogation as relativism, Jameson himself attempts to relativize the alternative models by citing examples which make the same absolutist claims as his own arguments. In such a way he seems to offer his readers a most reasonable choice: since "nothing is to be gained by opposing one reified theme — History — by another — Language — in a polemic debate as to the ultimate priority of the one over the other" why not choose this form of Marxist interpretation which, as I have shown you, is capable of leaving the institutional framework, the pluralism of the intellectual marketplace intact? Under the umbrella of History, all interpretive schools find their justifiable place (in my Father's mansion?), and will be assigned a "sectoral validity" by the master narrative. This would be the most stable and convenient arrangement all around, wouldn't it?

Jameson ignores the strongest argument against the adoption of History as absolute horizon by characterizing the decision as one to be made between various absolute systems. Thus he makes such a decision into a merely utilitarian one. The position which he ignores is one which all claims of absolutes are suspected, and one which, as Weber suggests, ought to recognize the frameworks of interpretation themselves as already the product of an interpretive process.[16] Jameson is in no way prepared to

make such a recognition, and indeed he spends the first one hundred pages of *The Political Unconscious* arguing that it is unnecessary and impossible to subject the framework of history itself to interpretation.

History, he says, is beyond our critical powers; it is present to us only as Necessity, which we all experience as "the inexorable *form* of events."[17] Thus History, finally, is present to us through the shared experience of necessity, and "can be apprehended only through its effects." "This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them."[18]

Thus Jameson hypostatizes, in terms of the Kantian antinomies, the understanding, whose requirement of a first cause as necessary for the teleological movement of nature choreographs nature with man in a unity as only the Enlightenment could project it. Jameson forgets, however, the conflicting tendency of reason which cannot rest satisfied with any final cause, and whose power of analysis refuses to recognize boundaries of any sort. In his call for a return to a basically Enlightenment historiography, Jameson can be sure of finding a ready audience, one wearied of the uncertainties of its age and of the ceaseless movement of signification. The call tantalizes us with its project of building a community capable of acting as the revolutionary subject, a project Jameson invites us to join. Nevertheless, this call must finally be understood as the one Lyotard warns of, the call of "a nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience."[19] As such the call is that of the Sirens, luring us with "the fantasy to seize reality" behind which stands, as Lyotard points out, "the desire for a return of terror."

Dialectic as Inoculation

In "Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson develops an exposition of postmodernism which attempts to deflect criticism of his project as totalizing and marxizing.[20] The "Postmodernism" essay acknowledges and incorporates as many elements of post-structuralism as possible into a text which seems constantly to problematize its own quasi-postmarxist tenets. While this was indeed already the case with certain elements of *The Political Unconscious*, the "Postmodernism" essay (1984) is quite literally a montage of postmodernist themes. With this strategy, Jameson acknowledges the historical fact of the movement, and in the same essay he offers an initial sketch of its periodization. Yet despite his detailed attempts to come to terms with current critical and cultural tendencies, he betrays his blindness to their implications by his recurrent strategies for recuperating political praxis. A discussion of the method by which Jameson seeks to incorporate, or better yet, sublate, post-structuralist elements

into his overall attempt at theorizing such a political praxis follows below.

A significant motivation and source of legitimation for this strategy is the notion of the dialectic itself. Jameson tells us that "moralizing condemnations of postmodernism" must be rejected, even while he is giving us subtile grounds for such judgments. He writes, for example, about the cultural critic in "postmodern space," who is "*infected* by its new cultural categories" (emphasis added).[21] Furthermore, we read that in relation to "Utopian 'high seriousness,'" postmodernism can rightly be faulted for its "triviality." Most significantly, in terms of Jameson's sympathy for collectives, we are given to understand that "for political groups which seek to intervene in history . . . there cannot but be much that is deplorable and reprehensible in a cultural form of image addiction which . . . effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project."

This "collective project" is indeed what Jameson seeks to theorize and legitimate. One needn't strain then to find Jameson's own sympathies, and yet his dialectician's sense gets the better of him when he writes: "Yet if postmodernism is a historical phenomenon, then the attempt to conceptualize it in terms of moral or moralizing judgments must be finally identified as a category-mistake." Jameson, at times at least, is saved from his intuitions and his beliefs by the recognition of a transcendental obstruction in their logic. He draws back from legitimating a moralistic approach to the phenomenon of postmodernism because it is a historical fact not to be done away with. Instead, he embraces it in the terms of a dialectic whose model he finds in the *Manifesto*:

> We are, somehow, to lift our minds to a point at which it is possible to understand that capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race, and the worst. The lapse into the more comfortable stance of the taking of moral positions is inveterate and all too human: still, the urgency of the subject demands that we make at least some effort to think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together.[22]

Clearly, despite his druthers, Jameson recognizes the categorical imperative of historical materialism requiring us to think of the postmodern dialectically; that is, both its good points and its bad must somehow be thought together. Despite his intuitive distaste for such a project, Jameson does a masterful job at attempting to do just that with the major drawback of the two positions being mutually exclusive. (The question might be raised, for example, with respect to Jameson and Eagleton. Could it be said that Eagleton does a better job at "letting go" from marxist structures — than Jameson? When they are trying the hardest to be current theorists, are they still Marxists, and conversely, when they are being Marxists, can they still be current theorists?) Having stated, if not entirely fulfilled, his obligation to refrain from moralizing, Jameson attempts to view the ex-

pansion of the notion of culture. He greatly needs this expanded notion of culture, for it's clearly trying for him to discuss Warhol's painting "Diamond Dust Shoes" in the same section as van Gogh's "Peasant Shoes." Jameson is able to do this, but not without a few nasty remarks about soup cans and tinsel.

Jameson titles this section "The Deconstruction of Expression," which he begins by warning us that if van Gogh's "often reproduced" image is not to "sink to the level of sheer decoration" he must perform something he calls in the *Political Unconscious* "semantic enrichment."[23] "Unless that situation — which has vanished into the past — is somehow mentally restored, the painting will remain an inert object." So it would appear that even works of high modernism face the fate of having their expression deconstructed, not just by the critical climate of the age, but merely by the passage of time itself. Jameson seeks to restore the "whole object world of agricultural misery," thus creating without acknowledging it, a text of the painting which is extended to the sociohistorical. Thus it regains its expression, which is one of "backbreaking peasant toil, a world reduced to its most brutal and menaced, primitive and marginalized state," a world Jameson fails to recognize as being itself textually based.

Claiming to have thus restored the expression of van Gogh's painting, Jameson turns to that of Warhol, of which he says in a moment doubtful of the dialectic imperative: "I am tempted to say that it [Diamond Dust Shoes] does not really speak to us at all." Nor does this painting seem to leave space for the viewer, he thinks, and its thematic level is one of mere fetish. Warhol's shoes are closer to the object world of nature than the depiction of a human artifact, and he likens them to shoes stacked outside an Auschwitz oven, so bereft are they of the life-world which filled them. Yet here we might wonder why the life-world of the Auschwitz shoes might not be semantically enriched following the same procedure he performs with "Peasant Shoes," and why Warhol's painting cannot likewise have some expressiveness restored. Jameson, however, can find no "lived context" in Warhol's paintings, nothing upon which to perform a hermeneutical operation. The reason for Jameson's impotence in the face of these shoes is not far to seek: "Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification"; thus it has no expression — at least none outside of the reified realm of commodity fetishism. But if commodification destroys "expression" in cultural artifacts, then only those archaically produced under precapitalist modes of production can be considered of interest with the catastrophic result that *our* cultural sphere falls into the mute world of nature. Yet the production of commodities is still — perhaps even more so than in the past — *social* production which re-presents the *social* world out of which they derive.

The final condemnation of Warhol's work is expressed by Jameson, despite his methodological intentions, by the fact that these images somehow forego the potential expression they might have: "the great billboard

images of the Coca-cola bottle or the Campbell's Soup Can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital, *ought* (Jameson's italics) to be powerful and critical political statements." Of course, the implication is that Warhol's work is simply another instance of what Jameson calls "image addiction."

It must be asked whether such a reading qualifies as "dialectical" under Jameson's own criteria of thinking the good with the bad in a single thought. He might have spoken, for instance, of the depthless surfaces of the image as a "statement" against the re-presentation of dimensionality as the tradition of oil painting knew it. Surely the technique of silk-screening itself can be read as an "expression." Instead Warhol's surfaces are "debased and contaminated in advance by their assimilation to glossy advertising images," and their explicit, highly reflected "dis-representation" robbed of significance. Thus, the sublation of poststructuralist notion of culture which expands the use of the term beyond the humanistically accepted genres, never succeeds in transforming the late modernism of Jameson's cultural prejudice. The notion of ideology as "false consciousness" is not overcome, as Jameson promises, by thinking the good with the bad. The analysis of culture given in "Postmodernism" remains intolerant of the expansion of the idea of culture under postmodernism.

Periodization as Theoretical Prophylaxis

In these late years of the Reagan decade, we find ourselves confronted with a startling, massive public education campaign promoting, of all things, "safe sex." Had we been told six years ago or even two, that a virtual parade of major figures in public health in our country would be publicly agitating for the use of condoms; a Reagan appointee himself arguing before Congress, against the resistance of the media executives, for condom ads on television; and colleges sponsoring a national condom-week during which condoms were given away free to the nation's best and brightest; who would not have been incredulous? As is so often the case, however, the unity in the ranks of the moral right and its claim to hegemony under the Reagan presidency is like veneer which has lost its glue: the veneer buckles, as if there were a bad leak in the roof, which of course there always is.

Perhaps even more surprising than the fragility of the Right's program for moral renewal, however, is the appearance in the writings of Jameson, of a figure equivalent to the *cordon sanitaire*, which is of course only the late, institutional offspring of the far more ancient and venerable condom. Thus prophylaxis is mobilized not only as a technical means for fighting the spread of AIDS — an increasingly essential aspect of public health policy — but in the openly ideological sphere of hermeneutics as well. Strategies in the public health sector and in what I suggest as a parallel for Jameson, the "ideological health sector," display a specific relatedness for which I

propose the following analogy: the condom campaign on the part of public health officials seeks to contain the spread of the AIDS virus in a way similar to the manner in which Jameson's strategy of periodizing seeks to contain the dissemination of post-structuralist theory, which in a solvent form endangers the project of reviving the revolutionary subject. Public health is endangered by AIDS analogously to Jameson's notion of community by deconstructive elements in the superstructure.

By "Periodizing the 60s," Fredric Jameson thinks he can isolate, categorize, and neutralize this epidemic, the "origin" of which he finds in the 60s. Theory in its post-structuralist form theorizes the principled shifting of signification, which undermines meaning and purpose; such attacks incapacitate the subject, delegitimating revolutionary praxis. By periodizing the 60s within the brackets of a time-table (appended conveniently to the end of the essay), Jameson constructs a *cordon sanitaire* around the decade which he thinks can contain it, thus restricting the temporal range of application of the theoretical movements which make their appearance there, and simultaneously restricting the period during which traditional Marxist theory, as he admits himself, was inapplicable.

Jameson writes as if he were the Surgeon General of Ideological Public Health seeking to avoid panic in a population faced with disaster: the situation, he says, while serious, needn't be as threatening as it seems given appropriate counter-measures, for post-structuralism is only an ephemeral Nachleben of the 60s. Recognized as such, it can be safely re-contained within the figure of periodization, which functions, like the condom, as a prophylactic. Once contained, these post-structuralist methods and insights become hygienic laboratory specimens, of interest for historical research:

> There is of course no reason why specialized and elite phenomena . . . cannot reveal historical trends and tendencies as vividly as "real life" — or perhaps even more visibly, in their isolation and semiautonomy which approximates a laboratory situation[24].

Thus would Jameson achieve the aims of theoretical prophylaxis: the containment of non-traditional theory in a scheme of periodization, which needn't deny those theories nor ignore them, having put them safely in petri dishes in the refrigerator.

I do not want these remarks to leave the impression that I think Jameson's efforts are insincere or his problems illusory. Nor do I think Jameson is maneuvering solely in order to resuscitate his own creed — a creed he openly admits is in crisis. Much more is at stake — about this I am in agreement with him: the stakes are the very possibility of some legitimate form of revolutionary social praxis, and here we must be clear that we speak of the possibility of mass-movements which would be capable of transforming the status quo into an as yet unglimpsed utopia. These are no trifling matters, for today few remain unaware of the difficult question of

mass-movements and how they are to be theorized and legitimated. Yet these are matters that must be scrutinized without sentimental feelings for a world which has passed by, a world in which instrumental reason successfully dissimulated a self-knowledge by which it seemed to calculate its own future. This is not our time, and we seek to restore it only at the expense of unduly privileging the very categories we claim to examine: first and foremost a concept of meaning which can bridge the chasm between concept and sense, or in Jameson's terminology, between language and history.

In the first section of this essay, I argued that *The Political Unconscious* was an attempt to reconstitute meaning within the absolute boundaries of history, that such a historical totality was methodologically necessary for halting the shift of signification which renders meaning problematic, community impossible, and thus mass revolutionary praxis illegitimate. In "Periodizing the 60s," periodization is a substitute for totalization: it attempts the same goal, namely rendering transparent the lessons of the past, even though its scope is of a less cosmic scale than History writ large. In terms of the proportions of *The Political Unconscious*, "Periodizing the 60s" is an attempt at intervention at the level of micro-structures.

I wish to sketch the opening and closing punctuation of Jameson's periodization scheme, and then address the question of signification which he hopes to contain within it. In a brief introduction he offers an apologetics for his periodizing concept, admitting it to be "unfashionable," thereby forestalling any principled critique of his plan. He attempts to distance himself from earlier periodization schemes by seeking "breaks" (*coupure*:"this break is most often related to notions of the waning or extinction of the hundred year old modern movement"[25]) which stand in some homological relationship to one another. By concentrating on these breaks he hopes to avoid what he himself criticizes as the "older organic history which sought "expressive" unification through analogies and homologies between widely distinct levels of social life."[26] Nevertheless, mustn't we ask whether the positing of relations between the "breaks" is any less expressive than the positing of relations between unities, as in the earlier model of periodization? It would seem that the homological relations between breaks, just as much as those between unities, are no less relationships of the logos under Jameson's description, that is, the relations he wishes to establish speak from a transcendental historical plane beyond quandaries raised by theory, for we recall from the *Political Unconscious* that history, the subject of Jameson's "Periodizing the 60s," is beyond theory — it reveals itself to us only as necessity.

Out of the internal relations of history's necessities which Jameson offers us, we may read lessons unobstructed by interpretational frameworks which cannot be theorized. Thus our text is of an unimpeachable veracity, our readings capable of verification.[27] There is a clear statement of the value of history in Jameson's essay "The Ideology of the Text," published in 1975:

> Each moment of the past . . . has a very special sentence or judgment to pass on the uniquely reified world in which we ourselves live: and the privilege of artistic experience is to furnish something like an immediate channel through which we may experience such implicit judgments, and attain a fleeting glimpse of other modes of life.[28]

The "moment of the past" passes judgments or sentences in what could only be a transcendental manner on the "reified" present; and by opening and closing a period of history, these judgments — untheorized and uninterpreted — provide the basis for evaluation, for meaning, and finally for revolutionary praxis.

Jameson opens the period of the 60s with the decolonization struggles in British and French Africa, specifically, on his time line, with the Battle of Algiers in 1957. The arbitrary character of this "origin" is only thinly masked by the following introductory sentence: "It does not seem particularly controversial to mark the beginnings of what will come to be called the 60s in the third world with the great movement of decolonization in British and French Africa."[29] Yet this statement is not controversial only to the extent that it is utterly arbitrary, for to speak of the beginnings of decolonization without reference to Mahatma Gandhi, the 20th Century prophet of non-violence, or the Jeffersonian idealism of Ho Chi Minh, is to emaciate any historical understanding of the struggles in Africa; and the problem is only further exacerbated by the ellipsis in which Gandhi's own experiences in Southern Africa as a young man contribute to the goals and strategies of his later efforts. Methodological objection must be taken against the suppression of this arbitrariness — which I submit is a principled arbitrariness. No one can really avoid, much less seriously object to periodizing as long as the procedure remains aware of its own arbitrariness. We may find, and have indeed found valuable readings of phenomena by organizing them in this way or that. Yet when the essential arbitrariness of historical delineation as such is not reflected, when it is not admitted that the selection of boundaries is in the all cases itself already an interpretive act, suitable only for particular and always limited tasks, schemes of periodization guise themselves as transcendental parameters, which are beyond the need of reflection, and which do not admit of their social origin in an underlying act of interpretation.

Jameson closes the period of the 60s in an equally arbitrary way, this time, however, motivating his closure in the basis, not the superstructure, namely with the oil crisis of 1972-4. The title of this section is "Return of the 'Ultimately Determining Instance'"(Engels, Althusser) and again suggests the transcendentality of the underlying structure. Here Jameson adopts a notion of the business cycles of thirty to fifty years, theorized by Ernest Mandel, and the end of the latest of these cycles falls around Jameson's dates. Also associated with this cycle is what Mandel calls "generalized universal industrialization" which he opposes to the idea of a post-

industrial period. Jameson interprets Mandel's description of this latest transformation of the basis as follows:

> Late capitalism in general (and the 60s in particular) constitute a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism — the last vestiges of noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world — are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the third world and the unconscious. The 60s will then have been the momentous transformational period in which this systemic restructuring takes place on a global scale.[30]

In addition to the power of his apocalyptic vision of world domination, Jameson heaps incident upon incident to prove that there is something significant enough about the years 1972-4 to warrant their selection to close the period the 60s: the founding of the Trilateral Commission, the fall of Allende, the Green Revolution, and Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Despite the amassing of particular incidents and their apparent subsumption under powerful business cycles, the closure remains in principle arbitrary, as even Jameson's appended time-line reveals, for it continues until 1976 with the death of Mao, the Soweto rebellion, and the victory of *Parti Quebecois*.

The classical argument about base-superstructure relationships finds a fertile field in Jameson's essay, but his attempt to finesse this problem by means of homological relationships between breaks does not go far at all with solving what is, in the framework of his essay itself, the larger problem: granting that the oil crisis is somehow related to the founding of the Trilateral Commission, and that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam hangs together with the role of I.T.T in Chile — all incidents cited by Jameson, why should these events in this time frame mark the end of the 60s and not some prior or subsequent set of events? In fact, I suggest it would not affect his argument in the least, for it is an argument which depends on closure alone, and it is largely irrelevant when the closure takes place: the collapse of the Paris barricades, the break-up of the SDS, or the election of Jimmy Carter, for that matter, would all serve Jameson equally well. I suspect that he would indeed be quite flexible about when the 60s ended, but I'm equally convinced that he would be vociferous about the fact that it did. The reasons for this should by now be clear.

I would like to discuss one of the principle elements Jameson wishes to contain, a topic which recurs in many of Jameson's recent works: the problem of signification. In section five of his essay on periodizing the 60s called "The Adventures of the Sign," Jameson speaks of the "reification" of the sign and the consequent mythification of the referent:

> in a first moment, reification "liberated" the Sign from its referent, but this is not a force to be released with impunity. Now, in a second moment, it continues its work of dissolution, penetrating the interior of the Sign itself and liberating the Signifier from the Signified, or from meaning proper. This play, no longer of a realm of signs, but of pure or literal signifieds freed from the ballast of their signified, their former meanings, now generates a new kind of textuality in all the arts, and begins to project the mirage of some ultimate language of pure signifiers.[31]

This is one of the main effects of the 60s that Jameson is at such pains to locate and isolate — although something quite similar could be read in Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," dating from the 20s.[32] Within a closed historical period — i.e., within the petri dish in the social laboratory — Jameson as *Literaturwissenschaftler*, can safely study the phenomena or contagion and thus lessons can be drawn. If it gets out of the laboratory, on the other hand, the "play of signification" must result in radical skepticism toward basic premises of culture by playing havoc with meaning. Such a threat to the ethical subject, in whom Jameson places his ultimate Humanistic faith, simply cannot be tolerated, for with the loss of meaning goes the possibility of community and thus any form of legitimated revolutionary praxis.

To show just how inimical Jameson is to the ellipsis semiotics describes language to contain, he links the inhuman power of the unfettered signifier to capital itself:

> I will suggest that this process [of absolute self-referentiality], seemingly internal to the sign itself, requires a supplementary explanatory code, that of the more universal logic of capital itself.[33]

In this way, the excesses of semiotics are linked with the excesses of capital, and the social control of both becomes the implicit proposal of Jameson's argument, a proposal which offers to halt the indeterminacy of meaning which paralyzes revolutionary praxis. This motivation lies very close to the surface of the concluding remarks to "Periodizing the 60s."

Jameson opens the concluding paragraph with a litany of the successes of the 60s: "an immense freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces, . . . the development of new and militant bearers of 'surplus consciousness,'" most of which, he continues, do not seem "to compute in the dichotomous class model of traditional Marxism."[34] Here Jameson seems to endorse, as he must, the factual accomplishments of the period, but immediately following this he undercuts this praise with an analogy which attempts to underscore its ephemeral nature:

> The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential

> gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers.

Fortunately, there is a rich, wise uncle who has apparently kept his gold in a sock in the mattress and avoided the crisis of Jameson's referential inflation. Now, in the 80s, when the completed form of multinational capital stands at the door waiting to dun us, we can call on him:

> 'Traditional' Marxism, if 'untrue' during the period of a proliferation of new subjects of history, must necessarily become true again when the dreary realities of exploitation, extraction of surplus value, proletarianization and the resistance to it in the form of class struggle, all slowly reassert themselves on a new and expanded world scale, as they seem currently in the process of doing.

Here is Jameson at his best, offering us, in the face of crisis, a tradition of interpretation which clarifies the messy problems once they have been liquidated by history. The trans-class feminist movement of the 60s has been quartered into a subcultural component, lesbianism, a middle class component in NOW, and its academic component in the university system. We are not expressly told what to do about the "inflationary" flight of signification; however, we have been shown — for Jameson, perhaps the less treacherous option: we can dismiss it as an epiphenomenon of a by-gone age, leaving our attention focused on the new configurations of the basis which can be traditionally theorized and which can therefore provide an object for analysis capable of a reorientation to a humanistic, utopian future.

Conclusion

The three texts of Jameson's I've discussed above all contain the methodological prerequisites for the (re)establishment of a Marxist Humanism. From the orthography in which Jameson regularly capitalizes history and utopia to the theoretical adroitness with which he maneuvers the totalizing perspective of a modernist philosophy of history into "postmodern space," these texts promise purpose, meaning, and program. The repudiation of such promises must jar right reason and offend all sensibility for the injustices of the present out of which the utopian takes its power. Yet the incestuous relations between reason and utopia have themselves no claim to innocence, for the instrumental form in which reason presently resides leaves none of its consorts unblemished. The postmodern pathology of communication would be debarred from utopia and only wordless signals, freed of indeterminacy and reflexively instantiating disembodied reason could take its place. This is the utopia reason has shown us already: in speechless monasticisms and in the compulsion of transubjective feeling of the beautiful in Kant. I suggest neither instance recommends itself. Rather than laying the foundation for a millennial kingdom in which rea-

son banishes force, the present moment offers us as the rare prospect of revealing force as itself as but one of a myriad of reason's own guises. We do not know what lines of escape the pathology of our present discursive practices may reveal; even so the reactive path which claims to (re)construct meaning and (re)establish community is all too well-known. After the experience of the 20th Century the unpresentable cannot hold more terror for us than the known; the unpresentable has become the salvational.

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Notes

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota, 1984, "Foreword", p. xix.
2. Samuel Weber, "Capitalizing History: Notes on *The Political Unconscious*," in his *Institution and Criticism*, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 31, (University of Minnesota, 1987).
3. *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 80.
4. Ibid., p. xix.
5. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 75.
6. Ibid., p. 10.
7. Ibid., p. 10.
8. Ibid., p. 74.
9. Ibid., p. 12.
10. Ibid., p. 75.
11. Ibid., p. 19.
12. See Alexander Karanikas' *Tillers of a Myth*, (University of Chicago, 1968), especially Chapter V.
13. Fredric Jameson, "Foreword," *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xv.
14. *The Political Unconscious*, p. 9.
15. Ibid., p. 100.
16. "Capitalizing History," p. 24.
17. *The Political Unconscious*, p. 102.
18. Ibid., p. 102.
19. Ibid., p. 82.
20. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *The New Left Review*, 146, July-August 1984.
21. Ibid., p. 85.

22. "Postmodernism," p. 86.
23. Ibid., p. 58.
24. Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," in *The 60s Without Apology*, p. 179.
25. "Postmodernism," p. 53.
26. "Periodizing the 60s," p. 179.
27. Ibid., p. 179.
28. Fredric Jameson, "Ideology of the Text," in *Salagamundi*, No. 31/32, 1975-6, p. 235.
29. "Periodizing the 60s," p. 180.
30. Ibid., p. 207.
31. Ibid., p. 200.
32. In Benjamin's essay, there seems to be something like a "reine Sprache" toward which all empirical languages move. This inference is justified by his assumption that all languages desire to express the thing.
33. Ibid., p. 197.
34. Ibid., p. 208.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue Canadienne de theorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, Number 3 (1988).

MARXISM AND RESISTANCE: FREDRIC JAMESON AND THE MOMENT OF POSTMODERNISM

David S. Gross

Jameson, Marxism, and Modern Theory

Throughout his career, Fredric Jameson has developed his own positions by bringing his Marxist critique to bear on the major critical theorists of this century. In this he resembles Marx himself, whose early works were critical engagements with Hegel and Feuerbach, and who wrote *Capital* primarily as an argument against Adam Smith, Ricardo, and bourgeois political economics in general. This "reactive" quality in Marx and Marxism anticipates the stress on inter-textuality in modern thought. As Jameson puts it himself in an early essay, "Marxism is a critical rather than a systematic philosophy." As such it presents "a correction of other positions ... rather than a doctrine of a positivistic variety existing in its own right."[1]

In his three essays on postmodernism[2] — his most theoretically ambitious, fully developed, and polemically critical essays in the mid-eighties, arguably in his career — Jameson engages both the artistic and mass cultural "stuff" of our time and the modes of thought and perception in post-structuralist and other postmodernist theory. He foregrounds the conceptual operations of modern theory in order to model Marxist analysis and critique, and to assert the necessity to "periodize" — in the case of postmodernism, to see our own time historically — in the face of the various movements in contemporary thought and theory which would deny both the validity of any totalization, and thus of any historical view, and the value of any Marxist categories or concepts.

The very title of Jameson's most important article on postmodernism — "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" — asserts the validity and priority of the Marxist analysis, the ability of the Marxist to represent the social and the cultural, "to grasp the design of history as such." This phrase is from Walter Benjamin,[3] who described his own project almost fifty years ago. Jameson, as well, announces by his title his intention to do what Benjamin does for Baudelaire, Paris and early high capitalism — "to demonstrate through example that only Marxism can apply high philology to the texts of the past century."[4] Jameson defends and demonstrates the view that postmodernism is *the* cultural logic of late capitalism, which in turn implies that to describe our era (period, moment) as "late capitalist," is meaningful and correct and that it is possible to understand late capitalism in such a way as to be able to deduce its "cultural logic." Both the definite article in the title, and especially, the appositional "or" aggressively challenge the anti-historicist tendencies in modern theory which Jameson is at pains to refute.

Jameson's view gives full weight to other aspects of postmodernism, such as deconstruction and other movements in modern theory which insist on heterogeneity, uncertainty, and indeterminacy in all meaning. Like the "post-marxism" of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau,[5] Jameson's version of Marxism stresses that the social, political, and cultural phenomena we describe, discuss, and interpret as "postmodernist," like all historical products or "moments," are always overdetermined, and have many causes. Jameson's title, however, like all his work on the subject, insists that postmodernism be seen and represented in the light of history, and that in our historicizing we engage the political and ethical issues of desire, power and control, production and consumption, injustice and privilege, which have always been the concerns of Marxism.

Later in "Postmodernism" Jameson expands and modifies the title phrase to make its totalizing claims even more explicit: "The conception of postmodernism outlined here is a historical rather than a merely stylistic one. I cannot stress too greatly the radical distinction between a view for which the postmodern is one (optional) style among many others available, and one which seeks to grasp it as the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism ... ."[6] He describes the latter position (his own, of course, and one which he elaborates, demonstrates, and defends in all three postmodernism articles) as "a genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present of time in History" (in "The Politics of Theory" the phrase is expanded to read "a present of time and of history in which we ourselves exist and struggle").[7]

Like Walter Benjamin, Jameson seeks to demonstrate that the totalizing vision of Marxist historicism constitutes the enabling conditions of the possibility of a theoretics, conceptualizations of culture which lay bare its social function, its meaning in history. At a recent conference session devoted to his work on postmodernism,[8] Jameson insisted in discussion on a dis-

tinction between *totalizing* views of social and cultural practices and any view of society and culture as some fixed, essentialist *totality* — the straw-man position attributed to Marxism by those who oppose all totalization as totalitarian. The totalizing practice in Jameson's theory dialectically accommodates heterogeneity and difference, the rifts, gaps, and aporias disclosed by deconstruction, but not at the expense of the "it's all connected" idea, as he stated when criticizing theory which would "throw that out." The idea that "it's all connected" in ways which explain and indict the late capitalist present and carry a strong demand for social change has been a cornerstone of Jameson's theory since *Marxism and Form* (1971).

In the preface to that book Jameson characterized the liberal pluralism and "humanism" hegemonic in academia since the 1950s as his "conceptual opponent": "that mixture of political liberalism, empiricism, and logical positivism that we know as Anglo-American philosophy and which is hostile at all points to the type of thinking outlined here."[9] The attempt to defeat that position constitutes, he says, "the tendentious part of my book." He describes the "ideological potency" and negative effects of his opponent like this: "the anti-speculative bias of that tradition, its emphasis on the individual fact or item at the expense of the network of relationships in which that item may be embedded, continue to encourage submission to what is by preventing its followers from making connections, and in particular from drawing the otherwise unavoidable conclusions on the political level."[10] Later in the book, Jameson develops more fully his picture of liberal humanism as culturally dominant:

> The dominant ideology of the Western countries is clearly that Anglo-American empirical realism for which all dialectical thinking represents a threat, and whose mission is essentially to serve as a check on social consciousness: allowing legal and ethical answers to be given to economic questions, substituting the language of political equality for that of economic inequality and considerations about freedom for doubts about capitalism itself. The method of such thinking, in its various forms and guises, consists in separating reality into airtight compartments, carefully distinguishing the political from the economic, the legal from the political, the sociological from the historical, so that the full implications of any given problem can never come into view; and in limiting all statements to the discrete and the immediately verifiable, in order to rule out any speculative and totalizing thought which might lead to a vision of social life as a whole.[11]

The contemporary post-structuralist thought Jameson seeks to correct in the postmodernism articles is no longer as confident about verifiable meaning as was the liberal pluralism Jameson described in 1971, but as "radical" as such thought may seem to itself and to those in the "anti-theory" camp (vestigial "humanists," defending the embattled Arnoldian shrine of

what Marcuse called "affirmative culture"),[12] Jameson makes very clear how the insistence on absolute heterogeneity, the complete refusal of any totalizing thought, and the denial of all reliable signification, end up — in terms of the social function of such thought — at one with the liberal pluralism which it attempts to displace as cultural dominant. The denial of meaning in history places post-structuralism in alliance with more old-fashioned positions it supposedly opposes, especially in the refusal to make connections, the practice Jameson denounced in 1971, and again in Kansas in 1987.

In opposition to anti-historicist views, Jameson seeks to convince us that to analyze (to theorize successfully, to conceptualize) the world we live in — the personal, social, cultural reality we have to deal with in living human existence — is to understand the effects of capitalism. In full awareness of the enormous changes since the time of Marx, and in no way taking specific *words* of Marx as dicta or dogma, Jameson argues as a Marxist that extremely diverse phenomena are "symptomatic" of life under capitalism; that architecture, movies, rock music, literature, cultural phenomena generally (including, especially, the history of thought and of critical theory) can best be understood as historically specific manifestations of late capitalism, that such an understanding is necessary if other modes of interpretation or understanding are to be effective, accurate, and truthful.

The argument, as I see it in Jameson's thought (and in Marx's) is not that the politico-economic, social-cultural forces — some *totality* "out there," completely prior to and pre-existing, separate from any thought or writing about it — that are the central concern of Marxism constitute some sort of "master code" which has conceptual priority over all others, but rather that dialectical and historical materialism *does* provide a necessary, if not in and of itself sufficient, perspective for understanding reality. "Historical and dialectical materialism" will be discussed as three important and controversial signifiers (at the conference Jameson mentioned that some of the disrepute that has gathered around the phrase has its source in Althusser, for whom "Hegel" is a code word for Stalin, and "dialectical materialism" for Stalinism).

The "historical" is certainly crucial for Jameson's Marxism. *The Political Unconscious* begins with the words "Always historicize!"[13] Thus for Jameson, as for Marx, the historical emphasis is on what humans have done and produced in response to necessity and desire, the resulting relations among people, between people and the rest of "nature," and on how all that has changed in time. To foreground such matters during capitalism and late capitalism (as to varying degrees, in different ways, in earlier eras) is to strike up against pain, suffering, exploitation, oppression, privilege and deprivation — so that indeed "history is what hurts."

"Materialism" is the "easiest" of the three, if the most misunderstood by non-initiates into this debate, who take it to mean an obsession with money and with ownership. The key meaning of "materialist" lies in its

contrast with idealist philosophies, which since Plato always postulate an ideal, essential realm outside time and history, "above" and somehow radically separate from material existence. Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche are all materialist thinkers; they insist on a view in which all human practice and the world of matter or "nature" are one, are components in a material reality that includes all manifestations of the spiritual, the ideal, and the soul.

"Dialectical" is the hardest to describe. It can seem either silly, unrigorous, Romantic/mystical, or as erring in the opposite direction, as mechanistic, rationalistic, and shallow — in a simplistic version of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad. Nonetheless, it is an essential component in Jameson's thought and in Marxism in at least two ways: the sense that "it's all connected," Hegel's "the truth is the whole" (which includes, as I understand it, the later Frankfurt school's stunning inversion: "the whole is the untrue"); and the insistence on contradiction, on interaction, conflict, and change in any interpretation of data or fact, in any meaning. Taken together my "two senses" exemplify the character of dialectical thought, with the necessary but flawed and vulnerable — in danger of congealing into dangerous rigidities or dissolving into the undifferentiated oneness of idealist mysticism — *totalizations* of the first part countered by the active, developing movement of the second. The Marxist dialectic involves the use of the imagination to make connections *and* to discern gaps, breaks, discontinuities, and contradictions.

Marxism is linked to post-structuralism through a shared materialism which, in postmodernist thinkers, mainly appears as a Nietzschean materialist sociology (and history) of culture. The dialectic makes the same link; among other things it is the component in Marxism that links it to the self-critical, self-scrutinizing thought about thought in modern theory, as Jameson pointed out (without mentioning Marxism) in his famous 1971 PMLA essay "Metacommentary," the same year as the publication of *Marxism and Form*.[14] A genuinely historical and dialectical materialist perspective is necessary for understanding reality; from that point of view Jameson insists that we recognize the effects of late capitalism in the phenomena we experience in daily life, in the social and cultural forms and practices that are the objects of our theorizing, and in the assumptions and demands of those theories themselves.

The position remains controversial, and that is why Jameson must engage in this battle. If he and Marx are right, then resistance, repression, and denial compose crucial elements in the refusal of his argument, in the power of Paul de Man's anti-historicism, and in the anti-Marxist current in Foucault's thought. Almost in an aside, Jameson discusses the way in which the "currently fashionable rhetoric of power and domination" in Foucault and others, with its "displacement from the economic to the political" is unsatisfactory, since "the various forms of power and domination ... cannot be understood unless their functional relationships to economic exploitation are articulated — that is, until the political is once

again subsumed beneath the economic."[15] The very title of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* suggests the role that resistance plays in fixing what Mikhael Bakhtin would call the conceptual horizons of the belief systems within which the validity of the Marxist argument is assessed, so that both awareness of the historical specificity of the negative effects of capitalism and hope for socialism are repressed or denied. In the postmodernism articles, Jameson depicts a wide variety of phenomena, and of shapes or patterns of movement in different areas or "levels" (economic, political, cultural) within the "moment" of postmodernism as linked effects of and responses to late capitalism. To the extent that his argument is convincing, it breaks through repression and exposes the mystifications of hegemony.

Late Capitalism as Blinding Light: Postmodernism and Resistance

> Every present is determined by those images which are synchronic with it: every now is the moment of a specific recognition. In it truth is loaded to the bursting point with time. (This bursting point is nothing other than the death of the intention, which accordingly coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth.) ... The image that is read, I mean the image at the moment of recognition, bears to the highest degree the stamp of the critical, dangerous impulse that lies at the source of all reading.
>
> Benjamin, "Theoretics of Knowledge"

The matter of our resistance — why we disagree, don't want to admit the value and validity of the Marxist view, why we bridle and claim that neither our intellectual approaches nor the "subject matter" we investigate have causal connections to economics generally or capitalism specifically — is of central significance for Jameson. As a guiding metaphor for the discussion as a whole, I will use a metaphorical passage from Benjamin. In the note book reflections on Marxist critical methodology from which I chose the above quotation, Benjamin greatly stresses "the dialectical image" in which, he says, "the past and the now flash into a constellation. In other words: image is dialectic at a standstill."[16] "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" contains a passage with just such a dialectical image that figurally represents the resistance that is under discussion. Benjamin is exploring the philosophies of Henri Bergson and others who, at the turn of the century sought to better understand the nature of experience, to distinguish "'true' experience" from "the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses." (The problematics of experience, its debasement of attenuation in modern life, its inevitable collective nature, is a constant concern for Benjamin in this essay and in others from the mid-30s, and links his thought to Jameson's and Bakhtin's.) Ben-

jamin says of Bergson that "he rejects any historical determination of memory:"

> He thus manages to stay clear of that experience from which his own philosophy evolved or, rather, in reaction to which it arose. It was the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism. In shutting out this experience the eye perceives an experience of a complementary nature in the form of its spontaneous afterimage, as it were. Bergson's philosophy represents an attempt to give the detail of this afterimage and to fix it as a permanent record.[17]

Along the same lines Jameson argues in "The 60s" that the movement in thought from existentialism to "structuralism" should be seen as a response to the discovery "of the opacity of the Institution itself as the radically transindividual," of "a realm of impersonal logic in terms of which human consciousness is itself little more than an 'effect of structure.'"

> On this reading, then, the new philosophical turn will be interpreted less in the idealistic perspective of some discovery of a new scientific truth (the Symbolic) than as the symptom of an essentially protopolitical and social experience, the shock of some new, hard, unconceptualized, resistant object which the older conceptuality cannot process and which thus gradually generates a whole new problematic.[18]

The shock Jameson speaks of is Benjamin's blinding light — a reality from which we turn away, only to have it continue to dominate our perceptions, our ideological positions, and our assumptions about the possibilities of human life, about "human nature," but always in the unacknowledged, denied and distorted forms that result when our thoughts and perceptions must follow the twisted paths through the political unconscious demanded by the forces of resistance, in a process which Freud called "the return of the repressed."[19] It is Jameson's task to restore this repressed material to conscious awareness, by showing us that what we have learned to think of as "apolitical," non-ideological, and especially, unconnected phenomena, such as developments in critical theory, the poems of John Ashberry in contrast to those of Wallace Stevens, or the new Bonaventura Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, are manifestations of a postmodernism which constitutes the cultural logic of late capitalism.

In both major postmodernism essays, Jameson is trying to conceptualize the historically specific features of our own era, of a world we have experienced as adults since the 1960s. In so doing, he is constantly engaged in battle with antihistoricist views, by asserting and demonstrating the possibility (and, therefore the necessity) of reading meaning in history. A key postulate he refutes is that we are no longer living under capitalism, that the mode of analysis suggested by the use of such terminology is hopelessly dogmatic and entirely out of date. This is one of the most

important positions in hegemonic anti-Marxism; it is a central tenet of liberal pluralism (of a writer like Daniel Bell) in North America at least since the 1950s, and it constitutes the most important link between such thought and "right" post-structuralism. Basing his historical analysis on that of Ernest Mandel in *Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues:

> that late or multinational or consumer capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great 19th-century analysis constitutes on the contrary the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas. This purer capitalism of our time thus eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way ...[20]

Jameson describes such enclaves as "the last vestiges of uncommodified or traditional space" that "are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the third world and the unconscious."[21] (Another interesting instance of the process is the case of the university, whose position as enclave has steadily eroded in this era, as the penetration and colonization described by Jameson takes place.)

What Jameson has in mind regarding the third world is the destruction of precapitalist patterns by the technological industrialization of agriculture known as "the Green Revolution," by means of which "capitalism transforms its relationship to its colonies from an old-fashioned imperialist control to market penetration, destroying the older village communities and creating a whole new wage-labour pool and lumpenproletariat."[22] The "colonization" or, perhaps better, the "occupation" of the unconscious under late capitalism is Jameson's central focus. He is referring to "the mechanization of the superstructure, or in other words the penetration of culture itself by what the Frankfurt school called the culture industry," the ascendancy and proliferation everywhere of the media and the advertising industry. The reference to the Frankfurt school is another sign of the closeness of Jameson's argument to Benjamin, who speaks so often of the attenuation of experience in modern society, comparing newspapers unfavorably with oral tales and stories, and arguing that the new "linguistic usages of newspapers paralyzed the imagination of their readers."[23] Jameson's argument is that the technological and organizational developments since, say, Benjamin's time, are on such a scale as to constitute the basis of a new era in culture which we are calling the postmodern. Thus, changes in the relation between our experience and available forms of narrative discourse brought on with the rise of the newspaper develops with unprecedented scope and depth (or lack of depth) in the television industry.

Jameson's view is close to the dystopian vision — associated with Adorno, Horkheimer, and those of the more recent Frankfurt school — of the

totally "managed" society in which a behaviorist, "instrumental" view of "human relations" holds total sway, or the pessimistic visions of a Foucault whereby a "total system" of authority and power creates an interlocking set of institutions which "discipline and punish" in order to achieve complete obedience and control. Jameson is actually closer to the thought of Raymond Williams or Bakhtin in recognizing the scope and power of hegemonic, monolithic authoritative discourse (Bakhtin's "the word of the fathers"),[24] while concurrently insisting on the actual and potential strength of alternative and oppositional cultural formations.

According to Jameson, postmodernist cultural forms and practices tend to exhibit qualities like those Benjamin saw in Bergson's philosophy, that is; symptoms of an experience which made him turn away, unable to face the historical truths about the "big scale industrialism" in reaction to which, says Benjamin, his philosophy arose. Faced with the awesome power and seemingly universal penetration of the processes of late capitalism into all aspects of our existence — from the consumerist commodification of daily life, in which desire is controlled and directed by television (not just advertising, marketing, teaching desire, what to desire, but all the "programming," including the network news, whose definitions of reality prove so persuasive), even the unconscious can be said to have been penetrated and "colonized" with our plastic money. This signifies the apotheosis of the *interconnected* power of capitalism, the nightmarishly inter-woven global network that has been feared and represented by artists since Kafka. Now this power has a whole other level of penetration and of suffocating universality with computerization, electronically fused banks, and data banks (and the consequences, crushing personal debt, huge profits for finance capital), to the planetary level of this computerized interconnectedness, as symbolized by the "multinational corporation" and the relations among the superpowers, with the (again computerized) constant threat of nuclear war. Faced with all that, we shut our eyes and we turn away. Our cultural reactions, the patterns of our behaviour, our discursive practices and formations always exhibit traces of what we say we're not talking about — patterns and preoccupations which constitute what I am tempted to term "reaction formations," with their source in what Jameson discloses as the newly penetrated, colonized, and politicized unconscious.

Jameson shows that the forces of repression, resistance, denial, and distortion which helped shape high modernism in reaction to the rise of the monopoly capitalism that Benjamin calls "big-scale industrialism," (a central concern of Jameson's in *The Political Unconscious* being the illustration of the actions of such forces in canonical modernism) continue to constitute key features of postmodernism, in (non)reaction to late capitalism. Although given the vastly greater power, extent, and interconnectedness of the present world system, the various effects symbolized in Benjamin's image of closing the eyes against a blinding light, with attempts to fix the details of the afterimage representing intellectual and cultural

production, are so intensified as to constitute a new stage in cultural history, the moment of the postmodern.

As I have indicated, Jameson's two most important postmodernism articles are filled with illustrations — clearly drawn deliberately from the most disparate areas of human social activity, from third-world agriculture, to the world-political history of decolonization and anti-imperialism to the far, windy reaches of philosophical and theoretical debate — of the historical specificity of late capitalism. In a long sub-section of "The 60s," called "The Adventures of the Sign," Jameson offers a definitive description and extended discussion of postmodernism as a whole, from the "death" of the subject, through the eclipse of depth and historicity, and the now classic "freeing" of the sign from meaning and reference. He argues that postmodernism differs from high modernism in terms of "the social functionality of culture,"[25] in that the earlier movement, "whatever its overt political content, was oppositional and marginal within a middle-class Victorian or philistine or gilded age culture," while postmodernism must be said to have achieved the position of "cultural *dominant*, with a precise socioeconomic functionality" — in the colonization of the unconscious by images from the spectacle, from Ronald Reagan to *Miami Vice*.[26]

Jameson presents a brilliantly condensed and concentrated discussion of the source in resistance, in the denial of history, of the key (since Saussure) structuralist-poststructuralist radical separation of the sign from its referent (the insistence that the relation between them is entirely arbitrary), so that there are only texts and intertextuality and "freeplay" among signifiers, with the referent (history, reality) surviving only as "a ghostly residual aftereffect" — Benjamin's "afterimage."[27] The next stage, as Jameson describes it, after ridding the sign as a whole from its connection to and dependence on a referent, is deconstruction within the sign, the radical separation of the signifier from the signified, as part of the "liberation" of words and all the signifiers from signification, from meaning proper. Jameson associates the results with Lacanian notions of schizophrenic discourse, with the breakdown of all syntactic order and meaningful relationships in time, and concludes with this bravura sentence:

> The break-up of the Sign in mid-air determines a fall back into a now absolutely fragmented and anarchic social reality; the broken pieces of language (the pure Signifiers) now falling again into the world, as so many more pieces of material junk among all the other rusting and superannuated apparatuses and buildings that litter the commodity landscape and strew the "collage city," the "delirious New York" of a postmodernist late capitalism in full crisis.[28]

My argument is that this movement away from history, the problematizing of meaning and connection and privileging of heterogeneity and difference, is symptomatic of the blocking, repression, and resistance symbolized by Benjamin's image of shutting the eyes against a blinding light. In terms

of the social functionality of culture, that movement away (De Man's "swerve"), is profoundly hegemonic. Born of reaction against, and aversion to a monolithic, authoritative reality, it becomes dominant and hegemonic itself. Culture under late capitalism, has lost the "semi-autonomy" it enjoyed in previous periods:

> Culture itself falls into the world, and the result is not its disappearance but its prodigious expansion, to the point where culture becomes coterminous with social life in general: now all the levels become 'acculturated,' and in the society of the spectacle, the image, or the simulacrum, everything has at length become cultural, from the superstructures down into the mechanism of the infrastructure itself.[29]

The acculturation of the mechanisms of the infrastructure is a major effect of what Mandel calls the "generalized universal industrialization" of late capitalism,[30] and is the main vehicle for a key task of any socio-economic order, what Henri Lefebvre terms "the reproduction of the relations of production."[31]

Throughout these essays Jameson takes great pains to demonstrate a dialectical point of view on postmodernism, which recognizes both its positive and negative, liberating and hegemonic aspects. The classic model for such thought is Marx's own analysis of the transformations that occur with the rise of capitalism. Jameson says that the famous analysis in the *Manifesto* demands:

> a type of thinking that would be capable of grasping the demonstrably baleful features of capitalism along with its extraordinary and liberating dynamism simultaneously, within a single thought, and without attenuating any of the force of either judgement. We are, somehow, to lift our minds to a point at which it is possible to understand that capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race, and the worst.[32]

In *The Political Unconscious*, one of Jameson's chief concerns was to demonstrate a dialectical view of high modernism as, at once, a symptom of alienation and reification, and utopian compensation for it. In these articles on postmodernism, he takes great pains to show both the positive and negative in, for example, the "liberation" of language from history, and the liberation of the subject from the connection to past and present. Since "personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with the present before me," and "such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time,"[33] the poststructuralist (or schizophrenic) break in the signifying chain can result in "an experience of pure material signifiers," which certainly recalls art for art's sake, (especially in the non-representational visual arts) and "pure

and unrelated presents in time." Jameson then cites an account of actual schizophrenic experience and concludes:

> The breakdown of temporality suddenly releases its present of time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material — or better still, the literal — Signifier in isolation. This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect, here described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity."[34]

Jameson recognizes the attraction of the "ludic" moment of free-play, postmodernism's moment of *jouissance*, what Jameson labels in the title of a major section, "the Hysterical Sublime." It is dependent upon freedom, as a condition of possibility, from anything resembling a Kantian ethical imperative, Sartrian or Dostoevskian responsibility in/for history. It is a great relief when we turn away from the blinding light, when we are able to "block" successfully, to deny the very reality of "the nightmare of history." Nevertheless, as shown here, the repressed and/or the referent, does not disappear when denied, and its power and control may be greater if the effect of postmodernism as cultural dominant is to deny the reality of that power. Jameson says of the effects of the anti-historicist view:

> There cannot but be much that is deplorable in a cultural form of image addiction which, by transforming the past [into] visual mirages, stereotypes or texts, effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm — from visions of "terrorism" on the social level to those of cancer on the personal.[35]

In an earlier article, Jameson describes this enabling retreat from meaning in history as "something like a defense mechanism, a repression, a neurotic denial, a preventive shutting off of affect, which itself finally reconfirms the vital threat of its object."[36] As symbolized by the movement within Benjamin's dialectical image, such resistance and repression is at the source of postmodernist cultural phenomena as a response to late capitalism. In the same discussion of the modern historical specificity of experience and consciousness under capitalism (with the work of Baudelaire in the foreground), Benjamin cites in a devastatingly laconic, matter-of-fact way Freud's observation that the main function of consciousness is to protect the organism from perception.[37] Specific distortions in perception and aware-

ness which result from the protective gesture — in Benjamin's figure, the details of the afterimage — become key constitutive features of our culture, of our thought.

Let me conclude with an example of Jameson's analysis of postmodernism that is particularly close to Benjamin's image. I will cite it at length, without editing or commenting as it proceeds, in order to illustrate the movement within the thought, to show the depth and relevance of the argument. Jameson is discussing our mixture of fascination and horror with computers and other powerful, sophisticated means of "high tech" communication and reproduction as instances of "the hysterical sublime." He is separating his position from a view of technology itself as the "°ultimately determining"' social force:

> Rather, I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating, not so much in its own right, but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp — namely the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself.

He illustrates of the popular culture manifestations of this vision with the "high tech paranoia" of movie thrillers about high-level business and political conspiracies to gain wealth or cause disaster in ways in which large, complex computer networks loom large. He then concludes:

> Yet conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt — through the figuration of advanced technology — to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system. It is therefore in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that in my opinion the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized.[38]

Throughout that analysis Jameson is aware of our powerful desire to block or resist awareness of the extent and power of late capitalism, in Benjamin's words to ignore or deny the "historical determinations" of our thought and experience. The move may even seem to be a progressive gesture, a liberation from complete indoctrination and imbrication in the apparatus of hegemony. Thus, the *jouissance* or delight in the play of signifiers: it feels like freedom. We feel relieved of the burden of intolerable awareness. Nonetheless, (to borrow, as does Jameson, Raymond Williams' distinctions between different social functions of culture) that "oppositional" impulse slides easily through the "alternative" to a position as a cultur-

al "dominant," as it allows the (only "dimly perceived") processes of penetration and colonization of experience and existence to take place unchecked. Thus, it has been the project of Jameson's career to show, not a retreat from meaning, nor from material and historical reality, but that a critical engagement with the forces of late capitalism offers the insight and understanding which might provide the basis for the success of the collective project to wrest the realm of freedom from the realm of necessity.

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Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 365. In a note on this page Jameson cites Sidney Hook's observation that "Marx came to critical self-consciousness by settling accounts with the varied intellectual traditions and attitudes of his day ... ."

2. "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate, *New German Critique*, no. 33, Fall, 1984, pp. 53-65; "Periodizing the 60s," *The 60s Without Apology, Social Text*, 3(3) and 4(1), Spring-Summer, 1984, pp. 178-209; "Postmodernism, or the Culture Logic of Late Capitalism, *New Left Review*, No. 146, July-August, 1984, pp. 53-92. I have listed these in the ascending order of significance. Jameson describes the argument in "Postmodernism" as "definitive" in a note to "Politics of Theory." Most of my references will be to the latter two, which I will call "the 60s" and "Postmodernism," respectively.

3. "N [Theoretics of Knowlege; Theory of Progress]," trans. Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth, *The Philosophical Forum*, 15(1-2), Fall-Winter, 1983-84, p. 6.

4. Ibid., p.25.

5. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack, (London: Verso, 1985). This book, with its revision of Marxism through a critique of the notions of the privileged place of the working class as historical subject and of any sort of historical inevitability, maintains the strengths of the Marxist tradition while ridding it of those features most often the object of anti-Marxist attacks. At many points their arguments are strikingly similar to Jameson's, with their incorporation into a new sort of Marxism of insights from Althusser, Lacan, and deconstruction.

6. Jameson, "Postmodernism" p. 85.

7. Jameson, "Politics of Theory," p. 62.

8. *Postmodernism: Texts, Politics, Instruction*, International Association for Philosophy and Literature conference, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, April 30 — May 2, 1987.

9. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. x.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., pp. 367-68.

12. Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 88-133. On several occasions Jameson calls attention to this brilliant essay, originally written and published in German in 1937.

13. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornelll University Press, 1981), p. 9.

14. For more on my use of Jameson to see the dialectic, see my "Infinite Indignation: Teaching, Dialectical Vision, and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*," *College English*, Vol 48, No. 2, February, 1986, pp. 177-79. Jameson is most specific on the subject in *Marxism and Form*, especially pp. 8, 53-4, 308, and in the long concluding chapter, "Towards Dialectical Criticism." All his subsequent work assumes the value, significance, and necessity of dialectical thought that were spelled out fully in that early work.

15. Jameson, "60s," p. 184.

16. Benjamin, "Theoretics of Knowledge," p. 7. Much could be written on the significance of the image in Benjamin, as in dialectical thought generally. By its very nature the image stands as an alternative to the pseudo-transparency of the language and the scientistic practices of the dominant discourse, which recognizes as valid only rationalistic demonstration through logical argument — Marcuse's "one-dimensional thought," Blake's "single vision." Jameson argues in *Marxism and Form* that "insofar as dialectical thinking characteristically involves a conjunction of opposites or at least conceptually disparate phenomena, it may truly be said of the dialectical sentence what the Surrealists said about the image, namely, that its strength increases proportionally to the realities linked [in the quotation from Benjamin which follows here, Bergson's philosophy and "big-scale industrialism"] are distant and distinct from each other," (pp. 53-4). Furthermore, I cannot refrain from citing Guy Debord's observation that "The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image." *Society of the Spectacle*, a Black and Red Translation, unauthorized, (Detroit, 1970), no pagination, paragraph no. 34.

17. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 157.

18. Jameson, "60s," p. 190.

19. Benjamin's image and Jameson's formulation strike very similar chords (or discords) as Arthur Kroker's "panic" positions in Arthur Kroker and David Cook *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). Kroker tends to see the phenomena of postmodernism as responses of shock, pain, and panic to the degraded, brutalizing "mediascape" of late capitalism, with the turning away or denial (what Jameson calls "a preventive shutting off of affect," see note 36) accomplished through his flip, sardonic, passionately dispassionate discourse, registering the murderous shocks of late capitalism, just for the hell of it. I see Kroker's lineage in Guy Debord (*Society of the Spectacle*) and the Situationists International counter-cultural politics of the late sixties in Europe (including their leadership role in May 68 in Paris, which, for well or ill, had a significant effect on the way events unfolded) to surrealism and Dada, and even to Alfred Jarry at the beginning of the century. Deconstruction through disrespect, offenses against decorum — including the alternately lofty pieties and down to earth earnestness of the academic essay or address after Arnold, which seeks to elicit enlightened assent. Jameson remains closer to such rhetorical strategies; Kroker leaves such paths entirely.

20. Jameson, "Postmodernism," p. 78.

21. Jameson, "60s," p.207.

22. Ibid.

23. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 159.

24. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 342.

25. Jameson, "60s," p. 195.

26. When Jameson speaks of the "socioeconomic functionality" of culture here, and in his assumptions regarding his analysis as a whole, he is very close to Mouffe and Laclau in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, with their post-Marxist, post-Althusserian, neo-Gramscian sense of hegemony as absent cause, present only in terms of the specific articulations of discourse, as institutional practice producing subjects.

27. Jameson, "60s," p. 196. The sources and implications of that movement in thought form Jameson's central concerns in his *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University press, 1972).

28. Ibid., p. 201.

29. Ibid.

30. Cited in Jameson, "60s," p. 201.

31. Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, cited in Stanley Aronowitz, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism: Class, Politics and Culture in Marxist Theory*, (New York: Praeger, 1981), p. 97.

32. Jameson, "Postmodernism," p. 86.

33. Ibid., p. 72.

34. Ibid., p. 73.

35. Ibid., p. 85.

36. Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Autumn, 1979, p. 55.

37. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 161.

38. Jameson, "Postmodernism," pp. 79-80.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de theorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, no. 3 (1988)

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE: POSTMODERNISM AND HERMENEUTICS

Steven Best

Crisis Theory and the Politics of Periodization

> In a certain way all this still exists, and yet in other aspects it is all disappearing.[1] Jean Baudrillard

Postmodernism is premised upon a radical break from the historical epoch known as modernism, or modernity. As theorized by Baudrillard, Kroker, and others, this break is understood as a "catastrophe," a cataclysmic emergence of a new order inaugurated on the death of all the classic philosophical referents — Subject, Society, Power, Reality, and Meaning itself.

The immediate root of this collapse of Western Logos is to be found in the death of God, that is, of the metaphysical center of the lifeworld. As Nietzsche saw, the unhinging of this foundational link in the chain of human knowledge and values would lead to a general cultural crisis and a widespread nihilism which would allow for and demand a transvaluation of all values. Of course, the Nietzschean transvaluation never appeared. Instead, for postmodernists, a more dramatic event occured, an altogether different kind of transvaluation, even higher on the Richter scale of cultural transformation. More profound than the death of God was the birth of electronic media, new idols consecrated with divine powers, secular icons for a secular age, and, in the form of television, the transcendental Subject of a decentered world.

Departing from McLuhan's premise, postmodernists such as Baudrillard and Kroker assert that the electronic media society reverses the age-old

Western dynamic of differentiation and explosion, and inaugurates a new era of dedifferentiation and implosion.[2] They see the media as a tremendous catalyst to the evacuation of cultural meaning and the final triumph of nihilism. In a process already well begun with the emergence of the consumer society, the media erode the distinctions between signifer and signified and sign and referent, nullify linear thought and rational discourse by proliferating an alternative universe of images and montage, and isolate human beings in serial relations. The "catastrophe" then is not just the death of the modernist era, but of the Enlightenment project itself, of the ideology and possibility of freedom and progress.

Thus, this discourse of catastrophe attempts to alert us to portentous events in our present world, but it is misleading to the extent that it posits an unbridgeable chasm between modernity and postmodernity and theorizes this passage only in terms of discontinuity. Rather than speak in millenial terms of catastrophe, I suggest that the Marxist discourse of "crisis" is more appropriate in understanding our situation today. By employing the term crisis as a diagnostic tool, we can theorize both the lines of continuity and discontinuity which characterize the relationship between modernity and postmodernity.[3]

This suggests, in other words, that we are in a *transitional* stage, a passage from an old industrial modernity into some new type of society, indeed, but where the familiar demons of class and capital continue to haunt us. To the extent that our present situation can still be called "capitalism," whatever qualifying prefix one wishes to add to this, to the extent that this old order stubbornly persists — in alienated wage labor, in exploitation, in the hegemony of exchange value and reification, in the brutality of imperialism — then it makes sense to speak of recent developments in terms of a "crisis" rather than a "catastrophe."[4] This suggests that new developments throw the old system into *disequilibrium*, but do not completely undermine or totally transform it; that the system is still beset by perhaps irresolvable contradictions, and not that "the schemes of control have been fantastically perfected."[5]

Thus, the sorts of qualifications that Jameson makes in his conceptions of postmodernism — as a "cultural dominant" where "subdominant" counter-tendencies exist and cannot be subsumed under the rubric of "postmodernism" — are lacking in the work of many postmodernists. "Postmodernism" is a useful concept, but only as an *organizing*, rather than a *totalizing*, term, helping to map out new social and cultural phenomena. Jameson's concept of "waning of affect," for example, is qualified in such a way as to not apply to all possible cases. "Of course, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all affect, all feeling, or emotion, all subjectivity has vanished from the new image."[6]

A key issue in this instance is the politics of periodization. As Jameson has made clear, any stance on postmodernism as a specifiable historical period is "a political stance on the nature of multi-national capitalism to-

day,"[7] a position on whether or not this capitalism still exists, its nature, and the possibilities for its transformation or elimination. Thus, where "crisis" has the empowering effect of suggesting that the system is vulnerable, making intervention and change possible, "catastrophe" has the paralyzing effect of suggesting that the present upheavals are over and done with, irreversible, and so it obviating any intervention.

Furthermore, "catastrophe" is a strictly one-sided term which fails to see, as Marx did with the emergence of capitalism, that this new transition brings with it, all at once, both negative and positive features, progress and regress. Thus, just as an earlier, modernist capitalism greatly developed the productive forces of society and had "pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors'," such that "man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life,"[8] the later, post-modernist capitalism has continued to follow the contradictory logic of commodification. Not only does it implosively erode the boundary between reality and unreality, thereby allowing the substitution of spectacle and simulacra for history and social reality, it also extends the denaturalizing and demystifying movement of modernity and dismantles traditional racial, sexual, and political hierarchies, in addition to deconstructing all fixed identities,[9] thereby creating "schizo-subjects" whose decoded flows of desire can find either radical "lines of escape" (Deleuze and Guattari), or can be repressively reintegrated into commodity logic and consuming practices.

Ironically, the catastrophe discourse of postmodernism has its roots in the apocalyptic hyperbole of certain religious systems and certain versions of Marxism. It differs from other millenial systems in its rejection of teleology, any guiding historical subject, and the belief in historical progress. Indeed, voicing only a sense of ending and exhaustion, defeat and decline, postmodernism is frequently characterized by an unremitting pessimism toward the possibility of any future that is not simply an intensification of totalitarian control. I should think, however, that if capitalism has taught us anything, it has shown us that it is a very resilent and protean system and that the heralding of its death, and hence the critical discourse of Marxism, is most premature. While postmodernity may be the twilight of the old political project, it is also the dawn (*Dammerung*) of new possibilities.

Postmodernism and The Critique of Hermeneutics

> The idea of content is today mainly a hindrance, a nuisance, a subtle or not so subtle philistinism.[10] Susan Sontag
>
> Interpretation is our modern way of being pious.[11] Deleuze and Guattari

Whatever differences postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard, Kroker, or Jameson might have, they all understand postmodernism as a radically implosive society: a culture of spectacle, signs, images, and codes that proliferate to such an extent as to overtake reality as we know it, where signs have definite referents, meaning has stable supports, and clear distinctions exist at the social and ontological level. In place of this old referential reality, postmodernity has substituted a new signifying and experiential order, a "hyper-reality" where signs are self-referential, connotations permutate endlessly, information devours meaning, reality and illusion are increasingly inseparable, and cultural simulacra are more real than the world they replace.

As an implosive system, postmodern society is said to reduce everything to a depthless one-dimensionality. From architecture to subjectivity to theoretical production itself, depth models are said to be obsolete, that behind the signifier there is only another signifer, that reality is as deep as the mirrors on the downtown hotels or the punk's sunglasses, and that meaning itself has evaporated in a puff of smoke.

Prima facie, this nullifies the very possibility of interpretation and cultural criticism. Traditionally understood, the project of interpretation has been premised on the distinction between surface and depth, manifest and latent meaning, falsehood and truth, illusion and reality. It has been based on the belief that there is more to the world than is immediately given to the senses or the understanding. This general assumption has held for all interpretive projects, from Plato to Jameson.

Beyond the shared belief that things are other than they appear, there are significant philosophical differences which can be categorized under the rubric of realism and anti-realism. A traditional realist understanding involves appearances that mask a true reality, an "essence," which, when grasped, will tell us how the world really is. The anti-realist conception, as can be found in the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, holds that there is no essence behind the appearance and that we can never know the "things-in-themselves" because all understanding is perspectival or historically conditioned and mediated in nature.

This is a common and simple distinction, but an important one that needs to be restated and retained. The employment of a depth model by no means commits us to a "metaphysics of presence" and a "transcendental signified" as defined and refuted by Derrida and others. The distinctions between surface and depth, manifest and latent, do not entail that third opposition between appearance and essence, and are therefore separable from metaphysics and classical realism. The postmodern argument, however, is more radical than that. Rather than claiming a sophisticated reform of the depth model, it demands a rejection of it in all forms and explicitly declares itself to be "against interpretation."

Perhaps the most influential attack on hermeneutics was written by Susan Sontag over two decades ago. Her seminal essay, "Against Interpreta-

tion," can be seen as an early "postmodern" statement in numerous respects: its critique of Enlightenment reason as terroristic; its rejection of the classical theory of representation; its celebration of populist camp and aestheticized play in textual surfaces; its apoliticism and tacit nihilistic rejection of the socialist project; its sense of decline, detritus, and panic in a culture based on "excess and overproduction"; and its privileging of textual form over content.

Sontag's attack is not, as she states, against interpretation in the Nietzschean sense ("There are no facts, only interpretations"), but against the "modern" view that every text has a single, specifiable meaning, a buried content that needs to be recovered, and then aggressively attempts to elicit this meaning by subsuming textual complexity to rigid theoretical schemes.[12] "In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capacity, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art ... To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world — in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings.'"[13] While repudiating interpretation as a violent and repressive practice, Sontag wants to recover the complexity and fullness of texts and experience. "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."[14]

A similar position informs Deleuze and Guatarri's *Anti-Oedipus*. Like Sontag, they reject hermeneutics as a repressive imposition of a monolithic model on a complex and incommensureable reality. Seeing desire as inherently "revolutionary" in its primordial "nomadic" state, they decry its "territorialization" in all possible forms, which includes not only the violence of the state, but the violence of reason, "crushing the whole of desiring-production, replacing it with a system of beliefs" such as Oedipus.[15] Hermeneutics belongs to the classical framework of representation that they see as "a social and psychic repression of desiring production."[16] Like Sontag, they pursue a strictly formalistic — albeit politically radical — approach to texts. For them, the "sole question" is not "what does it mean?", but "how does it work?" The text that concerns them, the unconscious, has no content (and so, one surmises, no psychic life whatsoever), it is just a machine in continual production. A key task of schizoanalysis, for example, is to discover how this machine works, to locate the social forces impeding it, and to liberate its productive intensities for dissemination throughout the field of partial objects.

Similarly, the new postmodern media theory tends to be a formalist mode of criticism that concentrates exclusively on how television works, as a signifying system, rather than on what it says, as an ideological apparatus.[17] Anchored in the postmodern social theories of Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, and in McLuhan's "the medium is the message," this new media theory is part and parcel of the new "post-" ideologies which deny the possibility of significant social opposition and transformation. For postmodernists, television is a purely imagistic environment whose only "message" is the visual medium itself. Its visual environment negates or absorbs

any content and so is nothing but surface. Thus, as the title of a recent book suggests, there can only be a "watching" of television in terms of images and montage, and not a "reading" of television in terms of symbols, myth, or ideology. In a word, television is signification, not socialization, and so demands a strictly formalist analysis.

There are numerous problems with the post-structuralist and post-modern critique of hermeneutics. First, there is a radical erasure of the distinctions and differences between the many types of hermeneutical projects. Sontag rightly critiques a dogmatic rationalism which sees texts as nothing but objects to be colonized by interpretive models and which search for *the* meaning of a text. To be sure, certain interpretive schemes are false and reductive. One needs only think of the ludicrous Freudian or Marxist models which see in everything a direct expression of the economy or the phallus.

Sontag, however, wrongly generalizes from such extreme cases to every possible type of interpretive method. Against this indiscriminating conflation of diverse problematics — which itself is totalizing and "terroristic" — it needs to be emphasized that the hermeneutic projects of such theorists as Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Jameson (who explicitly seek to construct a "new hermeneutic"), are significantly different in that they are based precisely on an attentiveness to difference — both historical and cultural — and define their fundamental methodological problem as how to properly grasp the full radicality of the "Other."

As stated by Gadamer, a genuine hermeneutical understanding proceeds through dialogue with the "Other" — be it a person or a text — and seeks to establish a "fusion of horizons" which, far from dissolving separate horizons, brings them into such a close proximity that genuine understanding becomes *possible*, in that one *overcomes* a universalizing, subject-centered understanding and learns to understand and respect the language of this "Other."[18] I would argue that the possibility of totalizing interpretation is limited, if not forestalled, by a hermeneutic emphasis on polysemy (Ricoeur), ambiguity (Jameson's dialectic of ideology and utopia), and undecidability (Derrida and Gadamer). A genuine hermeneutical encounter begins with the acknowledgment of a "surplus of meaning" (Gadamer) that requires a permanent hermeneutical revolution of a multi-perspectival approach.[19]

As soon as she states it, Sontag abandons her distinction between a valid Nietzschean sense of interpretation and an invalid hermeneutics of suspicion (equated with a totalizing impulse), and nostalgically longs for a return to pre-theoretical and non-rational expressive immediacy of life (a position that Baudrillard and every other thinker aligned with the Romantic tradition espouses). She fails to see how even reductive interpretive systems have provided powerful insights into art and social life and the extent to which interpretive rules and methods are needed. Kafka, for example, may have been ravaged by various "armies of interpreters,"[20] but

these interpretations have also shed important light on his work, which a formalist method necessarily could not. In fact, one might argue that a sensitive and sophisticated hermeneutics is necessary in order to let the text "be" at all. In Hayden White's words, "Far from reducing the work, [interpretation has], on the contrary, enflowered it, permitted it to bloom and caused it to display its richness and power as a symbolizing process."[21] Rather than rejecting interpretation for a mystical "luminousness of the thing in itself,"[22] we should also see the values and deficiences of each different type of interpretation, while appreciating the force of Sontag's insistence on the text as a sensual form in its own right (*le plaisir du texte*).

Sontag's excessively irrationalist position becomes politically reactionary when she espouses an indulgent play in textuality indifferent to political ideologies and their critique. By unqualifiably rejecting content, meaning, and interpretation, and espousing an aestheticized immersion in textual form, she occludes an ideological analysis of texts at the level of their production (both by the "author" and within social relations in general), distribution (within commodity circuits), and consumption (the "aesthetics of reception"), and so depoliticizes precisely what demands politicization and critique.

This privileging of form over content replicates the error of traditional content analysis at another level. Ultimately, the problem lies in a one-sided analysis that theorizes one aspect of the text in abstraction from its dialectical counterpart and fails to incorporate both aspects within one coherent theory of aesthetic production. The formalist argument is correct insofar as the important aspect of understanding *what* textual content means is *how* it is produced. Social meaning is not directly transmitted or reflected through the text, it is mediated through specific technologies, textual styles, genres, and codes that need to be theorized on their own terms. As seen by Brecht, for instance, radical art needs to understand how certain the kinds of form, genres, or representational styles (e.g., realism) can militate against progressive encoding, insofar as critical content can be short-circuited through a spectacular dramatic form that stifles critical thought.

If it is fallacious, however, for hermeneutics to exclude or devalue a formalist analysis, it is equally as false for formalism to ignore content analysis. Formalism fails to see how textual form is itself a type of "content," historically determined and ideological in nature, and which can promote — or prevent — specific beliefs and worldviews (e.g., the way filmic genres, conventions, and techniques can suggest a neutral depiction of an unchanging world).[23] It reifies texts as things, rather than cultural artifacts with a distinct "political unconscious" that requires critical excavation. This means that we must not abandon "interpretation," but "prolong interpretation" to the point where the text speaks to the socio-historical conditions

of its production, to issues such as "the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes" inscribed in the text by the "author."[24]

Thus, a much more complex and multi-dimensional interpretive model is needed. Television, for example, is not simply the cultural arm of rightist ideology, nor of postmodernism for that matter. Rather, it is a complex and contradictory site of signification *and* socialization, of formal effects and ideological conditioning (e.g., the ways films were crucial in indoctrinating millions of immigrants into American values, the multiple ways mainstream film and TV supports conservative values, etc.). One of the most insidious "ideologies" of a show like *Miami Vice*, for example, generally understood as only "about" its visual environment, is the ideology of the images themselves. The fast-paced montage, the cars, clothes, and cocaine, the Big Signifiers of Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll — are all signs of conspicuous consumption proferred for visual and libidinal pleasure and all translate into and reproduce consumerist ideology. The postmodern opposition between signifier and signified, signification and socialization, form and content, fails to recognize how the formal organization of the signifiers is itself an ideology and is translated into specific ideological positions.

Post-Modern Representation

> Who could say what the reality is that these signs simulate?[25]
>
> Jean Baudrillard

Another argument against interpretation, as stated by Baudrillard and Kroker, and also by Jameson, is that depth models are historically obsolete, no longer applicable within a postmodernity where subjects lack affective depth, where literary and artistic texts are sheer surface, and signs are self-referential. In its most extreme form — Baudrillard's vision of total "obscenity" — there is no content whatsoever to be interpreted ("content is neutralized")[26]; there are signifers, but no signifieds; no scene or mirror and the distinctions and depths they imply, only "the smooth operational surface of communication."[27]

While there is much truth to the claim that postmodernism is an era of extreme superficiality and flatness on various levels, I find it too totalizing and insensitive to the actual complexity and plurality of contemporary culture and society. This position is best understood as one that clarifies certain present-day *tendencies*, rather than a completed, totalized state without exceptions, differences, contradictions, and significant counter-tendencies.

There can be no question that the conceptual world, as described by Foucault where language stands within a dense web of resemblances organized by God, or mirrors a world of nature, is gone, eclipsed, never to return. It is indeed true that the relation between language and the world is a historical one and that signs today no longer "represent" a world in the classical sense.[28] Our contemporary world is very much shaped by

media, fashion, and advertising, and a new type of sign structure has emerged where signifers float in an unstable and infinitely manipulable vertical series which *can* indeed confine subjects to the prisonhouse of language or the castle of the hyperreal.

As pervasive as this type of experience may be, it is not an irrevocable, necessary, or universal one. To the extent that subjects reject mass media and consumerist ideology and learn to reshape their world apart from the codes of the consciousness industry, an analysis such as Baudrillard's is inadequate and determinist. This suggests that the "commutating" sign structure of late-capitalism does not dissolve social reality, rather social reality dissolves it when the subject gains a critical and interpetive grasp of the social structures and relations behind the production of commodities/signs.

Jameson's example indeed demonstrates a vast difference between the world represented by Von Gogh's peasant's shoes and the one we find, or don't find, in Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes." For Jameson, this painting suggests some "fundamental mutation" in the subject and object world; it shuts the viewer out of its world, that is to say, it doesn't speak of any world at all, and therefore gives us "no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture" and situate it in a larger context.[29]

Nevertheless, what is being said here? Do we really mean that such an object has no "referent" in any sense? Do we really believe that this painting is hermetically sealed in an inscrutable universe that somehow defies "interpretation"? Postmodernists have accurately described a mutation in the production of aesthetic texts, a new aesthetic where "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces."[30] Their mistake is to move directly from the phenomenology of surface to the surface of phenomenology and to claim that at the interpretive level — rather than the level of the text — there is nothing but surface when the distinctions between surface and depth, manifest and latent, remain valid to the extent that things are not directly and self-evidently given.[31]

Thus, rather than saying that there is no depth or referent, it is more accurate to say that there is a general, specificable reality or referent configured by such an object which, most generally, is late- or techno-capitalism. Postmodernity does not erase reality and install some inscrutable hyper-reality, that reality is only more mystified and more obscure, so much so, in fact, that it leads Baudrillard and others to write as though materiality no longer existed in any form, vaporized in its semiurgic processing. The semiotic idealism of some postmodern theory takes the linguistic turn of structuralism and poststructuralism to its extreme conclusion. Where language once referred to a world, now the world refers to language, nothing but a semiotic mirage. Jameson helps to forestall this very idealist confusion when he writes that although history is "inaccessible to us except in textual form," it is, nevertheless, "*not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise."[32] Rather, "History is what hurts" and its

"alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them."[33]

Therefore, the issue is not that fetishized postmodern artifacts nullify or invalidate any type of cultural intepretation and critique, it is rather that they necessitate the most incisive and complex hermeneutic we can develop, one which accounts for the historical changes in the nature of aesthetic production, subjective experience, and the linguistic sign, but rejects the Berkeleyian idealism of some versions of postmodernism, and locates the material forces which condition the relative autonomy of aesthetic production and determine the nature of signification.

Most immediately, then, it is true that Warhol's painting is flat, superficial, without a depth or resonance of sorts, a rupture from the old surrealist world of thick spatial symbols. In a more general context, however, it becomes a hermeneutic clue to the nature of a social reality where fragmentation, flatness, and blankness become culturally dominant (Jameson) and normatively celebrated (Lyotard and Baudrillard). It is significant, therefore, that as Jameson remarks on the supposed inscrutability of Warhol, he simultaneously presents us with a powerful dereifying interpretation that historically situates Warhol's work as a cultural practice of "late-capitalism," and whose supressed thematic is commodification and commodity fetishism.[34] Rather than, with Baudrillard, consigning the image to the inscrutable realm of the hyperreal, it is better to see it, with Debord, as the highest phase of commodity reification and produced within specifiable social conditions and relations.[35]

To draw from my earlier point, we should see postmodernism not as the catastrophe of representation, its convulsive involution in the form of simulation, but rather as a crisis in representation, the widespread inability to "map" the totality of social relations and networks hidden below the axiomatic and gleaming surfaces of everyday life.[36] Thus, I find Jameson's category of cognitive mapping, however vague and undertheorized, useful and politically empowering, unlike the postmodernist conception of the "end of representation" and the politics, or lack thereof, implied.[37] "Cognitive mapping" is a rewriting of "representation" that takes into account the problems that arise with the old concept of representation while trying to maintain the valid aspects of this problematic, namely the attempt to theoretically configure the complex forces and relations that structure the social and natural world. [Surely we should not too quickly equate (critical) reason with conceptual and political domination.]

There is no escaping interpretation; as Jameson has observed, the supposedly anti-hermeneutic positions of poststructuralism and postmodernism are nothing but calls for and practices of *alternative* hermeneutic positions, and their validity should be judged accordingly.[38] To the extent that postmodern theorists say anything beyond conventional wisdom, they are doing interpretive work and so rely on some sort of depth model.

It would be perverse, for example, to say that Deleuze and Guattari are not "interpreting" capitalism as a distinct type of social machine, or that Kroker is not offering specific readings of Fischl and Magritte. The anti-hermeneutical argument, taken at its word, is *self-contradictory* insofar as it cannot account for its own historicity and interpretive status. Are we to believe that the anti-hermeneutics position is not itself an interpetation? There are two unacceptable responses to this aporetical position: either it is *not* an interpretation, and so must be a realist metaphysics which it wishes to reject; or it *is* an interpretation, and so again becomes what it claimed not to be.

Obviously, it *is* a kind of interpretation and the argument pivots on the meaning of "interpretation." In its historical inception and development, hermeneutics has been associated with religious values, founding subjects, stable unitites, and transcendental signifieds. If these remain necessary elements of a theory of interpretation, then it is best indeed that we become anti-hermeneutic. If, as I have argued, these traditional aspects of hermeneutics are by no means necessary to the general project of hermeneutics — a reflexive elucidatation of the pre-theoretical meanings, historically and linguistically mediated, embedded in texts and experience — then we can develop a sophisticated theory of interpretation which sidesteps the metaphysical lures of the "being" of the text, and gets down to the real *work* of decoding.[39] Hermeneutics is fully compatible, for example, with a Derridean philosophy insofar as its principle of "always already" is a statement of *différance*, a philosophy, of course, worked out in part through a critical appropriation of the hermeneutic tradition.

Thus, we must not let the deconstruction of some hermeneutical positions carry over into the total rejection of this problematic, so that nothing is left but the apolitical and aestheticized formalism of Sontag, Paul de Man, or Harold Bloom. This is, alas, throwing out the baby with the bathwater. To the degree that meanings are not directly given, interpretation is needed; and since social and textual meanings are prejudicial and never innocent, interpretation immediately entails ideology critique.

The Politics of Interpretation

> The political interpretation of literary texts ... [is] the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.[40] Frederic Jameson

Ultimately, there's nothing new in the postmodernist/post-structuralist argument against hermeneutics. Its roots reach deep into the positivist tradition and the rejection of any reality beyond empirical "facts" and observational statements. Poststructuralists and postmodernists certainly are not empiricists, but they both hastily reject hermeneutics and depth models. Anti-hermeneutics becomes a reactionary philosophy insofar as it occludes any attempt to decipher social ideology and mystification. The problem, however, as Jameson states, is that a that "no society has ever

been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own, saturated as it is with messages and information, the very vehicles of mystification".[41] Therefore, some postmodern theory is a depoliticizing practice which precludes other ways of reading texts in terms of the ideological tendencies, conflicts, and contradictions within a culture.[42]

The alternative method I espouse is a political hermeneutics which draws from the philosophical problematics of Gadamer and Ricoeur, and synthesizes aspects of Ernst Bloch, Guy Debord, and Fredric Jameson. This political hermeneutics has a two-fold task: a (positive) hermeneutics of recollection and a (negative) hermeneutics of suspicion. Negatively, a political criticism interprets the production and reproduction of political ideologies in cultural texts that are by no means ideologically innocent (e.g., the way a film like *Top Gun* aggressively promotes militarist values). With Jameson, it would seek to uncover those "strategies of containment" by which a text attempts to position itself outside of social history and to resolve real social contradictions at an imaginary level. Insofar as postmodern theory prevents this important ideological analysis, it too must be seen as a strategy of containment, complicit with ideological mystification and reification.

Since texts are not just negative and reactive, however, nor simple manifestations of ideology and false consciousness, a political hermeneutic must also thematize their utopian longings, reveal how they advance desires for a better world, critically contrast these moments to the actual poverty of everyday life under consumer capitalism, and politicize the difference between what is and what could be.

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Notes

I would like to thank Douglas Kellner for helpful remarks on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. Jean Baudrillard, "The Esctacy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 126.

2. For McLuhan's use of implosion, see *Understanding Media* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

3. For a fuller discussion of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity, see Steven Best, "The Commodification of Reality and the Reality of Commodification: Jean Baudrillard and Postmodernism," forthcoming in *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 1988; and "Jameson, Totality, and the Post-Structuralist Critique," forthcoming in *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique*, ed. Douglas Kellner, 1988.

4. The strongest statement of the irrevocably crisis-ridden nature of the capitalist mode of production remains Ernst Mandel's *Late Capitalism*, (London: New Left Books, 1975).

5. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 111.

6. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism," *New Left Review* #146 (July-August, 1984), p 61. It could be argued that Jameson himself frequently misreads cultural phenomena which seem to belong more properly to modernism as "postmodern". See my "Jameson, ..."

7. Ibid., p. 55. Also see Jameson's "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate," *New German Critique*, #33 (Fall 1984), where Jameson maps out various political positions entailed by different attitudes toward modernism and postmodernism.

8. Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, quoted in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp 475-476.

9. For an analysis of how the media has worked to erode traditional hierarchies, see Joshua Meyerwitz, *No Sense of Place*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

10. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, (New York: Dell, 1961), p. 15.

11. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 171.

12. Fredric Jameson's aggressive Marxist hermeneutics could be seen as an ideal example of what Sontag decries. For Jameson, "a criticism which asks the question 'What does it mean'? constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master code or 'ultimately determining instance'. For Jameson, then, all 'interpretation', in the narrower sense, demands the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a given text into an allegory of its particular master code ...." *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 58. While I believe Jameson has produced some powerful and convincing Marxist readings of literary and cultural texts, it is also clear that his interpretations are somtimes too reductive and "forcible," too quick to draw mediating links to economics and class. For further discusssion, see my "Jameson ...."

13. *Against Interpretation*, p. 17.

14. Ibid. p. 23.

15. *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 178.

16. Ibid., p. 184.

17. The most pronounced examples of postmodern media criticism are Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*, and the essays by Todd Gitlin, Pat Aufderheide, Mark Crispin Miller, and Michael Sorkin in *Watching Television*, ed. Todd Gitlin (New York: Pantheon, 1987). For a critique of this latter book and an elaboration of the position stated in this paper, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "(Re)Watching Television: Notes Toward a Political Criticism," in *Diacritics*, (Summer 1987), and Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "Watching Television: The Limitations of Postmodernism," in *Science as Culture* #4.

18. See Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: Crossroad, 1962). Ricoeur provides a good formulation of this *decentered* hermeneutic: "The very work of interpretation reveals a profound intention, that of overcoming distance and cultural differences and of matching the reader to a text that has become foreign, thereby incorporating its meaning into the present comprehension man is able to have of himself." *The Conflict of Interpretations*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 4.

19. In a later essay, Gadamer moves very close to a semiotic and post-structualist problematic. See his "Text and Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: SUNY Press), pp. 377-398.

20. *Against Interpretation*, p. 18.

21. *The Content of the Form*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), p.213.

22. *Against Interpretation*, p. 23.

23. For the best examples of an approach which sees aesthetic form as an important ideology in its own right, see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious, Marxism and Form* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), and Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

24. *The Political Unconscious*, p.85.

25. *Simulations*, p. 152.

26. Ibid., p. 115.

27. "The Estacy of Communication," p. 177.

28. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970).

29. "Postmodernism," p. 60.

30. Ibid., p. 62.

31. In Marx's famous words, "science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided." Quoted in Alex Callinicos, *Althusser's Marxism*, (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 25.

32. *The Political Unconscious*, p 35.

33. Ibid., p. 102.

34. "Andy Warhol's work in fact turns centrally around commodification and the great billboard images of the Coca-cola bottle or the Campbell's Soup Can, which explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital ....," "Postmodernism ...," p.60.

35. See my "Commodification ..."

36. A concrete and dramatic example of this is the whole problem of the verification of nuclear weapons.

37. See Frederic Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347-357.

38. *The Political Unconscious*, p. 23.

39. Even Heidegger opposed the naive idea that hermeneutics could rely only on untheoretical intuitions, rather than a sophisticated methodology. His theory of "destruction" is premised on this assumption.

40. *The Political Unconscious*, p. 17.

41. Ibid., pp. 60-61.

42. See Kellner and Ryan, *Camera Politica*.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue Canadienne de theorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, No. 3 (Fall) 1988.

THE THEATRE OF CONSUMPTION: ON COMPARING AMERICAN AND JAPANESE ADVERTISING

Stephen Kline

Industrialization and Cultural Convergence

Recently, Chinese officialdom was faced with the difficult metaphysical problem of determining whether Coca Cola constituted "spiritual pollution". Viewed through the economistic monocle of Western social and marketing theory in which goods are primarily apprehended as dull and lifeless objects of rational contemplation and preferential choice, this concern for the latent cultural properties of the products of Western industrial society remains as enigmatic as a Chinese puzzle box. To societies in the process of modernization, however, the question of the cultural implications of industrialization are very much at the centre of social policy debate. Does modernization necessarily imply the internalization of an 'alien' way of life? Is the consumer society a cultural abnormality or the unalterable destiny of all developing countries?

The predominant view amongst earlier researchers of modernization saw the historical course of international social development as an inevitable march to a Western-like civilization based on the industrial mode of production. The influence of industrialization eventually spreads to all domains of socio-cultural relations, particularly with the enhanced ideological adaptation promoted through modernized communication systems.[1] Based on this view, the current highly interrelated global context is just accelerating socio-technical transfer through an intensification of international market relations. As one research group noted, trade volume was the best predic-

tor of intercultural flows of information.[2] Convergence theory, as it is sometimes more politely called now, holds that under the same conditions of industrial production, all nations will gradually come to resemble modern nations with the same infrastructure, goods, and means of organizing the economy. Cultural and political variation gradually become at most surface markers for different societies in a globalized melting pot, more like regionalized accents than different languages. Modern society was, after all, industrial society. The United States was merely the most advanced traveller down the road to industrialization and not, as some historians claimed, an "ineluctably singular" or historically unique society.[3]

This notion of convergence was itself based on the social theory that saw the industrial mode of production as the central force in the socialization of modern nations; the forms of industrial socialization expanded outward from the workplace technology to shape the family, educational, workplace, and community practices which reinforced and solidified the values and structure of modernized society. This view of socialization processes is often held by both critics who see Western technological (or capitalist) society subjugating the cultures of the developing world and by advocates of modernization who see the industrial society as both historically inevitable and unquestionably desirable.

Under these assumptions, the notion of progress implied a globally homogeneous and highly interdependent industrial order. Convergence, as Herbert Passim[4] argued, seemed to bring with it a "homogenization" of cultural styles and expression. Under the sway of the technosphere, industrial society was to be viewed as a single monolithic and invariant set of social and economic relations. The spread of modern communication technology is merely the final stage in the intensification of the processes by which modernization is enhanced and extended as a way of life in the developing world.[5] Advertising and marketing are the ultimate means by which the developing world is integrated into the social framework of the developed West.[6]

Japanese Modernization: Industrialization as Internationalization

For Japan, the most advanced and conscientious adopter of industrial technology, successful modernization is an undeniable fact of life. For many historians, Japan and has been a perfect laboratory for the study of the complex forces of modernization.[7] Its current situation and involvement in the global exchange of commodities, capital, technology, information, and people makes Japan the perfect locus for the consideration of emergent global social forms identified with the final stages in the development of the high intensity market relations of late industrial society.[8] The

conundrum of Japanese modernization, however, persists in the ambiguous answers it provides to the question of social convergence.

Any major Japanese city leaves the occidental visitor with little doubt that Japan is one of the advanced industrial nations; it remains less clear, as Reishauer remarks, that it is a western nation.[9] To the observer, the familiar details of modern life first emerge in relief, the background alone has an oriental veneer. Many such visitors, brought up on orientalist mythology, feel confused by the seemingly familiar face of Japanese society. They conclude that convergence is inevitable and Japan is well on the road to Westernization. Later, figure and ground invert and socio-cultural differences are noted.[10] The implicit cultural assumptions of modernization theory themselves are called into question, because traditional Japan seems to be both merging with Western elements, while shaping Japanese development.[11]

The Japanese had realized this rather contentious aspect of cultural and technological diffusion from the start. Resistance to Westernization was an important part of the Meiji restoration (1868) and was emboldened in nation-building slogans such as *Wakon yousai*. "Western know-how" and "Japanese Spirit," they said, would guide the process of Japanese development into a modern nation. The process of industrialization would not, the Meiji reformers promised, be one of domination by Western culture, ideas, and social forms. Japan would be careful to assimilate the industrial mode of production into the traditional and continuing national essence of Japanese society. Modernization was possible without Westernization. The adoption of the modern technology and production techniques of advanced industrial countries did not necessarily mean succumbing to Western ways and lifestyles. Even after the Pacific War, care was given to the distinction between the admiration for things American and the dependence on America, and the wholesale emulation of American society.

Indeed, there has been a recent interest in this question as it pertains to Japanese economic development. As the first modernized non-western nation and as a significant challenge to American economic power, Japan's miraculous success as an industrial power had to be explained and understood. In this view, Japan is no longer a mere understudy of modernization; the Japanese economic miracle represents a major contribution to the modernization of the industrial world. Japanese management techniques, quality circles, and employment structures have become the object of American envy, emulation, and adoption. To one commentator, Japan is the example, *par excellence*, of the technological state, surpassing, in its social organization and practice of production, even the United States in its capacity to perfect the cultural logic of industrialization.[12]

Furthermore, the successes of Japanese industrial production are naturally enough spreading to the marketing arena. The U.S.A., which has long dominated the international market for most cultural products and services (including advertising, films, management consulting, toys, and tele-

vision programming etc.) has recently been challenged by this new entrant.[13] How serious the challenge remains to be determined, however, what remains hidden in this debate is the role of cultural relations in the marketplace.

The case of the popular toy "transformers" — the hottest item in the American toy market — provides an indication. Ironically, "transformers" emerged from a tradition of Japanese science fiction television, which is a modification of American-style programmes, not a mere replica. Like western science fiction, these dystopian visions are of a world at constant war, defending itself against alien attacks. Seigel[14] has pointed out, however, that the Japanese science fiction tradition has become extremely popular because it vivifies on the screen a number of essentially Japanese cultural traits, among which are fear of invasion and encroachment from aliens, componentialization, hierarchical social structure, selfless dedication to the group, stoicism in the face of danger, a need to perform at the peak of one's personal capacity, and a Japanese model of group interdependence and decision-making. At the end of each story, when the invaders must once again be defeated, the components of the combat team reassemble into a giant robot warrior that battles with the alien machine. The battle is won through the cooperation and dedication of the team against individualist mechanical gain.

The message of these morality tales cannot be missed. In the American toy market the gobots and autobots indicate other societies' relationship to modern technology, behind which is a message about their relationship to Western ways. The future society portrayed in these science fiction stories is most interesting because it is almost identical to the growing body of social science literature (Japanese and Japanologist) that has attempted to comment on the current phase of Japanese social development[15] wherein the success of the economy is attributed to distinctly Japanese social and personality characteristics.[16] The question of Japanese productivity, management techniques, the employment system, distribution networks, unions, etc., have all been reduced to the issue of the "uniquely" Japanese traits that has enabled Japan to develop so rapidly, to adjust to the industrial mode of production, and to ultimately perfect it. Each has attempted to identify at the core of Japanese culture (including language, emotionality, strategic thinking, social interdependence, groupism, hierarchical social organization, etc.) the basis of Japanese success.

The underlying common theme of this literature (called *Nihonron* — theory of the Japanese by some commentators) is that national character, rooted in a uniquely Japanese set of social relations and values, has resisted foreign domination and provided the base for an alternative, culturally more appropriate and more successful mode of production.[17] Indeed, one time-sequenced study of changing Japanese opinion indicated that it was

attitudes towards personal relations that have changed least over the post war period:

> Summarizing the trend in the opinions of Japanese people today, we could say that new attitudes toward political problems and daily life coexist with a traditional outlook on personal relations ... we could say at the same time that the Japanese national character consists essentially in personal relations because the least changeable things are regarded as of greatest value. Needless to say, terse personal relations form the foundation of all social problems.[18]

Herein lies the limits to the pressures towards cultural convergence exerted by the industrial mode of production and also the inspiration for the particular success of the Japanese version of modernization. The implicit ethnocentric and nationalistic traces in this position have become the major points of concern for critics.[19] Irregardless, the net effect has been to bring cultural issues to the very centre of the analysis of modernization.

Marketing and Cultural Convergence

For the last twenty years, the issue of the cultural effects of markets within the industrialization process has been predominantly focussed on the expansion of its strategic dimension by American advertising firms into the third world arena, and what this means for development.[20] Because the Americans have long dominated the international advertising scene they have been the focus of severe criticism for extending cultural colonialism and helping to perpetuate the dominance of American-controlled multinationals in the international marketplace.[21]

Nakasone's official unfettering of Japanese consumerism leads one to wonder whether the influence of "internationalized" Japanese industrial society will long be confined to the social relations of industrial production, or whether it will spread to distribution, marketing, advertising, and other business practices as well.[22] Dentsu has been the world's largest advertising agency for the last several years, and as yet has not had a large share of non-Japanese billings. Eight Japanese agencies are among the world's top fifty. Nevertheless, as the Japanese gain more experience in their own and Western markets, will the Japanese marketing and advertising style, and practice come to have a similar influence to that of Japanese management and technology? Will the influx of Japanese marketing technology follow in the wake of Japanese goods? Now that the Japanese seem to be poised to challenge American dominance (32 of the world's top fifty advertisers in total global billings), some wonder whether this implies changes to the marketing scene with new sensitivities and approaches. Are the Japanese going to be any better adapted to international marketing[23] aespecially in third world markets (Asia, Africa, South America, and the

Middle East) where American marketing has been subject to severe criticism?

Hidden behind this impending confrontation between marketing giants, however, is the more general issue of how the expansion of international marketing and advertising influences the processes of modernization. The theory of convergence had predicted increasing cultural homogeneity based on the commonality of the mode of production (technology) and the diffusion of products that were at the centre of modern life. The Japanese theorists of "internalization", on the other hand, argued that the same technology may be adapted to different sets of social relations of production based on fundamental differences in socio-cultural form, implying that Western forms of industrial society would not dominate in perpetuum. Both approaches however were premised on the notion of the mode of production as the central domain of socialization and an ultimate vision of a fairly homogeneous global order.

Recent social theory has questioned this assumption, asserting that it may be the marketplace rather than the workplace that is the central organizing agency of socialization in the comtemporary phase of industrialization.[24] This approach puts new emphasis on the cultural significance of commodity exchange, most especially with regard to the meaning and use of products. The marketplace is viewed as an historically expanding cultural zone, ultimately concentrating and refracting the central dimensions of social meaning for the consumer culture in its modern phase. Commercial media and advertising provide focus to the system of communication which crystallizes the broader patterns of values, social relations, and satisfactions appropriate to the consumer society.

By implication, both the modern media (the culture industries) and international marketing become of central importance both as a force for commercializing media, and as a cultural discourse in its own right: international advertising tends to be viewed as the central locus of cultural domination and as a significant new force for social homogenization. As the McBride Commission stated:

> Advertising must be counted as one of the more important forces in our present world. It is becoming a factor to be reckoned with on the international level, since those few countries providing the major part of advertising in the world can have a strong commercial/cultural impact on the large majority of other countries. American advertising stamps its imprint all over the world and continues to increase steadily.[25]

These concerns have also brought international marketing and advertising practice to the centre of the theory of Japanese modernization and modernism.

Nevertheless, the implied shift from a production — to consumption-oriented analysis only intensifies the debate about convergence. On one

hand, it is argued that the adoption of the standardized communication practices of the West, based on the globally accepted media technologies (print, radio, television, film, and now computers), has provided a major impetus for universalization in the cultural sphere of Japanese society. Under this logic, whatever cultural resistance to homogenization existed within the social sphere of the industrial workplace in Japan, will be gradually eroded and overcome by the more intense media-based socialization process. Anticipating increasing pressures towards Westernization, especially among the young in Japan,[26] observers have noted that the Japanese are among the most intensive users of media, particularly television (perhaps the most active users of media in the world). Moreover, there is an active and very modern commercial media system with a large number of world-class agencies in Japan with an increasing number of Japanese-American co-ventures. Based on these observations, some conclude that Japan, although lagging somewhat behind in consumerization, is becoming increasingly subject to Western cultural influence.

On the other hand, following the logic of the "marketing concept" itself, it can be argued that the practice of modern advertising demands that product design and communication practice be increasingly adjusted to cultural predilections, which will thus accentuate cultural specificity.[27] This adjustment occurs through highly directed consumer research in an increasingly segmented market, and harmonizes the non-product content (values, characterizations, arguments) with those prevalent within the media and culture. Consequentially, it is possible to argue that to the degree such culturally rooted differences (in preferences, utility, satisfaction, etc.) exist, we must expect limits to the convergence exerted through the media.[28] Increasingly because of marketing communications then, the market may come to emphasize the socially specific dimensions of goods and by way of consequence, the producers will be forced to accommodate consumer dispositions indigenous to the developing market.[29]

Another anecdote may help to explain the dimensions of this dispute. Entering a Japanese bank is rather like entering a bank in any modern country with the single exception that they tend to have more automatic tellers — a sign of hyper-modernization and the most advanced computer communications some will say. This is not the whole story though, for on punching the code into the familiar banking terminal one is reminded that the machine is undoubtedly Japanese. The account code animates on the screen an image of a woman who effects a deep bow and politely requests further information. When the transaction is done, the figure bows again and the machine delivers the money. In Japan, this supposedly neutral and universal technology seems to be wearing a cultural mask. The technological form has been reappropriated by Japanese culture on behalf of the Japanese consumer.

The above dilemma is the central problem of comparative research into the development of the globalized consumer marketplace. How are we to

assess whether the dramatic increase in marketing communications of the last century, and particularly international marketing communication over the postwar period, has contributed to cultural homogenization or diversity? There is little enough interest in the development of a broad and critical history of advertising and marketing, let alone comparative cultural analysis. Yet the criticism will not go away; the dimensions of the problem will expand in tandem with the development of the 'socialist marketplace' and the growing interdependence of the global economy. In a sense, it is the cultural corollary of the tariff and protectionism issue. The New World Information Order debate will be increasingly heard in social theory circles.

The Case of Japan

Japan, the first industrialized non-Western nation to experience the high intensity consumer marketplace on a widespread basis, is again a natural laboratory. How have marketing theory, methods, and approaches come to Japan? Do indigenous Japanese firms practice marketing and advertising in the same way as the American multinationals? Is there now a internationalized marketing practice? Has the systematization and formalization of marketing theory and education contributed to uniformity in the images of society, and does the meaning of products perpetuate Western values and lifestyles? Is there uniformity of method, approach, and style of marketing communication in Japan and the United States? Or do the more contemporary consumer research-oriented approaches enhance the ability of advertising strategists to respond to cultural variety? Does the new communication technology (especially satellites) imply broad changes in the ability of marketeers to orient to specific cultures, or leave these societies more open to cultural colonialism?

The available historical evidence is limited. In asking these questions one must rely on casual sources of information, until more thorough comparative historical work can be done. Most of the useful historical work done in Japan has not been translated; however, one basic fact that limits the conclusion of simplistic convergence remains: American advertising agencies retain a comparatively small share of the world's second largest advertising marketplace in part, it seems, because the Japanese agencies insist that Western marketing approaches just don't work in the Japanese market primarily because of cultural difference.[30]

Despite their historical presence in Japan and the undoubted adaptation by Japanese companies and agencies to American marketing theory, methods, and approaches — differences persist. One observer suggests that Japan has a lower proportion of retail and a higher percentage of industrial advertising in its mix.[31] Moreover, television accounts for a higher percentage of advertising expenditure (35%) than in the US.[32] One knowledgeable observer has remarked on the different spending allocations of the Japanese consumer for luxury goods and Japanese advertising

firms accept competing accounts.[33] Hakuhodo's detailed consumer lifestyle research[34] reflects many differences in values, preferences, and culturally specific consumption practices (i.e., gift giving, food sharing) which are crucial to efforts by foreign as well as Japanese companies who market consumer goods there. Kobayashi[35] also identified a number of features which distinguish Japanese from American advertising design, including: the use of information, the hard sell, the absence of comparative ads, and the orientation to the elite as opposed to the everyday, practical use of goods.

In making these contemporary comparisons, it must be pointed out that television advertising in Japan is itself not new. Commercial advertising on television in Japan began in 1952 and surpassed newspapers as a source of total advertising revenue in the mid 1970s. Early examples from the Dentsu archives reveals efforts that would have hardly been recognizable as ads to the American audience of the time. Many were animations or shadow puppets with a highly staged and clearly Japanese orientation. Although the idea of television advertising was no doubt borrowed from the USA at the time, the forms and messages were themselves rather different in spite of a widespread emulation of American business practice based on the supposed admiration that was accorded the victorious enemy.

Although often more condensed (given the availability of the fifteen second format), contemporary television advertising in Japan is much more recognizable in its current internationalized form, which in part obviously reflects the rather uniform cultural features of television itself, attributed by convergence theorists as central to the dynamics of homogenization. Programme form and general television style remain very much a common element of American and Japanese broadcasting.[36] Japanese media practitioners and particularly advertising personnel seem alert to foreign arts styles and trends giving a familiar (to the visitor) flavor to many of the scenes, locations, music characterizations; about 50% of Japanese ads have at least one foreign element. Foreign advertisers sometimes retain non-Japanese agencies and Japanese agencies have themselves tried approaches proven in the American market (for example the in-store consumer testimonial). Japanese advertising therefore reflects many of the characteristics that would be expected of convergence theory. The commonality of the television technology and of the basic forms of television production gives a tone of familiarity to the act of watching television. The symbolic grammar of the commercial media seems to be an important common dimension which makes advertising understandable even when the language is different.

Nonetheless, underlying these similarities are some important differences, like, for example, the automatic teller. The observation process reported below used content analysis in a very preliminary way to discern more precisely and sensitively differences in the emphasis of content and form of Japanese and American advertising. The analysis was undertaken of 60

prime time national television advertising campaigns broadcast on national networks in each country. The coding protocol was based on one developed for the historical study of magazine advertising and adapted to television. It was then expanded to accommodate features unique to Japanese advertising. The dimensions of judgement that were included in the protocol were:

1) Roles
2) Relations
3) Personal Types/Lifestyles
4) Emotional Tone
5) Activities
6) Values
7) Persuasive Appeals
8) Narration
9) Style

Coding was done by myself with the assistance of four bilingual Japanese university students. Only significant differences will be emphasized in this account.

Major differences were indeed noted in the approaches of Japanese and American advertising, even if on the surface they both appear modern. In terms of persuasive appeals, the American television ads were judged higher in terms of rational appeal, "worry" and typical person testimonial. The Japanese ads were particularly high in the known person testimonial: there were twice as many funny-popular stars in these testimonials as opposed to the status-respected group. These general differences in approach were also reflected in the stylistic categories, with 32% of the American ads rating judgement of "demonstration of product characteristics" as compared to 5% of Japanese ads. On the other hand, 38% of Japanese ads had humour as a basic element as opposed to 8% in American advertising. Our general impression of Japanese advertisements was that of a very light and bemused approach as opposed to the rather heavy-handed rationality of American ads. The Japanese ads did not seem to reflect the American concern for communicating a unique selling proposition.

Values also differed. Practicality (usefulness, effectiveness) was a primary value in 25% of the American ads but only in 12% of Japan's. Contrary to much of the Nihonron theory, Americans valued work in 12% of ads (0% in Japan) and convenience (5%) while Japanese valued leisure (7%) beauty (7%), sensuality (5%), and health more. The basic consumerist, rather than industrialist, values seem to be the basis of Japanese advertising. The Japanese also value traditionalism, whereas the Americans value modernism, although this was apparent more frequently in secondary valuations.

This pattern was further revealed in an analysis of roles, social relations, and emotional tone of ads. Thirty-three percent of Japanese ads contained happiness and excitement as the basic emotional content, and the experience of sensual pleasure occurred in 12%. Eight percent of American ads had each of these characteristics, whereas 22% were rated as having "pride, sense of success, achievement" as their primary emotional content. Other emotional references were rather similar.

In terms of social relations, it was noted that 33% of Japanese ads involved no social reactions, as opposed to 20% of American ads. American ads favored romance, family, friendship, and official, including work, relationships; the Japanese favored the parent-child dyad and independence. There was a very significant difference in the depiction of these social scenes as contexts of product use. The American ads tend to depict the product used in a typical social context, but the Japanese ads have the social relations between the characters as a symbolic illustration or field upon which the product's qualities (or frequently a visual joke) is to be interpreted. This is why in many Japanese ads human characterization appears as a symbol or image of the product's characteristics rather than the context of appropriate use.

This tendency is also reflected in the role categories that appear in the ads. Extended families, friends, couples, and bosses/workmates occur in American ads more, while fathers, children, and performance related roles (media) are favored in Japanese advertising. A breakdown of the "non-naturalized" roles (parasocial interactions as defined by Horton and Wohl[37]) reveals the obsessive interest of Japanese advertising in people enacting media-based roles. Japanese advertising uses models, artists, television personalities (including singers, actors), and comedians most in its advertising. These characterizations account for up to 44% of advertising portrayals. Of parasocial roles, American advertising concentrates on the announcer and sports personalities. Although characters talk directly to the audience about 20% of the time in both countries, a little skit or performance occurs in 17% of Japanese ads. The testimonials obviously work on different premises in Japan and America.

Personal prototypes also differ although this judgement was very difficult to make and seems especially culturally loaded. The judgments were based on the appearance and state of dress of the characters and their mannerisms (i.e. posture, bowing, mouth hiding, etc). In both countries, about 18% of characterizations emphasize the healthy/sporting dimension. Japanese ads however, seem to stress traditional or old fashioned types (13%), cute-young (nowii) 15%, and attractive-sexual (12%), although these types were almost all non-Japanese). American ads emphasize "everyman" types (27%) and the authorative announcer (12%).

The extent to which Japanese television and commercials in particular depict foreigners has been noticed by other researchers and seems to mirror a tendency common to many rapidly developing countries.[38]

Nonetheless, whether the presence of foreigners in advertising reflects the introjection of Western ways and cultural convergence remains difficult to determine. In fact, Japan probably has a lower proportion of foreign TV productions than many developing countries and many of the foreigners who appear in ads are not typical foreigners but well known star performers. Moreover, there is some attitudinal evidence that reveals that respect for foreigners has declined since the war[39] as their appearance in advertising increases.

My own comparison confirmed that representation of foreigners is an important aspect in Japanese ads. Whereas 90% of American ads occur in distinctively American settings with 80% containing only Caucasians, only 52% of Japanese ads are clearly set in Japan, with 67% of the characters being Japanese only. One remains circumspect about whether this is confirmation of convergence. These doubts were accentuated not only by the frequent occurrence of Western performing stars, but also by the way Western women models are used in Japanese advertising. Whereas Japanese women (both traditional and modern) appear demure and in decorous state of attire, foreign women are invariably exposing some part of their anatomy. It appears that their foreignness is less important than the fact that they conjure and symbolize for the Japanese a legitimate expression of sensual and erotic attachments. This is interesting because romantic social relations occur in about 15% of the American ads and in less than 3% of the Japanese's. The representation of foreigners in Japanese advertising may have less to do with respect for Western lifestyles than the peculiar and circuitous way that the Japanese have for referring to sensual matters.[40]

All advertising can be criticized for fictionalizing contemporary life and providing a more optimistic vision of the world than seems appropriate. Advertising is, after all, what McLuhan termed the "good news" about modern society. Advertisers feel no compunction to reflect the world as it is. In many senses advertising always reflects "another world" — a more idealized one in which the promise of the future infuses the present. In summary, we might say of the field of American advertising that the everyday world of idealized consumption reverberates between reasoned or demonstrated exhortations to purchases and a romanticized vision of everyday life. In Japanese advertising the idealized world of goods is symbolically marked by three quite different dimensions: by a foreign world which appears exotic and sensual, a domestic world in which traditional Japanese ways are maintained, and a third entertainment world in which media personalities 'play' out the enjoyments of the world of goods.

It should not be surprising that in none of these worlds of Japanese advertising do we find representation of the groupish, emotional, and social-relationships of the folk culture of Nihonron writings. Nor do we find the high-intensity, work ethic oriented rationalistic technoculture of some of its critics. We do find the traditional dichotomy of Japanese and Western ways; in Japanese advertising we see a world that is entertaining and fun.

Humour and silliness are rampant. Carefree, consumerist lifestyles and values hold sway; a world populated by some foreign and many famous Japanese performers provides the basic "social" dimension of this imagery. Whereas American advertising provides the expected picture of bourgeois consumerism; the Japanese seems to be fleshed out in the image of an other more joyous, even hysterical world. Kobayashi comments on the contrast:

> Japanese commercials, on the other hand, look like a variety of ploys and tricks which are exhibited to a princess who has been fed up with all that has appeared in fairy tales and brought to her by those men who contrive with speculative mind to win her favour. No on knows what may prove to be effective.[41]

Discussion and Interpretation

How are we to make sense of these major differences in emphasis, image, tone, style, and human characterizations represented in Japanese and American advertising. Certainly in the extensive representation of other societies' values and relationships to goods, and the remarkably high occurrence of stars and celebrities in Japanese advertising. That these differences exist are important to recognize. In order to interpret them, we must leave the narrow analytic frame of content analysis to understand the whole cultural system of signs.

As Raymond Williams[42] noted: "A main characteristic of our society is a willed coexistence of very new technology and very old social forms. Advertising is the most visible expression of just this combination." This is true of Western advertising although it is often forgotten because the traditional social forms themselves have been undergoing a constant process of change. In Canada, for example, as Leiss et al.[43] argue, the study of advertising has revealed a process of social transformation from a rudimentary industrialism to a segmented consumer society through several stages; the historical course of this social transformation has involved a shift in the cultural frames for understanding the meaning of goods and their use. Within these frames, the image of the "traditional" occasionally marks certain products with qualities of craftsman-like production or pastoral quietude, but there is little sense that the traditional world has been preserved. Apart from these nostalgic associations to a mythologized history, the world depicted in contemporary advertising appears less concerned with the opposition of the modern and the traditional, than with being modern. Western advertising constantly reminds us that history is to be transcended and is therefore not a problem within the cultural frame.

In Japanese advertising, however, the modern and traditional worlds seem at first to stand side by side in a state of co-existence; the modern one westernized in its form and structure, and the traditional one preserving the sanctity of "pure Japanese." The system as a whole thus reflects the fulfillment of the Meiji ambition to acquire the benefits of moderniza-

tion without a loss of cultural identity. The traditional/modern and Japanese/Western distinctions provide the basic categories for the cultural frame of Japanese advertising as it does for many other areas of Japanese life. Within this matrix goods are sorted and symbolized; kimonos, rice, restaurants, inns, and sake are generally linked to the traditional. These are not objective assignments but, as Befu[44] explains, essentially subjective or semiotic oppositions. For example, the same commodity "rice" can be designated gohan when served with Japanese cuisine and raisu when served with Western fare. Likewise cars, many foods and drink, communication technologies, clothes cosmetics, and leisure products seem to belong to the westernized world, irrespective of where they were manufactured. The system of advertising therefore articulates on another level the basic opposition between the traditional-Japanese and the modern-westernized way of life.

Some anthropologists suggest that the tension between modern and traditional ways need not be resolved. Umesao,[45] for example, has argued that Japanese civilization has long contained elements of traditional and foreign cultures (i.e. Chinese and Korean before Western); modern Japanese society is essentially bi-codal in containing both elements in parallel coexistence. Wakon Yousai was preceded by Wakon Kansai (Japanese spirit Chinese know-how). Japanese civilization therefore was rather unique in having an already established cultural pattern for preserving its own identity while assimilating foreign ideas, technologies, and life patterns.

The invasion of foreign elements into the inner sanctum of private Japanese lifestyles, however, has left other observers wondering whether the predominant pattern isn't one of progressive intrusion and domination by Western social forms with the concommitant erosion of traditional Japanese life.[46] Although Japan is fully modernized in the mode of production, it is only in the early stages of the modernization of consumption. Since production was geared towards export in Japan until the early 1970s, when the Japanese market and consumption were opened, many compare the Japanese consumer market to that of the late 1950s America. Japan, they claim, is only beginning to experience the high-intensity consumer market and will have consumer society values and attitudes towards products shortly.[47] In the meantime, Japan's advertising might be characteristic of the early stages of intensive consumerization.

Japan may be behind the West in developing the high-intensity consumer culture, but is it necessarily travelling in the same direction? Befu, who accepts Umesao's historical argument about parallel culture, argues that Western elements are increasingly penetrating from the public domain into the private and more personalized inner regions of Japanese civilization, westernizing what were traditionally Japanese aspects of behaviour and belief.[48] The behaviors that Befu refers to revolve around the central daily products and life practices — food, clothes, houses, appliances, etc. — the regions we would most expect from a progressive consumerization. Be-

fu's comments then, lead directly back to the debate about the role of advertising and marketing in shaping contemporary Japanese society, for it is precisely in the private daily interactions with everyday products that marketing is expected to have its impact.

Therefore, in the purview of advertising, the sorting of product meanings within the cultural matrix have almost nothing to do with the mode of production. In their attachment to foreign imagery, certain products are marked irrespective of where or how they are produced. For example, Japanese-made cars are consistently advertised in foreign contexts, as are many other Japanese manufactured durables.[49] In Japanese advertising the car is a foreign good; symbolically it exists in a world separate from the domains of Japanese life defined by the processes and relationships of production.

On the other hand, traditional Japanese goods or cultural activities (i.e., kimono, inns, Japanese restaurants, sake, even though produced with modern technology) mix with restaurants' foreign style cuisine (including McDonalds) and several other products which are advertised predominantly within traditional Japanese representations. In these ads, the importance of family roles and bonds, historical and mythological references, the home, and traditional Japanese values and behaviour patterns (i.e., women in Kimono, formality, dedication, strong emotional bonds) are suffused into the social relations of consumption.

These two distinctive worlds — the traditional/private Japanese and the modern/public Western — do coexist in Japanese advertising. Notably, they also exist as prominent dimensions of the lifestyle (psychographic matrix) identified by market researchers.[50] As Kawatake[51] points out, these lifestyle groups are related to preferences for foreign or traditional elements in advertising. Such lifestyle segments, however, account for less than forty percent of the population, and these opposed worlds account for an even lesser percentage of the advertising imagery. The rest consists of a world in which modern and traditional mixes with foreign and Japanese, a "middle" kingdom in which the categories merge and overlap. It is the exciting terrain between oppositions where, as Edmond Leach[52] pointed out, the most interesting things happen. It is a world where Japanese and modern are not categories in opposition. Here, I believe, we find the central discourse on modernization and what it means.

The intermediate world in Japanese advertising is not peopled by traditional types who represent longstanding characteristics of Japanese civilization, or foreign characters that resonate with the promise and sophistication of the "other" modern world; it is populated primarily by well-known Japanese stars from the world of arts, sports, and entertainment. In many cases, these are the young entertainers of the world of music and film. Unlike the American ads, the Japanese ones seldom revolve around typical scenes where typical (but unknown) people engage in the rituals of modern lifestyles. In the middle kingdom, foreigners and for-

eign elements (music styles, clothes etc.) can mingle and interact with Japanese. It is the image of a 'convergent' civilization of an internationalized (but not dominated) modern Japan.

That this force for resolving the tension between traditional and foreign identities emerges from the world of arts and entertainment, that is from the cultural industries, may not be atypical in itself of Japanese society.[53] That it has been powerfully amplified by the extensive development of and fascination with the modern media of communication also seems to be the case. This not only occurs in advertising but is typical of many of the arts, for example the acclaim given to a Japanese version of Oedipus or the founding of cultural centres. Befu[54] argues that the distinction between traditional and Western cultural styles have themselves become deeply interwoven in the celebration of many Japanese occasions and rituals, for example Beethoven, and New Year's, and Ishige,[55] makes a similar example of the public consumption of food. Between the traditional world of *bunraku* and *enka* and the westernized arena of jazz, Mozart, rock, and Shakespeare a very large domain of modern Japanese style and performance exists. For example, wasai (homegrown) pops and pops *kayokyoku* that mingle traditional Japanese and Western forms are popular. In advertising this intermediate style also appears in association with a large range of goods that are both contemporary and Japanese. These particular dimensions should not be overlooked.

In terms of Umesao's "syntax of culture," advertising, like *wasai* pops seems to reflect syncretic rather than coexistent grammars. In wasai pops television shows, young (nowii) performers act out their songs sprinkled with English words, dressed in extreme and exaggerated versions of Western clothes, performing their gyrations in controlled and stylized movements only faintly reminiscent of Western style pop performance. The audience for this music exists with the audience for very modern and classical Western music and the traditionally popular *karaoke* styles.[56] In these performances, Western content and references have been reappropriated by Japanese style and form. In advertising and marketing studies the same seems to be true. As Ishige states in his discussion of the historical antecedents of this type of assimilation: "In the realm of daily life as well, the same sort of trend is seen in the acceptance of Western civilization, the various elements having been reorganized within the Japanese context."[57] Advertising, like other types of popular culture, seems to indicate that the syncretic mode which assimilates alien meanings into the home context through the mechanism of style is of crucial importance.

That the syntax of culture redoubles a pattern established in language is not surprising. The Japanese assimilated the Chinese ideographic writing system (*Kanji*) by combining it with a more indigenous phonetic system called *Hiragana*. More recently confronted with having to incorporate new phonetic foreign words — the Japanese have developed the use of *Katakana*. Some foreign words are written only in the foreign language

("sexy", "pop", etc.). *Katakana* is a considerable part of contemporary Japanese language usage, where foreign ideas (including technical terms) although japanized, remain marked as different from traditional Japanese concepts. They are no longer foreign nor are they part of traditional Japanese language. *Katakana* represents a middle kingdom of language — the naturalized foreign word. These usage conventions obviously permeate television advertising (as well as magazines, product labeling, and product design, etc.). For example, an ad for a car writes "Sexy Sprinter" across the screen in Roman letters. On the other hand, the ad for coffee uses the *katakana* form (pronounced *koo-hee*) reflecting the greater degree of assimilation of this product into the Japanese daily life.

Like the *katakana* words, the products of the "middle kingdom" are neither traditionally Japanese nor clearly foreign. Their design and use reflects a combination of elements of both. It is true of the school uniforms based on Western designs but modified to Japanese custom, of the western-style clothes in general, of beverages, ice-creams, and indeed to a goodly part of the menu of many restaurants, other than traditional fish and rice. In many cases the customization extends beyond the central domains of food, clothes, and shelter to the wide variety of goods that comprise modern life. Like the banking machine, the Japanese market demands alterations in the design, meaning, and use of the products. The Japanese have far greater acquaintance with and attachment to the appropriated aspects of foreign cultures than with things foreign. This possibly explains why they both like to travel abroad and have trouble adjusting when they do.[58] It also reflects the basic difference between the foreign and international components of Japanese life; when talking about internationalization the Japanese refer to policy adjusted to Japanese interests and cultural preferences.

In summary then, though we have wandered far away from the original issue of cultural convergence and modernization in Japan, we may return to this terrain for the final word. This analysis of advertising as communication has focussed on factors other than the economic workings of a marketplace. From this point of view, there is little to say about whether advertising has modernized the economy, and a lot more to say about whether it contributes to the modernization of the culture. If Japan is in any way a typical case, then we may say that the dilemma of advanced industrialization necessarily involves a debate between traditional and Western images of life. Advertising itself is an important part of the discourse on modernization; it takes up the themes of this dialogue about convergence and assimilation, and in some important and striking ways it helps to formulate in concrete symbols a sense of their resolution. In much of modern Japanese advertising the past is interpolated with the modern western present and a new vision of a unified modern world supplants the older schismatic one.

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Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de theorie politique et sociale, Volume XII, No. 3 (Fall 1988)

A SKETCH OF THE JAPANESE LANDSCAPE

Nakao Hajime

Every mid-August and again at the end of the year, up to thirty million Japanese leave metropolitan areas for their old homes in villages all over the country. These two occasions, that involve the closure of many factories and offices, are the times when people's pockets or bank accounts are somewhat fat with bonus money, when people send gifts to their bosses and kin. *Bon* in mid-August is the Festival of the Dead, while *kure* in December is the time for every faithful citizen to somehow settle old accounts, wishing a new fresh year upon him- or herself and upon the family. It is as if modern Japanese society all at once, though only for a few short days, struggles to become aware of its native roots.

Trains become packed with people, highways jammed with cars. Through the windows of the air-conditioned home-bound trains and cars the passengers see landscapes, that as the vehicles travel further, grow greener and richer in natural features that become more abundant. The ceremonial home coming from the big cities has always meant this revival in the awareness of old fields, mountains, rivers, and coastline. Getting closer to the birth- place has meant becoming sensitive to nature; remembering the tasks that parents and other villagers carried out in the fields, while working with seasons, weather, soil, water, and all sorts of vegetation, insects, animals, in short, all things physical. It has also meant that the travellers are temporarily allowed to again become "native," at home with their particular dialects and conventional, "unscientific" ways of thinking. "*Sato*" or "*mura*" (village) connotes a stubbornly old way of life where people have been bound by the labor-intensive mode of agricultural production. It connotes low educational skills and all the other contradictions of

modern Japan. It is not unusual for parents to almost masochistically admire a young one who went to the big city to become a student or an office clerk. This young one, however, would make a poor show in the world where the parents work and live. Yet these *mura* have long been the homes of Japanese. They, together with the surrounding nature, survived World War II which took many lives of people in their youth. The ancient Chinese poet Tu Fu's words, "The country defeated, yet remains the mountains and rivers" echoed all through Japan for a while, precisely expressing what people actually saw. So, during the post-war reconstruction of the national economy, city dwellers away from home sang many popular songs almost always with sad melodies of this or that old home country.

It was at about this time that ethnologist Yanagita Kunio pointed out that the big cities and factories had pulled so many people so far away from their villages that many Japanese were no longer able to keep in mind those peaks and hilltops which had once been within daily sight, and perceived as the locations from which their souls would ascend to rest. It took some years even for this great folklorist Yanagita to pursue and discover that the nationwide custom of lighting fires on mountains constituted a part of the ceremonial procedures to welcome then send off the souls of the dead. Through numerous works, Yanagita, with his consistent oral historical method and critical stance toward the superficial application of Western styles, tried to awaken the people to the treasure of native knowledge, and to its legitimacy. The forgetfulness of the Japanese people of, among other things, some of the meanings of their annual connection between the dead and living (*Bon*) suggested that the "homing" sense, not only of the dead but also that of the living, had already become severely confused.

The passengers returning to their old villages also easily recognize that the panorama through which the cars are moving, and their destinations, in the old country, were much more beautiful only a few years ago, and that the degradation of the landscape evidently started some thirty years ago. If not self-deceiving, a grown person would understand clearly, though perhaps not through detailed analysis, that he himself who works in the metropolitan economy belongs to the force which has brought about this change in landscape. It may seem that the more he works for the good of his family — what else does an ordinary man work for? — the more he sees the beautiful scenery of his country turn into characterless construction sites. His old village itself, if he still has one at all, might look very different, with paved roads for automobiles and new tunnels which enable the once isolated villagers to communicate with other parts of the world more easily; it might also have a brand new reinforced concrete "community center," "community gym," and other facilities perhaps built with money donated by a power company to obtain the villagers' consent to build a nuclear power plant that can just in one day sell more than enough electricity to pay for those buildings. Unfortunately, the buildings

look alien to this village, and mar its particular mood and traditional community customs. Furthermore, the huge plant occupies the site of once lush pine woods or dunes where the citizen remembers he and his playmates once played and adults once worked. At least on the surface, it seems that the old community's original way of life has not contributed to these new things, except for the villagers' habitual craftiness of bartering for a price they can brag about. Their virtue of keeping the community unanimous in action, works in favor of super-capitalism.

The home-bound passenger's mind works very delicately and subtly, with its depth tangled and aching, as he *comes home* his senses once again grow closer to nature, his old naturalistic knowledge revives, while all his ambivalent emotions towards the poverty of the village returns. At the same time, he, an economic soldier of the metropolis, is *seeing his home dying*, all its traditional native knowledge being lost in the process of the denuding, dumping, and flattening the land. Who can deny that he might even be calculating the tricks that would best preserve his heirship: some piece of land which would make good money through the hands of real estate brokers? For we know all too well that if he desires to own a place to live in a major urban residential area, he will have to throw in an entire month's income or more for every square meter he buys. But then, who can calculate in terms of money either the attachment to, or loss of, one's native home?

At this desperate moment, a "national identity" is sought by worried nationalists, an identity which would ensure that even after the extinction of their native homes in the hinterland, the people could continue to work obediently for some metaphysical belief which unifies the nation.

The ecologists are also alarmed by this weakening village tradition. In the twenty years between 1960 and 1980[1] the number of people working in agriculture and that of young successors who took up farming as their calling decreased sharply: in 1960, the agricultural labor population was 13,120,000, about 30 percent of the whole labor population, and in 1980 it was 5,430,000, less than 10 percent of the whole (1985: 4,440,000!); the number of successors was about 80,000 in 1960 and only 7,000 in 1980. From the end of the war to 1960, Japanese farmers produced about 80 percent of the grain consumed by the country's population. Today they produce only 30 percent. The feed grain produced was about 2,000,000 tons in 1960, but only 220,000 tons in 1980. As a whole, the nation's self-sustaining ratio of food, including aquatic products, is about 50 percent in terms of calories, the lowest among the advanced industrial nations.

A graphic example of this situation would be a bowl of ordinary *udon* (noodles) a typical Japanese dish. Noodles are made of wheat, 90 percent of which is imported mainly from North America; and *shoyu* (soy sauce) which is the main ingredient of soup, is made of soy beans, along with wheat and other grains, 95 percent of which are imported from North America and China. If you want to have a bowl of *kitsune* (fox) *udon* with

a few pieces of *abura-age* (fried *tofu*), which is believed to be a favorite of the fox, you are again adding another imported item to your basic *udon* dish, because this Japanese *abura-age*, or *tofu*, is also made of soy beans. There is nothing purely Japanese-made about a bowl of *udon* except the water.

This situation is surely threatening to the ideals of present-day Japanese ecologists whose criticism of economic practice and of industrial society sometimes resembles that of the pre-war Agrarianists,[2] in spite of the fact that the ecologists' arguments are derived more or less from modern experts' trained in the doctrines of the law of entropy and the closed system of the biosphere.

Before the period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s, even during the pre-war period of "enriching the country and strengthening the army," it was quite reasonable to claim that Japan was an agricultural country. Throughout the regime of the Tokugawa shogunate, in fact ever since the establishment of the Yamato Imperial court as early as the 5th century, agriculture, especially rice, has been the key to the central government's rule over the country. (A prominent vestige of this history is the fact that the currently ruling Liberal Democratic Party has been kept in power by the solid bloc of votes from the farming and fishing communities, whereas its vast legal and illegal election campaign funding comes from big business. The reader may have noticed, in the trade liberalization issue, the Japanese government's stubborn protection of rice, which has even gained acknowledgement from GATT.) Whatever the regime, the people — feudal peasants and their descendants — have never stopped growing rice in paddy fields even during the years of desperate starvation and infanticide, and the years of losing men to the wars.

Nevertheless, the structure of rural life really began eroding during the Meiji Revolution, that is, after 1868. Since that time, waves of centralization policies have repeatedly reached into the scattered villages. Let me list, rather randomly, some of these policies and try to discern the courses through which the Japanese view of nature has been transformed.

First, private ownership of land and the land tax system were introduced, which laid the foundation for a modern capitalist state. This, in principle, brought about a great deal of conflict in the villages, because the land had never belonged to individuals, rather it was at the same time the land of the family, of the extended family, and of the community *mura*. Possibly people had felt that rather than the land belonging to them, they belonged to the land, just as individuals belonged to their families. On the other hand, the government, which made a law giving itself a monopoly over all the waterways, decided to maintain the traditional customs of water usage in the villages, without which the cooperative community work of paddy field irrigation would have been impossible. In this way the Meiji government successfully secured for itself the agricultural foundation of the country.

The role of *ro-no* (literally translated as "the old farmer" and referring to "the gentleman farmer" or "residential landlord") might be better understood in the context of the tension between the native community structures and the nation's rush to build a centralized market economy. The *ro-no* belonged to the class publicly acknowledged as the landowners whose interest lay not only in collecting farm rents, but also in caring about their villagers' well being, for the *mura* was the indispensable unit of farming. Many of the landowners became national leaders, among other industrial heros of the era, in actively inspiring the people toward building a modern nation which could rival those of the Western colonialists. It was quite natural for them as Agrarianists to advocate the refinement and renewal of traditional agricultural technologies, and to become ethnocentric ideologues who resisted the "westernization" of Japanese agriculture. About a half century later, this trend of pursuing utopia in small farming villages, in self-government, and in the solidarity of those villages was unfortunately co-opted into the arrogant dream of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It was perhaps more tragic that, on the other side of the issue, many of the intellectual leaders who opposed the war had spiritually abandoned the small villages as a "backward" phenomenon which only restricted their own modernized free spirits.

Some of the other policies were adopted in the area of religion. For example, in the later years of the Meiji era, the government forcibly abolished the numerous *shinto* shrines of small communities. Within about fifteen years, 190,000 shrines, including the newly erected ones associated with the recently-concocted state-shinto and emperor system were reduced to 110,000 by consolidaing 80,000. According to Minamikata Kumakusu, a folklorist and biologist who strongly opposed this policy, 2,923 of the 3,713 community shrines were abolished in the Wakayama Prefecture. The government's intent was to destroy the villagers' common meeting place, a place where their minds came together in the seasonal and daily rythmn of work and life to channel their religious worship into the glory of the imperial nation. The recution was also aimed at securing lumber from the numerous sacred groves of the shrines for use in the developing cities. Wakayama and the neighboring Mie Prefecture were the regions where the most beautiful forests of Kumano were located, and where the consolidation of the shrines was most fiercely enforced. Minamikata, persistently speaking for the countryside, lamented the death of communal religion and of the huge ecological universe of Kumano as well.

It was not accidental that the explicitly erotic folk customs which usually climaxed in the big summer festivals also became the target of suppression. This, I believe, has certainly contributed considerably to today's extremely sexist society where women's sexuality is repressed to a minimum, and where men, such as members of *Nokyo* (the Agricultural Cooperative Associations), go on package tours to buy prostitutes in other Asian countries.

The implementation of the mandatory school system was another policy that eroded rural culture. Its compulsory and exclusive use of the superficial standardized Japanese dialect instead of the rich local ones in addition to the imported meter-kilogram-second system, effectively neutralized the local vigour of the people and their technologies. Worst of all, most people have come to believe that the schools are the only educational institutions where the young can properly prepare for working in society. It is therefore obvious that people worship the technocrats who draw plans for distributing expertise below. Coupled with the specialization of daily work and the distance of the workplace from people's homes, the competitive ideology of the Japanese school system with its uniform examination standards has, especially since the rapid economic growth period, taken away the opportunities for young pupils to be involved in housekeeping jobs or to participate in house-building , (frame-raising used to be a communal occasion of ceremony). As a result, for example, few university students know the meaning of Japanese words like *genno* (hammer), *tagane* (cold chisel), *kajiya* (crowbar) and so forth. It is incredible to think that they cannot tell what a *kusabi* (wedge) is, although they have carefully memorized that *kusabi-gata-moji* (wedge-shaped characters, i.e., cuneiform) has something to do with Babylonia. Some don't even know the names of body parts such as *mukozune* (shin) or *fukurahagi* (calf). These have nothing to do with entrance examinations, but are important if people do physical work with their bodies and with tools. How can an average person acquire the knowledge for diffentiating various kinds of birds or trees when he does not actually look at them or other living creatures? How can it be possible, even if the manifoldness of natural geography is emphasized in the context of ecological scholarship, that it will catch the alienated eyes of this generation? Hence, the favorite destination of today's massive number of young Japanese tourists going to the U.S.A. is Disneyland, instead of, say, the Grand Canyon or Yosemite National Park, names that no longer carry any magical significance for them.

Finally (and by that I do not mean that this is the last of the numerous attacks on people's consciousness), triggered by the flood of drastic changes made to old place names, the government implemented the "law to make the address system more efficient" in 1962. Although this was not the first of such trends since the Meiji period, it happened during the period of widespread land speculation, and has worked powerfully to destroy people's attachment to, and memories of, their home territories. Many of the minor names, every one of which had carried the memory of countless lives, were replaced by numbers; the mechanical naming of North-something or South-something, for example, was imposed on smaller, stranger names; a great number of local large and medium-sized cities imitated names of districts in Tokyo like Marunouchi, Chiyoda, Otemachi, Ginza, and Bunkyo regardless of their particular meanings. Chuo (meaning "central" in Japanese) was the favorite new name that was adopted in almost

a hundred district rearrangements throughout the country. New housing developments were attributed such names as Sakuragaoka (Cherry Hill), Hibarigaoka (Skylark Hill), Midorigaoka (Green Hill) and so forth, even though there are no cherry trees, skylarks, or lush vegetation and even though they are sometimes located in valleys or damp landfills. There even appeared such names as *Fuji-Birejji* (the English word "village" in Japanese *katakana* characters) or *Hairando* ("highland" in *katakana*). These are no longer the names of places, but are instead names of commodities, similar to Seven Star or Hilite for cigarettes.

Over a century since the Meiji remaking of the country according to policies such as these, of seeking power which, it is believed, enabled the nation to avoid being drowned in the sea of world competence, Japan is now facing perhaps the final stage of the war between regaining its native home and the probability of cultural suicide.

Let me go back to the home-bound passenger. He might have already learned that the village's *iriaichi* (common), the most ingenious preservation of tradition at the time of conflict between ownership and the right of communal use, has already been sold for a golf course with the unanimous agreement of the villagers. This certainly lowers the improbability for a community member to sell his own forests and fields, because now he need not fear criticism from others for double-crossing his fellow villagers and disrupting the harmony of the village. Actually, acre upon acre of beautiful forested commons have already been bulldozed and transformed into golf courses where rich people, who can afford to buy membership for a million yen or even twenty times that, toddle around after the ball, with their country wives who follow them as caddies wearing the sunbonnets they used to wear in the fields.

It is true that there are still farm fields across the country, and some of them look good. Every year, however, it becomes more and more doubtful as to whether the farmer will be keeping his land to continue farming or because he is just waiting for a better price, for sometimes two or three acres of paddy field are now valued at one hundred million yen, an amount he would never be able to earn toiling day and night as a farmer. In addition, the central government's policy of top-down control of agriculture seemed to have come to an impasse when it enforced the "production arrangement of rice" in 1971. Under its protection policy, rice had been overproduced, and the government announced that farmers would be paid for not cultivating it. With price increases kept more or less to a minimum, the farmer cunningly started looking for another's fields to buy or rent, so that he could grow more in order to sell enough to survive as a farmer. It was hardly possible in this situation to expect the traditional agricultural community to maintain itself. With this steady death of the native villages, the transformation of the home-country and of the landscape into commodities, and into, more menacingly, the objects of "sciences" came visibly closer to completion.

It is this unprecedented loss of the native home, not just the scientific problem of environmental pollution, that the present day ecologists are now facing. If the task of learning and understanding nature is to be carried out only in the scientific and quasi-scientific terms handed down by a few experts who are good at talking about abstract universal laws, then it seems very probable that the ecologists are going to be helplessly isolated amidst a neo-nationalistic corporatism that addictively seeks only monetary profit in the world market economy, and will have neither spiritual ties to the land, nor practical knowledge of how to make a household remain in direct contact with nature.

This is, hopefully, why quite a few ecologists have decided to go back into the villages, to try to make themselves farmers. Needless to say, this is no easy task to adhere to, because of the low profitability of agriculture, on one hand, and the clannishness of the villagers against people from big cities on another. Times are changing too rapidly, clouding the eyes of the country people so that they can scarcely imagine that the country's future depends, not upon the power of money nor of science and technology, but upon the earth-bound way of living and working. The young ecologists find the landscape all the more tragic in discovering that the most weird proliferation of science and technology is somehow coupled with the spiritual endurance of the best people of the traditional kind. This endurance, even though it may be interpreted as the perverted pride of the non-violent powerless, has surely been the maxim of the old Japanese communities by which they have maintained themselves for centuries under the overwhelming power of past tyrannies.

The present-day novelist Minakami Tsutomu criticizes the exploitive nature of the city. He was born as a son of the coffin maker of a poor village on Wakasa Bay, where there was no electricity in many houses until 1944 but where today thirteen nuclear power generation units are crowded together. As a young acolyte of Sokokuji-temple in Kyoto from the age of nine, he learned that the Buddhist establishment, especially that of the Zen school, has long been the servant of the power class of society, scarcely reaching the sorrow in ordinary minds.

On the other hand, Minakami understands and shares the deep, almost predestined grace of the Wakasa people who have for centuries been serving the Capital of Kyoto with their labour and he wholeheartedly affirms the dead and living souls' silent, enduring attendance on the city culture. He seems to maintain that as long as the city continues to exist, and as long as its relation to the hinterland is inevitably there, it will continue to be the place to which the people's grace is devoted. It was not mere defeatism, but also loyalty to their families and pride in their work, that brought so many girls from Wakasa to work in dye factories and weaving shops in Kyoto, making gorgeous textiles for the rich, and returning home with tuberculosis and dying young. So, Minakami Tsutomu dares not take

the same stance as other, more theoretical, critics in his opposition to the nuclear power industry.

Instead, he has returned home to live in Wakasa. People and home are the vessels of memory, which only ripens over the years of a life cycle — a person's growth — or over generations. It is not surprising that the people are still enduring, enveloped in the same web of sentiments as before, still serving the city, but in new and even more self-destructive ways, now selling it not only their rice and their daughters, but also their very homeland. For better or for worse, this is Minakami's home and these are his people. Immersed in this community, he takes his anti-nuclear stand.

The big question for which I do not have any plausible answer is how we are to make ourselves proper and competent before the uncompromising gap between the tempo and logic of the technological power complex and that of the rediscovery and restoration of "home" among ourselves. It seems certain, though, that making "home", perhaps the most basic of ecological processes, cannot be simulated or explicitly preplanned, nor can it be done with sentimentalism.

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Notes

1. This includes the so-called "rapid economic growth" period when Japan maintained a growth rate in excess of 10% a year. Ed.

2. Agrarianism (*nohon-shugi*) was an anti-industrialist, populist movement dating from the Meiji era. Ed.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale, Vol. 12, no. 3 Fall 1988.

NOBI FEUX D'HERBE

Francine Prévost

L'Anthologie de poésie japonaise contemporaine., Paris: Gallimard, 1986, 285 pages.

Dans le choeur de toutes ces voix aux destinées multiples baignées sur d'autres rives culturelles que la mienne, je pris pour guide ma propre voix.

L'écriture de soi que requiert toute création poétique nécessite l'abandon du soi et l'identification aux mouvements de la nature universelle. Ce mouvement participe de l'Amour épars dans toutes les strates de l'existence. Le désir transforme les âmes en roues et les fait courir au dessus des nuages. L'âme qui s'immerge dans le flux n'échappe cependant pas au temps qui bouge en elle. Dans ce constant devenir, elle est aux prises avec la difficulté d'être. C'est l'adieu de chaque instant, la mort vécue à chaque pas. La souffrance traverse toutes les fibres de ce soi qui s'avance seul et se dépouille de lui-même. Au profond chante une voix forte de mille vies, forte de mille morts, affranchie du temps par ses multiples réapparitions. "Coup soudain, la (l'âme) voici médusée par l'énergie atomique," avertit Kôtarô Takamura

La terre désacralisée est à l'agonie, l'homme meurt de sa technologie. Il nous faut détruire la langue qui cautionne cette destruction et trouver les mots pour une nouvelle maison de l'être. Il nous faut attendre. Immobile la main à contre courant capter une image de soi dans l'onde changeante.

"Ainsi lecteur, je suis moy-mesme la matière de mon livre".

Je ferai miennes les paroles de Montaigne. Cette lecture que j'ai faite de trois générations de poètes japonais éclaire certaines pensées, les fait siennes (sans doute parce que déjà en moi je les reconnus) et laisse de vastes plages inexplorées. Se dessine ainsi une géographie toute en ombres et en lumières. Géographie de l'être humain que je suis. Baignée à "la source

souterraine du chritianisme" pour reprendre les mots de Kôtaro Takamura, chevillé au corps le sentiment de l'urgence, mon âme n'en plonge pas moins dans le réminiscences lointaines de la rivière (fût elle la Loire ou le Gandhara).

> Traverser la rivière cette rivière
> Qui a l'air de n'avoir ni commencement ni fin

dit Motoo Andô dans son poème *Une périlleuse promenade.* Périlleuse promenade qu'est toute vie, périlleuse promenade dans cette anthologie, foulées les pensées et méditations émanant d'hommes au destin différent, chants multiformes à plusieurs voix-discordantes — et qui finalement dans leur variété ressemblent à la vie.

Toute création poétique est écriture de soi. Rien ne naît sous la plume du poète qui n'ait été vécu, qui n'ait reçu l'initiation de la chair et du sang.

Comme Tatsuji Miyoshi, nous pouvons essayer d'imiter les anciens poètes "qui ont célébré sur leur route, les saisons en s'abandonnant à la nature environnante." Le mouvement premier est l'abandon, abandon du soi et l'identification au mouvement de la nature universelle. La même pensée se retrouve chez Goethe: "Pour se retrouver dans l'infini l'individu accepte volontiers de disparaître, s'abandonner est une volupté."

S'ouvrir, faire taire la voix intérieure, avancer d'un pas égal sans essayer d'engranger l'ineffable dans des catégories à tiroirs, laisser l'inconnu s'infiltrer dans le sable des sensations, c'est s'avancer bien au delà, métamorphosée de l'intérieur, fécondée par la nature environnante. L'abandon ne consiste pas dans l'expérience du soi, mais dans l'expérience de l'autre ou dans l'expérience de devenir autre. Cette approche de la vie ressemble à cette grande épreuve humaine qu'est l'amour.

> Ténèbres d'un parc. Feuilles des arbres qui embaument
> Jet d'eau qui jaillit
> Dans tous les sens comme l'amour dans tous les sens
>
> (Kazue Shinkawa)

L'amour est partout empreint autour de nous et jusqu'en nous. Force de vie qui traverse d'émois une terre gelée par l'hiver et nous à peine distincts de ce monde qui nous entoure.

> La tendre déesse est arrivée ...
> elle a secrètement mouillé les temples
> la langue de la déesse dévergondée secrètement
> A mouillé ma langue
>
> (Junzaburô Nishiwaki)

La pluie pour Junzaburô Nishiwaki comme le "vent et l'herbe menue" pour Rimbaud dans son poème "Sensation" sont ces amoureuses, ancillaires d'un

plus grand dessein qui est l'accomplissement de l'amour infini, de l'amour vagabond, errant dans toutes les strates de l'existence. L'étreinte avec ces amantes insaisissables exige l'abandon, le don de soi.

"Flamber" dit Gozô Yoshimasu, "c'est s'insérer dans le mouvement des astres. Laisser s'imprégner un mouvement, devenir ce mouvement sans essayer de lui donner forme humaine."

> Ma volonté ...
> Substance qui se transforme en soleil en pomme
>
> (Gozô Yoshimasu)

C'est le consentement de ma volonté à la volonté de la nature universelle. La volupté s'épanouit sur cet élan du coeur. Mais cette force anonyme, ce "rythme terrifiant" répond à sa nécessité interne et nous laisse échoués entre deux assiettes; deux assiettes où "flotte la fatigue" pour reprendre les mots de Shinkichi Takahashi. Ces ragoûts froids de l'existence nous remplissent et nous étouffent d'une sécurité — dérisoire.

Nous sommes ces errants de la cinquième élégie de Rilke qu'un désir fait rebondir.

> Le désir est un poisson inquiet qui nage dans l'espace de rêves prisonniers

Ecrit Miyoshi, le désir nous jette, nous reprend, nous attache "dans tous les sens." Le désir ne participe pas à l'être mais au devenir.

> Et puisqu'il ne suffit pas d'être mais de devenir, je serai une avanlanche douloureuse de chair

C'est notre incapacité à rester immobile que décrit Takasuke Shibusawa, nous en qui le temps bouge. De cet apprentissage de l'amour Kazue Shikawa écrit:

> Les heures ont passé par dessus les heures seules
> Elles portaient une lame parfaitement aiguisée sur ma joue
> Elles ont fait couler du sang
>
> Après l'ardeur de la passion, le silence des heures.

Le temps qui porte à maturité vieillit tout, lame qui trace un trait de sang. C'est l'adieu de chaque instant à ce qui passe. C'est la mort vécue à chaque pas. Mais nous sommes tout aussi incapables de rester en mouvement.

> Peux-tu tatouer de face les étoiles filantes
> Sur le visage?

demande Gôzô Yoshimasu. Dans notre "voiture de sport" ce serait si bien ...

Que d'époques ont passé et ce soir que de monde
... Dehors il fait noir noir,

chante Chuya Nakahara.

Les innombrables morts silencieux de la cinquième élégie de Rilke sont là,

ils attendent que la mer passe
ils attendent que les mots reviennnent
Et pourquoi alors as-tu eu cet enfant?

demande Takayuki Kiyooka dans "la mer des rapatriés".
Je répondrai avec les vers de Sachio Yoshiwara:

"Je veux te donner la vie sa merveilleuse douleur"

Terrible ambivalence que celle de la mère qui recueille un être, l'étreint de toutes ses fibres et doit accepter de se séparer, de desserrer l'étreinte —violente — au fil des années.

Car les enfants auront des printemps
étrangers aux parents

(Mitsuharu Kaneko)

Loi douloureuse que celle de toute vie, si inextricablement proche.

Se séparer parce que rencontre infinie

(Taro Naka)

Comment peut-on se séparer puisque nous sommes unis vivant aux morts et mort aux vivants?

C'est la main qui tient la plume, celle qui porte un jugement sur les choses qui fait l'expérience de la séparation. La vie est perçue comme un adieu de chaque instant. La métamorphose opérée par l'amour ne glisse pas dans la fixité. Il n'y a aucune fixité en nous et autour de nous. Tout passe et la main qui tient la plume aussi. Ce qui passe ainsi balloté sur la mer de l'infinité:

d'innombrables papiers
qui portaient d'innombrables signes
Ils coulaient doucement
pour ne plus réapparaître

(Makotô Ookâ)

"En vérité c'est la langue qui parle et non l'homme" dit Heidegger.

L'homme à peine distinct de son environnement, vivant porteur de toutes ses morts, est un passage, une cour de résonnance, traversée de forces

élémentaires. Mais celle que je suis au profond ne bouge pas et reste tapie, attendant forte de mille et une vies, affranchie du temps par ses multiples réapparitions dans les générations. Prisonnière, un cri crève ma poitrine, cri de peur vécu et revécu à nouveau dans la trame des jours, dans la trame des vies.

> Dans la profondeur des ténébres nocturnes
> Je me suis mis à creuser le corps vivant de ma douleur
> Bientôt dans la terre de cette fraiche tombe
> Je répandrai la lumière rouge de la pleine lune couleur de sang
>
> (Konosuke Hinatsu)

Des aubes se sont déjà levées quand la lune était ensanglantée.

> Voici que s'empare du monde
> Un esprit d'extermination
>
> (Mitsuharu Kaneko)

> L'imagination s'effare
> Partout les yeux voient la dévastation du paysage
>
> (Tôzaburô Onô)

Le poète qui s'ouvre aux saisons est le premier à ressentir l'étouffement progressif. La terre désacralisée souffre et "pleure comme on hurle" pour reprendre les mots de Mituharu Kaneko. Le respect de la nature (qui est respect de soi-même) a sombré dans une morale clinquante: le voile d'Isis arraché, la contemplation remplacée par l'idée de progrès. La nature se revélait à celui qui respectait son secret, s'en faisait son gardien. Voilée, profanée la terre est à l'agonie.

> Monsieur Cotte étend sur le lit
> son long corps de malade
> oh, mais il n'y a pas de riz
> oh, mais il n'y a pas de bois
>
> (Mitsuharu Kaneko)

L'homme défroqué meurt. Le feu s'éteint.

> le cerveau rongé de vers ...
> des yeux strabiques ... sur l'horizon glabre
>
> (Tarô Naka)

Cet enfer là n'est pas dans un au-delà mythique. Cet enfer là nous l'avons intériorisé, nous le respirons tous les jours. Il nous impose son ordre men-

tal desructeur, sa démence. Et l'on s'effare. La fuite est vaine, la roue tourne

> Comme un cortège funéraire prisonnier de l'éternité
>
> (Tarô Naka)

Que nous reste-t-il donc dans ce monde de la technique qui perfore notre ticket de métro en même temps que notre doigt? Refuser l'ordre imposé par l'extérieur, qui rend les hommes qualifiables, les fait s'intégrer dans une société quelconque; les laisse désorientés aux carrefours urbains. Devant l'ampleur de ce délabrement Takasuke Shibusawa propose une attitude:

> eh bien maintenant qu'il nous faut devenir l'homme inflexible dans ce paysage où tout détone.

L'homme inflexible est celui qui refuse de se laisser émouvoir par la désolation ambiante. Ayant fait taire la cacophonie ambiante, la périphérie de son être, il n'en reste pas moins aux prises avec un problème angoissant: peut-il encore laisser son âme s'épancher?

> Bientôt des tristesses sans nombre coulent parallèles aux lignes des rivières
>
> (Tarô Naka)

Agir est le maître mot de cette culture. Glissé subrepticement dans maint poèmes, dit et répété par quelques voix est le mot attente:

> Sans doute est-ce un endroit très loin
> Mais c'est ici qu'on doit attendre
>
> (Chuya Wakahara)

Attendre, c'est laisser passer l'heure immobile, ne pas lui donner forme humaine mais la laisser dans sa longue respiration, inconnue, indifférente.

Attendre, c'est circonscrire le présent qui lentement fertilise, immobiliser les constructions imaginaires du soi qui se projette dans l'avenir. Attendre que les mouvements de la nature s'intériorisent, laissent leur empreinte.

Vider la scène, renvoyer tous les figurants, répudier même les mots qui viennent au secours du soi.

Laisser la violence des forces élémentaires faire rage, dévaster le rythme quotidien des habitudes sans essayer d'endiguer la tourmente, sans essayer d'en comprendere ses motivations.

Le soi tremble sur ses fondations, sa perfection ébranlée.

> "Les lignes du destin de chacun, tremblements confusions noeuds"
>
> (Tarô Naka)

Les lignes de notre destin se brisent. La même dynamique qui nous poussa

dans nos vies antérieures nous porte au-delà de nous-mêmes, allégé le poids des influences.

> Solitude
> Elle est en vérité un superbe pont suspendu ...
> Il conduit à la lointaine frontière entre la mort et la vie
>
> (Noboyuki Saga)

Avec les années se détachent les liens, avec les années croît la solitude. La réflexion du soi dans l'onde changeante s'épure. Quitter, abandonner, s'enfoncer:

> Saisir le vide Cette falaise
> Tremblements de doigts
>
> (Tarô Naka)

Cette douleur si proche, larmes du corps. L'éparpillement du soi est une vision terrifiante. C'est la paume qui tremble, elle si humaine qui a un contact plus intime. L'humain, d'un trait effacé:

> Rusu (absence)
> Dites que je suis absent
> Qu'il n'y a personne ici
> Je reviendrai dans cinq cents millions d'années
>
> (Shinkichi Takahashi)

L'humain d'un trait effaçé, la scène vide, la transparence des ténèbres s'illumine.

> Kaiketsu (dénouement)
> C'était une gare vétuste couverte de suie. Les vitres aussi en étaient couvertes de suie ... une nuit je vis l'une d'elles qui avait l'air de rayonner presque jusqu'aux ténèbres extérieures splendidement transparente je m'approchai la vitre brisée était tombée ..."
>
> (Heiichi Sugiyama)

La gare est ce lieu de passage, où de multiples voyageurs se relaient pour attendre.

L'horloge qui égrène les heures continue sa ronde immobile. Les voyageurs sont devenus l'âme immortelle de la gare. Leur vision reste tapie dans leurs bagages. Mais abolie la vitre, aboli le regard qui s'obscurcit, qui crée la distance avec le monde environnant. L'espace infini des ténèbres extérieures est redevenu l'espace intérieur illimité. Une même ténèbre intérieure et extérieure. Une même transparence.

NOBI FEUX D'HERBE

Nobi Feux d'herbe

> Aux yeux de qui quelque chose en flammes
> Dont il n'est pas fait mention et qui finit par s'éteindre
> Aux yeux de qui est-elle chose inestimable?
>
> (Noboyuki Saga)

Nobi est un de ces poèmes que j'approche avec tristesse, étant dans l'impossiblité de sentir la langue porter le penseur et sa pensée.

Mais aux yeux de qui ce feu d'herbe, dont le temps ne fait même pas mention, aux yeux de qui est-ce chose inestimable?

Pour ce regard qui caresse sur le monder environnant cette image de lui-même, si éphémere, si solitaire soit-elle.

Pour celle que je suis qui couche sur la page le dernier mot pendant que l'été baigne d'une dernière ardeur les herbes folles en attendant la gorge sèche l'hiver.

Trait blanc sur l'horizon enfammé.

Montréal

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de theorie politique et sociale, Volume 12, No. 3 (Fall) 1988.

DILIGENCE AND INDUSTRY: ADORNO AND THE UGLY

Thomas Huhn

> Plain and simple as it was, it enchanted me; as a matter of fact, any sort of painting enchants me, however foolish and clumsy it is, because every painting reminds me first of diligence and industry, and second of Holland.
>
> From "The Walk" by Robert Walser

The purpose of this piece is to show how Walser's passage reveals the aporia within any modernist aesthetic that attempts to move beyond the seemingly closed dialectic of beauty and the ugly. Put differently: I want to use aesthetic theory and this passage to display the recent history and the contemporary status of subjectivity itself.

First, let us consider the place and status of aesthetic experience, the supposed intersection of aesthetic theory and subjectivity. The place of aesthetic experience in society, which lies entwined with an aesthetic theory that comforts and supports it, is unfortunately everywhere. That is, the place of aesthetic experience and even production is not as difficult to locate as thought. We need only *not* pay attention (like the character in the Walser passage); instead let us drop our guard, just for a moment before the flood of those promises of satiety, happiness, and oblivion that laps at our heels daily, to see the shimmer and hear the murmur of a desire that begs to be ours. We awake with the threat and promise of this desire, bathe with it, eat it, and unfortunately, all too often sleep with it. Our world is overstuffed with merchandise that promises not only happiness but also completion and satisfaction in the guise of a succession of moments —

each complete, unique, and enduring in and of itself. That this promise is a lie is the empty but painful echo of the words from Walser, "every painting reminds me ..." That is, not even artworks can differentiate themselves from one another. Each painting is like every other. The uselessness and increasing rate of obsolescence of this merchandise, and this lie, is both a tribute to and a reminder of the real transitory nature of a former aesthetic experience.

Until the recent past, and the advent of late panic industrialism, this desire for and promise of the Other appeared to us in the guise of the artwork. Today, however, this desire and promise has been overtaken by the commodity form. The aesthetic experience par excellence is that of the commodity's eviscerated form, and this imploded form is the single defining simulacrum of modern life. Within archaic aesthetic artifacts, that is myth, we find the pre-history of the commodity as form.

It is more crucial and interesting to discern not the locale (everywhere and always) but rather the effect of this echoing absence. Aesthetic experience, unfortunately, no longer has effect. Worse still, its effects are pernicious. The history of the perversion of aesthetic experience began at the very moment when aesthetics (that is, the commodity form) became a separate (read potentially total) sphere of production, judgment, and experience. The autonomy that aesthetic activity, however, gained in its separation from the reproduction of social life is only in part illusory. A crucial question is whether aesthetic autonomy has become wholly illusory, if it has itself become a false totality.

The ambiguous independence of aesthetic activity represented not only the liberation of aesthetics, but also the creation of a mechanism of repression. The constitution of aesthetic activity within a separate realm of production and experience serves to emasculate genuine (yes, masculine) hopes and fears by displacing them to a "purposeless" realm. Aesthetic artifacts are allowed to maintain their critical, subversive, and liberating aspects as long as they remain only a commentary on their own precursors. The tension and power of artworks is tolerated because of their narcissism. The question is, to what degree has narcissism, the trajectory of subjectivity, eliminated this tension and power that may be the last refuge of hope in world gone fairly mad with self-production and consumption? This question is posed by the Walser character, for whom *every* artwork is merely the occasion for the self-reproduction of a form of subjectivity through nostalgia and sentiment.

The artwork no longer exists as a residue of human suffering, rather only as a blank screen and an empty field of panic in which a static and regressive subjectivity may re-constitute itself anew in the form of what it has always been — a master of self and nature, and now art, that which resisted incorporation into subjectivity and which provided the only setting for an overwhelmed Nature to threaten to disclose itself.

The production of "new" aesthetic artifacts, which presupposes the reproduction of static social relations, guarantees a social context in which all experience can potentially be aestheticized (but this really amounts to anesthesia). The commodification of aesthetics, the "aestheticization" of commodities, is not perversion but destiny.

Aesthetic experience today is the great equalizer, not of men and women or one class and another, but of thoughts themselves. *Every painting reminds me* ...; aesthetics, as a separate abode of spirit, used to maintain the ideology of a form of life that was not subject to the power of equivalence. The semblance of this form of life is today impossible to maintain. The positive side of the constitution of aesthetics as a separate sphere was the protection it afforded against the Enlightenment demand that all experience be subject to rational calculation. Aesthetics, however, can no longer serve this end precisely because aesthetic "effect" has become the standard of measure for the whole of experience. "Any sort of painting enchants me"; in coming to be the universal measure of all experience it ceases to be the measure of any experience. "Every painting reminds me first of diligence and industry ..." not of Nature or the Other, but precisely the opposite: every painting reminds me of subjectivity, of the diligence and industry that recreated Nature in the image of a dominating and hence false subjectivity. Every painting is then a tribute to the domination of Nature and the manic autonomy of the subject. "Every painting reminds me of ... Holland," where the landscape itself is not an appearance or symptom of Nature but the product of human diligence and industry; where Nature appears only in the form of that which has been dominated. Aesthetic experience is the measure of a desire that conceals itself as our own; that is, aesthetics is simultaneously the legitimation and vehicle of commodification. Aesthetic experience is the most debased and debasing aspect of modern life. What can rescue it? In a word, the ugly.

The concept of the ugly needs to be considered in the context of two separate but intimately related realms: the realm of artistic beauty, and that of nature itself, not natural beauty. Counterpoising artistic beauty with natural beauty would be fruitful had the model of artistic beauty not usurped entirely the traits that an earlier aesthetics granted to natural beauty. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the category of the ugly according to Adorno's account of it in his book, *Aesthetic Theory*.

The role that the ugly plays in art has changed radically in modernism, which is not to say that the category of the ugly has been altered in the least, but only how and where ugliness occurs, along with the form it takes in artistic beauty and nature. The transformation of this role is evidenced by the preponderance of the ugly in modernist art, which does not mean that nothing is beautiful about modern art, but rather that any beauty produced or achieved is nowadays possible only with the ugly as material. The plays of Beckett, for example, are beautiful not in spite of the ugliness that pervades them but precisely because of it. Another example is

the way in which Pop Art, through a displacement of everyday artifacts to the aesthetic realm, succeeds in producing a kind of beauty by making their ugliness transparent. This result, or success, I term an ambivalent beauty.

We can account for the increasing presence of the ugly in modern art by way of a recent history of the concept of harmony. A previous aesthetic account of artistic harmony, articulated by Hegel, posited ugliness as, actually or potentially, a moment of art. According to Adorno, this sort of harmony is now bankrupt in modern art; it has become false because a stronger and thus qualitatively different impulse toward, and desire for, harmony has taken its place. The new, modern kind of harmony is one that does not give ugliness its due as a moment of art but forcibly restrains it from participating at all. Consider Mondrian's paintings, of his desire to remove any possibility of the appearance of the ugly by limiting expression to three colors, straight lines, and right angles. Mondrian was correct in discerning the impetus behind his formula for composition as a desire for "purity." In straining so completely for a purity which takes geometry as *the* standard of expression, and in desiring to exclude any sign of the Other or any moment of ugliness, Mondrian's compositions do succeed in producing beauty. Their beauty, however, is inhuman and thus ugly. I won't defend this claim, however, as merely a judgment of taste. Instead, I mean that his work is, precisely because of its obsession with formal beauty, objectively ugly. Even in those works which strain the hardest against it, we find a preponderance of the ugly.

This is the new harmony and it should be understood as the reflection of an alteration within subjectivity, specifically an increase in the subject's hostile relation to nature. The subjective desire for unification and the demand for increased autonomy translates, in the aesthetic realm, into the exclusion of any sign of Nature as the Other, i.e., ugliness. The result of this forced restraint and exclusion of the ugly is the return, with a vengeance, of the ugly in modernist art.

This new harmony, resulting from exclusion, isn't a harmony at all. (Adorno terms this false harmony "harmonistic.") Art in this modern age is both an expression of the deformation of harmony (for example Mondrian) and an attempt to return the ugly to its proper place within harmony. Cubism, I would argue, is not to be understood as the play of surfaces or the deconstruction of the plane of the canvas, but as a crucial moment in the history of figuration and beauty. The depiction of the human figure could no longer produce beauty, or be beautiful. The success and continuation of figuration could be achieved only with the deformation and deconstruction of the figure itself. The human figure could be beautiful if it were depicted as ugly. Subjectivity could recognize itself in the revelation of its ugliness, which is what I mean by ambivalent beauty: beauty that occurs only with the ugly as dominating element. Successful modern art contains a preponderance of the ugly in an attempt to return some semblance of harmony

to a world dominated by the exclusionist and autonomy-mongering species of subjectivity. Unsuccessful art, and kitsch, which *contain* nothing of the ugly, and yet nonetheless *are* ugly, have fallen prey to the new subjectivity, are indeed manifestations of it.

The battle for autonomous subjectivity, waged between beauty and the ugly, is not as uncomplicated as it at first appears. The difficulty lies in the dialectical nature of the concepts of harmony and autonomy, which are central to any understanding of the ugly, and which issue in the concept of aesthetic form. Harmony became false when it tried to "disown" the tension between beauty and ugliness. The harmony formulated by Hegel has become outdated by the increasingly autonomous character of art that is achieved through a principle that is at once both immanent to the development of artistic form and extraneous to it. The principle within form, which prescribes aesthetic autonomy, is a principle adopted from the subject's relation to nature. This means that the principle that gives aesthetic form to material is the same principle according to which the domination of nature occurs. All artifacts, whether aesthetic or not, are given form by way of a domination whose guiding principle is the repression of expression. Form is possible only at the expense of nature. The ugly has returned precisely because of the latest onslaught against nature by subjectivity. The ugly, as we shall see, is precisely the memory of repressed nature; it is the return of the repressed, and indeed, the return of nature itself through expression.

The modern attempt to prohibit this return takes place through the harmony which excludes the ugly, that is, nature, on the subject's road to autonomy. The vehicle of subjectivity on this road is art, whose autonomy is produced by harmony. The prohibition by harmony against the ugly results in an inversion of the concept of harmony. This inversion of harmony occurs when the harmony that once was a momentary or provisional synthesis of the tension between the ugly and the beautiful is supplanted by the harmony that attempts to disown this tension by suppressing the ugly, that is, nature. This inversion delivers us to the position we now occupy in which artistic beauty is not the product of a harmonious synthesis of beauty and ugliness, but is rather just dissonance. One can say that Beckett's plays are "beautiful," but modern artworks seem less capable of presenting themselves as unified wholes. They exist as fragments.

In this inverted harmonious world, then, the art which is most harmonious is kitsch. Kitsch is pure beauty, in the sense that it is art that entirely excludes, not only the tension between beauty and the ugly, but also thereby the ugly itself. The result is, of course, obvious: that which is kitsch, pure beauty, is empty — not just of tension but of any content or expression. Kitsch is, like Mondrian's work, pure form. Instead of excluding the ugly by reducing expression to the geometrical, kitsch achieves the same result by prescribing for itself only cliche, surface, and sentiment. This emptiness is due to the false nature of the form of kitsch; this form in turn

depends on exclusionist subjectivity, and is both a product of, and is itself, pure domination. This attempt at complete autonomy can succeed only with the complete denial and exclusion of nature, which, in the realm of artistic form, is the ugly. Kitsch is not harmless or neutral, but a frightening manifestation of the current state of subjectivity.

The ugly results from the negation of nature, but this very negation allows for the autonomy of art. The autonomous character of art is nothing new, being as old as art itself; what *is* new is the attempt to transform art into something completely autonomous (read total).

> The identity of the art work with the subject is as complete as the identity of nature with itself must once have been. The liberation of art from heteronomous subject matter, especially natural objects, and the claim raised by art to the rightful appropriation of all objects have allowed art to come into its own, purifying it of all crudity that stands in the way of mediation by spirit.[1]

Yet, there is something more than slightly contradictory about this attempt by subjectivity to make art completely autonomous, since subjectivity desires this in order to reduce the threat art poses to subjectivity, resulting in not more but less autonomy for art.

The continuing presence of the ugly, along with the attempt to deny it, is a testament to the falsity of a subjectivity gained and formed through domination. (Incidentally, this new subjectivity began to issue in aesthetic theory at the close of the 18th century, after Kant, when natural beauty was no longer taken to be the model for artistic beauty. This served to locate within the subject, and not nature, the possibility of some autonomy from nature. Art was thus transformed from the autonomous to the product of an autonomous subject.)

The ugly remains the antithesis of the beautiful and in so doing continues to confront the affirmative autonomous function of art. In doing this, however, in continuing to confront the autonomy of art, the ugly in turn becomes the subject of an aesthetic taboo that condemns it. Kitsch, for example, is an object of this taboo. It is this aspect of the ugly, the aesthetic taboo against it, that holds at once the most fascinating interest for an aesthetic analysis and the most fruitful means for understanding aesthetic autonomy and art. Adorno accounts for the aesthetic taboo against the ugly by locating its origin in the birthing of mythical subjectivity through the mimetic response to fear. He writes:

> Archaic ugliness, the cannibalistically threatening cult mask was a direct imitation of fear, which it diffused around itself in the form of expiation. As the mythical fear grew weaker through the development of subjectivity, the ugly traits in archaic art became the target of a taboo (whose instrument they had originally been). They did not emerge as ugly until the idea of reconciliation was born in the wake of the formation of the subject and its nascent freedom. But

> the old images of terror continue in the history which did not redeem freedom and in the subject, as the agent of unfreedom, who has perpetuated the mythical spell by rebelling against it and submitting to it at the same time.[2]

The fear of nature resonates in the ugly. The traits in archaic art that came to be ugly, then tabooed, were originally the residue of a fear quelled by the mimetic appropriation of nature. The mythic content of this fear was sublimated into aesthetic form, and thereby assured nature, in the guise of the ugly, a continued existence within aesthetic artifacts. This is what Adorno means by rebelling and submitting, at the same time, to the mythical spell. Or we could say that mimesis is necessarily ambivalent. Mondrian rebels against the ugly but his work nonetheless, in being ugly, submits to ugliness. To complicate this dialectic and to understand just how deeply rebellion against the ugly is entrenched, we should again consider kitsch. The desire by kitsch that only the "pretty" should become apparent is clearly a rebellion against the ugly, and yet the cultured pronouncement that kitsch *is* ugly is a part of the very rebellion that produced kitsch. There is no easy escape from the dialectic.

The concept of the ugly is the antithetical other necessary for the very concept of art. Art gives expression to the ugly, that is, the effects of repression; but the ugly bears witness to the rights of the repressed only within the autonomous realm that beauty offers. Art appropriates and preserves the fear of nature only as long as beauty retains within its autonomy-generating function a place from which a taboo against nature, in the form of the ugly, can be prescribed. Art is autonomous if harmony is composed of both beauty and the ugly. Nature, in the guise of the ugly, retains its presence, albeit a redoubtable one, within the autonomy that beauty provides art. Nature remains fear-inspiring today only through the continuing presence and continuing threat of the ugly. "The image of the beautiful as being a unique entity emerges simultaneously with the process of man's emancipation from his fear of the omnipotent oneness and homogeneity of nature."[3] There is however a price to be paid for emancipation.

Beauty, as the sublimation of nature, is that which allows the possibility of art as an autonomous realm. The ugly is the necessary counterweight to the autonomy-mongering character that beauty serves in art. The autonomy of the subject depends entirely upon the autonomy of art. The exclusion of the ugly is also the exclusion of that which is human — human in the sense of the wounds that are the traces and memories of the inhuman domination and destruction of nature in the name of humanity and progress. If the return of the ugly is to rescue the autonomy of art we need to ask if this return serves to restore a harmony composed of the tension between beauty and the ugly or if harmony itself is no longer possible. The preponderance of the ugly in modern art, the fragmented character of modernist works, is evidence of the impossibility of any return to harmony. If it is not beauty or harmony or unity that modernist works

achieve, what *do* they achieve? What is their affect on us, on subjectivity? What, in a word, is aesthetic experience today? In order to have the least presumptuous concept of aesthetic experience, rather than presume that aesthetic experience is a particular sort of experience, assume instead that only one experience exists.

If at this point, there is only experience, then it is easy to assume its opposite: the cessation or interruption of experience, which we can characterize as death. An interruption or break with experience, nevertheless is the very experience of art. Strictly speaking then, aesthetic experience is not an experience at all but its interruption, and therefore it has no real content, though it has plenty of false content.[4] The illusion in art is not the illusion that it represents something else, but the illusion that in presenting itself as a copy it somehow *is* something. This deeper illusory aspect conceals the fact that the artwork is nothing more than a gap in experience.

The interruption of experience by the artwork has been discussed by Walter Benjamin in terms of a shock and by Adorno as a shudder. This break with experience, which the successful aesthetic artifact achieves, is prompted by the memory of an experience that was not produced by the squelching of expression or the domination of nature. This characterization implies more than a profound imprint on the subject of an aesthetic experience; indeed, it points to the obliteration of the subject, the individual who has an "aesthetic experience." An artwork effects a shudder through its form; it has no positive content. Artworks lack any true, specifiable content, and this makes their identification and definition difficult to posit except when examining what they claim to be and why this claim is illusory.

The false content claimed by an artwork is the means by which the artwork presents itself as embodying the material for an aesthetic experience. False content is the means of seduction. The artwork's presentation of itself as the bearer of meaning is likewise the source for the illusory notion of aesthetic experience as an experience of something. There is some truth in the artwork's claim; although it is not the carrier of meaning, it is nonetheless an occasion for an aesthetic experience. The false claim by the artwork that it is meaningful provides an authentic aesthetic experience that would be the experience of the negation of the artwork's false claim, and, simultaneously, the negation of experience as false. Unfortunately, there is as yet no content and thus no positive meaning to this interruption.

Why are artworks false to begin with? Why can't we construe them as being truthful insofar as they negate the false claims of social reality? The answer to these questions lies in the ambiguous ontology of aesthetic artifacts. Artworks embody both social and anti-social aspects, what is at once both the most social and the most anti-social. Complicating the ontology of artworks even further, this dualistic ontology has a dialectical nature; for example, in some instances the radical anti-social aspect of artworks serves as the most social. In this case, I am thinking of Marcuse's early essay on the affirmative character of culture, in which he shows that the most

radical anti-social impulses are not only negated when they occur in a separate sphere of aesthetic experience, but become affirmations of the very status quo they originally attempted to subvert.

The only authentic aesthetic experience is thus a contentless interruption of experience produced by and through the ugly as the dominating anti-formal element. I do not want to imply that an interruption of experience must remain without purpose or use. An aesthetic experience can be given some content and value if it is completed by thought. It is only ugly aesthetic artifacts that arrest experience; this interruption completes itself through reflection. What that reflection might consider or conclude I cannot speculate.

The truth of the Walser passage, then, lies in its ironic acceptance of the impossibility of experiencing the content of the ugly. The character admits that a particular painting is ugly by calling it "plain and simple" and further explains that no matter how "foolish and clumsy," (i.e., ugly) any painting might be, it's ugliness in no way prohibits beauty, or better, enchantment. That is, no degree of ugliness can break the mythic spell unless it can at the same time break the spell of dominating subjectivity itself. Therefore, in reading "The Walk" one feels a great deal of affection for this character who rejects and embraces the ugly, and who is himself foolish and clumsy. The beauty of "The Walk" — the harmony of beauty and the ugly that it achieves, is in a large part due to its humor; but if we want to propose humor as a possible reconciliation, as a potential means of recovering a lost harmony, we would have to first contend with Adorno's statement that humor is "more repulsive than all the ugliness there is."[5]

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Notes

1. T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) p.93. Translation amended. German: p.99.

2. Ibid., p.70. Translation amended. German: p.76.

3. Ibid., p.76. German: p.82.

4. See my "Adorno's Aesthetics of Illusion," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44(2): 181-189, Winter 1985.

5. *Aesthetic Theory*, p.72. German: p.78.

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CANADIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THEORY

Vol. 11 Nos. 1-3

1987

Produced by
Canadian Periodical Index
Info Globe
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Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory
Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale

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