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Our Catastrophic Century

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About Theoria

Theoria, a scholarly, non-disciplinary journal in the humanities, arts and social sciences, is intended primarily to serve the purpose of encouraging reflection on, and engagement with, the more important intellectual currents and social, artistic and political events by which the contemporary world is configured. The compass of the journal is wide, and the editors believe that this purpose can be served in a variety of ways – ranging from recondite scholarly meditations on the early historical forces that gave shape to our world to sharp critical interventions in contemporary public debate. Thus, any matter of moment – whether it be the epistemological implications of new research in the neurosciences, the impact of post-modernist styles in architecture, new departures in philosophy or literary criticism or exploration of development strategies in southern Africa – will, in principle, be able to be addressed in the pages of *Theoria*.

The editors have, however, decided that although each issue may carry contributions in a diversity of fields, the contents of each issue will be largely dictated by one or more governing themes. In order to secure contributions in good time, these themes will be announced well in advance of publication.

The editors are, furthermore, of the view that the purposes to which the journal addresses itself will be best served if contributions take a variety of forms. In particular, we wish to encourage, in addition to 'conventional' articles, communications from readers designed to further debate around issues dealt with. Also, we hope to establish a review essay tradition in *Theoria* – in our view an important genre that has not been well served in South African journals – as well as a book review/book note section.

Note to Contributors

Contributors are requested to submit THREE hard copies of their contribution as well as a disk version in any of the following: M.S.Word, WordPerfect, XyWrite and WordStar. *Theoria* no longer accepts copy for publication that is not accompanied by a disk version. Contributors are advised to retain copies of their texts as *Theoria* does not return unused copy.

Contributors are also requested to submit short abstracts of their contributions as well as very brief biographical sketches indicating their institutional affiliation, research interests and the activities and publications they consider most important. This information should preferably be so formulated as to be reproduced in *Theoria*'s brief Notes on Contributors.

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Editorial Panel

Editorial Consultants

Editorial

As the twentieth century draws to a close, we are increasingly invited to reflect, by way of a synoptic and critical retrospective, upon its tortured history. Concordant with the mood of a momentous *fin de siècle*, we are also invited to meditate prospectively upon the trajectories that its people and its institutions are likely to follow. The principal institutional forms and intellectual templates of the twentieth century issued from the great transformations that re-configured the life-worlds and social, political and economic systems of the occidental epicentre of the modern world order. These transformations bore with them the hopes and promises of an age shaped by the projects of an ascendant and increasingly hegemonic new class – the bourgeoisie – and of those originally excluded 'others' – the working class – who came to contest this hegemony within the rapidly expanding system of industrial capitalism.

Consequently the great paradigmatic politico-economic contest of the twentieth century was between two systems – capitalism and socialism – which competed for dominance as the authentic institutional means for the realization of human progress. Their respective advocates and detractors concurred broadly not on the appropriateness of the respective means, but on the appropriateness of the goals: freedom, equality and democracy. These goals, however divergently defined, are central to the normative discourses and ideologies of the late modern world.

These projects, informed as they were by the logics and dynamics of occidental modernization – by the rationalization of world views and the harnessing of technological capacities in the service of a specific, capitalist, mode of accumulation – came to define the complex contexts of action and meaning without reference to which the turbulent, often calamitous conflicts of the twentieth century cannot be comprehended. These projects had an inherently universalizing force. The reach first of anglo-european and then american industrial modernity became, through the often ruthless imperialist enterprise, truly global. The twentieth century thus marks the first epoch in which we can perhaps begin to speak, intelligibly, of a truly global civilization.

Yet it is precisely the universalizing claims and ambitions of

occidental modernity that have come, in the last decades of the twentieth century, to be so critically interrogated. For the twentieth century has been witness not only to the spread of democratic citizenship and to the consolidation of the integrative arrangements consequent upon the globalization of capitalist production and consumption; it has also been witness to the construction of totalitarian regimes and the often cruel exclusion and marginalization of the 'other', of the poor and resourceless inhabitants of the economically less developed world. Disintegrative forces associated with the particularist ends of ethnically or religiously defined interests stand in disturbing counterpoint to the forces of integration. The emancipatory promise of modern revolutionary socialism has remained unredeemed both in the more and the less economically advanced parts of the world. The principal intellectual perspectives of modernity have come to be seen by many as arrogant and in the service of a particular, occidental, regime of domination. It is to these issues, among others, that the 'post-modern' turn in intellectual life has alerted the academic and intellectual communities. For it is especially within the reflexive institutions of modern societies – the universities, literary, artistic and research establishments – that the uncomfortable circumstances of the contemporary world have been so thoroughly documented and searchingly explored. In particular, the philosophical and theoretical traditions in terms of which the modern age has interpreted – and often celebrated – itself have themselves become contested. Do the theoretical perspectives of occidental modernity deserve the kind of privilege at one time so uncontestedly accorded them? Are there other voices, suppressed and unheard during the age of western colonization, that are able to articulate truths of equal status? If so, what are the implications of such seeming relativization for our conceptions of the self, for our political visions, for our conceptions of the role and nature of literature and of history and for our moral vocabularies? What are its implications for the language of politics and for conceptions of society? What, indeed, are its epistemological implications?

The contributions to this issue of *Theoria* deal either explicitly or implicitly with these questions and concerns. Some treat of them in more specifically disciplinary registers; some treat of them in more general terms, while others attempt to situate them in the particular context of contemporary South Africa. For South Africa lies at the intersection of so many often conflicting currents and forces; born of the great European imperial mission, its institutions reflect the tensions and strains of strikingly uneven modernization. Many negative – as well as some admirable – features of modernity have been uniquely articulated in its social, political and economic systems

and suggest an uncommon particularity both to its history and to its future. Yet its destiny is unavoidably bound up with that of the global context to which, as a region, it is inextricably linked. The post-modern critique of previously dominant perspectives on transformation has obliged us to reflect anew on the challenges posed by such processes. How, in terms of political strategies and political culture, will South Africa's people forge institutions appropriate to the formidable developmental tasks that lie ahead? Will their intellectual capacities – capacities so fundamental to any society in the contemporary world – be properly served by its system of university education? Will the reflexive capacities of the society be equal to the forbidding tasks attendant upon further modernization – the tasks, that is, of building a durable democratic culture, securing individual liberties and distributive justice and prosecuting programmes of environmentally sensitive industrial and economic growth?

Theoria 83: At the Frontiers of Theory

It might be argued that the past few decades have witnessed an extraordinary revival of theoretical reflection in the human sciences. The highly original work of Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias in Europe, James Coleman's impressive elaboration of rational choice theory in America and the 'arrival' of British sociological theory in the voluminous writings of, among many others, Anthony Giddens, Michael Mann, W.G. Runciman and Zygmunt Bauman suggest that sociology has perhaps experienced its most fecund period since the era of its great founding figures. The resurgence of theory has not left other disciplines unaffected. The vocabularies of social and political philosophy have, for example, been fundamentally recast in the work of John Rawls, Agnes Heller, Alasdair MacIntyre, Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas to mention only a few. Economics and literary theory, linguistics and psychology have all felt the impact of theoretical renewal and revitalization. The 'post-modern moment' has disturbed the quiet ways of many disciplines: its impact has been felt not only in philosophy and literary studies but also in geography and history.

It seems appropriate that *Theoria* should contribute to the critical reception of, and reflection on, these developments 'at the frontiers of theory'. Why have they occurred? Do they, and if so in what way, issue from the perceived failures of Marxism? What merit, if any, attaches to these enterprises? In what directions might the 're-thinking' of the human sciences be most usefully taken? In what ways do they speak to those in the more peripheral areas of the world? What

bearing, if any, do they have upon us in South Africa in our attempts better to understand our society and more adequately to shape its future? How in the light of these developments might we judge our own intellectual practices?

Contributions are invited that, in whatever way, relate either directly or indirectly to this topic. The final date for submission is 25 March 1994.

THE EDITORS

Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction

Richard Turner and Radical Reform*

Eddie Webster

In 1972 Richard Turner published a remarkable book, *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy in South Africa.*[1] In this book he stressed the capacity of people to change the world in which they lived while at the same time providing them with a vision of a future South Africa based on participatory democracy. Most importantly, Turner placed heavy emphasis on the significance of black workers in the economy. He believed that it was through collective organization, especially trade unions, that black people could exercise some control over their lives and influence the direction of change in South Africa.

From 1972 he began to organize, with student activists, a programme of action research in which groups of students would enter industrial plants to gather information from workers on wages and work conditions in the factories in and around Durban.[2]

In January 1973 over 100 000 workers went out on strike in the Durban-Pinetown area, breaking a decade of industrial acquiescence.[3] A month later Turner was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act for five years. In the midst of this turmoil he began to write a book on these historic strikes. It was to become the first sociological study of the new type of industrial worker, the semi-skilled machine operator, setting a new research agenda for the social sciences in South Africa.

These were heady days when university-based intellectuals distributed pamphlets at factory gates at 6.00 a.m. in the morning, strategized with activists during the day and discussed Hegel's relationship to Marx late into the night. In his 1990 Richard Turner Memorial Lecture Tony Morphet spoke about this period – from 1970 to 1974 – as the Durban moment.[4] As formal evidence he identified four intellectual projects:

* The Richard Turner Memorial Lecture, delivered at the University of Natal, Durban, on 25 March 1993. This lecture is part of a long term project on the origins, methods and scope of the sociological study of labour in South Africa.

Theoria, October 1993, pp. 1–13

- Richard Turner's philosophical work;
- Steve Biko's attempt to formulate the political discourse and practical programmes of Black Consciousness;
- Dunbar Moodie's reinterpretation of Afrikaner nationalism;
- Mike Kirkwood's reinterpretation of South African literature.

I would like today to identify a fifth – class theory and the new labour studies. At the core of Turner's theory of South African society was the concept of social class and the exploitation of black labour. It was not race, he would say to Steve Biko, that explains the exploitation of the black worker, but the capitalist system. Do not let your Blackness blind yourself to the fact that your power lies in the unorganized working class, he would say to the advocates of Black Consciousness.[5]

In this lecture I want to link this neglected but crucial aspect of the Durban moment with the present and with our future. I want to do this by focusing on the contribution of Richard Turner to our understanding of the central challenge facing our country in the nineties – moral decay and social reconstruction. I argue that, while outlining a radical vision, Turner provided activists with a strategic approach to power. This approach – what I will call radical reform – provides a strategy for tackling the massive task of reconstruction in the nineties.

I seek to show this by advancing three propositions. Firstly, that our country is faced increasingly by moral decay and social disintegration. Secondly, that Turner's political writings combined a moral vision with a strategic approach to power and that the crucible for this approach was the Durban moment. Thirdly, that the innovations introduced during this period contributed in important ways to the rise and rapid growth of the labour movement in the eighties and that radical reform is likely to provide the basis for reconstruction in the nineties.

I

The question of corruption has recently been highlighted in the press. In fact the Democratic Party has estimated that the South African taxpayer has been cheated of over R5 billion during the past eighteen months.[6]

Phil van Niekerk, writing recently in *The Weekly Mail*, is on target when he points to the hypocrisy of the current moral outrage against

corruption.[7] Grand apartheid was one of history's all-time scams, he writes. He is also right to stress the fact that in a period of recession people may use illegal methods to maintain their 'culture of privilege'.

But Van Niekerk deals too dismissively with this moral outrage by the South African public. Indeed there may be a need to take the social significance and political function of moral outrage more seriously, especially in relation to our past and to the task of building our future.

Barrington Moore, in his important work *Injustice: the Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, has discussed the crucial role of the experience of moral outrage for the social and political possibility of resistance.[8] Moore holds that all societies, however unequal and oppressive, involve a negotiated set of mutual obligations implicitly binding rulers and subjects together, so that there are limits to what both dominant and subordinate groups can and should do. Violations of this implicit contract may vary from case to case but always involve a basic denial of reciprocity, and it is this which arouses moral outrage and a sense of injustice, leading to resistance and revolt.

Underpinning Barrington Moore's notion of an implicit contract are social institutions – the bedrock of society – such as the family, the school, the church, and the voluntary organized network of associations that hold society together.

It is these institutions that carry the norms and values of society – that is the rules of conduct which specify appropriate behaviour in a given range of social contexts. These norms, in a stable society, are backed up by strong sanctions, from informal disapproval to physical punishment and even execution.

What is happening in South Africa today is that these institutions are breaking down. This is evident in the explosion of white-collar crime, family breakdown and the alienation and dislocation of black youth. Youngsters in Soweto, for example, declare that teachers who they decide are 'sell-outs' deserve to die. A leading banker steals a large sum of money and then explains to the South African public why he feels he has been wronged!

The union movement is not immune to this phenomenon of institutional breakdown. Bobby Marie faced this head-on in an article last year in the *South African Labour Bulletin* when he described the growing gap between leadership and the base inside COSATU. In this article he speaks of the decline of the union local and how these locals are being turned into 'the passive recipients of the national directives'.[9] More significantly, he points to the decline of the vision that drove union organizers before February 1990 to 'make enormous personal sacrifices and push the union movement into achievements well beyond the resources available'.

When institutions break down, so do their sanctions. We have seen this in the willingness of the state to release murderers such as Barend Strydom. What impact does this have on our understanding of right and wrong when a man who cold-bloodedly murders eight innocent civilians is released after three years in prison? In situations such as these, social norms lose their hold over individual behaviour. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim had a name for this – *anomie*.[10]

Durkheim was writing at the turn of the century when the processes of change were so rapid and intense that they gave rise to major social problems, which he linked to *anomie*. Traditional moral controls and standards, which used to be supplied by religion, he argued, are largely broken down by modern social development, and this leaves the behaviour of many individuals unregulated.

This is what I believe is happening to institutional life in South Africa today. The social cement that held society together is crumbling and our society is faced by moral decay. Monique Marks, drawing on the concept of *anomie* and her research into the involvement of youth in Soweto in political violence, writes that:

> If traditional authority has broken down, there is even less chance of the youth taking moral direction from parents and teachers . . . Without the presence of somebody which (*sic*) will give guidance and direction to the youth, responses to events and conditions will continue to be haphazard and disorganised. The expectations of the youth need to be limited . . . there needs to be some authority which can monitor these means and ends and so ensure that boundaries are maintained.[11]

What relevance does the work of Richard Turner have to our understanding of this moral crisis?

II

The significance of Turner's writings is that he successfully combined a radical vision of the future with an argument for the strategic use of power. The first point to make about this vision is that it is a moral vision where the reader is invited to make a choice between capitalist values – where people are treated as things – and Christianity (or participatory democracy) – where society has people as its central value. The second point to make is that his vision of a future South African society was a radical one – there was to be a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power, workers would control industry and agriculture, and the economy would be run along planned lines.

It may be worth noting here that Turner's vision of participatory democracy was typical of the New Left rather than the Traditional Left. As a result, he looked to workers' self management in Yugoslavia as the best example of participatory democracy and not to the Soviet Union, which he firmly rejected in the *Eye of the Needle* as a 'large, inefficient, and undemocratic state bureaucracy'.[12]

However it is in a series of lectures entitled 'The present as history' that we see the strategic side of Turner's thinking. In these lectures he explores the organizational possibilities for change. He makes it clear that he rejects armed struggle as unrealistic and economic sanctions as counter-productive, arguing instead 'that there is only one sphere in which Africans do have potential power and in which their power potential is in fact growing: this is within the economy'.[13]

It is important to note here that in these lectures Turner explored favourably the possibility of using the institutions of separate development (especially Chief Buthelezi) as a platform through which a link could be made to the potential power of the urban working class and 'thereby develop a coherent and powerful black political movement in South Africa'.[14] However this suggestion needs to be placed in its context – at this time the ANC from exile had links with Buthelezi and it was only in 1979 that these two national movements – Inkatha and the African National Congress – began to take diametrically opposed paths.[15]

Turner's combination of a radical vision with a strategy of reform was to have a profound impact on the intense debates that took place in the early seventies on economic growth and its relationship to social and political change.[16] These debates had been dominated by the assumption that change in South Africa would either take place through revolution, where there is a sudden shift in the balance of power and the old ruling class is destroyed altogether, or the leadership of the subject group would be co-opted and the *status quo* would remain. Turner pointed in the direction of an alternative, one in which the subject group is able to challenge the dominant group through the mobilization of an independent power base. Such a power base implies a permanent organization which is able to mobilize its members.

The creation of democratic trade unions, he believed, would lead to a change in the balance of power that would not lead to a revolutionary rupture, but to compromise and radical reform. Durban after the 1973 strikes was to be the crucible for this alternative approach to social change, the labour movement the agent, and Turner's ex-students and colleagues from the University of Natal the creative implementers.

The project consisted of two parts: the one educational, the other organizational. In May 1974, along with colleagues from the

University of Natal, Turner launched the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE), an ambitious intellectual project that included a correspondence course on labour studies for black workers, a research institute (Charles Simkins was the first employee) and the *South African Labour Bulletin*. Harriet Bolton, Lawrence Schlemmer, John Copelyn, Alec Erwin, Foszia Fisher, Beksise Nxasana, Omar Badsha, Halton Cheadle and Dave Hemson were some of the key figures in this initiative. Gatsha Buthelezi was the Chancellor.[17]

From its beginning the IIE fell between two potential roles: either to be a resource to build the shop floor leadership of the new unions, or to be an adult education centre with the aim of educating workers in general in union and community leadership. Both tendencies were represented in the IIE and it vacillated between the two until, towards the end of 1975, the union position came out on top and the IIE was brought directly into the educational work of the unions.[18]

An important part of the educational project was historical: what lessons, the workers wanted to know, can we draw from our own labour traditions? A worker newspaper *Abesebenzi* was launched with a column on popular history by Luli Callinicos – the first exploratory step in what was to become her trilogy, *A People's History of South Africa*.[19]

To understand and contribute to this project, a new generation of academics stepped outside the class-room. We began to interview workers and learn about their work and living conditions, as well as their past. Initially such work had a didactic aim, responding to a demand from the new unions for educational material. Articles were solicited by the *South African Labour Bulletin* from academics who took labour seriously. Bonner's article, for example, on the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) of the twenties was critical of that organization for failing to organize urban African workers and he warned of a vague political populism.[20] Social scientists in South Africa, influenced also by the new school of radical historiography emerging in exile at that time, were forced to rethink and to reconceptualize their research programme in a manner very fruitful for the social science project as a whole.[21]

The second part of the project, the organizational, led to important strategic innovations which profoundly affected trade union development as well as the course of political struggle in South Africa.[22] The adoption by these emerging unions of a strategic use of power introduced a new way of operating. Where possible, these unions sank deep roots on the shop floor, transformed as it was by the dramatic economic changes of the sixties and seventies. The introduction of the shop steward committee and the recognition agreement in factories in Durban at this time was the key institutional innovation through

which shop floor power was built. On the shop floor, unions could develop a strong factory-based leadership, less prominent than head-office activists, and closely tied to their members. With the strong backing of their members, factory leaders had the power to push concessions from management, which not only created space for further advances, but also won concrete improvements in workers' conditions, thereby reassuring them of the efficacy of direct action.

There were two components to the union's strategic use of power:

1. Democratic processes to win voluntary consent from members for action and restraint when necessary;

2. Tactical flexibility, which included a capacity to distinguish principles from tactics, and to choose those tactics most likely to succeed, including negotiation and compromise. These strategies, in the new economic conditions of the seventies, facilitated the growth of the trade union movement, ultimately resulting in the government's legal recognition of black trade unions in 1979 – a decades-long demand on the part of black workers.

In its emphasis on gradualism, flexibility, and compromise with employers and the state, the strategy stood in marked contrast to the armed struggle being waged by the ANC, which aimed at the state's overthrow. Furthermore, in place of a vanguard movement to smash the state, the unions sought to build a broad movement based on strong factory structures, held together through practices of democratic accountability. This is not to suggest that non-violent struggle was adopted by the labour movement as a principle; rather, in the context of the security clampdown of the sixties and seventies, it was an appropriate strategy for internal opposition.

It was for this reason that in 1974 the IIE argued (against SACTU who wished to isolate them from international support) for an association with Ruskin College in England. SACTU argued against this link on the grounds 'that there can be no effective African working class organisation within the present economic and political structures'.[23] The new unions, they said, would either be crushed or co-opted. It was also for this reason that when the newly formed Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) called a series of stayaways from August 1976 to June 1977, the new trade unions, with the exception of one Black Consciousness-aligned union, remained aloof, fearing that their modest organizational gains would be destroyed by the power of the apartheid state.

The shift of the struggle to the schools of the Witwatersrand marks

the end of the Durban moment; no longer could the factory be isolated like some sociological experiment from the wider struggles for democracy in South Africa. The national struggle was re-emerging and asserting itself into the heart of the workers' movement. Of course it had been there all along; workers in Durban were not some collective *tabula rasa* waiting empty-headed for 'the academics on the hill' to tell them what to think. In a survey conducted of membership of the new unions in 1975 it was found that 11% had previously belonged to SACTU.[24] The fact that the national movement had deep roots and historical appeal was something that was never adequately dealt with theoretically or strategically by the intellectuals of the 'Durban moment'.

More significant was the presence in Durban and Pietermaritzburg of ex-political prisoners recently released from Robben Island such as Judson Kuswayo, Jacob Zuma, and Harry Gwala. Anxious to find a conspiracy between the ANC-SACP alliance and the new unions, and conflating the New Left with the Old Left, the state went on the attack. In December 1975 two of the editors of the *SALB* were arrested under the Terrorism and Suppression of Communism Acts for allegedly promoting the aims of the alliance. The state was in the coming year to embark on a sustained offensive against the leadership of the new unions, which culminated in the banning of 26 unionists in November 1976. The *SALB* was to be the only part of the IIE project to survive this period of repression by retreating into the university and becoming more of an academic journal.[25]

It would be tempting to conclude that state repression on the one hand and the insurrectionist politics of the post-Soweto generation on the other, had marginalized Turner and his project of radical reform. This would be a serious error. I would like, in the third part of this lecture, to deal with the implications of radical reform for the process of transition in South Africa in the eighties and nineties.[26]

III

I suggested in Part Two of this lecture that Turner had pointed in the direction of an alternative strategy of transition to that of revolutionary rupture, namely that of radical reform. I have furthermore suggested that Durban in the early seventies became the crucible for this approach, and the strategy developed and the innovations introduced were to help shape the approach adopted by the labour movement in the eighties.

To illustrate, let me cite four examples of radical reform from the democratic labour movement:

Firstly, there was the decision to register trade unions in 1979 under the Labour Relations Act. This led not to co-option but to a legitimization of the union as an institution and the rapid growth of shop floor based unions in the eighties.

Secondly, there was the recognition agreement. The negotiation of recognition agreements in the eighties was an important step in establishing the rule of law on the shop floor.

Thirdly, there was the decision to enter industrial councils and through these institutions to establish the power of the union at a national industrial level. This enabled unions to make demands around industrial training, retrenchment and industrial restructuring. Instead of being co-opted, as the critics of participation in Industrial Councils argued, the unions have extended their power and opened up new terrains of struggle.

Fourthly, there was the successful anti-Labour Relations Amendment Act campaign that led COSATU in 1990 to decide to participate in the National Manpower Commission (NMC). It is of particular interest that two of the leading figures in the restructured NMC are Halton Cheadle and Charles Nupen, both students of Turner.[27]

By treating state structures such as the NMC as negotiating forums, and backing-up its bargaining position with mass action such as stay-aways, the labour movement has developed practices of radical reform rather than adhering to a Leninist notion of revolutionary rupture. Thus the campaign of mass action between 1988 and 1989 against the amendments to the Labour Relations Act ushered in a new era characterized by the politics of reconstruction. In the process, the labour movement has logically extended a strategy of negotiation backed up with industrial action first developed on the shop floor to contest managerial authority. More recently this strategy has been employed to influence state policy through participation in forums such as the National Economic Forum (NEF). 'It is another stage of advance in the negotiating process', according to COSATU Negotiations Coordinator Naidoo, 'that we've been participating in for the last twenty years, moving it logically onto a higher level because we are unable to solve certain things unless we bring the government in.'[28]

The central question raised by this account of gains made by the labour movement in the eighties is, 'What within such a process, is to distinguish radical reform from reformism?'[29] Drawing on Andre Gorz's writings in the sixties in France, John Saul identifies two attributes of radical reform, or what he calls structural reform. One lies in the fact that reform, to be radical, must not be 'comfortably self-contained', but must be part of an emerging project of structural transformation. In Gorz's words, 'any intermediary reforms are to be

regarded as a means and not an end, as dynamic phases in a progressive struggle, not as stopping places'. Secondly, radical reform is rooted in struggles from below, rather than on high and is part of a process of empowering the working class.

In a sharp critique of the concept, Marxist economist Laurence Harris argues that it is weak in principle and unrealistic in practice. The principle embedded in the concept, he says, is that of determinism, that reform strategies will necessarily carry the movement forward.[30] This, however, is an inaccurate interpretation. At the centre of the notion of radical reform is its open-ended nature, i.e. that the outcome of any reform initiatives depends on whether power is used strategically in a way that empowers workers.

Harris is on stronger ground when he argues that the conditions necessary for the success of corporatism – sustained high growth and improvements in working class conditions – will not be present in South Africa. 'As a result, conflict over control of production and the distribution of resources will intensify and undermine any (corporatist) arrangements', he says.

This critique of radical reform gets to the heart of the dilemma facing socialists in the nineties – the options have narrowed. As Gay Seidman puts it:

> In the past militant labour activists often believed they knew how to proceed once they gained control of the state: programs of nationalisation and state ownership . . . But with the collapse of Eastern European States, a general pessimism about statist solutions was reinforced. Moreover, most Third World movements recognize that socialist experiments have proved extremely risky . . . Monetarist ideologies, which insist that growth requires unlimited freedom for capital, seemed to have become internationally hegemonic.[31]

That is why socialist economists such as Stephen Gelb see the crucial struggle lying in the effort to

> intervene and shape a capitalist order which is both more humane and more dynamic than has been true of . . . capitalism in the past, a capitalist order which could be more favourable for socialist prospects in the long run, by enabling the working class to become considerably better off, economically and politically, than they have been.[32]

This quotation from Stephen Gelb raises crucial questions about the relationship between reformism and radical reform, questions which will have to be left to another occasion.

Let me now conclude. For a post-modern generation, this privileging of class may seem to lack sensitivity to multiple identities such as

gender, ethnicity, race, nationalism, that are of such central concern to modern social science. But to stress the plurality of our society is to miss the central innovation, at that time, that lay at the core of the new labour studies – namely, class theory. And the importance of class theory was that it not only provided concepts to understand society; it also gave activists the means for approaching change in a strategic way.

I began this lecture by identifying the moral decay and social disintegration that I believe is taking place in South African society and asked the question: what relevance do the ideas of Turner have to this moral crisis?

The answer I trust is now clear: Turner provided a generation disillusioned by the repression of the sixties and the challenge of Black Consciousness, with a vision – a moral vision – of what a new South Africa could become, and he provided a strategy of how we could begin to reach it. Paradoxically the strategy of the democratic movement is increasingly beginning to look like radical reform but the vision has been lost – the world view that drove activists forward and made them, in Bobby Marie's words, willing to make enormous personal sacrifices, has collapsed.

In part of course we are echoing global trends which have seen a general shift from the collective norms and values that were hegemonic at least in working-class organizations and other social movements in the sixties, towards a much more competitive individualism as the central value in an entrepreneurial culture that has penetrated many walks of life.[33] But in important ways we are experiencing the sociological effects of a society in rapid transition. The apartheid institutions that once regulated norms are breaking down and in an ironic way the movement in opposition to that order has been deprived of its *raison d'être*. Between the politics of resistance and the politics of reconstruction has come a void, leaving the lives of individuals without meaning.[34]

Debates about the future of South Africa are dominated by economists concerned with a new economic growth path and political scientists and lawyers concerned with a new constitution. What is urgently needed is a sociological understanding of the transition process and a vision of reconstruction that includes not only the economic and the political but the social and moral as well.

The reconstruction accord proposed by COSATU as a possible electoral pact with the ANC begins to address these issues, especially in its emphasis on the need to empower grass-roots organization such as civics, women, youth, students, parents and teachers to have power over decisions that affect their lives. In this way, Cosatu General Secretary Jay Naidoo says, 'we will build an effective countervailing

power to that of unresponsive and unaccountable state bureaucracy'.[35] So too does the proposal put forward by the Nedcor and Old Mutual scenario team for a Socio-Economic Council to advise a transitional Government on social policy.[36] But the mechanisms for democratic policy-making, says Moses Mayekiso, President of SANCO, should be open, transparent, and assign key roles to organizations of civil society. Resources should be assigned to make this participation possible, and keep the public informed.[37]

These are the core values of Turner's vision of participatory democracy. *This* is the contribution of the life and writings of Richard Turner to the process of transition in the nineties. However, unless the strategic use of power is linked to a vision which includes a social plan to ensure that the main burden for the transition process is not carried by working people, then the promise of participatory democracy will not be fulfilled in the new South Africa.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this lecture to my wife Luli Callinicos, who shared the Durban moment with me, to my stepdaughters, Helene and Thalia, who have a very different memory of it, to my son Kimon, who was born during it, and to my daughter Alexia, who was a twinkle in my eye throughout the Durban moment.

NOTES

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2. Johann Maree, 'The Emergence, Struggles and Achievements of Black Trade Unions in South Africa from 1973–1984', *Labour, Capital and Society* (18), 2 November 1985.
3. Institute for Industrial Education, *The Durban Strikes 1973*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974.
4. Tony Morphet, '"Brushing History Against the Grain": Oppositional Discourse in South Africa', *Theoria*, no. 76, October 1990.
5. See E. Webster, 'Black Consciousness', *Dissent*, March/April 1974. This paper was drawn up in close collaboration with Turner, banned under the Suppression of Communism Act at the time.
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7. 'How Civilized is Corruption?', *The Weekly Mail*, 27 February to 4 March, 1993.
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11. Monique Marks, 'Youth and Political Violence: the Problem of Anomie and the Role of Youth Organisations', Unpublished Conference paper, ASSA, July 1992.
12. Turner, p. 65.
13. Turner, p. 120.
14. Turner, p. 120.
15. Gerhard Maré & Georgina Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and the Politics of 'Loyal Resistance'*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987.
16. Lawrence Schlemmer & Eddie Webster, *Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa*, Ravan, 1978.
17. IIE file, Personal Collection, E. Webster.
18. This interpretation is taken from an article by Johann Maree, 'The Institute for Industrial Education and Worker Education', *South African Labour Bulletin*, vol. 9, no. 8, July 1984. This debate foreshadowed the workerist/populist debate of the eighties, where workerists were concerned to prioritize the capital-labour relations in production and populists the need for class alliances. It could be argued that Turner would have identified with the latter position. This may have been the case although it could also be argued that he would have favoured close links with Inkatha. However, it is not a debate he participated in and I have chosen not to explore it in this lecture.
19. The three volumes are: *Gold and Workers: 1886–1924; Working Life: Factories, Townships and Popular Culture on the Rand 1886–1940; A Place in the City: the Rand on the Eve of Apartheid.* All three volumes have been published by Ravan.
20. For a collection of the articles that appeared in the *South African Labour Bulletin*, see E. Webster, 'Essays In Southern African History', Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978.
21. E. Webster, 'Taking Labour Seriously', *South African Sociological Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, October 1991.
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Change, Progress and the New World Order

A. M. Johnston

It is tempting for the observer of contemporary international politics to recycle Voltaire's celebrated dictum,[1] and say of the 'New World Order', it isn't very new, it doesn't cover the whole world, and it isn't very orderly. It is not really surprising that the international developments set in motion by events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1989 onwards, should have given currency to rhetoric about the 'New World Order', yet it is equally unsurprising that scepticism as well as affirmation should have greeted its unveiling.

On the credit side, the changes appeared so far-reaching and benign as to call for a grand design to interpret and exploit them. The dissolution of the last great formal empire not only transformed the status of existing but dependent states in Eastern Europe, but also recovered independence for those (like the Baltic states) which had lost it, and bestowed it on those (ranging from Ukraine to Central Asia) which had never enjoyed it in modern times. Because, moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the principal axes of power competition and ideological conflict, the world seemed certain to become a safer, if more populous and clamorous place. This seemed to call not merely for the discrete and *ad hoc* adjustment of national foreign policies, but something more generous, expansive and long-sighted.

On the debit side, for the political classes of the dominant Western states who would have to be the architects of such a design, caution and scepticism were always likely to temper the enthusiasm which in the short term greeted the prospect of wholesale change. While 'order' in the sense of a quality characterizing the stable and peaceful management of transactions between states is generally held in the West to be desirable,[2] the notion of 'an order', in the sense of a structural distribution of rights, duties and assets, has ambiguous, even sinister overtones, and evokes equivocal responses. For progressive opinion, 'an order' can carry with it associations of hierarchy, stratification, and the defence of unjustly-acquired vested interests,[3] not to mention echoes of imperialism and the rhetoric of fascism. On the right, no problem arises with the defence of existing

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assets, however acquired, but too generous, programmatic, and wholesale a definition of 'an order' threatens the assumption of costly and unprofitable commitments in far-off places, and a reduction of the freedom of action which the right is determined to defend against 'internationalist' notions of all kinds.

These critical and sceptical attitudes seem to draw force from previous attempts of the dominant Western powers to define and defend an order. The equivocations of Britain and France between the League of Nations and the rule of law on the one hand, and the exigencies of the balance of power on the other, do not inspire confidence.[4] Nor, in its very different way, does the imperial overconfidence – the 'arrogance of power'[5] – which inexorably extended America's policy of containment into an open-ended global commitment. Indeed, in a field of policy-making so wholly shaped by what are assumed to be the lessons of history, any consideration of what a new world order is, or may become, has to begin with an assessment of how 'new' it is, and is perceived to be.

Certainly there should be little difficulty in accepting that the content of the changes which have taken place since 1989 justifies us in accepting that a new order of things prevails.[6] Central to this has been the creation of new states, the recovery of formal statehood by 'historic' states, and the retrieval of autonomy by those whose enjoyment of formal sovereignty did not conceal dependent, client, or even satellite status. At the same time, a drastic alteration in the distribution of power and influence among states accompanied the demise of the principal axes of conflict in the post-war world – an end to the rivalry between the USA and the USSR which was closely related (though not to the point of isomorphism) to the rivalry between capitalism and communism. These forces have made themselves felt and have been diffused in second-order developments, often dramatizing, accelerating and aggravating already existing trends. Among these derivative effects have been the resurgence of nationalism and ethnicity as international problems, and the redefinition, democratization, and possible marginalization of the Third World. The questions posed of the winning and losing superpowers have been refracted onto their allies[7] and clients.[8] The role and functions of international organizations have been opened to redefinition,[9] as has the conceptual geography of regions, which made the post-1945 world comprehensible.[10]

All of this is indisputably new, in the sense that change has taken place and familiar landmarks have been replaced. But if we are seriously to interrogate the New World Order, or the post-Cold War world, we have to ask if all, or indeed any of this is new, in the sense not merely of change, but also of innovation. Does the post-Cold War

world represent a cyclical reshuffling of international relations' traditional elements, or a linear step over some paradigmatic boundary?

This question invites a consideration of the form, or media of change, as well as the content. A useful point of entry here is the observation that these large-scale changes were registered without a major war. This is (in modern times at any rate) unusual to say the least. War has been the habitual, if not indispensable accompanist to change involving the creation and disappearance of states, alterations in the distribution of power and the form of conflict. Debate around the macro-questions of how states should manage and order their relations, including specifically the question of future change tends to take place (as at Vienna in 1815 or Versailles in 1919) in the aftermath of wars. As Gilpin puts it:

> Every international system that the world has known has been a consequence of the territorial, economic and diplomatic realignments that have followed such hegemonic struggles. The most important consequence of a hegemonic war is that it changes the system in accordance with the new international distribution of power; it brings about a re-ordering of the basic components of the system.[11]

Although the political transformation of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was achieved without formal interstate hostilities, the process has not been entirely pacific. Border wars between former Soviet republics, the violent overthrow of the Ceaucescus in Romania, and above all the breakup of Yugoslavia, make this clear. But it is fair to say that changes of the magnitude of the breakup of the USSR and the reunification of Germany have not previously occurred without war in Europe.

One way of confronting this apparent innovation is simply to deny it, asserting that change did in fact take place as the result of victory and defeat in a major war; it is just that the nature of war has changed. This position in turn depends on the status we ascribe to the Cold War. Is this usage merely metaphorical? Or was the Cold War a 'real' war? Or does the appellation represent an admission that under late twentieth century conditions it is no longer feasible to distinguish between 'real' and metaphorical usages? Certainly, the conception of war as exclusively a chronologically specific passage of time, reflecting a contest exclusively of arms, begun by a declaration, ended by a treaty and decided on the battlefield, is difficult to sustain in the late twentieth century. The terms world war, total war and guerrilla war are too well diffused to require extensive discussion here,[12] beyond noting that the scope of warfare has broadened enormously to embrace virtually all aspects of production, be they material or

mental, with a corresponding broadening of our understanding of who is a combatant. Questions of chronology and classification of conflicts were already problematic before the Cold War. Which of the conflicts involving the revisionist powers, Germany, Italy and Japan merit inclusion in the Second World War? Did the world war begin in 1931 with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria? Was there a European civil war which began in Spain in 1936 and continued until 1945?[13] Did Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, and the Allied re-conquest belong to the same conflict, although they were separated by four years of 'peace'? If we accept that there was a multi-faceted, but essentially unitary conflict between 1931 and 1945, during which the major participants were sometimes at 'peace' and others at 'war',[14] it is easier for us to accept that the Cold War was indeed a war and that its climactic period (the 'New Cold War' of 1980–85) was the principal catalyst of large-scale change in international politics.

If this is the case, can argument be taken further? Change in international politics associated with war has been more rapid and extensive when it has taken place in a dialectical relationship with revolution and imperial decline. In this respect the wars of 1789–1815 were of markedly different nature and effects than those of the eighteenth century up to that point. The effects of the First World War on the international system cannot be understood without reference to the long-term decline of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, and to the social and political revolutions of the period, notably in Russia.[15] If the changes whose collective effect we dub the post-Cold War world arose from the same kind of chain reaction between war, revolution and imperial decline, then what we have witnessed in them is a cyclical re-ordering of geopolitics, power and influence within a familiar framework.

Given that revolution is a much analysed and debated phenomenon, the status of events in the former Soviet Union since 1985 is bound to be the subject of controversy. For the purposes of this discussion, the question will be limited to whether or not the transformation of the former USSR has been of the scope and form that in the past have been associated with revolutions.

What has taken place there represents a profound change, not only in the form of government but also in the basis of political authority. This has arisen from the failure of an existing regime to make itself secure through reform and modernization. Those responsible for this alteration in the basis of political authority also aspire to use it to achieve a decisive reorientation of society and the economy. These features correspond with our commonplace understanding of revolution, and are reinforced by three others.

Firstly, the sequence of events is familiar from previous revolution-

ary upheavals; stagnation and decay; reform from above, within set limits; the escape of events from central control, and the re-definition by popular initiative of the limits of change; the failure of a counter-revolutionary coup, sealing the fate of the old regime. Secondly, the actors involved in political change are the products of long-term movements of social and economic change. Specifically, Gorbachev's reforms and the chain reactions they caused represented the coming to maturity of an educated professional and managerial class (epitomized by Gorbachev himself) who were both the beneficiaries and the hobbled and frustrated servants of the Soviet system. Thirdly, the changes in the former Soviet Union have acquired momentum not only from the accumulated specific dissatisfactions of a population with an existing regime, but also from what can only be called historical ideas; in this case 'freedom' perhaps, but certainly 'nationalism' have provided a dynamic quite beyond the capacity of incremental change from above to satisfy.

In these respects, what we have witnessed in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is a historical movement on a scale which we habitually associate with revolution.

Another element which would confirm the traditional pattern of change in international relations is imperial decline. There have been three aspects to Soviet Russian imperialism. Firstly, the USSR was the heir to the contiguous expansion of the Tsars. In this largely south- and eastward movement which accelerated in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Russian state absorbed indigenous societies in the Caucasus and Central Asia, modernizing and Russifying them. To the continuation of these processes under the Bolsheviks was added the imperative of communizing them. Secondly, the USSR exemplified the imperialism of a great power which sought the strategic goal of security in a hostile world through hegemony over a buffer zone. Beginning with the re-absorption of the Baltic states in 1940, continuing with the westward extension of the USSR's own boundaries as a result of the Red Army's victories, and culminating with the communization of most of Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1948, the USSR sought to cope with the specific threat of first German, then American power, against a generalized perception of 'capitalist encirclement'. The third component of Soviet Russian imperialism was the disposition to intervene, acquire commitments, engage in struggles, as a byproduct of the clash of universalizing ideologies and competing models of social, political and economic development.

All three of these dimensions in their different but overlapping ways, imposed commitments and engendered contradictions. The far-flung and diverse nature of the Tsarist legacy meant that the integrity and cohesion of the Soviet state could never be taken for

granted. This meant that an element of Russian autocracy was grafted onto the already authoritarian tendencies of Marxism-Leninism, in order to repress nationalism. It also imposed the burden of 'equalization' through resource transfer between less and more productive republics, a policy which understandably caused resentment among the latter, and in general did not assist economic development. The desire for security through a buffer zone in East and Central Europe was not only self-defeating in classical 'security dilemma'[16] terms by appearing to pose a military threat to Western Europe, but required that repression be imposed not only on the USSR's own citizens, but those of the Warsaw Pact countries as well. As for the commitments in the wider world acquired in competition with the USA (and to a lesser extent China), no area of Soviet concern and influence brought anything but dubious political returns. Nothing remotely like the creation and transfer of wealth between the industrialized Western countries, or even the exploitation of unequal relations with the Third World could provide a dynamic input into the Soviet economy.

Since at least the first two dimensions of Soviet Russian imperialism touched the heart of the USSR's security concerns, the option of decolonization, which allowed the Western imperial powers more or less gracefully to resolve at least the sharper of imperialism's contradictions, was not available until such time as contradictions had deepened to the point where any planned Soviet withdrawal would become a rout. This central contradiction was largely instrumental in shaping the USSR's imperial decline in the face of international competition, overcommitment in the wider world, unrest from subject peoples, economic stagnation and the decay of political authority at home.

If there appears to be at least a prima facie case for treating the genesis of the post-Cold War world within a conventional, perhaps even timeless, framework of the interplay between war, revolution and imperial decay, are there any special circumstances to dilute or distort this reflection of large-scale historical change?

Probably the weakest of the three elements in constructing this case is war, and its own weakest element is the literal ascription of victory and defeat to the USA and USSR respectively. There are two principal problems with this kind of interpretation. The first is the danger of misattributing responsibility for the collapse of the Soviet Union, at least in shades of emphasis. In its extreme form, the argument that collapse was the result of defeat in war claims that the USSR was forced into destructive engagement with the capitalist world on terms not of its own choosing, principally those of military competition. This explains the USSR's skewed development, relative impoverishment, and the distortion of the example of international peace and

harmonious social development which socialism might, under more favourable circumstances, have shown to the world. Such arguments ignore (or in their less extreme form merely underemphasize) the shortcomings of Marxism-Leninism as a model of economic and political development. They also ignore the inhospitable terrain presented by underdeveloped Russia for both socialism and economic growth, and the legacy of Russian autocracy and imperialism. All of these factors made their contribution to the skewed, distorted and disintegrative contradictions of the Soviet system, irrespective of any considerations of victory or defeat in war.

Secondly, the ascription of victory and defeat comes much closer to metaphorical than to literal usage in the context of the Cold War, whose principal (perhaps defining) characteristic was, it is worth remembering, the strenuous avoidance of direct combat between the forces of the principal protagonists. In fact, the USSR, much more so than the USA, avoided committing its own forces at all, except in short, decisive police actions, contenting itself for the most part with the role of quartermaster. The exception of course was the case of Afghanistan, where commitment predictably resulted in the kind of ambiguous defeat which comes of being unable to achieve political goals against militarily inferior forces, without being bested at arms. In this light, there is some distance between any meaning we can ascribe to victory and defeat in the Cold War, and the experience of victors and vanquished in the major interstate wars of this century. In order to make the point, it is worthwhile recalling the trajectories of the defeated after the two world wars.

For Germany after 1919, the myth of the undefeated army and the 'stab in the back', combined with the burden of a punitive peace settlement, formed the basis for *revanche*. For Germany and Japan after 1945, conclusive military defeat paved the way for rapid, forced, but generously supported rehabilitation, which involved the radical re-making of political institutions and the economy, during the breathing space of guaranteed stability which the occupation represented. Not only was the readmission of Germany and Japan to international respectability vital for Western security in an increasingly divided world, but the reconstruction of their economies was vital for the international capitalist economy. The scale of the Allied victory starkly highlighted the problem and at the same time offered its own solutions – democracy, capitalism and demilitarization, or integration into Western security – and the means to pursue it.

By contrast, the USSR's 'defeat' in the Cold War conjures neither the nightmare of *revanche*, nor a *tabula rasa* on which the 'victors' can impose their own imprint. Ironically perhaps, Russia has been spared the trauma of defeat in any literal sense, and has remained a

very considerable military force, but has also escaped the opportunity of extensive remodelling and reconstruction, either from its own, or interventionist resources, which literal defeat often brings in its train. This situation is in keeping with Russian history. Often defeated on the battlefield, but never in modern times subdued as a state, Russia has generally recovered to defeat its principal adversary, without being able to put the experience of defeat to constructive use. Arguably this did happen after the defeats of 1914–17, but not as a unified national effort at reconstruction, only after a devastating civil war, from which in some respects (terror as a political weapon, a political culture of paranoia, the imposition of party autocracy) the country never recovered. Viewed in this light, Russia's incomplete and at least partly metaphorical 'defeat' in the Cold War is unlikely to conform to the patterns of the past, notably in the speedy recovery of the vanquished, with or without the aid of the victors.

Such lack of conformity to previous periods of change in international relations is also the hallmark of change in the former Soviet Union viewed as revolution. In two related aspects, this change, profound and ambitious as it is, is very different from the classic revolutions of the past. Firstly, there is no good reason to believe that in the short, or even the medium term the changes in the former Soviet Union will release into the international system a dynamic force capable of radically altering the distribution of power among states. This is what the French Revolution did in a remarkably short time, and the Russian Revolution achieved over a rather longer time-span. Even the Chinese Revolution was able to project a new centre of power into the international system, at least until the Sino-Soviet split and China's subsequent isolation. Secondly, the changes in the former Soviet Union are in tune with and not counter to the dominant political and economic institutions and structures of our day. This is quite unlike the subversive qualities of the French and Russian Revolutions, which posed immediate and far-reaching changes to the prevailing international order.

In some ways, the case for locating the transition to the post-Cold War world in a familiar paradigm of historical change in international relations is strongest when we think in terms of imperial decay. The symptoms are familiar; failure of will which sees the collapse of ambitions in the wider world; the calculations which persuade that the costs of commitments outrun the benefits; and finally the inability even to maintain the integrity of the imperial state as formerly submerged peoples find the self-confidence and political space to assert their claims to self-determination. Something, however, seems to distinguish the context of Soviet Russia's imperial decline from the twilight of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Tsarist and even the

European seaborne empires. That is the absence of predator states, ready to act in rivalry (or, more rarely in concert) to hasten or slow down, to stabilize or to upset the process of decay by their interventions. Historically empires have usually waned as others have waxed, or at least have expired in an atmosphere of great power (or superpower) rivalry with a strong strategic and geopolitical dimension.

The classic case of this is the Eastern Question, in which complicated rivalries were contested between a number of imperial states (not all in the best of health themselves) at the expense of Turkey's enfeebled grip on south-eastern Europe. These rivalries were bound up with the self-assertion of the Balkan Slavs, especially after 1875.

> The great issues of strategy and power remained; the new issue of national struggle cut across them, at once a new incentive and a new danger. Once the Balkan Slavs were astir, the Russian government dared not let them fail; Austria Hungary dared not let them succeed.[17]

Today, the great issues of strategy and power have gone, and the Balkan Slavs are left to self-destructive self-assertion.

Even after 1919 when naked imperial rivalry appeared too dangerously destabilizing to be legitimate, the League of Nations mandates system offered a curious hybrid of imperial expansion and internationalist concern for the former Turkish provinces of the Middle East. Similarly, the successor states to German, Tsarist and Austro-Hungarian domains in east and central Europe, although they did not instantly fall prey to territorial expansion by some other predator, were quickly absorbed – via ententes and alliances – into the rivalries of balance of power politics.[18] After 1945, the activism of the USA and the USSR was a factor in the dissolution of the European colonial empires,[19] and although the phenomenon of non-alignment gave an innovative veneer to the emergence of the newly-independent successor states, it ineffectively concealed the volatile cocktail of regional power balances, domestic instability and Cold War intervention which lit so many blazes as the imperialists departed.

By contrast, the imperial decline of Soviet Russia has taken place in a context which lacks this dynamic of predatory rivalry. Accusations to the effect that western countries have actively sought the disintegration of the USSR have been confined largely to the paranoid shores of Russian nationalism. Critics accuse Germany of too ambitiously active a role in the demise of the former Yugoslavia, while others accuse the USA of trying for too long to prevent the

break-up. Once again however, these interpretations are confined to those with the most conspicuous axes to grind, the warring republics themselves. Nuclear weapons, European integration and the demilitarized contours of Germany's and Japan's recovery have brought the strategic and geopolitical dimensions of rivalry between these states to an end, displacing them into economic competition over tariffs and market shares. At the same time, America's domestic difficulties and the economic strength of Japan and Western Europe have ensured that US leadership can only be at best, first-among-equals. Disgruntled and fractious collaboration rather than dynamic rivalry has marked the post-Cold War crises in the Gulf and Yugoslavia, as well as other awkward issues in the contemporary world like the question of aid to Russia. American leadership in the West has come to resemble nothing more heroic than the sight of a US president trying to construct a majority for a contentious piece of domestic legislation by a mixture of arm-twisting, favour-calling and horse-trading.

All in all, the changes which have propelled us into the post-Cold War world seem to lend themselves to ambiguous interpretation. In some respects they seem to indicate that a well-established pattern has been repeated; that defeat in war, domestic convulsion, and imperial decline in one of the world's most powerful states, have led to one of the periodic reorderings of states and their assets which serves as a starting point for another, similar cycle. On the other hand, it can be argued that these processes and their context have been so altered that the pattern has been broken. International violence will remain depressingly familiar, but systemic war will not occur. Future revolutions, however defined, will not threaten the international order by calling into being a radically new principle of social organization (along the lines of popular sovereignty, or class conflict). Even if imperialism continues to flourish in any way that is meaningfully continuous with the past (which is doubtful), the rise and decline of imperial states will not excite the cupidity and apprehensions of similar rivals.

These ambiguous reflections prompt another line of inquiry. To what extent, if any, does the passage to the post-Cold War world represent 'progress'? Certainly the easing of Cold War tensions was accompanied by a lightening of atmosphere, a sense of movement and a heightening of expectations, which were visible in the spontaneous popularity of Mikhail Gorbachev among the populations of Western states, and in the euphoria which greeted the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. With the spectre of nuclear holocaust largely (though not completely) removed, the worst of the anxiety and pessimism which has afflicted recent generations[20] has lifted. But these diffuse movements of popular feeling do not necessarily affect the day-to-day

transactions of states and the policy-makers who act on their behalf, nor do they necessarily filter through to remake the structures in which these transactions take place. To assess whether anything more sustained and substantial in the way of progress has taken place, it would be useful to review how progress has been conceptualized in international relations.

Considering how much violent conflict there has been in international relations, and in view of the intellectual hegemony of 'realism'[21] as a source of prudential maxims for statesmen (especially in rich and powerful countries) and grand theory for scholars, it is surprising how much has been said about progress in the theory and practice of the subject. This apparent paradox is less striking however, when it becomes plain how compatible ideas of progress are with versions of self-interest not too far removed from those of realists themselves. The idea of progress enters the discourse of international relations in a number of ways. The first is more or less frankly partisan, holding that the spread of certain principles of social and political organization to cover more of the globe than before will have beneficent effects on the way states perceive and conduct themselves towards each other. This belief has attached itself to many figures and movements; to nationalists like Mazzini[22] who saw self-determination as the key to international harmony; to the tradition of radical 'troublemakers',[23] who urged solidarity with suppressed nations on the makers of nineteenth and twentieth century British foreign policy; to Woodrow Wilson, who advocated parliamentary institutions, robust public opinion and self-determination; to Lenin and other revolutionary socialists.[24]

Like the first model of progress, the second takes domestic politics as its starting point, and holds that progress is achieved in international politics, by any development which endows international institutions with authority and powers like state governments.[25] Less openly partisan than its predecessor, this position nonetheless often appears in oligarchical rather than democratic form, with a presumption that the larger stakeholders in the international system, acting in concert, should formally or informally constitute the source of such authority.

Another gloss on the idea of progress is offered by the belief that it is not so much the extent of the authority possessed by international institutions, as the representativeness of their decision-making processes that offers evidence of improvement. The idea that democratic procedures rather than power or vested interests should confer authority has, not surprisingly, been associated with the Third World in international relations since decolonization.[26]

Although the idea of progress in international relations is often

linked to universal international institutions, this is not invariably so. Western policies of collective defence after 1945 were based on the assumption that lessons had been learned from the failure to face up to the dictators in the 1930s. The discrediting of appeasement and the acknowledgment of the indivisibility of security which underlay the policy of containment, were clearly understood in the West to be not merely appropriate policies for the problems of the day, but part of a progressive historical evolution.

These versions of progress are varied, and at times contradictory. From within their ranks, progress can be conceptualized as a crusade, a humbling process of learning from mistakes, a rational response to the increasingly destructive possibilities of war. The direction of progress can be invoked with equal confidence either to confirm, or transcend the place and role of the nation state in international relations. But something all of these versions have in common is that they are in one way or another, 'internationalist' in their orientation.[27] That is, each is disposed to treat the world of states as a single political system whose problems (especially that of security) are indivisible, and must, one way or another, through institutional regulation or enlightened self-interest, be tackled in a holistic way. But although all versions of progress in international relations stress the importance of states and their policy-makers perceiving and acting on the interconnectedness of things, they are not unanimous in interpreting the nature and significance of these connections.

This point can be illustrated by discussing British and French policy towards the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.[28] This example has not been chosen at random. Anglo-French diplomacy in the inter-war period had the superficial aspect of being in a transitional stage. The exigencies of *realpolitik* and the balance of power were urgently re-stated in the problem of containing Germany under Hitler's assertive leadership after 1933. For some, both in and out of office in the two Western powers, this was the diplomatic question to which all others were subordinate, and to which all others had to be related. At the same time, the League of Nations represented a commitment to universal principles, notably the rule of law, applied equally to both weak and strong. In fact, this was not so much a period of transition, but one of stasis, with neither conception of policy able to recommend itself unequivocally to policy-makers. As Kennedy points out, the 1935 Anglo-French offer of a territorial readjustment in north-eastern Africa to Italy's favour (the Hoare-Laval Pact), '. . . caused British public opinion in particular to explode in moral indignation'. But at the same time, '. . . the London and Paris governments were torn between responding to that mood, and still in private facing the overwhelmingly plausible strategic reasons why

they should not go to war with Italy'.[29] French foreign minister Laval, with his determination to prevent Italy drawing closer to Germany, at virtually any cost, represents the extremes of *realpolitik*. Britain's decision to take the lead in organizing League sanctions against Italy seems to stand for the disinterested application of universal principles, where no vital national interest was violated by Italy's adventure, and none was served by punishing her for it. In reality, Britain's stand was corrupted by hesitancy in adopting it, and undermined by the assessment of the situation by military experts,[30] the equivocal nature of public opinion,[31] and the residual influence of those who were concerned to limit the offence to Italy.[32] The result, predictable enough with hindsight, was that Ethiopia went down to defeat and subjection, and Italy's (probably inevitable) progress towards alliance with Hitler went unchecked. The fate of Ethiopia seemed to suggest that if the rights of small states could not be subordinated completely to balance of power diplomacy, neither could they be seen exclusively on their own merits.

In taking note of the Ethiopian crisis and the subsequent career of appeasement, western policy-makers after 1945 seemed inclined to reject both of the alternatives which were on view in the 1930s and opt for a third. The integrity of small states would be defended, even if they were in peripheral, strategically obscure places. Or rather, hitherto (at least from about 1949 onwards) nowhere was to be regarded as strategically obscure. They would be defended, not because to leave them to their fate would be a dereliction of duty to the rule of law (although rhetoric along these lines was always useful in domestic consensus-building), but because dictatorships are inherently expansionist and opportunistic; their appetites are fed by each success, while simultaneously the will of the next potential victim to resist is eroded.

In this way, the indivisibility of security was acknowledged – there would be no more 'far away places of which we know nothing' – and, after a fashion, internationalism triumphed. But this triumph did not lie in transcending the national interest as the purest and most fervent internationalists had always hoped it would. In fact the price of triumph was to be shackled to the national interest in uncomfortable, if not unholy, matrimony. In practice of course the union was nothing if not flexible. The element of national interest could be inflated and concern with the rights of small nations diluted, for the benefit of sceptical realists and recalcitrant isolationists. For nervous liberals, concerned at arms expenditure and the exercise of military power in far-off places, the operations could be reversed. As a result, many perfectly well-intentioned people could believe that progress was being served. It was progress imperfectly realized, it is true. It was

unfortunate of course that the rights of small states, the rule of law, and the claims and counter-claims of messy regional conflicts could not be seen on their own merits. It was equally true that the consequences of being defended could be much worse than those of being abandoned. Despite these imperfections, Western (especially American) insistence that Cold War foreign policies should be expressed in the discourse of internationalism and progress, created the presumption that once the central conflict was removed, the West's internationalism would be purged of its unfortunate, but necessary duplicities and distortions.[33] It could then emerge in a much purer form, in which all rights and claims would be judged on their own merits. This implicit presumption could be allowed to flourish unchecked as long as there was no conceivable possibility of a delivery date being put on any of its implications.

The indecent suddenness with which the Cold War order passed into history altered this complacent calculation, causing unfocused popular euphoria, presidential doodlings about a 'New World Order', and only fractionally later, a chorus of better-informed calls to order.[34] When it became clear that a pseudo-war, a revolution which posed no threat to the organizing principles of the major states, and an imperial collapse which sparked off no predatory scramble for geopolitical advantage, had caused such widespread change, it ought to have been possible to hope for future conflicts to escape contamination by exterior considerations of power competition and ideological rivalry. What is more, the internationalist pretensions of the West's Cold War strategies gave reason to believe that such conflicts would receive remedial attention, on the basis that security and stability are indivisible in a world integrated by swift communications, a common political agenda, and common material aspirations.

The first post-Cold War crisis, the Gulf War, appeared to confirm these expectations, but it did so in a way which was at best ambivalent. At first sight there could hardly have been an issue more clearly designed to confirm an internationalist commitment to the rule of law. All states are in a sense property owners, and, all other things being equal, the unpunished violation of one of their number makes them collectively nervous. Iraq's case against Kuwait was perfunctory to say the least, and had been pursued without any of the consistency or vigour which might have lent it some credibility.[35] In short, although aggression is a notoriously slippery concept,[36] whose difficulties of definition have bedevilled all previous efforts at collective security, Iraq's seizure of Kuwait was a case which was quite without the moral ambiguity which usually attaches in some measure to the use of force in international relations. The absence of serious ideological or balance of power conflicts among the great powers meant that Iraq

could not call on the blocking or countervailing support of a powerful patron. This meant in turn that another bugbear of collective security – the inability of the forces of law and order to mount an overwhelming force for deterrence or retaliation – could be avoided.

Despite these favourable circumstances, Western enthusiasm for this law and order operation was not undivided. In ways reminiscent of earlier crises like the invasion of Ethiopia, military experts warned of the dire results of action,[37] while a strongly-voiced preference for sanctions to war made itself felt. Although these critical voices were silenced by the ease and the extent of the military victory, revulsion at the extent of the slaughter and the collateral damage, took their place. Worse than this was the realization that the victors had no clear idea of what to do with their victory, beyond leaving a punished but unrepentant Saddam Hussein in control. The drastic imperial options of occupying and remaking Iraq, or alternatively pushing for its dismemberment by the discontented Shi'ite and Kurd populations, would have far exceeded the appetite of Western populations for involvement, the tolerance of Arab states for outside intervention, and have greatly altered the local balance of power in favour of Iran. This last point illustrates the costs of focusing too narrowly on only a few of the sources of change in international relations. At the same time as conflict between the dominant powers has been defused, the diffusion downwards of military power made possible by Cold War rivalry in the post-colonial world and the sheer economic incentives to sell arms, have created regional power balances with dangerously destabilizing potential. The belief that a rule of law uncorrupted by power calculations is imminent, cannot survive the experience of the Gulf War.

The second post-Cold War crisis, the breakup of Yugoslavia, probably offers a better reflection of the altered world than the first. The conflicts of secession are never likely to offer as clear cut examples of legal or moral violation as invasion of one state by another.[38] Yet as the agenda of international politics has broadened beyond the formal rules of coexistence for states, to include the status and rights of 'peoples', and at the same time, costs of interstate war have increased and opportunities for successful aggression have narrowed, clashes of self-determination are likely to account for an increasing proportion of international conflict. If there is one thing which makes states more nervous than aggression, it is secession. Every seceding minority contains minorities within it, and the nightmare of disorder without end, of multiplying statelets and dissolving borders, bears heavily against any generalized help for seceders beyond diplomatic recognition. The case for decisive involvement is not improved when most of the contenders have quite

unsavoury pasts. If the pessimism of military advisers is well to the fore in cases of interstate aggression, it knows no bounds at the prospect of open-ended guerrilla war. The breakup of Yugoslavia tends to confirm some of the lessons of the Gulf war, and go beyond them. The impression is of a crisis of confidence among the 'victors' of the Cold War, an intense awareness of the costs of activism, and a tendency to disagree among themselves.

The changes which together constitute the post-Cold War world point ambiguously to the future. In one sense, it is difficult to see them as merely one of the periodic convulsions by which the international system re-arranges itself, before setting out on course for another distant (or not so distant) eruption. In the limited sense of a departure from cyclical versions of change (or entry into a new cycle with fundamentally different dynamics) perhaps progress has taken place. But progress in the normative sense of betterment is, on the evidence of the post-Cold War crises, likely to be more elusive. At least one cyclical aspect of international politics has not changed. As states acquire the capacity to deal with challenges to world order, the nature of the challenges themselves alters.

NOTES

1. 'This agglomeration which was called and still calls itself the Holy Roman Empire, was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire'. *Essai Sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations*, lxx.
2. For a discussion, see R.J. Vincent, 'Order in International Politics', in J.D.B. Miller & R.J. Vincent (eds), *Order and Violence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, pp.38–64, and the source with which Vincent engages, H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977.
3. For instance, 'The word "order" in the mouths of those in power is always suspect'; F. Halliday, 'Looking Back Without Anger: Myths on the Left Obscure Gulf War Gains', *In These Times*, Chicago, Jan. 15–21 1992, p.16.
4. See A. Wolfers, 'Policies of Peace and Security After World I' in his *Discord and Collaboration: Essays in International Politics*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962, pp.253–273.
5. J.W. Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.
6. For discussions of the post-Cold War world, see S. Hoffman, 'Delusions of World Order', *New York Review of Books*, April 9 1992, pp.37–43; J.E. Spence, 'Entering the Future Backwards: Some Reflections on the Current International Scene', Address to the Annual Conference of the British International Studies Association, 1992 (forthcoming in *Review of International Studies*, Jan. 1994); R. Jervis, 'The Future of World Politics: Will it Resemble the Past?', *International Security*, vol.16(3), Winter 1991–2, pp.39–73; J.S. Nye, 'What New World Order?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.71(2), Spring 1992, pp.83–96; A.Z. Rubinstein, 'New World Order or Hollow Victory?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.70(4), Fall 1991, pp.53–65; A.M. Johnston, 'Altered States: Structural Change in Contemporary World Politics', *Theoria*, 76, October 1990, pp.45–65.

7. For instance a large literature has quickly grown up on the place of Japan in this redefined world. See for instance, H.H. Baker & E. Frost, 'Rescuing the US-Japanese Relationship', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.68(3), July 1992, pp.487–510; K.E. Calder, 'Japan in 1991: Uncertain Quest for a Global Role', *Asian Survey*, vol.32(1), January 1992, pp.32–41; M.K. Hawes, 'Japan and the International System: Challenge from the Pacific', *International Journal*, XLVI, Winter 1990–91, pp.164–82; T. Inoguchi, 'Japan's Foreign Policy At Time of Global Uncertainty', *International Journal*, vol.46(4), Autumn 1991, pp.579–606.
8. Cuba is a good example of a client badly affected by the changing world order. See C. Blaiser, 'Moscow's Retreat from Cuba', *Problems of Communism*, vol.40(6), Nov.-Dec. 1991, pp.91–99.
9. See for instance B. Urqhart, 'The UN's Critical Choice', *Foreign Policy*, 84, Fall 1991, pp.157–65; B. Russett & J.S. Sutterlin, 'The UN in a New World Order', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.70(2), 1991, pp.69–83.
10. Much of the debate over the redefinition of regions has centred on Europe. See for instance, L. Xian, 'Is Germany in the West or Central Europe?', *Orbis* 36(3), Summer 1992, pp.411–22; K. Kumar, 'The 1989 Revolutions and the Idea of Europe', *Political Studies*, 40(3), September 1992, pp.439–61. See also, on the Middle East, F. Jahanpour, 'A New Order for the Middle East?', *The World Today*, 47(5), May 1991, pp.74–77 and J.E. Akins, 'The New Arabia', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.70(3), Summer 1991, pp.36–49. On the Far East, see G. Segal, *Rethinking the Pacific*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
11. R. Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.198.
12. On the diversification of war, see for instance, A. Buchan, *War in Modern Society*, Edinburgh: Watts, 1966, especially pp.34–79.
13. On differing interpretations of the Second World War, reflecting differing chronological perspectives and political meanings, see D.C. Watt, 'The European Civil War', in W.J. Mommsen & L. Kettenacker, *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp.3–21.
14. For instance Watt refers to a view of the period 1919–45 in Europe as 'a struggle which moved from the pre-violent to the violent stages of war, or from a "cold" to a "hot" war . . .'; Watt, 'The European Civil War', p.4.
15. 'Revolutions are international events in both cause and effect . . . The shape of the modern world has to a large extent been formed by the triumph of revolutions and the international consequences they have had'; F. Halliday, 'Three Concepts of Internationalism', *International Affairs*, 64(2), 1988, pp.187–98.
16. Under the security dilemma, states undermine their own security by making their neighbours insecure through '. . . the unintended and undesired consequences of actions meant to be defensive'; R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p.66.
17. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954, p.229.
18. On Eastern Europe between the wars, see A. Polonsky, *The Little Dictators*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975. On the later stages of the successor states' fate, see D.C. Watt, *How War Came*, London: Heinemann, 1989, especially pp.271–88 and pp.289–311.
19. The strongest version of this view is to be found in the work of revisionist marxists who argue that the USA's economic imperialism demanded expression in a new political *imperium* which involved ousting the European colonialists: 'Since the Americans could not define the critical point at which British power was neither too great nor too weak, but could only clearly define their own objectives, they laid the basis for Britain's defeat in the Middle East'; G. Kolko, *The Politics of War*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, p.313. Non-marxist scholars are less convinced of economic imperialism as a motive, and of the degree of intentionality: 'In the end it is impossible to escape the melancholy conclusion that the policy-makers in the United States played a major part in bringing about the decline of Britain, although those who saw that decline consummated did not realise what they were doing and regretted it when they realised what they had done'; D.C. Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place 1900–1975*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.162. See also, C. Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War Against Japan, 1941–45*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp.699–730.

20. Exemplified for instance in the writings of E.P. Thompson. See especially, 'Notes on Exterminism: the Last Stage of Civilization', in *Zero Option*, London: Merlin Press, 1982, pp.41–79.
21. Realism as a consciously formulated school of thought is generally dated from the publication of E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in September 1939. Realists '. . . took as their starting point states' pursuit of power, the centrality of military strength within that power, and the enduring inevitability of conflict in a world of multiple sovereignty. While not denying entirely a role for morality, law and diplomacy, they laid great stress on armed might as an instrument for maintaining the peace'; F. Halliday, 'The Pertinence of International Relations', *Political Studies*, vol.38(3), September 1990, pp.502–16.
22. See L. Namier, *Vanished Supremacies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, pp.55–59.
23. See A.J.P. Taylor, *The Troublemakers: Dissent Over Foreign Policy 1792–1939*, London: Panther Books, 1969.
24. On Wilson and Lenin, see K. Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.
25. For a critique, see J. Burton, *International Relations: a General Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.
26. For a discussion, see J. Davis, 'Confrontation or Community: the Evolving Institutional Framework of North-South Relations', in M. Wright, *Rights and Obligations in North-South Relations: Ethical Dimensions of Global Problems*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986.
27. On internationalism, see Halliday, 'Three Concepts of Internationalism'.
28. See F.S. Northedge, *The Troubled Giant: Britain Amongst the Great Powers, 1919–1939*, London: Bell, for the London School of Economics, 1966; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Supremacy*, London: Macmillan, 1976.
29. P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1988, p.336.
30. Taylor argues that the 'honest' mistakes of the British naval establishment in overestimating an enemy they were to defeat so resoundingly in 1940 were compounded by their conservatism and lack of enthusiasm for action against an 'enemy' they admired; *The Origins of the Second World War*, pp.124–5. Kennedy takes far more seriously the 'compelling' considerations which made all the Chiefs of Staff (and not just the navy) 'ardent appeasers – of a strategic rather than a moral kind'. See Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, pp.289–90.
31. See Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, pp.120–22.
32. See in particular the scathing assessment of Lord Perth, the British ambassador in Rome, in Watt, *How War Came*, p.85.
33. For example, the maxim, widely attributed to Jeane Kirkpatrick when part of the Reagan foreign policy team, that right wing authoritarian regimes should receive Western support because they are vulnerable to overthrow, while left wing versions are not. On the discrediting of this maxim by the popular movements of Eastern Europe, see D. Edgar, 'Stepping Back from the Precipice', *Guardian Weekly*, May 20 1990.
34. Among these, Hoffman, *Delusions of World Order*, is a particularly cogent example.
35. On this point see A.M. Johnston, 'In Defence of the Status Quo', *Sunday Tribune* (Durban), 27 Jan. 1991. See also 'What is Iraq's Best Case?', *New York Times*, 16 Sept. 1990.
36. For a discussion of the problems of defining aggression in the context of collective security, see I.L. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares*, New York: Random House, 1971, pp.245–84.
37. These dissenting voices were heard inside the highest ranks of military command. See B. Woodward, *The Commanders*, London: Simon and Schuster, 1991.
38. On this point, see Spence, 'Entering the Future Backwards', p.9.

Culture and Absent Epistemologies in the International Relations Discipline

Stephen Chan

Among others, this essay had two ambitions, one of which was not fulfilled. The first was that it should not only say something about culture and international relations but also serve as a foundational bibliographic plan for future research – hence its construction as a bibliographic essay. The second was that Third World treatments of the subject would be included. This proved difficult for three reasons: the first was to do with the languages involved; the second was to do with the scattered nature of the sources; and the third was to do with the fact that, even though the present author collected a range of Third World materials – e.g. English language editions of the *Iranian Journal of International Affairs* – they could not be called representative of any Third World position. There is, therefore, a basic presumption in this essay that the texts of the Anglo-Western world can introduce an argument which calls its own texts into question.

Several disciplines have labelled their internal schools of thought 'paradigms', and in many of them the lines of division have been trenchantly drawn. International Relations is one of a few with a prevailing orthodoxy that an inter-paradigm debate is not only possible but normal. This sense of open debate, however, tends to exclude from debate anything which is not represented by one of three paradigms, and anything which cannot be tested by the methodologies and epistemology selectively absorbed from the social sciences. This effective restriction has helped the discipline grow by providing a coherence to its thought; it has given international relations a separate identity from, for instance, comparative politics; but it has not necessarily provided a better understanding of the world than would have been possible if the discipline did not exist; it cannot say with any confidence that the discipline has grown, as one of its founders, William T.R. Fox, hoped, 'to help move men forward toward a future of their own choice . . . (to serve as) a functional equivalent to large-scale war'. Its paradigms have not helped, for instance, to explain Iranian or Iraqi movements to war; nor have the paradigms in a generalized applied sense – power politics, mediation and negotiation, and international class struggle – brought peace to the world. It is important to remember, even in an academic conclave, what the

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discipline first sought, and to ask why it cannot, even now, understand a large part of the world.

Some Other Disciplines and International Relations

As Manor points out (1991), the two previously dominant paradigms in Third World studies, political development towards modernity, and structuralism, are now in decline; and scholars are reflecting on the open-endedness of history and various hybrids of thought in which cultural specificities play a large role. Even within the structuralist school, which has its affiliates in development studies and international relations as well as Third World studies, there is discussion of specific structures. There may well be an international system of global accumulation, encompassing many local accumulations, but there are highly specific local systems, as Zimbabwean scholarship for instance seems to indicate (Mandaza 1987). Cultural differences, in short, can no longer be written out of structuralism. They are being written into Third World studies far more prominently than before.

Some writers on the periphery of the international relations discipline, such as Mazrui (1990), have emphasized the importance of culture in international relations, stressing that this is the only way by which the Third World might be adequately understood. This has paralleled the call by other scholars that the Third World, instead of waiting to be understood, should distance itself from both Eurocentric thought and the Eurocentric world system (Amin 1989; 1990); and this, in turn, descends from a call Julius Nyerere made in 1979, for a south-south dialogue, and for the possibility of a separated southern system.

These feelings of being both misunderstood and mistreated have been around a while. The international relations discipline, however, had mostly resisted the claims of cultural specificity and cultural misunderstanding. There are four major reasons for this. Firstly, particularly as evidenced in a generation of textbooks, what is represented by international relations is an international system rather than its component parts. Even when those textbooks devote space to the claim for a 'world society' with as many strands as a cobweb, the impression is still that a system is generalizable even if complex (Olsen & Groom 1991). Even those textbooks that portray different country approaches to international relations, that even stress the limited utility of debate in the inter-paradigm sense (Windsor 1989), and that acknowledge several 'sub-fields' of international relations, propagate nevertheless the idea of a recognizable field – the complexly generalizable system. Secondly, there is a concern for thought on this system, and on the paradigms that represent the system, to have

sufficient philosophic or epistemological validity to maintain the discipline's academic standing (Hollis & Smith 1991). Thirdly, there is the assumption that the system is sufficiently universal that it triumphs over any dissident particulars. States, in one way or another, whether they like it or not, are socialized into predictable forms of behaviour (Dore 1985; Mayall 1990) – although this view does not address the issue as to whether these predictable forms of behaviour are founded on predictable forms of thought, and may be challenged from the simple proposition that there is a difference between an international system and an international society. Socialization into the homogeneous mechanics of the system does not mean there is a homogenous society underpinning it. Fourthly, there are already quite enough candidates queuing up for a piece of the international relations action. Some writers in international communications studies see their niche as pretty much where the pluralist paradigm currently sits (Korzenny & Ting-Toomey 1990), not so much adding to it as replacing it. There was also, a decade ago, something called anthropological diplomacy, which was more anthropological than diplomatic (Sutlive, et al. 1982a; 1982b). The discipline needs to be stable and cannot therefore become too diverse. If the barbarians are at the gate, then the gate is closed and barred.

The Appeal and Limits of Postmodernism

As with other western disciplines, international relations is susceptible to the general fashions of thought and the critiques they bring. There is a certain aptness about postmodernism, in its literary and French usage, as a champion of 'other' cultural claims, if only because the formlessness associated with postmodernism has, as one of its lines of descent, aspects of oriental thought. Der Derian and others have championed a postmodernist enquiry in international relations, not to replace any or all of the existing paradigms, but to establish through the opening of new texts from diverse sources a greater range of dialogue (1989). There are certain dangers in this apparently innocent call. The first is that many new texts may be subversive of the old. If the project involves some undermining, why not be honest about this at the outset? Secondly, the method of reading new texts is open to quite honest misunderstanding. Said's 'orientalism' remains a danger in the interpretation of texts from other cultures. Thirdly, the increasingly frequent juxtaposition of postmodernism on the one hand, and critical theory on the other, as avenues international relations might explore in future (Brown 1992), begs the question of compatibility in these future explorations. In Hoffman's terms (1987; 1988), critical theory begets universal cosmopolitan values. This

universalism need not be linearly derived from the west; there may well be arguments for a non-linear universalism as Wallerstein claims (1991). Even so, here are meant recognizable and verifiable values: a human right is a human right is a human right. What seems more than possible is Pauline Rosenau's suggestion that postmodernism and more social scientific modes of enquiry might simply agree to differ, enrich each other if possible, but essentially go their separate ways (1992). The current affiliation of many perhaps younger scholars to postmodernism or critical theory raises the intriguing speculation of three very different paradigms in the future: of western political philosophy, postmodernism, and critical theory replacing the current paradigms and satisfying the need of their exponents for formalism, pluralism, and an intellectual fountainhead for a left agenda.

At the present moment, whether through postmodernism or not, there is a very recently articulated need to give some place for different cultural views within international relations. Ashley and Walker have sought to suggest this in a complex manner (1990); Rengger in a surprisingly uncomplex manner (1992); and Brown in a stylish though diffident manner, suggesting a possible but hedged endorsement of a postmodernist approach (1988).

What is surprising is not that such a need has been articulated, but how much was ignored before its articulation. In 1974, China expounded a Three World Theory of international relations but, notwithstanding its status as the only theoretical exposition of the international system made by a great state in the postwar years, it was virtually ignored by the international relations discipline. Yee explained what it was (1983), and Chan noted its cultural roots (1985).

In more recent years, with the rise of 'fundamentalist' Islam, international relations has been at times not merely unaccommodating but dismissive. Notwithstanding Khomeni's pronouncements, Dore insisted that a common international language and behaviour would prevail (1985). There might well be a mixture of values, but the ones derived from, or imposed by, the international system would be dominant. This led Chan to ask why, in the mixture of values, there was so much of 'ours' and so little of 'theirs' (1991), and various Islamic scholars, rather than seeking to explicate an Islamic view of the international system solely from Islam's own sources, have employed a postmodernist vocabulary to do so (Sharabi 1990). In this way at least, they would enter the western debate.

Philosophies

That something foreign might be rendered in western terms, and thereby satisfy western epistemological (or even epistemic) tests is

not something that can only be attempted by a postmodernist vocabulary and its 'defusive' attitude towards proofs. The most heroic of philosophical explications in English of an 'other's' beliefs were surely made by Matilal in his work on Indian belief systems and philosophies (1971; 1977; 1985; 1986). If, as Matilal concluded in one of his last works before his recent death, 'we agree that there cannot be any absolute conception of the universe, but only many conceptions of the presumably absolute universe, some more elegant, more comprehensive and more coherent than others, then we have to be satisfied with a sort of ontological relativity' (1986:425). Gyekye thought much the same in his study of a particular African philosophy (1987). Two things are at work here. Firstly, there is an elevation of ontological experience, so that an epistemological test becomes a partial one only. Secondly, as Gyekye concludes, any debate on relativism, on ontologies or epistemologies, can only proceed on the basis of the languages concerned being read and understood. Things may be explicated in English, but only properly argued if those arguing know the language of the culture that gave rise to the thought. This is a demand for rigour greater than most epistemological tests. A language, as Chan points out for Chinese and Japanese, can be a minefield for assumed correlations of meaning between its words and those of English (1992b). Schrecker has shown how Chinese categories of analysis and a Chinese intellectual vocabulary, recast somewhat fundamentally the historical antecedents to the Chinese revolution (1991).

This means at least three things. Firstly, it means an international relations of fieldwork. It should not be, as Rorty criticized linguistic philosophy for becoming, an armchair discipline (1991a). Secondly, again in Rorty's terms, there cannot be a God's eye point of view, a skyhook of science or knowledge that can free us from acculturation (1991b). In international relations terms, it means the international system simply cannot be asserted in the face of its components. Thirdly, in terms of a practical association between international relations and another helpful discipline – in contrast to Der Derian's sweeping opening up of international relations to dialogue with all comers – that discipline should be anthropology.

Anthropology has its own combative paradigms, but there is much useful work being done in political anthropology. McGlynn asks where, in different communities, power is socially situated (1991), and how it is differently perceived by those at different social levels. Here, one can become immediately simplistic and say, by a process of extrapolation, that it is no wonder the north-south dialogue never knew what it was talking about. If, however, anthropology is subjected to a philosophical sensitivity then, although the results may

not be perfect, there is some progress towards an accessible international relations which would be denied if mastery of many languages was an inviolable prerequisite. Fundamental texts in an anthro-philosophic international relations would include those by Gellner (1991).

Nationalisms, Philosophic and Irrational, as the Basis of Internationalism

This all makes sense if one supposed languages and their parent cultures to be rational, or if one could comprehend what seemed at first irrational or even extra-rational. If, however, one took the simple proposition that nationalism provides a necessary foundation for internationalism, then the construction and propagation of a nationalism might not be seen as rational or easily comprehensible. In the last dozen years, the study of nationalism has been transformed with the idea that a nation imagines itself and creates itself according to what it has imagined (Anderson 1983). The works of the 1980s reflect this idea of national individualism (Gellner 1983; Armstrong 1982; Breuilly 1982; Hroch 1985; Smith 1986; Chatterjee 1986; Hobsbawm 1990). Although this reflects what Freire (1970), in his radical pedagogy, called the right of each person to 'name the world' as a precondition to free participation in it, the process of nationalism can be not only idealistic but chauvinistic. It can be structured from existing traditions, or create entirely new ones.

A very great deal of work has been completed over the last decade by Africanists on the question of identity in Africa, and how this identity has been affiliated to nationalism. Ranger (1985) and Lan (1985) wrote on the contribution of peasant culture to the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. Vail (1989) and Oliver (1992) have written on the tribalism seen today as a contemporary construct, assembled as a means to resist colonialism. The themes of cultural struggle and resistance have been taken up by other writers (Kaarsholm 1991; Crummey 1986).

To draw a parallel, this sort of work is not unlike the cultural Marxism undertaken in Britain by E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams – the attempt to view history from the bottom up. There are, however, significant differences. Firstly, African nationalism could not draw on any African culture of maps (Mabogunje & Richards 1985) and, therefore, state boundaries. The spatial limitation of nationalism was derived from colonialism. As early as Malinowski (1961), there has been an appreciation that many Third World societies have their own appreciations of time. Secondly, as Chan has sought to demonstrate in the case of Kaunda, national philosophies

that articulate the meaning and mission of new states and their citizens can be completely ersatz in their claim to an older cultural provenance (1992a). This is, in part, owing to the fact that culture was, until missionaries and colonialism, oral. So that, thirdly, there are methodological problems in assessing what happens as the oral becomes written (Goody 1987). Fourthly, there are problems to do with who does the first writing. Iliffe found that early missionary reports on African society mistook the African condition because the missionaries were writing from their own perspectives (1987). In Europe, Anderson found that the invention of printing revolutionized the propagation of meaning (1983). In Africa, by the time the modern nationalist struggles achieved a discernible, mobilized, popular base, the wide publication of a few writings on cultures in formation, authored by those outside the cultures concerned, meant a basis for nationalism that was highly syncretistic.

Discerning the constituents of this syncretism has its own problems, and is encountered in the study of non-African cultures as Hobart and Taylor found in South East Asia (1986). In China, anthropology must first find some reconciliation between 'Chinese anthropologies' and foreign models, as Guldin writes, before investigation begins (1991).

All of this means fundamental problems in conceptualizing society (Kuper 1992), and accounts partially at least for a western category of 'primitive' (Kuper 1988). It means fundamental problems also in the practical sphere. In dealing with famine, as de Waal found (1989), and with refugees, as Harrell-Bond writes (1986), western aid has stuck determinedly to its own models of hunger and suffering, and has often failed to deal with problems in ways that are meaningful and important to the recipients. In the 'high politics' of global intercourse it can mean not only a view of, say, Libya as problematic, but of Ghadaffi as mad; whereas, problematic or not, there is, as Davis has shown (1987), both method and cultural basis to Ghadaffi's regime.

The theological writer, Eliade, in a remarkably consistent output until his death, spoke of an 'eternal return' – a phraseology common to others but, for Eliade, it meant the basis of a society's tradition: that something never quite dies, that history is not linear, but that history and time are filled with the creative repetitions of primordial archetypes (1959; 1982; 1989). This may be found not only in Third World systems of thought, but European ones as well – Barandiaran's Basque nationalism being a case in point (Azcona 1992). If, problematically – with translations from the oral to the written, and with syncretisms – this is the case, a nationalism may not only see the world through its own eyes, but view itself as the centre of the world, the hub of time's cycle. Within this system of time, to which the space

of a state is appended, what is known as the international system may be only a sub-system – even if there is a current (temporary) sub-system dominance. This turns international relations on its head and is a challenge to it.

A Neat Way Forward for International Relations

A serious course on international relations would these days include, if not emphasize, Linklater (1990) and Beitz (1979) for their philosophically-based considerations of the international system. Linklater proposes an attractive thesis, that moral development involves a progressive universalization of norms. This development derives from a commonality of all men (*sic*) as their social organizations broaden from family, to community, to nation, etc., and as the values that sustain this process deepen. This very neat progression must answer the challenge of nationalisms differently arrived at, often on the basis of values that are exclusive, or fabricated. Beitz's contention that the international system is now able to provide benefits much as a domestic system has, and that the international system therefore has rules, obligations and normative values, just like any domestic system, is also attractive and neat. This must, however, address itself to various empirical tests. Those who suffer famine and war, unaided by the international system, hardly feel its benefits; or feel it late, insufficiently, and according to someone else's normative value of how hunger is to be treated.

In the 1990 edition of his book (*Men and Citizens*), Linklater appends a largely unsatisfactory postscript on the work of Foucault and Habermas. Both, in rather different ways (1979; 1991) argue against the universalism proposed by Linklater, Foucault through the idea of the 'other', and Habermas with an emphasis on specific developments, linked and converging on a universalism (not unrelated to a non-linear universalism), rather than one that developed smoothly and universally throughout. There appear, therefore, to be two ways forward for international relations – to subject its theories and philosophies to the critiques of postmodernism on the one hand, and critical theory on the other (a sort of tri-paradigm debate foreshadowed earlier in this paper), or to subject them to empirical tests. One preserves a sort of armchair discipline, the other demands a field discipline.

Armchair and field (perhaps armchair and deckchair) might be both usefully employed in an international relations that follows Nardin's distinctions, derived from Oakeshott, between practical and purposive association (1983). Here, there would be largely universal assent for an international system because of the practical benefits gained;

but the study of international society, in terms of differing and conflicting values, and their different origins, might find a larger place in international relations than that which a 'socialization' thesis provides.

This, too, is neat if system and society remain separated. To borrow Aron's terms (1966), not too often used or debated in the anglophonic discipline, the system can be homogeneous and society heterogeneous. What, however, if the heterogeneous society seeks to challenge the homogeneous system? What if that turns out to be the basis ('real' or constructed) of some, perhaps much of international conflict today?

Forsaking Neatness

The retention of one system as the focus and foundation of international relations means the relegation of other systems. What, however, of the memory at least of other systems? There was an Islamic world system. There was a Chinese world system – at least in the minds of their theoreticians, not to mention their policy-makers. There was, even in the antique states and statelets (with or without conventional boundaries) of west Africa, a regional diplomatic system of representations, exchanges and protocols not unlike the Vienna system (Smith 1989). The problem for international relations is either that the contemporary state, as in some parts of Africa (Ergas 1987), is in a transitory mode, so that its status as an international actor may be subject to qualification, or that, as with some Islamic states (Luciani 1990; Vatikiotis 1991), the nature and expectations of the state correspond more to a former international system than the current one.

This is a vexed area of study. In an early work Piscatori (1986) likened Islam to a horizon of which Islamic states were conscious. This metaphor had value in that it suggested a commonality among Islamic states, but also the distance to that commonality. In more recent work, that commonality becomes more fragmented (1991). The more one delves, the more traps there are for beginners. To talk of Iranian 'mullahs' is, in fact, to use a pejorative term. They refer to themselves as 'ulemas' – so that the choice of basic vocabulary can identify an orientalism, as opposed to an enquiry freed from western values (Burke & Lapidus 1988). Despite such caveats, it is nonetheless surprising that international relations has not launched a theoretical enquiry into the tensions that exist between practical affiliation to one system, and purposive affiliation to another. It would mean the forsaking of some neatness.

That the world is, nevertheless, becoming messier seems to be the

distinguishing aspect of international relations in practice at the close of the twentieth century. International relations theory has to cope with this messiness. There are attempts to apply political philosophy to the nationalist struggles in the old Yugoslavia and other parts of what was eastern Europe (Brown 1993), but the scope is far wider. Chipman has noted what ethnic revivals mean for strategic studies, a discipline which still parallels its applied form (1992a). He has also compiled a partial list of institutes and journals, most little-known to the international relations discipline, of non-anglophonic and Third World attempts to view the world and its security (1992b).

In a messy world that needs dialogue, international relations should also become, at least in part, dialogic. Maranhao (1990) has suggested what this means in terms of the social scientific legacy absorbed by international relations. It means essentially its abandonment in favour of an 'anti-epistemological hermeneutics' or 'dialogical hermeneutics'. Maranhao would also like to get beyond ontologies towards an ethical dialogue although, in the light of earlier comments in this essay, that may be ambitious. Where this differs from postmodernism is not in its acceptance of process, fluidity, and a certain non-definitive outcome to the academic enterprise, but in its materials. The dialogic is not confined to the inter-textual. Rather, to borrow a term from Galtung (1971), it views each person as a 'culture-bearing' individual, and proceeds from there. In this messy cultural international relations, there may well be conflicting epistemologies. Maranhao would rather there were only absent epistemologies.

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Political Relations and the Analogy with Language

Philip Nel

Language as Paradigm

One of the results of the linguistic turn during the past few decades has been the often implied, and sometimes expressed assumption that language is in one way or another the 'paradigm of human relations' (Minogue 1987:55). Although the close link between language and political relations was already highlighted by Aristotle,[1] it was only since the mid-seventeenth century that the nature of language was extensively pursued by political philosophers as a possible key to understanding social relations, and to justify proposed models of political ties which are based on both freedom and obligation, sovereignty and responsibility.

Language has proved to be a fruitful paradigm for political philosophers to explore in at least two senses. In the first place, social relations in general are taken to be linguistically constituted. This rediscovery of the basic linguistic nature of human endeavours has enabled contemporary political thought to notch up considerable advances. From a meta-theoretical point of view it provides an extremely fruitful avenue for exploring the legitimacy of positivist claims about the status of propositions in the social sciences (cf. Shapiro 1981). It also provides for a healthy pluralization in our conception of the conversations of humankind (Oakeshott 1962:197–247 and 301–333; Rorty 1984; Nelson 1987). From the point of view of political theory, the rediscovery of language has broadened our conception of what falls within the purview of 'the political', whether the latter is conceived 'idealistically' as the sphere of public interaction *par excellence* (Arendt 1973), or 'realistically' as the domain where power is ultimately obtained, retained, and exercised (Bell 1975). In addition, linguistic innovation is increasingly being viewed as the medium and basis of political change (Ball, Farr, & Hanson 1989).

Perhaps because of these exciting developments it is now not uncommon to slip from the claim that political relations are linguistically constituted to the belief that political relations are like linguistic relations in all, or most, important respects. What is at stake in this second interpretation of the paradigmatic character of

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language, is the question whether the dynamic of language provides an adequate analogy in terms of which the distinguishing features of politics can be investigated. It is this analogy that I wish to explore episodically in this paper.

Tracing the history of this analogy, and its varied and sometimes surprising manifestations is a task worth pursuing, but one I cannot tackle here. What I can do, however, is to provide a few glimpses of this history and to point out some of its implications for the concept of politics. My rhetorical strategy is to select three episodes in the history of this analogy, to present them as if they constitute a critical encounter amongst themselves, and to see where this encounter leads us.

My first choice falls on Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan.* As is increasingly being appreciated, Hobbes is a rather ambiguous figure in the development of linguistically-minded political philosophy (Danford 1978; Rossini 1987; Ball 1987; Ryan 1982). On the one hand, Hobbes deserves to be recognized as the first 'modern' philosopher to explore systematically the linguistic constitution of social and political relations. On the other, the roots of the authoritarian implications of especially *Leviathan* can be traced to Hobbes's image of language. The inclusion of Hobbes is clearly justifiable, not only because of his novel attempt to elevate language to a primary position in political philosophy, but also because his thought on political relations was developed by means of an extended analogy with language.

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's *Wittgenstein and Justice* (1972) is a useful antithesis to Hobbes, not because she directly responds to him, but because she challenges the atomistic political and linguistic assumptions underlying much of earlier contractarian thinking. Her book is also of importance for my purpose because she consciously, and very critically, examines the limits of the analogy with language in political thinking.

Pitkin's conclusion is that the analogy is misleading since linguistic relations are not subjected to the type of power plays which can rightly be said to constitute the uniqueness of politics. This conclusion is forcefully challenged by the recent body of thought which can, following Said (1978) and Rorty, be called the textualist school. In the Foucauldian world of Michael Shapiro for instance, language is indeed subjected to publicly sanctioned, institutionalized power relations. For Shapiro (and I believe also for Foucault, although he does not deal directly with this question), the analogy between language and politics holds, not only because political relations are linguistic relations, but also because linguistic relations are subjected to the same kind of power otherwise thought of as distinctive to

politics. Textualism thus represents the strongest form of the analogy to date.

My arbitrary, but justifiable, selection allows us to trace, in very broad terms admittedly, the evolution of political philosophy's images of language. More important, however, is the opportunity it allows to question whether the language-politics analogy is indeed as instructive as so many contemporaries in our linguistic era seem to believe. Clearly, the three cases of this analogy I am about to review of themselves do not provide sufficient cause to challenge the analogy beween language and politics *tout court*. Yet, in looking at these three instances I hope to generate some legitimate questions about the effects of the analogy for our concept of politics; in particular the question of whether the analogy provides sufficiently for the explication of the distinctiveness of 'the political'.

Speech and Political Obligation

Thomas Hobbes was the first modern thinker to explore systematically the implications of viewing political relations linguistically. Influenced by Thucydides' 'rhetorical' history of the Peloponnesian War, the translation of which was Hobbes's first major work in English, Hobbes came to emphasize the linguistic constitution of human relations. Language, and for Hobbes speech especially, is not only the 'most noble and profitable invention of all other', but is the condition without which social and political relations would not be possible. As God intended it, speech forms the basis of all of man's authentic modes of existence, whether in naming and thus symbolically mastering nature, in teaching and counselling others, in revealing our wills and purposes to others, or in pleasure and ornament. Yet, God also punished man through speech. For Hobbes, as for many other early modern thinkers, the Tower of Babel is a symbol of the dark side of societal interaction. The general dispersal of many tongues is a symbol of the fragmentation of society: a fragmentation which is manifested through political disorder, revolution, and the general absence of peace. The paradigmatic case for all these political ills is the 'conceptual' anarchy during the revolution at Corcyra, as recorded by Thucydides. Conceptual anarchy, both of the kind of Corcyra and Babel, is what Hobbes had in mind with his 'methodological fiction' of the state of nature where individual avarice, greed, and passion result in the war of all against all.

The strong analogy Hobbes draws between the state of language on the one hand and political order on the other becomes obvious once one reads together Chapter 4 ('Of speech') of his *Leviathan* and his conceptions of the state of nature and the Commonwealth. The anarchical manifestations of the free reign of passions in the state of

nature correspond to what Hobbes in Chapter 4 identifies as the abuses of speech. These abuses are the inverse of the general and special felicitous uses of speech. The general felicitous uses include the transferring of mental discourse into verbal discourse, and 'signification', i.e. the use of the same name by different people to identify outward things and inward mental states in such a common way that communication becomes possible. From these general uses follow four special uses, namely: registering the causes and effects of things, instructing or teaching our fellow men, disclosing our will to others so that we may help each other, and, finally, innocently to delight others by means of playing with words.

Concerning the dark side of speech Hobbes identifies four abuses which provide the paradigm for the state of nature. First, men deceive themselves and others when they 'register their thoughts wrong . . . by the inconstancy of the signification of their words'. Second, others are deceived when words are used metaphorically, i.e. when words are used 'in other sense than that they are ordained for'. Third, when words are used to conceal the true purposes of the will, greed is rationalized and the passions go unchecked. Finally, words can be used to 'grieve one another' as other living creatures use teeth and horns to injure others and establish predominance over them.

The primary duty of the sovereign in upholding the Commonwealth is to prevent the state of nature from engulfing us. This means guaranteeing those obligations we incur when we wilfully seceded sovereignty to the state. Yet, Hobbes clearly had in mind a linguistic responsibility for the sovereign as well; here speech and the prevention of its abuse become a paradigmatic instance of what it means for the sovereign to rule. The task of the sovereign is exemplified, *par excellence*, in ruling out the abuses of words. Political order itself becomes dependent on the trustworthiness of language usage; hence the significations (or meanings as we would say) of the basic political words must be settled once and for all, and people will have to be compelled by the power of the state to mean what they say. In this regard the development of a Political Science which can discover the true meaning of political words, and which can then proceed to deduce the principles and institutions of the Commonwealth from a number of basic definitions, is crucial. The Sovereign and Science are the guardians of conceptual unanimity, and hence of political order.

Despite his mistrust of metaphors (which he sees as one of the abuses of language), Hobbes's whole political philosophy is based on a series of metaphors (Ryan 1982). According to my reading of *Leviathan*, one that is heavily indebted to Terence Ball (1987), 'speech' or language itself serves as an extended metaphor for his

conception of political order and what its absence entails. Here, I would argue, lies the key to the authoritarianism Hobbes's thinking has rightly been accused of. If the true purpose of language is constantly and unambiguously to register physical and mental 'things', and societal interaction or communality can be safeguarded only if it is ensured that words have one meaning, rule by decree is the inevitable result.

Yet, Hobbes's conception of language has another (often overlooked) implication for his political thought. This is that his notion of political community and political obligation remains contrived exactly because of the analogy he sees between it and speech.

The primary functions of speech for Hobbes are naming things and translating our 'mental discourse into verbal discourse'. On both accounts humans are conceived of as by nature atomized, autonomous, and self-contained individuals whose relationships with the pre-existing external world of nature and culture, and with other atomized individuals are logically secondary. The state of nature, and its linguistic correlate – the Tower of Babel – convey both the sense of man's self-centred isolation and his inability to bridge the communication gap naturally. The task of Hobbes's political philosophy is thus to provide for an external power or institution which can limit the destructiveness of man's natural individuality and secure stable societal interaction. Unity in diversity is achieved only *post hoc*, and the key to it lies somewhere outside the natural individual. Individual and community, self-interest and obligation, can only be reconciled with one another by means of a *deus ex machina*.

Hobbes's challenge to reconcile the individual with political relations which would provide for an obligation to public interests is the same challenge faced by the contract theorists of political obligation. As Hanna Pitkin summarizes this dilemma:

> The social-contract theorists always take for granted that men are by nature separate, autonomous, self-contained individuals, without relationship, membership, affiliation, or obligation; their problem then is to create such ties. The separate individual, they assume, is natural; relationship and authority are human conventions which must be created by men. (Pitkin 1972:198)

In the case of Hobbes, these individualistic assumptions are (perhaps only partly) induced by his conception of language. Indeed, Hobbes took language seriously enough (as we saw) for us to justify such a proposition.

The Games of Language and the Games of Politics

As political philosophy in the twentieth century tried to free itself

from the atomized and mechanistic universe of liberalism, social-contract theory, and behaviourism, the new holistic, constitutive and transcendental image of language provided a possible solution to the problem of creating or understanding political community. In contrast to Hobbes's conception, the new image of language discarded the notion that the language user is exactly that: a self-contained individual whose utterances are extensions of his free will, able to choose whatever linguistic tools are available. Although not all contemporary linguistic-minded thinkers would go as far as Heidegger to claim that what is important is not what language we choose to use, but rather what language chooses us, it is widely accepted that language is much more transcendentally constitutive of what we *can* say than was previously thought. Language usage 'always already' presupposes the existence of an internalized set of norms which does not impede 'freedom of speech', but rather makes it possible. And it is not only speech (*parole*) which is made possible by transcendental *langue*, but also (and for Saussure perhaps primarily) the understanding of speech that is constituted by the a priori structure of language as a self-referential system of signs (Jameson 1984:183). Language, whether conceived of as a structured system of signification (Saussure), as a 'prejudice structure' (Gadamer) or as a plurality of practices embedded in forms of life (Wittgenstein), represents a domain of acquired obligations which simultaneously precede and enable individual choice. 'Brutus's language is not his own.' (Pocock 1984:29).

This new image of language enables thinkers as diverse as Connolly, Oakeshott, Habermas, Arendt, and Pocock to proceed well beyond the atomized universe of liberal and contractarian political thought. While all of these thinkers, to some or other extent, rely on this conception of language to develop a notion of communal and political practice, it was the self-styled political interpreter of Wittgenstein, Hanna Pitkin, who explored the implications of the language-political relations analogy the fullest.

Pitkin is primarily concerned with the seemingly unavoidable conservative implications of the application of the new image of language to the political sphere. While she is prepared to grant that '(l)anguage seems to provide a model of membership showing how norms can be learned, acquired without choice and without a real alternative, and yet end up being obligatory', she believes that the analogy with political community and obligations breaks down on at least three counts (Pitkin 1972:199–204). First, political innovation generally assumes a deliberate, conscious, collective, and *public* activity which is generally absent from language innovation. While individual word artists do stretch the borders of the linguis-

tically possible continuously, language change is hardly ever revolutionary, nor is it by definition a collective effort. And although political innovation is rooted in the past and in a particular political culture, political acts of will are less restrained by a priori structures than is the use of language.

Pitkin's second concern deals with the issues of conflict, power, and interest. The analogy with language, she claims, is misleading because it can close our eyes to the continuous and essential contestability of political relations. Because politics is about the attainment of publicly sanctioned power in order to protect and advance certain interests, politics by definition is conflictual. By contrast, '(r)arely if ever does some individual or group have a serious stake in the maintenance or alteration of linguistic patterns. Rarely if ever is change in language effected or prevented by the exercise of power' (Pitkin 1972:202). When it does happen, we call such events instances of the 'politicization of language', registering that they amount to an intrusion of one set of relations from one sphere into another.

Finally, Pitkin argues that the mechanisms of enforcing obligations in language and in politics are so dissimilar that the analogy between the two breaks down. In language, obligations are much more internalized than in politics. Although Pitkin does not resort to this argument, one can say that exactly because Brutus' language is not his own, his verbalizing of a political act is placed under more, albeit considerably different, constraints than when he is acting politically. *More*, because *langue* is a tough Hermes as everyone finds out when he/she tries to make words mean whatever he/she wants them to mean; *different*, because a specialized agency of public authority, whose power significantly exceeds even that of the Afrikaanse Taalkommissie, enforces political obligations.

The new image of language, Pitkin concludes, is useful inasmuch as it provides a model of communal-collective norms preceding and enabling the choice of individuals. Language, however, cannot be an adequate analogy for political relations since it does not entail sufficient similarities as far as innovation, power, and authority are concerned.

But is language really as devoid of publicly institutionalized power as Pitkin wants us to believe? Are the norms of language use only internalized linguistic phenomena, or are they part of a wider *regime*, that is a set of institutionalized norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which the expectations of actors converge? Surprisingly, Pitkin does little to explore the Wittgensteinian notion of language as embedded in 'forms of life', i.e. in a practice or set of practices, despite her close adherence to Wittgenstein. Once we stop

regarding language simply as a linguistic phenomenon, and view it rather as a practice, or as some would have, as *discourse*, the distinction between internal and external norms and coercion, and with it Pitkin's common-sensical distinction between language and politics, become less secure.

The Politics of Language

The development of discourse analysis and post-structuralist intertextuality over the past two decades has pushed the analogy between language and politics to limits not explored before. What is particularly striking about these recent developments is that they explore the analogy in the reverse direction of what we have been considering so far. What is at stake is not the light that the analysis of language can throw on the character of political relations. Rather, the analysis of language has to be based upon social and political investigations into the relations of power that determine what can be said in particular circumstances. Language usage depends not only on the generative rules of *langue*, but also (and perhaps more fundamentally) on past and present social practices, i.e. patterns of inclusion and exclusion, of privileging and institutionalization, of remembering and/or forgetting.

If politics is the domain in which power is publicly exercised to form and enforce authoritative distributive decisions, discursive practices are political. For Foucault, for instance, the important instances of differentiation and therefore of closure and exclusion are not the purely constitutive grammatical rules of usage. They are rather to be found in the historically particular authoritative decisions used to distinguish between truth and falsehood, sense and nonsense, madness and normality which constitute the space of modernity. Further, they are to be found in the discursive regimes imposed by particular disciplines and professions. Each discursive domain is historically constituted by the broader distinctions of modernity, and by the individual instances of closure and prohibition on which this domain's uniqueness is predicated. Science does not stand opposed to doctrine, but is itself doctrinal. Moreover, the very existence of a scientific discipline is made possible only by the doctrinal closure of what may legitimately be said in that discipline (Foucault 1984). Authoritative, enforceable rules, hence violence and power, are constitutive for, and not external constraints on, particular language regions or domains. While it may be possible to distinguish between language regions, as Pitkin does *à la* Wittgenstein with reference to the regions of morality, politics, and science, every region is fundamentally constituted by the exercise of power; power not of

individual agents, but power – simultaneously limiting and enabling – institutionalized in the regime of a particular discourse.

This image of language as discourse on each score neutralizes Pitkin's attempt to undermine the analogy between language and politics. By means of both his archaeological and genealogical methods, Foucault's account of discursive changes and revolutions highlights the violence of power in these changes. Pitkin's obsession with 'ordinary language' allows her to appreciate the linguistic nature of political change, but prevents her from grasping the political nature of discourse innovation. Furthermore, she assumes that the norms of language-use are predominantly internal linguistic rules, and that linguistic membership is accordingly a question of internalizing established rules of usage. Enforcing linguistic rules excludes the use of public power. Foucault and others allow us to appreciate that discourse is not only constituted by self-regulating linguistic rules, but is based on institutionalized, and therefore publicly enforced, discursive rules. These rules are indeed internalized, but not as freely and inconsequentially as Pitkin believes. Partaking in a discourse means that one is constantly under the public sanction of power-full strictures. In addition, Foucault's unearthing of the origins and bloodlines of discourses suggests that the very reference point of our discussion about the obligations faced by the speaker and his/her choice and will is itself the predicate of a discourse. Indeed, the speaking self, our traditional speaking subject in the terms used by Hobbes and Pitkin and their model of free, obliging man, is itself a creation of a discourse which is hardly two hundred years old. The postulating of the individual as subject and as final reference point is a creation of modern disciplinary society, claims Foucault. Thus: '(t)o seek to dismantle the modern subject, along with its shadow which grows longer the more it is perfected, is to oppose the hegemony of disciplinary society. Anything else plays into its hands' (Connolly 1984:160).

There should be little doubt that this politicized, discourse-oriented image of language has had a considerable, and mostly beneficial, impact on the field of political studies. One should be careful not to sanitize the insights of Foucault and the intertextual movement by incorporating and thus taming them within the confines of an established discipline. That would be to counter the critical spirit which informs Foucault's work. Yet, at the same time, it would be foolish not to acknowledge that it has led to an exciting expansion of the focus of political analysis to include the politics of language (Connolly 1983; Shapiro 1981). As suggested earlier, the concept of discourse and its cognates have also proved to be useful in countering anachronistic thinking about the metatheoretical claims of political

studies. This is not the place to go into these salutary effects, but it is noteworthy that even that last vestige of metatheoretical ignorance, International Relations, has not been left unaffected by the self-critical implications of discourse analysis.[2] Shapiro nicely sums up some of these implications when he writes:

> Given that our understanding of conflict, war, or, more generally, the space within which international politics is deployed is always mediated by modes of representation and thus by all the various mechanisms involved in text construction – grammars, rhetorics, and narrativity – we must operate with a view of politics that is sensitive to textuality. While much of political thinking is exhausted by concern with the distribution of things thought to be meaningful and valuable, our attention is drawn to another aspect of political processes, that aspect in which the boundaries for constituting meaning and value are constructed. (Shapiro 1989:12)

Broadening our notion of what falls within the purview of politics always contains the risk that the concept of politics itself may be stretched to unacceptable limits. On the furthest point of such conceptual stretching lies the dilemma of non-vacuous contrast, i.e. a position where the referential domain of the concept is so wide that nothing falls outside it, and the concept can thus not be intelligibly distinguished and defined.

It is not clear whether this is indeed the position entailed by at least some representatives of discourse analysis. This verdict will, to an extent, depend on clarity being reached on what are the social practices which are said to constitute discourse. Even more crucial is the question of what counts as discourse and what does not. It is not always clear whether the proponents of discourse analysis regard all language as discourse, or whether the term is reserved for instances of special modes and ways of speaking about defined areas associated with certain institutions or disciplines (cf. Du Toit 1990:197). This is a matter of concern for the theme of this paper. If all language is discourse, and hence is to be explored (at least partly) by means of the concepts of political analysis, we clearly have a stronger form of the analogy than when it is argued that certain institutionalized domains of language-use lend themselves to an analysis in terms of concepts of power, public coercion, and collective behaviour. What is being claimed in the latter is somewhat tautological: institutions, disciplines, and professions are political by definition, and it is hardly surprising that their discourses will be too. (Of course, discourse analysts suggest some interesting and novel ways to explore the politics of their discourses). Whatever the case may be, there is a tendency, reflected especially in the work of some textualists, to opt

for the stronger of the two claims, namely that all language, *qua* texts, is based on exclusions and privileges, power and coercion. Matters become even more confusing when it comes to the issue of intertextuality where the distinction between text and non-text is deliberately collapsed. As I claimed above, the recent trends seem to push the analogy between language and politics to uncharted limits. That in itself is not necessarily to be regretted. In a time when politics abounds, but 'the political' is under constant threat of sublimation (Wollin), a radical reconsideration of the scope and nature of what counts as political is surely in order. Such an endeavour, I will venture to state but not defend now, will only succeed if we can distinguish between politics and non-politics, between political discourse and other domains of language-use.

Pitkin's claim that language is largely devoid of power and public coercion and that the analogy between language and politics breaks down because of this difference no longer seems tenable after Foucault. Indeed, as Foucault successfully illustrates, discourse will not be possible without power and the violence it entails. Yet, this does not imply that we have to collapse Pitkin's distinction in full. If we are serious about a concept of the political/politics which will enable us not only to distinguish intellectually, but also to engage in political struggle, the undifferentiated and almost sanitized notion of power as proposed by Foucault needs our attention. It is ironical that Foucault's analysis of how discourse domesticates, co-opts, and sanitizes words in its power plays behind the backs of speakers, can be applied to his own use of the word 'power'. Because power is discursively presented as ubiquitous, as impersonal, as universally institutionalized, and as pre-reflective, power emerges as an always present, neutered companion and guard: power is a eunuch. I am not claiming that Foucault does not distinguish between various forms of power, or that he has an undifferentiated conception of its uses. Rather, it is because of the tendency to universalize the notion of discourse and its political analogy, that his concept of power is 'curiously passive and sterile', as Said comments (Said 1978:710).

Dominant discourses are powerful not only because their discursive strategies make them so. Very often the exercise of publicly endorsed political or economic power by an individual, a group, and/or a class determines the outcomes of discursive contests. It is for the ability to compel others to do what they otherwise would not have done that power is sought after, maintained, and exercised in public life. The processes through which these power plays proceed, and whereby they are managed in order for the collective to go on living as a collective, constitute the distinguishing features of *the political* – features that cannot be accounted for by an agentless concept of

ubiquitous power.[3] Because there are differentiated spaces wherein it matters who has power and who does not, political struggle becomes possible and is irreducible.

What I have been claiming about the distinctiveness of political power is well illustrated by the feminist movement. As Shapiro rightly argues, the success of this movement ultimately depended on its ability to get people to use the concept 'woman' and its cognates differently.

> Innovative political action, which has a constitutive effect on political life, consists in linguistic action. A more powerful political membership for women is evolving as 'woman' begins to mean something other than it has traditionally. This altered meaning results from locating woman in different discursive practices and/or altering the discursive practices in which they now reside. (Shapiro 1981:233)

It is indeed the greatest achievement of Foucault and his followers, of whom Shapiro has surely done the most to translate Foucault for students of politics, that the inescapable linguistic and power-full constitution of political life has been highlighted. Yet, Shapiro misses exactly that point concerning which I argue that Foucault also has a discursive blind-spot. The success of the feminist movement can indeed be measured in terms of changed discursive practices. Yet this success cannot be accounted for by means of reference to a changed power configuration within the realm of discourse alone. Feminists succeeded because they refused to accept their powerless position, and embarked on a whole series of political struggles to gain the power to change discursive practices. The power needed to change discourse is not only different discursive power, but is also differently located. A conception of power that does not clearly distinguish political power from discursive power is of little use in a search for the appropriate sites of struggle where the attainment of power can make the difference we want it to make.

NOTES

1. See Gadamer (1976:59–68) for a treatment of Aristotle's identification of *logos*, i.e. the ability to use language intelligibly, as that which constitutes man as a rational/political being.
2. See the collection of papers edited by Der Derian and Shapiro under the title *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (1989). It is also worth noting that the flagship of the International Studies Association, the journal *International Studies Quarterly*, has devoted a whole issue recently to the alternative, once excluded voices in the discipline, including intertextualists and discourse analysts.

3. See Connolly (1983) for a treatment of the concept of power which reveals the inseparability of 'political power' and 'agency'.

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Eternity and Modernity

Bakhtin and the Epistemological Sublime

Graham Pechey

> There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of *great time*. [1]

The last thoughts written down by Mikhail Bakhtin before his death turn not on the meaning of life but rather on the life of meaning. The gesture is characteristic: the 'meaning of life' could not be other than a monological 'transcription' and generalization of that forcefield of the singular and situated which (for him) is life as it is lived and endlessly becomes. The whole internally open-ended work of his life is brought to an external end with the words 'great time', by which he signifies the immortality of all meanings, the endless circulation and return of semantic energies, the interaction of live contexts in infinite dialogue across hundreds and even thousands of years. 'Great time' is a concept that should speak quite directly to us as we move towards the end of our catastrophic century in a world where supposedly forgotten themes and narratives are being revived or newly inflected, not just by single writers in theory but by whole collectivities in practice.

I

'Every meaning will have its homecoming festival', Bakhtin writes, using a trope which is deliberately archaic and anthropomorphic, not only propelling the idea of an ancient ceremony of welcome into the (open) future but also flaunting its form as a little personification allegory. To see anthropomorphism as a disease of thought is to close oneself to the challenge of a kind of thinking that 'hear[s] voices'

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(Bakhtin 1986:169) everywhere and discerns the lineaments of a potential hero in even the most depersonalized and detemporalized discourse. The story of meaning is, like much of Bakhtin's own story, a tale of exile which is often the richer in outcome for the length of its duration. Time in properly human terms is nothing other than the dimension in which meaning opens out. Just as the word in Bakhtin is defined as that which strives always to be heard, which posits implicitly a forever absent ideal or optimal listener, so meanings tendentially seek out the means of their return. A meaning is at home wherever it comes up against a context that will re-open the context(s) it has preserved through time, in a Gadamerian 'fusion of horizons'.[2] By explicitly casting meaning itself in the role of hero, by bringing to life what is otherwise suspended or suppressed, Bakhtin exemplifies in a sort of instant discursive miniature the very realization of potential that he is describing and celebrating.

There had been other candidates for immortality earlier in Bakhtin's work: in the Dostoevsky book it is *personality*; in the Rabelais book it is *the people*: immortalities respectively of the spirit and the flesh. The immortality contemplated by the dying Bakhtin is more encompassing, more of the ground of our humanity, than either of these. It is not incompatible with a strong emphasis upon historicity, though it is at odds with any tendency towards a radical relativism. As an eternity of potential, it has nothing in common with that eternity of closure by means of which Bakhtin apophatically thinks the sense of 'historical time' that is for him the great defining discovery of modernity. In this 'naïve' eternity of epic the first words and deeds are also the last words and deeds, and the past is the highest value. This 'absolute past'[3] is precisely extra-temporal in so far as those in it cannot imagine that their epoch was ever someone else's future or that it will ever be someone else's past. In their primal temporal introversion they show no foresight that the likes of us will ever follow them further down the line of time. Bakhtin imagines the eternity of mediaeval Christianity as similarly closed, as a vertical axis of everlasting synchrony from which the horizontal of history at length detaches itself. The exemplary site of this move (for him as for Erich Auerbach)[4] is *The Divine Comedy*, while the eighteenth-century move that decisively launches history as a category of thought bears the proper name of Goethe.

Now these classical and feudal orders of extra-temporality serve Bakhtin mainly in the middle of his career as antitypes of the novel's self-conscious chron(otop)icity. Great time must not, I think, be seen as flatly contradicting his valorization of the novel's orientation towards the present of 'unresolved contemporaneity'[5] – its sensitivity to languages of 'the day'[6] – or as marking a turn to 'poetry' with

its stately, epochal temporality. This eternity of semantic potential should instead be seen as fashioning for the novel a friendly dialogizing other rather than a purely heuristic opposite, thereby averting the dangers of a fall into 'small time' that might ensue for any hermeneutic that makes a dogma out of the socio-historical relativity and novelty of cultural meanings. It's one thing to use the novel as a battering ram to bring down the bastions of poetics, or indeed to use the still more extreme idiom of carnival against all law or authority whatever; it's quite another thing to build a new hermeneutic on that highly polemical base. With great time Bakhtin seeks to reduce the threat of a radical forgetting posed by both of these powerfully deconstructive categories. His early concept of 'outsideness' in 'aesthetic activity'[7] is now refunctioned in the direction of diachrony and of the reception (rather than production) of cultural texts.

The problem with carnival is that it is one of those hyperbolic concepts that can always go over into their opposites. Starting as a will to freedom, this paradoxical rule of non-identity contains the threat of becoming a finalized unfinalizability, a category without an outside, enshrining 'jolly relativity' as a metaphysical absolute. As an eternal corrective to this possibility, Bakhtin revives and rethinks for other purposes what I will call his *positional* absolute. This category is the wild card among categories in that it requires that we think of uniqueness as multiple, of a non-commutable situatedness as infinitely repeated across the whole of (human: the qualifier is redundant) reality. No one situatedness can be known except from the standpoint of another such situatedness. Applied to history, it means that we neither reduce a work of the past to its conditions nor read it as if it were a product of our time, but always read its uniqueness from our own; that we avoid the abstract objectivity achieved by forever putting ourselves out of the picture and instead think of the work as precisely needing us for the realization of its semantic potential. Besides the (mutually dialogizing) chronotopes within the work, and as the condition of their having their effect, there is this chronotope of the reader 'outside' the work. Reading is the meeting of these chronotopes, by means of which the work is freed from the 'captivity'[8] of time.

This redemptive hermeneutic of utopian surplus offered by Bakhtin in his last writings is no different in kind from the aesthetic activity conceptualized in his earliest writings. Works and/or their (internal) authors are now themselves the heroes; readers are the authors that these text-characters everywhere posit and search out. Thanks to this readerly authoring, the 'text' becomes the 'work', internalizing – activating within itself – the unforeseen and unforeseeable context(s) in which it finds itself. Or rather: the 'text' is an analytic

abstraction from the work, which is always the text-and/in-a-context, the context-and/in-a text. The hermeneutic of the late Bakhtin is this 'consummating' activity made reflexive, taken as it were to the second power. Qualifying the strong mid-career emphasis upon histor(icit)y is the perspective of a newly-reaffirmed philosophical anthropology, a deeply committed phenomenology of the ways we live our humanness at once in and beyond history. Before we live in those purely conceptual objectivities called 'society' or 'history' we live absolutely in meaning; the infinity and eternity of meaning is both the outcome and the making-good of our own finitude. Meaning is always everywhere because we as individuals can never be, because we end both spatially and temporally where and when our bodies end.

II

It should be clear by now that the turn taken by the late Bakhtin is from the grotesque-in-history to the sublime-in-theory, and from an avant-gardist agency rooted in the people to one that now devolves upon the practitioner of hermeneutics within the 'human sciences'. In his last essays and notebooks Bakhtin revives the Diltheyan distinction between *Verstehen* and *Erklären* in the new situation presented by the mid-twentieth century, when the 'sciences of the spirit' were adopting or had widely adopted the paradigm of language and were no longer in the thrall of the methodology of the natural sciences. The peril faced by these disciplines making up the dominant or emergent field of structuralism in the period after the Second World War was not the lapse into causal explanation: they were founded precisely upon a programmatic rejection of any concern with genesis, any genetic approach to cultural texts. The systemic options of which texts were made up were internal determinants; its realized virtualities were its composite 'inner' or immanent cause. Bakhtin must at this moment have felt alienated by both official and academic discourses on culture in the Soviet Union: on the one hand, there was 'Marxist' ideology-critique enshrining a species of vulgar causal explanation rooted in 'class' – in the empirical author's given or chosen place in the social division of labour – and backed always by the violence of repression; on the other, there was the structuralism of the Tartu school which, like its Western counterpart (though less polemically), abolished any causality other than structural causality. The scientificity of both discourses about culture would have amounted for Bakhtin to little more than rival scientistic ideologies, theoretical monologisms of the

same order. The 'linguistic turn' of twentieth-century thought might have promised the instalment of a more appropriate paradigm for the human sciences, if the conception of language invoked by these disciplines had been different. Dilthey's work had been done before that 'turn' took place – before language became the model of all social objectivation and interaction.[9] Bakhtin is writing at a time when that paradigm-shift had been only too successful, in the age of the growing hegemony of what he calls 'the potential single language of languages' (Bakhtin 1986:107). The successful 'revolt against positivism'[10] in the name of those strong claims made for the language-paradigm by so many disparate currents of contemporary thought had resulted in the triumph of yet another objectivism.

That paradigm stood in need of correction. The ontological-hermeneutic turn of the late Bakhtin is also in some sense a turn towards the dimension (and problem) of *time*. Why did this happen? Well, the metaphors of both structuralism and of his own popular-carnivalesque deconstruction are predominantly spatial metaphors; space, it would seem, is the privileged dimension of any body of thinking which (like structuralism, notoriously) foregrounds synchrony at the cost of diachrony. In the last writings it is omnitemporality and 'depth of meaning' – he is very careful to say 'not height or breadth' (Bakhtin 1986:127) – that preoccupies Bakhtin before all else. And so the Bakhtinian *Dasein* enters the last of its incarnations as 'great time', the plane in which all meaning lives and grows. To be is to understand: understanding is the activity called forth both by texts proper and by those potential texts-to-be called human acts. Texts are events and not those quasi-spatial entities: 'systems' or 'structures'. The text is at once that which is nothing if not understood and yet also that which can never be 'completely translated', in the sense of being subordinated to a 'common logic' (Bakhtin 1986:106). Complete translation would effect a logical reduction of the text, its derealization as a text-event, the resolution of all of its elements into a potential metalanguage and their rerealization in another text. Structuralism is the paranoiac ideal of 'complete' translation inasmuch as it takes the text as far as possible towards the extreme pole of language-as-sign-system – the highest hierarchical level of removal from its radical 'eventness' or historicity. Both 'poles', according to Bakhtin, are 'unconditional': there is the logical absolute of the ultimate metalanguage, and there is the ontological absolute of the 'unique and unrepeatable text' (Bakhtin 1986:107). All knowledge begins with such singularities; what is distinctive about hermeneutic understanding is simply that it strives to theorize such singularity and thus to remain within and faithful to that realm of the unique for which 'the text' is so potent a figure. All understanding – even *Erklären* if only it

knew itself – is dialogical 'to some degree' (Bakhtin 1986:111). Even the comprehension of a foreign language that proceeds by rote-learning of its rules partakes of the dialogical: between it and the comprehension of a text in a known language there is no absolute boundary. Bakhtin is always at pains to stress the epistemological and methodological 'impurity' of both the human and the natural sciences: the former mix hermeneutics with a certain (of course subordinate) use of causal explanation; while the latter deceive themselves twice over – firstly, if they believe they do not begin with singular phenomena, and secondly, if they fail to see that their own moves are as much rhetorical as logical. Causal explanation is after all itself a genre of utterance; rhetorically and dialogically speaking it is equivalent to a 'refutation' (Bakhtin 1986:123); internally and in terms of content monological, it is none the less externally and formally caught up in the dialogue that constitutes its disciplinary field.

One way of summing all this up is to say that 'the text' rather than 'language' is Bakhtin's paradigm; that we cannot understand deeds except as (possible) texts; that the deed and the text are figures for each other – the potential verbal elaboration of the first being only the other side of the potentially performative, active character of the second. Bakhtin associates this latter characteristic with premodern speech and writing, above all with 'ancient inscriptions' (Bakhtin 1986:115). Hermeneutic understanding is for him not so much a response to the 'misunderstanding' that comes about as the print culture of modernity dissolves the face-to-face speaking and teaching of the past; it is rather a late-modern means of bringing to consciousness the effects of that 'entire about-face in the history of the word when it becomes expression and pure (actionless) information' (Bakhtin 1986:115). Hermeneutics conducts a rearguard action against the modern reification of meaning in the methodological discourses of the humanities. It is this collusion of causal-explanatory methodologies with the neutralized word that is the antagonist in these last essays – not the traditional genres or 'feudal ideology', as had been the case in his earlier work. The antagonism is in any case deeply modified by an insistence on the necessary hybridity of *all* methodologies; so perhaps we should say that the work of this phase abolishes the role of the polemical adversary to which so much of the force of the early and middle writing is to be attributed.

We are not surprised then to find that dialogism is now carefully dissociated from those antagonistic modes – such as parody and polemic – with which it had before been all but identified. In place of the almost routine emphasis upon contradiction we have the notion of a deep consensus no less dialogical than its opposite; indeed the

infinite shadings of 'agreement' are lauded as the least 'crude' and 'externally most obvious' (Bakhtin 1986:121) of dialogical phenomena. Submission to authority conceived as dialogical concurrence with the 'authoritative word' takes the place of – without of course contradicting or invalidating – those earlier denunciations of an authoritarian monologism. Bakhtin at his most Gadamerian speaks of 'the mandatory nature of deep meaning' (Bakhtin 1986:121). Like Paul Ricoeur, he seems to be suggesting that a conflictual intersubjectivity, exploitable for its possibilities of freedom or critique, emerges only against the ground of a profoundly consensual intersubjectivity experienced as fate. With the categories of the novel and carnival what was foregrounded was wilful non-communication, the deliberate misunderstanding of orthodoxy, authority, spirituality, tradition. Dialogism now becomes the key category of a communicative rationality that does not so much oppose the instrumental reason of our time as benevolently assert its own more fundamental and prior (in the Kantian sense, transcendental) status. Not only the carnivalesque force of undermining and forgetting, not only laughter and parody, but also the positive work of understanding finds its place in what Hans-Georg Gadamer would call 'the dialogue [Gespräch] "we are"'.[11] Where before the almost exclusive emphasis in Bakhtin was on the present of 'unresolved contemporaneity' militantly pitted against an oppressive past, we now find him invoking the nexus of past and future as the real ground of a present threatened with the reification that ensues when heuristic methodological moves are allowed to develop ontological pretensions – in short, when 'method' comes to believe that it is 'truth'.

When Bakhtin writes of the 'layering of meaning upon meaning, voice upon voice' or of 'departure beyond the limits of the understood' (Bakhtin 1986:121), he seems in these sublime evocations of the bottomless depth of the word to be seeking not (to be sure) some metaphysical ground but nonetheless some profound and underlying dialogical rationality in which both the living and the long-dead and the yet-to-be-born all take part. Beyond the exceptional moment of carnival or the programmatic novelty of the novel there is this substratum of our *Dasein* as beings whose being it is to understand. The Bakhtin who had sought to intervene in the crisis of late European modernity by projecting the avant-garde back into the past – reminding the modern project of its repressed insurgency – now intervenes precisely by refusing to isolate exemplary moments or instances from the historical record. Without quite deserting that project, he no longer sees it as centrally involving the critical overcoming of tradition; instead we are offered a distinctively postmodern perspective in which tradition conceived as the infinite

chain of voices past and to come (that long temporal distance which Bakhtin regularly correlates with depth of meaning) is the only basis not simply of our freedom but of all value as such, and without which even critique itself would be meaningless. Our freedom lies in grasping our conditions of possibility rather than in any story of perfection or revolution in this world. Bakhtin decisively joins those other philosophers of our century who have broken with the nineteenth-century post-Kantian philosophy of history by (re)instating a philosophical anthropology.

'The Problem of the Text' ends (more or less) with Bakhtin's new concept of the 'third', or 'superaddressee'. Just as 'those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it . . . have their rights' (Bakhtin 1986:121), so we always posit in our speaking and writing this 'third' by whom we will be heard and absolutely understood. This Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' is not conceived in Bakhtin as realized or realizable sometime or somewhere, but rather as always implied in every speech situation whatever and wherever: an 'as if' of every interaction, every bit as ineluctable as it is indispensable. Bakhtin is now more concerned to stress this transcendental instance of 'absolutely just and responsive understanding' than to stress the empirical failures of communication. Our being consists not in our presence on hand but in our ability to recollect and anticipate acts of understanding – to hear and be heard in our turn. The working of the superaddressee can perhaps best be illustrated by Bakhtin's remarks on two special speech situations: the 'dialogue of the dead' and the 'dialogue of the deaf'. These are (respectively) the dialogue of those who are not present to each other in life but nonetheless come to hear each other in the afterlife; and the dialogue of those who cannot hear each other at all though they are present to each other and both alive. The first of these – 'the imagined situation of a meeting in the hereafter' (Bakhtin 1986:124–125) – almost or actually dispenses with the 'third'; in the second, the 'third' is the condition of even the most elementary understanding taking place. All non-pathological exchanges in this world lie somewhere between these two extremes, presupposing as they do a third party 'in some metaphysical distance or distant historical time' (Bakhtin 1986:126) who will absolutely understand the 'whole self' of the author. 'The author', Bakhtin holds, 'can never turn over his whole self and his speech work to the complete and *final* will of those who are on hand or nearby' (Bakhtin 1986:126). If Bakhtin does not wholly play down the near and the contemporary in these essays, he nonetheless redresses an inadequate emphasis upon distance and depth, and upon the hearing no less than the speaking subject – more especially the subject who hears the echoes of voices coming, temporally and

culturally speaking, from afar. Speakers, it is now acknowledged, are also listeners (always already listeners); and we are reminded of Jean-François Lyotard on the theme of justice when Bakhtin writes of the 'rights' of all voices to be heard and identified as equal to the 'rights' of the speaker.[12] Before we speak, we listen, and after speaking we listen again, and so on endlessly.

III

Those who might think that the postmodern Bakhtin offered here forsakes the modern project altogether need look no further than the opening pages of the 'Notes made in 1971' to be disabused; for there we find a ringing celebration of irony as a feature of all European languages since the onset of modernity. Nevertheless there are two points on which this Bakhtin differs from the outright modernist of the middle period. In the Rabelais book irony is a form of sadly 'reduced' or 'muted' laughter; here we notice that what had been a phenomenon of the decline of the carnivalesque in European history now becomes a great historical gain in itself, and more than that: an aspect not only of certain genres and styles but of whole languages and the cultures they carry in suspension. This quintessentially modern discourse of irony – the 'equivocal language of modern times' – is everywhere we read or listen; our modern speech without fixed occasions is also a speech that is always 'with reservations' (Bakhtin 1986:132). Even liberated carnival speech had its specific occasions; the modern language of irony is not denounced for its faint echo of the belly laugh but rather celebrated for its ubiquity, its everydayness, its universal opening-up of our freedom. We breathe a linguistic atmosphere that has already been freed for us; we are at home in a language of emancipation. Bakhtin clearly subscribes to a view of language which sees it as subject not just to neutral or arbitrary change but as being in some sense tendentially 'progressive', fraught with implicit value and pre-understanding. Neutral only in so far as they are systems of signs, the European languages have 'precipitated' within their very 'syntactic and lexico-semantic structure[s]' (Bakhtin 1986:133) a story of freedom from authority. Irony has historically helped to rid us of the authoritarian word – not to be confused with the authoritative word, which carries authority only in so far as it is 'internally persuasive' (to use a phrase from 'Discourse in the Novel'). Bakhtin effectively deconstructs the modern opposition between reason and authority, at once internalizing and moving beyond the Romantic critique of the Enlightenment, along with Gadamer and other twentieth-century

hermeneutic thinkers. The second point to be made about this case for the emancipatory force of ironic discourse is that to have broken with this modernist narrative of linguistic freedom – to have 'overcome' it critically or dialectically – would only be to rehearse a typically modernist reflex. The argument for a late postmodern Bakhtin is precisely strengthened by the evidence he here gives of the will to *include* the phases both of his own earlier thought and of earlier European history. Juxtaposing them in this way gives a certain dialogical character to the very form of his meditations – refuses the language of sublation, transformation, supersession. Irony and the authoritative word coexist as peacefully in the postmodern condition as in Bakhtin's reflections upon them.

It is then not surprising that these reflections are followed straight away by a brief consideration of *silence*. Raising language to ontological status as Bakhtin does here, seems almost inescapably to entail imaging its absence. As creatures whose being is language, it behoves us to think through the meaning of the empirical absence of speech. If my transcendental and situational at-homeness in language is not incompatible with the contingent stopping of speech, that is because silence is not simply the lack or failure of speech but is rather what can positively begin when speaking stops. Silence is not the negation of language but its greatest and most wholly human potential: my being (in a Heideggerian phrase) is a being-towards-silence. Silence makes us aware that what founds our humanity is not a ground: it is the ever-shifting boundary between speech and its cessation. Our at-homeness in language is not to be conceived empirically. In contrasting (what the translator renders as) 'quietude' and silence Bakhtin invokes and adapts the Diltheyan opposition between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. Quietude can be (causally) explained; silence, being not a condition but an experience, can only be (hermeneutically) understood. In the case of quietude there is nothing that can be heard by anybody who might be listening; we have a mere physical absence of sound in which no listener need be presupposed. In the case of silence I do not hear the voice of another. The listening subject must needs be reckoned into the equation. The elaborating sub-text of quietude is a sentence in the passive voice; the sub-text of silence is a sentence in the active voice. In these thoughts on silence Bakhtin reinflects Diltheyan terms in the context not of consciousness (which is where Dilthey himself was) but of the paradigm of language. The intersubjectivity in which our being consists is language conceived as a chain of speech whose constitutive outside is silence. Language and silence are not so much opposites as forms of – potentials within – each other. Or again: language when it passes into silence is only turned inside-out and as such retains its human shape

and constitution. The 'logosphere' which is our home is the endless and forever open-ended alternation and interpenetration of silence and 'intelligible sound' (Bakhtin 1986:134).

What does Bakhtin mean by describing irony as a 'form of silence' (Bakhtin 1986:134)? I can only think he means that a culture of the serious and single tone fixes subjects in positions, cannot imagine an other than itself, must always be proclaiming itself. Irony is a mode of speaking-by-implication whose extreme instance and perhaps most powerful manifestation is saying everything by saying nothing in the empirical sense of speaking audibly for another to hear: in short, speech with such radical 'reservations' that it reserves its right not to manifest itself at all. Silence is then the ultimate 'loophole'; speech with reservations so absolute that it reserves itself altogether; the ultimate measure of one who wants to ensure that the last word is never spoken. Bakhtin is suggesting that there may be situations in which to refuse a culture of the last word I must refrain from speaking at all and all articulation must be renounced. Silence is, after all, *all* implication: it is nothing more or less than the absolute rule of implication, and therefore demands that acutest variety of hearing (listening for intelligibility) called understanding. Just because it doesn't activate physiological hearing it brings the deep-semantic or spiritual hearing of understanding into full working and self-awareness. Irony is a form of silence because silence is the transcendental irony of language itself, the world of pure implication that is in constant constitutive tension with its own dense intersubjectivity.

Nowhere is Bakhtin's refusal of the metanarratives of any (Hegelian or Marxist) philosophy of history clearer – nowhere is his alternative of philosophical anthropology better spelt out – than in his story of 'the witness and the judge' (Bakhtin 1986:137). This character (they are not two but one) is not in any sense modern like 'the writer' but hails from the very dawn of consciousness itself. With the appearance anywhere upon the global scene of the witness and the judge, the whole event of Being changes utterly. This is emphatically not the story of being as a higher subject coming to consciousness in Man: like Jürgen Habermas, Bakhtin rejects that solution to modernity's problem of self-grounding which gives primacy to the 'higher' subjectivity of Absolute Spirit, the solitary subject-object of both Nature and History.[13] The whole of Being alters with its very first and most narrowly local acknowledgement, inasmuch as everything else then becomes the unacknowledged. Being is not presence or presence-to-itself; it is that which is forever passing over the border from the uncognized to the cognized. The 'supra-existence' or being-to-the-second-power that is consciousness makes an absolutely

new event of being. The tacit polemic with Marxism comes out most evidently in Bakhtin's claim that the 'absolute freedom' of the 'supra-I' is its 'creativity' and that this contrasts with our merely 'relative freedom' to change existence materially (Bakhtin 1986: 137). Its creative knowing is not and can never be a 'material force' – and not because it is weak but because it has the real (the truly human) power of changing the whole sense of things. Which is to say: the most radical revolution of all is semantic, and it has always already happened. The other side of the misunderstanding of the work of meaning in our constitution is the modern fetishization of material force, the false worship of our very much less than absolute freedom to change existence in itself. For Bakhtin as for Habermas, both historical materialism and Hegelian idealism solve modernity's problem of self-grounding only too well.

Bakhtin returns in the notes of 1971 to the issue of epistemological 'impurity', and – in a move that is of a piece with the general leavening of antagonism by consensus in these late writings – insists that reified 'relations among objects' and personified 'relations among subjects' form a continuum of mutual transformation rather than a sharp polarity. We are better able to understand and exercise our 'real freedom' if we realize the 'transitions and combinations' of these relations and actually practise or encounter 'death-dealing analysis' (Bakhtin 1986:138–139). In other words, the methodological hybridity of our thinking has a positive and even emancipatory ethico-political charge within the conditions of our late modernity. The *Geisteswissenschaften* constitute an area in which it is 'hardly possible to think about necessity'; but the self-consciousness of this realm of freedom – of '*possibilities* and the *realization* of one of them' (Bakhtin 1986:139) – only comes about thanks to a constant thinking and making of the difference between this realm and that other (nomothetic) world of causal determination and necessity. The late-modern sciences of the spirit can only become the active custodians of our freedom if they free themselves from the Eurocentric 'miniature world' of the nineteenth century and boldly claim for themselves that whole world of texts (and potential texts, or acts) which is 'as boundless as the universe' and 'as bottomless as the depths of matter' (Bakhtin 1986:140). The epistemological sublime that has been usurped by the sciences of matter and nature must be (re)claimed by the knowledge that takes as its field the infinite depths of meaning. Bakhtin would seem to be calling for the humanities to modernize themselves, though not in the direction of letting the natural sciences impose their model of objectivity. The humanities must catch up with the latter, achieve an equality with them not by resorting to similiar methods but by keeping the difference from each

other forever in view, and by claiming for their own special (semantic) dimension the depth and scope of the physical world opened up by the natural sciences. Now this is a paradoxical modernization inasmuch as it commits Bakhtin to a deeper and deeper archaization of thought, a further and further reaching-back to the premodern, a listening to and for the oldest voices, and a reconstruction of the universal conditions of the possibility of our understanding and being-in-the-world. Modernity having brought in its train the mixed legacy of irony and reification, it is no answer simply to revalorize myth over reason: cultures of myth are legitimately and happily closed, deaf to what is outside their bounds; for modern cultures to try to re-invent myth is (as Lyotard has argued) to produce the monster of a monopolistic narrative with global pretensions, a particularism that becomes terroristic because it thinks universally.[14] Fascism is of course the major empirical instance of this sociopolitical teratology. The problem for radical critics of modernity like Bakhtin is then to redescribe the personalistic universe of myth so that it poses no such threat and its naïvety does not become the basis for an oppressive totalization. In a move that recalls Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the myth of reason is to be dissolved by unfolding the reason of myth. The interest of emancipation is to be served by bringing communicative and instrumental orders of rationality into dialogue with each other. For this to happen the human sciences must somewhat distance themselves from the avant-gardist ethos that proclaims the shock of the new; instead it is their task to confront a self-satisfied modernity with the revelation of the old and the not-yet-born, the past in the yet-to-be and the yet-to-be in the past. The hermeneutics that Bakhtin proposes as the appropriate methodology of the human sciences is assured of being a critical hermeneutics in so far as its deep-semantic knowledge of time is in constant dialogue with the other knowledges of our epoch: that is to say, in so far as it is the complex and inwardly distantiated self-consciousness of a heterogeneous spectrum of (non-violently) coexisting rationalities.

'To understand a given text as the author himself understood it. But our understanding can and should be better' (Bakhtin 1986:141). Bakhtin in these words appears to be half-quoting the best-known dictum of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the founder of modern hermeneutics. But then we find him immediately rethinking this maxim in a way that signals his break with this Romantic paradigm and with the whole method that sought to understand understanding as the marriage of empathy and paraphrase, 'divination' and 'translation'. Re-activating his early work on self-other relations, he reconceives understanding (along lines uncannily close to those of Gadamer and

Ricoeur) not as the 'loss' of one's unique position in absolute identification with the other but precisely as the full use of one's 'outsideness', one's spatial and/or temporal and/or cultural exotopy with regard to the other (text). Distance is not to be overcome but rather to be maximally put to use, as the very condition of 'creative understanding'. Understanding is 'co-creation', the multiplication of meaning thanks to outsideness, which – and again we are reminded particularly of Ricoeur – transforms the one who understands. Understanding is quite literally a 'meeting' that places an obligation upon the understanding subject, and the 'highest moment' of such deeply committing understanding is the meeting with 'a great human being' (Bakhtin 1986:142). In understanding recognition and discovery, apprehension of the known and apprehension of the new are inseparably united. The human sciences will work our salvation by bringing to consciousness the 'primary fact[s]' of consciousness itself in a study of the everyday miracle of understanding. Among such 'primary' realities are the 'complex interrelations' between the small world of my own words and the 'immense, boundless world of others' words' (Bakhtin 1986:143) into which I come and which will be there after I am gone: a reality which is not only not conceived but positively obscured by the study of culture which rarefies and effaces the struggle that takes place between these two verbal worlds of the 'mine' and the 'yours' in the construction of 'objectivity'. 'Objectivity' arises on the ruins of the *I* and the *thou*. Abstraction is not the value-free, ethically neutral act of resolving already lifeless particulars into still more ethereal generalities; it is quite specifically 'abstraction from the *I* and the *thou*'; it is 'life as the object of thought' (Bakhtin 1986:143–144). Life cannot become the object of thought without the prior move of turning the intersubjective nexus of first and second persons into the 'position of the third party' (Bakhtin 1986: 143). Bakhtin's point is that abstract thought by definition unfits itself for conceiving that on the destruction or rarefaction of which it has itself been constituted; that it cannot make a theme of that which it implicitly posits itself against in its very form and constitution. Hermeneutic understanding by contrast is the self-consciousness of 'the most vital, experienced life' (Bakhtin 1986:144): the unmerged *I* and *thou* and *he* will be brought to light only by sciences of the spirit which conceive their own method as the unmerged and unmerging interaction of an *I* and a *thou*, of two 'spirits', the person who understands on the one hand and the understood on the other.

What is understood is *meaning*; and Bakhtin at this point proffers a definition of (*a*) meaning in negative terms when he writes: 'anything that does not answer a question is devoid of sense for us' (Bakhtin 1986:145). We might develop this by saying that the meaning of a

text is then to be found on the boundary between the question it answers in its context and the question it in turn asks of me in mine. (A) meaning is the living precipitate of an act of understanding – living in so far as it always demands of me another act of intersubjective understanding. The answer to a question which always asks or provokes another one: *that* is a meaning. In reconstructing the question to which a text is an (not the) answer, I cannot but at the same time frame the question it asks of me and prepare an answer accordingly. This answer may not be articulated – may not be a text but instead those potential texts which are my later deeds. This is what Bakhtin calls 'contextual meaning': meaning that is responsive, universal, omnitemporal. Contextual meaning is 'truly' universal; 'formal definition', the product of 'abstract thought', is universal only as it were in theory, only 'potential meaning' (Bakhtin 1986:145). In abstract thought, context carries a connotation of the particular, the less than universal. The universality of contextual meaning is therefore a case of paradoxical hyperbole from the standpoint of such thinking; even a contradiction in terms. From Bakhtin's point of view it is the claim of abstract thought to be universal that is paradoxical, inasmuch as that order of thought is the product of a particular history and of a determinate mental operation. It is itself the result of an act in a certain historical European context which hubristically elevates its own claim to universality over that of the world of contextual meaning, a world which it at once historically springs from and thematically represses. All of our time and all of our space is filled with contextual meaning. Hermeneutic understanding has privileged access to life as it is intersubjectively lived; it does not seek to supplant abstract thought; by rendering reflexive that meeting of contextual meanings by which we all truly understand, it can tell the story of abstract thought which that thought itself is constitutively unable to tell. Pragmatically, it can help us to put abstract thought in its place: determine where such thinking is appropriate and where not. Before we even begin to think of our world as 'objective' we must remember that we already live in and are occupied by the everlasting agonistics of contextual meaning that is everywhere in our reality.

We have seen how the 'Notes' of 1971 began by giving a new face to irony – positively revaluing it as the ubiquitous modern language of freedom rather than as a sort of etiolated remnant of carnival. Near the end of the same text we find Bakhtin giving a new face to the novel, in a structurally similar move. Thirty years earlier he had presented the novel as the genre of contemporaneity *par excellence*, the modern narrative, defined by its difference from the ancient narrative form of epic wedded to the 'absolute past'. Now the operative opposition is between the polyphonic novel (not mentioned

since 1929) and what we might call the genre of absolute contemporaneity: journalism. This modern counterpart of ancient rhetoric is the genre of now-as-the-time-of-resolution. Like the law – and is Bakhtin also perhaps thinking of politics here? – journalism assigns guilt and innocence absolutely, and its subjects are 'third part[ies]' (Bakhtin 1986:150). It is dominated by a logic of winning and losing and by a kind of dialogue that can be resolved and ended. Bakhtin seems to imply that, unlike true contextual meaning – that greatest of all powers in the world which nevertheless cannot change 'existence itself' – the discourse of journalism is a case of language seeking to approach the condition of an 'empirical force', an instrumentalized language that can be 'translated into action' (Bakhtin 1986:152) almost immediately. Journalism is the sort of (relatively) impoverished meaning that can become a material force; the corollary of its relative weakness as meaning is its relative strength as the discursive accompaniment or impulse to material intervention in reality. This discourse of either-or, of winners and losers, of subjects that are categories of persons rather than 'personalities', 'acting agents' (Bakhtin 1986:152) rather than hero-ideologues, is also (surely) in some sense the discourse of parties – of 'the Party'. However that may be, what is certain is that the polyphonic novel is the form that is at the furthest remove from the discourse of 'small time', with its 'issues that have been resolved within the epoch' (Bakhtin 1986:151). Where before Bakhtin had encoded a modernist stance in offering the novel as the genre of modernity, he now openly proclaims the Dostoevskian prototype of modernist fiction as the genre of omnitemporality. Polyphony opens us to a semantic eternity in so far as it resolves the immediate struggles of all epochs into the forever irresolvable 'dialogue on ultimate questions (in the framework of great time)' (Bakhtin 1986:151). Like the church in Orthodox theology, its heroes speak and act and think 'before heaven and earth' (Bakhtin 1986:152), compelling the intimate and immediate into the ultimate. We can now see the truth of Tzvetan Todorov's observation that in Bakhtin 'Dostoevsky has ceased standing as the object of study' and has 'pass[ed] to the side of the subject'.[15] That is to say, there is an analogy between hermeneutic philosophy and polyphonic poetics: Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky's fiction a model of the infinite reach of understanding outside fiction, in life. As Dostoevsky does with his heroes, so must we go to work with cultural texts and their meanings; we must become readers (in the widest sense) after the fashion in which he was a writer. Dostoevsky's poetics of fiction is trans-rhetorical in exactly the way that the hermeneutics here espoused by Bakhtin is translinguistic: in both cases the discourse is 'beyond' in the sense of 'outside', a metalanguage but without

the (mono)logical implications usually carried by that term. Dostoevsky's (proto)modernist aesthetic is given a postmodern reinflection as the model for a critical knowledge of and in late modernity. His nexus of ultimacy and intimacy offers us a paradigm of a sort of politics of the spirit that Bakhtin wishes to launch into the world as the 'consummating' outside of a politics that resolves issues summarily and in the short term – rather in the way that Justice should ideally both embrace and inform the practice of Law. Ethics for Bakhtin is just such a spiritual politics, a realm of deeply obligating imperatives that can never be assimilated to the realm of state decrees and formal legality that it always and everywhere lovingly-critically shadows.

IV

Bakhtin's last reflections in 'Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences' begin with the word 'Understanding', capitalized, much like a single note or chord struck at the start of a piece of music. Understanding is a complex, composite act whose phases – component acts, as it were – have their 'semantic independence' even as they merge in the whole 'empirical act' itself (Bakhtin 1986:159). These phases are: perception; recognition; understanding 'significance' in the 'given context'; and finally 'inclusion in the dialogical context' (Bakhtin 1986:159). Only the last of these is truly actively evaluative, extending beyond the immediate context to deep-universal meanings in the dimension of great time. Now it is here that we find yet another of those striking revaluations of earlier categories that I have twice remarked upon, and this time the category to be reinflected/rehabilitated (this was after all a moment of many 'rehabilitations' in the then Soviet Union) is the *symbol*. In 'Discourse in the Novel' the symbol had been assimilated to the poetic trope, and it had been construed as the monological correlative of the (dialogized) 'prosaic' symbol.[16] The symbol was then single-voiced in so far as it rested upon a logical relation, was self-identical, and was always adequate to its referential object. Here, by contrast, the symbol becomes the valorized term of a new pair, and its other is now the 'image'. As the word which connotes the world, the symbol is now counterposed to the verbal trope with a limited reference. Indeed 'the image' now seems to be much the same entity as was earlier meant by the (undialogized, unprosaicized) symbol. An image can be made into or understood as a symbol by activating in it the potential infinity of contextual meaning. Correlated with 'worldwide wholeness' and resolving the particular into the primordial, the symbol produces in

me 'an awareness that [I] do not coincide with [my] own individual meaning' (Bakhtin 1986:159). In other words, it is the aesthetic resolution of the ethical 'I-for-myself' into 'I-for-another/another-for-me'. The understanding of the symbol is itself symbolic, an instance of 'somewhat rationalized' symbolicity tending towards – without ever reaching – conceptuality: 'there can be *relative* rationalization of the contextual meaning (ordinary scientific analysis) or a deepening with the help of other meanings . . . through expansion of the remote context' (Bakhtin 1986:160). The symbol is understood only by opening an 'infinity of symbolic contextual meanings'; the image, while it can be submitted to this kind of understanding, does not demand more than the unfolding of 'significance in the given context' (Bakhtin 1986:160). In the symbol we have that which imperatively calls upon us to effect an unfolding of the remotest contexts; the discursive phenomenon which brings all conceptual analysis up against its limits. With the symbol the hermeneutic circle is stretched to its widest reach before the return to the text is made: it is the textual part which invokes the most extensive contextual whole, the most extensive semantic opening-out through time-space.

It does not follow that a word with the temporal reach of the symbolic is an ancient phenomenon, a survival: it is as modern as the polyphonic novel. Bakhtin's periodization of the history of meaning moves from an epoch of 'naïve mythical personification' through the 'epoch of reification of nature and man' – presumably the mid-life of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and on to our own time, which he characterizes as that of 'personification of nature and man', but without loss of reification' (Bakhtin 1986:169). The symbol is a feature of this last phase of late modernity which has seen the rise of philosophies which repersonify 'nature and man' not naïvely but self-consciously, reflexively, in conscious resistance to high-modern reification, taking this stance in some cases all the way to a total critique of reason of the kind that has prompted Habermas to relaunch the project of reason under late-modern conditions. This reflexively personifying thought, which takes as its field the radically interpersonal nature of our being-in-the-world, is Bakhtin's alternative within modernity to the purposive rationality that holds sway over modern life. Its equivalent to the orthodox conceptuality of modern reason is, one presumes, the 'relatively rationalized' (meta)language of symbol: in short, something like the discourse of Bakhtin himself in these late fragments. The universalism of this language is achieved without reification or abstraction, and it is also more encompassing than the universalism of laughter which Bakhtin had championed in his middle period. It is 'not hostile to the mythic, and frequently utilizes its language (transformation into the language of symbols)'

(Bakhtin 1986:169). That is to say, it doesn't share the prejudice of Enlightenment reason against myth; on the contrary, it puts myth to use in a way which is appropriate to a late-modern critique of reason that wishes to avoid the 'self-destruction' of reason described by Adorno and Horkheimer. The symbol along with its quasi-symbolic interpretants is the most potent signifier of a late-modern discourse which is critical of the concept and yet knows it cannot return to the spontaneous personification and ritual performativity of the pre-modern.

It would seem that the sub-textual act of understanding going on in these thoughts on understanding is the effort of the old and dying Bakhtin to understand his own ideas, to make deep sense of his whole career as a thinker and thereby to fashion a philosophy for our postmodernity. For Bakhtin the 'place of philosophy' (Bakhtin 1986:161) is on the boundary between exact science and hermeneutic understanding, as the metalanguage of all knowledges. If then Bakhtin is plainly no 'postmodernist' in the Lyotardian mould – that view of philosophy hardly bespeaks a thinker who doubts the commensurability of language games and is suspicious of all 'meta-' claims – he is certainly in a broad sense postmodern first and last. We might even see his modernist middle period as a digression, an interlude between two phases which reconnect beyond its end, without the last being either a simple or 'dialectical' return to the first. The populist aesthetico-political modernism of the nineteen-thirties and early forties takes its place within the longer temporality of his whole thinking life. Bakhtin now seeks to situate the phases of his thinking in relation to each other and to situate that thinking as a whole in relation to the context(s) of its inception and reception. The remarks he makes on Dilthey and Hegel as *both* of them monological thinkers signal this reflexive self-consciousness that now comes to characterize his thought. Dilthey's post-dialectical move fails to establish a properly dialogical order of thinking: narrowly psychological and epistemological, Dilthey's hermeneutic is predicated upon a philosophy of consciousness which eschews Absolute Spirit only to install an equally single-voiced *Einfühlung*. The turn from objective Spirit to psychology as the ground both of understanding and action merely supplants one philosophical monologism with another. The diachronically inflected metaphysics called dialectics, in which philosophy is the sublation of all earlier expressions of Spirit, was not challenged by a revival of empathetic Romantic hermeneutics which extends the definition of 'text' to the events of history. *Einfühlung*, in short, is no challenge to *Aufhebung*. Thought is nothing if not worldly for Bakhtin, in the sense that at its highest and deepest it is both 'in' and 'about' the world. Thought is a special kind of event in the world

because at its fullest stretch it embraces that greatest of all events which *is* the world. In the hermeneutically inspired fundamental ontology Bakhtin is here exploring (for the last time), thought is nothing less than the self-awareness of the multifarious 'eventness' of everything. Or again: there is a great intersubjective project that we call 'the world', and thought is the reflection of this project upon itself which deeply respects and faithfully preserves the open-ended heterogeneity of being.

Occupying his boundary position as a philosopher between the precise and the human sciences, Bakhtin accordingly rethinks the objects of these knowledges – the 'thing' and the 'personality' respectively – not as substances but rather as extremes of a continuum between which all thought oscillates asymptotically. That contact between texts in which alone texts live and are understood is at bottom a 'contact of personalities and not of things (at the extreme)' (Bakhtin 1986:162). Yet Bakhtin also insists – and that last parenthesis begins the suggestion – that thing and personality are hypothetical limiting cases which are never actually encountered in their pure state: there is simply thinking that is tendentially reificatory, and thinking that is tendentially personificatory. Reification and personification are not absolute conditions after all, but tendencies subject to mutual modification: in short, relative states. The language of causality and 'material conditions' realizes and absolutizes things: unmodified by the language of interacting texts (personalities), it monopolizes understanding. Bakhtin is seeking a philosophical narrative which neither heroizes the personality nor demonizes the thing, but rather sees both as effects of the way I speak about what is not myself, effects which realize extreme possibilities of speech but which are never fully 'effective'. Bakhtin's old friends *tone* and *intonation* put in a last appearance in this context. The tone of performative utterances can find its way into speech or writing that is not technically performative; the intonation of words that take speech as close as it ever gets to action (words that 'do things') can take leave of its typical content and inform any aspect of speech. All our understanding is informed by an underlying 'tonality' of consciousness, a quasi-semantic context of inexplicit evaluation on the ground of which 'complete, semantic understanding' arises (Bakhtin 1986: 164). Within this accompanying music of cognition are tones that reify, tones that personify. To affect a personality a thing must already have become a (potential) word, a contextual meaning. Aesthetic activity at its strongest is exemplary inasmuch as it is the one human function that makes its business the assimilation of the world of things to the world of personalities.

And so we come at last to Bakhtin's closing meditation upon great

time. An important stage in the train of thought is the reflection on 'form' and 'content' in his last notes – and in particular on the more-or-less smooth and automatic issue of form into content in premodern times. Form is conceived as generic pre-understanding or 'congealed' content which always precedes the initiative of those who put it to use; it is also seen as an 'implicit context' that doesn't need to be spelt out because it is assumed in the very implementation of the form. Bakhtin associates form in this sense of tradition with 'general collective creativity' and 'mythological systems' (Bakhtin 1986: 166). The cultural texts of post-traditional societies effectively turn this situation inside-out, in that the work now thinks of itself as new and does not so much presuppose tradition as challenge me to create the tradition from which its novelty might be supposed to have sprung. Hermeneutic interpretation only becomes at once necessary and possible when innovation has to be deconstructed in what is simultaneously a *re*construction of tradition: the 'before' or 'already' that the work might have acknowledged is brought to light in order that its 'after' or 'not yet' – its reception by a collectivity in principle without bounds – might be realized. Symbols are an instance for Bakhtin of this modern 'form': at one and the same time the 'most stable' and the 'most emotional elements' of discourse (Bakhtin 1986: 166), they proclaim within the condition of modernity a universality which is non-conceptual. In order for this non-conceptual universalism to be apprehended, I must move beyond the mere 'recognition' of meaning at the level of the text's iterable technicalities (and their corollary: the anonymous and uncontextualized 'individual consciousness') to attain to – or rather activate – that deep-semantic understanding which is essentially 'evaluative'. The symbol calls forth this understanding beyond 'definition', and is nothing without it. When Bakhtin writes that the work's 'evaluative-semantic aspect' is 'meaningful only to individuals who are related by some common conditions of life . . . by the bonds of brotherhood on a high level' (Bakhtin 1986:166), we are strongly reminded both of the Kantian notion of the aesthetic as founded upon community and of the Wittgensteinian notion of the relation between meaning and 'forms of life'.

Perhaps then the difference between 'myth' and 'symbol' in Bakhtin's (late) sense of those terms is that the 'common conditions' that are taken for granted in the texts of the first have to be explicitly posited in the texts of the second. 'Assimilation' to a 'higher . . . at the extreme absolute value' (Bakhtin 1986:166) is the modern surrogate for the implicit pre-understanding and pre-evaluation of premodernity. 'Deep' understanding in our epoch presupposes the transformation of what had been given into a project, the formation of

a past which is paradoxically also a future. The category of the aesthetic is the offshoot of an eighteenth-century move in which posited community filled the space vacated by the departure of given community, while at the same time containing any emancipatory ethico-political implications by conceiving the aesthetic as a separate faculty of the same subject that carried the dominant (paradigmatically logical or mathematical) rationality. The Romantic moment saw the partial liberation of the aesthetic as it was freed into an autonomy over-against the rational – an autonomy which in the end only reproduced the Enlightenment structure of oppositions it had sought to invest with opposite values. Turning the binaries of reason on their heads left them much as they had always been, resulting not in a critique of the modern project but in a new lease of life, and thereby opening the space for those revivals of its promises that bear the names of Hegel and Marx. Bakhtin represents a twentieth-century hermeneutic or philosophical-anthropological move which revives in a radical way the move that inaugurated the aesthetic as a category, without keeping it from challenging the dominant conceptuality; or posing it as an anti-conceptuality; or sweeping it up as a moment in the totalizing conceptuality of the dialectic. With his help we are able to think an agonistics of deep meaning which challenges the dominant conceptuality on a ground other than of the latter's choosing, and which is not to be superseded by 'philosophy' in the grand march of the Concept in history. The deep 'form' characteristic of modernity is the 'tradition' of post-traditional societies, and it is what we must (re)turn to if we wish to argue that the loss of 'given' community does not have to be made good by the abstract universality of the unsituated thinking subject. Community comes to take up its residence in language conceived neither as a tool nor as a system but as our only home.

Great time cannot be properly elucidated without, finally, probing further Bakhtin's crucial distinction between 'the work' and 'the text'. The work is the text as performed (read) or potentially performed (read); it is what we have when the text is enabled at least partially to realize the far larger and potentially infinite context in which it resonates. Commenting on the notion of 'kin' in one of his earliest essays, Bakhtin writes that we ought to say not 'They are mine' but rather 'I am theirs':[17] his translinguistic project is analogously a hermeneutic which concerns itself not so much with this text's context as with this context's text(s). Most profoundly, this 'extratextual' context is neither one of inert things – that much we have already seen – nor is it one of words in any lexico-semantic or purely linguistic sense: it is a context of *tones*. It is the never-fully-realized 'intonational-evaluative context' against which the text is perceived,

in which alone it lives as a *work*. 'The work', Bakhtin writes, is enveloped in the music of the intonational-evaluative context in which it is understood and evaluated' (Bakhtin 1986:166). Understanding is, then, listening for context: context conceived as the music of the spheres of meaning, the resonance within which the work is individuated and resonates in its turn. Great time is not an objective state of things; it is a level of understanding in which the remotest of contexts meet and make mutual sense. It is nothing less than 'outsideness' launched into history. It is the temporal dimension of 'I-for-another' and 'the-other-for-me', while 'small time' is the equivalent of 'I-for-myself', the easily memorable past and the merely 'imaginable' future of fear and hope. The cultural text read in the dimension of great time is understood prophetically: that is, as a moment in a process which I use my outsideness to apprehend but which at the same time I can only apprehend if I also enter imaginatively the realm of its outsideness in respect of me. At the last boundary of his life, going out of the phenomenal world, Bakhtin contemplates 'the future without me' (Bakhtin 1986:167). Understanding in the aspect of great time I learn to turn my temporal and cultural outsideness inside-out; I learn to transcend in terms of time the category of 'I-for-myself'; I enter the sphere of 'evaluative non-predetermination, unexpectedness . . . absolute innovation, miracle' (Bakhtin 1986:167). The new in this deep-semantic sense is of the order of grace: the future neither hoped for nor feared but in which our completion as finite beings lies. We must live in the present, recalling at every moment that where we are, the anticipation of the past and the memory of the future intersect. Modernist notions of amnesiac novelty have no appeal for the dying Bakhtin; not because he takes an anti-modernist stance but because late modernity both needs and makes available a new sense of the miraculous. The event that nobody living in the category of 'I-for-myself' and 'small time' could have expected is the event that only the community of others-for-others could most deeply understand. We are 'in' great time in so far as texts are for us not mere iterable entities but provisional climaxes in the unceasing music of contexts speaking to each other against all the material odds and across the deepest of empirical divides.

NOTES

1. Bakhtin 1986, p. 170. The present essay takes the form of a relatively unstructured commentary on the three last texts in this volume (see pp. 102–172), which the reader is advised to read before reading the essay itself. Like the texts upon which it is a meditation, it is wholly provisional and exploratory and has no pretensions to an 'argument'. This episode in my understanding of the late Bakhtin is dedicated to my wife Nola Glendinning, the miniaturist and painter of icons whose extraordinary work will be known to many friends of this journal, and who died very shortly after it was finished; and to my mother Dorothy Martin, who died while I was writing it.
2. *Horizontverschmelzung* in the original German: one of Gadamer's 'most notorious metaphors', according to Holub 1991. See Gadamer 1975, p. 273.
3. See 'Epic and Novel' in Bakhtin 1981, pp. 3–40.
4. Auerbach's claim that Dante's 'beyond' is 'changeless and of all time and yet full of history' (Auerbach 1968, p. 197) coincides closely with Bakhtin's notion of a 'tension' between 'living historical time' and the 'extratemporal otherworldly ideal' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 158) that governs the form of *The Divine Comedy*.
5. Bakhtin's own phrase for this preoccupation of the novel is the 'inconclusive present': see (for example) Bakhtin 1981, p. 26.
6. Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291.
7. *Vnenakhodimost'* in the Russian; Todorov (1984) renders this concept as 'exotopy'. Its force resides in its stress on the uniqueness of my place in being: answering to my outsideness to (all) others is their outsideness to me. We 'consummate' each other but can never 'consummate' our individual selves. Aesthetic differs from cognitive or epistemological activity in its respect for this absolute mutual outsideness of others-for-others. See 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' in Bakhtin 1990, pp. 4–256.
8. Bakhtin 1986, pp. 5–6.
9. See Markus 1984, pp. 104–129.
10. The expression was coined in 1959 by H. Stuart Hughes in his influential *Consciousness and Society* (see Hughes 1979, pp. 33–66) to describe the 'turn towards the subjective' in late nineteenth-century social thought; I have chosen to extend its use to the later 'turn' in this century away from a philosophy of consciousness and towards the language-paradigm in the belief that these rather different currents of late modernity converge in their common rejection of models of objectivity borrowed from the natural sciences.
11. Gadamer 1975, p. xxiv.
12. See Carroll 1987. For another staging of the dialogue between Bakhtin and Lyotard, see Simons 1990, pp. 161–167.
13. See Holub 1991, pp. 153–154. Holub's discussion of the Habermas-Gadamer debate (pp. 49–77) is essential reading for anyone concerned to locate the late Bakhtin within the currents of late twentieth-century thinking, as is the excellent chapter in Gardiner 1992 (pp. 99–140) on 'Bakhtin's Critical Hermeneutics'.
14. 'We respect the Amazon peoples to the extent that they are not modern, but when modern men make themselves into Amazons, it is monstrous' (quoted in Carroll 1987, p. 101). See also Lyotard 1987, pp. 116–117: totalitarianism is modern in its combination of 'legitimation by myth' with the 'powers of universalization' that belong to republican discourse.
15. Todorov 1984, p. 107.
16. On this distinction between the poetic and the 'prosaic' symbol, see 'Discourse in the Novel' in Bakhtin 1981, pp. 327–329.
17. Bakhtin 1990, p. 178.

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Beyond the Poetics of History

Narrativity and Referentiality in the New Literary Historiography

William H. Thornton

In his preface to *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn cites a small news item from a 1949 issue of the Soviet science journal, *Nature*. The editors of *Nature*, in reporting the discovery of numerous specimens of a prehistoric salamander in a frozen stream, mentioned that the creatures were so well preserved that the men who discovered them ate them '*with relish* on the spot' (Solzhenitsyn, ix). Fortunately for the editors, few readers of *Nature* would be equipped to decipher the encoded message of the salamander. *Gulag* can be read as an introductory text to the *political* meaning beneath that scientific cover.

Only when the report on the salamander is emplotted in Solzhenitsyn's narrative do most of us gain access to its referential force. This journalistic datum, like any historical fact, takes its meaning from its place within a narrative order. There it becomes, like the frozen salamander, a point of reference outside ichthyology. Referentiality, in other words, is never reducible to static facticity. Its powers of signification are rhetorically circumscribed by their place in active discourse, such that any given 'fact' may serve as an element in any number of narrative channels, discourses, or paradigms. Indeed, it would be almost meaningless to speak of an 'established fact' apart from such a channel. Even entire sign systems – such as 'Orientalism' or 'Occidentalism' – can be re-channelled according to ideological fiat (Chen 1992:693).

Narration, then, is not just one form of representation among others. It is the channelling agency behind all factual meaning. As Lionel Gossman argues, narrativity furnishes the very bedrock of historical objectivity (1990:293). Whereas conventional historiography pictures narrativity as being secondary (if not superfluous) to objectivity – and whereas poststructural literary theory tends to reverse that order of priority, making objectivity secondary (if not wholly illusory) – the position of this paper follows Gossman in recognizing the dependency of objectivity upon narrativity without devaluing objectivity itself.

That qualified dependency, we shall argue, provides the foundation

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for the new literary historiography – a frankly literary and yet objectivist mode of historical discourse in which investigation and objectivity are not construed as being primary, with representation purely secondary. Rather, investigation is seen as an integral part of representation, with objectivity being achieved through the interaction or counter-discourse that representation affords. Our model is highly influenced by the position of the later Gossman (after his turn from a less qualified poetics of history). While Gossman sees himself as having moved somewhat closer to Leon Goldstein's constructivist approach to 'scientific' historiography (*Historical Knowing*, 1976), it is significant that he does not share Goldstein's rejection of historical narrativism (1976:299). He is particularly uncomfortable with Goldstein's sharp division between historical infrastructure and superstructure (1976:303), with historical representation relegated to the latter.

The subtitle of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag – An Experiment in Literary Investigation* – indicates the direction that the new literary historiography is taking. A growing number of professional historians seem ready to legitimate this form of investigation, however cautiously. The historical novels of Gore Vidal, for example, have attracted unprecedented attention from specialists – albeit in the form of scathing rebuttals (e.g. 'Vidal's *Lincoln*: An Exchange', in *The New York Review of Books*, April 18, 1988). Far more positively, Solzhenitsyn's works, as Matt Oja notes (1988:111), have earned sufficient professional respect that they could be quoted as source material by Robert Conquest in his acclaimed history of Soviet agrarian collectivization, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 1985.

No doubt part of this new acceptability stems from the 'postmodern turn' of historical theory. One source of such 'postmodernism' – the Anglo-American, analytic school of Danto, Gallie, Mink and Morton White – holds narrative form to be constitutive of historical meaning, and thus draws the principal meaning of an historical work from its textuality rather than its referentiality. A second source, deconstructionism, lays so much emphasis on the signifying power of language that literary discourse is privileged while objective discourse is nullified. In both cases, however, history is thought to be heavily informed by fiction (Gossman 1990:289). 'Postmodernists' of either kind would be hard pressed categorically to reject literary ventures in historiography, though most of the best practitioners of the genre – Doctorow being a worthy exception (Doctorow 1983) – would be likely to take a dim view of the terms on which they are being accepted. Neither Vidal nor Solzhenitsyn would countenance the proposition that historical works in general, and their own historical novels in

particular, are incapable of rendering a reasonable facsimile of the past on its own terms.

To fathom this dubious acceptance, one must enter the labyrinth of the current debate over postmodern historiography. The debate has its salient extremes in F.R. Ankersmit (*pro*) and Perez Zagorin (*con.*). The latter charges nominal postmodernists like Ankersmit with voiding the truth-conditions of responsible historiography by absorbing history into aesthetics. The distinctive significance of history, according to Zagorin, depends completely upon its claim to veridicality (1990:272). That, in turn, is defined more by the absence of fictive elements than by the presence of 'truth' in any larger sense.

As Ankersmit notes, Zagorin's conception of history rests upon the assumption of an unproblematic borderline between literary fiction and historical fact (1990:276). Without even considering the historical work of much fiction – not to mention literary nonfiction – Zagorin's unproblematic border turns out to be a fiction in itself. The indelible contribution of Hayden White is the exposure of a monumental fiction: the idea of an utterly non-rhetorical historiography. Any history which extends beyond the scope of the most limited monograph can be shown to contain a plethora of rhetorical elements. Chief among those elements is the very conception of an integrative work of history.

Paradoxically, however, it is Zagorin rather than Ankersmit who defends historiography in that more sweeping, integrative sense. Zagorin's position can be described as an unwitting postmodernism, in terms of scope, welded to a positivist content. Conversely, Ankersmit's position can be read as an amalgam of an unwitting positivism, in terms of scope, and postmodernism, in terms of form.

Ankersmit's claim to postmodernism rests largely on his aversion to 'totality' in historiography, an aversion which could more accurately be described as poststructural than postmodern (the former being subsumed by the latter). He wrongly assumes that macrohistory as opposed to micro-history is by definition totalistic. He fails to recognize that the micro-history which he valorizes is but a continuation of the positivistic drift toward ever greater specialization. This, as Zagorin notes, leads to mere antiquarianism, 'a trivialized, tired, and defeatist conception of history' (1990:273).

It is precisely the prevalence of this antiquarian drift over many decades that has made the need for synthesis so pressing. That need is no less pressing when considered in the context of postmodern theory. In fact, postmodernism provides the best available foundation for large-scale synthesis. It is nothing so much as positivist hyperempiricism which has broken our faith in what may be called 'grand

synthesis.' The question at issue in postmodern historiography is not whether to have synthesis or to continue the regime of micro-historical positivism. Over time the two movements are (or could well be) mutually supportive. The only valid question is *what kind of synthesis* should be sought. If the grand syntheses of the past were totalistic, that was because they rested their case on metahistorical or even metaphysical assumptions about the *telos* of history, and were oblivious to the rhetorical motives and methods of their own historiography. Hence they operated under the shadow of positivism, or what Ankersmit calls the 'modernist' paradigm (1990:276).

More is involved, however, in postmodern historiography than a movement from *telos* to poetics. A genuine postmodernism, to be sure, must be conscious of the tentative and rhetorical nature of its operative model, its methodology, and its conclusions. More than that, however, it must move beyond the current debate by juxtaposing the genuinely postmodern elements of both poles of the current debate: the postmodern aesthetics of Ankersmit and the postmodern scope of Zagorin. A genuine postmodernism, in other words, would not be anathema to all synthetic historiography. Instead of defining macro-historiography in general as totalistic, it would invite a pluralistic discourse that encourages works of synthesis even as it proscribes any final, ineluctable teleology.

Likewise, this more capacious postmodernism would absorb the poststructural concern for difference by encouraging the kind of local, regional, or biographical studies that Ankersmit privileges. The real issue in postmodernism, then, has nothing to do with the scale of documentation and interpretation in a study, but with the transformational imperative of 'seeing the phenomenon differently . . . through reinterpretation' (LaCapra 1985:18). Just as the purely documentary or objectivist theory of history served to marginalize literary investigation, this transformational imperative promises to engage literature as never before. This is not simply because some of the best contemporary literature has itself been 'historicized' or 'empiricized' – as is the case with nonfiction literature – but because even the less 'factual' literature can make a vital contribution, serving as an antidote for what LaCapra calls the 'over-contextualization' of historiography (1985:132).

Any genuine postmodernism, therefore, has the effect of narrativizing history and de-naturalizing the border between history and literature. This does not require that the border be wholly eliminated; but at the very least it should be made elastic and porous, allowing for a healthy exchange of goods and services from both sides. Linda Hutcheon, in this regard, notes the union of poetics and praxis in a new, literary historicity. This insurgent poetics can fairly be called

postmodern, insofar as it challenges romantic and modernist demands for the supremacy and autonomy of art. While much metafiction has only extended the modernist marginalization of art and literature, historiographic metafiction 'attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical . . .' (Hutcheon 1988: 108).

That vital confrontation contributes to an aesthetics of postmodern realism as opposed to poststructural irrealism. So too, it reinforces the call for historiographic legitimacy on the part of nonfiction literature, centred as it is on the tenuous boundary of history and literature. An important question is just how seriously this new literary historiography engages 'the past for itself.' How far, in other words, has it moved beyond the simple utilization of history as a diegetic backdrop? To what extent does it enter the thick of historiographic interpretation, discourse, and debate? To what degree, finally, has it taken us beyond a postmodernism centred around the 'poetics' of history, with little regard for the most pressing political and ideological issues of our times?

At this juncture we should distinguish two basic stances on the question of literary historiography. What we shall call the minimalist position simply claims a victory for narrativism over positivistic realism, thus affording a foundation for literary historiography. This much has even gained acceptance among some working historians. The maximalist position, however, has barely affected practical historiography, and is increasingly on the defensive in theoretical circles as well. Carlo Ginzberg charges this maximalism with curing the deficiencies of positivism by creating 'the opposite trap':

> Instead of dealing with the evidence as an open window, contemporary skeptics regard it as a wall, which by definition precludes any access to reality. This extreme antipositivistic attitude, which considers all referential assumptions as a theoretical naiveté, turns out to be a sort of inverted positivism. Theoretical naiveté and theoretical sophistication share a common, rather simplistic assumption: they both take for granted the relationship between evidence and reality. (1991:83)

Cushing Strout, likewise, notes that such 'inverted positivism' forms a natural alliance with anti-realist literary theory. While seeming to move fiction closer to history by fictionalizing history itself, such theory in fact minimizes the historical significance of literature in general (Strout 1992:153). As Ginzberg enjoins, the 'fashionable injunction to study reality as a text should be supplemented by the awareness that no text can be understood without a reference to extratextual realities' (1991:84).

This is not an argument against textualism, but for a textual/extra-textual complementarity, whereby narrativity and referentiality become allies in postmodern historiography. Fictional historiography is the new frontier of this perspective on the past. As Paul Ricoeur argues in the second volume of *Time and Narrative* (1985), fictional narrativity more incisively taps the narrativistic nature of time than does either mythic or ordinary historical narrativity. For the historian to ignore the insights of fiction would be the equivalent of ignoring a valuable archive just because it lies under a layer of dust, or requires translation – in short, because it is troublesome.

Just as the rhetorical 'dust' of fiction is troublesome to the historian, the presence of a valid historical element in fiction is problematic for the literary scholar. It amounts to a disciplinary inconvenience – rather like the burden of Troy V for an archaeologist who is digging for Troy VI. What does one do with this layer of unsolicited historicity? For over half a century literary critics have, in effect, dumped it on the scrap heap. This goes by the name of treating literature as literature (Todorov 1977:120) – as if one were panning for gold, and historical elements were the mud and dirt to be washed away. Over time the denigration of fiction's historical insights became a ritual act – a mark of literary professionalism.

In sum, both historians and literary theorists have tended to ignore the fictional wing of literary historiography. Only slightly less opprobrium has been attached to what may be called nonfiction literature, that mongrel subgenre made famous by works such as Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*. Although *In Cold Blood* was presented by Capote as being 'immaculately factual' (Heyne 1987:481), historians had little interest in its subject matter, while literary-minded readers took it for just another suspense novel. A rare exception was Eric Heyne, who located its mimetic value, ironically, in its distortion of actual fact – the idea being that higher truths are available from fictional distortion than from straight, journalistic reportage.

Such a suggestion, if uttered by a working historian, would be heresy. The only historians who might have taken some interest in either *In Cold Blood* or *The Executioner's Song* would be social historians, and they, as LaCapra and Kellner point out, have effectively been trained how *not* to read their sources as anything but 'documents' (Kellner 1987:13). From a literary point of view, that is almost like being taught how not to read at all.

This anti-literary professionalism is finally coming under question, insofar as narrativity is once again being taken as a core element of historiography. Hans Kellner points out that Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* and Paul Veyne's *Writing History* (1984) share the view

that historical events take their meaning from their temporal emplotment – a view that runs diametrically counter to the event-orientation of Anglo-American historiography. The deeper purpose of history, from this new perspective, is not so much to chronicle particular events as to situate ourselves in time. Indeed, as Kellner points out, it is not even possible for us to grasp those events independent of their emplotment (1987:17–18).

From this perspective, Heyne's apology for Capote – his defence of the higher truth of Capote's distortions – could arguably be supported in historical as well as literary terms, so long as the distortion is moderate in nature and is clearly intended to highlight some essential historical point, not simply to heighten dramatic effect. This is not to be taken as an argument for the deliberate distortion of crucial historical events. It is simply to ask for a relaxation of the paranoiac empiricism that would rule out literary historiography categorically.

The essential foundation for literary historiography, then, is a narrativistic understanding of historical meaning. A movement in this direction is not only taking place within the historical profession, but in many human sciences. Donald Polkinghorne, the author of *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (1988), became interested in this interdisciplinary tendency through his clinical practice as a psychologist. He found that the natural scientific bias of his profession conflicted with his need to grasp the narrative aspect of his patients' pasts, i.e. their historical being. Like Ricoeur, he locates that essential historicity in the attempt to interpret and give meaning to temporal experience. Thus he defines narrative as 'a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their temporality' (Flaherty 1992:262).

Such a scheme can no longer be a field of unproblematic reference. The givenness of 'facts' that prevailed under naïve realism, on the literary side, and under positivism, in the human sciences, we now see as mere credulity; and the notion of ontological objectivity it supported is irretrievably lost. There may yet be hope for objectivity, however, if we relax this ontological requirement. Following the precedent of Stephen Toulmin's *Human Understanding*, Lionel Gossman steers a course between yesterday's absolute objectivism and today's absolute relativism. For Toulmin, rationality is redefined as the ability to change one's mind for good reasons. On this basis, Gossman brings rationality into the realm of decision and practice, drawing a methodological rather than foundational distinction between rationality and irrationality. Historical judgements, thus defined, are intersubjectively verifiable (Gossman 1990:318–19).

This qualified objectivity must be contrasted with the anti-

referentiality of deconstructionist criticism and most poststructuralism. As Michael Fischer observes, Derrida shares this aversion to extrinsic criticism with the New Critics he excoriates:

> Anxious to avoid reduction, the New Critics . . . fell back on tautology, allowing the poem to say what it says. Equally anxious to read . . . intrinsically, deconstructionists favor . . . a superficial expansiveness. History, philosophy, and other kinds of writing, to be sure, may now enter literary study – but as literature, redefined as 'writing'. The openness that results is finally claustrophobic, as literary critics invite historians and philosophers to share their confinement in language . . . The apparently bold advances of deconstruction 'beyond formalism' turn out to be steps on a textual treadmill. (Fischer 1965:96–97)

Such textualism, unfortunately, has generally been taken as the distinctly 'postmodern' attitude toward the historical past, the real, the world, etc. In accord with the Saussurean theory it valorizes, deconstruction reverses the epistemological biases of naïve realism and positivism by imposing a blanket 'materiality' of language. Thus all language becomes opaque, closing off any objective contact with the world beyond linguistic signs. Oddly, this linguistic hermeticism, as David Farley-Hills points out, commands its greatest influence after Saussurean theory 'has largely been superseded in modern studies of language' (1992:173).

Doctrinaire anti-realism claims to merge history and literature, but in fact widens the gap between them by setting practical historiography not only against literary theory but against any historical theory that deconstruction might influence. By contrast, the postmodernism advocated in this paper does not eviscerate the issue of referentiality, but problematizes it by moving beyond the notion of monolithic context to a pluralism of contested context(s). This pluralism, in combination with the minimalist narrativism adumbrated above, forms the basis of the new contextualism that I have treated elsewhere in relation to postmodern realism (Thornton 1992).

In its literary application, such contextualism reaches beyond the interpretation of individual works to literary history in general (Dissanayake 1989:xi). Whatever the scope of analysis, it entails a revisionist understanding of objectivity and facticity. We must begin, as Jerome McGann points out, 'by reminding ourselves that "facts" are not mere data, objects, or monads; they are heuristic isolates which bring into focus some more or less complex network of human events and relations. As such, "facts" always have to be reconstituted . . . ' (1985:12). In other words, they must at once be 'historicized' and 'postmodernized.' As McGann cogently argues, the issue of referentiality was never settled by formalist and text-centred theories, but was

simply bracketed out of consideration (1985:3). Postmodern realism removes those brackets and opens the discourse on referentiality in all its labyrinthine complexity.

Part of the confusion in interdisciplinary studies of postmodernism stems from the seemingly opposite direction that the 'postmodern turn' has taken in different interpretative communities. In architecture, for example, postmodernism entails a rejection of modernist functionalism and élitism, combined with a bold reassertion of historicity and populism. The latter is especially evident in Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), which inverts modernist avant-gardism. In *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Venturi imposes a populist, anarchitectural style in the name of postmodernism; but, later in the 1970s, Charles Jencks (*The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, 1978) allows for a stylistic dualism where a postmodern building can enter professional and popular discourses simultaneously.

This exposes Jencks to criticism for retrieving modernist avant-gardism in the name of postmodernism (Caygill 1990:273). Nevertheless, his dichotomy between the stylistic codes of an 'élite' and the 'man in the street' does rupture the universal, modernist dictum – coined by Mies van der Rohe – that 'less is more'. As Howard Caygill points out, the thrust of architectural postmodernism is toward a pluralistic complexity where, in Venturi's words, 'less is a bore' (Caygill 1990:271). Hand in hand with this complexity, Linda Hutcheon notes that the work of Jencks and Paolo Portoghesi offers a new contextualism (1988:29).

In anthropology and historiography, by contrast, the postmodern turn devalues the professional iconology of 'fieldwork' and 'archival studies', respectively, conducing to rhetorical or 'writerly' textualism. In short, the postmodern turns of architecture on the one hand and of anthropology and history, on the other, would seem at first sight to have nothing in common but their almost inverse relationships. On closer analysis, however, we recognize that both postmodern turns have been away from the simplicity of epistemological, aesthetic, or methodological totalism. Where there was textual/functional simplicity before, there now is contextual/historical complexity. Where context previously dominated, there now is a drift toward textualism. In either case, the insurgent movement, for all its sound and fury, fails to capture the field entirely. At most it succeeds in throwing established professional mores into confusion, which is the whole point. Conventions that were accepted as natural are de-naturalized and problematized – which is to say, 'postmodernized'.

By comparison with architecture, anthropology, and historiography, the postmodern turn in literary theory appears anomalous, for its

initial thrust was toward a greater textualization of an already (after the New Criticism) textual field. It is understandable, therefore, that many literary studies have concluded that postmodernism did not so much involve a revolt against modernism as a further extension of certain modernist characteristics. Janet Wolfe, for example, finds that 'the characteristics of so-called postmodernism appear to duplicate many of those adduced more than half a century ago in relation to modernism: self-reflexivity, decentring of the subject, alienation effect, consciousness of . . . the medium itself, montage, use of new media, and so on' (1990:204).

Now, however, a second wave of literary postmodernism is breaking on these already entrenched definitions. For better or worse, literary theory can no longer escape the plangent issues of socio-historical contextualism (McGann 1985:4). As Jerome McGann states it, 'literary work can be practiced . . . only in and through various institutional forms which are not themselves "literary" at all' (1985:4). These 'mediational structures' include the academy, commercial publishing, and even the courts (1985:4–5).

Had literary theory shifted its attention toward context at an earlier date, the cross-fertilization that belatedly occurred between architectural postmodernism and literary theory, as Linda Hutcheon traces it in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), might have been less noteworthy. Tom Wolfe condemns architectural postmodernism itself for failing to make a clean break with modernism, thus reducing postmodernism to camp (Hutcheon 1988:31). Wolfe's literary revolt against modernism came under the rubric of the New Journalism. Because the term 'postmodernism' in literature has been equated with poststructuralism, the New Journalism could not be recognized even by Wolfe for what it was: a realist counteroffensive within, rather than against, postmodernism.

In a 1975 interview Wolfe called for a new 'critical chaos' – precisely what postmodernism claimed to foster – such that the arts would no longer be Clement Greenberg's 'little hamlet' but 'a broad plane that all sorts of people can walk out upon' (see Buckley 1990:92). The litmus test of that 'critical chaos' would of course be the acceptance or rejection of Wolfean realism by the critical establishment.

However belatedly, indications of such 'chaos' are now abundant. One patent example is the debate over contemporary nonfiction, which shows signs of emerging as a postmodern genre in its own right (Thornton & Thornton 1992). The conflation of 'fact' and 'fiction' in this genre represents a blend of journalistic and novelistic narrative strategies. Within these, as Lois Zamora observes, we encounter a plurality of possible 'real' worlds (1989:44). Historical material is

drawn into the service of literature rather than acting as a mere fictional backdrop (Zamora 1989:48). The reverse also obtains, however, as historiography enlists fiction into its interpretative (rather than merely illustrative) reconstruction of the past.

What distinguishes the new literary historiography is that it engages both of these functions simultaneously – the textual and the contextual. It thus passes beyond the 'poetics of history' that Steven Greenblatt and other contextualists have implicitly endorsed by reissuing the New Historicism under the label of a 'cultural poetics' (see Greenblatt 1989:2). The lines of battle over postmodernism in the 1990s are not being drawn between textualism and contextualism, but between the 'little hamlet' of pure textualism versus the open plane of postmodern realism, which incorporates textualism and contextualism alike. In order to achieve an open and genuinely critical postmodernism, what is needed is less a cultural poetics than a cultural prosaics. Literary historiography, in any case, is the field upon which this critical battle will be decided.

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Holocaust Fiction and National Historical Memory

Elie Wiesel, *The Fifth Son*

Harold P. Maltz

Authors of fictional narrative on great historical events face many problems. In this article I initially discuss some specifically associated with Elie Wiesel's *The Fifth Son*, a novel on the Holocaust: the subject matter is gradually receding into the distant past; the narrator is dependent on surviving witnesses some of whom are unable or unwilling to communicate their experiences; awesome questions are inescapable yet answers are not forthcoming. I subsequently discuss problems arising from the narratorial use of the device of memory in a fictional text. For in order to give the narrative authenticity, the main narrator in *The Fifth Son* purports to convey the memories of survivors who witnessed, even actually experienced, these events; the memories of these subordinate narrators are recorded verbatim. Such a device is essential in this novel, in which the narrator-protagonist, son of a survivor, has grown up in New York. Yet *The Fifth Son* is a work of fiction and in fiction the concept of memory is problematic and needs to be clarified, particularly when, as in this novel, it is juxtaposed with national historical memory as recorded in the Passover *Haggadah*, a text whose symbolism is used extensively in *The Fifth Son*.

The Fifth Son is a retrospective novel, in which the reader encounters the Holocaust presented at one remove, for the narrator is not himself a survivor, having grown up in New York; he is the son of the survivor Reuven Tamiroff. Since the narrator did not witness the Holocaust, he is totally dependent on those who did, on the survivors who function in the novel as subordinate narrators – Reuven Tamiroff and his friends Simha-the-Dark Zeligson and Bontchek. Together they enable the narrator (and the reader) to piece together details of the pre-war life and the wartime destruction of the town of Davarowsk.

Why, one may wonder, does the reader encounter the Holocaust only at one remove, narrated by a survivor's son? For (it may be argued) surely it would be better for the author to have chosen as main narrator a survivor, one who could speak directly from experience of

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the horrendous events to which he was an unwilling witness? Perhaps so – but such a narrator would make for a different novel. The choice of a survivor's son as main narrator in *The Fifth Son* could be seen as a literary device acknowledging that the period of the Holocaust is gradually receding further and further into the past. Novels yet to be written on that period will no doubt use various literary devices to accommodate the ever increasing temporal distance between the narrating time and the Second World War (narrated or presented world time). The device of the narratorial chain transmitting narratives from one person to another may well be used, as may the device of a character discovering or revealing documents (letters, diaries, memoirs). Alternatively, the Holocaust novel may well be transformed into a species of historical novel.

Besides, the devices of temporal distance and the narratorial presentation of the events of the Holocaust at one remove indicate the narrator's concern with the depiction of the suffering of the survivors four decades after World War II, particularly when survivors cannot speak for themselves. In *The Fifth Son* the narrator speaks for his father who is silent and his mother who is ill. He also speaks for those who did not survive, taking upon himself in this way the burden of the author of the novel. (How free is their choice, how much an imposed task?)

Further, the narrator as survivor's son initiates the theme of the suffering of the next generation and subsequent generations. As the narrator says, 'The children of survivors are almost as traumatized as the survivors themselves'.[1] Will the impact of the Holocaust ever be nullified or forgotten? To the extent that the past may serve as a guide, and Jewish national-historical memory may continue to operate, indications are that the Holocaust will forever impinge strongly on Jewish consciousness. It is this theme that Wiesel touches upon in his choice of a second generation narrator and a setting outside of Europe. For, to use the narrator's words, 'I suffer from an Event I have not even experienced' (192). As a consequence of his father's sufferings, he feels that he is 'punished, cursed' and so sinks into 'a precocious grief' (46). As he says, 'I judged myself, I condemned myself; I grew old fast. I knew hardly anything of the surprises, the mischief, the exploits, the complicities and adventures that enrich childhood' (46). In the opinion of Lisa, a girlfriend, he is 'the most reserved, the most inhibited, the most complex-ridden'; he himself was 'content to go unnoticed' (96).

Since the distance in time from the Holocaust induces narratorial dependence upon the memories of his father, Bontchek and Simha, all witnesses and survivors, in large sections of his narrative he repeats their recollections verbatim. They recount their experiences to the

narrator, inventing nothing themselves. Thus the narrator says of Bontchek, '[He] is my inexhaustible guide and teacher. To share his memories with me, he plunges back into them . . .' (109); '. . . for the voyage into the past, I follow him' (126). As a consequence, the narrator feels, 'The ghetto of Davarowsk, I know it now. I find my way around easily' (109). His thoughts wander into the ghetto which to him is more real than his surroundings:

> The forbidden and condemned quarter has become my home; I know its early morning sounds and its nocturnal rustling of wings. The moaning of the dying, the mournful chanting of the gravediggers, the dead orphans' litanies: I hear them all. (148–9)

The emphasis on memory in *The Fifth Son* is an important device in a novel which attempts to present historical events, in spite of the fictional structure of the novel. The narrator criticizes other works on the Holocaust – novels, essays, films – which cheapen the experience: 'None has anything in common with the experience the survivors carry within' (193). Hence the imagined reality in this novel attempts to be faithful to that experience as authenticated in memory, of which the narrator says:

> . . . memory drives one mad and the future pushes us back to the edge of the precipice and death envelops us and rocks us and stifles us and, helpless, we can neither cry nor run. (14)

After surviving the massacres and the death camps, Reuven Tamiroff is, for the remainder of his life, mostly absent, inaccessible, elsewhere, living, as his son realizes, in a strange kingdom 'in which one is forever dying, forever keeping silent, for the storm that blows there is a storm of ashes' (19). To his son, Reuven's acceptance of that degree of suffering is evil and even dangerous, like choosing nothingness over being, for Reuven is one who perforce is friend of the dead rather than ally of the living. Reuven's wife, the narrator's mother, is even more withdrawn: ever since her forced separation from her young son Ariel, who soon after was tortured to death, she has been as one who was 'dead among the living, believing herself dead among the dead' (24); in America she is institutionalized and only regains full consciousness an hour before her death. Reuven himself is torn between starting all over again, rebuilding a home, having children which he regards as his obligation, for he is a Jew 'bound to his tradition and rooted in its history', and ending it all. He confides to his son: 'It would have been so easy, so comfortable to let myself be carried by the current of death, to glide into nothingness' (51). Reuven goes on to explain: 'Your mother and I told ourselves

that not to give life was to hand over yet another victory to the enemy. Why permit him to be the only one to multiply and bear fruit?' (51–52). Yet he is forever tormented by the thought that

> '. . . this earth and this society are inhospitable toward Jewish children . . . The enemy is too powerful, and we are not enough. One thousand children are helpless against one armed assassin! . . . How is one to foresee, how is one to know?' (52)

Small wonder that Reuven has the greatest difficulty in telling his son about his experiences in Europe both because of their traumatic nature and because he wishes to protect his son from such dark knowledge. As the narrator says of his father:

> . . . he rarely reached out, spoke little . . . Sometimes, when I urged him on, he would offer me a crumb from his childhood . . . But as soon as we broached the forbidden topic of war, he would clear his throat and appear frightened and intensely weary . . . Visibly overcome by a great sadness, an unspeakable anguish from long ago. (43–44)[2]

It is Simha who provokes Reuven into relating episodes of his past life, appropriately on Passover Eve (when parents relate to their children about the exodus from Egypt), arguing that 'the duty of a Jewish father is to the living' (35). On another occasion, the eve of the narrator's bar mitzvah, his father is again coaxed into telling his son about his past in Europe. As his father is about to begin, the narrator experiences great tension and anxiety:

> An iron fist was pounding inside my chest. My father was finally going to lift the veil, I felt it. And I no longer knew whether that was what I wanted. I could still stop the mechanism that would transport me to that awesome, timeless place. (49)

But at the last moment his father changes his mind and instead recounts the events occurring when he emigrated to America. Eventually the narrator challenges his father outright: '. . . isn't it a father's duty to pass on his knowledge, his experience to his son? Am I not your son . . .?' (131).

Reuven's rare narratives focus mainly on his pre-war experiences for of his deepest anguish – the death of his beloved son, Ariel – Reuven cannot speak; instead he writes of his sorrow in letters to his dead son, letters which the narrator subsequently discovers (161).[3] Reuven's letters to Ariel manage to give voice to his profound silence, enable him to speak without being heard. Reuven is both unable and unwilling to speak to his living son about the death of Ariel. Yet the

act of writing if not of speaking indicates a rudimentary attempt at communication. When eventually the narrator discovers and reads some of these letters, his father hands him others as yet unread – a form of written communication with the narrator which is followed soon afterwards by Reuven breaking his silence. Then with great pain, Reuven speaks of the death of Ariel who to his grieving father was 'the heart of the world', 'the glory and future of the doomed Jewish community of Davarowsk . . .' (164). When at last his father does speak, the narrator feels that he is hearing 'an ancient tale I knew long ago but had forgotten' (164).

The narrator, talking of his father, comments at one point to Bontchek: 'He doesn't answer my questions. Does he even hear them?' (130). Indeed the narrator is in general preoccupied with questions to which he is told there are no answers – questions about good and evil, the creator, suffering and injustice. One of his tutors bids him wait patiently until he is forty – not for the answers but for the questions. And Simha tells him, 'I like your questions.'

> 'What about the answers, Simha?'
> 'They exist, and they have nothing to do with your questions.' (47)

The Rabbi in Brooklyn speaks in similar vein: '. . . I don't know the answer but I shall continue to encourage you to look for it' (60). For the narrator, as for others, confronting the facts let alone suffering the experience of the Holocaust inevitably precipitates searching questions and the contemplation of awesome possibilities. Yet no answers are forthcoming and the possibilities remain forever conjectural. 'You won't understand' whispers his father, 'nobody will understand'; his mother adds, '. . . it is God I do not understand.' To this assertion his father responds: 'And who tells you that God Himself understands?' (19).

The theme of questions and answers is counterpointed in this novel to the same theme in the Passover *Haggadah*. In the *Haggadah* four sons (human types) are categorized by the questions they ask (35); the Holocaust survivors and their children are characterized by questions to which no answers are forthcoming. The *Haggadah* prescribes that parents give an extended answer in response to a series of questions asked by the youngest child; the Holocaust survivors cannot answer their children's questions, nor their own, and the youngest child, Ariel, is dead. The *Haggadah* presents the hand of God as evident in history which is consequently meaningful and redemptive; the narrator's parents can see no meaning in history and doubt that God can either.

When the narrator relates the events of his own life and his

experience of his parents, he too is dependent upon memory. He says of himself as a child: 'True I was small but . . . my memory is good' (28). During his narrative he frequently reiterates his recourse to memory (35, 57, 60, 71 et al). Yet in his narrative the narrator feels obligated to become clear about the facts of the liquidation of the ghetto of Davarowsk and then on the deepest level of his imagination to re-live the lives of those trapped in the nightmare of Nazi Europe. But he does not emerge with theories which explain these events. Memory of the past furnished mainly by others becomes, for the narrator, knowledge and provides the key to his imagination whereby he extends his experiences beyond those of his physical self; in his imagination he re-lives the lives of those who were caught up in the Holocaust. He identifies with the living and with the dead and empathizes with their experiences: 'I have attempted to live their lives by assuming them as my own' (219); 'Everything seems so familiar that I'm no longer sure whether it is my father or I who is traveling on this train' (186). The narrator's kinship with his dead brother Ariel is even closer. He identifies with him and answers 'Yes, father' when his father whispers the name of the dead child. He feels both like a usurper of Ariel's identity and one who has been usurped, whose death has been stolen by Ariel: 'Ariel is not [my name], and yet I use it; . . . I say 'Ariel' and I become a child again, I relive the child's departure and then his death' (187); 'Ariel lived inside me, through me . . .' (217). He has integrated Ariel into himself so that Ariel partly died and partly lives on, while the narrator himself partly lives and has partly died. In his compulsive and obsessive quest the narrator acknowledges, '. . . I have risked damnation and madness by interrogating the memory of the living and the dreams of the dead in order to live the life of those who, near and far, continue to haunt me . . .' (220). Yet his final plea is a plaintive one: '. . . when, yes when, shall I finally begin to live my life, my own?' (220).

In his narrative of the transmission of memory from father to son, from one generation to another, the narrator makes extensive use of the symbolism of Passover; the mode of celebration of the festival involves the recital of the elaborate narrative of redemption – the *Haggadah* – transmitted by the generation of the narrating father to that of the child. The juxtaposition may seem an unlikely one, for the narrative of the Holocaust is mournful, one of suffering, death, and vast loss, whereas that of Passover celebrates joyful redemption. Yet the *Haggadah* also relates of persecution and suffering, while behind the fearful events of the Holocaust – behind the persecutions and the centuries of pogroms, exile and suffering, behind the *Haggadah* itself – the narrator at times glimpses intimations of a tremendous victory. Such an insight is brought home to others as well, for example, in the

teaching of Rabbi Aharon-Asher, grandson of the great preacher of the same name, when he lectures the young Reuven Tamiroff in Davarowsk on the significance of Jewish suffering:

> 'Of course Death loves to ravage our ranks, of course we have endured too many persecutions in too many nations and for too many reasons, but what does that mean? It means that we live in spite of Death, that we survive Death! It means that . . . our prodigious history is a permanent challenge to reason and fanaticism, to the executioners and their power!' (39–40)

Reuven himself encounters similar teaching in the *Haggadah*, in a passage which particularly strikes his attention during the last Passover celebrated in the ghetto before its liquidation. The *Haggadah* teaches that 'Forever and everywhere, enemies rise, threatening to annihilate us, but forever and everywhere, the Lord, blessed-be-He, comes to our rescue' (41–42). On this passage Reuven comments in one of his letters to his beloved Ariel: 'Is is true that God always intervenes? Did he save our generation? He saved me. Is that reason enough for me to tell Him of my gratitude?' (42). In a subsequent conversation with the narrator, Reuven affirms that '. . . something in us is stronger than the enemy and tries to be stronger than Death itself', to which the narrator replies, 'I hope so.' To himself he adds, 'But I was far from sure' (63).

In other ways also the narrator implies the comparison of the transmission of the experience of the Holocaust with the transmission in the *Haggadah* of the record of the exodus from Egypt: the events of the Holocaust too may be recorded in an eternal book, but one of which the writing will never cease. As the narrator says,

> There were so many events, so many mutilated, buried destinies, that I could spend my life and that of my people evoking them. Even if all the Jews in the world were to do nothing but testify, we would not succeed in filling more than one page. However, the Book contains six million pages. (210)

He has a similar insight when he hears recollections of the war in Europe by people who have 'known the unspeakable': '. . . one day they will begin to testify and will continue to the end of time' (138).

In the presented world of *The Fifth Son*, then, the narrator implies comparison of the survivors' memories of the Holocaust, albeit still individual and personal, with the national historical memory codified in the *Haggadah* (the narrative of which begins, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt . . .'). Yet for the literary theorist such comparison is problematic, for the narrative of the Holocaust in this novel is

avowedly fictional, whereas the narrative in the *Haggadah* purports to be a non-fictional record. What complicates matters is the narrative mode in *The Fifth Son*, in which the main narrator and three subordinate narrators all speak in the first person. Some theorists such as Käte Hamburger argue that the structure of first-person fictional narratives tends to imitate the structure of non-fictional, particularly autobiographical, narrative. As she puts it, 'The I of first-person narration . . . is oriented toward the objective truth of the narrated' (1973:313). Indeed, Patricia Waugh observes of fiction in general: 'We tend to read fiction as if it were history' (1984:33). For all that, first-person narrative may be fictional: Bertil Romberg (1962:30 ff.) replies to Hamburger's assertion that '. . . the first-person novel cannot be classed as fiction at all'; Franz Stanzel (1971:90 ff.) argues as untenable Hamburger's thesis that 'first-person narrative theoretically ceases to share the fictionality of narrated worlds'. Hence one may legitimately claim that in *The Fifth Son* the reader encounters first-person fictional narrative – a fictional treatment of a historical event.

But if the narrative memory in *The Fifth Son* is fictional while that in the *Haggadah*, say, purports to be non-fictional, what (if any) are the implications for the concept of memory? Do they have the same logic? Memory in a non-fictional text has a logic akin to that of memory in the real world; for both, a claim to remember has ontological and epistemological dimensions. Memory implies the prior existence of the events or whatever is remembered; it also implies that assertions about these events are true, for one cannot claim to remember events which have never occurred, so that tests of verification may be applied to memory claims.

However, the implications of the use of the term 'memory' or 'remember' in fiction are by no means so clear. May one even speak strictly of the narrator in a novel remembering? Certainly the narrator in *The Fifth Son*, say, speaks of memory and remembering, but should the literary theorist use these terms of the narrator? For, one may argue, the narratorial claim to memory is but a tissue in a web of fictions: the narrator, the novel's characters, the reader may all subscribe to the fiction that the narrator remembers – but, I argue, the literary theorist should not. For when the narrator claims to remember, his assertions are neither ontologically nor epistemologically justifiable. The events of which he speaks have no existence prior to his narrating them, and hence the ontological implications of memory in the real world are not transferable to memory in fiction. It follows, too, that the epistemological implications of real world memory are also not transferable to memory in fiction: since no events occur, the concepts of truth and verification are not applicable, or if so, only in a

special and watered-down sense. When the narrator in fiction relates his narrative, the narrational or presentational process brings the events into being. True, many narrators imitate people in the real world, and claims to memory, like claims to truth, are powerful tokens: they function for the narrator as a license to tell the tale, and as a claim that such a narrative is worth listening to. Yet for all that, a claim to memory in fiction functions very differently from one in non-fiction or in the real world; their logic is clearly very different.

Memory in fiction implies narratorial invention which like a Chinese box disguises and conceals the notion of authorial invention. As Patricia Waugh puts it, '. . . the apparent teller of the tale is its inventor and not a recorder of events that happened' (1984:33). However, narratorial invention is not thereby trivialised or rendered unimportant, for invention is the key concept in imaginative literature, the primary space for the practice of creative genius.

Analysis of the concept of memory in fiction and non-fiction is important to the literary theorist whose brief is the analysis of concepts. Yet for the reader who is invited to respond to the fiction created by the narrator, such analysis may be put aside. In the presented world of the novel the narrator of *The Fifth Son* implies an analogy between the individual memories of Holocaust survivors and the national historical memory of the exodus from Egypt. He does not emphasize the fictionality of his text as some narrators may do, but rather the historicity of some of the multitudinous events constituting the Holocaust and the survivors' reactions to these events. For the reader too the fictionality of the text is thrust into the background while the historicity of the Holocaust is foregrounded: events such as the annihilation of the Jews in the ghetto of Davarowsk represent the massacres of the Holocaust whether or not some of the victims bore the names Bontchek or Simha. It is likely that in a novel based upon historical events the author may well exploit the reader's knowledge of history. Yet at the same time the author enlightens the reader through the devices of empathy and imagination: for the Holocaust, as for other historical events, fictionalization must be forever justifiable. It is this literary principle, one may suggest, which is implicit in Wiesel's novel in which the individual memories of fictional characters are juxtaposed with and counterpointed to the national historical memory as recorded in the Passover *Haggadah*. Such counterpointing suggests that narrative literature involving memory provides two royal roads to knowledge of the past – the novel and history, fiction and non-fiction.

NOTES

1. *The Fifth Son*, p. 192. All further references to this text are indicated by page numbers in parentheses.
2. On the silence of some survivors, see Berman, 1988:30–35.
3. As the Prologue to the novel proclaims, the *Haggadah*, recited on Passover Eve, refers to four types of son. The fifth son of the title of the novel is the one who is absent – dead (p. 35); he is Ariel, whose cruel torture and death at the age of six dominates the novel and is a prime symbol in it of the barbarism of the Holocaust. It will be recalled that Ariel – 'lion of God' – is one of the names signifying Jerusalem.

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Texts under Arrest

The Autobiographical Writings of Helen Joseph

J. U. Jacobs

Nadine Gordimer concludes her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953) with an explanation of the autobiographical impulse:

> . . . although no part of one's life can be said to come to an end except in death, [and] nothing can be said to be a beginning but birth, life flows and checks itself, overlaps, flows again; and it is in these pauses that a story is taken up, in these pauses that there comes the place at which it is inevitable to set it down. (Gordimer 1988:366)

At such times, living-in-history is arrested – either voluntarily or involuntarily – in order for it to be 'narrativised' (to use Hayden White's term, 1987:2). Experienced events are not simply narrated chronologically, but life is paradigmatically apprehended so as to establish its shape and its substance. The self is, in effect, brought into being. An inability to 'narrativise' oneself through an act of memory would have consequences that are not merely epistemological, but ultimately ontological. To suffer from a total loss of recall would be to experience a loss of being, to be doomed to perpetual, fantastic self-reinvention with reference only to the present, the amnesic condition described by the neurologist Oliver Sacks as Korsakov's Syndrome in his imaginative work on psychopathology, *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*. Sacks's whole endeavour has been to restore the human subject at the centre of the 'case history'. The person, 'the suffering, afflicted, fighting human subject' (1986:x), he maintains, can be recovered only by deepening the case history into a narrative or tale:

> . . . for each of us *is* a biography, a story. Each of us *is* a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us – through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives, we are each of us unique.
>
> To be ourselves we must *have* ourselves – possess, if need be re-possess, our life-stories. We must 'recollect' ourselves, recollect the inner drama, the narrative, of ourselves. A man *needs* such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self. (1986: 105–6)

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And what Sacks says of the individual, also holds true for a country or a culture, Milan Kundera has argued in his fictions about societies that have been subjected to an 'organised forgetting'. It is within the larger context of this country, now suspended in just such a moment of self-narration as Gordimer describes in *The Lying Days* – a national recollection of those blanked-out areas of its identity – that I wish to consider the autobiographical writings of Helen Joseph.

During her life of resistance, Helen Joseph herself paused on three occasions to tell her South African story. The first was precipitated by her arrest at the end of 1956 together with 155 others on a charge of high treason. When she was acquitted five years later in 1961, but still banned from public activity, she wrote as a sequel to Lionel Forman's book, *South African Treason Trial*, her own account of the Treason Trial, and in particular of its last year. This was published in England in 1963 under the title *If This Be Treason*, but banned in South Africa. The second instalment of Helen Joseph's 'autobiography' was written in 1965, during the third year of her house-arrest, and was published in London in 1966 under the title *Tomorrow's Sun: A Smuggled Journal from South Africa*. In this book, which was also banned in South Africa, Helen Joseph tells the story of her life before the Treason Trial, in conjunction with an account of a two-month, 8 000-mile journey she undertook. (She set out as soon as her first banning order expired on 1 May 1962 to visit the victims of banishment and their families, confined by the South African government in remote rural areas.) Her third pause for recollection was twenty years later, when in 1986, at the age of eighty-one, she published *Side by Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph*. In this volume, a few years before her death in December 1992, she summed up the various modes of arrest under which she had lived most of her life in South Africa: 'I have been banned four times, gaoled four times, on trial for four years . . . I am still hedged around with the prohibitions attached to being listed' (1986:237).

Helen Joseph's achievements as an activist, from her earliest involvement in the Federation of South African Women and the Congress of Democrats onwards, are deeply inscribed into the struggle for freedom in South Africa. My concern here, however, is with the ways in which the three texts, especially the earlier ones, constitute stages in a larger autobiographical enterprise in terms of Philippe Lejeune's (1989) definition of autobiography as a pact made by the author with her reader to provide a sincere attempt to come to an understanding of her own life – in this case a uniquely South African one. *If This Be Treason* is, strictly speaking, a memoir; *Tomorrow's Sun* combines autobiography with biographical sketches of some of the victims of apartheid; and *Side by Side* is the only conventional autobiography of the three.

In my approach to autobiography I follow Paul John Eakin's view that the writing of one's life story is an act of self-invention, its 'act of composition . . . reaching back into the past not merely to recapture but to repeat the psychological rhythms of identity formation, and reaching forward into the future to fix the structure of this identity in a permanent self-made existence as literary text' (1985:226). Governed by impulses of both repression and confession, autobiographical truth is, in Eakin's view, 'not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and . . . the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure' (3). In autobiography, he maintains, 'the process of self-discovery is finally inseparable from the art of self-invention' (56). In this ongoing process of identity formation 'new versions of the past evolve to meet the constantly changing requirements of the self in each successive present' (36). It follows, therefore, from the interplay between past and present in the autobiographical act that its ultimate significance lies more in its revelation of the autobiographer's present situation than in the uncovering of her past (56). The autobiographer searching for her identity through memory does so within the context of an ongoing history (see Eakin 1985:25). Underlying Eakin's theory that the autobiographical act constitutes a coming together of self and language is a developmental model. It begins with the acquisition of language, then leads to the origin of self-awareness (which he calls the 'I-am-me' experience), and culminates in the '*self*-conscious self-consciousness' (219, my emphasis) of autobiography. All three of these moments of self-definition yield 'a constitution of self' in which language 'is not merely a conduit for such self-knowledge but a determination and constituent of it' (219).

Inherent in Eakin's theory of autobiography is the apparent paradox which he himself recognizes and pursues in his more recent study, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (1992): whereas in the past twenty years the trend has been to regard autobiography as an imaginative art and to emphasize its fictionality, it remains, however, like biography and history, an insistently referential one (1992:28). Post-structuralist criticism of autobiographical claims for referential truth is wrongly based, Eakin argues. It assumes outmoded beliefs in a self that pre-exists language, and in language that transparently allows access to a world beyond the text. It assumes at the same time a naïve belief that the form of the 'chronologically organized biographical narrative' is the 'natural' one for autobiography (30). Autobiography, he says, has a characteristically double nature: it is both anti-mimetic *and* mimetic (31), fictional *and* factual, an art of retrospection *and* an active engagement with the historical present. For example, on each

of the three occasions that Helen Joseph revisited her past, she revised and supplemented it in order to establish how fully her life was articulated in apartheid South Africa in 1963, 1966 and 1986 respectively. And in each case it was the discourse producing her counter-discourse that provided her with the cultural models for her narrative self-construction. It is in this sense that Eakin maintains that 'autobiography not only records an imaginative coming-to-terms with history, it functions itself as the instrument of this negotiation' (1992: 144). Elsewhere Eakin changes to an organic metaphor for this symbiosis of self and culture: 'Narrative in autobiography is always a retrospective imposition on remembered experience, but the choice of narrative is justified by its *roots* in that experience' (197, my emphasis); and he later develops this metaphor of entanglement when he describes autobiography as an 'experiential process, first *growing out of* experience and then, *looping back*, coming to be a part of its structure' (208, my emphasis).

One example will illustrate the claim that Helen Joseph's three texts represent an ongoing process of identity-formation. The phrase 'side by side', which serves as the title of her third book, the 1986 autobiography, comes from the last sentence in the Freedom Charter which she reproduces in full as a coda at the end of her life story. The phrase is also quoted by Helen Joseph at the end of her Foreword to the earlier book, *Tomorrow's Sun*, and is similarly cited in the Author's Note to her first work, *If This Be Treason*, after Albert Luthuli's Foreword to the text. In this Author's Note she emphasizes the common cause of all those brought together by the Treason Trial: 'This is not the full story of the treason trial. It is neither a legal nor a political analysis. It is primarily *our* story . . .' (1963:12). The full text of the Freedom Charter is also reproduced as the final Appendix to *If This Be Treason*, so that the sentence containing the phrase 'side by side' then concludes the first stage of Helen Joseph's story as it does the final one.

If This Be Treason is, however, not simply a chronologically organized history of the Treason Trial, nor uncomplicatedly a linear testimonial document by someone whose story metonymically represents the experience of others. After an introductory outline of the background to the trial, Helen Joseph provides a chronological 'Diary of Events' that covers all the major dates: the dawn swoops throughout South Africa on 5 December 1956; the first period of detention; the year-long Preparatory Examination in the Drill Hall in Johannesburg; the trial of the thirty accused in the Old Synagogue in Pretoria that was to continue for the next four years; the Sharpeville massacre and State of Emergency in 1960 when the treason trialists were held in jail for five months; and finally the acquittal of all the

accused on 29 March 1961. In order to 'narrativise' this formative stage of her life, however, Helen Joseph reconstructs her experience in terms of the cultural models which have determined her. It is as an Englishwoman who has travelled extensively in India and who has undertaken lengthy journeys throughout South Africa in preparation for the Women's March to Pretoria in 1956, that she seizes on the total distance covered by the accused in the bus which carried them to Pretoria and back to Johannesburg every day for four years – nearly 23 000 miles, 'a girdle around the earth' (1963:23) – as a metaphor. It inaugurates not only her autobiographical journey but also her protracted journey through the South African legal system. It is as someone with a literary education that she responds to the melodramatic dawn arrests as a 'strange mixture of comedy and high tragedy' (13), and describes the Treason Trial as a 'bitter farce played out upon the South African stage' (17). With a sure sense of its satirical effect she recounts in dramatic dialogue an exchange between Sydney Kentridge, Counsel for the Defence, and the presiding Judge Bekker about the alternative charges under the notorious Suppression of Communism Act:

> [*Kentridge*]: 'My learned friend . . . suggested that it might be necessary to apply surgery to the alternative charges. I submit, My Lord, that they should be buried.'
> *Mr Justice Bekker*: 'There's still life in them yet!'
> *Kentridge*: 'Then I would suggest, My Lord, that your Lordships should quietly put them out of their misery.' (29)

And with a similar sense of its theatrical effect Helen Joseph describes the climactic moment when the Judge President delivers his verdict at the end of this drawn-out exercise in political futility:

> Judge Rumpff is speaking now, in a low voice, but very clearly, leaning forward a little. 'You are found not guilty and discharged and you may go.'
>
> The Court is hushed. Not a movement anywhere, not a murmur, as the judges leave. We stand motionless, stunned, gazing at the door which has closed behind the last scarlet robe. (141)

Ultimately, South Africa itself was on trial in its own Supreme Court, and Helen Joseph's narrative is mainly determined by the structures of the Treason Trial which she had assimilated during this period. She both grasps and presents her story in terms of what she has learnt in court about the linguistic constructedness of truth. All the accused, she says, eventually came themselves to speak legal language quite effortlessly. Not only were they prepared by their

counsel for the witness stand and led in their evidence, but they had the examples of their legal team. Helen Joseph distinguishes among their various styles of cross-examination: 'Issy' Maisels who relentlessly 'dissected and re-moulded' (34) the evidence of the Crown's star witness; Vernon Berrangé who would lull the police witnesses into false confidence before he tore their reports 'piece by piece into shreds, ridiculing the witness into a state of gibbering confusion' (30); and Bram Fischer who, without ever raising his voice, managed to get a witness to say exactly what he wanted him to say.

The dramatis personae of the Treason Trial are all allowed to perform in the text, as judges, advocates or witnesses either giving evidence or under cross-examination. The impression the reader is left with by this dialogized narrative is of reality mediated by language: the fabrications of police witnesses; the difficulty of the leader of the Crown team in summarizing his mass of documentation; the garbled records of political speeches taken down in longhand by the Security Police; the reliable accuracy of the shorthand writers; the communication systems devised by the accused during their detention; the endless questioning and definition of terms like 'non-violence' and 'freedom'. Voices clamour in this text: Albert Luthuli's disbelief when his integrity is questioned by the Crown; the brilliant oratory of Robert Resha who, Helen Joseph says, could play on a hostile audience 'like a musician on an instrument' (111); Nelson Mandela's unequivocal affirmation of his beliefs; the simple force of sixty-year-old Gert Sibande's story from the witness box of the life of the ordinary African farm labourer; Z. K. Matthews's authoritative exposition of the policy and development of the African National Congress; the fulminations of the Prosecution; the supportive voices of the African women singing in prison – and Helen Joseph's own voice merging with this narrative polyphony when she describes her own testimony and cross-examination, seeking its register and finding its truth as she is compelled to justify herself as a South African on trial for her life. The story she tells is part of the collective story: 'Over the months the history and the policy of the Congresses has been told, the unwritten history of the struggle for freedom has gone into the record of this trial' (131).

The final forty pages of *If This Be Treason* is given to biographical profiles of all thirty accused in which Helen Joseph outlines their lives in relation to the ongoing political struggle. Frequently, as in the case of Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph has them speak of their experiences in the autobiographical first person. And still more significantly, she includes together with theirs her own biography, narrating 'Helen Joseph' in the third person but inserting also, in the first person, passages from her testimony in court.

What Helen Joseph was able to carry forward from this memoir-cum-collective biography to her second book, *Tomorrow's Sun* (the title is from Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halkett*), three years later, was a recognition of the need to restore the human subject at the centre of what, in the Treason Trial, were no more than legal case-numbers. The models of journey-narrative and of cross-examination assimilated into textual self-interrogation have also grown out of the earlier work to structure the narrative here. In *Tomorrow's Sun*, biography is deepened into autobiography: the first third of the book consists of an autobiographical account of Helen Joseph's life up to the Treason Trial; and autobiography recognizes in turn its obligation both to travel narrative and to biography. The middle section of the book tells of the journey undertaken by Helen Joseph, together with Joe Morolong and Amina Cachalia, from Johannesburg to Louis Trichardt, from Lydenburg to Stanger, from Durban to the Transkei and Basotholand, from King William's Town to Cape Town, and finally to the North-eastern Cape. They were searching for people who had been banished from memory by the Government to waste away in poverty on remote trust farms. By first investigating the histories of these banished people and trying to establish contact with them and their families by letter, Helen Joseph enters the next stage of a process of narrative recovery. Having consciously inserted herself as subject into her own story, she records the stories of all these vanished South Africans in a story-cycle in which each tale, including her own, is told as part of the whole. In her Foreword she claims: 'I am not a historian, and I am much aware of my inadequacies. Undoubtedly I have left gaps in the story . . .' (1966:11). Helen Joseph the developing autobiographer has, however, recognized the need for each of these casualties to be allowed his or her own voice: 'They told us their stories, simply, unforgettably, in their own language' (126). The significance of such narrative self-repossession is best expressed by Maema Matlala when he wrote from his place of banishment: 'We are more than thankful, seeing that we are made people again' (116). Narrative moments like these vindicate Helen Joseph's reply to accusations that her political acts were not adequately supported by political theory: to her, she said, 'people were more important than theories' (232).

Shortly after her return to Johannesburg, Helen Joseph became the first person in South Africa to be placed under house arrest (on 13 October 1962), which provided both the subject of the last section of *Tomorrow's Sun* and the context for telling the story of the banished people. Confined to her home in Johannesburg and restricted from public life, she was condemned for most of the rest of her life to what she calls a 'twilight existence' (1986:128), a half-life in which she was effectively forced to become her own jailer.

What had begun in 1963 with *If This Be Treason* as a heightened awareness of testimony and cross-examination was to grow twenty-five years later into a fully conscious literary examination of self. That *Side by Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph* had its beginnings in the earlier memoirs, in which autobiography was combined with biography, is obvious from the way that, paradoxically, although Helen Joseph is herself the centred subject of the autobiography, it is also her most complete exercise in self-effacement. It offers textual recognition that, if she has enabled others to have their stories told, then their life stories have determined hers. Hers is the story of the struggle of a people for freedom: they are mutually constructed and mutually inscribed. If Helen Joseph has had to learn during the many years of her house-arrest to live, as she says in *Side by Side*, 'a half life' (1986:133), her reader has also come to realize that neither half of her narrative can be read without the other. Recollecting in her old age the moment when she first came into conscious being, she begins her life story not at its biographical beginning in 1905, but in 1956 with the Women's March in Pretoria:

> On that day in August 1956, I was already fifty-one. I often wonder just how it took me so long to find the road to what must surely be one of the highest peaks of my whole life. On that day I walked with seven other women at the head of a march of 20 000 women of all races to the Prime Minister of South Africa . . .
>
> Looking back now at the age of eighty, it seems to me that perhaps for twenty years I travelled inevitably, if unknowingly, uncaringly, along the road towards that great day and what followed after it. As a white in South Africa, I belonged to an unjust society, protected, cosseted by the colour of my skin. I had left England when I was twenty-two. It was only when in my forties, during and after the Second World War, that I began to open my eyes to the real world around me. (21)

This is Helen Joseph's moment of autobiographical self-consciousness, recorded in a text which concludes, typically, with a tribute to those South African families whose stories are part of a larger narrative of struggle – the Mandelas, Cachalias, Sisulus, Naidoos and Weinbergs – and that finally ends with her singular narrative voice being subsumed into the first-person plural with which The Freedom Charter begins: 'We, the people of South Africa, declare . . .' (243). The autobiographical writings of Helen Joseph reveal, side by side, how the imaginative (re)discovery of self has produced important South African works of reference.

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Moral Truth and the Power of Literature

Seumas Miller

In a great deal of contemporary theorizing of literature, the mass media, and other cultural forms, ethical issues are treated either as if they were purely a matter of cultural or group preference, or they are explained away in terms of processes of ideological or social conditioning. The widespread acceptance of this kind of view of the ethical – and of the impoverished conception of the human agent that it entails – has resulted in a rejection within literary and cultural studies of the proposition that literature, and other cultural forms, can provide genuine illumination of the ethical. But ethics is a form of rational inquiry grounded in the notion of substantive moral agency.[1] Moreover cultural forms such as literature do not simply evidence particular social attitudes and relations; they are conventional mechanisms that enable individuals to express important ethical insights. This latter claim has seemed obvious to people from widely different cultures, and for hundreds, indeed thousands, of years, but it is now so widely rejected, albeit within the relatively narrow 'cultural' confines of contemporary cultural studies, as to require restatement and justification.[2]

There are two main theoretical positions or tendencies discernible in the writings of the contemporary theorists in question. The first view is a species of cultural relativism, and has adherents across a wide range of humanities disciplines, though very few within the discipline of moral philosophy itself. The second view, which might be termed 'ethics as ideology', is prevalent in cultural studies, though once again not in the discipline of philosophy itself.[3] This view is subscribed to by certain marxist theorists and – in a somewhat different form – by many supporters of Foucault. This is not to say that *all* marxists or *all* Foucauldians or *all* practitioners of cultural studies subscribe to one or other of these views. That would be absurd. There are many exceptions including, notably, humanist marxists. However, it is clear that these philosophical views are sufficiently widespread to require attention.

Both views have long been discredited within philosophical circles, including within analytical marxism and communitarian political philosophy. They both confront an array of powerful objections. Here are some of these objections.

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According to cultural relativism, actions or practices are not right or wrong *simpliciter*, rather they are right or wrong *for some cultural group*. Thus if in a particular society some practice is generally accepted then this makes it morally right for that society to engage in that practice.

Cultural relativism has profoundly unacceptable consequences. If cultural relativism is true, it follows that slavery is as right as any practice can be. And it follows that destroying other species or polluting waterways or female circumcision or discriminating against another race group or cannibalism or indeed any practice characteristic of some cultural group, is as right as any practice can be. For slavery is the accepted practice in some societies, and if it is the accepted practice of some society, then it is morally right for that society to have that practice. In another society which does not practise slavery, slavery is wrong (for that society). But according to cultural relativism there is no external standpoint to evaluate cultural practices. Since slavery is generally practised in some societies, and is therefore right for those societies, slavery is as right as anything can be. In particular, it is no less wrong than the practice of outlawing slavery favoured by other societies.

Indeed, if cultural relativism were true, then it would be morally wrong for an individual within, say, a predominantly racist society, to oppose and refuse to participate in those racist practices. For according to cultural relativism, if it is the generally accepted practice in that society, then it is morally wrong for an individual member of that society not to participate in it. This has the absurd consequence that those men and women who opposed racism when most of those around them fully participated in racist practices, were not persons of moral insight and courage, but rather evil doers!

Before turning to the ethics as ideology conception, I want to make some further points about a certain version of cultural relativism that has had great prominence in literary theory in particular. I refer to that form of cultural relativism associated with post-structuralism.

Post-structuralism lays great stress on the alleged constructive capacities of linguistic practices, as opposed to general cultural practices. Certain influential versions of post-structuralism treat ethics, and indeed the very notion of the moral agent, as essentially linguistic constructions. Thus does a leading American deconstructionist, Hillis Miller claim in his *Ethics of Reading*: 'Well, if ethics has nothing to do with any of the things it has traditionally thought to be concerned with (self-hood, freedom, interpersonal relations, etc.) with what does it have to do? The answer is that ethical judgement and command is a necessary feature of human language.'[4] Here it is important to stress that these theorists see language as constructing the

ethical realm. There is no ethical truth as such. There are only the claims and assumptions of particular languages. It is language in its fictive capacity that is central to this conception. Ethical conceptions and judgments are allegedly entirely fictional. Thus Hillis Miller claims: 'An ethical judgment is always a baseless positing . . .'

So for these post-structuralists moral rightness and ethical worth are relativized to particular culture-specific discourses, and assume the status of culture-specific fiction. This conception of the ethical is a species of cultural relativism, and is open to the objections already made to that doctrine. However it has an additional difficulty. It deploys an incoherent conception of language. Language cannot make up the world, be it its ethical, social, physical or other dimensions. Rather language stands to the thought of particular individuals and social groups both as an enabling mechanism and as a constraint. Language enables individuals and groups to express thoughts. Sometimes these thoughts or complexes of thought (e.g. theories) have never been expressed in the language before. Sometimes these thoughts while not new are nevertheless prior to language. For words sometimes come into existence in order to enable us to express prior thoughts or experiences or objects. Take the words, 'headache' or 'holocaust', as examples. We did not summon into existence the very real phenomena of headaches or the systematic extermination of six million Jews by performing linguistic acts of uttering the words, 'headache' or 'holocaust'. Quite the reverse; language followed thought. Language also constrains thought, although partially so. In providing a conventional instrument or enabling mechanism for thinking and communicating thought – thoughts are expressed in some language – language partially constrains the thoughts that can be expressed.

It is common for post-structuralists to respond to this by suggesting that there is no such thing as an objectively existing social, psychological, ethical, or even physical, world, since there is no fundamental distinction to be drawn between the real and the imaginary. And there is no fundamental distinction to be drawn between the real and the imaginary because there is no fundamental distinction to be drawn between fictional and non-fictional language. But this simply leads to absurdity. For we can now no longer distinguish between Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle, or between Moriarty and Adolf Hitler; on this account all these personages were equally real and equally fictitious.

According to the ethics as ideology conception, ethical standards, practices and traits of character are essentially expressions of, and vehicles for, relationships of power between institutions and individuals and between social classes. Thus Foucault states in his *Two*

Lectures: 'Right should be viewed, I believe, not in terms of a legitimacy to be established, but in terms of the methods of subjugation that it instigates.'[5]

The first point to note about this strong ethics as ideology conception is that, if it were true, it would follow that in any given society there is no real ethical order and no real moral agents; there are simply exploitative ideological practices followed by ideologically constructed 'agents'. But a society without a real ethical order and without real moral agents would be a society bereft of any real sense of right and wrong, of any real concern for others, of consistency in the application of standards, and so on. For these features are in part constitutive of moral agency and of the ethical.

If ethics is ideology then no doubt many societies will *appear* to be ethical, and *appear* to consist of moral agents. Thus contemporary Australian society *appears* to be ethical to some extent and to contain some morally worthy individuals. But if ethics is ideology then these appearances are not the reality. There *appears* to be a degree of freedom and justice in countries like Australia. But in fact this is not the reality. And South Africans *appear* at times to have a real concern for one another, but in fact they do not. For on the ethics as ideology conception, ideologically constructed appearances are *constitutive* of ethics. It follows that if we look through the ideology and the institutional and social power relationships we see a community with no sense of justice and no compassion. Such a community might be construed as 'a community of psychopaths' with an ideological overlay, and to claim that the ethical is necessarily merely ideological appearance is to accept such a community as being the only possible community.

This strong conception of ethics as ideology could be weakened. It might be maintained that much, but by no means all, of what presents itself as morality is merely ideology. This is no doubt true. But the point is that if it is true, then there are genuine ethical issues and real questions of morality that need to be confronted, and not simply dismissed as ideological effects. It follows that ethics is *not* simply ideology.

A further point involves drawing a distinction between the rhetoric and the actual value commitments of proponents of ethics as ideology. The rhetoric says that ethical discourse and moral agents are out; but in practice, of course, it is clear that they are not. On the contrary such discourse is both invoked and employed. One such example would be the way in which a marxist view is often used to criticize existing paradigms of self and society. Another example is the deployment of Foucauldian models of social power to account for the relations between the sexes. Such critiques, whilst rhetorically denying the

ethical and the moral agent, are in fact employing notions of these very things in order to describe, evaluate and deplore the repressive nature of society as they find it. In committing themselves to notions of freedom and social justice they are themselves moral and cannot do without moral categories and judgments. Such projects exemplify a kind of anti-humanism against itself, in which political change is required to achieve ends that correspond to values, that at another level of theorizing, have been renounced.

The inadequacies of cultural relativism and of ethics as ideology indicate the inescapablility of a conception of the ethical grounded in the notion of a substantive moral agent, as opposed to the constructed and insubstantial self entailed by cultural relativism and ethics as ideology. The set of properties such a substantive moral agent would necessarily possess include the following.[6] One, he/she possesses a capacity for rational and imaginative thought. This involves, among other things, a capacity to envisage hitherto unencountered situations and ways of behaving. It also involves the capacity for consistency in the making of ethical judgments. Two, the agent possesses freedom in the sense that he/she can make decisions on the basis of his/her rational thought processes and implement these even in the face of external resistance. Three, the agent experiences emotions such as sympathy for other people, compassion, love and so on. Four, the agent possesses an awareness of him/herself, and this together with his/her powers of rational thought and volition, enables the agent to conceive of his/her life as a totality, and to develop that life in particular ways. Five, the agent possesses a sense of ethical value. This includes the sense that certain things are worth doing and others not; and that certain actions are morally right and others not. Importantly, this sense exists and can be acted on despite contrary personal inclinations and various forms of external social prohibition and pressure. Six, in virtue of the above properties, and especially the capacity for sympathy and a sense of justice, the agent is able to establish intrinsically valuable relations with other agents. Seven, the agent's values and standards must cohere with one another and persist over some significant period of time. Otherwise his/her ethical dimension will become conflict-ridden and eventually disintegrate. Eight, the structure of ethical values internalized by the agent will be to some extent a response to, and a result of, the particular historical circumstances – including social circumstances – in which the agent finds him or herself.

This last point is in need of further elaboration, since it is the source of persistent confusion. Given that the structure of ethical values internalized by an individual agent is to some extent a response to, and a result of, particular historical – including social – circumstances,

we would expect to find the following. Firstly, we would expect to find agents belonging to the same social group to share a core set of ethical values. It does not follow from this that each member agent is the passive recipient of the values of the group. The existence of shared values follows from the fact that groups of individuals do not confront the world wholly as atoms but rather in concert with their fellows. People who live together have to work out a coherent system of shared values. Now in some cases these values might be imposed on the individual members of the group by the coercive action of the group as a whole or by some controlling sub-element. But this is not necessarily the case, and it is a matter for empirical investigation whether some value has been imposed on a particular individual(s) or not.

The second thing we would expect to find, given that the structure of ethical values of an individual and/or group is partly a response to and a result of particular historical circumstances, is some differences in ethical values from one socio-historical group to another. In some instances this might be due to moral development. Presumably, contemporary attitudes to women in the workforce, while by no means exemplary, constitute moral progress over attitudes prevailing in the nineteenth century. In other instances it is simply due to the different requirements of the material and social circumstances of the day. Physical courage is a great virtue in war but not nearly so important in times of peace. Physical strength is rightly valued in a society at a low level of technological development. And so it goes on. But it is important to stress that the inevitability and, indeed, desirability, of such differences in no way supports cultural relativism or the ethics as ideology conception. Here I do not have in mind the claim that these differences between cultures, and over time, typically take place against a background of a commonality of ethical values across cultures and times, though this claim is in fact true. My point is rather that the objectivity of ethical values and judgments is not called into question by the obvious fact that different circumstances call for, and cause, different ethical responses. Allowing weak and sickly infants to die might be morally right for a community living on the very edge of survival and morally wrong for us. But this might simply mean: as a matter of *objective truth*, to allow infants to die *under certain circumstances* is morally right and *under other circumstances* is morally wrong. It is morally right, for example, if the infants are weak and sickly and would be a burden of such a kind as to threaten the survival of the community.

We have seen that certain accounts of the ethical and of the moral agent prevalent in contemporary theorizing of cultural forms are inadequate. In their place I have put forward the notion of a

substantive moral agent, and outlined some of the features of such an agent. I shall now argue that literary texts, and other representational cultural forms, can simulate and embody salient aspects of the ethical realm, and indeed are centrally concerned to do so. In short, the genre of fictional literature is a conventional enabling mechanism;[7] it enables the communication of ethical truth through the construction of imaginary worlds. It does not follow from this that literary texts do not have ideological content, or even that some texts are not principally ideological in character. Some texts are principally ideological, just as some agents are bereft of moral qualities. Perhaps all texts are to some extent ideological and all agents in possession of some ideological beliefs. But the point is that the ethical is not reducible to the ideological, and texts can offer, and are often concerned to offer, genuine ethical illumination.

The communicative acts which constitute, for example, a literary text are not themselves either true or false, and typically they do not have explicit ethical content. So how is it that I am able to claim that fictional discourse represents the ethical realm?

I suggest, following the philosopher John Searle, that fictional discourse consists of what he calls 'pretend speech acts'.[8] A 'speech act' is simply a communicative act such as asserting or commanding or asking a question. Such acts are either written or spoken. A 'pretend speech act' is simply an act of pretending to perform a speech act without actually doing so. So according to Searle, in writing, for example, 'Holmes turned into Baker St.', the author pretends to be speaking about a real person, and pretends to assert of that person that he turned into Baker Street.

Ordinary speech acts (whether written or spoken) are able to be performed in virtue of the conventions of language. But fictional literature is governed by an additional set of conventions which suspends the operation of the ordinary conventions of language, so as to enable 'pretend' assertions to be performed. These 'pretend speech acts' are not acts of linguistic deception. The audience knows, and is intended to know, that they are 'pretend acts'. The point about such convention-determined 'pretend speech acts' is that they construct an imaginary world. This imaginary world consists of those persons and events which the author in performing these 'pretend speech acts', pretends exist. But where in all this could there be ethical truth?

Truth in fictional literature consists of some relation between this imaginary world and the ordinary world that we inhabit.[9] It is obvious that some of the elements of this imagined world – characters, events and so on – in varying degrees resemble elements of the ordinary world. But it does not follow from the fact that one thing resembles another that the first thing is true of the second. One acorn resembles

another, but the one is not *true* of the other. And even if someone draws a picture of a suburban street which fortuitously resembles very closely a particular suburban street, it does not follow that the drawing is a representation of that particular street, much less a true representation. If, on the other hand, the artist had done the drawing for a resident in the street, and intended it to be taken as a representation, then it would be assessed in respect of truth/falsity, accuracy or inaccuracy. Translated into the case of literature, the question is whether certain conventions exist by virtue of which the author is taken as intending that these fictional objects created by his 'pretend' assertions are representations of the real world. The aspects in question could be particular individuals and events or general features. Quite clearly, the answer to this question is in the affirmative; and indeed this is one of the things that distinguishes fictional literature from other forms of pretence like (say) circus clowning, where it is not assumed that the activity performs any representational or instructive function. It is mere pretence for the sake of pleasure.

I have argued that ethics is a form of rational inquiry grounded in the notion of a substantive moral agent. I have also argued that there is a variety of cultural forms which deploy fictional discourse for the conventionally-determined purpose of conveying ethical truths. Now it does not follow from this that novels, plays, films and so on, do in fact provide genuine illumination of the ethical. But there is an ethical realm to be illuminated, and these cultural forms provide a communicative mechanism by means of which such illumination *could* be provided. There can be no a priori objection to the claim that such cultural forms deliver ethical insights. Whether or not in any given case there is ethical insight will depend on the particularities of the novel or play or film in question. It will be a matter of the rational judgement of morally, politically and aesthetically sensitive readers, whether or not any given 'text' is ethically insightful or merely evidential of social attitudes. Or at least, it will be a matter of the judgement of such readers, as to what extent it is insightful, and to what extent merely evidential.

The view that literature, and other cultural forms, have the power to represent the ethical has been dismissed in many quarters. But, as I have argued above, the rational backing for this dismissal is very weak. Moreover the arguments against prevalent forms of ethical relativism and the ideological constructedness of texts are powerful and longstanding. There is in fact within much contemporary theorizing of culture a deep aversion to notions of truth and of morality, and also to the possibility that social forms could facilitate, rather than repress, individual lives; and there is an accompanying

immunity to rational debate on these issues. This immunity to rational debate marks the existence of ideological commitments.

NOTES

1. The term was coined by Richard Freadman.
2. Thanks to Andrew Alexandra, Will Barrett, Tony Coady, Allen Hazen and Crawford Miller for comments on this paper. Special gratitude is owed to Richard Freadman for lengthy discussions on these issues. A number of the passages in this paper were in fact formulated in concert with Richard during our co-writing of *Re-thinking Theory: a Critique of Contemporary Literary Theory and an Alternative Account*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
3. For a detailed treatment of this conception see Seumas Miller, 'Marxist Literary Aesthetics', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 16(4), 1990.
4. Hillis Miller, *Ethics of Reading*, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 46.
5. Michel Foucault, 'Two Lectures', in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–77*, Harvester, 1980, p. 96.
6. This set of properties was first elaborated in Seumas Miller's 'Ethics and Literature', *Redoubt*, 14, 1991.
7. For a detailed account of conventions, see Seumas Miller, 'On Conventions', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, December 1992.
8. John Searle, 'Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', *New Literary History*, 1, 1974.
9. This account of truth in literary discourse is elaborated in greater detail in Seumas Miller's 'Truth and Reference in Fictional Discourse', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 11(1), 1992.

Life Among the Remnants

Postmodern Consciousness and the Borderline Self

Gavin Ivey

I come to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.

Adrienne Rich.
Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–72.

Introduction

Postmodernism is a curious and elusive term, a linguistic paradox that evades precise definition despite having become common coin in academic and artistic circles. Within its polysemic labyrinths, traditional conceptual co-ordinates shift, contradictions melt and fuse in a textual alchemy. Science becomes rhetoric, philosophy becomes literature and the familiar world transmogrifies from matter to metaphor to reveal a spongy universe with nothing but discourse at its deconstructed core. While the intellectual mapping of the postmodern proceeds at a furious pace, the vexing question of the relationship between the rarefied world of postmodern discourse and that of everyday experience emerges as the dark backdrop to the shimmering spectacle of postmodern wordplay. The broad scope of this paper, therefore, is the relationship between postmodernity, postmodernist theory and the phenomenology of everyday experience. The narrower focus, however, is the question concerning the relationship between the fate of the self in postmodernist theory and the lived experience of self by people unfamiliar with postmodernist discourse. At stake is the ubiquitous concept of postmodernity. Is postmodernity simply the academic projection of postmodernism onto a culture impervious to the insights of its intellectuals, or is there something stirring in the collective experience of contemporary man which provides the cultural conditions for postmodernism to possess the intellectual imagination? This paper explores the latter thesis and entertains the possibility that people living in postmodern times exhibit a historically specific psychic life, qualitatively distinct from that of preceding generations, a psychic life referred to here as *postmodern consciousness*.

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The Postmodern Quaternity

The postmodern problematic is a metaperspective synthesizing four related concepts: postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction and postmodernity. This quaternity or family of concepts maps the domain of the postmodern and each refers to a specific object or aspect of the postmodern problematic. These terms, although closely related, are often incorrectly used synonomously and interchangeably, thus blurring important distinctions between them.

Before discussing the postmodern quaternity we need to define a triad of related conceptual antecedents: modernization, modernity and modernism. *Modernization* refers to the uneven historical process, commencing in seventeenth century Europe, whereby expanding capitalist industry occasioned a radical socio-economic restructuring of social systems, based on scientific advancement, technological innovation, mass industry, urbanization, knowledge dissemination and liberal-democratic forms of government. *Modernism* describes the dominant aesthetic movement which emerged in the nineteenth century as a paradoxical response to modernization. It celebrated the autonomous sphere of the aesthetic against the alienating uniformity of the machine age, venerating individual artistic creation as the expressive path to truth and self-realization. *Modernity* is the synthetic periodizing concept which signals the break from feudalism, integrating the diverse aspects of modernization into the collective historical awareness of social transition and transformation in modern industrial civilization.

Modernity was the progenitor of everything postmodern, and the latter, like any offspring, bears the genetic parental stamp. However, it is the discontinuities rather than the commonalities that interest us. *Postmodernism* may thus be defined as the diverse ensemble of aesthetic objects and practices deriving its negative identity from its ambiguously oppositional relation to the modernist aesthetic. The term 'postmodernist' describes those avatars of post-modern theories and practices, who criticize the modern and celebrate the ruptures (artistic, philosophic, social and political) perceived to mark a decisive historical break with the modern. If postmodernism is the aesthetic heart, then poststructuralism is the philosophic brain of the organism.

The term *poststructuralism* refers to a multiplicity of anti-humanistic perspectives within philosophy and social science, having in common the simultaneous critique and extension of linguistic structuralist analysis into the various signifying practices constituting cultural existence. Poststructuralism, because it is concerned with how knowledge is discursively constituted and constrained, provides the epistemological axis of postmodern theory.

The third postmodern concept, *deconstruction*, describes the activity of the organism. *Deconstruction*, it is argued, is an essentially ludic or creative activity in which any text or text analogue, philosophic or aesthetic, is sceptically probed to disclose the latent rhetorical assumptions, tensions, contradictions and hierarchical values implicit within its stated claims. The overt constructed meaning is thus de-constructed to reveal a world of multiple meanings, contradictions and rhetorical devices, thereby subverting and mutating the text from within its own boundaries. Wood (1985) uses the metaphor of parasitism to describe the practice of deconstruction. The deconstructionist parasites do not merely feed off their textual prey, but hatch their eggs inside its flesh. What is hatched is a new perspective that destabilizes and disorganizes the conceptual field, thereby preventing the 'conservative logic of system recuperation' whereby a destabilized system might congeal into its original state. Every deconstruction, of course, is another construction which willingly offers itself to the deconstructive fate of its predecessor. This destabilization is an end in itself, perpetuating the endless 'play of difference' without semantic conclusion.

For our purposes the concept *postmodernity* is the most important, as the other three may be considered specific cultural manifestations or institutional expressions of a historical epoch called postmodernity. Postmodernity is thus a periodizing concept which posits a qualitatively distinct juncture in Western history, characterized by the evolution of a new socio-economic order with a unique constellation of social relations, norms, ideologies, cultural practices and institutional structures. Postmodernity is thus a socio-historical concept designating a shared cultural reality or *Weltanschauung* arising from a unique set of social dynamics which, it is argued, signals the demise of modernity. The claim that modernity has ended hinges on the notion that there has been a metabletic shift in our shared perception and experience of the world that cannot be accommodated within a modernist framework:

> Modernity ends, since it is, in part, a question of culturally shared consciousness, as people begin to realize that there is a critical distance that separates them from the thinking and living that they have inherited . . . Postmodern thinking problematizes what was once unquestionable: the paradigm of knowledge, truth and reality that has dominated the whole of modern history. (Levin 1987:3)

The argument of this paper for the existence of a postmodern consciousness is based on two premises. The first, a radical historicist position, concerns the mutability of psychological life. Psychological structures, particularly the individual self and its expressions, are not

essentially transhistorical or a priori conditions of human existence, but historically contingent and context-dependent. The humanistic conception of individual self is historically unique to modernity and its continued existence in postmodern times is problematic and uncertain. The second premise, a corollary of the first, is that psychological structures are socially constituted by the cultural, economic and political practices, relations and institutions that characterize specific social formations. These exert their influence not only directly, but also indirectly through ideological discourses which provide interpretative frameworks that structure and mediate experience. Modern institutions and ideologies provided the necessary social conditions for the birth of the individual self, and the transition to postmodern society threatens to undermine this structure as the psychological axis of the humanistic subject.

The Waning of Modernity

Before looking at the psychology of postmodernity we need to briefly examine the impact of modernity and its defining characteristics. Modernity refers to a historical epoch, beginning in sixteenth century Europe, characterized by the rise of machine industry, capitalism, urbanization, secularization, technological innovation, social differentiation, political democratization and instrumental rationality. The modern age announced a historical rupture in Western culture, characterized by sweeping scientific, economic, philosophical and spiritual transformation. The spirit of modernity was that of technological self-determination arising from the enlightenment vision of scientific mastery of the world and emancipation of the individual from traditional political, religious, ideological, economic and psychological constraints. Modernity announced a clearly demarcated temporal break with the preceding sense of historical continuity in the West, initiating a self-conscious awareness of the present as a revolutionary moment severed from past ideologies and forms of social life. With this sense of a new beginning, expressed as temporal disjuncture, history became understood as the progressive triumph of Western rationality over

> emotions or animal instincts, science against religion and magic, truth against prejudice, correct knowledge against superstition, reflection against uncritical existence, rationality against affectivity and the rule of custom. Within such a conceptualisation, the modern age defined itself as, above all, the kingdom of Reason and rationality. (Bauman, in Smart 1992:149)

Modernity's philosophic self-understanding is paradigmatically exemplified in Descartes' radical doubt, 'an extreme rejection of

everything accepted on trust, authority, tradition, common sense; a suspension of our inclination to accept . . . the immediate looks of things' (Pippin 1991:23). Descartes' radical doubt expressed the historical mood of scepticism in the face of previously indubitable and God-given cosmological, philosophic and spiritual certainties. The nature of the world and man's place in it was called into question in an unprecedented manner. By critically and methodically reflecting on the contents of consciousness, man (now defined as a thinking subject rather than a creature of faith) could establish rational contemplation as the methodological path to truth and self-knowledge. From this perspective modern man springs, like a secular Adam, self-created from a radical cognitive act and a wilful distancing from the received wisdom and authority of the past. The defining hegemonic ideology of modernity was thus technocratic, anthropocentric, democratic and individualistic. What is important from a psychological perspective is that identity no longer derived from one's role-determined external relation to traditional institutions, but rather from an internal relation to one's own individual reflective activity. This historically new, semi-autonomous interiority is the precondition and, perhaps, definition of the modern psychological subject. The psychological hallmark of modernity was thus the emergence of a self-reflexive consciousness which inaugurated both the experience of an internal world and a sense of personal history. The structure of this historically new self-reflexive consciousness was autobiographical narrative. Psychic life became the self-reflective narrative integration of personal experience into a more-or-less coherent story of the individual author's unique history. The psychological subject is consequently the product of modernity and did not exist before this time.

Yet modernity was not a static and ahistorical phenomenon. Its character changed and shifted dynamically in response to its internal tensions, contextualized by historical events. Various authors (Berman 1982, Harvey 1989) thus identify various phases of modernity, beginning with the Enlightenment and continuing up to the mid-twentieth century. Early modernity (from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century) was characterized by confusion, disorientation and the inability to conceptualize the destabilizing flux of modern existence:

> This atmosphere – of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities and destruction of moral boundaries and personal bonds, self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in the soul – is the atmosphere in which the modern sensibility is born. (Berman 1982:18)

The second phase begins in the 1790s with the French Revolution and a shared public sense of socio-political upheaval, contrasting sharply

with collective memories of premodern existence. Characteristic of this period is an excited ambivalent awareness of unprecedented multiple possibilities, at once promising and perilous. The definitive mood of modernity is captured by Marx in the mid-nineteenth century:

> Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones . . . All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air . . . (in Berman 1982:21)

The period 1870–1914 marked the greatest period of economic scientific, technological and creative growth in history. These four decades saw the rise of capitalist imperialism, the internal combustion engine, air travel, telephonic communication, mass media, motion pictures, the metropolis and other phenomena that were to revolutionize people's experience of themselves and their world. Two discoveries in the science of physics are particularly interesting in terms of their psychological implications: Roentgen's discovery of X-rays in 1895 and Rutherford's atomic model in 1911. These discoveries are suggestive metaphors for the psychology of modernity. The discovery of X-rays made the previously opaque human body transparent and turned it into a spectacle of visible depth. Freud, in the 1890s, did the same for the mind when he discovered the psychic interiority of the unconscious and developed a method for exploring it. At the same time Rutherford's new atomic model revealed that the supposedly indivisible units of matter were not only divisible, but comprised polarized physical forces. In the same way Freud revealed the modern individual to be riven by opposing psychic forces, generating the painful anxieties and complexities of modern life. In this way the modern mind, conceptualized by Freud, mirrors modern matter as revealed by Roentgen and Rutherford.

It was argued above that the birth of the self or psychological subject was created by the erosion of institutionalized hierarchical social relations and the usurpation of faith by critical rationality. At the end of the nineteenth century this nascent psychic interiority deepened and acquired a positive content. Psychic life began to embody the internalized contradictory possibilities created by the tensions and transitions in modern social life. The personal unconscious was the result of this modern conflict and a new discourse, psychoanalysis, emerged to map the modern psychic space and explore the symptomatic manifestation of modern contradictions. The

neurotic subject was thus the creation of modernity and became its psychological emblem.

The third and final phase of modernity begins at the turn of the century and ends toward mid-century with a disillusionment in the failed promises of the Enlightenment vision, and the countercultural youth revolts of the 1960s. The modern triumph of progress and choice was soon afflicted by the sequillae of alienation and anomie. The Faustian hubris of unbounded instrumental rationality spawned the uncertainty and disorientation of a modern people, described by the poet Conrad Aiken (1936) as

> . . . we, poor grovellers between faith and doubt,
> the sun and north star lost, and compass out,
> the heart's weak engine all but stopped,
> the time timeless in this chaos of our wills . . .

The Enlightenment myths of the perfectibility of man, and salvation by industrial technology, were countered by the experience of urban alienation, and the sharpened proletarian perception of capitalism as an inherently exploitative economic system. The mass slaughter of the two World Wars revealed the modern understanding of history as a process of linear progression to be a hollow myth. Freud gave expression to this realization by modifying his psychological theory to include the controversial death instinct (1920), an equiprimordial motive force working in opposition to the creative life instincts. Moreover, Nietzsche's prophetic vision of a world without metaphysical certainty was being realized. The Enlightenment belief in a single representational mode (instrumental reason) succumbed to the conviction that the chaotic, disordered and ephemeral reality could only be grasped by employing multiple perspectives. However, the belief remained that the underlying reality, though complex and paradoxical, was nonetheless unified and accessible.

Modernism may be conceptualized as the ambivalent aesthetic response to the project of modernity, beginning in the late nineteenth century and waning after the Second World War. It celebrated the autonomy of high culture as an imaginative realm, self-legislating and free from the influence of mass culture which the modernization process had created. This modernism, since its inception, has been characterized by internal tensions and paradoxical ideals: the Enlightenment project which inspired the birth of individualism had created the industrial democracies, which in turn fostered an anti-aesthetic uniformity of mass culture. The very society which made the radical creative exploration and expression of self possible, was the same society which fostered bureaucratic rationality, alie-

nated labour, and conservative ideologies. The alienation of capitalist society and the élitist aesthetic of high modernism signalled the failure of the Enlightenment dream. Betrayed by the broken promises of industrial civilization and élitist modernist ideologies of redemption, the common response was to retreat to the psychological realm.

The pessimism of Freud's mature theory, embodied in the death instinct, was tempered by the institutionalization of psychoanalysis, and other therapeutic offshoots, as a means to personal truth and the reconciliation of psychic conflict. Since the irrational and destructive forces of history could not be controlled at a social level the project of self-control became paramount. One such strategy was an extension of positivist philosophy into the psychological arena. This assumed the form of radical behaviourism. The other strategy, exemplifying the counter-ideology of the 1960s, was the tradition of humanistic psychology. The American popularization of psychotherapy as creative self-realization, and its penetration into popular culture via self-help manuals, initiated a proliferation of humanistic discourses and techniques devoted to the cultivation and perfection of the self.

Of course, modernity did not end suddenly. Its decline has been geographically uneven and its presence is still detectable, even in those societies where the heretical discourse of postmodernism emerged more than two decades ago. The art critic Hughes observes that speaking of the end of modernism 'does not invoke a sudden historical terminus. Histories do not break off clean, like a glass rod; they fray, stretch, and come undone, like rope . . . Its reflexes still jerk, the severed limbs twitch, the parts are still there; but they no longer connect or function as a live whole' (1980:375). Modernity, it is alleged, could no longer sustain its own mythology in the face of radically transformed social circumstances, and we now find ourselves staring, disillusioned and confused, at a postmodern landscape.

Given that individual psychological experience is invariably shaped and framed by its socio-historical context one would expect that we, as postmodern citizens, would evidence a concomitant transformation of our psychic life. In other words, a postmodernist consciousness or mentality, defined in terms of specific historically distinct psychological qualities and tendencies, must be readily discernible if postmodernism does have the status of contemporary *Weltanschauung* rather than mere academic fad. The question, therefore, concerning the sociological status and legitimacy of the postmodernity theory has been and continues to be hotly debated by social theorists. Some contend that there has not been any qualitative epochal rupture designating a historically distinct social consciousness warranting a new label. According to this argument what we are

witnessing is the continued development of modernism in an era of advanced capitalism (Graff 1973, Raulet 1986). However, those arguing in defence of the concept point out that the discontinuities in almost every sphere of contemporary social life cannot be construed as merely quantitative shifts in the modernist ethos. A radical qualitative transformation of first-world culture, either welcomed or decried, is evident and this cannot be subsumed under the modernist rubric. An obvious question concerns the causal influences at work in this transformation. There are many sociological shifts that theorists contend are responsible for the advent of postmodernity, including the information revolution, technological transformation of industrial production, the proliferation of mass media, the erosion of class differences, and the replacement of old scientific and philosophical positions by new paradigms. However, the two factors most often cited are, firstly, the advent of epistemological pluralism (Lyotard 1984), characterized by the demise of grand metanarratives or 'totalizing discourses' which legitimate knowledge claims by appealing to apodictic foundations, thereby guaranteeing their status as universal truths. The second factor, emphasized by both Baudrillard (1988), and Jameson (1983; 1984), is a radical transformation of capitalist society involving, *inter alia*, a shift in emphasis from production to consumption, the commodification of all cultural forms, the implosion of all traditional boundaries, the separation of signs from referents, the loss of history, and the erasure of the centred subject.

Postmodernism and Postmodernity

Having sketched some of the broad sociological contours of the postmodern world, we turn now to an examination of its aesthetic form, postmodernism. Postmodernism is harder to define since a definition implies consensual demarcation of semantic boundaries which institute the positive identity of the thing defined. Since postmodernism revolts against boundaries, semantic fixity and the very idea of stable identity, the attempt to define it clearly is doomed from the start. The negative definition, provided earlier, is aggravated by the fact that there is no unified postmodern theory. Nor can there ever be, for postmodern thinkers are radically antisystemic and reject any attempts to homogenize their perspectives or smooth over points of difference between them. To be modern is to seek out the deep commonalities beneath the surface differences, to be postmodern is to valorize differences and dwell on their dissonant surfaces. It would thus be more accurate to speak of postmodernisms rather than postmodernism. An alternative access point is to outline the qualities

and characteristics emerging from a plurality of aesthetic objects and practices, insofar as these signal intersecting, ambiguously adversarial responses to the modernist aesthetic. Insofar as these characteristics bear a strong family resemblance, we may speak of a coherent postmodernist discourse. Furthermore, in focusing on these genetic similarities we find that postmodernism, in spite of its discordant registers, comprises a discernible epistemology, aesthetic and ideology.

The overriding feature of postmodernism is its linguistic ontology. Whereas modernism was concerned with the problematic relation between word and world, postmodernism begins with the linguistic constitution of reality – word *as* world. The reigning metaphor in postmodernism is that of *textuality*. This means that language replaces perception as the dominant mode of apprehension. We no longer see the world but instead *read* the world. A consequence of this textual cosmology is that we have no immediate access to the world since our experience is always linguistically mediated. Postmodernism, adopting the philosophy of poststructuralism, reverses the historical dominance of signified over signifier, making language self-referential rather than a secondary reflection of a primary material reality. In postmodernism the term *text* encompasses far more than written works. Text is defined more broadly to describe any system of signs in which each signified becomes another signifier in an infinite field or network of signifying relations. Because language is at once the condition and boundary of communicable experience we cannot speak of an anterior or extra-linguistic reality beyond the sign-system. Language does not *represent* reality, since this presupposes a reality outside of language. Instead, language *constructs* reality. Reality is thus nothing more or less than an interrelational matrix of sign-systems, an intertextual web. The focus in postmodernism is not on language as an abstract system, but rather on language games or *discourses*, specialized conceptual frameworks embedded in particular social contexts and power relations.

Postmodernity has made ontology an existential, rather than an intellectual concern, by forcing people to question the very nature of reality. McHale uses Jakobson's concept of the *dominant* – the principle of systematicity underlying apparently heterogeneous features – to distinguish modern from postmodern literature. This distinction is a 'shift of dominant from problems of *knowing* to problems of *modes of being* – from an epistemological dominant to an *ontological* one' (1987:10). The textual universe that emerges in postmodernism lacks the solidity, weight, gravity and enduring meaning that it had when reality was defined by its sensual qualities. The textual world is not a tactile world. The postmodernist object

world is more porous, diaphanous, insubstantial, ephemeral, and uncertain. It is hard to dwell in this universe without the nostalgic yearning constantly to touch surfaces, feel the weight of objects in one's hands, their textured outlines and their reassuring inertia against one's flesh. This reassurance is fleeting, however, because language reclaims these objects almost instantaneously and thrusts one back into the spongy mediated world of text.

The second distinctive feature of postmodernism stems from its discursive conception of reality. The linguistic ontology of postmodernism is thus accompanied by an equally radical epistemology. Since there is no extralinguistic reality and meaning is dispersed along an endless chain of signifiers (without any grounding in a transcendental signified), truth can no longer be defined in the realist sense of a correspondence between concept and fact. In other words the truth value of statements cannot be tested by determining their fit with an external reality. Thus the referential or correspondence theory of truth underlying the empiricist and positivist traditions is effectively destroyed.

Furthermore, the *logocentric* search for an absolute foundation or metaphysical centre that would guarantee truth beyond rhetoric, a still point in a turning world, is fruitless. When Nietzsche, the prophet of postmodernism, announced the death of God he sealed the fate of modernity's substitute deities – science, art, and philosophy – as well. The modernist metaphysics of depth, which posited immutable truths beyond the flux of appearances, has been replaced by radical postmodernist scepticism toward any faith, belief or transcendental truth issuing from any totalizing master narratives (Lyotard 1984). There can no longer be any metalanguage capable of comprehending the pluralistic language games of postmodernity. Jameson (1984) isolates superficiality or depthlessness as the 'supreme formal feature' of postmodernism. The notion of depth is a spatial metaphor which captures the modern cultural experience of a less visible reality beneath the surface of things.

Western philosophy has provided five depth models which have all been attacked by postmodernist theory (Jameson 1984). These are: the hermeneutic model of internal and external, the dialectical model of essence and appearance, the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity, the semiotic model of signifier and signified and the Freudian model of conscious manifest and repressed latent psychic content. By rejecting the modernist notion of depth, postmodernism inaugurates a shift from interiority to exteriority, from depth to surface.

> What is amiss with old-fashioned modernism, from this perspective, is just the fact that it obstinately refuses to abandon the struggle for meaning. It is

> still agonizingly caught up in metaphysical depth and wretchedness, still able to experience psychic fragmentation and social alienation as spiritually wounding, and so embarassingly enmortgaged to the very bourgeois humanism it otherwise seeks to subvert. Postmodernism, confidently post-metaphysical, has outlived all that fantasy of interiority, that pathological itch to scratch surfaces for concealed depths; it embraces instead the mystical positivism of the early Wittgenstein, for which the world . . . is just the way it is and not some other way. (Eagleton 1985:69)

The first consequence of this depthless epistemology is that there can be no truth beyond appearance. A second consequence springs from postmodernism's radical perspectivalism. Whatever knowledge is gained is provisional and perspectival, awaiting its immanent decay, even as it emerges, in the deconstructionist play of difference. All meaning is thus unstable and disturbingly ephemeral, dissolving as it forms, no more dense or enduring than mist. Lacking the metaphysical weight of tradition, and the teleological certainty of modernism, the landscape of postmodernism is fluid and transient, with no absolute origin and no destination. There is, furthermore, no privileged methodology for acquiring knowledge because all knowledge, including that of empirical science, is the consequence of particular rhetorical strategies. The resulting truth claims arise from the violent repression of the method's own internal contradictions and organic oppositions, to present a perspective which forecloses on contending implicit meanings.

If all truth arises from rhetorical strategies embedded in discursive power relations, then any opposition between fact and fiction dissolves, the only canonical facts being those that ideologically repress the rhetorical condition of their own existence. This not only undermines the epistemological dominance of empirical knowledge and method, but also that of the hermeneutic method which conceives of truth as *aletheia*, the process by which meanings become unhidden or uncovered before interpretative inquiry. Hermeneutics, particularly that of the empirical-phenomenological method which aims at general descriptions of essential meaning structures, is as complicit in perpetuating the logocentric myth of depth metaphysics as its neo-positivist adversary. If truth is the product of discursive rhetoric, then it is created rather than discovered beneath the prereflective awareness of the natural attitude, as the phenomenologists would have it. Thus the only truths that postmodernism concedes are aesthetic truths. Nietzsche anticipated this position in his 1873 statement that serves, even today, as an eloquent postmodern manifesto. Truth, he said, is nothing but a

> mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transposed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonical and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that this is what they are . . . (in Kaufman 1954:46)

Descartes' radical doubt was stabilized by his faith in rational certitude and a benevolent deity. The radical doubt of postmodernism, however, has buried both of these dead gods. This radically aestheticist epistemology means that there can be no rational criteria for adjudicating competing knowledge claims. For modern man, afflicted by the vertigo of lost tradition, there was always escape from consequent psychic disorientation in the anchoring truth offered by scientific or artistic endeavour. Postmodern scepticism toward any institutional truth cuts off these modernist avenues of escape.

The undercutting of institutional truth has a further psychological consequence, since ideological commitments and courses of action are founded on perceptions of truth. Postmodern scepticism towards all legitimating master narratives and institutional truths makes commitment to any course of action or ethical system impossible. The cynicism and gamesmanship of postmodernism is readily understandable in this light. With nothing to affirm, one can only play instead of act upon the world; with nothing to believe, moral relativism and a detached infidelity towards a plurality of micro-narratives, is the only possible stance.

> Classless society, social justice – no-one believes in them any more. We're in the age of micro-narratives, the art of the fragment . . . (Virilio, in Hebdige 1988:160)

The revolutionary significance of postmodern epistemology is not that it posits truth as essentially subjective, but that it further eliminates the possibility of subjective criteria as guarantors of truth.

Historically, the position of epistemological relativism has been ameliorated by a pervasive faith in the human subject as the experiential centre of subjective wisdom. This doctrine, beginning with the romantics, was taken up and refined by the discourse of humanistic psychology in response to the 'dehumanizing' perspectives of behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Its most sophisticated and influential articulation has been in the person-centred psychology of Carl Rogers (1951; 1963). The guarantor of subjective truth in Rogers' work is the biological immediacy of what he terms the 'organismic valuing process', which serves the individual's one motive force, the drive to self-actualization. This process is an innate

psychosomatic awareness of what needs, feelings and actions will foster the holistic actualization of the individual's highest potential. The power of this approach is that it offers an immediate (unmediated), centred, essential, transhistorical and biological criterion of non-rational truth. Our thoughts may deceive us but our organismic strivings never lie. What is true is what feels right deep inside when the organismic valuing process is being followed.

This naïve but influential perspective is untenable from a postmodern perspective because it is founded on three defunct myths:

1. The autonomous, holistic and integrated self-actualizing subject;
2. Unmediated experience free from ideological influence; and
3. An ahistorical body preceding and existing outside of discursive power relations.

We have already implicitly dismissed the second myth when we acknowledge the function of language to be constitutive rather than reflective. Meaningful experience does not precede language but takes shape only in linguistic articulation. This means that there can be no immediate experience – it is always linguistically mediated. The political consequence of this, given Foucault's insights into the discursive structure and exercise of power, is that Rogers' organismic valuing process does not lie outside of language, and hence cannot exist outside of the ideological influence. There can thus be no 'natural', ideologically untainted experience to function as the curator of subjective truth. Locating the mythical process in somatic experience is untenable since knowledge and ideology – in postmodernism the two are inseparable – are always embodied and the body is consequently always a site of ideological relations and rituals of power. Postmodern man can thus trust neither his subjective experience nor his carnal intuition as custodians of truth or guides to conduct since these are tainted by language and ideology.

The film industry's preoccupation with malevolent alien life forms incubating within the bodies of their unknowing human hosts, I think, gives cinematic expression to a latent social awareness that not even the body can be trusted, infected as it is with ideological aliens. This has important psychological consequences, since our earliest experiences of self-continuity are bodily ones, and these persist into adulthood as foundations for the autobiographical narrative of identity. Within postmodernism, however, the body is no more unified, stable or physically given than any other object in the textual universe:

> The body is the inscribed surface of events, traced by language and dissolved by ideas, the locus of a dissociated self, adopting the illusion of a substantial unity – a volume in disintegration. (Foucault 1977:138)

The body is not simply another object. It is privileged because of its constitutive importance in the ontogenetic project of selfhood. But, as we have seen, the body no longer serves as a stable referent, a source of continuity, solidity, wholeness and integrity in the evanescent chaos of contemporary social life. The body is no more stable than any other text, its tissues no more firm, fixed or enduring than the decaying webs of signification shrouding it. The strict bodily regimes of diet and exercise followed today testify to a pervasive anxiety about maintaining and reinforcing a tenuous and weakening sense of internal cohesion by controlling this external envelope of the self.

The second and third humanistic myths, discussed above, are built on the assumption of the first myth, that of the autonomous and integrated self. This canon of humanistic faith fell long ago beneath postmodern knives. The decentring of the subject as epistemological foundation is thus the third and most distinctive feature of post-modernism. It is also the one that is psychologically most interesting because of the relationship between subjectivity and selfhood. We may define the self as the individual's acquired psychosomatic experience of being a relatively bounded, differentiated, cohesive and temporally continuous agent across a diversity of interactional contexts. The self is that structure underpinning the narrative project of individual identity. The term subject is an impersonal and anonymous concept, but the self is what personalizes and grounds subjectivity within the ensemble of life-projects of each individual. It was argued earlier that the individual self was the historical product of modernization that began with man's historically and ideologically contingent capacity for self-representation, and hence self-reflection. The philosophy of modernity was humanism, and the individual self replaced God as the transcendental referent and philosophical centre of existence. The development and perfection of the self became the new (and only) moral imperative of modernism, hence the status of self-actualization as the sole motive force in humanistic psychology. But the integrity and holistic unity of the self was irrevocably exploded by Freud, who showed the individual psyche to be an essentially divided and contradictory entity, torn between instinctual urges and social prohibitions. Freud, however, despite dethroning and de-centring consciousness, was an arch-modernist who saw the scientific and rational appropriation of the unconscious by the ego, in order to strengthen the latter, to be the proper aim of psychoanalysis. Moreover, the fractured language of dreams and symptoms, in Freudian psychoanalysis, always refers to an essential, ahistorical and biological order that precedes and transcends the linguistic order. The Freudian ego, born and anchored in the body's mechanics, is weighty and substantive in spite of being riven by contradictory callings.

Interestingly, the term *self* never appears in Freud's work and only emerged in psychoanalytic theory during the 1950s. In contemporary psychoanalysis, however, it now occupies centre stage. How do we account for this sudden interest in a concept alien to the psychoanalytic tradition? One answer is that in the past fifty years the experience of selfhood has become problematic in a way that it never was before. Just as one lives unaware of one's appendix until it becomes inflamed, the self has only become an object of intense psychoanalytic scrutiny because its condition is unstable. As many psychoanalytic authors testify, the first world is witnessing a major demographic shift in psychopathology, from neurosis to a spectrum of character disorders referred to as borderline pathology. Given the overdetermined influence of the social conditions of existence on the psychic life of individuals we should not be surprised to find that personality structures reflect the changes in their cultural matrix. It is precisely the instability of the self structure in borderline pathology and its experiential manifestations that invite suggestive comparisons with postmodernism as a cultural dominant.

Life on the Border

Borders are indeterminate positions between places, positions or qualities. The borderline personality disorder is aptly named, as it straddles the border dividing neurosis from psychosis, exhibiting characteristics of both without falling into either of these diagnostic categories. The coexistence of rational mentation and madness in these individuals defies the formulaic understanding of classical psychoanalysis. Reports from this no-man's land dismay psychologists, who are used to hearing the neurotic's coherent historical narratives of familial dramas, with their repressed passions, to which the psychological symptoms point unerringly. The borderline, however, does not relate coherent stories, but speaks from a place where disordered, jagged narrative fragments collide, where stories break off and resume abruptly in another world, peopled by a different cast of parodic figures who bear little resemblance to actual others. If the neurotic is the emblem of modernity, then the borderline is the emblem of postmodernity. Whereas neurotic pathology concerns the unconscious refusal of the centred self to integrate its repressed aspects, borderline pathology concerns the attempt of a decentred, dispersed and fragmented self to maintain its tenuous existence against forces that would obliterate it.

The neurotic fears self-knowledge, but the borderline fears self-annihilation. This phenomenon of identity diffusion is characterized by unstable boundaries between self and others, the experience of

being split, of being multiple contradictory personalities, of wearing many masks, of oscillating between polarized moods, of feelings of derealization, distrust, chronic anxiety, hollowness, destructive and self-destructive aggression, and a pervasive uncertainty about existence in general. The term that best captures this state of being is *ontological insecurity* (Laing 1960). The borderline's world is a fractured mosaic of multiple, impermanent, partial and contradictory parallel realities which defy integration into coherent wholes. Lacking a solid, cohesive core of identity the borderline negotiates a discontinuous, depthless world that seems unreal, precarious and insubstantial, where meanings shift, slide and congeal momentarily into antagonistic forms, before dissolving once more.

The borderline feels absent while present, neither dead nor alive, discontinuous across time and context. The borderline self is thus a *bricolage* of broken images and assorted idioms, other people's narratives and mannerisms, loosely assembled into a fragile crust or pastiche with nothing but void at its centre. The borderline's pathological dependence on other people and inability to be alone issues from her need to parasitically assume the characteristics of others, composing a chameleonic false self from the fragments of others' lives to suspend over the abyss of his/her own hollow interior.

The borderline, unlike the neurotic, has no interiority or substantive internal world behind the conscious surface. Having no centre, the borderline is all surface, with no vertical dimension, no sense of depth. Whether manically excited or profoundly depressed, the borderline feels intensely but not deeply, affectively drifting without a self to ground or anchor his/her labile, but superficial, emotional life.

The temporality of borderline existence is also disturbed. Lacking a cohesive self structure to ensure continuity over time, the borderline's capacity to recall his/her past in detail, and to project a conceivable future, is severely compromised. Without a sense of past or future the borderline is locked into the eternal present. Imprisoned in the moment the borderline lacks the capacity for autobiographical narrative. All that he/she can voice are sensations, narrative fragments, traces of half-formed meanings, etchings in sea sand, and the tide coming in.

The borderline condition is interesting because of the visible structural parallels it has with postmodern theory. The borderline experience and the postmodernist vision are almost isomorphic. The fate of the self in borderline pathology mirrors the fate of the subject in postmodernism. It is no coincidence that the self, and hence the question of individual identity, becomes problematic in psycho-

analysis at the same time that the ontological status of the author in postmodernist literature is brought into question. The deliberate literary strategy of authorial self-effacement in modernist fiction has been replaced by the author's intrusion in postmodern narrative. However, the author is no longer the originating subject and creative agent, but merely another fictional character, dispersed by language and the centrifugal force of signification. The author's status, too, is ontologically insecure. Authorial intrusion calls ironical attention to the author's absence and what Roland Barthes calls the death of the author. Writing, says Barthes, 'is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost . . .' (in McHale 1987:200). The aesthetic shift is from art as creative self-realization to art as discursive self-dissolution. But this is complicated by the fact that the dead author's intrusive absence is a simultaneous presence. McHale notes that the author is an 'ontologically amphibious figure', alternately present and absent, flickering in and out of existence. The fate of the author in postmodernism thus echoes the fate of the ontologically insecure self in postmodernity, exemplified by the phenomenon of borderline psychopathology. The borderline self, like the postmodernist author, feeling neither alive or dead, flickers in and out of existence, dispersed within a decentred narrative beyond authorial control or comprehension.

The modern subject possessed language and used it as an instrument of will. The postmodern subject does not possess, but is rather possessed by language, so becoming its instrument. The shift from modernity to postmodernity is thus from possession to dispossession. The borderline condition existentially epitomizes the postmodern experience of dispossession in two ways. Firstly, as a consequence of fragmentation they feel more absent than present to themselves. They feel a lack, an emptiness which cannot be spoken and hence cannot be possessed. The typical borderline symptoms of boredom, futility, empty depression and a pervasive sense of meaninglessness express this. Silence is unbearable for borderlines because in silence they cease to exist, the spectre of non-being shadows them continually. Secondly, because this emptiness is precisely *who* they are, they feel dispossessed of agency and initiative. They are the zone in which feelings and events happen, stripped of authorship and intention, a witness to things beyond their control. I borrow the term zone from that exemplary postmodern text, *Gravity's Rainbow*. The borderline's internal world, the ghostly status of the borderline self could not be better evoked than in Pynchon's portrayal of the Zone:

> Ghosts used to be either likenesses of the dead or wraiths of the living. But here in the Zone categories have been blurred badly. The status of the name

> you miss, love and search for has grown ambiguous and remote, but this is even more than the bureaucracy – Some still live, some have died, but many, many have forgotten which they are. Their likenesses will not serve. Down here are only wrappings left in the light, in the dark: images of the Uncertainty . . . (1973:303)

Like the borderline self, the only reality of the postmodernist subject is nonidentity, the emptiness between the unstable signifier and a referent irretrievably lost in the tracts of discourse. Like the borderline, too, the postmodern subject ceases to exist in silence, discourse being a condition of its existence.

The borderline self comprises a pluralistic amalgam of subpersonalities arising from nonmetabolized part-object introjects. This refers to significant others, internalized in early childhood as fragments, rather than as whole individuals. The synchronic co-existence of these subpersonalities means that, metaphorically, the borderline speaks with many voices and in many registers. The postmodern text, too, has the structure of a *heteroglossia*, a discursive plurality or polyphony of voices that resists all attempts to integrate the character's discrepant languages.

Jameson, a neo-Marxist critic of postmodernism, bemoans the historical waning of the centred subject and blames the bureaucratic organization of late capitalism for its demise. Jameson, though acknowledging the loneliness and alienation of bourgeois modernist consciousness, contends that the decentred subject heralds the death of what is unique and personal in the centred modernist individual. What essentially distinguishes the decentred postmodernist subject from the alienated modernist?

> The depthless, styleless, dehistoricized, decathected surfaces of postmodernist culture are not meant to signify an alienation, for the very concept of alienation must secretly posit a dream of authenticity which postmodernism finds quite unintelligible. Those flattened surfaces and hollow interiors are not 'alienated' because there is no longer any subject to be alienated and nothing to be alienated from . . . (Eagleton 1985:61)

The postmodern individual is no longer alienated (in the Marxist sense) because to be alienated presupposes a coherent rather than a fragmented sense of self from which to be alienated (Jameson 1983). Thus the alienation of the subject in modernity is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject in postmodernity. This fragmentation, according to Jameson, assumes two related forms: the fragmentation of reality into images, and time into a series of perpetual present moments.

Jameson likens postmodern psychology to schizophrenia, using

Lacan's understanding of the latter as a linguistic disorder in which the signifying chains of meaning in one's sentences snap, leaving a 'rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers' (Harvey 1989:53). Since the personal identity of the speaking subject obtains through a sense of continuity over time, the resultant inability to unify past, present and future in the form of sentence structure mirrors the same inability to establish temporal continuity in one's psychic life. The postmodern subject thus exists in the frozen moment of the perpetual now. This breakdown of the signifying chain reduces experience to a series of unrelated 'now' moments and disconnected experiential fragments.

Jameson's conception of postmodern psychology as schizophrenic is extreme and inaccurate. One finds no reflection of the schizophrenic's florid madness and disintegration in the lives of postmodern citizens. It is for this reason that the borderline, rather than the schizophrenic, is a far better exemplar of postmodern psychic life. The borderline is more cohesive than the schizophrenic, rarely deluded or hallucinated, and far better adjusted to vocational and social demands. Their ambiguous existence, and capacity to contain a fragmented internal world without exploding into psychosis, establishes them as a more suitable emblem of the postmodern condition.

Postmodernism is also not, as Jameson contends, a form of cultural schizophrenia. Despite its attack on the metaphysics of discourse, postmodernism, to the extent that it employs language to deconstruct language, is subject to the very metaphysical constraints it seeks to unravel. These shared metaphysical latencies, imposed by language, prevent postmodernist discourse from becoming psychotic. This is what distinguishes the postmodern author, composing grammatically correct sentences on his/her personal computer, from the schizophrenic, scrawling unintelligible symbols in his/her own blood on the walls of a psychiatric ward. Only schizophrenics escape metaphysics. Postmodernism is thus also a borderline phenomenon, straddling the neurotic metaphysics of modern language and the psychotic slippage of random signifiers.

Jameson, despite his unsophisticated psychological analysis, correctly focuses on disturbances in temporality as a central cultural symptom, a symptom common to both borderline pathology and postmodern theory. Earlier on I referred to this as the temporality of the eternal present. Baudrillard describes the postmodern as a period in which history has stopped. The past, as a series of real non-discursive events, does not exist. Any future dialectical resolution of present events in terms of historical progress is a modernist myth. The relics and icons of modernism have been destroyed and cannot be resurrected. Progress, and hence any conception of a future, is

unthinkable. Anderson (1984:104–5) describes the situation in temporal terms as 'the closure of horizons: without an appropriate past, or imaginable future, in an interminably recurrent present'. Postmodern living is movement without progress, form without substance; it is, in Baudrillard's words, 'survival among the remnants'.

We have seen a common problematic subjectivity in borderline pathology and postmodern literature. Of course, any disturbance in the subject necessarily entails a corresponding disturbance in the object pole of a phenomenon. Consequently, one of the most obvious shared features is the fate of the object world in both borderline pathology and the postmodern aesthetic. Here, as with the decentred subject, fragmentation is the dominant motif. The horror of the borderline's existence is not only a consequence of a fractured self, but also of an attendant fragmented object world. A developmental condition for the emergence of a stable self is the attainment of *object permanence* in infancy. Object permanence arises from the infant's growing awareness of an external ('not-me') world outside of fantasy. The solidity and persistence of this external world (at first embodied by the mother), despite the infant's fantasized destruction of it, has the effect of securing the infant's experience of being a substantive, bounded self, interacting with a resilient external world. In borderline pathology object permanence has not been fully attained, and the ontological status of the external world is thus determined by the vicissitudes of the borderline's fantasy life. The very objecthood of the object world is thus undermined, with the borderline person being unable to clearly determine what is 'me' (internal world) from 'not-me' (external world). The experiential consequence of this is that the world becomes unpredictable, precarious and unstable, lacking cohesion, clearly demarcated boundaries, continuity over time, and ultimately, any enduring meaning at all.

The borderline's lack of object permanence is culturally reflected in the boundary erosion, fluidity, instability and impermanence of the social world in postmodern ontology. Because there is no external reality in the postmodern textual universe, the attainment of a cultural object permanence is impossible. Therefore, the experience of a stable community and enduring social world against which to measure and define oneself, is missing. For postmoderns, the cultural precondition for self-continuity, a solid world outside of fantasy, is no longer possible. This existential reality, however, is not simply the consequence of the postmodern worldview, but also a result of our experience with the commodified objects that populate the world of late capitalist consumer culture. The marriage of technological innovation, capitalist commodity production, and aggressive adver-

tising has resulted in a world where enduring natural objects are eclipsed by mass-produced commodities, designed for consumption and disposal, rendered immediately obsolete by the next model or consumer fad. These objects are designed to be impermanent in order to perpetuate the consumer frenzy that capital depends on for its survival. The psychic consequence of living in a world of immediately obsolete commodities is to further erode our tenuous experience of an enduring material reality. This is aggravated by the fact that our sense of identity in late capitalist culture is determined by consumer lifestyles and the semiotic codes governing this consumption (Baudrillard 1988). Because an enduring sense of self is contingent on an enduring material world, the socio-economic organization of late capitalism undermines the cultural foundation of the self structure.

The borderline's psychic interior is populated by part-objects, broken moods and experiential fragments. His/her external world, being nothing other than a projection of this shattered interior, is equally fragmented, unstable, distorted and ephemeral. Whereas the neurotic employs the defence mechanism of repression to disown negative, but integrated, self- and object-representations, the borderline employs the more primitive defence of *splitting*, whereby the synthetic function of dialectically integrating opposing representations into meaningful wholes, is made impossible. Repression, the typical defense of the neurotic, is a 'vertical' phenomenon in which meaning is forced beneath the surface of consciousness. Splitting, however, is a 'horizontal' phenomenon in that there is no hidden or repressed meaning to uncover, simply a surface rupture between dissonant alternating self and object representations. The borderline, like the postmodern object, has no interiority, no inner world beneath the surface. To have no inside is to be eviscerated, hollow, a shell around an emptiness. The neurotic's pain springs from suffering deeply, from having a subversive depth which contradicts the surface. The borderline's agony springs from having no depth to give meaning to his/her pain; this pain is thus superficial pain, suffering on the surface, and infinitely worse as a consequence.

Splitting is an attack on semantic linking, severing and disconnecting opposing meanings and representations, until all experience consists of heterogeneous and incommensurate worlds, between which the borderline shifts without any attempt to reconcile the contradictions. Postmodernism, similarly, signals the death of anything total, whole, full or solid. The postmodern world is a *heterotopia*, a term Foucault uses to describe

> the disorder in which fragments of a large number of positive orders glitter separately in the dimension without law or geometry . . . in such a state things are 'laid', 'placed', 'arranged' in sites so very different from one

> another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a common locus beneath them all . . . Heterotopias are disturbing, probably, because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences, but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite to one another) to hold together. (in McHale 1987:44)

The parallel between the borderline's world and Foucault's heterotopia is remarkable. In postmodernism any dialectical or teleological quest for the reconciliation of differences, in whatever form, is a futile longing for the *metaphysics of presence*. Postmodernism's energy derives from the friction that occurs as its multiple internal contradictions – stylistic, rhetorical and conceptual – rub together without the relief of reconciliation or dialectical synthesis. Its contradictory elements are irreconcilable, with no unifying principle or possibility of drawing its antitheses into a stable marriage. It criticizes any synthetic function or activity; instead, the postmodernist 'only disconnects; fragments are all he pretends to trust' (Hassan, in Calinescu and Fokkema 1987:19). The postmodern object is a collage or montage, dislocated, disunified, decentred. The term *bricolage*, the juxtaposition of heterogeneous or contradictory fragments in opposition to the idea of unity, best illustrates the postmodern aesthetic. This aesthetic, however, has existential implications in that it is a prescription for contemporary survival in a postmodern world. 'All that remains to be done', says Jean Baudrillard, 'is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces – that is post-modern' (in Kellner 1988:247).

The borderline, too, is a bricoleur. Just as the postmodern text is a tissue of intertextual references and fragments borrowed from other discourses, the borderline self comprises an unstable assembly of qualities and traits borrowed from other people. In the same way that postmodernism resists the integration of its dissonant fragments, the borderline patient strenuously resists the psychotherapist's attempts to suture the multiple contradictory self and object representations into semantic wholes. The borderline's resistance assumes the form of aggressive responses to the therapist's attempts to establish boundaries and continuities in his/her world. The borderline is thus constantly destroying, undoing and severing the therapist's attempts to connect, integrate and establish a stable universe of shared meaning. The borderline's attacks on boundaries mirrors postmodernism's critical strategy of dissolving conceptual boundaries between previously differentiated domains of all descriptions – disciplines, sexes, classes, artistic media, and genres.

One of the defining characteristics of postmodernism is the apotheosis of critique – its tendency to subvert, undermine and parody conventional knowledge claims, institutions, ideologies, political systems and aesthetic standards. Postmodernism is thus negativistic, in the sense of negating or destroying that which is affirmed by tradition and convention. Its ideology, moreover, is disconfirmative – that of radical unbelief. Postmodernism has a political agenda which it carries out by means of textual terrorism. Its goal, however, is not the instatement of an alternative order but the perpetual pursuit of disorder. Its language is the 'rhetoric of rupture' (Hutcheon 1988:20). Although deconstruction presents itself as a ludic, rather than a destructive activity, it is not difficult to see the aggressive impulse at work in its implementation. While its ideological intent is clear it demonstrates the same unneutralized aggression manifest in the borderline's attacks on the cohesive influence of psychotherapy.

Conclusion

This article has presented a number of suggestive structural parallels between the postmodern worldview and the borderline spectrum of self disorders. Postmodernists would, of course, reject any contention of a mimetic relationship between their fictional worlds and contemporary psychological life. I am not arguing that postmodern life causes borderline pathology, in any determinist sense, nor that all people in postmodern society have a borderline self structure. Such arguments would be both reductionistic and demonstrably false. I am also not advocating the use of the borderline concept as a cultural diagnosis. What I am arguing is that the ontological insecurity accompanying the transition to postmodernity is manifest synchronously on two levels: (a) discursively, as the emergence of postmodernism as a cultural dominant and, (b) experientially, as a predisposition to clinical and sub-clinical disturbances of the self structure.

The first thesis assumes that postmodernism performs an ideological function, insofar as it provides a conceptual framework to articulate and contain the prereflective experience of people traversing the postmodern landscape. Of course, by articulating postmodernity, postmodernism reinforces and partly constitutes it as a discursive reality. Postmodernism is thus an ideological expression of postmodernity, but the direction of influence is bilateral, insofar as it helps shape and determine that which historically determined its emergence.

The second thesis is that the conditions for the epidemiological shift toward disorders of the self are the historical consequence of

socio-economic changes within late capitalism. It would be facile to suggest that late capitalism causes borderline pathology. The aetiology of borderline pathology would seem to lie in qualitatively deficient mothering at a crucial stage in the infant's striving for psychic separation and individuation. However, mothering does not occur in a social vacuum, and mothers involuntarily communicate their cultural experience of being postmodern subjects via their maternal care. The infant suckling at the postmodern breast is already internalizing aspects of postmodernity, his insides already populated by postmodern objects. Postmodernity does not determine borderline pathology, but rather provides, through a complex set of mediations, the cultural matrix for a weakened sense of psychic integrity, cohesion and continuity.

It is important to note that postmodernity has not completely replaced modernity. The two co-exist, and modernity continues to exert a social and psychic influence on us, despite the impact of postmodern themes. Thus, notes Eagleton, the 'subject of late capitalism . . . is neither simply the self-regulating synthetic agent posited by classical humanist ideology, nor merely a decentred network of desire, but a contradictory amalgam of the two' (1985:71). The argument of this paper is that the borderline personality is our postmodern symbol, the psychic embodiment of a shared cultural experience, distilled and thickened to an anguished intensity. In the convulsions of his/her internal world we see the perturbations of our postmodern life.

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Yeats, Revolution and South Africa

Nicholas Meihuizen

Conor Cruise O'Brien, in 'Passion and Cunning: an Essay on the Politics of W.B. Yeats', presents an apocryphal anecdote that epitomizes Yeats's supposed political naïvety. In an Arts Club speech Yeats insisted on referring to Mussolini as 'Missolonghi'. When corrected, the poet responded in measured tones: 'Does . . . it . . . really . . . matter?' (in Jeffares and Cross 1965:246). But if the anecdote offers a true reflection of one Yeatsian pose, relatively recent studies, such as Elizabeth Cullingford's *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (1981) and Cairns Craig's *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* (1982), suggest, rather, Yeats's political acumen, as well as a political view of the poet very different from the popular caricature (generated by the poet himself, it must be admitted, in another familiar pose) of the bombastic reactionary. A leader of the Irish literary revival in the early years of this century, a revival that drew both politics and aesthetics into its revolutionary ambit, Yeats was no stranger to fundamental political and social issues. A letter to the *Irish Times* concerning the unrest surrounding the massive 1913 strike in Dublin occasioned by disputes between labour leader James Larkin and arch-capitalist William Murphy bears eloquent witness to this fact (Yeats 1975:406–7). However, such a document, sadly, written by a middle-class, Protestant, Anglo-Irish intellectual, had at most a perfunctory public impact. Dubliners are sceptical of Yeats to this day. It seems to me that Yeats was aware of his inherited limitations in a populist context, and even though he became an active politician himself as a senator in the newly formed Irish Free State, he also sought other modes than public ones through which to explore and experience his era. Hence we find, along with his life-long interest in politics, a concomitant interest in mysticism, which, stemming from an age curiously prone to psychical research and other currents of thought opposed to a totalizing foundationalism (or belief that rational knowledge reflects the absolute truth of given 'foundations' such as God or History (Waugh 1992:6)), was not at all unique. But this interest is a function of a late Romantic tendency in Yeats, which incorporates the tenets of French symbolism, the aestheticism of Pater and Oscar Wilde, and the thought of Nietzsche in a syncretic philosophy fundamentally opposed to the grand narratives of Enlightenment rationality. If this mix suggests a congruence prophetic of

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the 'syncretism' of the 1960s, where such figures as Che Guevara, Timothy Leary and the Maharishi were often spoken of in the same breath, it is perhaps no accident: impulses observable in the early years of this century gained new momentum after the Second World War under the anti-foundationalist banners of what R.C. Somerville, defining Arnold Toynbee's focus in *A Study of History*, called the 'postmodern' (Waugh 1992:5). Of course, Yeats was to propound his own totalizing theories in *A Vision*, and we should not forget his brief flirtation with fascist absolutism. Even *A Vision*, however, deliberately subverts its own systematizing tendencies, and Yeats's interest in fascism was qualified by a keen irony.

A useful measure of the Yeatsian decentring of any totalizing vision is apparent, I will argue, in 'Easter 1916'; a poem that also brings to mind the long-standing link between Ireland and South Africa in revolutionary matters. In a sense, this catastrophic century's potentiality for unrivalled devastation first became apparent in South Africa, in a struggle for freedom whose characteristics anticipated much in modern warfare. A Boer War monumental arch leading into St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, commemorates Irish engagement in this struggle, where the Boers as much as the British benefited from an Irish presence. Indeed, the 1916 revolutionaries and their sympathizers, including Yeats, had been pro-Boer. Significantly, the revolution that concludes our century in South Africa has evoked the 1916 Uprising through 'Easter 1916' itself, as reinscribed (albeit with a marginalizing intention, though not, as I hope to show, with a marginalizing effect) in Sally-Ann Murray's 'Easter 1989' (Faller et al. 1992:79–80).

Set in present-day Durban, Murray's poem, though drawing on its precursor, makes much of its geographical and social background to emphasize the remoteness of Yeats's world. Thus, in the first section, instead of Dublin streets, we find a Durban lecture room. Although the names are only implicitly paired, the slightly out-of-focus quality of the near-coincidence of 'Durban' and 'Dublin' is symptomatic of the glancing disparity achieved by Murray in the remainder of the poem. The lecture room is filled with barely awake first-year students, who seem far less capable than Yeats's revolutionaries of relinquishing the 'casual comedy'. Apart from the Durban social environment, the hard facts of the political environment intrude on the class-room setting. If Yeats introduces various revolutionaries, Murray introduces one in particular, Sandile Thusi, who is on hunger-strike:

> First class of the day. Heavy-eyed
> with sleep, first years yawn through Yeats
> in unrelenting heat. Outside,

pale blue and vivid yellow wait.
A sky that tumbles the sun,
a sea that plashes the beach:
minute by minute Durban
streams into the room as I speak
of metaphor and history,
romantic myths and Irish pride.
Minute by minute while Sandile
Thusi dies.

But, despite his sacrifice, Thusi is no purveyor of 'terrible beauty'. The symbols of circumscription in the first section of the poem conspire to make sure of this. Police, police vans, the implacable injustice of the state of emergency regulations, and the complacency and helplessness of the populace – epitomized by the 'colleague' who merely heads for the beach once he has, apparently, eased his conscience by appealing to the Minister of Law and Order – ensure the fact of Thusi's non-elevation into the transformative heroic realm as imaged in Yeats's poem:

Blue uniforms bide
their time in yellow vans at
the campus gate. Class ends. We have tea,
then send to Minister Vlok a fax
urgently requesting that he release
or charge all detainees. Afterwhich
a colleague heads for Durban Surf Life-
Savers' Club – white males only, such
is life – to practise in a five
man rowing team. Pull together.

The remainder of the poem corroborates the initial position set up by Murray. Indeed, the only affirmative statement in the poem is the final line of the third section, and, in the claustrophobic situation portrayed, it is qualified by heavy irony: 'His action is a statement of hope for the future'.

In the fourth section, Yeats's soothing murmuring of names is transformed into an activity that brings 'rash comfort'. And Yeats's impersonal 'stone', at once stern symbol of the foundation of nationalist spirit and cold emblem of feelings numbed by rigid adherence to 'one purpose alone', attains a personal specificity, limiting in its implications, through its relation to Thusi's mother:

her son's constancy becomes
at once a shield and an injury,
the rock foundation and the stone that numbs
her heart.

She is seen to bear the burden of nationalist sacrifice and experience the chilling numbness, not of hate, but, ironically, of love. Despite her sacrifice, Thusi's fame is not heroic, but 'awkward', heralding, it may be, the questionable worth of an isolated 'martyred stranger'. And if 'change' results from the Easter uprising, here a sense of stasis, implicit in the imponderable police silence, characterizes the situation. The stasis contrasts with at least some form of legal activity, where to charge *or* release, paradoxically and stultifyingly, might both take on a positive light:

Many others wait with her for police
to charge or release their children.

In the final section of the poem, human rights protesters, drum-majorettes and student charity activities serve as backdrop to Thusi's 'communion', underlining a spiritual moment in the midst of the indefatigable tide of life. The moral integrity of his position suggests itself in the fact that Thusi's only food will be spiritual, double-blessed because of the propitious time of the year, Easter. Contrasted with this image of integrity is the Minister of Law and Order, who gains easy absolution through artifice and deceit. He can, through corrupt temporal power, justify his position by fabricating a charge, or by promising *ad infinitum* to review the case. The final image in the poem is of marching protesters actually receiving some concession from the riot police regarding laws of trespass. This small triumph, however, only highlights the general impasse.

The poem's sombre ending would displace the sense of hard-won pride presented in Yeats's poem, by, in a final stroke, explicitly comparing the situations in the two poems, and pointing to the inexorable differences:

But what has changed so utterly? the students ask.
Yeats has no real answers for the class.

The ending clinches Murray's overall strategy; by presenting a series of slightly out-of-focus near-parallels with Yeats's poem she in fact undermines any sense of consanguinity derivable from such parallels.

Playing on the remoteness of Yeats's Ireland from present-day South Africa, Murray also seems to question the relevance of poetry

itself in a political situation: 'minute by minute Durban/ streams into the room as I speak/ of metaphor and history,/ romantic myths and Irish pride./ Minute by minute while Sandile/ Thusi dies.' 'Easter 1916', first published on a large scale four years after the Uprising, might equally be viewed as isolated from the events it commemorates. In which case, Murray's critique exposes more than superficial historical, geographical and social differences, but points, also, to the old problems underlying the very nature of artistic engagement in political issues.

This observation is most pertinent in South Africa today, and is expressed in one way in James Matthews's poem 'They Say' (Matthews 1981:43). In the poem Matthews presents himself as the beleaguered poet, who, because of his political situation, is unable to satisfy his artistic needs. His critics in the poem make a distinction between a prescriptive attitude that furthers political causes, and an attitude apparent in the type of poetry which merely describes political situations, without offering any 'solutions'. Matthews is accused of writing descriptive verse, of no pragmatic value to the revolution:

> they say
> writing poetry at
> this stage of
> our struggle is
> absurd, and writing
> black protest poetry
> is even worse
> people need direction
> and not words
> relating the situation
> as it is
> things that everyone
> knows all about
> poets, black poets,
> have written themselves
> into a dead end

Matthews, although himself committed to political change, feels that such criticism is 'acid' eating the 'flesh' of his poetry:

> they say
> my neighbours do
> not even read
> what I've written

and that poetry
will not bring
about any changes
in our situation
a revolution can
do without poets
poets should switch to
things more constructive
furthering a revolution
offer a solution
to the problem
their contempt
is acid eating
the flesh of
my poetical work

The nature of his imagery in this instance suggests that at a fundamental subjective level he deeply values artistic autonomy.

The position he portrays has been the focus of much recent discussion in South Africa, prompted by a paper by ANC intellectual Albie Sachs, once a political hard-liner who advocated that culture is an instrument of the struggle, but who now urges freedom of expression in the arts (de Kok 1990:19–29). Sachs suggests that an artistic position that is ideologically free can better argue the complexity of socio-political situations, and thus provide us with a richer appreciation of the socio-political environment. Sachs re-articulates a view long since held in Marxist circles. One thinks of the young Edmund Wilson's essay 'Marxism and Literature', apart from ideas expressed by Lenin, Trotsky, and, indeed, Marx himself (Wilson in Lodge 1972:241–6).

To reach the perspective of artistic freedom advocated by Sachs, one should not simply bypass issues and situations that bring a tremendous weight of coercive power to bear on one's life. One has to face these situations: as Matthews does, as Murray does, and, indeed, as Yeats does. Seamus Heaney indicates this aspect of the problem in his essay 'Feeling into Words', when he writes of his poetic need 'to search for images and symbols adequate to [the Irish] predicament' (Heaney 1984:56). The search would be for a 'field of force' in which 'it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity'. Heaney quotes Shakespeare and Yeats: 'The question, as ever, is "How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?" And my answer is, by offering "befitting emblems of adversity"' (1984:57). The ethos of the bog people, at

once richly familiar, spiritual and barbaric, is to provide Heaney with an adequate context with which to face events in Northern Ireland, as the poem 'Punishment' attests. (The poem links the fate of a bog queen figure with 'the exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge' carried out on present day girls who have been fraternizing with English soldiers (Heaney 1990:72).

In 'Easter 1916' Yeats faces his situation in a more direct way. He does not seek a correlative mythology as Heaney does; he dramatizes his present-day situation, mythologizing it in the process. But despite the heroic nature of aspects of this mythologizing, 'adversity' is noticeable in the poem. We detect adversity in the consequences of political violence which Yeats presents. Through his careful examination of these consequences Yeats is able, in Heaney's words, to 'encompass the perspectives' of both a 'humane reason' and 'religiously intense' violence. Neil Corcoran in his study of Heaney emphasizes the 'authenticity' of Heaney's vision: the atavistic emotions and responses in his vision of violence 'criticise the shallowness and presumption of most rationalist and humanist responses' (1986:116). Yeats, although drawing in an indirect and somewhat backhanded way on atavistic emotions and responses, achieves a similar inclusiveness of vision. This vision bypasses the merely rationalist and humanist responses of what amount to, in the end, prescriptive notions of literature that seek patterns of unambiguous cause and effect, or explicitly presented praise or censure.

Harold Bloom is puzzled by 'Easter 1916' because it is, in his view, so uncharacteristic of Yeats (Bloom 1970:314). He feels that the poem 'excels in a sober coloring of accurate moral description, a quality normally lacking in Yeats', that it is 'a model of sanity and proportion'. Perhaps more than any other poem of Yeats, this one indeed mirrors the sober responsibility of conventional morality. But in the mechanics by which the poem does this, an interesting notion arises. Violence assumes a positive value in the poem, but not through the political ends that it achieves, which are presented in a highly qualified manner by Yeats. It would seem that Yeats is rather elaborating on a position that dates back to 1907, where he wrote of the clarifying influence of 'memory of danger' (Yeats 1961:259). He expresses a similar notion in his final years in 'Under Ben Bulben': a fighting-mad man 'completes his partial mind' (Yeats 1950:398). Here Yeats underlines his inherent belief that conflict is a necessary aspect of life. He does not have in mind, of course, the blind political conflict that leads to the mother murdered at her door, but the sense of existential conflict, as propounded in *A Vision*, which has roots in Yeats's study of such mystical doctrines as the Christian Cabbala and the Indian Vedanta, but which finds its most cogent expressions in, of

all Yeats's sources, Blake: 'Without Contraries is no progression' (Blake 1972:149).

How does the poem achieve its noteworthy degree of proportion? It seems to me that Yeats, in the intensity of the moment, attains a conception of the violence not mitigated by the comparatively simplistic and one-sided idealism apparent in 'September 1913', for example. 'September 1913' equates violence with heroism; no hesitations or qualifications are offered. We find memory of danger in action, as it were, as Yeats bitterly taunts the wearers of motley with visions of a romantic past: 'But let them be, they're dead and gone,/ They're with O'Leary in the grave' (Yeats 1950:121). Confronted with actual violence, Yeats is far more cautious in his response to heroism. Thus the qualifications in 'Easter 1916' are numerous. Yeats tells of his scepticism in the face of the motley of the casual comedy; he tells of the lost promise of lives cut short by the violence; he tells of the dangers of political idealism; he even questions the value of the sacrifice considering England's possible granting of Home Rule after the war. But he nevertheless acknowledges a transformation in Irish spirit: a 'terrible beauty' is very actively 'born' in the immediacy of the present tense.

It is, finally, the birth of the beauty that interests me. Some form of integration or individuation creative of beauty, of proportion, has taken place, an individuation that does not exist independently of the violence, but, like Yeats's Vision of Evil, must incorporate the violence, in order not to compromise human nature by undervaluing what is good in life (Bornstein 1970:201–2). In other words, in Jungian terms, the shadow has to be integrated within our natures if we are at all to bring some sense of proportion to the forces that constitute our lives (Jung 1959:20). Yeats's task is not mere description, then, but an active humanizing engagement, which transforms violence into an important facet of what is to become the existential process of the Vision of Evil. It seems to me that this process, already apparent in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* of 1917 (Yeats 1959:329), deeply informs Yeats's approach in the poem: it is fundamental in the poem's meditative weighing and balancing of opposite perspectives, and is, I would argue, an active application of the Blakean notion of unifying contraries. To return to the question at the conclusion of Murray's poem, 'What has changed so utterly? . . .', I believe it is, primarily, the poet's perception, which shifts from the monologic vision of the opening of 'Easter 1916' to a dialogic engagement with contraries. The contraries often surface in Yeats's poetry, of course, as primary and antithetical forces, saint and poet, Helen of Troy and Crazy Jane, absurd green-pated duck and otherworldly hawk, Christ and rough beast, self and anti-self – and so

the list might continue. However, the disparate conditions and forces in Yeats also mirror the concerns of an era opposed to instrumental rationality, and, as pointed out in my introduction, are not simply mystical in orientation, but are reflective of wider social and aesthetic trends, making it unwise to delimit and localize Yeats's vision. Paradoxically, then, Yeats's sense of sane proportion emerges from a disparateness that is postmodernist in its roots; he questions the bogus proportion of political or social foundationalism through his evocation of the 'Other' excluded by nationalist commitment, however justified that univocal commitment might be in its immediate context.

It appears that Murray, despite her skilfully ironic assimilation of Yeatsian elements (which must surely qualify, as the irony acknowledges its source of power, at least the attitude conveyed by the conclusion of her poem), too readily limits Yeats. Yeats's discourse is not remote from concerns in South Africa as the millennium draws to a close, once we set aside the crudely prescriptive notions of the 'opinionated mind'. I think not only of a conception of existential process that tells of the necessity of opposites, but of a process that parallels the contemplative one, and is thereby able actively to embrace contraries. It is the resultant comprehensiveness and depth of vision of this process, embodied in 'Easter 1916', which is so important, and which is so necessary to any society, but especially a divisive society such as present day South Africa, where poetry and politics cannot afford continually to be undermined by the pervasive dualistic attitude (summarized in Matthews's 'They Say'), which incorporates and mirrors the polarizing and stultifying simplifications of one of the most insidious of totalizing systems in a century no stranger to rampant totalitarianism – apartheid.

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Beginning at the End

An Economic Approach to University Reform

Robert Klitgaard

Consider these words, spoken of an economic system. If you like, imagine a Russian accent.

> About half of our output is substandard. We are forced to accept too many workers, and consequently supervision and motivation is slack. We do not deal well with the disadvantaged members of our population. Those in charge of production lack incentives, as their pay is unrelated to their performance or to workers' output. Gradually we have slipped from emphasizing the production of what the market desires to what those in charge of production find convenient to produce.
>
> For years we have faced these problems without facing up to them. We have tinkered with production quotas, with new equipment and improved facilities, with exhortation and discipline. None of our tinkering has made much difference.
>
> Our systematic shortcomings grow more evident as state subsidies shrink. Yet we have not embraced the need for structural change. We have always said that we are different, that the usual economic principles are not applicable to us.
>
> But it is evident now that we require fundamental reforms based on economic principles. We *must* change, because our trajectory is disastrous.

These words might have been spoken of an economy in shambles, say by Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Republic. But actually, if you alter the accent and allow poetic licence, this is a repackaging of conversations with my new colleagues in South African universities. One hears talk of crisis. Resources are stagnant. Incentives are meagre. Educational outcomes are unsatisfactory. And greater trials lie ahead: like Russia, radical reform may be our only viable choice.

A Changing Environment

Changes in the South African environment present severe challenges to the country's universities – challenges that, in less strenuous forms, have devastated universities in many other countries.

Declining Resources

In the decades ahead, tremendous sums will be needed to elevate black educational levels, beginning of course at primary school,

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where international studies show the greatest benefit-cost ratios. By international standards, South Africa overspends on higher education compared to primary education. It is almost certain that government spending on higher education will be slashed in the decade ahead. To meet this challenge, universities will have to change.

Assimilating Larger Numbers of Black Students

At the same time as their resources decline, South Africa's universities will face irresistible pressures to enrol many more black students. Yet compared to whites, black students in South Africa may lag as much as two standard deviations in conventionally measured learning ability – compared to a one standard deviation gap in the United States. Most black students will need both financial assistance and greater pedagogical resources. To meet this challenge, universities will have to change.

Preparing Students for an Internationally Competitive Economy

The end of sanctions and the general internationalizing of the world economy mean that South Africa must compete as never before. Experience elsewhere shows that highly trained people who are able to absorb and create ideas and who are capable of adaptation to change are crucial to economic development. Yet South Africa's universities have tended to stagnate with old-fashioned pedagogies and outmoded objectives. To meet this challenge, universities will have to change.

How can South African universities meet these challenges? What changes will be required? Are there lessons from other countries?

Failures Elsewhere

In July 1991 I participated in a fascinating week-long workshop on higher education, under the auspices of the World Bank. Heads of universities from around the world came to Malaysia to discuss the need for change. I was struck by some similarities among universities from Colombia to Senegal to India to Papua New Guinea. Over the past two decades, many universities in low- and middle-income countries have been confronted with versions of the same challenges South Africa now must face: declining real resources, absorbing greater numbers of academically underprepared students, and having to produce an élite that can lead the country in an internationally competitive economy.

Most universities have failed to meet these difficult challenges. Their travails contain lessons. Here is a simplified rendition of what

might be called the 'standard university response' to these challenges – a response that did not work.

With regard to *declining resources*, the standard response does not want to face the long-term implications. For political reasons, budgets for student support remain high, while expenditures on libraries, maintenance, and faculty stagnate. Eventually, the physical facility and the university's most precious resource, the professorate, collapse in mediocrity.

With regard to *expanding enrolments of disadvantaged students*, debates concentrate on two issues: entrance standards and what happens in the classroom. I call these the *start* and the *middle* of the educational process – as opposed to the *end*, which is the outcomes actually obtained: what students learn and what professors contribute in research and service.

The debate over admissions (the *start*) tends to focus on the preservation of old entrance tests and minimum scores on them. One extreme incorrectly decries the tests as culturally biased and completely lacking in predictive power. The other extreme incorrectly treats the tests and minimum scores as sacrosanct. The truth tends to be lost. Around the world, admissions tests tend to be correlated about 0,4 to 0,5 with academic performance at the university and somewhat less with various measures of later-life success. Careful statistical studies seldom find evidence that the predictive power of the tests is less for members of disadvantaged social classes or racial groups. There are large gaps in test scores and in later performance among those groups, but this does not imply 'cultural bias' in the predictive sense, contrary to much popular opinion.[1]

The debate over the *middle* tends to revolve around the 'relevance' and 'standards' of the subjects taught and the pedagogical methods employed. One side seems to equate high failure rates with evidence of social irrelevance and bias. The other side seems to believe that high failure rates are necessary to preserve standards.

In most developing countries, the first side of these arguments tends inevitably to win. Admissions tests are downplayed and standards are lowered, at first with the argument that 'the poor should be given a chance at least'. But then when too many of the new entrants fail at university, the next step is pressure to make sure they pass. Then 'the middle' tends to buckle: courses become more 'relevant' and less 'academic'. Eventually, the pressure point reaches graduation itself. The university degree is devalued. And as a consequence, unemployed or unproductively employed graduates are a common phenomenon.

The third challenge is to *compete internationally*. Given the first two failures, it is not surprising that most universities in developing

countries have failed to do this. Even the best students are unable to compete with those trained in the industrialized countries. As a result, a country's economic performance begins to lag, and dependence grows.

The remarkable message of the Kuala Lumpur meeting was that around the developing world, universities are in financial collapse, with vast student bodies serviced by poor quality instruction, producing graduates unable to fulfil national needs. The situation is truly alarming.

And yet I believe it is fair to say that the challenges that are facing South Africa's universities in the decade ahead will in many ways be even more severe. The pressures on resources will be greater. The numbers of disadvantaged students and the extent of their disadvantage will be greater. Compared with the previous two decades, in the 1990s the pressures of international competition and therefore of international standards of excellence will be greater.

The standard response gives us an idea of what not to do. Is there another approach akin to what Russia must do with its economy?

Rethinking Objectives

Almost two decades ago, Harvard President Derek Bok encouraged the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to rethink its curricular objectives for undergraduates. One result was a new core curriculum. Students are required to take core courses in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. They supplement this core with the systematic pursuit of a major field of study, complemented by electives in other disciplines.

Harvard's core curriculum embodies a fundamental change in pedagogical objectives. Core courses are no longer designed to convey a body of knowledge or information. They are instead a vehicle for teaching students *how to think like* (or, 'as') . . . an economist, an anthropologist, a physicist, a historian. What methods of learning, sensitivities and skills, tools and controversies, does a discipline entail?

The distinction between a discipline as a body of knowledge and a way of thinking and learning is of course not clear-cut, especially in cumulative fields. But the Harvard faculty's reasoning is instructive. Most professors agreed that in each discipline the body of knowledge was simply too vast to convey or absorb in a survey course. Another and I think more important reason was the recognition that a liberal education should be designed to teach students how to think and how to learn. We should not try to send graduates off laden with six boxes of knowledge in their brains, but with a strong and finely tuned mental machine for thinking and learning.

This distinction – admittedly oversimplified here – led to radically different core courses. For example, a new core course in literature might invite students to step inside a particular period of literature, analyse texts with great care, and examine through case studies the interactions (or lack thereof) between social setting, historical circumstance, biography, and work of art. This is in contrast to the usual survey course where one learns (memorizes?) names and dates and schools and characteristics: where one tries to absorb, at an elementary level, a body of academic knowledge. Under the new system, professors enjoyed designing and teaching core courses – as opposed to their avoidance of the usual survey course – and students enjoyed taking them.

Should we rethink our educational objectives in a similar fashion? Let me give an example from my new home, the department of economics at the University of Natal in Durban.

Consider some rough numbers. Perhaps 350 of the 750 first-year students will go on to Economics II. The rest are students fulfilling a requirement or satisfying a curiosity. Of those 350, perhaps 200 will end up in Economics III. And only a score or fewer of them will do Economics honours. These numbers are guesses, but say that 200 of the 750 will end up as economics majors, and 20 will end up as 'trained economists' in the sense of an honours degree. The rest are here for something else. In analogy to the Harvard core curriculum, shouldn't part of that be learning to think about problems as an economist does?[2]

It would take too long here to discuss what 'thinking like an economist' means; it is a discussion, however, that ought to be encouraged. I will note that despite the disagreements one observes among economists – Ronald Reagan once said, 'If you laid all the economists in the United States end-to-end, they still wouldn't reach a decision' – one would find a remarkable agreement about what it means to think like an economist. Joan Robinson once said, 'Economic reasoning seems perfectly obvious until you argue with someone who doesn't have it'.

Yes, alas, one must master certain principles. I tell my students the drilling they must do to learn the tools of economics is like the push-ups and laps an athlete must do in preparing to play a sport. But just as laps and push-ups are not sufficient for a sport, so elementary principles are not sufficient for a liberal education. What ultimately matters is the thinking, conceptualizing, analysing, and above all the applying of economic tools to real problems. Virtually never does memorizing play an important part.

Structural Adjustment

After rethinking our educational objectives, we must turn to what we teach and how. Based on my limited experience in South Africa, I expect the issues here will include more problem-oriented assignments; the use of computer-aided instruction; lectures that stress relevance, applications, and 'putting things together'; tests and exams that give no credit for memorization but stress problem-solving skills; and more graduate students in the educational process.

These initiatives operate at the departmental level and do not involve changes at the Faculty or University level. Metaphorically, we improve the production process at the Vladivostok steel factory but do not reform the structural defects of incentives and information that cripple the Russian system.

To pursue the analogy, let us briefly consider 'economic adjustment'. Many developing countries face problems of economic instability. They have trade imbalances where imports far exceed exports, payments imbalances where capital outflows exceed inflows, and budgetary imbalances where spending exceeds revenues. One extreme result is hyperinflation. Orthodox stabilization programs are one extreme cure, at least sometimes: budgetary austerity is coupled with a devaluation and the strict control of credit and the money supply.

After stabilization comes structural adjustment. Bluntly speaking, this entails the liberalization of internal and external trade. Prices are to be determined more by the forces of the market and less by government officials. State monopolies are to be privatized. Government's role includes the encouragement of competition, the distribution of information about prices and quality, improved security and property rights, and structural reforms to facilitate the situation of the small farmer, producer, and borrower.

It is a useful oversimplification to say that success in liberalizing an economy depends on *information and incentives*. For both public and private sectors to work well, there must be plentiful information about the quality and quantity of services offered. And then incentives must be linked with that information – in the private sector, via competitive markets, and in the public sector, through processes of budget, pay-setting, and promotion.

Without reforming systems of *information* and *incentives*, today's macro-economic reforms are likely to fail. This, I fear, will be one of the lessons of the 1990s.[3]

But here I simply want to suggest analogies to the situation faced by universities in South Africa (and other countries). Information is poor concerning the quality of the services provided. Incentives are weakly linked to results, for both faculty and students. Without changes in

these domains, I fear that other university reforms – such as budget balancing, cost cutting, and managerial improvements – will not remedy the crisis.

Let us therefore ponder the economic analogy and ask what fundamental reforms in information and incentives might entail.

More Information

Students' marks are posted on departmental bulletin boards, but data about how well the teachers are doing range from non-existent to top secret. For example, in one department student course evaluations were recently initiated – a welcome step. A score of questions was read to students in class, each answerable along a scale from 'poor' at one extreme to 'good' at the other. The results were given to the teacher but not to other teachers, university administrators, or students. Not only is 'excellent' not a possibility on the questionnaire, but the information is kept confidential.

Studies in the United States reveal that student assessments of their teachers' competence are not correlated with how much students actually learn in the courses. But experience shows that the onset of student assessments leads lecturers to take teaching even more seriously. It also helps students recognize that they are valued participants in the educational process, that their views matter.

Are there ways to encourage more competition and choice inside South African universities? Can we allow students more choice across disciplines, and more choice of courses within disciplines, in order to enhance their freedom and our competition? In the case of large courses like Economics I, can we not create different sections taught by different lecturers?

Better Incentives for Students and Teachers

There are many possibilities here, and I will discuss some of them later. But let me propose a shocking experiment: contracts with students.

Imagine that at the outset of each course the student receives this contract.

> I hereby promise: I will attend every lecture, tutorial, and practical session; purchase the textbook; complete every problem set and tutorial punctually and without copying; read every assignment before the date due; study diligently for every test and examination; and undertake any remedial work that my teachers may deem advisable to assign me. Signed, [The Student].

At the bottom of the contract appear these words:

> We promise to monitor the above-signed student's progress carefully and to assign remedial work as needed. If the student fulfils the conditions of this contract, we hereby promise that he or she will pass the course. If not, his or her tuition fees will be refunded. Signed, [The Teachers].

You will be able to think up many problems with this contract. Obviously, it would be hard to know if the students truly kept their end of the bargain. Obviously, it would be desirable to have examinations set (or graded, or both) externally, in order to minimize adverse incentives or even corruption. Obviously, passing is not the sum total of what we or the students should care about, and obviously one would need to create incentives for the teachers based on how well their students succeeded (more on both subjects below). If many students failed despite fulfilling the contract, then we would have to re-examine our admissions policies or what we teach, or both.

But before we take up our knives against the idea of a contract, consider the points it underscores. A contract along these lines would starkly and credibly change the rules of the game. Students would promise to do certain things, and they would understand that if they do, they will pass. Teachers would have more reason to follow students' progress during the school year, and to allocate attention as needed. Students would have the right to demand effective teaching, and lecturers would have the right to demand student diligence. It would be a dramatic, jarring, symbolic way to escape from our current 'low-level equilibrium trap', by working together toward agreed-upon aims.

International Metrics: Information and Incentives

Now imagine a still bolder and more thoroughgoing experiment. Select a subset of subjects taught at the university for which 'international standards' fairly clearly exist. For example, physics, computer science, statistics, economics, and biology.

Reconceptualize 'international standards' not as a binary variable – yes/no, pass/fail, meets them or does not – but as a continuum. Thus, a 'standard' now means a metric, through which it makes sense internationally to say something is excellent, something else is good, something else is fair, something else poor. For conceptual purposes, think of a 0 to 100 scale.

Now convene a consortium of educators from these disciplines and from many countries, including South Africa, and with the participation of organizations like the African National Congress. Suppose this group, supported by foreign donors, designs tests that measure the continuum of competence in physics, computer science, statistics, economics, and biology at the level of *first-year courses* and *after the*

third year. The tests would emphasize thinking ability and problem-solving rather than memorization.

As an analogy, consider the standardized achievement tests in these and other fields offered annually to university graduates in the United States. These achievement tests are parts of the Graduate Record Examination. The tests take three hours per subject.

Like the GRE, no such tests would be perfectly valid or reliable. But in the South African context, with universities confronting the pressures of the decade ahead, creating and using such tests would have remarkable advantages:

RECAST THE DEBATE

Such metrics of performance would focus discussion on the competencies to be gained at the university, rather than on the admissions standards or the particular reading lists and lecture schedules. We would *begin at the end*, not at the start or the middle.

IMPROVE INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS

These metrics of performance would avoid the pernicious tendency of this university's students to think almost entirely in terms of pass/fail. Students would have new incentives for achieving excellence.

PROTECT AGAINST DECLINING STANDARDS

The new metrics would offer a virtual continuum of outcomes, credibly and independently certified, with international meaning. Such scales would enable us to undertake a variety of experiments without the risk of the unravelling of standards that has sunk universities in other countries. For example:

EXPERIMENT WITH ADMISSIONS STANDARDS

Suppose many more disadvantaged students were admitted with lower-than-usual matric scores. Suppose that at the end of his or her third year, one such student got a 40 on the 100-point scale in statistics. The student might still protest, but the university would be insulated from the charge of arbitrary, irrelevant, or outmoded standards.

Suppose another student earned an 80. No matter whether 'admissions standards have fallen' or whether 'the average graduate isn't as good as before', that student's excellence would be credibly earned and communicated to the outside world.

The central point is that today's (binary) credential or signal would be usefully supplemented by a much more fine-grained and inter-

nationally meaningful measure of learning. This in turn would enable us to experiment with admissions standards, including the enrolment of many more black students.

TRANSFORM FACULTY INCENTIVES

Lecturers could be challenged with incentives without fear of grade inflation or corruption.

A recent review of the voluminous research on pay-performance schemes draws several interesting conclusions. Although the linkage schemes vary and methodological problems, as always, plague empirical estimation, a good rule of thumb is that linking pay and productivity induces a 20 percent increase in productivity, other things being equal. Another rule of thumb: incentive and bonus payments should not exceed 25 to 30 percent of the base pay. Research also indicates, though less robustly, that pay-for-performance schemes work better when employees participate in defining objectives and performance measures.[4]

To the lecturers, the idea might be put this way: We all agree that your salaries are too low. In this political climate and economic situation, the only way we can afford or justify pay raises is if we can show that they are linked to increased productivity and better student outcomes.

We should push for *experiments* rather than master plans. A possibility: 'Bonuses of up to 25 percent will be paid based on the performance of your department's students on the international examinations, with special weights for the performance of disadvantaged students'.

FOMENT PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION

Teachers would be encouraged to experiment with different educational techniques, and information about the results would be publicized. Because of new incentives, innovations that worked would spread.

RAISE THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF THE EDUCATION

For incentives to be right, prices must also be right. This means that students should pay a greater share of the true costs of their education than they now do. Moreover, if science courses are more expensive, in theory they should cost more. If one economics course costs more than another, in theory it, too, should have a higher price.

Here the economic metaphor runs afoul of both bureaucratic and political resistance, and the reader does not need me to restate the arguments against higher student fees. I will note that the economic

metaphor would easily encompass bursaries and loans. Bursaries should depend on the social utility of having certain students in the university – subsidies for socially valued individuals such as (depending on your point of view) superior scholars, members of disadvantaged groups, athletes, and offspring of faculty members. Loans should be available through the private sector, perhaps with the government helping by enforcing repayment as part of the future taxation of graduates' income.

No doubt a question has occurred throughout these recommendations: Where can we get the resources to pay for the changes? A long-term answer is: People should be willing to pay for a better product at a lower cost per unit. This means students and their parents, the government, the private sector that benefits from better trained graduates, and philanthropists and foreign donors, the latter perhaps especially with regard to disadvantaged students. Some of the reforms would be self-financing if more market principles were followed and more information were available.

MOBILIZE INTERNATIONAL FUNDING

But in the short run, bold reforms will require external financing. I believe that the strategy of beginning at the end would provide a unique focal point for fund-raising. Universities would be saying that they are committed to international standards, but also not constrained by the usual debates over entrance criteria and defences of *status quo* teaching techniques. Would this not be an even more exciting place in which to invest in potentially transferable experiments in educational development, pedagogy, and evaluation?

RECAST THE POLITICS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

From the perspective of institutional change within a university, the usual battle lines would change dramatically. For example, the role of the university's top management would shift away from *the perception of* centralized decrees and cut-backs. Instead, a central task for the university's leadership would be the development of rich systems of information about outcomes and strong linkages between outcomes and incentives. This in turn would open up opportunities for different teachers and departments to experiment with pedagogies, to work harder, and to learn from each other. And this in turn would create an environment attractive to the very best faculty members.

In short, the professorate and the administrators would see themselves as enabled and empowered by the needed reforms, instead of what is so often the case: feeling powerless and victimized by reform.

PROVIDE A STRATEGIC FOCAL POINT FOR UNIVERSITY REFORM

Beginning at the end might provide the basis for a simple, dramatic, and mobilizing example of leadership. Here is part of the speech:

> This University proposes an unprecedented programme of defining international standards by which its education will be judged. Such standards will enable us to undertake bold experiments to learn for us and for other universities how best to admit, motivate, and educate our students. They will enable us to meet the challenges of educating historically disadvantaged South Africans while raising our standards of excellence and relevance. And these standards will enable us to put more pedagogical power back in the hands of the professorate where it belongs.

Problems with Radical Reform

If beginning at the end were easy and natural, there would be no need to call for it. The suggestions are radical and face several important objections. Here are a few:

Measuring results externally violates each department's and indeed each professor's desire to set his or her own standards. This objection could be partially addressed in two ways. The departments could still define where on the scale 'pass' would be defined. And in honours and masters courses, the current system of locally defined standards could remain. In any case, given South Africa's challenges, the alternative as I see it is not a pleasant *status quo* but instead the spiral of decline we have seen in universities in other middle-income countries.

Incentives violate the academic culture, which is egalitarian and not individualistic, motivated by an academic calling and not by money. Currently, lecturers' pay is not only low, it is unconnected to their success in teaching. There are many reasons, good and bad, for this phenomenon. One is that we count on professional ethics and calling, another is that we wish to avoid a training-school mentality. A third is that it is hard to measure outcomes and to control for the extrinsic factors beside teaching that affect them. One can pile on the reasons why incentives in higher education, and indeed in business and government, are not a good idea.[5]

And yet. Around the world, reforms in incentives are increasingly seen as the key to institutional reform. In the United States, efforts to reform incentives in the public schools have generally moved from individual incentives to school-wide or departmental incentives, from test scores to peer judgment of teaching excellence. In part because the egalitarian culture of public schools makes competition among

colleagues too threatening, team incentives prove more successful.[6] For this reason, the greatest share of the results-based incentives for lecturers might be awarded by department.

International metrics would be difficult to impossible to develop for fields like the humanities and law. My suggestion is to begin with a few fields for which international standards would be recognized by most people. Regarding other fields, the university's leadership would encourage faculty members to develop their own measurable standards of excellence – imperfect though these may be. The university's leadership would make it clear that these subjects are equally important and would try to raise funds for them. But from the crucial message should remain: we must get away from the binary measurement of success, must stimulate more information about outcomes, and must link incentives for both students and faculty to those outcomes.

Has this idea worked elsewhere? Incentives based on results are increasingly used in universities around the world. Nonetheless, to my knowledge the reform proposed here has not been tried elsewhere. It would be nice if we could follow many such experiments in higher education and learn from them. On the other hand, we can learn from many examples in private and public management, and in secondary and primary education around the globe.[7]

Moreover, in environments like ours the alternatives are hardly promising. Experience at other universities that have faced challenges resembling South Africa's suggests that other strategies have seldom succeeded. I conclude that if we adopt an experimental approach, the many advantages of the idea are worth a try.

Doesn't 'international standards' imply Oxbridge and the Ivy League? Our university shouldn't try to be a haven of excellence, which is what this idea implies. This objection represents a serious but understandable misrepresentation of my suggestion. Remember how we reconceptualized the idea of international standards as a metric, not a cut-off. The point is to escape a binary classification and think in terms of a continuum.[8] The point of the internationally certified exams is not that every department should try to be Stanford or Heidelberg, or for that matter Hull or San Diego State. Rather, we hope that an international metric will stress the thinking and problem-solving skills that are needed for our students to be internationally competitive, rather than the 'six boxes of knowledge' approach that tends too often to dominate here. We also hope that through an externally set, internationally recognized exam, we will be

able to avoid the disastrous dynamics of mediocrity and irrelevance that have plagued many universities in other countries.

Our university does not have the capacity to change. Even if we 'begin at the end', we don't have the managerial or entrepreneurial talent or spirit to meet the challenge. The evidence cited for this view is the lackadaisical, uninnovative behaviour of many lecturers.

I do not have much experience of South African universities. But this argument is an instance of a quite general one, which is often quite mistaken. Evidence in many other areas shows that what looks like laziness or lack of skill in an organization is the consequence of a lack of information about outcomes and a lack of incentives linked to those outcomes.[9]

Putting it positively: when one does 'begin at the end' by creating credible and variegated outcome measures and appropriate incentives, one is often pleasantly surprised by the initiative and excellence that ensue.

The Radicalism of Economic Metaphors

Perhaps many universities in South Africa can be compared with the best factory in Vladivostok. Students and teachers are making in many ways a heroic effort in the midst of a system that suppresses relevant information, provides meagre or even adverse incentives, and hopes to find its way out of crisis by cutting investment and maintenance and denying that economic principles are involved in the crisis it faces.

Universities in South Africa face unprecedented challenges. The subsidies of yesteryear are declining and will continue to decline. We confront remarkable pedagogical challenges and they will grow more remarkable. We must include many more disadvantaged students, whose education is more costly and whose means are more limited. We must train our students to compete not only in a new South Africa but in an increasingly integrated world economy.

I am suggesting parallels between our crisis and the need for radical reform in countries like Russia. The need is not just for better management, not for more dedication to old principles, not for more top-down control. We must experiment with structural change. To an economist, structural change means above all the reform of information and incentives.

Always problematically, never as simply as 'let the market work', prices and wages must be linked to their social values. Competition must be enhanced. Excellence must be rewarded. Do these economic metaphors suggest new ways of thinking about university reform in

South Africa? Might 'beginning at the end' help us avoid the disasters that have occurred in many other universities over the past two decades? To stimulate a rethinking, Table 1 summarizes some points that might be considered in an economic approach to university reform.

NOTES

1. Robert Klitgaard, *Elitism and Meritocracy in Developing Countries*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
2. An important part of defining educational objectives is a careful appraisal of the jobs, tasks, and careers that graduates will undertake in the new South Africa, and the skills, knowledge, and sensitivities those jobs, tasks, and careers will demand. It is here, too, that the ability to learn and adapt, rather than the mastery of an existing body of knowledge, may come to the fore as a principal pedagogical objective.
3. Robert Klitgaard, *Adjusting to Reality: Beyond 'State vs. Market' in Economic Development*, San Francisco: ICS Press and International Center for Economic Growth, 1991.
4. Alan S. Blinder (ed.), *Paying for Productivity: a Look at the Evidence*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990.
5. Rosabeth Moss Kanter emphasizes the importance of performance-based pay in the corporation of the 1990s. She highlights five key trade-offs in incentive systems: (1) individual vs. group contributions, (2) whole agency vs. units, (3) discretion of management vs. automatic or target-based rewards, (4) incentives related to base pay vs. relative to the value of the contributions to the agency, and (5) a single system vs. multiple systems. (*When Giants Learn to Dance: Mastering the Challenge of Strategy, Management, and Careers in the 1990s*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989, chapter 9.)
6. Linda Darling-Hammond & Barnett Barry, *The Evolution of Teacher Policy*, Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 1988, pp. 51–68.
7. In addition to the references noted above, see Robert Klitgaard, 'Incentive Myopia', *World Development*, vol. 17, no. 4, April 1989.
8. By the way, a similar misunderstanding plagues discussions in economics of 'quality'. Two good uses of the word can be mixed up. One is quality control in the sense of zero defects. The other idea is that it pays everyone in the market to have grades and standards so that various levels of quality can be credibly distinguished. The optimal level of quality for a particular firm or organization may not be the highest quality. It is this second sense of quality, that of a dimension measured continuously rather than a discrete target at the top of the scale, which I am advocating.
9. For recent examples, consider Paul Milgrom and John Roberts, *Economics, Organization and Management*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992.

Table 1

Summary of Recommendations and Pseudo-Recommendations

Begin at the End: Redefine Pedagogical Objectives

1. Begin with the jobs students are likely to get, the roles they will fill in a changing world and country. What skills, knowledge, and characteristics will they require to do those jobs well? Distinguish different kinds of students (for example, those who take only Economics I and students who specialize in economics).
2. Consider how well we are now engendering those skills, knowledge, and characteristics – and how well we might if we changed what and how we teach. In particular, consider shifting our pedagogical objectives. Teaching economics should be less conveying a body of knowledge or information and more helping students learn how to think and learn for themselves, using economic tools.
3. Brainstorm with the analogy of the Harvard core curriculum. A core course should try to convey how to think like an . . . (economist, anthropologist, physicist . . .). How might we restructure our courses to meet such an objective?

Assess Educational Production Functions

4. Study the educational production function. Among other things, face up to the importance of academic aptitude, which poses difficult questions for selection policy that go beyond the scope of this paper.
5. Devise easily graded problem sets and quizzes that force students to do their laps and push-ups. Grade them and monitor students' progress. To reduce the possibility of copying other students' work, use some tutorial sessions for in-class assignments that build on the problem sets. These assignments can be discussed on the spot as problems arise; and they should quickly make clear if some students have done no work in the area.
6. Disparage any form of lecturing that encourages students to 'parrot learn' or believe that lectures substitute for, rather than reinforce and supplement, their study outside the classroom.
7. Include many more applications and local examples in class.
8. Require students to own the textbook for the course.
9. Do not let students believe that memorization and 'spotting' will enable them to pass tests and examinations.
10. Because of scarce resources and large numbers of students, even more use should be made of multiple-choice examinations. But, emphatically, these tests should assess problem-solving, reasoning, and mastery more than memorization, jargon, or idiosyncratic facts. A corollary is that the faculty should spend more time together, and with banks of test questions, in the design of examinations.
11. Exams should not be 'speeded'. Either make tests shorter or allow more time (say, twice the scheduled amount) for students to finish. As a consequence, student anxiety will be reduced, the validity of the tests will be enhanced, and the performance of disadvantaged students will be more fairly evaluated.
12. The numbers of honours and masters students should be increased. They can play an indispensable role in improving the quality of undergraduate

education. One ingredient in increasing the numbers is to reduce the hassles and inefficiencies that attend the research paper and the thesis. Faculty members should play a more active role in identifying topics and guiding the research from the outset.

13. An economics example of a more general point: To prepare economics *majors* for an increasingly competitive national and world economy, they should be required to complete at least one year of calculus, a course in statistics, and a course in the use of computers. With such preparation, the teaching of advanced economics courses could also utilize such tools, with dramatic gains in efficiency and applicability.

Consider Experiments with Analogies to Structural Adjustment

14. Generate more information about how well we are doing. Students should be surveyed for each course and more generally, and their evaluations shared with other students, lecturers, and administrators. Employers are another important source of information – as are the lecturers themselves.
15. Offer students contracts, signed by them and their teachers. If they pursue their work diligently, they will be guaranteed to pass, or they will get their money back.
16. Decompress marks. More first- and second-class results are needed so that marks can serve as an incentive for excellence and not just the avoidance of failure. Publicize the new percentages that receive various results and honours, so that students, alumni, and employers can understand what they mean compared to earlier students' results – and to avoid devaluing those earlier results.
17. In subjects for which international standards exist, work with local and international educators to create metrics of success at the first- and third-year levels. Use the results of such tests to create new incentives for students and teachers, as well as new signals for the labour market.
18. Raise university fees so that students pay a greater percentage of the true costs of their education. Vary fees by departments and courses, depending on true costs.
19. The government and the university should offer more bursaries. The choice of students and subjects should depend primarily on the social value created by the education the bursaries would finance, and not solely on financial need or academic criteria.
20. An expanded programme of loans, preferably through the private sector, should be made available for students. The government could facilitate the availability of credit by collecting loan repayments automatically as part of income taxes.
21. Students should be allowed more choices – of teachers, courses, and combinations of courses in constructing a major. In the process, competition should be enhanced, leading to greater efficiency.
22. Link pay and performance. Explain that in the present financial crisis, pay hikes can only be justified if evidence can be given of enhanced productivity. For example, experiment with 25 per cent bonuses depending on how much students learn measured by externally set examinations, success with disadvantaged students, and so forth. Challenge the lecturers to design and evaluate a variety of incentive experiments.

Reform and Academic Quality in South African Universities

Bill Freund

In the period of what will be called 'reformed' apartheid, after 1976, higher education was a major beneficiary of state policies. Amongst whites, university enrolment expanded rapidly to embrace a large percentage of the population. However, university enrolment also grew for other 'population groups'. The establishment of numerous universities was seen as a perquisite that the system could offer participants in the overall political order. In general, the state enforced little rational planning on these universities. They were encouraged or allowed to duplicate facilities and rewarded for the number of students signed up.

It is increasingly clear to all that this is not a process that can go on indefinitely. The state no longer claims to offer the increasing sums from the budget that might be allowed according to the subsidy formulae from the early 1980s. The University of Natal, for one, is currently undergoing an exercise described as one based on 'strategic planning.' But what is the strategy and what is the problem?

What follows[1] is going to take a line that will seem eccentric to some. Moreover, it needs several qualifications before it proceeds. First, I realize that much of my discussion may be utopian but it may be important to propose utopian solutions – ideals – as a way of determining an academic 'growth path'. We certainly want to determine our priorities in a general sense before we lay plans. The thrust of this essay is not a plan of action, but an exercise in orientation. Second, I shall write very little about science and professional courses, about which I do not presume to know much. The question of arts and social science will be my main interest here. Third, reference will be almost by definition to the English language universities that were designed for whites and which have relatively rich resources today and particularly to the University of Natal, because I know it by far the best.

In these institutions, university problems tend to be defined in terms of two areas of thought. One is the problem of *equity* and in particular, the problem of weak, 'at risk' black students (effectively, the creation of remedial programmes not normally in the university teaching purview at all). The second is the need to cut corners and *save money*.

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Strategic planning therefore means above all ways of saving money without jeopardizing a sense of outreach to and inclusion of the black 'community'. To the limited extent that national policy is beginning to be questioned, these two areas of concern are united through the idea that university development should be tilted away from rewarding the universities established for whites to rewarding the rest (these were, in fact, already rather generously treated before 1990, in terms of their research output and according to the subsidy formula officially agreed on). This potentially mindless and unmonitored exercise could well be popular in the context of a post-apartheid state where power is shared between whites who want to change as little as possible (and can shore up existing structures through collecting funds from the private sector) and blacks who simply demand more resources than before and abandon more substantial kinds of changes in direction.

By contrast, I wish to focus on a different line of emphasis which is often piously assumed but rarely gets serious attention. I am going to suggest that the 'growth path' we need to adopt focuses on improving the quality of undergraduate education and upgrading humanities and social sciences to make up for what we have missed out on during thirty years of relative isolation. I see this as a fundamental national task; the churning out of career graduates without this kind of foundation and university life in my view hobbles South African national development qualitatively.

A fashionable phrase we often hear is 'centre of excellence': universities ought to be supporting *centres of excellence*, concentrating resources in this direction. In fact, my concern is with the promotion of academic excellence. I write because of my view that the university (with others in South Africa) promotes excellence very little in the areas with which I am familiar, whilst mediocrity in higher education is a very serious national problem. The two issues of inclusion and economy are of course serious and real ones, and I shall say something about them towards the end of this paper; but for the moment, I want to focus on precisely this issue of excellence which gets passed over quickly once the appropriate genuflections have been made.

You rarely hear about the possibility that an Anthropology Department or a History Department could be potential 'centres of excellence': the point is that the concept of excellence which is referred to, is only really appropriate to a science department or research unit in which students are apt to show an interest from the time they enter the university. Excellence gets reduced virtually to a commodity that can be measured in terms of publication quantity – especially articles and research reports of a standard form – and in terms of income from contract work from outside the institution.

Qualitative measurement is problematic, of course, but I would start by suggesting that, however uncomfortable this makes bureaucrats, quality is all that really counts, if one wishes to build up excellence in those intellectual activities where judgement is fundamental.

It is not only that an individual may write a book which in a limited number of pages may make a department or a university famous, and put it on the map, and that this may be far more important than the outpouring of worthy but relatively unoriginal or unmemorable writings from another individual. It is also true that in subjects that concern critical reading and writing, excellence has to characterize undergraduate teaching, teaching that rises to the level of lively two-way communication some of the time. It cannot be promoted, disembodied, in institutes of 'pure' research. Nor is there really such a thing as a 'researcher' who emerges into this excellence without long and effective, challenging training that develops his or her ability to interpret and produce critically salient syntheses. Research, moreover, must be measured in terms of how it feeds back into writing and teaching, into the development of a quality product and a quality mind, not just as the development of standardized methodologies that are applicable to results desired by clients or purchasers.

South African University Culture

The South African universities do contain excellence in some areas that reflect the national history and culture, that accord with the 'common wisdom' of the South African bourgeoisie of what the universities ought to be for. The cultivation of the life of the mind, originality, learning, the legitimation of an *intelligentsia*, are not, however, a significant part of this mentality.

Historically, the tradition in the English language universities was that the outstanding student who developed intellectual concerns continued to Britain to do postgraduate work; research and development was something that essentially occurred 'overseas'. Perhaps the successful product returned home to share his (or very occasionally her) wisdom, perhaps not. Otherwise the academics were graduates unable to get jobs in Britain, perhaps young academics prepared to come out to South Africa for an initial phase in their career. The political climate in South Africa from the late 1950s, coupled with availability of jobs in academic systems opening up all over the world, powerfully reinforced this pattern and made things much more disadvantageous.

However, it was accepted that society needed to have first-rate professionals to match the 'First World' infrastructure, social and physical, in which whites work and live, and here the universities did

and do a good job. They train the accountants and engineers who become corporate executives. They produce the professionals who service this class (and, of course, the wider population to some degree) in essential ways – architects, doctors, lawyers, etc., who are quite respectable by international standards and who 'do the job' along lines laid down elsewhere. Medicine is the one field where, by common consent, there is even a substantial research community of considerable international repute. The (important) mark of good approval is the extent to which graduates can compete for equivalent jobs in other rich English-speaking countries. Over the past twenty years, as the future of South Africa has become uncertain, a huge share of these professional and managerially trained specialists take their training and talents elsewhere.

In general, though, an autonomous research and intellectual capacity is not the point of the exercise. South Africa has managed on the basis of those individuals who have come along whether encouraged by the system or not. The dramatic conundrum of apartheid, moreover, came to inspire opposition in intellectuals who have produced work of great merit informed and focused ultimately on that issue. The nature of white politics, perhaps structured by the Afrikaner-British antagonisms of the past, created a space in the 'liberal' universities for opposition to the state, and for that, all due respect should be paid. Up to 1990 this could sometimes give the illusion of an intellectual ferment. It lacked, however, substantial intellectual and methodological foundation at an institutional level.

As a result, this system is proving to lack any significant space for outstanding writers or thinkers in the arts or social sciences as one pulls away from the simple, harsh realities of the apartheid confrontation as it existed for many years. Where would their outlet really be? The wider community is essentially oriented to colonial thinking and philistine attitudes; it doesn't breed young people who dream of beating tunes to 'a different drummer'. Their ambitions are to be consumers rather than creators within the world at large.

As the universities expanded massively in size from the 1960s (with the growing affluence of white South Africa), attracting students who fitted less and less the élite model for which the British model was designed, the circumstances deteriorated. Old-fashioned curricular requirements, etc. were allowed to weaken or lapse without any real effort being made to create a quality education appropriate to a broader entry group.

University budgets expanded dramatically partly through the extension of the system to racially and ethnically defined groups who could thus feel 'rewarded', and partly through the dramatic expansion of administration. The feel of the university was hardly to introduce

students to a new way of life, except for a handful of the self-motivated. Boys could play a lot of sport; girls could enjoy a pleasant social life. Nobody expected the average student to take the life of the mind too seriously. To the extent that university education served as a ladder of social mobility, it was a ladder for boys in the technical and professional fields. And for English-speaking whites, it was not that crucial, after all. The working class could count on being part of the racial élite of the society to get access to jobs and employment/business networks, anyway; they didn't really need to struggle to 'better themselves'. The English-medium universities are not very attuned to social mobility through achievement and competition in general. Historically the situation was different in the Afrikaans-medium universities but may well be much the same today.

An example I like to use because it so horrified me was a recent television interview with a well-known politician's grandson who examined as the outstanding Afrikaans Cape matric student. While allowing his love of sport and being in all ways a regular chap, this 17-year-old announced that his dream in life was to become an actuary. So often there is no vision other than an escape from South Africa's problems into an affluent life surrounded by the symbols of affluence – and actuarial 'science' is listed from time to time as the best-paying profession in the country!

Actually, as the bourgeoisie abandons apartheid swiftly and shamefacedly, they often turn, I think, to acquisition and the 'free market' out of an ideological conviction, as something to believe in, rather than simply demonstrating a gross love of money. No other ideal is held out for them other than sport, a vague concern for Nature under threat, and money-making, now that the ancient virtues of race, *volk*, and church seem to fall flat. This is disastrous; our purpose as a university must be to train young people who can rise to the challenge of remoulding South African society.

If one moves beyond the white population, the problems just multiply. There are not only the problems of lack of skills and unfamiliarity with a culture of books and ideas, but also the confusion of social and political issues which *are* a source of real commitment with a religious-like faith in the 'quick fix', a faith that the end of apartheid can mean the end of everything wrong with South African society. If not, best just to keep one's head down and try to accumulate like the rest. Of course, it was right to oppose racially segregated institutions and to think that an end to segregation was a worthy goal, but it was wrong to see that as the whole problem.

Correctly, writers such as Mamphela Ramphele talk about the dearth of a 'culture of learning'. There is little sense of individuals

taking up particular issues and special skills, finding a particular niche that satisfies their needs for personal development and then applying that within a context. It is understandably but disastrously assumed by many that after years of hard knocks, scrimping and saving, entry to university should be the guarantee of an easy, unproblematic future with no special continued effort required. The university as a source of knowledge for everyone who knocks at the door (the promise held out in the noble words of the Freedom Charter) is confused with the university as the source of paper qualifications to hand over the keys to lucrative, secure employment. The university as an arena for the key debates about culture, about values, about politics and society, gets little attention. This is a basic argument underlining this essay, that serious reconstruction of higher education would involve a powerful concern for quality and standards and not simply a quantitative effort to spend on institutions that were designed for the underprivileged or remedial programmes at the other institutions for people so categorized who can then be fitted into the existing slots.

Standards

'Standards' are a peculiar topic of conversation in South African universities. The word implies universally recognized and recognizable measurements but academic standards are not, of course, universal. For most white South African academics, they are simply the standards to which they are accustomed – a certain modest level of command of English, interest level, etc. Black South African students encountering these 'standards' often fall short; they are unfamiliar with the discourse of the white middle class and its way of expressing English, and often their skills and motivation are poor as well. Techniques and ideas that they find oppressive, culturally alien and alienating, become a subliminal turn-off. There is a need to reconsider the curriculum from this point of view.

But it would be a mistake to think that the existing 'standards' are anything very fine or worth fighting for in any event without qualification and rethinking. I have been impressed, for instance through 'externalling' at the University of Zimbabwe, that change in the skin colour of students in no way needs to be associated with lower standards (this is not to minimize other real problems from which that university suffers). It is true that the course content has become pretty Afrocentric in Zimbabwe and thereby more congenial for African students. Yet the basic admission standard there in arts courses and the general student command of English strikes me as considerably higher than at the University of Natal, looking at South African students of all colours, even though there are extremely few white

students left in arts subjects in Harare. Nor are Zimbabwean staff very kind-hearted towards the weakest students in their classes. Thus standards are not the same as the colour line; here in Natal the majority of *white* students do not meet this standard as set by an entirely black student body of a neighbouring African country.

Nor in the areas with which I am familiar as an academic are South African standards as they operate in the 1980s in the English-speaking (predominantly white) campuses good. To compare with the USA, the normal undergraduate standard at Natal is comparable to the lower reaches of the American state college, as opposed to university, system. Such institutions, as I will come back to in more detail, are there to promote people into lower middle-class jobs, not to serve as key building blocks in resolving national research priorities or a cultural life for the society. That is the job of the real universities, which make far more demands on successful American students. To compare with England, our Honours is probably the equivalent of A-levels at the élite end of the British school curriculum. Even having finished Honours, students at our university can hardly be said to have a good mastery of the literature or current debates in their field. One of our weaker graduates could best profit from a British university as an *entering undergraduate student.*

The point, in my view, is that standards are terribly important. They are what give us at the university self-respect and a sense of worth, and they serve a powerful national purpose. But it would be a disaster to see the issue in terms of 'defence' of unproblematically defined standards that are under threat from the dark hordes, which is all too often what sits in the minds of those who talk about them. Existing standards are probably reasonable enough in some subjects but very weak in others.

School Days, School Days

The point about standards, however, is not only the one often made about racism. From the point of view of how the university should be developing, the real problem is to get away from ideas about standards derived from school rather than those appropriate to a university. The governing principles of the university in the areas with which I am concerned are those of the schoolroom. Teachers lecture as often as four times a week and the point of this is largely to get students to regurgitate material for examinations. Students are expected to read little that is not covered in the lecture room. Assignments consist of make-work exercises set up to guarantee that some labour is performed; 'good' teaching is often defined in terms of repetitive tutorial work in the basics.

Something like 15% (or more) of the year is set aside for exams and exam reading periods. If students fail, modest indeed though the standards for passing are, and even though we are admitting many students with little chance of academic survival, this is considered a reflection on the academic staff. There is an assumption, as in high school, that you are 'preparing' all your charges for getting through their degree. It takes many a failure before the student is pushed out of the university as the notorious 1992 Mdlalose case at the Durban campus of the University of Natal demonstrated so glaringly. The white press held up this student's miserable academic record as a case for ridicule but the reality is that with only one more passing mark, he would have automatically been able to continue and an appeal made in the normal way would have been likely to gain him acceptance in either Durban or Pietermaritzburg's somewhat under-utilized arts faculties.

At the same time, there is little or no practical incentive for students to do *more* than the minimum; there is little incentive for attaining 60% or 70% other than personal pride. Unsurprisingly, many students can and do spend much of their time making money off-campus as the curriculum hardly requires all their time or energy. There is very little grasp of the idea that the curriculum and degree have a deep intrinsic value to which the students had better measure up – or else. Academic departments' 'success' is in fact evaluated in terms of their body count, not the quality of what is going on within.

Moreover, no employer seems to make a distinction here either and even our own postgraduate courses will often take quite mediocre graduates. State policy which rewards postgraduate numbers but makes little effort to check for quality is in large part the culprit here. There is no particular incentive, indeed, now a serious financial disincentive, to continue in Honours even though that is the first point where recognizably university work is finally the order of the day. (It should be underscored that in countries with the Honours system, such as Australia, Canada and Scotland, a way has long been found to ensure that most self-respecting graduates of good quality do the extra year.)

In some respects, the antiquated formal curriculum structure makes matters much worse. The three-year degree only requires doing ten semester courses and there is no choice in one's final year – you do your two majors full stop (although more enterprising students as a result sometimes do extra credits). It is quite normal for a department that graduates 50 and even 100 students in a major for those students to carry through in lecture courses until they graduate, passively absorbing fairly general knowledge. By the time that students might start to explore intellectual alternatives, they are locked in to a couple

of set courses (some departments are beginning to offer variant classes, to be fair). Small departments experience little staff turnover; this hardly encourages aspirations for the academic life amongst potentially bright young people.

Most substantial areas of knowledge are relatively starved of students, especially students of any ability. The orientation of subject structure presses the overwhelming number of our students into only a handful of subjects – often Psychology, Sociology, English and Economics – mainly because of the reality or the perception that they fit into a career track, not because of any particular interest on the part of students. Today even the demand for schoolteachers, the one traditional *raison d'être* of arts departments, has disappeared, and it is quite unclear what the point of these departments is, if the university has no commitment to, or clear ideas about, promoting a national cultural and intellectual life. It is hardly surprising that their enrolments are often poor and generally declining in the more challenging classes even though all acknowledge their definitional centrality to the university.

Money is a serious issue as well. Since the middle 1980s, student fees, which in white terms were historically very low, have skyrocketed. They are now at levels which are modest by the standard of private secondary schools but enormous in terms of the income of the poor, and substantial even for the middle class. Scholarships seem scarce, unless tied to career tracks themselves and the disincentive to pursue learning outside of such tracks has become great except for the well-to-do. Loan schemes tie students down in this direction, schemes which are probably fundamentally unrealistic for poor black students.

Outside of the arts, South African university admission standards are presumably much higher but the education is extremely narrow. The economic, social and political illiteracy of many of South Africa's 'leaders' is only too obvious. It is extraordinary that in as mundane a subject as commerce, students can obtain a degree without ever touching a non-commercial subject. What is the point of such a 'degree', which would better be pursued at a technikon? Law, exceptionally, is a postgraduate subject but at the University of Natal, students are permitted to do 'legal studies' as an undergraduate subject. The result is that a great many of our students actually spend much of their time memorizing facts for their law exams, limiting further their exposure to the humanities and social sciences. There is not even a strategy of charging through the nose those who are doing such a course purely for its certification value, since their main reward is going to be the salary they earn (at least so long as such degrees retain scarcity value) in order to put money into the intellectually robust but non-career orientated parts of the university.

What is an excellent undergraduate education? It is one that focuses on relatively small courses, with high-quality, independent written work, very well-selected and demanding reading lists, and in general a structure and approach that reflects current intellectual life. It is possible to make an Honours course work in this way but few students ever get to Honours level in substantial subjects which live up to this design. (Passive learning and memorization exercises sometimes persist even into the departmental coursework Masters' courses that are being promoted with alacrity and little real evaluation.)

Academic excellence also requires maintaining a 'community' of scholars who can keep up a discourse amongst themselves and relate to their peers elsewhere, not just a tiny number of well-paid boffins or research teams of hired hands that can be bound over to business or political parties. Very little teaching at present in our university consists of challenging exploration or communication that relates to the genuine interest of the academic. It is unrealistic to expect that students themselves will opt for so-called impractical choices.

Instead, what is needed is a way of harnessing at least some of the practical course structure to successful performance, to achievement of excellence, in the academic sphere. We need to provide integrated degrees that combine career orientation with genuine intellectual enquiry in the course of study. To expect the real academics to *compete* for 'bodies' with the career minders is ridiculous and only a formula for degrading the universities further.

Many people dismiss these kinds of ideas as reactionary élitism because they focus on quality in education rather than access to what exists already. But I don't think they are reactionary. I don't believe in low-level 'pass one pass all' degrees for blacks as the answer to our problems. *The idea that promoting degrees of poor quality in increasing numbers serves some national purpose needs to be challenged.* In any event, if the number of university students increases enough, the economic value of the degree and the scarcity bottled up in the consequent skill certification will be reduced. The idea that the South African economy is going to absorb ever greater numbers of affluent accountants, lawyers, architects, etc. is chimerical.

I hope I do not sound disrespectful to those who are involved in tutoring and outreach programmes that do provide a useful service in present circumstances if I point out that the universities are at any event doing a poor job in terms of actually giving students 'at risk' a real education of any quality *in any numbers*. This is simply a job for which the universities lack resources and skills. What South Africa needs instead is substantial investment in selective sixth-form colleges that instil an interest in learning and operate on a meritocratic

basis for those who suffer from poor secondary education. (Of course, these could be linked to universities, let us say, to the Education Departments, so long as it was always understood that university admission was in no sense 'guaranteed' by attendance. They would need access to some of the best and brightest of teachers and admission to them must itself be competitive, inevitably.) These in turn must diffuse what they have to offer towards wider and wider circles of schools. Universities cannot do what the schools have failed to do. There also needs to be a divorce between the idea of access to *learning* (as a cultural and political right) for all and the national requirements of *certification* for those, and only those, who can do the job.

The universities can then be reserved for those who can pass through such institutions reasonably successfully without massive investment in remedial work that will tilt the academic environment even further towards mediocrity and high school level standards. For the black student who shows interest and initiative, doors should indeed be opened. Everything should be done. Every pressure needs to be exerted to force the state to provide 'no-strings' scholarship money to students *of all races* as well as scholarship money aimed at attracting students to a wide range of key disciplines. (There is certainly still room for some affirmative action here.) Today, there isn't even money earmarked for the serious black postgraduate student, the kind of man or woman who can be a role model and play a catalytic role in social change! All there is, it seems at times, is money from foreigners with their own agendas for 'training' 'researchers' (whatever those terms mean) to redress racial balances (gender is always referred to but of course nobody is really very interested in non-black women), regardless of quality, regardless of all the rules those foreigners know about full well in evaluating their own society's educational needs. What a great formula for making up a non-racial society!

Creating excellence in general education in this country, however, is absolutely necessary if we are going to be a more pivotal, less colonial and less derivative society. This must be the bread and butter of the arts and social science academics. It is also the hard but only real way that the traditional associations of race (or, for that matter, gender) with expertise and class can be changed. It is essential to engage in a process that will ultimately be decisive in eradicating the historic inequalities of South Africa but it will be a very long and gradual one. It is not a coincidence that university life flourishes in societies that aspire to think of themselves as autonomous, as metropolitan, as countries that are more or less free actors in the modern world.

American Higher Education as a Model

South Africans often talk about moving towards an American kind of education, an American kind of degree structure. For instance, there is a tendency towards adopting semesterization and, to a certain extent, modular courses. Another index is vague talk of the community college model. In some ways, the South African system has been Americanized. It represents an odd graft of American values (linked to the affluence and diffusion of higher education amongst whites) on to an older English stock where universities were about the formation of a very small élite. The white student lifestyle is rather American. But in other ways, the difference is vast and should be pointed out in comprehensible ways. The following description works on the idea that the American way may be very advantageous in some respects, more so than the older British university model designed for a small, well-schooled élite, but that its structures need to be examined critically with real care and attention.

What is American higher education like? I would characterize it in four ways:

1. It is vast and rich. Millions of students. More academics than there are miners or carworkers. Economies of scale can work in such a system. Large universities have tens of thousands of students while little colleges with only a few hundred proliferate and find their 'market niche'. Internally articulated sub-communities and sub-communities of sub-communities are effective in determining standards.
2. Americans do believe in something like the Freedom Charter clarion call, of 'the doors of learning open for all' – *but on an equal opportunity basis*, not a 'pass one pass all' basis. Some access to free or virtually free tertiary level courses is universal (although since Reagan, it has been significantly reduced). Good students get scholarships and these do not hinge on their doing accountancy or some other business-linked subject. Enlightenment is taken to be a self-evidently valuable and important thing; a good general education is highly valued. In many institutions, arts and social science academics are in a strong position and the 'big names' amongst them are at least honoured, if not richly rewarded. Nobody would see them as marginal in the university compared to business academics, engineers or even doctors, and that is usually reflected in the balance of power in faculty structures. If anything, it can be argued that they are too closeted in a world of their own, a genuine 'ivory tower', something which hardly exists in South Africa, too comfortable with their own internal rules and ideals.

3. Resources being finite, however, the extent to which Americans count on higher education as a road to social mobility means that access is balanced with a very individualized and competitive set of values, which dominate the whole society. The academy consists of many, many diverse kinds of institutions which are associated with hierarchies and pecking orders. To get into the bottom orders of the higher education system is not to get very far on the high road to fame and fortune. More on this below.
4. Access to professions (even, for instance social work or librarianship) is through postgraduate training that requires students to pass through a general knowledge first degree. It is perfectly possible and not especially rare for a medical student to have majored in arts as long as he or she has taken the requisite science requirements as his or her electives. Only after a four-year degree do you start your three-year medical study. Commerce degrees (apart from MBAs which can be prestigious programmes) traditionally are of very low value and are not taught in quality institutions at all at undergraduate levels – although it has to be said that this is changing to a certain extent.

It would take many pages to give a full indication of the American system and how its variations work, so what follows is extremely simplified; but perhaps it is useful to describe in crude form some rungs on the ladder.

Let us first take the extremes. There is a network of real élite institutions which would include private universities, liberal arts colleges that only grant first degrees, and some technical institutions. You virtually can't transfer into these places; admission is extremely competitive. Costs may be high but there are a substantial number of scholarships (loans are far more significant than they used to be). The work-load is very heavy; as the American movies indicate, the fun time for young people is high school. When you reach university, Saturday night is date night but otherwise in term-time, the students labour away. The work expected at the élite liberal arts colleges or a very prestigious technical institution such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is far beyond a full-time job of 40 hours a week during term-time. Science students do work the hardest traditionally but other students are expected to take their studies seriously too.

A good first degree from such an institution is the best way to gain admission to a prestigious postgraduate course. You may gain entrance from a much less regarded institution but it is not likely unless you have outstanding marks. Systems have been devised so that nobody dreams of simply equating a II/1 at say, Yale, with a II/1

at Pocatello State, in making the selection. The graduates of these institutions form the national élite, the top professionals and managers, on the whole. Such institutions are very well situated to monitor and channel the admission of men and women from all kinds of backgrounds into the élite while ensuring that such an élite reproduces itself: social conservatism leavened well with objectively-graded, socially legitimating, upward mobility based on talent.

At the other end of the spectrum are the community colleges. These are cheap (nearly free), omnipresent two-year institutions that grant a sort of degree, usually Associate of Arts (in America, there are no technikons). Such a 'degree' is really for apprenticeships and the like. Those in non-technical courses might become, say, secretaries. It is true that a fair number of successful community college graduates continue to four-year institutions, moving on to take proper degrees (BAs, BSs, etc.) more so than in the past, as many states have now instituted significant fee charges for four-year institutions. Even then, such transfers very largely go towards the lower middle of the system, to state colleges which mostly grant first degrees only, and extremely few to the prestigious institutions described above. State colleges might have a few career-orientated Masters' degrees at most. Their graduates become the local salesmen, bookkeepers, schoolteachers, etc.

The best students at such institutions go on to professional courses but rarely at the more élite institutions. Most university students of working class backgrounds generally, most black or Chicano students, are found at these community colleges and, to a lesser extent, the bottom rungs of degree-granting undergraduate institutions.

American colleges and universities, by contrast with American high schools, are not shy about failing students. Equal access means just that; to get in doesn't mean you get through. At state institutions, failure rates are high and professors are happy to eliminate weaker students (by contrast with élite, especially élite private institutions where it is assumed that all who are admitted can make the grade). There is not too much tender, loving care at the entry level courses; the students must sink or swim (although the whole system, given the American consumerist way, is far more user-friendly in terms of access to information and the like). Large classes are handled by part-time staff or postgraduate teaching assistants and marking is multiple choice.

I don't believe that South Africa can learn too much from the far ends of the American spectrum. I think that we rather need to say somewhat more about the in-between level of institution, the big state universities, because they are most like what we try to do here. These institutions do it all. They have many career-orientated programmes

and they take in many students who are not very strong. They are relatively cheap especially if you live within the defined catchment area and there is an ethos of access. Before Reagan, it was possible for students to support themselves with part-time and vacation work entirely if they were really committed and had no resources. This is much less true today, however. Still it cannot really be said that deserving students are turned away purely on financial grounds. Although the student body is diversified, the typical state university student is lower middle class. Students are noticeably from a higher class stratum on average than in a community college or a commuter state college in the city and noticeably from a lower class stratum than at the élite colleges and universities.

Yet these institutions, which are often huge (30 000 students and more) also aim at excellence. Some are in international terms great centres of learning with Nobel prize winning scientists, fantastic libraries, gigantic academic departments, etc. A small percentage of the student body is very good indeed and groomed for better things even when the average intake is mediocre. There are many extremely esoteric courses with tiny numbers of students of which the university is nonetheless proud. The big numbers are accommodated in many career-orientated 'bread and butter' courses. Such state universities cater, in other words, for a vast range of needs fairly effectively. They do this, of course, with big budgets.

They also profit from *advantages of scale*. One of the fundamental problems in South African universities is the amazing range of activities expected from a relatively small resource base and student body. The biggest dysfunctionality at the University of Natal is certainly found here. To put it simply, to cope with two to three times the number of students, we would not need an equivalent increase in faculties, departments or staff. Many departments could absorb such an increase 'as is' and others could cope very effectively by growing moderately. We try to do far too much and are spread too thin. By American standards, both campuses of the University of Natal put together would only add up to a modest size state university, one that would probably not attempt much postgraduate facilitation. A campus the size of Pietermaritzburg would certainly just concentrate on undergraduate activity, perhaps apart from one or two specialities! This is why nationally negotiated broader rationalization of South African universities is so essential.

The American multi-versity (to use the term made famous by Clark Kerr in the 1960s) is *regulated* in a way that accomodates many interests. Nobody dreams of thinking of such institutions as homogeneous communities. Nobel Prize winners are not supposed to humiliate themselves by finding the pass marks for the football teams;

apart from occasional lecture courses (in which others do the marking) for those good at it, they probably only see postgraduates. In successful institutions, there is a recognition that the revenue derived from quality in say, basketball, is designed to pay for quality in say, physics. There are some 'easy' majors but they are not prestigious and they will hardly be given all the resources as a reward for attracting students. In the serious subjects, large numbers are weeded out in the first year or two. It would be a scandal for a very high percentage of students in this kind of institution to pass the first year course and failure rates are hardly a source of disgrace. In a sense, they are a badge of prestige! In your major, in fact, you must certainly have the equivalent of 60% to get a degree at all.

There is often a form of internal tracking; students are given the option of enrolling in prestigious Honours colleges and the like which attract the most intellectually substantial staff and offer demanding courses. The better academics put most of their energies into such programmes and into upper-level undergraduate teaching. Teaching is terribly important in terms of what people do most of the time, but it is not the kind of schoolmaster stuff that South Africans too often associate with the devoted teacher.

There is an incorrect stereotype that often exists, certainly with regard to the humanities and the social sciences, that exaggerates the extent to which academics are driven to publish massively. Only in the upper rungs of the American system is there a strong research ethos, and these upper rungs are richly provided with specialized resources. Up until tenure, yes, it's publish or perish but once the academic is tenured, he or she cannot 'perish'. Departments are oligarchies and most become full professors if they survive the miserable seven-year untenured phase (during which there is absolutely no right to a permanent slot and such a slot may turn out not to exist if economic conditions are unfavourable or if you have made the wrong enemies).

The 'high-flyers' may be motivated by the ambition of a yet more prestigious job elsewhere; American academics usually have little institutional loyalty, especially in the big impersonal state institutions, rarely work at a university they themselves attended, and try to be quite mobile. Where (in most cases as the university lecturer ages) such mobility ceases to be a practical possibility and there is little consequent motivation, the American academic is often not very productive in writing.

However, many do take great care to keep up with their subject and others do research and write without any specific promotional motivation. It is far more likely than in South Africa that American academics are worthy bearers of the Protestant Ethic and have deeply

internalized the ambitions appropriate to their profession; they rarely need to be offered 'car benefits' and the like. In practical terms, what the profession offers is a long career haul to sixty-five or more and then excellent old age and medical benefits. American academics tend to come from far more modest class backgrounds than is true in South Africa. Their sense of self rarely makes of them particularly commanding or ambitious people in any event; they really do tend to be people who like ideas and books, not executives and not 'movers and shakers'. College teaching as an educational process is unshaken in its prestige and importance in American society but nobody dreams of thinking of the individual academic as having the prestige of the more lucrative and/or power-linked professions. He or she is really not very different in the public eye from the schoolteacher. The quality of what goes on in the university is what gives people their morale, their sense of worth. People fuss a great deal about teaching and are deeply obsessed with standards – it is what makes their lives worthwhile and meaningful.

Departments are large enough, of course, to control their own academic standards. Faculties are of some importance as general rules-setting bodies but the departments are where the substantive debates go on and a good department is by definition one where the quality of a colleague is known independently of the number or physical weight of his publications. University teachers are able to think of themselves as intellectuals, not as 'researchers'. Communities of Indologists or geographers or specialists in modern French literature cross-cut the institutions, meet frequently and have a very strong sense of being a guild with a pecking-order of quality and an intense oral communication network determining changes in that order. These communities, into which one is initiated in graduate school, are generally far more significant than membership in an institutional community of a particular college or university.

In South Africa currently the SAPSE system encourages a high rate of publication, probably far more than makes sense in arts and social science subjects. I recently served as reader for a very good history *ms.* for our press. The author had obviously felt constrained to produce every single chapter for an article somewhere! This is substantively, of course, quite pointless and stupid although one could congratulate the author for playing the system well.

Oddly enough, American academics are apt to produce far less. An equivalent historian producing a significant book once in a decade and never troubling with articles is hardly going to be looked down upon. The demands of teaching in the American style curriculum are really too much to allow for massive publication records in many areas of knowledge (except in the privileged heights of the system where

teaching loads are light) and, as I have stated, there is no real incentive anyway in promotional terms.

Students who aspire, not merely to being postgraduates in academic subjects, but who want to get admission to law, medicine and other postgraduate courses, are subject to keen competition where quality is evaluated. They are not allowed merely to do a practical curriculum and they are effectively pushed into working very hard at their numerous general education and major requirements. Graduate students in academic subjects often have a renewed experience of entry into a big, competitive programme. Here again a substantial weeding out process takes place both through exclusion if marks are not high, and through the limited availability of money, as opposed to outright failure. So performance in arts and social science departments is highly competitive and carefully monitored and tailored.

To use the fashionable terminology, the multi-versities are 'driven' by various factors, but a major one, and money and innovative energy goes into it, is academic prestige and support for the internalized intellectual values in the profession. Of course, another ethic entirely prevails in more technocratic subjects and courses, but that is not my concern. The whole point of the 'multiversity' idea is that it allows for a balance between different types of university activity. I say this although it may well be true that there is a tendency for this to become less effective and strong in recent years. The Reagan boom saw the universities again prosper financially, and life became considerably sweeter for academics, whatever their ideology, in stark contrast to Thatcher's England. In 1991, however, public education budgets were extremely hard-hit by the recession and the academics are taking a big knock. This may be simply a phase in the cycle of things; it may be the start of real restructuring in ways that are not so congenial. In my view, the 'multiversities' of the USA are more relevant models for us than the élite English model which in its heyday in the 1960s created exciting and wonderful institutions for the pursuit of knowledge by a very small minority.

In the economic sense, I would argue that the universities are going to have to nurture academic rewards that are to an important degree extra-financial. The pressures for increasing enrolments will take off once more black students find ways of qualifying for university entrance in growing numbers, something fairly predictable from any assumption of marked black presence in central state power in South Africa following a political settlement. There will be a need for more academics but the academics will inevitably be paid much less; the days of comparisons with countries like Australia or Canada will probably give way to comparisons with countries like Brazil, Portugal, Korea or Malaysia. This will be a painful process that will

surely affect all in the public service with no access to private contracting.

Driven by What? What is to be Done?

How could one redesign the curriculum fairly radically in a way that fits a 'multiversity' future in Natal and elsewhere (*starting from the recognition that no university problems are as central as mediocre standards, lack of intellectual vitality and challenge in what has to represent much of the core of any normal university curriculum*)? The main steps follow naturally from the points made above. We have to move towards a four year curriculum, towards greatly increasing the number of courses and decreasing the enrolments in any particular course that students take.

Lower level courses must be places where weaker students are eliminated as a matter of course, not regret (unless and until admission standards can be very substantially raised) and where only a limited amount of tenured staff time goes. Counting marks from the final semester only must stop, and students must be required to get second-class marks in their major to graduate. Ways should be found for making Honours level courses, perhaps within a four year degree structure, more or less compulsory for students with aspirations to go places, and good teaching should be understood primarily in terms of administering the quality of what goes on at that level. Postgraduate study needs to be concentrated in a few inter-departmental and inter-faculty sites and divorced from the need to build up 'student numbers'. Postgraduate study must be made highly selective as soon as possible and departments should not be allowed to create their own postgraduate programmes unless they can demonstrate suitability, not just 'body count' enhancement. Creating an appropriate culture for postgraduate training should be given priority.

Students in all departments need to take a good core of non-professional courses. There must be an ethos of the importance of high-quality general education. It must frankly be accepted that the schools cannot perform this job alone. The tendency to design academic departments largely to suit a career track may be ideal for a technikon but is inappropriate at a university and must be overcome. Education departments, say, must be about changing the schools and debating what they do, not just servicing them. The prestige of intellectually weak (if popular) parts of the university based on enrolment appeal needs to be reduced. If the academic and intellectual quality is low, this must itself be seen as a major problem, even if graduates are churned out. Universities should not be discouraged from introducing a small, high-quality MBA programme to replace an

over-stretched commerce degree for which there are few suitable teachers. Alternatively, a market-driven response would provide students searching for affluent careers with such academic structures – but then they should be charged the kind of fees that would be paid at private secondary schools and then some – as a way of providing revenue for the academically substantial parts of the university.

It might be possible to specialize the curriculum further. The university could continue to offer popular but academically limited professional courses as long as this is so recognized and advertised. At the same time, it could promote something like an Honours College and reward the better students who do such a course in various ways. These could also be transitional structures on the way to qualitative improvement overall. As student bodies grow and economies of scale become possible, the chances of successfully advancing a more complex curriculum increase.

Nothing however, is more important than for the universities to work at creating prestige around the internal academic standards, not only in technological but other subjects, standards which are independent of political red herrings and in which we can all believe – standards which are self-sustaining and do not need to keep being referred to SAPSE norms and the like, which take in far more criteria than numbers of publications and which give life and excitement to the careers and work of academics as intellectuals.

A More Radical Solution?

This means taking specialization seriously. First of all, close down most arts and social science departments, apart from those needed as service courses, face reality and redesignate 60% to 70% at least of the existing universities as advanced technikons and teacher training centres concentrating on applied professional courses motivated by a mix of market considerations and sense of national purpose.

Shift real intellectual activity to half-a-dozen research centres that could function as universities. Library and other facilities could be so re-concentrated as well with a bit of time. Genuinely interested and appropriate staff could move to those centres where they could exist in substantial numbers and form a sort of equivalent, say, to the prestigious *grandes ecoles* of France. A fair way to do this would be to select from a mix of those institutions serving each racial and language 'group' under apartheid so there is no sense of only white or English language institutions being favoured. Some arts and social science service courses would necessarily be far more widely diffused, and no doubt UNISA would continue to service a large population unable to attend classes. Out of this could come a quality

university teaching zone capable of administering standards that would raise up full-blooded thinkers and good university research that did not get confused with the short-term practical needs of state and business. Its needs would not be confounded with the broader demands for certified and qualified middle-level professionals. I am sure such concentrations in science would have great economies of scale to offer to a research and development climate.

Either solution as a matter of course requires national planning. The individual universities cannot reform themselves beyond a certain point. But reform is important. Without a willingness to move either way, a big chunk of South African university life will continue to sink in a shallow sea of mediocrity with little clear sense of purpose. The particular heritage of the last twenty years, when the state poured large sums into building a university system but without real consideration for quality and in all sorts of ways hampered by the limited character of what I shall call reformed apartheid and the structure and leadership it bred, is not one that can automatically lead to a good future without internal restructuring. The state simply can't pay more and more and more along existing lines (and with new demands related to affirmative action!) The concentration will have to be on quality, and universities will have to be 'academically driven' to a significant and unprecedented extent for that to happen.

NOTE

1. I have been stimulated and encouraged to revise this paper by, in particular, Jeff and Sheila McCarthy, Rob Morrell, Raphaël de Kadt, Mervyn Frost, and Andrew Duminy.

The Poet J.C. Dlamini and *Theoria*

On ending his subscription of more than twenty years, the editors of *Theoria* recently received the following poem from the well-known Zulu poet John Charles Dlamini. He has published three collections of poetry in Zulu, the most well-known being *Inzululwane* (*Giddiness*) in 1957. In a central poem in this collection, 'Isondo', he deals with the difficulties encountered in obtaining education. The following poem relates to this theme. J.C. Dlamini writes under the pseudonym Bulima Ngiyeke, which can be translated as 'Stupidity stay away from me'.

The editors of *Theoria* feel honoured to have received this poem and wish Mr Dlamini well in his retirement.

MLUNGU WOXOLO KWEZEMFUNDO

Angazanga ukuthi ubudala bunamahlaba:
Buza nokukhathala bansuku zonke
Ukhathale ngokungacabangisisi izinto;
Ukhathale ngokungenzisisi izinto
Ungcwekisane namangabangaba angapheli,
Izinto ngapha nangapha zikwedlule.

Ubudala mntanomuntu!

Bukufuse ngevuthayo impama emehlweni
Agcine eseqhunsulile ukubona do.
Agcin' eseqhunsulile kodwa zintunte
Agcin' eseqhunsulile nakho ukufifiyela;
Agcin' esefunda ngokubal' amagama
Ngisho ukubala amagama okuyisicefe,
Ukubal amagama okungahlanganisi umqondo.
NASO ISIHOGO SOKWEHLUKANA NOKUFUNDA!!!
SALA KAHLE MNTANOMLUNGU, NGIYABONGA!!!

WHITE CHAMPION OF PEACE THROUGH EDUCATION

Had I only known old age entails pain:
Had I only known that daily it drains our strength.
Old age saps one's power to think clearly;
Constantly the mind is beset by endless doubts,
And all things beautiful vanish from sight.

O the misery of old age!

With a fierce blast one's eyes are beaten
And the eyes stare blankly without seeing.
Finally they stare as though stricken by madness,
And eventually they squint to see nothingness;
And words turn into numbers,
Counting becomes tedious and without joy,
No longer to fill the mind with achievement and certainty.
Here then is the living hell of a life without learning!
Farewell, child of the whiteman and thank you.

J.C. Dlamini (Bulima Ngiyeke)
3 February 1993

(*Translation by Prof. Mazisi Kunene*)

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