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Power and Resistance

Pouvoir et résistance







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*Edited by Jelica Šumič-Riha & Oto Luthar*

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**POWER AND RESISTANCE**

**POUVOIR ET RÉSISTANCE**



# I.

## *Power and Resistance*

*The current issue of Filozofski vestnik/Acta Philosophica centres on a re-thinking of the complex dialectic of power and resistance. The present constellation characterised by the victory of the alliance between market economy and liberal democracy throughout the world, seems to preclude the very idea of resistance, labelling it utopian. A drift away from the politics of emancipation and towards reflections on resistance - a major shift that has been taking place in contemporary thought over the past two decades - also bears witness to what we propose to call "the growing impasse of resistance".*

*In most of the articles gathered in this issue, a questioning of the impasse of resistance does not entail a celebration of the retreat of the political or the relinquishment of all resistance. On the contrary, by refusing to tie resistance to some already-existing and identifiable node, such as the proletariat, these contributors fully accept its radically contingent character and the impact this contingency has on the "way out" and on the constitution of the subject in the field of politics.*

*The aim of this issue is to provide a range of reflections on post-emancipationist thought in its attempts to deal with the impasse of resistance, as well as to articulate the main issues in the current debate centred around the power-resistance dialectic. These issues include: the radical discord between the effects of resistance and the institutions and mechanisms of power that provoke them; the ambiguity of resistance in its relation to the entity it allegedly subverts; the complicity of the powerlessness of thought with mastery; the task of thought; and the victimisation of the subject.*

*Jelica Šumič-Riha*





Alain Badiou  
*Résistance et philosophie*

Inspirons-nous ici de Georges Canguilhem, mon maître en philosophie des sciences, qui est mort il y a peu de temps, et auquel un colloque sur la Résistance peut et doit rendre hommage sans restriction. Canguilhem n'était pas homme à mener grand tapage sur ses faits d'armes, pourtant aussi réels que consistants. Il était de ce point de vue comme beaucoup de résistants, dont le silence politique et personnel sur leur action fut à la mesure de ce que cette action avait de simultanément radical et intime, violent et réservé, nécessaire et exceptionnel. Ce n'est pas la subjectivité résistante, on le sait, qui tint le haut du pavé dans les années cinquante. Le silence de bon nombre de résistants a été l'effet d'une politique dominante qui n'entendait pas s'expliquer jusqu'au bout, ni sur l'effondrement de la III<sup>ème</sup> République, ni sur l'allégeance à Pétain, ni sur la question, qui aujourd'hui fait retour, de la continuité de l'État jusque dans l'abjection.

La circonstance veut que nous soyons réunis au lendemain, ou presque, de la mort de François Mitterrand, un des grands politiciens des années cinquante. Nous endurons aujourd'hui le décret d'un deuil national en son honneur. Or Mitterrand a défendu sur l'État, le pétainisme et la Résistance des propos dont l'audience et la solennité présidentielle font, forme et contenu, un vif contraste avec le silence prolongé de Canguilhem, et de beaucoup d'autres.

C'est qu'il appartenait, le Président dont il y a deuil national, à l'espèce répandue des tacticiens, pour qui il était naturel d'être pétainiste quand tout le monde l'était, puis de devenir résistant au fil des circonstances, et de poursuivre ainsi sa route en devenant tour à tour bien des choses, pourvu qu'elles aient la faveur du temps ou autorisent des calculs réussis.

Un deuil national suppose qu'on ait quelque idée de ce qui, d'être national, n'en est pas moins suffisamment universel pour que la conscience publique ait motif à le célébrer.

Disons, avec mesure, et en respectant comme il le faut toujours la paix des morts, que je suis heureux que ce colloque me permette, sous le signe du national, de célébrer, ici et maintenant, Georges Canguilhem, Jean Cavaillès, ou Albert Lautman, plutôt que François Mitterrand.

S'il était silencieux sur lui-même, Georges Canguilhem ne l'était pas sur les autres. Sur les autres philosophes engagés dans la Résistance. Il faut périodiquement relire la petite plaquette éditée en 1976, en 464 exemplaires numérotés, sous le titre *Vie et mort de Jean Cavaillès*, aux éditions Pierre Laleure, à Ambialet, dans le Tarn.

Nous avons là les interventions de Canguilhem lors de l'inauguration de l'amphithéâtre Jean Cavaillès à Strasbourg (1967), d'une commémoration à l'ORTF (1969), d'une commémoration à la Sorbonne (1974). Canguilhem y résume la vie de Jean Cavaillès: philosophe et mathématicien, professeur de logique, co-fondateur du mouvement de résistance «Libération-Sud», fondateur du réseau d'action militaire Cahors, arrêté en 1942, évadé, arrêté à nouveau en 1943, torturé et fusillé. Découvert dans une fosse commune, dans un coin de la citadelle d'Arras, et baptisé sur le moment «Inconnu N°5».

Mais ce que Canguilhem tente de restituer va plus loin que l'évidente désignation du héros («Un philosophe mathématicien bourré d'explosifs, un lucide téméraire, un résolu sans optimisme si ce n'est pas là un héros, qu'est-ce qu'un héros?»). Fidèle, au fond, à sa méthode, le repérage des cohérences, Canguilhem cherche à déchiffrer ce qui fait passage entre la philosophie de Cavaillès, son engagement, et sa mort.

Il est vrai que c'est une énigme apparente, puisque Cavaillès travaillait, très loin de la théorie politique ou de l'existentialisme engagé, sur les mathématiques pures. Et qu'en outre il pensait que la philosophie des mathématiques devait se débarrasser de toute référence à un sujet mathématicien constituant, pour examiner la nécessité interne des notions. La phrase finale de l'essai «Sur la logique de la théorie de la science» (texte rédigé pendant son premier emprisonnement au camp de St Paul d'Eygau, où l'avait assigné l'État pétainiste), devenue célèbre, porte qu'à la philosophie de la conscience il faut substituer la dialectique des concepts. En quoi Cavaillès anticipait de vingt ans les tentatives philosophiques des années soixante.

Or c'est justement dans cette exigence de rigueur, dans ce culte instruit de la nécessité, que Canguilhem voit l'unité de l'engagement de Cavaillès et de sa pratique de logicien. Parce que, à l'école de Spinoza, Cavaillès voulait dé-subjectiver la connaissance, il a du même mouvement considéré la résistance comme une nécessité inéluctable, qu'aucune référence au Moi ne pouvait circonvenir. Ainsi déclarait-il en 1943: «Je suis spinoziste, je crois que nous saisissons partout du nécessaire. Nécessaires les enchaînements des mathématiciens, nécessaires même les étapes de la science mathématique, nécessaire aussi cette lutte que nous menons.»



Ainsi Cavaillès, délesté de toute référence à sa propre personne, a-t-il pratiqué les formes extrêmes de la résistance, jusqu'à s'introduire en bleu de chauffe dans la base de sous-marins de la *Kriegsmarine* à Lorient, comme on fait de la science, avec une ténacité sans emphase dont la mort n'était qu'une éventuelle conclusion neutre, car, comme le dit Spinoza, «l'homme libre ne pense à rien moins qu'à la mort, et sa sagesse est une méditation, non de la mort, mais de la vie».

Canguilhem conclut comme il convient: «Cavaillès a été résistant par logique.»

Canguilhem énonce en somme que dans ce «par logique» se tient la connexion entre la rigueur philosophique et la prescription politique. Ce n'est pas le souci moral, ou, comme on dit aujourd'hui, le discours éthique, qui ont, semble-t-il, donné les plus grandes figures de la philosophie comme résistance. Le concept paraît avoir été en la matière un meilleur guide que la conscience ou que la spiritualité – Canguilhem brocarde ceux qui, philosophes de la personne, de la morale, de la conscience, ou même de l'engagement, «ne parlent tant d'eux-mêmes que parce qu'eux seuls peuvent parler de leur Résistance, tellement elle fut discrète».

Il y a eu, dans le registre de la philosophie, l'illustration de ce qu'il n'est pas nécessaire au philosophe, et peut-être même improbable, du moins en France, quand le choix et la volonté sont requis de façon abrupte, et à contre-courant d'une opinion asservie, d'en passer par la conscience morale et l'impératif catégorique kantien.

Après tout déjà, le grand philosophe dont est attesté un acte périlleux de résistance n'est pas Kant. C'est bien Spinoza, le maître ultime de Cavaillès, quand après le meurtre des frères de Witt il alla placarder l'affichette qui stigmatisait les «*ultimi barbarorum*», les derniers des barbares. Anecdote que Canguilhem ne se lassait pas de commenter.

Cavaillès, en train de passer de Husserl à Spinoza. Ou aussi bien Albert Lautman, qui tentait, appuyé sur une maîtrise stupéfiante des mathématiques de son temps, de fonder un platonisme moderne: voilà l'arrière-plan singulier des figures résistantes exemplaires de la philosophie française.

L'un et l'autre ont été fusillés par les nazis. Et il n'est pas exagéré de dire qu'ainsi le cours de la philosophie, en France, a été durablement modifié. Car de cette connexion intime entre la mutation radicale des mathématiques au XXe siècle et la philosophie il ne sera, pendant un quart de siècle, presque plus question dans notre pays. Ainsi la Résistance aura de fait été à la fois le signe d'un rapport entre la décision et la pensée abstraite, et la transformation de ce signe en énigme, puisque ceux qui en

étaient les porteurs symboliques ont été, dans le combat, abattus. A la place de quoi est venue la théorie sartrienne de l'engagement, dont on sent bien qu'elle est un bilan en trompe-l'oeil de ce qui s'est joué dans la séquence de la Résistance.

Mais je peux lire encore autre chose dans la formule de Canguilhem «résistant par logique». D'autres enseignements philosophiques.

Tout d'abord, je crois que cette formule rend vaine toute tentative d'assigner l'étude de la Résistance à des représentations sociologiques ou institutionnelles. Aucun groupe, aucune classe, aucune configuration sociale ou mentale objective, n'a porté la Résistance. Et, par exemple, le thème, «les philosophes et la Résistance», est un thème inconsistant. Il n'y a pas eu dans la séquence quoi que ce soit d'identifiable en termes de groupes objectifs, pas plus du reste «les ouvriers» que «les philosophes». Cela résulte de ce qu'un résistant «par logique» obéit à un axiome, ou à une injonction, qu'il formule en son propre nom, et dont il déploie les premières conséquences, sans attendre que d'autres, en termes de groupe objectif, y soient ralliés. Disons que, procédant par logique, la Résistance n'est pas une opinion. Bien plutôt est-elle une rupture logique avec les opinions circulantes et dominantes. Tout comme Platon indique, dans la *République*, que le premier stade de la rupture avec l'opinion est la mathématique, ce qui après tout éclaire le choix de Cavallès et de Lautman. Mais peut-être sur ce point suis-je sous l'influence de l'image du Père. Car c'est très tôt que mon père m'avait présenté sa propre résistance comme purement logique. Du moment, disait-il, que le pays était envahi et asservi par les nazis, il n'y avait d'autre issue que de résister. Ce n'était pas plus compliqué. Mais mon père était mathématicien.

On posera donc que, détachée de la considération des entités de la sociologie, et détachée tout aussi bien des aléas de la philosophie morale, la Résistance n'était ni un phénomène de classe, ni un phénomène éthique.

D'où son importance pour nous. Car la situation philosophique contemporaine est celle où, sur les ruines de la doctrine des classes et de la conscience de classe, on tente de toutes parts une restauration du primat de la moralité.

Saisie dans ses figures philosophiques la résistance indique presque aveuglément une autre voie. Le choix politique s'y présente comme séparé de la contrainte des collectifs, et comme étant du ressort de la décision personnelle. Mais, symétriquement, ce choix n'est pas non plus tel qu'il se subordonne à des maximes éthiques préexistantes, et encore moins à une doctrine spirituelle ou juridique des droits de l'homme. Le «par logique» de Canguilhem doit s'entendre comme un double écart. Il s'écarte d'un «par



nécessité sociale» qui dissoudrait le choix dans des représentations collectives appréhendables par la sociologie historique. Il s'écarte d'un «par impératif moral» qui dissoudrait le choix dans des dispositions doctrinales extérieures à la situation concernée. En fait, le choix n'a son intelligibilité ni dans le collectif objectif, ni dans une subjectivité d'opinion. Il a son intelligibilité en lui-même, dans le processus séquentiel de l'action, tout comme un axiome n'est intelligible que par les déploiements de la théorie qu'il soutient.

On a cru un moment monter un beau débat d'opinion quand on est passé de la thèse commune au gaullisme et au PCF: «toute la France était résistante», à la thèse historiographique et sociologique: «toute la France était pétainiste». C'est la méthode de ce débat qui est intellectuellement irrecevable, tout comme les deux énoncés qu'elle oppose sont, non pas faux, mais dépourvus de sens. Car aucune séquence politique véritable n'est représentable dans l'univers du nombre et de la statistique. En France, ce qui est vrai est que l'État était l'État fantoche pétainiste, ce qui avait en termes d'opinion des conséquences considérables. Et ce qui est vrai tout aussi bien est qu'il y avait des résistants, donc une Résistance, ce qui avait aussi des conséquences considérables. Rien de tout cela n'est pensable à partir du nombre. Et d'abord parce que la Résistance elle-même n'aurait jamais eu la moindre existence si elle avait attendu, pour être, une conscience de son propre nombre, ou de ses assignations sociologiques, ou si elle avait dû s'articuler sur une certitude quant à l'état des opinions.

Toute résistance est une rupture avec ce qui est. Et toute rupture commence, pour qui s'y engage, par une rupture avec soi-même. Les philosophes de la Résistance ont indiqué ce point, et qu'il était de l'ordre de la pensée.

Car c'est la signification ultime du «par logique» de Canguilhem. Dire ce qu'est la situation, et tirer les conséquences de ce «dire», est d'abord, aussi bien pour un paysan auvergnat que pour un philosophe, une opération de la pensée. C'est cette opération qui, quoique totalement naturelle et pratique dans son réel, ne renvoie ni à l'analyse objective des groupes sociaux, ni aux opinions antérieurement formulables. Ceux qui ne résistaient pas, si on laisse de côté la clique collaboratrice consciente, étaient tout simplement ceux qui ne voulaient pas dire la situation, pas même se la dire à eux-mêmes. Il n'est pas exagéré de soutenir qu'ils ne pensaient pas. Je veux dire: qu'ils ne pensaient pas selon le réel de la situation du moment, qu'ils récusaient que ce réel soit, pour eux personnellement, porteur d'une possibilité, comme est tout réel quand la pensée, selon l'expression de Sylvain Lazarus, nous en fait rapport.



En définitive, toute résistance est rupture dans la pensée, par l'énoncé de ce qu'est la situation, et fondation d'une possibilité pratique ouverte par cet énoncé.

Contrairement à ce qui est souvent soutenu, il ne convient pas de croire que c'est le risque, très grave en effet, qui interdit à beaucoup de résister. C'est au contraire la non-pensée de la situation qui interdit le risque, lequel a pour contenu de pensée l'examen des possibles. Ne pas résister, c'est ne pas penser. Mais ne pas penser, c'est ne pas *risquer de risquer*.

Cavaillès, Lautman, et quantité d'autres qui n'étaient nullement philosophes, ont seulement pensé qu'il fallait dire la situation, pour ce qu'elle était. C'est-à-dire risquer qu'il y des risques, et il y en a toujours, grands ou petits, quand la pensée ouvre à des possibles. C'est pourquoi aujourd'hui, où penser qu'il faille penser le réel de la situation se fait rare – car le consensus qu'on nous vante c'est cela: la non-pensée comme pensée unique-, nous pouvons nous tourner avec reconnaissance vers les résistants. Car il y a eu en définitive, je rectifie ce que je disais plus haut, des résistants, plutôt qu'il n'y a eu une Résistance. Oui, avec reconnaissance. Comme le dit Spinoza, le maître à penser de Cavaillès, «seuls les hommes libres sont très reconnaissants les uns envers les autres».

Sue Golding  
*Poiesis and Politics as Ecstatic Fetish:  
Foucault's Ethical Demand\**

"Seduction is *not* a passive form of incitement."

M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, pp. 95-6

Toward the end of his third volume on the *History of Sexuality*, whereupon he expressly links the "art of living" with the care of oneself, Foucault invites us to think through the moral and ethical implications of such a connection. It is a troubled connection, indeed, a dangerous path, and we are forewarned of the trouble ahead. "...[A]s the arts of living and the care of the self are refined," says Foucault, "some precepts emerge that seem to be rather similar to those that will be formulated in the later moral systems."

But one should not be misled by the analogy. Those moral systems will define other modalities of the relation to self: a characterization of the ethical substance based on finitude, the Fall, and evil; a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will for a personal god; [...] a mode of ethical fulfilment that tends toward self-renunciation. (Foucault, 1988: 239-40).

At the risk of too rapidly citing these dangers or stating their implications in too coarse a way, here is what lies at the heart of the matter: on the face of it, comparisons of apples and oranges do not – because they cannot – yield the same fruit. But why not? What is it that makes this comparison untenable?

It is not enough to point out the obvious, says Foucault; to wit: that these 'latter [judeo-christian] systems', these 'modalities' might sound like, might even appear similar to, earlier modalities touching upon body and soul and the relations therein or thereabouts ascribed – but now, given a 'different' socialized horizontal history we might call 'the Law' (whether that Law be reconstituted with a different set of markers: the singularity of God, or reason or renunciation or madness or whatever), that these comparisons must now come to an abrupt halt. Would it to be that there *could* be a transcen-

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\* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the London (UK) Foucault Conference, June 25, 1994 and at the International Congress of Michel Foucault, organized by Professor Paul Bouissac, University of Toronto and the Institut Michel Foucault [Paris], on Oct. 12-16, 1994, Toronto, Canada. That version, entitled, "The Politics of Foucault's Poetics, or, better yet: the ethical demand of ecstatic fetish," was subsequently published as part of the conference proceedings in J. Squires (ed.), "J'accuse", *New Formations*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, May 1995). This is an enlarged version of the original article.



dental move or over-arching archimedean point, i.e., some kind of 'outside', however opaque or permeable or dynamic, that *would* allow us to decipher the belonging-together, the identity and, hence the comparison (or indeed, the dissimilarity), of these modalities.<sup>1</sup> No, this is not why they are incomparable. Nor, on the other hand, is it enough to suspend a comparative association out of some kind of (formal) onto-theo-logical disengagement from the very concept of identity/difference and the dialectical contradiction or limit therein implied or so synthesized, whilst retaining the very metaphysics of transcendence itself.

No.

These comparisons cannot be made, as such, because a something 'else' or something 'other' is at play in Foucault's work, an elsewhere or otherness that is located precisely in the very parenthesis of representation; that is, in the nomadic 'in between' of the limit; in the uncharted and multiple (but no less specific) distancings and/or journeyings required to make an identity, and therewith, a naming, a meaning – a 'some kind of' truth – possible.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Though Foucault will develop the question – and the actuality – of identity along quite a different route than that of his philosophic predecessor, we could also take some cues from Heidegger on this point: "If we think of belonging *together* in the customary way," says Heidegger, "the meaning of being is determined by the word together, that is, by its unity. In that case, 'to belong' means as much as: to be assigned and placed into the order of a 'together', established in the unity of a manifold, combined into the unity of a system, mediated by the unifying center of an authoritative synthesis. Philosophy represents this belonging together as *nexus* and *connexio*, the necessary connection of the one with the other. However, belonging together can also be thought of as *belonging* together. This means: the "together" is now determined by the belonging ... That is how things look – until we take a closer look and let the matter speak for itself." (Heidegger 1969: 29).

<sup>2</sup> We will return to this claim shortly when discussing Foucault's notion of a *conversio ad se*, developed mainly in the *History of Sexuality*, vol. III; i.e., the transformation of the self; its creation/making/inventing of "self-hoodedness" (self-mastery of the self-to-self relation). Perhaps it is worth mentioning that this kind of distancing/spacing (which begins to produce a wholly different concept of otherness) can be found throughout his work – certainly the same themes resonate in his introduction to *Herculine Barbine* (1980); or in his work on transgression (Foucault 1977) or his imaginary dialogues with Blanchot (Foucault 1987a); or in his remarks on rationality/truth games. For further reference to his development and use of fluidity and discontinuity, and the 'distancing' this requires and exploits for these truth-identity relations, see for example, his *Death and the Labyrinth* (Foucault 1987b); "Politics and the Study of Discourse," and "The Problem Rationalities," (Burchell, et al. 1991: 53-72; esp. 79-82, respectively); "Truth and Power," (Foucault 1972). On the other hand, perhaps it is also worth mentioning that by finding these threads throughout his work, this 'find' is not meant to imply that 'he always already knew what he was trying to say' and then just went about and said it, so that his work might be interpreted as

Indeed, this something else or something other is rather more like the unnameable space or domain of knowledge, self-knowledge, captured by Foucault in reference to Plato's metaphor of the eye:

'How can the eye see itself?' [Plato asks]. The answer is apparently very simple, but in fact it is very complicated. For Plato, one cannot simply look at oneself in a mirror. One has to look into another eye, that is, one *in* oneself, however in oneself in the shape of the eye of the other. (Foucault 1984a: 367)

Here we begin to find clues for a different articulation of self-formation/self-knowledge, one which is formed, of necessity, from an 'other' relation, not quite specified. Yet rather than the supposed deep and violent cut of identity drawn from exile or negation, for Foucault it will be but a queer and superficial wound; or, perhaps better put, it will be but a metamorphosis of surface distances, whose 'other' meaning is not constituted by recourse to a mediation born of contradiction – dialectic or otherwise. Like the gaping, open mouth of a pig before slaughter (is she laughing out of ignorance; is she screaming out of knowledge – maybe she is doing both, at exactly the same time),<sup>3</sup> the perpetual corruption of an edge or boundary that stands neither as an 'outside' nor as an 'in' to any language-game, now quietly replaces what was once considered the absolute necessity of conceptualizing any identity – symbolic, real, or imagined; to wit, the immediate *"/"* of the either/or.

And yet, this something else or something other is not simply a 'trace' of the not-nameable representation standing before, beyond or beside the Law. Nor for that matter is it 'difference', if, by difference, we mean to say 'not-the-same'. Nor, finally, is it 'lack', if by lack we mean an incommensurable 'empty space' waiting to be filled. Apologies to Baudrillardians and Lacanians on this score, but this something else or something other is not a trace or a lack at all; nor is it an abyss, a shame, an embarrassment, an error, a negation, a castration, a sacramental rite, celebration or void. For we

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though it were one long univocal proposition or even celebration regarding sex, identity, politics – indeed, life itself. As one of the few creative intellectuals of our time – one whose intellectual work was also his artistry and, not surprisingly, his passion – Foucault had the creative nerve to deduce new propositions from his various works and, by way of example, encouraged others to do so too. "Leave it to the police and bureaucrats to see that our papers are in order"; he once chillingly threw back at the academic posers, "at least spare us their morality when we write".

<sup>3</sup> The image of the gaping wound as smiling pig as (morbid) metamorphosis was first brought to my attention through the wonderfully unconventional writings of Irving Massey (1976).



are not dealing with representation, as in identity, in any of its symbolic order or symbolic disarray. Nor are we dealing with a representation around which an x or y can be reproduced or deduced or induced, leaving, in its wake, a remainder *tout court*.

Something much more excessive, or ungrateful and greasy, something much more melancholic, subtle, and in some ways, more precarious, is nagging at the skin of our so-called (and seemingly not comparable) fruit. Rather than the bold and sweeping morass of dialectical contradiction (subjectivity v. objectivity – and the transcendentalism this implies – be damned!), Foucault is insisting upon an ‘other’ as a ‘something else’, a *bios*, whose porous-like creation or invention, whose *multiple*-singularity is itself contoured by, while simultaneously contouring, the very processes (reciprocal, wandering, mannered) of tradition, custom, habit (1984a:344-51). To put this slightly differently, this strange kind of ‘otherness’ *refuses* the neat one-to-one singularity/identity ratio of truth (meta-narrative or otherwise), wherein the ‘other’ comes to mean that which does not quite ‘correspond’ or ‘fit in’. Indeed, this ‘otherness’ is completely at odds with one that might imply or mean a ‘not-of-the-Something’ – a point Foucault stresses often enough when writing directly on sex and/or sex-as-gender. Otherness, the other, etc., cannot be reduced to or be equated with or seen as circumscribing the identity of ‘those who do not fit in’: the (straight) woman, the homosexual, the hermaphrodite, or all three.<sup>4</sup> No more is otherness meant as the negatively configured, excessive ‘blip’ on the screen of dialectics, than is it meant to uncover the true, point-for-point, identity of Truth, and therefore, of any identity, be that identity secret or wrong or even the norm.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the glib proclamation, which in days (not yet) gone by announced,

<sup>4</sup> Foucault is basically attacking the widespread but no less facile tendency of those political philosophies which forward in one way or another (either for progressive reasons or not) the concept of those who ‘do not fit in’ (which include, also: the Jews, people of colour, travellers, etc.). In reality those theories only take as a given exactly what they are trying to prove (around oppression, who is ‘the enemy’ and so forth). Interestingly enough, Adorno (1966) makes a similar point in his “Critique of Positive Negation,” though, unlike Foucault, Adorno tries to rescue the negative from a hegelian positivity and poorly understood freudianism, wherein for example, ‘woman’, becomes ‘other’, and, in more contemporary times, as the female ‘castrated’ container (as it were) always-already pitted against and subsumed in terms of the ‘phallic-male’ real. “Against this,” says Adorno, “the seriousness of unswerving negation lies in its refusal to lend itself to *sanctioning* things as they *are*.” (Adorno 1966: 159) [my emphasis]. See also my “Curiosity,” (Golding: 1995), where this point is detailed more extensively.

<sup>5</sup> For a glimpse into Foucault’s development of the concept of other in relation to the identity as one which *eo ipso* rejects ‘otherness’ as an ‘error,’ at least “as understood



"Wake up, young people from your illusory pleasures; strip off your disguises and recall that every one of you has a sex, a true sex" (Foucault 1980: x), there is no 'true sex' nor its exiled relative, the 'other'. There is simply the 'strange history' of people who insist that this is so.

If that be the case – if, that is to say, it is not the 'outside' negation of a that-which-lies-around-us – then what constitutes Foucault's handling of 'other/excess'? In one word, though many more will follow, it is *techné*; indeed, a peculiar re-invention of the term, wherein *techné* becomes also the strategy of *techné*; a strategy of compulsion (as in: to compel); a strategy of style and manners (as in: to charm not without pleasure and attention to detail, to have grace, *savoir faire*); it is a strategy of use (as in to handle and be handled; to utilize; to exercise, exhaust; to corrupt; to resist; to invoke pleasure or pain or both). In short, it is a strategy of *seduction*.<sup>6</sup> For let there be no mistake about it, this otherness points to a stylistics of existence, a 'being used', in the most profane and corrupting senses of the phrase: lying to hand. And yet, we are rather far away from Heidegger's *techné* as a transcendent "looking out beyond what is given at any time" (and the heterogeneous sense of time clipped out at the expense of 'space').<sup>7</sup> We are even further from its

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in the most traditionally philosophic sense: a manner of acting that is not adequate to reality," see his fun little introduction in *Herculine Barbin* (Foucault 1980: x).

<sup>6</sup> This point will be played out in greater detail momentarily. But see in particular Foucault's, "Why the Ancient World Was Not a Golden Age, But What We Can Learn From It Anyway," "The Structure of Genealogical Interpretation," and "From the Classical Self to the Modern Subject (all in 1984a: esp. pp. 348-51; 353-58; 361-68, respectively) and "The Cultivation of The Self," "Self and Others," "The Body," (1988: Parts II, III, and IV).

<sup>7</sup> From Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1961) as quoted in Fynsk (1993: p.120). Fynsk, in succinctly extrapolating upon Heidegger's use of *techné*, clearly maps out the way in which that usage leads squarely back to the negation, the disaster, the error, the wronged, and so on. He writes, in part: "'Techné' Heidegger defines as 'knowledge': the being of what is is disclosed and realized – opened and held open – in the work as a being. Techné, Heidegger says, provides the basic trait of *deinon* in the sense of 'the violent'...Man is *deinon* in that he moves in the violent action of 'machination' (*mechanoen*) that Heidegger defines in terms of *techné*, but man is the strangest or most uncanny (to *deinotation*), in that in his opening of paths in all the realms of being, he is constantly 'issueless': 'he becomes the strangest of all beings because, without issue on all paths, he is cast out of every relation to the familiar and befallen by *ate*, ruin, catastrophe.' ...Man is 'without issue on all paths' because his violent and venturesome way-making must shatter against death, 'this strange and uncanny thing that banishes us once and for all from everything in which we are at home.' ... As man ventures to master being in *techné*, he constantly stands before the possibility of death. To stand before death is fundamentally to stand in the possibility

Benthamite predecessor of a pleasure/pain utility.<sup>8</sup> For the physicality of this terrain (if, indeed, there is a singularly dimensional terrain), its 'materiality' emerges out of, and by way of, the so-called 'in between' of the stitched together discourse, the fleeting in between of an infinitely beating strange-time called 'the present' (despite the fact this entire remark has been resting on pre-the Christian martyrdom). In philosophic prose, it is a mimetic re-presenting of the present around which this something else or something other is created by virtue of its *being there* (as in: 'over there', 'over here' and the relative webbings and weaves in between and around that t/here) – to which our varied customs, manners and so on, permit us – and indeed, demand of us – to make use.

That is to say, then, that this 'other' self/identity self becomes, simply, the expression of multi-particled selfnesses, made meaningful, made into a something 'else' – a kind of gaseous 'nodal point' of self – due precisely to its having been attracted/seduced, and therewith, sutured, into a oneness (of sorts) not because of beauty (per se) or desire (per se) or even magnetism (per se) but precisely because it *can be* – and must be – used. *Techne*. Cohesive relations, processes, wanderings, traditions, fleeting nodal points, dreams, even the sweat (or especially the sweat) of the body loins, are all grist for the mill, all 'props' for establishing the multiple-as-a-singular-unity, establishing, in other words, the that which lies around us, the elsewhere or otherness, *as us*; but an 'us' as 'selfhood' quite distinct from the wholly-formed Truth of the Cartesian ego-I, self-reflexive sense of self. "If A = A as

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of disaster – downfall into the placeless and issueless, the event of *Umheimlichkeit* itself. ... Disaster, then, is not only possible, it is necessary. Man is driven to assume his essence as Dasein in *techne* by Being that *requires* a place of disclosure." (Fynsk 1993: pp. 120-21).

<sup>8</sup> Of course, as is well-known from *his Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham's utilitarianism, and the notions of 'use' and 'usefulness' that stem from this, operates by way of a zero-sum game of pleasure and pain, or, what he calls the aggression/resistance principle of physics (Bentham 1988: see chapters III-V). This presupposes, amongst other things, a fully formed cogito, and a self-reflexive self, whose selfhoodedness (self-mastery of the becoming of self) is based on the concept that being is intrinsically 'good'. But to accept this, is also then to take as a given that reality is precisely – and only – the reality of each individual per se. At the end of the day, this would mean, finally, that 'use' and/or 'discovery' (*techne*) would encompass the (individual) desire of her or his own pleasure for its own sake. Or to put this slightly differently, it would be to accept that, as the human animal is intrinsically benevolent, yet this benevolence only exists to the degree to which whatever we may do (for or to each other), we would do it to advance ourselves first and foremost: the 'use' of a thing would be judged accordingly. Foucault is not invoking or even hinting at this type of 'use'.



an identity is reformulated as  $I = I$  (Fichte)," concludes Joan Stambaugh in her introduction to Heidegger's *Identity and Difference*, "and by Schelling as 'more precisely the indifference of the subject to the object'," (Heidegger 1969), we can say that for Foucault, it is no more nor less than a path or field of compressed/ multiple [relative] relations informed, conformed, indeed reformed as a kind of double headed arrow of I-selves  $< - >$  I-selves. Foucault puts it like this:

"In Epictetus there are 2 exercises: sophistic and ethical. The first borrowed from school: question-and-answer games. [...] The second are ambulatory exercises. In the morning you go for a walk and test your reactions to that walk. The purpose of both exercises is control of representations, not the deciphering of truth. They are reminders about conforming to the rules in the face of adversity. [...] For Epictetus, the control of representations means not deciphering but recalling principles of acting and thus seeing, through self-examination, if they govern your life. It is a kind of permanent self-examination. [But in the end] *You have to be your own censor.*" (Foucault in (Martin, et al. 1988: p. 38, my italics)).

This 'kind of permanent self-examination' and 'self-censorship' is what Foucault short-hands as 'technologies of the self'; i.e., a 'logic of the techné,' a logic of seductions (plural) of the self to the self which creates the necessary distance or path for a *conversio ad se*, a conversion of the selves into self as self. (Foucault 1988: p. 65ff; 1986: p. 29ff).<sup>9</sup> In Foucault's preliminary and ancient cartography of the self-to-self relation, this distance gained or accumulated amounts to (or circumscribes) nothing other than the social and constitutive self in its fluid fullness: where the other and its something come together to form a self-contained self; a self wherein finally "one 'belongs to [one]self,'" says Foucault, where "one is 'his own master'; one is answerable only to oneself, one is *sui juris*; one exercises over oneself an *authority* that nothing limits or threatens; one holds the *potestas sui*." (Foucault 1988: p. 65, my emphasis).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this technology of the self is but a discursive human geography, a kind of permeable civil fortress of self-hoodedness/self-mastery that not only emphasizes *control* in the sense of establishing a peculiar masterliness

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<sup>9</sup> In Part Two, "The Cultivation of the Self," he writes, "... one had best keep in mind that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself." (1988: pp. 64-5). In the earlier referencing cited above (Foucault's second volume to the *History of Sexuality – The Use of Pleasure*), similar themes are raised though here he is speaking of a 'decipherment' of the self by oneself, rather than the relation *per se*.

<sup>10</sup> As Seneca writes: "The soul stands on unassailable grounds, if it has abandoned external things; it is independent in its own fortress; and every weapon that is hurled falls short of the mark." (Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*) as quoted in Foucault (1988: pp. 82,5).

of sorts that *can* defy limits or threats without, at the same time, incubating in its wake the hegelian predisposition of the master/slave dialectic, but also emits of itself a specific *ethics* of control; the (ethical) control of the perpetual self-creating/self-inventing self.

How different is this from the cogito of a Western metaphysics! How different is the fruit of this 'otherness' from the more contemporary attempts to which we have not only beared witness, but often assume!<sup>11</sup>

With this different use of reason, we have before us a beheaded rational mastery of self, a multiple personality *order*, controlling and controlled at the fleeting threshold of pleased self-uses – a metamorphosis, a *conversio ad se*, a kind of flight of fancy nothing less than 'ecstatic' – sans a teleological 'desire' or transcendental 'ought to be'.<sup>12</sup> And yet, its transitory momentum belies an oddly stable, though distinctly imaginative, mapping of the self, which, in this read, becomes both infinitely changeable and rigidly concrete, circumscribing an impossible arena of both self-possession (as in a juridical model of possession) and nomadic self-rule. For this is an "ecstatic flight," as Bernauer casts it; a pleased flight, which requires an entire preparation linking body with soul without referent to the Western forms of masterliness, in the name of the Father or of Desire or Lacuna or Law. (Foucault 1984c: p. xiii). One's time becomes "full time;" indeed, becomes focused, disciplined, dirty/gritty time, with the Oracle at Delphi – 'know thyself' – looming large. Indeed, in this multiple/singularity of self, unified (if this be the word) by the peculiar seductive acts of the 'being used', there is no space at all for the what will later be described by Nietzsche as "toxic time," that is, the wasted, mediocre time, of the modern self-reflexive Being-as-Time.

The desiring subject is dead.

And in its wake, the pleasure/using 'other' of self-related-self re-emerges, one whose very relations invents/creates an ethics of pleasure, in the fullest sense of the phrase: to cultivate pleasure, be it raw pain, transformative, melancholic, meditative, nomadic. Foucault thus writes:

<sup>11</sup> In responding to a query on 'postmodernism', and whether or not the term is worth keeping, Foucault raises the issue of how one 'reads' the different uses of reason, its historical effects, its limits and its dangers. I point this out in order to underscore that by accepting or even paying attention to the 'greek' *conversio ad se*, this is not meant to imply or demand "some cheap [nostalgia for] some imaginary past form of happiness that people did not, in fact, have at all." (Foucault 1984b: p.248). On the other hand, it is not meant to designate it as 'wrong' either. Indeed, there is no moralistic implication – though, as one might already detect, an ethical one is ready to hand.

<sup>12</sup> This point is made more forcefully in James Bernauer's excellent study on Foucault, especially in his chapter six, "Ecstatic Thinking" (1991: pp.171-84).



"It was against the background of this cultivation of the self, of its themes and practices, that reflection on the ethics of pleasure developed in the first centuries of our era. As for the definition of the work that must be carried out on oneself, it too under[went], in the cultivation of the self, a certain modification: through the exercises of abstinence and control that constitute the required *askesis*, the place allotted to self-knowledge becomes more important. The tasks of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing – *central to the formation of the ethical subject*. Lastly, the end result of this elaboration is still and always, defined by the rule of the individual over himself. But this rule broadens into an experience in which the relation to self takes the form not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance." (1988: pp.67, 68)

This "rule", which broadens into an experience forms an 'other/self (as the multiple-other-selves-of-the-that-which-lies-around-us), whose cohesiveness, in its metamorphosing seduction, presences an ethics of self-creation. An ethics, as Foucault says, "which would not be their expression in the sphere of ideology; rather, [...] would constitute an original response to them, in the form of a new stylistics of existence." (Foucault 1988: p.71)

So it is that this fleeting relation of pleasure and its uses, this metamorphosis of self to self, is captured by Foucault with the term 'stylistics of existence', an ecstatic flight of invention – and seduction – which is no less than the ethico – political art of carving out one's life, should one be willing to journey onto the surface of the risk. Its metonymic rhythms, its poetic beat-beatings – repetitive, lyrical and distinct – have no *a priori* moral agency, though its cohesive synthetics emit nothing short of an ethical demand, an ethical demand made 'real' by virtue of its having been coagulated into a multiple something, whatever this something – or for that matter, its multiplicity, may be. A politics of 'making real' at the level of otherness, if ever there was one.

All this may be very interesting for our ancient boys and girls adhering (or otherwise) to the dream spaces of an Artemedorius or a Lucilius or a Seneca; but what does it have to do with us? The 'us' of a judeo-christian-hindu-moslem worldly world? The 'us' of a capitalist and racist and sexist and homophobic and heterophobic and genderphobic world? For, as Nietzsche intones in his *The Gay Science*, and quite rightly, too:

"§152. *The greatest change.* – The illumination and the colour of all things have changed. We no longer understand altogether how the ancients experienced what was most familiar and frequent – for example, the day and waking. [...] Every wrong had a different effect on men's feel-

ings; for one feared divine retribution and not merely a civil punishment and dishonour. What was joy in ages when one believed in devils and tempters? What was passion when one saw demons lying in wait nearby? What was philosophy when doubt was experienced as a sin of the most dangerous kind – as sacrilege against eternal love, as mistrust of all that was good, high, pure, and merciful?...” (Nietzsche 1974: pp.196-7).

The first answer must include, as Gramsci would put it, this ‘common place’ remark: that as every philosophy brings with it layers of politics, and vice versa, it then also brings forward a specific set of questions (and ‘answers,’ not to put too simplistic a spin on it) about being human, of what this humanity consists, and what kind of societies should best promote whatever ‘is’ or ‘is to become’ the ‘is’; whatever, that is to say, is/to become ‘necessary.’ If that be the case, it is entirely plausible to suggest that a self-reflexive unity (of self) has embedded in it a certain set of interests with respect to personhood, body, property, community, and the like. Conversely, it is equally plausible to suggest, then, that with quite a different concept of self – one which is inherently multiple – a whole series of ‘common places’ are re-mixed and re-masticated to inform yet another set of interests, a re-newed, re-packaged, resuscitated set of interests time-travelled and squarely landing within the glories (or not) of an information-cybernetic age. A rather odd eternal return, one that holds out the promise of a ‘something different.’

And yet, a small recourse to Nietzsche, once again, may be necessary.

“§158. *An inconvenient trait.* – To find everything profound – that is an inconvenient trait. It makes one strain one’s eyes all the time, and in the end one finds more than one might have wished.” (Nietzsche 1974: p.198).

Second answer, then: Let us be very careful not too strain too intently. Shall we just steal a small leaf from Foucault’s ‘book’, nodding to the infinite quagmire of change and in attempting to do so, avoid the profound? One step backward, two steps ahead: let us link Foucault’s notion of the ecstatic flight with the contemporary armour of fetishistic play to create what could be called, conceptually or otherwise in our less-than-world-historic times, ‘ecstatic fetish’.

As we have seen, with this (seductive) notion of the ecstatic, a peculiar relation is formed based on the multiple singularity of otherness which disrupts, out of necessity, the convenience of ‘either/or’ polarities (and with it, either/or politics). For the “other” that an ecstatic self-to-self relation exposes, is at best a ‘quasi-negation’ that plays with, circumscribes, and dances across the surface of each and every limit. We find then, a kind of otherness/identity, say for example, in being gay, that has little to do with being ‘anti’-



its supposed polar opposite (in this case, the so-called straight). Instead it elucidates a concept of self-as-other; i.e., a self no longer singular, unified and whole, but eliding multiplicities, self-as-selves-in-the-plural, based on the erupting surfaces between and amongst 'internal' and 'external' polarities.

To be clear, and to have some fun (why not?), let's move onto a queerer version of this thing called 'fetish,' and the ethics of multiplicity to which it may (or may not) speak – resurrected and now laid out across the somewhat masturbatory (but in any case no longer inconspicuous) use of the phrase 'the relation of the self-to-the-self.' For it can certainly be said that fetish/fetishism, whilst including, initiating or cementing codes of behaviour and dress sense, does so in a way that neither privileges nor ignores this multiple sense of 'otherness' and with it, this multiple sense of excess whose 'negation' is no longer to be sought in the contradiction of the limit, but indeed, its rupture. By saying this, I want to disengage the concept (and/or, indeed, the reality) of fetish from being thought of as a signifier of death or of a failed mourning or of a melancholia-writ-large-and-inescapable – as one finds in contemporary remarks on the subject.<sup>13</sup> I do not wish to say that fetish is not at all connected to death or to grieving or to a weirdly cathected fashion sense – it is just to say it is not connected like *that*.

If one follows Foucault's general indications on the impossibility of homogeneous otherness and the like, we get a different read of the terrain. Fetish becomes a far more delicate, though like silk, rather durable, construction. Fetish becomes a far more raw (and explicit) bleed, though like blood, changes colour the moment its presence surfaces to air. Fetish becomes a far more complicated joke – some say a 'compacted story', funny and alive, though precisely and at the same time, rather desperate and clinging, painful, stillborn, and even gut-wrenching. Laugh till she cried. (And then cried for more?) Yes, why not?

For fetish, if it is anything at all, in at least being all these contradictory and mutating 'doubles', is precisely and only the multiple singularity of itself.

One could say it entails, inscribes and delimits a kind of ripped and shared hermaphrodism (and I do not use this word lightly) which is not a metaphor 'standing in' for anything else. Neither is it an 'empty' container waiting to be filled by some endless struggle between this thing called, (for example) heterosexual desire, this thing called homosexual desire, and this

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<sup>13</sup> The best example of this problem can be found in Lorraine Gammon and Merja Makinen (1994); but we find it, albeit it much more complex and meaningful ways, in works as varied as Freud's initial (1905) "Three Essay on Sexuality," his "Mourning and Melancholia; and most recently in Derrida (1986), "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man," pp. 155-249.



thing called bisexual desire mutated into one pair of rubber stockings, one certain 60's hairstyle, one opened and smiling or tortured mouth. The fetishization of these creatures: male, female, transgendered beings, homo/lesbo/bisexual erotics, hairstyles and hose, cannot quite be reduced, however microscopic, to some kind of impenetrable mass, stuck together and 'understood' only in terms of their opposition, contradiction or annihilation.

For its synthesis, its moment, is not a 'something' that *can* be flung open and brought to public light, public scrutiny or even public 'liberation'. *It is far too vampiric for all that.* The meaning of the fetish both disappears *and* hovers at the very instant it seems most near to hand. There are neither truths nor secrets in a fetish; no discovery, no bringing to the surface its authentic point of departure; indeed, no 'authentic' point at all. This does not mean that it is meaningless; or that it describes no limit or can be seen as an infinite regression.

Rather, it is to say that fetish *is* the surface *and* the departure *and* the arrival; its whole point is that it is a squished up line at the very moment of its being a dot (and/or vice versa: an elongated dot cleverly doubled as a line); a process and an end-point, endlessly processional and finitely punctuated; the very threshold of a compacted story, a narrative that could never become 'meta'; never become 'spectacle' as such. Its presence, like all presents, is simply impossible (here, there, and gone at the exact same instant); a virtual 'to be', a mastery of the coming of masterliness. A radical mastery: being a perfectly imperfect autonomous mastering, as de Sade would say, *one without* submission to a fixed and totalized Other. It is rather a *virtual* mastery, a radically impure mastery – de-sanitized over and again on the slippery slope between and amongst the relation of self to self.

An obsessional, virtual, metonymic surface. An unreal (but, on the other hand, no less real), floating, magical, pleasure seeking surface, shot through with the absurdity of the cruel, of the dead, of the wronged. Isn't life funny!? Isn't life grand?! A cyberspace of present tense passion, of perpetual movement going nowhere in particular, but going there with speed and agility and attentiveness to detail, nonetheless. *Not a becoming of self, not* an immanence as such; not a telos unfolding either to the known or unknown truth of self-awareness self; not a Law because, by definition, Law (and therewith, truth). Simply a coming without the 'be'; a coming without the identity relation of the 'to be'; a coming to the surface of the present tense presence; superficiality in all its glory, re-making and re-present-ing the radical plurality of self without recourse to the always already signed, sealed, and delivered self-given self.

For fetish is simply, if it is anything at all, history with a Pop, the singularly self-identified-self, blown to smithereens, undone and redone in the *sacred* image of mutated selves, cyber-selves; variegated selves of the re-thought-out selves, bent and re-designed in the instant coming of its come, by self-immolation self-exhibitionism, self-abuse, all fitted neatly into corset and collage. A mutilated series of selves (any selves), a repetitive series of selves, well-rehearsed some might say (ritualised, most would say) through the mirrored multiplicity of space in between (and amongst) the snap-crackle-pop of leather, latex and lace self forming selves.

Translation: No more 'inside' v. the 'outside' of individual body selves. No more self-reflexive self. Fetish as a kind of marker, horizon, even a kind of 'skin' for the politically, emotionally liberal-impaired self; nothing more and nothing other than the infinite metamorphoses of the self into selves (or vice versa); the transformative mutations whose strange but somehow familiar (though utterly uncharted) pluralities meld into oddly coherent, albeit risky, wholes – holographic wholes – making metamorphosis, and with it, fetish, the very staff of identity itself. An identity which is no more or less than the excessive ecstatic flights of seduction in all its varying 'other' possibilities. Indeed, one could say that fetish is precisely the 'other' of Being, in all the multiple flawed and time worn senses of the verb: to be.

In the fetish world: a world that is *not* community and *not* geared toward a 'something' (but is rather that heterogeneous sense of coded regulations and conduct spoken of earlier), we have before us then a peculiar imaginary of variegated impossibilities, an oozing excessivity of the self no longer outside the very processes of change, and therewith, no longer outside our grasp or reduced to a singular, opaque and unblemished purity. Could it not be said, without overstating the case that we have the possibility (or anyway, 'a' possibility) of routing out, if nothing else, a damning fascist logic of the fixed whole-truth-and-nothing-but-the-truth-so-help-us-god morality. And in its place? A fleeting, mutinous, fetishized, politics of existence, a peculiar form of ethics: social and multiple, mannered and refined, continuous in its rupturing of the aesthetic form (though aesthetic nonetheless); a kind of political-[aesthetic]-ethics whose integrity is graspable only at its multiple "other" crossing.

Ecstatic fetish: it is not a Profound Thought worthy of grounding any vision. It is a small, fleeting, ethical demand at the point of inventing the double joke of a multiple self: at the neither/nor threshold of a fetish gone to light; at the neither/nor pleasure of the come.

A new dance step; a borrowed dance step; an old re-packaged dance step. Is this not precisely what a constant tango with ecstatic fetish – the



*conversio ad se* of our day and age – invents, sweats out, [re-]presents, and plays with, over and again? One small aspect of contemporary resistance to domination and insistence on change, not to mention: fun.

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Kate Nash  
*A "Politics of Ideas" and Women's Citizenship*

*Introduction*

The question this article will address is that of the role of ideas in the development of the social and political institutions of women's citizenship, historically and in future feminist strategies. There has been little direct consideration of this question on the part of feminist theorists, with the notable exception of Anne Phillips who introduced it in her recent work, *The Politics of Presence*. In this book she makes an interesting distinction between a conventional "politics of ideas", in which political representation is taken to involve the representation of party policies and voter preferences and beliefs, and a "politics of presence" in which democratic procedures are held to require the physical presence of members of social groups. For Phillips, the latter is required because while political equality entails the inclusion of voices previously excluded from the political process, it also requires an informed judgement of the probable outcome of that process, and she believes that the presence of members of historically disadvantaged groups could result in more egalitarian policies (Phillips 1995). Phillips is evidently using the term "politics of ideas" in a very particular way here and in this article I will open up the discussion of the relation between ideas and social and political practices to compare her theory with another view of how politics is conducted at the level of ideas, the theory of hegemony of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In order to do so we will look at the proposals that have been made by feminists concerning the relation between the ideas of liberalism and the institutions of women's citizenship in order to show that the theory of hegemony is best able to deal with the issues raised by this relation. Finally it will be argued that the politics of ideas proposed by Laclau and Mouffe is at least as important to feminist strategies to end the secondary status of women's citizenship as Phillips' "politics of presence".

*The feminist critique of liberal citizenship*

Since this paper is concerned with the empirical question of the extent to which ideas have affected, or could affect, social and political institutions, rather than normative questions concerning how citizenship should be expanded to include women, we will take the historical theory of citizenship of T.H Marshall as our starting point. Marshall's basic argument is well-known and will not be outlined in detail here. According to his view, liberal rights have been extended since the beginning of capitalism. Civil rights to individual freedom - to speech, the ownership of property, justice before the law and so on - were established in the eighteenth century, more or less. Political rights to participation in the exercise of political power were gained with the establishment of the modern parliamentary system in the nineteenth century. And finally, there was the institutionalisation of social rights to economic welfare and to participation in the social and cultural life of the nation with the establishment of the welfare state in the twentieth century (Marshall 1992). Although there is considerable controversy over Marshall's theory, particularly regarding its evolutionary logic and the question of its status as a model of the development of rights in liberal-democracies other than in Britain (Barbalet 1988, p. 30), it nevertheless provides distinctions between the different forms of rights which have been useful to feminist critics of women's citizenship in Western liberal-democracies.

Theoretically, the most important point of the feminist critique of liberal citizenship is that rights have to a large extent been developed from a male perspective so that they are inappropriate to women: on the one hand, women and men are treated alike when they should be treated differently; and on the other, women are sometimes treated differently from men, as inferior citizens. The first case is exemplified by civil and political rights. Here feminists have mainly focused on formal anti-discrimination rights which fail to take women's particular embodiment and circumstances into account; the right to equal pay, for example, which fails to recognise the occupational segregation of the sexes (Frazer and Lacey, 1993 pp. 78-88). The second case principally involves gender-differentiated welfare rights. As a group, women receive more welfare benefits than men, but there is a difference in the type of benefits men and women are entitled to. There is a two-tiered welfare system in Britain and elsewhere: one tier consists of benefits to which citizens are entitled by virtue of insurance contributions paid on the basis of waged work; men are predominantly entitled to this type of benefits. The other consists of benefits which are not directly paid for by insurance contributions and these are predominantly received by women.



They include benefits to which citizens are entitled by virtue of being the dependants of insurees, means-tested benefits for those in poverty and, in rare cases, benefits which are paid to those who have the main responsibility for the care of children or others who can not care for themselves in the home (Pateman 1989; Walby 1994). The type of welfare benefits which have greatest legitimacy and financial value are those received through work-related insurance; the other type is somewhat stigmatised, since they may be seen as unearned, and involves lower sums of money. Women's social citizenship is, therefore, not just different from men's, but secondary.

Feminists, like Marshall, tend to see citizenship in Western liberal-democracies as an extension of liberal rights. But for feminists, the fact that citizenship is liberal is closely related to the disadvantages it presents for women. Firstly, liberalism is concerned with gender-neutral individuals as the rights-bearing members of society. For the classical liberalism on which formal rights tend to be based, only universal principles which treat all individuals identically are acceptable. This makes it difficult for liberal legislation to take differences between men and women into account, while in some cases, like the famous judgement in which it was ruled that a woman dismissed because she was pregnant was not discriminated against because the same treatment would have been accorded to a similarly situated man (Frazer and Lacey 1993, p. 81-2), it turns out the gender-neutral individual is actually a man. In actual fact, then, women are not always liberal individuals. In the case of social rights the matter is somewhat different; in this modified version of liberalism, which comes close to social-democracy, it is acceptable to treat different categories of citizens differently in order to ensure that minimal economic and social needs are met equally for all citizens (Beveridge 1966, p. 45). But, as we have seen, it is the (male) individual who is contracted to insure himself with the state through paid employment who is the privileged citizen; the (female) dependant of this male breadwinner is not directly insured with the state and is not a full citizen. Secondly, and closely linked to the first point, liberalism divides up society into public and private spheres, where the private sphere tends to be conflated with the home. For liberals the private sphere is outside the jurisdiction of the state, and when this is combined with the view that family relations are natural and therefore somehow outside society altogether, it becomes very difficult for liberals to consider granting rights to women in the home (Kymlicka 1990, pp. 250-262). It is for this reason that it has proved so difficult to gain civil rights for women in the home, and no doubt why, although the welfare state does minimally recognise the work women do in the home, it is nevertheless seen as inferior to men's economic contribu-

tion in the public sphere in terms of the quality and quantity of welfare benefits awarded on the basis of this "feminine" contribution.

*Liberalism as an ideology and women's citizenship*

Feminist criticisms of liberalism seem to suggest quite a close link between the ideas of liberalism as a political ideology and the development of women's secondary status as citizens. That is, they suggest the link between ideas and social and political institutions with which we are concerned here. However, the question of the precise nature of this relation has not been directly addressed by feminists. The following accounts are taken from feminist analyses of liberal political philosophy; I am assuming that they can be applied to the more specific question of women's citizenship in a liberal society. On the basis of the problems these theories give rise to, it will be suggested that the theory of hegemony provides the best approach to understanding the relation between liberal ideology and the institutions of women's citizenship, even though it is not without problems of its own.

The first account we will look at is derived from Marxism and sees liberalism as capitalist ideology. In an article on seventeenth century liberalism, Teresa Brennan and Carole Pateman argue that the main tenets of liberalism - individualism and the distinction between public and private spheres - were established in early modernity with the rise of capitalism and the subsequent shift of production out of the home, and with the liberal political system which developed alongside it (Brennan and Pateman 1979). Brennan and Pateman deny that political theory can simply be seen as reflecting socio-economic changes; they suggest rather that liberalism is a necessary condition of capitalism:

"Individuals can not be seen as freely entering contracts and making exchanges with each other in the market, and as able freely to pursue their interests, unless they have come to be conceived as free and equal to each other. Furthermore, unless they are seen in this fashion, they have no need voluntarily to agree to, or consent to, government or the exercise of authority." (Brennan and Pateman 1979, p. 184)

Brennan and Pateman explicitly reject economic reductionism in refusing to see ideology as determined by the economy; but in suggesting that liberalism is a necessary condition of capitalism as an economic system the problem nevertheless returns. And the economic reductionism which haunts Marxist theories of ideology, however nuanced, is problematic both from a



general theoretical point of view and from the more particular point of view of the question of women's citizenship with which we are concerned.

Firstly, if liberalism as an ideology is a necessary condition of the capitalist economy, then it is also part of that economy; it exists not simply as ideas but as the practices of capitalism in the form of contracts, the rules regulating exchanges and so on. In fact, although it is a feature of the Marxist theory of ideology that has been particularly drawn out by neo-Marxists, Marx himself made this point concerning the legal forms of capitalism, in particular the wage-form in which labour is "freely" exchanged as a commodity. But for Marx, although real in their effects, these forms are at the same time merely a surface appearance concealing the essence of capitalism, the class struggle which takes place over the means of production. It is for this reason that in capitalism, according to Marx, man lives alienation in the material conditions of his life; it is an illusory understanding of the social nature of production, but it is an illusion with real social effects (Marx and Engels 1977). This view of ideology raises difficult epistemological questions which we will consider briefly below, but it also presents particular difficulties for feminist accounts. As work by Marxist feminists has shown, an explanation of how women and men have been differently positioned in relation to the division between the private domestic sphere and the public sphere of the economy and state can not rely on the, at best, gender-neutral Marxist theory of capitalist development since, however nuanced such a theory might be, by definition it can not explain sexual division (Barrett 1980; Nicholson 1986). A theory of how ideas are related to the political and social institutions of women's citizenship can not rely on a general theory of the relation between liberalism and capitalism such as the one put forward by Brennan and Pateman because such a theory can not explain why, if liberalism provided the ideological conditions of capitalism, women have not been full liberal citizens on the same terms as men. In order to do so, Brennan and Pateman would have to show how ideas are related to practices in ways which produced and reproduce *gendered* capitalist institutions and although it seems that they tacitly assume such a relation in the case of the public/private distinction, it can not be theorised from the Marxist perspective they propose.

In her later work Pateman proposes a second view of the relation between political ideology and practice. The public/private distinction of liberal political theory is best seen, she argues, as ideological in the critical, epistemological sense which is also derived from Marxism: it obscures and mystifies real underlying social and economic relations. However, Pateman is now using the term to describe the mystificatory ideas of patriarchy rather

than those of capitalism in order to capture the specificity of women's subordinate position as citizens. Firstly, she argues, having defined the home as private, and therefore non-political, liberalism then forgets about it and treats the public sphere as if it existed entirely independently; it forgets the interdependence of the two in a way that obscures, for example, the economic dependence of women on male breadwinners. And secondly, the way in which political ideology forgets about the home allows it to consider that all citizens are in fact the free and equal autonomous individuals of the public sphere; it allows it to forget women's subordination in the home (Pateman 1989, p.120-3).

There are a number of problems with this view of ideology. Probably the most important in terms of feminist strategy is that it pre-supposes that theorists have access to the "truth" which other social actors do not possess; this seems to be an incipiently authoritarian stance given the inherently contentious nature of most social issues. Furthermore, it would seem that if political theorists can take issue with ideologies, there is no reason to assume that others accept them uncritically and that they are effective as mystifications of reality. At the root of these political problems are difficult questions concerning the validity of drawing a sharp distinction between ideology and scientific knowledge. The Marxist tradition has long been grappling with such problems and it is impossible to do the debates justice here. However, there seems to be widespread agreement that they are irresolvable within the terms of the Marxist paradigm itself and, as Michele Barrett argues, such unresolved problems combined with other developments in social theory have contributed to a paradigm shift to a post-Marxist model which sees ideas and practices as more closely tied together in a theory of discourse (Barrett 1991, p. 46-7). We will explore this theory in more detail below. In relation to Pateman's view of ideology, however, it is worth pointing out that the "forgetting" of women has never been complete, it has only ever been partial and temporary. While she is certainly correct to argue that political theorists have "forgotten" women in the private sphere, the same is not true of social and political movements that have attempted to institute, maintain or subvert the opposition between public and private.

The third view of the relation between political ideology and social and political practices holds that it is psychological. Political ideas are produced by men, and, because men are socially positioned differently from women, they are also psychologically different; political ideology is always generated, then, from a male perspective (DiStefano 1991; Benhabib 1987; Frazer et al. 1992). This claim is not often made explicitly by feminist critics of liberalism; it is more frequently implied. Broadly speaking it is based on the psychoana-



lytic theory of Nancy Chodorow which links psychology to capitalism: because men are brought up by attentive mothers and absent fathers, in order to become masculine they learn to distance themselves from personal relationships and so perform well in the impersonal, competitive public sphere of capitalism; women, on the other hand, retain their close connection with their mothers, which makes them ideally suited to caring for the family in the private domestic sphere (Chodorow 1978). As a result of this cultivation of distance in their upbringing, men are oriented towards thinking morally in terms of hierarchical universal principles which treat all individuals and situations alike (Gilligan 1982). As we have seen, this is the logic of the universal principles of liberal justice which fail to take gender differences into account where they are actually relevant to achieving equality between the sexes (Frazer et al. 1992; Benhabib 1987; Phillips 1992). On this theory, men are also given to rigid, dualistic thinking and especially to the denigration of whatever is associated with the feminine because of their need to maintain strict boundaries between the autonomous masculine self and the dangerous feminine (m)other. This aspect of male psychology can be seen as responsible for the liberal dichotomy between public and private (DiStefano 1991; Benhabib 1987; Pateman 1986).

The main problem with this theory is that liberalism has not been as rigidly universalistic and dualistic as this view proposes. Firstly, liberalism has never totally excluded the feminine from the public sphere of liberal rights. Women actually occupy a rather ambivalent place in liberal political ideology and practice: women are frequently included in the universal principles of liberal justice, sometimes in a way which goes quite far towards challenging their subordinate position in society precisely because it does give them rights as public citizens, while simultaneously they are situated, by the very same theorists, as inferior creatures, subordinate to men and without rights in the private domestic sphere. Liberal theorists have had a much more fluid and ambivalent conception of women than would seem possible on the psychological theory of political ideology. And secondly, liberalism itself has been much less monolithic, and much more varied than this approach suggests (Nash forthcoming). It is important to look at how women have been positioned in historically specific versions of liberalism and, from the point of view of the question of feminist strategies in relation to women's citizenship, at how liberalism has actually been modified by the feminist use of its ideas. It is more useful to look at liberalism as a tool with which to change social and political institutions, rather than supposing that there is a pre-given masculine (or feminine) psychology which will manifest itself in every social product, including political ideology.

*Laclau's and Mouffe's politics of ideas*

The theories of the relation between liberal ideology and social and political institutions we have examined so far may be said to be foundational insofar as they are all realist theories of determinant structures, of society or of the mind (even if that mind is seen, at least to some extent, as historically specific). Such theories are over-deterministic, giving rise to accounts of particular social forms as necessary in relation to underlying structures. What they neglect is social agency, the understanding of which gives rise to accounts of the social which emphasise the contextually specific and continually revisable qualities of social structures. It is this emphasis on agency which makes Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony a better account of the relation between political ideology and social and political institutions than those theories we have so far considered.

Laclau's and Mouffe's theory enables us to situate liberalism as a political ideology which, although retaining a core of key terms without which it would no longer be situated in the liberal tradition, has been used in different ways by different social and political movements in attempts to institute, maintain and disrupt social and political relations. Hegemonic articulations are always contingent: they are not the necessary outcome of a class or gender structure which is hidden to social participants but which the theorist can uncover, nor are they the product of a pre-given psychological will. The success of a hegemonic project lies in the linking together of ideological elements which were previously linked in other ways, or were floating free, spread across a variety of different contexts without being related one to the other. A hegemonic project attempts to articulate these floating elements in ways which will gain support from those who were previously hostile to the project. Furthermore, hegemony is constitutive: it institutes social identities and relations in a way that does not depend on any *a priori* social rationality, nor on any objectively given social structure. On Laclau's and Mouffe's theory, ideas and social and political institutions are inseparable because all social practices are meaningful. According to their version of discourse theory, material objects and actions have no social being unless they have a significance for us which is necessarily linguistic, in the widest sense; for discourse theory, material social practices are inextricably bound up with ideas as they are articulated in relations of signification. This is not to say that all ideas have social significance, though none can be ruled out as insignificant *a priori*; but for a hegemonic project to be successful, the articulations it makes must be embodied in institutions which weld together a historical bloc, a hegemonic formation (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p. 134-6).



On this model, then, it can only be as a result of social action that a hegemonic project is successful. This is not to say that ideas are instituted precisely as social actors intend, nor that the use of ideas has no unintended consequences, but only that, since a hegemonic project involves re-working ideas in new, and in principle unpredictable ways, it would be impossible without the active intervention of social actors. However, although this is clearly a consequence of their theory, Laclau and Mouffe have not themselves elaborated an adequate account of social agency. As a result of their commitment to anti-humanism they have developed a view of the subject based on Lacanian theory, a subject of lack and identification (Žižek 1990). But there are serious questions concerning whether this subject can do the work Laclau and Mouffe require of it. Laclau is clear that if there is no *a priori* determination of a hegemonic formation, and if, as he argues, the social field is increasingly prone to dislocations which make evident the contingency and historicity of existing social structures, then the question is increasingly that of *who* makes the hegemonic articulations which create new forms of the social (Laclau, 1990 p. 59). But the theory of the subject he puts forward to explain how social transformations take place seems to be that of a subject entirely without agency. For Laclau, the subject is thrown up by the undecidability of a hegemonic structure and, since on his theory all identity is social, it is nothing but a subject of lack which can only construct an identity through identification with a partially constituted subject position in an already existing, dislocated social structure (p. 60). The subject is not, for Laclau, a reflexive social agent; it has no capacities for strategically planning and purposively re-working the terms of a hegemonic formation in order to realise an aim it has set itself. Laclau's and Mouffe's model of the subject, while usefully pointing out the unconscious and irrational aspects of social identity, seems inadequate to theorising the more instrumental and reasoning aspects of social action: we might say that it over-emphasises reaction at the expense of action. This is not to say that the alternative is to take agency as politically and epistemologically pre-given. As Judith Butler points out, to think of agency in this way would be to foreclose investigation into its construction and regulation. The point is rather that "subject" and "agency" may not always be identical such that the conditions of possibility of reflexivity and purposiveness need to be theorised as well as those of lack and identification (Butler 1992).

This paper is not concerned with a general theory of the conditions of possibility of agency. The point here is that, even if Laclau and Mouffe do not theorise agency adequately, their theory of hegemony is nevertheless preferable to the other theories of the relation between ideology and institutions we have looked at because it requires us to consider the action of

social agents in bringing about particular, meaningful social and political practices. In terms of the question with which we are concerned here, it therefore sensitises us to the action of feminists who can affect, and have affected, the institutions of women's citizenship. Once we look at feminism and women's citizenship from the perspective of the theory of hegemony we can see how the somewhat peculiar position women occupy as citizens in liberal political ideology and practices is to some extent a result of the efforts of feminists, as well as of those working from a conventional liberal perspective. From the very beginning of liberalism in the seventeenth century, feminists saw the potential in liberalism for women's equality, while at the same time warning against the way in which it subordinated women to men in the non-political domestic sphere. And nineteenth century and early twentieth century feminism used the existing terms of liberal political ideology in a counter-hegemonic project that influenced the development of women's citizenship as we know it today. First-wave feminism extended women's civil and political rights to be equal to men in terms of rights to own property, the right to vote and so on, but in terms of social rights, for which they campaigned vigorously before and after political rights for women were won, they pushed for a recognition of women as different, as primarily concerned with caring in the home. The terms in which women were situated as citizens who were primarily wives and mothers in the British post-war welfare state, for example, were to some extent the result of the influence of "new feminists" like Eleanor Rathbone. This is not to say that such feminists were entirely successful in their campaigns, but contesting and re-articulating the terms of hegemonic liberalism, along with the new liberalism of the times, meant that they were to some extent able to shape women's citizenship according to their maternalist ideals (Nash forthcoming; Koren and Michel 1993; Bacchi 1990, ch. 3).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Lewis takes issue with this understanding of feminist agency, arguing that in Britain while women were involved in voluntary action and local politics, there is no evidence that they influenced the welfare state at the national level (Lewis 1994). However, she fails to recognise Rathbone's successful attempt to persuade Beveridge to award family allowances to women (though it is true that it was not, as feminists hoped, introduced to reward women's unpaid care), and also the endorsement of the new welfare state on the part of "new feminists" like Vera Brittan (Dale and Foster 1986, p. 3). Nor does she consider the more informal influence of women who were close to the political establishment, nor of those women actively involved in influencing policy through political parties. It was "equal rights" feminists of an older liberal persuasion who were critical of the way in which the welfare state positioned women as wives and mothers; "new feminists" - concerned especially with the conditions of working class women and - and women in the labour movement seem largely to have approved of the way in which welfare liberalism addressed women in the specificity of their position as women.



*A feminist "politics of ideas"?*

Laclau's and Mouffe's theory is a theory of a politics of ideas in that it is concerned with the use of ideological elements in hegemonic projects which aim to institute new social and political institutions. It is clearly different from the "politics of ideas" put forward by Anne Phillips. Firstly, because for Phillips politics is restricted to representative democracy in the public sphere; she explicitly argues for a definition of politics as involving deliberations in the public arena in which common concerns are negotiated across differences, seeing the second-wave feminist slogan "the personal is political" as having heralded a retreat from politics as such (Phillips 1991 p. 115-9). In the case of the "politics of ideas", for Phillips, it is party policies and voter preferences which are represented. For the theory of hegemony, on the other hand, politics involves the contestation of meanings across the social field and the democratisation of everyday life which are more commonly associated with the feminist movement since the late 1960s. Secondly, Laclau's and Mouffe's view of agency is quite different from that of Phillips. As we have seen, Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of the politics of ideas implies that agency is required in order to hegemonise social and political meanings, although they do not specify how agents are formed. Phillips, on the other hand, is explicitly concerned with agency, counterposing the "politics of ideas" in her sense with the "politics of presence" on the grounds that the physical presence of women in the political process could provide the conditions in which women will be genuinely empowered as political agents.

Phillips is explicitly concerned to outline a theory of gender-differentiated political rights on the grounds that they may provide the solution to women's secondary status as citizens. It has come to be accepted by many feminists that in order for women to achieve equality with men, women should have specific citizenship rights *as women* (Pateman 1992; Young 1990). It is probably not very controversial now to argue for a minimally different set of social rights for women where it is a matter of biological differences between the sexes, with regard to pregnancy and breast-feeding, for example. And the argument for a gender-differentiated citizenship has also been extended, somewhat more controversially, to civil rights in the case of women's right to self-defence on the grounds of provocation where they have been subjected to severe, long-term violence by their male partners. Phillips, alongside other feminists, including Iris Marion Young, is arguing that gender-differentiated political rights are necessary because political rights for women *as women* would ensure that reasonable numbers of women were



engaged in the political process and this would be likely to result in more egalitarian civil and social rights for women because it would then be more difficult for policy-makers to marginalise issues which are of significance to women (Phillips 1995; Young 1990). This raises extremely complex issues concerning representation which will not be addressed here (Phillips 1991; Phillips 1995). But it also raises interesting questions concerning the role of ideas in the political process and the agency of women as a social group.

Phillips' tentative hope - that if women participate in policy-making it will make a difference to the outcome - is based on the view that women, though not all women, may share a perspective which is distinctive from that of men on particular issues. In agreement with feminist arguments against essentialism, Phillips is reluctant to give too much weight to the commonality of women's experience or shared interests. But she does argue that women are more concerned about certain issues than men are, or can be - on matters of female reproduction, for example - whatever their actual stance on those issues may be. And she also holds that men's and women's interests can be in conflict - rights to employment for women undermine men's pre-eminence in the labour-market, for example - even though this is not a conflict between the interests of *all* women and those of *all* men (p. 67-9). Phillips' strongest argument for the necessity of a "politics of presence" is not that women will be more strenuous advocates on women's issues than men, though she does make this point, but rather that when policy is being made in new areas when women's concerns have not yet been formulated, and so are not even on the agenda for discussion, it is only if there are women actually present in the policy-making process that those concerns stand any chance of being voiced at all (p. 43-5). It is for this reason, she argues, that the "politics of ideas", the conventional view of representative democracy in which what is of concern is what constituents think and believe, is inadequate. If women's concerns have not yet been formulated, they can not be represented in this way. Although she is clear that there is no guarantee that women's presence in policy-making will result in more egalitarian policies, and although she is against assuming that women share a group identity, Phillips' conclusions are based, then, on the possibility that most women do have a distinct perspective and that most men do not see certain things in the same way (p. 158).

As we have seen, Phillips convincingly counterposes her "politics of presence" to the conventional "politics of ideas". However, from the point of view of the "politics of ideas" of the theory of hegemony, Phillips' account needs to be supplemented with an understanding of how perspectives are

socially constructed; in particular, of how "a woman's perspective" could become meaningful to women *as* women in the policy-making process.

Phillips makes the interesting point that in the case of class interests, representation has not seemed to require a "politics of presence" because class interests have been seen as "objective", as definable and definitive beyond the experience of a particular group and therefore as representable by advocates who do not themselves directly share those interests (p. 174-5). In the case of women, however, according to Phillips, interests are not seen as so clear cut and this is why she prefers the term "perspective"; in the case of women it is more a matter of issues yet to be defined on the basis of experiences and perceptions of oppression (p. 176). One of the interesting things about the way Phillips makes this distinction is that she actually sees the distinction itself as a matter of a difference in perspectives: class interests have been *seen* as objective where women's interests are not. This is interesting because, in bracketing the "truth" or otherwise of this perception, Phillips comes very close to adopting the discourse theory view that *everything* is a matter of perspective.

The idea of perspective is linked, for discourse theorists, to the importance of language, because it is in language that experience is organised and given meaning, that anything can be perceived or "known". For discourse theorists, then, while individual women participating in the policy-making process might have certain inchoate experiences and perceptions which have no current political validity, to articulate these as "a woman's perspective" must involve constructing it as such in language. How women's interests are understood, whether or not all women are taken to have a distinct set of interests, whether some women are held to have a very different set of interests from another group of women and so on, depends largely on the persuasiveness of the arguments made for one view or another. Phillips acknowledges as much when she notes that the position Norwegian women MPs take on issues of child-care is determined by party rather than gender: the right favours policies to raise the value of work women do in the home, while the left advocates enhancing public child-care provision to increase women's participation in the labour market (Phillips 1995 p. 76). While women may come to see themselves as having certain interests in common, how those interests are interpreted will depend on how they are constructed in relation to already existing discursive possibilities.

Furthermore, the view that experience is always constructed in language is also linked to the Derridean idea that because of the way in which language works, there is no possibility of any kind of "presence". Derrida's theory of language has been worked through in relation to feminist theory



and the issue of women's presence by Judith Butler. Butler's theory of performativity as the re-iteration of the identity of women which both regulates and constrains its production, and at the same time destabilizes it, is in part derived from Derrida's deconstruction of Austen's *How To Do Things With Words*. In *Ltd Inc*, he shows how performatives depend on "iterability": the performative capacity of the "serious speech act", "I name this ship...", for example, depends not just on the context and intention of the speaker, but also on the repetition (which is at the same time, necessarily, the alteration), of the words used in disparate "non-serious speech acts". What this means is that words are never fully present, they can not be captured in the intentions of the speaker, and their meaning can never be made singular and self-evident (Butler 1993; Derrida 1988). If we take Derrida's theory seriously, the construction of women as the possessors of a set of interests which could then be represented in the political process is impossible in that such a construction would always depend on other constructions, repeated in other contexts, for other purposes, which could not, by definition, be identical. There would always, necessarily, be a plurality of women's identities and sets of interests precisely because women can never be fully present in one place.

If "women" never "is", in that it is never a fully constituted, single identity, this again indicates that the outcome of Phillips' "politics of presence" is dependent on the "politics of ideas" elaborated by Laclau and Mouffe. Although the re-iterated identity of women can never be finally fixed, feminist politics involves the contestation and re-definition of what it means to be a woman and what it might mean in the future. While this requires the disruption of hegemonic definitions, the aspect of feminist politics advocated by Judith Butler, it may on occasion also require the attempt to establish a new hegemony which makes it possible for women to participate in social and political life on a more equal basis with men. A more egalitarian social formation may require the attempt to constitute a feminist identity for women, by fixing a particular version of what it is to be a woman in legislation concerning the right to self-defence against domestic violence, for example, in the institutionalisation of citizenship rights, and perhaps in the case of affirmative action in the economy and state (Nash 1994). To this end, Phillips' "politics of presence" may be one aspect of feminist hegemonic projects which contest the social and cultural meanings of women's lives in the face of traditional and authoritarian conceptions of family life and women's role, and which promote more inclusive definitions of women in order to establish more egalitarian citizenship rights. Insofar as it contributes to such a project, however, it will not be the presence of women in the politi-



cal process which is effective, but rather the contestation and transformation of women's position that is achieved in arguing for women's equality, both within the formal political process and outside it.

### *Conclusion*

In this paper I have argued that feminism should be seen as a "politics of ideas". Ideas should not be seen simply as the epiphenomena of socio-economic or psychic structures; they have an efficacy in their own right insofar as they are constitutive of social and political practices. In order to achieve this efficacy they require the elaboration and commitment of social actors who institute them in social practices. Once we see ideas in this light, it is evident that the formal political process is not the only forum from which political change may be realized; indeed the efficacy of ideas in "official" politics may very well depend on the politics of ideas conducted in civil society, the bureaucratic institutions of the state, and even the confines of the "private" domestic sphere, at least as much as in the arenas of representative democracy. It follows then that political agency can not be considered in terms of the experience of a particular group of physically present, embodied persons in these arenas, as Phillips' argument concerning women as the agents of feminist political transformation suggests. It is rather that since social change depends on the contestation and transformation of ideas embedded in social practices carried out by less formally empowered agents, we need to consider how such agency is constructed in other social sites and the conditions which make it effective in some cases but not others. It is not that increasing the presence of women in the formal political process will have no effect; its effect or otherwise is an empirical matter, not one on which an *a priori* judgement can be made. On the argument presented here, however, insofar as it is successful, the "politics of presence" will not be effective because it enables the representation of women's unformulated experience in the formal political process. It will only be successful if increasing the numbers of women in the political institutions of representative democracy is interpreted as indicating the will and the opportunity to realize a more egalitarian form of citizenship, and such interpretations are a matter of a "politics of ideas".

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Aletta J. Norval  
*Frontiers in Question*

*Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

... the presence of frontiers is inherent to the political as such ... there is only politics where there are frontiers ...<sup>2</sup>

... it is impossible to clarify the conceptual status of the frontier without working through its political status ... there is at the very least an uneasy relationship between the desire to establish sharp *conceptual* boundaries on the one hand, and on the other, to abolish *political* frontiers through cosmopolitanism ...<sup>3</sup>

... the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines) ...<sup>4</sup>

These remarks, extracted from the writings of Laclau, Bennington and Derrida, all touch upon one of the most central problematics of our times, namely, the issue of frontiers. It arises, not only in the full immediacy and urgency of practical politics, but also in politico-philosophical reflection on closure and limits.<sup>5</sup> The problem of frontiers is thus not indicative of a sin-

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<sup>2</sup> E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Verso, London 1990, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> G. Bennington, *Legislations. The Politics of Deconstruction*, Verso, London 1994, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> J. Derrida, 'Living on: border lines', p. 257 in P. Kamuf (ed.), *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London 1991. It is important to note that Derrida here explicitly denounces the 'nonreading' which claims that the text is to be dissolved into an extratextual realm. Rather, he argues that he sought to 'work out the theoretical and practical systems of these margins'.

<sup>5</sup> It should thus be clear from the start that even where the sheer physicality of borders force themselves onto us, their significance is essentially a *symbolic* one. In this respect I would argue, following Balibar, that every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary, and that the distinction between real and imaginary communities is therefore a fallacious one. See, E. Balibar, 'The nation form: history and ideology', p. 93, in E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, Verso, London 1991.

gular problem. Rather, it signifies a complex nexus of irreducible issues which, nevertheless, are difficult to separate from one another. Indeed, what is at stake in the multiple ways of approaching the question of frontiers, is precisely the problem of separation, distinction, and differentiation (rather than separateness, distinctness and difference) which simultaneously raises questions concerning belonging, holding-together, and solidarity.<sup>6</sup>

This paper addresses the complex relation between the more general conceptual, and specifically political questions concerning limits and frontiers,<sup>7</sup> and it does so in the context of contemporary post-structuralist debates on the nature of political identity and ideology.<sup>8</sup> Even a brief survey of literature in this field reveals a strong preoccupation with questions concerning the theorisation of political identity in terms of the permeability of boundaries between and around identities, and the relation of identities to the construction and contestation of larger social imaginaries.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to concentrate on Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation of the idea of political frontiers.<sup>10</sup> This rather specific focus

<sup>6</sup> The question of frontiers politically is thus intimately bound up with the establishment of distinctions, for example, between insiders and the outsiders, citizens and non-citizens, citizens and refugees. For a discussion of the significance of the refugee in our contemporary world, see M. Dillon, 'The scandal of the refugee: the production of the abjection the international politics of sovereign subjectivity, and the advent of another justice'. Paper presented to the conference: Sovereignty and Subjectivity, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, September 1995. For a discussion of the question of boundaries in political theory, see S. Wolin, 'Fugitive democracy', pp. 31-45, in S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996.

<sup>7</sup> This very distinction is not one which is unproblematic. With regard to a 'purely' conceptual clarification, one has to ask with Wittgenstein whether 'the engine is idling'? L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, remark 88, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1968.

<sup>8</sup> The term 'ideology' is used here, not as an indicator of false consciousness or as a merely superstructural phenomenon, but as a necessary and inescapable element of any social formation. As Lefort argues, any society in order to be itself, has to forge a representation of itself, and I take ideology to be a result of discursive attempts to forge such an imaginary. See, C. Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Two recent collections in which these issues are raised are, I. Grewal and C. Kaplan (eds.), *Scattered Hegemonies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1994; and L. Nicholson and S. Seidman (eds.), *Social Postmodernism. Beyond Identity Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995.

<sup>10</sup> The idea of political frontiers was first elaborated in E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London 1985. Later works contain reformulations of important aspects of the theory of hegemony, but do not return to the question of political frontiers. See, E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, Verso, London 1990; and C. Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, Verso, London 1993; and E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, Verso, London 1996.



enables me to raise some of the more general, as well as more specific problems alluded to above, for the theorisation offered by Laclau and Mouffe is one of a few systematic attempts to engage with the implications of deconstruction and post-structuralism for the analysis of political identity and ideology.

### *I. The Genealogy of a Problem*

The question of limits and of frontiers in Laclau and Mouffe's work arises as a result of the movement from a Marxist to a post-Marxist framework of analysis. Once the unity of society is no longer viewed as a result of the workings of the necessary laws of history, and political and social identities are no longer conceived on the basis of their insertion into relations of production, the question of the manner in which identities are forged and the unity of the social is produced, has to be addressed anew. It is on this terrain that the problematic of limits and frontiers first arises.

In this respect, Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony, subjectivity and radical democracy forms part of a larger panorama of post-Marxist writings – including, for example, the work of Etienne Balibar, Jacques Ranciere, Claude Lefort, and Stuart Hall – all of which operate with a working assumption of the non-closure of the social and the constitutive character of difference.<sup>11</sup> That is, their starting-point is a negation of determinism and of any *a priori*, underlying logic as providing a necessary unificatory principle to social and political identities and discursive formations. Laclau puts it in the following manner:

The impossibility of the object 'society' is founded in the de-centred character of the social, in the ultimately arbitrary character of social relations. But social – or discursive – practice can only exist as an effort to constitute that impossible object, to limit the arbitrary, to constitute a centre. And this centre ... [is] always precarious, always threatened ...<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, Lefort argues that

... a society can relate to itself, can exist as a human society, only on the condition that it forges a representation of its unity ...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> That is not to say that there are not considerable differences between these writers. There are, and they should not be neglected. They do, nevertheless, form a recognisable 'school' of thought.

<sup>12</sup> E. Laclau, 'Transformation of Advanced Industrial Societies and the Theory of the Subject', *Argument-Sonderband*, AS 84, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Lefort, *Political Forms of Modern Society*, p. 191.

At stake here is clearly the question of *how*, in the absence of either natural and given forms of identity, or laws of history regulating society, we are to make sense of and account for different forms of unification.<sup>14</sup> In Laclau and Mouffe's writings, the category of frontiers is introduced to address this question. Their argument, in brief, is the following: if any identity and, by extension, society is no longer a given and immutable datum, if its character cannot be determined in a naturalistic fashion, then it can also no longer be individuated on the grounds of positively attributed characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, some other way of delimitation or individuation has to be found. Laclau and Mouffe locate this mechanism of delimitation in the drawing of frontiers: it is through the consolidation or dissolution of political frontiers, they argue, that discursive formations in general, and social and political identities specifically, are constructed or fragmented.<sup>16</sup> They argue:

... limits only exist insofar as a systematic ensemble of differences can be cut out as *totality* with regard to something *beyond* them, and it is only through this cutting out that the totality constitutes itself as formation. ... it is clear that that beyond cannot consist in something positive – in a new difference – then the only possibility is that it will consist in something negative. But we already know that the logic of equivalence ... introduces negativity into the field of the social. This implies that a formation manages to *signify itself* (that is, ... constitute itself as such) only by transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a chain of equivalences which constructs what is beyond the limits as that which it *is not*. It is only through negativity, division and antagonism that a formation can constitute itself as a totalizing horizon. The logic of equivalence ... is ... the most abstract and general condition of existence of every formation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The whole of Laclau and Mouffe's work may arguably be said to be an engagement with that question, in all its multifarious dimensions.

<sup>15</sup> Laclau and Mouffe argue in *Hegemony*, and Laclau in *New Reflections* that to affirm the essence of something consists in affirming its *positive* identity. See Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 160.

<sup>17</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 144. The logic of equivalence is internally related to the presence of antagonistic relations. Laclau and Mouffe argue that 'certain discursive forms, through equivalence, annul all positivity of the object and give a real existence to negativity as such. This impossibility of the real – negativity – has attained a form of presence ... negativity – that is, ... antagonism ...' *Hegemony*, p. 129. Laclau, in his later writings, introduce the concept of 'dislocation' which significantly alters the theoretical status of the concept of 'antagonism'. In *New Reflections*, antagonism becomes one possible response to a dislocation, which has to be articulated politically; the conception of political frontiers are not, however, simultaneously reworked.



Having established the *general* conditions which may delimit an identity or discursive formation, it is now necessary to turn to the political articulation of these insights. In this respect it is necessary to trace out both the Marxist and non-Marxist intellectual resources upon which they draw in the course of the elaboration of their argument.

The most important Marxist influences on the emergence of the problem of frontiers and its theorisation, is to be found in the writings of Gramsci and Sorel. Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony and their anti-essentialist critique of political identity draws heavily on the legacy of Gramsci. Indeed, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they situate their work explicitly in relation to the Gramscian moment, as an attempt to recover some of the basic concepts of Gramscian analysis, even while these concepts are radicalised in a direction leading 'beyond' Gramsci.<sup>18</sup>

It is in Gramsci's theorisation of political subjectivity as collective will that Laclau and Mouffe locate both the last traces of a Marxist determinism and the first glimmerings of a non-deterministic conception of political identity which will shape their post-Marxist theorisation. Gramsci develops the idea of a collective will by drawing on insights from both Sorel and Lenin.<sup>19</sup> From Sorel, Gramsci takes the emphasis on political agency as animated through myth. Myth works as 'a concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will'.<sup>20</sup> A collective will is thus forged through the welding together of a set of elements with no necessary belonging. The influence of Lenin in this respect is also clear: from him Gramsci takes the emphasis on agency as broader than particular classes.<sup>21</sup> A combination of both of these elements crystallises in the idea of a collective will. Such a will is:

... the precipitate of a plurality of demands, political initiatives, traditions and cultural institutions, whose always precarious unity is the

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<sup>18</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 136.

<sup>19</sup> It is here that the influence of Sorel on Gramsci is perhaps at its clearest.

<sup>20</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 126. A myth thus has to be distinguished from a utopia, which is an intellectual construction that can be analysed and discussed, and that can be refuted. Sorel argues that a utopia leads people to reforms, while 'our present myth leads people to prepare themselves for a battle to destroy what exists.' Myths, therefore, in Sorel's words, are not descriptions of things, but are expressions of will and groups of images that 'can evoke as a totality ... the mass of sentiments that correspond to the various manifestations of the war waged by socialism against modern society'. Quoted in Z. Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> For Lenin, of course, this had meant class-alliances which did not affect the identity of the classes so aligned.



result of the fusion of these heterogeneous elements into global images constituting a 'popular religion'.<sup>22</sup>

The Gramscian theorisation of political subjects as 'collective wills' contains both a non-essentialist, non-deterministic dimension, and a last deterministic core. As is clear from the characterisation offered by Laclau, collective wills are strictly speaking not classes but arise from a politico-ideological articulation of dispersed and fragmented historical forces. Gramsci's intervention, in this respect, can be read as a discourse on the genesis and formation of the historical subject, whose nature is not immutable and fixed, but arises in a 'becoming' which is ineradicably rooted in the historical process.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, Gramsci's affirmation of the final class determination of a hegemonic formation, reaffirms an inner essentialist core which sets a limit to the logic of hegemony.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, if one is to take the logic of hegemonic constitution seriously, then the identity of subjects must be thought of as resulting from a multiplicity of practices of contingent articulation and disarticulation, rather than having the status of a priori ontological givens; the last traces of essentialism have to be eradicated from the theorisation of political identity.

Following from this, it becomes imperative to theorise the process of articulation through which identity is contingently brought into being. This, Laclau and Mouffe argue, should take place *not* on the grounds of positivities, but in terms of negativity or antagonism. That is, individuation has to be theorised not on the basis of one or another positively identifiable characteristic, for that would immediately lead us back into essentialist forms of argumentation, but in terms of *that to which an identity is opposed*. On this reading, the unity of identity is produced only in so far as it is opposed to that which it is not, and such relations, are *always antagonistic*:

... in the case of antagonism, ... the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself. ... It is because a peasant *cannot* be a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land.) Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> E. Laclau, 'Gramsci', unpublished paper.

<sup>23</sup> B. Fontana, *Hegemony and Power*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, pp. 67-9.

<sup>25</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 125.

It is crucial to proceed carefully here, for it is at this point that an important ethico-theoretical decision can be located in the argument.<sup>26</sup> The manner in which their critique of essentialist forms of argumentation is developed lead Laclau and Mouffe to a position which privileges the dimension of negativity in the individuation of identity.<sup>27</sup> In this process, the critique of essentialist forms of theorising identity is conflated with the *further* proposition that the *only* manner in which identity can be thought in a non-essentialist fashion is through negativity. I will pursue this argument and the consequences of this shift in more detail throughout this article. At this point it is simply necessary to highlight the fact that the way in which their critique of essentialism is articulated closes off other possibilities of thinking about identity which does not, at the outset, privilege the moment of frontiers and antagonisms.<sup>28</sup> As I will argue, what is presented as purely formal and abstract conditions for the individuation of identity, in fact, already contains a set of rather thicker assumptions concerning the role of conflict in the process of identity formation.<sup>29</sup>

The complaint against Gramsci is thus more complicated than what is overtly indicated by their reading. Given Laclau and Mouffe's emphasis on the role of antagonism and negativity in the constitution of identity, it seems that the problem with Gramsci is *not only* that he retains a final class

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida developed the notion of an ethico-theoretical decision in his work. See, for example, J. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973. For Derrida, an ethico-theoretical decision both is and is not a decision. It is a decision insofar as other possibilities were present; it lacks the characteristics of a decision insofar as the very path chosen is determined by the tradition of Western metaphysics.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that the denial of the importance of difference is one which relates specifically to the *individuation* of identity. It is not that Laclau and Mouffe do not give attention to the logic of difference, but that the focus on limits forces them to overemphasise the equivalential dimension.

<sup>28</sup> I have in mind here, as an alternative, a Wittgenstinian position on family resemblances. This position allows one to take into account the positive dimensions of identity without reducing it to an essentialist sameness. A Wittgenstinian position could thus be developed to counter the excessive emphasis in Laclau and Mouffe's work on the formation of frontiers.

<sup>29</sup> In *Hegemony* and elsewhere, Laclau and Mouffe argue that what they present are characteristic of all processes of individuation of identity in general. In a recent interview Laclau argues, for instance, that he has tried to show in different works that 'political boundaries are neither the result of a contingent imperfection of society, nor even of an empirical impossibility of overcoming the latter, but, instead, of the impossibility of constituting any social identity except through acts of exclusion.' D. Howarth and A. J. Norval, 'Negotiation the paradoxes of contemporary politics. An interview with Ernesto Laclau', *Angelaki*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994, p. 46.



core, *but also* that he does not break with thinking about identity in positive terms. Not only does he retain a final class core in his analysis, he also holds onto a conception of collective wills which on Laclau and Mouffe's account is ultimately incoherent. Its incoherence results from the fact that while it provides us with a conception of identity as an articulated ensemble of elements, it does not provide us with the tools with which to think the *unity* of that ensemble.

It is here that the crucial Sorrelian/Schmittian moment enters the theorisation of subjectivity. The seminal insight from Sorel which, I would argue, informs the emphasis on limits and frontiers in Laclau and Mouffe's work, is that identity is created and sustained only in *oppositional*, that is, *antagonistic* relations. For example, in his *Reflections on Violence* Sorel argues that the general strike gives reality to the 'dichotomous thesis' of a society 'split into two fundamentally antagonistic groups.'<sup>30</sup> Owing to the strike, society is 'clearly divided into two camps, and only two, upon a battlefield.'<sup>31</sup> What is important here is not the actual victory of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, but the very fact of the open confrontation between the two groups: without confrontation there is no identity.<sup>32</sup>

It is this centrality of confrontation to the constitution of identity that the idea of political frontiers most crucially captures. This is equally evident in Mouffe's other writings, in which it is Schmitt, rather than Sorel who acts as source of inspiration in order to capture the essence of the political moment, as the moment of confrontation between 'friend' and 'enemy'. Drawing on Schmitt, Mouffe argues that:

... every definition of a "we" implies the delimitation of a "frontier" and the designation of a "them."<sup>33</sup>

and that:

A radical democratic politics agrees with Schmitt that the friend/enemy distinction is central to politics. No struggle is possible against relations of subordination without the establishment of a frontier ...<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> From this it is also evident that Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation of the formation of political frontiers in so-called Third World societies, as frontiers which divide society into two dichotomous camps, takes much from Sorel's analysis.

<sup>31</sup> Sorel, in Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> E. Laclau, 'George Sorel, Objectivity and the Logic of Violence', pp. 3-4, unpublished manuscript. This Sorellian emphasis, I would argue, also influences Laclau and Mouffe's reading of the constitution of 'popular struggles', which I criticise for its naturalism below.

<sup>33</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Feminism, citizenship and radical democratic politics', in J. Butler and Joan W. Scott, *Feminists Theorise the Political*, Routledge, 1992, p. 379.

<sup>34</sup> C. Mouffe, 'Radical democracy or liberal democracy?', *Socialist Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1990, p. 64.



What is abundantly clear is that the category of political frontiers, far from being a purely 'formal' mechanism which may account for the constitution of identity, is intimately related to a set of assumptions concerning the role of conflict in identity formation and struggle.<sup>35</sup>

Two related questions arise from this characterisation of identity in terms of political frontiers, the implications of which I will explore in the final section of this article. The first concerns the form of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of essentialism, and the possible alternative ways in which such a critique may be developed; the second concerns the consequences of an alternative critique, and the different directions in which it may lead. In developing these points, it has to be emphasised that the aim is not simply to look for alternatives, but to explore the consequences of an alternative which simultaneously addresses the problem of the conflation of the formal and political conditions in the theorisation of identity.

The emphasis on the dimension of negativity is evident also in Laclau and Mouffe's account of the ordering of political space and their analysis of the logic of operation of political forces. In order to further clarify the development of the idea of frontiers and its relation to the ordering of political space, it is necessary to look at the non-Marxist sources on which they drew. In this respect, the relational account of linguistic identity developed by Ferdinand de Saussure is of particular significance.<sup>36</sup> Laclau and Mouffe transposes Saussure's account of syntagmatic and paradigmatic/associative relations to the political terrain, arguing that identity is constituted, and socio-political space ordered through the operation of both systems of difference (syntagmatic relations) and systems of equivalence (paradigmatic relations).<sup>37</sup> From this basic starting-point concerning the dual axes constitu-

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<sup>35</sup> It is crucial to question the proclivity towards naturalism in Schmitt, as is particularly evident in his tendency to talk of opposing groups in *concrete* terms, as well as the tendency towards a valuation of homogeneity over difference. Connolly, in a recent review of Mouffe's work on the political, argues that Schmitt's text 'is governed by a covert aesthetic of homogeneity - an identification of the beautiful with unity and strength and the ugly with diversity and weakness - that exacerbates the political logic of exclusion.' W. E. Connolly, 'Review Essay: Twilight of the Idols', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 3, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* was, of course, seminal in the theoretical elaboration of the movement from structuralism to post-structuralism.

<sup>37</sup> Saussure summarises the distinction in the following manner: 'From the associative and syntagmatic viewpoint a linguistic unit is like a fixed part of a building, e.g., a column. On the one hand, the column has a certain relation to the architrave that it supports' the arrangement of the two units in space suggests a syntagmatic relation. On the other hand, if the column is Doric, it suggests a mental comparison of this style with others (Ionic, Corinthian, etc.) although none of these elements is present

tive of identity, Laclau and Mouffe develop their account of the division of social space.

In a move which parallels their critique of attempts to theorise identity in positive terms, they argue that the logic of difference never manages to constitute a fully sutured space since systems of difference only partially define relational identities. In order to present itself as objective and differential, that is, in order to individuate itself, certain elements have to be expelled. The objectivity of identity thus requires the expulsion of a 'surplus of meaning', made possible through the construction of sets of equivalences which define that which is radically 'other'. The production of frontier effects for Laclau and Mouffe thus come into existence through the operation of systems of equivalence which construct the beyond as that which it is not. Identity is thus not individuated through a set of positive elements, but through the creation of *political frontiers* which divide political space into equivalential constructions and externalisations.

On this account, any enumeration of positive characteristics will be insufficient to individuate identity since there is no principle which can bring to a halt the almost endless possibilities of elements which can be articulated together as merely different from each other. A principle of articulation is thus needed to stop the play of differences, delimiting identity from *what it is not*. That is, the drawing of a political frontier is necessary in order to individuate an identity.<sup>38</sup> The consequences of the ethico-theoretical decision which I located in the nature and character of Laclau and Mouffe's critique of essentialism is, thus, also evident in their utilisation and elaboration of Saussure's insights into the nature of individuation of (linguistic) identity. Saussure's theorisation at no point privileges the moment of the paradigmatic over the syntagmatic.<sup>39</sup> The huge emphasis on the former in Laclau and Mouffe's rendering of Saussure follows the same structure of argumentation as the one elaborated above with respect to Gramsci: difference is subordinated to equivalence as a precondition for the individuation of identity.<sup>40</sup>

in space: the relation is associative.' F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Collins, 1974, pp. 123-4. It is important to note, however, that in the linguistic argument on the relation between paradigms and syntagms, there is no a priori privileging of the paradigmatic moment.

<sup>38</sup> The construction of an equivalence between the different groupings is possible only on condition that the focus shifts from the concrete identity of each group, to that by which they are commonly threatened.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, it could be argued that for Saussure the syntagmatic is privileged over the paradigmatic since he states that, from the point of view of the organisation of language, syntagmatic solidarities are the most striking. Saussure, *Course*, p. 127.

<sup>40</sup> In this sense, more recent publications by Laclau, can be argued to be a reiteration of an argument already implicit in *Hegemony*.



Having established the conceptual roots and basic dimensions of the logics involved in the drawing of political frontiers, it is now necessary to look in more detail at several further specifications of this category. The category of political frontiers in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is intimately bound up with a number of other issues. I will concentrate here on how it informs Laclau and Mouffe's account of variations in the character of frontier formation in the cases of advanced industrial societies and so-called Third World contexts respectively.

## II. The Ordering of Political Space

Political frontiers serve not only to individuate identity, but also to organise political space through the simultaneous operation of the logics of equivalence and difference. The simultaneous operation of these logics in the construction of political frontiers may be elucidated with reference to the Gramscian idea of transformism. Transformism, for Gramsci, is a process that involves a gradual but continuous absorption of 'the active elements produced by allied groups - and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile.'<sup>41</sup> A transformist project, expressed in terms of the operation of the logics of equivalence and difference, will consist of efforts to expand the systems of difference defining a dominant bloc, and if such a project is successful, will result in a lessening of the antagonistic potential of the remaining excluded elements. A failure of transformism, on the other hand, may lead to the expansion of the logic of equivalence, the construction of clear-cut political frontiers and a proliferation and deepening, rather than a limitation, of antagonistic relations.

Laclau and Mouffe argue that an expansion of the logic of difference tends to 'complexify' social space, while the opposite situation, where the logics of equivalence is expanded, will tend to a 'simplification' of such space.<sup>42</sup> Given this, they elaborate a series of political logics which demand

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<sup>41</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>42</sup> It has to be pointed out here that the logics of equivalence and difference stand to one another in a relation of reciprocal delimitation. Consequently, neither the conditions of total equivalence, nor that of total difference ever fully obtain. Following Derrida, I would add that they are always found in *hierarchical* combination, where one takes precedence over another in the ordering of political space. On this reading, the moment of frontiers would not be privileged *a priori* as it is in the work of Laclau and Mouffe. Rather, which dimension takes precedence would depend entirely on the political context under discussion.



further attention. These concern the distinction between popular and democratic struggles in relation to First and Third world contexts; the question of the complexity of frontiers; the friend/enemy distinction and the centrality of antagonistic opposition to Laclau and Mouffe's account of identity formation.

Let us quote the relevant passage where the first set of distinctions are articulated, since much depends on the exact formulation. Laclau and Mouffe maintain that:

... an important differential characteristic may be established between advanced industrial societies and the periphery of the capitalist world: in the former, the proliferation of points of antagonism permits the multiplication of democratic struggles, but these struggles, given their diversity, do not tend to constitute a 'people', that is, to enter into equivalence with one another and to divide the political space into two antagonistic fields... We shall use the term *popular subject position* to refer to the position that is constituted on the basis of dividing the political space into two antagonistic camps: and *democratic subject position* to refer to the locus of a clearly delimited antagonism which does not divide society in that way.<sup>43</sup>

On this reading, political space will be divided into two antagonistic camps in Third world contexts where centralised forms of oppression endow popular struggles with clearly defined enemies. This is in contrast to political struggles in advanced industrial societies where a proliferation of antagonisms makes the construction of unified chains of equivalence and the division of political space into clearly defined areas, very difficult.

It is important to be precise about the claims advanced here. Firstly, starting from the distinction between types of struggle, closely associated with the Gramscian and Sorellian moments identified earlier, Laclau and Mouffe posit a coincidence between types of struggle and of society. Thus, they argue that political struggle in Third world contexts would tend to take the form of a war of movement, while in advanced industrial societies it more closely resembles war of position. In the latter case, it is difficult to foster unified chains of equivalence, while that is typical of division of political space in Third world societies. This claim is based upon the idea that in Third world contexts centralised forms of oppression tend to endow popular struggle with clearly defined enemies:

... in countries of the Third World, imperialist exploitation and the predominance of brutal and centralised forms of domination tend *from the beginning to endow the popular struggle with a centre, with a single and*

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<sup>43</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 131.

*clearly defined enemy ... Here the division of the political space into two fields is present from the outset...*<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, this picture is further overlaid with the claim that the division of political space in Third world contexts is less complex than that in advanced industrial societies. The reason for this is, once again, closely bound up with their *naturalised* characterisation of Third world struggles. As Laclau and Mouffe argue:

... in the countries of advanced capitalism since the middle of the nineteenth century, the multiplication and 'uneven development' of democratic positions have increasingly diluted their simple and automatic unity around a popular pole. ... The conditions of political struggle in mature capitalism are increasingly distant from the nineteenth-century model of a clear-cut 'politics of frontiers' ... The production of 'frontier effects' ... ceases thus to be grounded upon an *evident and given separation*, in a referential framework acquired once and for all.<sup>45</sup>

Each of the claims advanced also marks the site of a problem. I will concentrate on the following: firstly, that there are two types of society which correspond to different kinds of political struggle; secondly, that these struggles can be characterised as 'popular' and 'democratic'; thirdly, that there are marked differences in the degrees of 'complexity' displayed by different kinds of political struggle. Let us take each one in turn.

It could plausibly be argued that the distinction between the First and Third world is an unthought leftover from debates on the relation between capitalist centre and periphery and, as within that problematic, the operation of the distinction in Laclau and Mouffe's work leaves open the possibility of a developmental logic from one to the other. This problem cannot be skimmed over, for the consequences of this simplistic distinction for theorising political struggles are far-reaching. In fact, what is called for here is a rethinking of the nature of the Third/First world distinction itself. Several considerations have to play a role in its recasting. It is, firstly, important not simply to do away with the distinction, since it captures something of the unevenness of relations and asymmetrical distribution of power and wealth which no post-Marxist analysis of political struggle can afford to ignore. It is, secondly, important to consider the extent to which a binary opposition succeeds in capturing the complexity of forms of social division at stake in our contemporary world.

Against the backdrop of these considerations, most recent attempts to rethink the First-Third world relation fail to provide a viable alternative.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4. Emphasis in the original.



The global-local distinction, for instance, has the advantage of not being elaborated upon pre-given geographical regions, and is capable of addressing the issue of unequal distribution within as well as between national and regional entities. However, like other binarisms (First-Third world, centre-periphery), it tends to overlook the complex, multiple constituted identities that cannot be accounted for by binary oppositions.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, as Stuart Hall notes, in focusing on the local one runs the risk of romanticising it as a site of pure difference, opposed to a globalising homogenisation.<sup>47</sup>

The substitution of the term 'postcolonial' for 'Third world' is also not without its problems. Apart from the sometimes overly literary appropriation of the term, which tend to empty out its political and critical import, it has become so general that it is difficult to see how it may be deployed to overcome the problems outlined above. Nevertheless, a recent attempt by Grewal and Kaplan to resituate the term points in a direction which may be of use. They argue that to keep the idea of the 'postcolonial' subversive one would have to resist the centre/margin dichotomy that situates the 'postcolonial' as geographically and culturally 'other'; one would have to refuse the construction of 'exotic authors and subjects'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, both the geographic and cultural specificities of the term would have to be emptied out, so as to keep in view the complex interweaving of identity and locality which no longer are subsumable under easy binary divisions.

The thrust of this argument coincides with the suggestion by Howarth that we need to shift our attention away from concerns with space as bounded, and as linked to territoriality, since such conceptions valorise tradition and particularism. Instead, attention should be given to the elaboration of a non-hypostatised space which 'can actively accommodate and foster differences and plurality within it.'<sup>49</sup> In order to do so, we need to:

blur and weaken the drawing of clear boundaries and spaces so as to facilitate multiplicity and openness to otherness. Similarly, we need to

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<sup>46</sup> For an insightful discussion of these issues, see I. Grewal and C. Kaplan, 'Introduction: Transnational feminist practices and questions of postmodernity', pp. 1-33, in Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The local and the global. Globalisation and ethnicity', in A. D. King, *Culture, Globalization and the World System*, 1991. Hall argues that a return to the local as a response to globalization will only be productive for social change if it does not become rooted in exclusivist and defensive enclaves. For an in-depth discussion of the 'politics of location', see, C. Kaplan, 'The politics of location as transnational feminist practice', pp. 137-52, in Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*.

<sup>48</sup> Grewal and Kaplan, 'Introduction', p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> D. Howarth, 'Reflections on the politics of space and time', in *Angelaki*, vol. 1., no. 1, pp. 53-4.



deconstruct our notion of identity so as to facilitate the permeability and overdetermination of identity construction.<sup>50</sup>

Even if these suggestions are followed through - if contextual difference is no longer thought in territorially bounded terms, and if it is, consequently, recognised that the unevennesses and asymmetries associated with the original distinction can no longer be assumed to coincide with geographically discrete spaces - it still seems necessary to retain distinctions between different frontier formations in different contexts.

Before this can be explored more fully, it is necessary to deal with the manner in which Laclau and Mouffe theorise the distinction between kinds of political struggle and the carving up of political space. They argue that, coinciding with the Third world/advanced industrial society distinction, there is a distinction in the manner in which frontiers are formed. This leads them to establish the distinction between *popular* and *democratic* subject positions. Popular subject positions correspond to cases where the social is divided paratactically into two antagonistic camps, and democratic subject positions to cases where society is not divided in that way.<sup>51</sup>

This characterisation, however, gives rise to a possible confusion. In naming these frontiers 'democratic' and 'popular', an illegitimate *content* is attributed to a *form* of social division. That is, what can only be *constituted in the process of struggle* and what has to be result of a *political articulation*, is treated as something which can be read off from the form of social division. The problem that arises here is the following: what is termed 'popular struggles', may have a democratic content, while what is called 'democratic struggles' are not always articulated within democratic horizons. For example, many 'popular struggles' have been fought in the name of democracy; one only needs to think here of the various anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. Many 'democratic' struggles, on the other hand, bear no relation to democracy at all.

A clearer separation between the form of division of social space, and the substantive content in terms of which that division is discursively constituted, thus needs to be maintained. In this respect it may be useful to reserve the term 'paratactical frontier' for situations in which relatively clear-cut frontiers are articulated in a process of struggle; and

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<sup>50</sup> Howarth, 'Reflections on the politics of space and time', p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 131.

the term 'fragmented frontiers' may be introduced to characterise contexts where that is not the case.<sup>52</sup> That would allow one to retain the sense of difference in the manner in which frontiers are constructed politically, while avoiding ascribing a (political) content to the form in which social division is articulated.

But, if the distinction between different ways of dividing social space cannot be made in terms of the content of struggles, then how is it possible to maintain the distinction, which intuitively seems a relevant and useful one? One way in which the thought informing the distinction may be maintained, I would argue, is by emphasising the *context* in which struggles occur, rather than their content. In the case of a conjunctural crisis, for example, where structural dislocation is limited, an articulation of frontiers which divides the social paratactically, is unlikely to occur. Rather, one would expect to see an articulation of struggles around very precise issues, which may prevent struggles their being 'linked up' with one another. On the other hand, should there be a large degree of dislocation, such as that found in conditions of organic crisis, the domain of elements available for rearticulation is vastly expanded, and the likelihood of the formation of frontiers around a wide set of equivalences, is enhanced. If the problem is addressed in these terms, it is no longer a question of making a distinction between 'types of society'. Rather, Laclau and Mouffe's crucial insight into the different processes of frontier formation is retained, but is now related to the degree of sedimentation of social forms. In addition, the distinction between frontiers - one I have argued should be designate by the terms *paratactical* and *fragmented* frontiers - is no longer conceived of as a distinction in kind, but as one of degree.

If political frontiers, whether they are paratactical or fragmented, always result from processes of political articulating and struggle and if different ways of dividing social space cannot be distinguished from one another on the basis of a given geographical division, they also cannot be distinguished with reference to the presumed degree of 'complexity' of their modes of constitution. Laclau and Mouffe argue that in contrast to the case of 'popular struggles', political struggles in mature capitalist societies tend to exhibit a far greater complexity, which increasingly moves away from the 'nineteenth century' model of a clear-cut politics of frontiers. Here two related problems are present. First, the crucial insight into the fragmented

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<sup>52</sup> I am emphasising the element of political articulation and struggle here, since in Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation, they argue repeatedly that in Third world contexts there is a 'given and evident' form of separation which precedes political articulation.



nature of (modern) identity is 'reserved' for advanced industrial societies. Consequently, the construction of paratactical frontiers is regarded as a somehow less complex operation than in the case of fragmented frontiers. This misconstrual of the complex construction of paratactical frontiers occurs because the model for paratactical frontiers/popular struggles is that of the 'nineteenth century' where, on Laclau and Mouffe's reading, lines of division are 'evident and given'. The assumption that the nineteenth century model of clear-cut frontiers corresponded to some 'evident and given form of division', and that this is transposable to the thought of contemporary paratactical divisions, is simply untenable. In politics, no naturalism exists, not for the 'Third world' and also not for the nineteenth century. While it may be the case that the non-naturalness of identity has become increasingly visible over time, it does not mean that earlier lines of division were based upon natural and given forms of identity as Laclau and Mouffe seem to assume.<sup>53</sup> Once this is clarified, it is possible to show that the construction of paratactical frontiers which tend to divide the social into two camps, is every bit as 'complex' as the articulation of more fragmented frontiers.<sup>54</sup> That is, the experience of a fragmentation and multiplication of forms of identification, cannot be limited to advanced capitalist societies. The production of political frontiers – regardless of whether they are fragmented or paratactical – always proceed as a result of a complex articulation of division between the logics of inclusion and difference on the one hand, and that of exclusion and negativity on the other.

It is precisely the complexity of this process of identity formation which is sacrificed in the over-emphasis on the moment of antagonism in the theorisation offered by Laclau and Mouffe. This is particularly evident in the utilisation of the 'friend/enemy' distinction as exemplary of the nature of identity construction. Laclau and Mouffe argue that the us/them, friend/enemy distinction is *necessary* to the process of individuation of identity. In addition to the foregoing, several issues are condensed into this claim, and it is my contention that they need to be treated separately if the proper political nature of frontiers is to be understood in its full complexity.

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<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note in this respect, that Laclau and Mouffe, in their discussion of the concept of war of position, criticise Gramsci for presupposing a division of political space into two camps. Yet, they go on to impute a similar phenomenon to the 'Third World'. See, Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 139.

<sup>54</sup> I have analysed the complexity of the processes involved in constructing paratactical frontiers in apartheid discourse, in *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, Verso, London 1996.

### III. General and Political Logics: From Limits to Frontiers

Instead of a single claim that the individuation of identity necessarily requires the construction of a friend/enemy distinction or an antagonistic relation, there are in fact several different argumentative strains present in Laclau and Mouffe's basic thesis. They concern, firstly, the individuation of identity; secondly, the relation of that process to antagonism and frontiers; and, thirdly, the theorisation of frontiers themselves, specifically in relation to the question of complexity and the problem of homogeneity. As I have argued in Part 2, the problem of the individuation of identity, for Laclau and Mouffe, arises from their critique of essentialism which is developed in such a way as to simultaneously privilege the moment of negativity, antagonism and frontiers. This is in sharp contrast to the intellectual 'sources' upon which they draw: in both Gramsci and Saussure, I have argued, there is no privileging of the oppositional moment or of paradigmatic relations. For that, one has to turn to Sorel and Schmitt, where the oppositional moment becomes dominant and defining. Now, it is possible, and this is the central thesis of the paper, that identity may be individuated without making essentialist claims *and also* without an overemphasis on the idea of exclusion, opposition, antagonism, and so forth. That is to say, a critique of essentialism may be developed which does *not* conflate the *general* logic of individuation of identity, and the *specific* logic of political frontiers. For such a critique, one could draw on both Derrida and the later Wittgenstein. In the case of the latter, it is quite clear that the idea of 'family resemblances' offers an account of identity formation which fulfils both the stipulated demands. As Wittgenstein argues with respect to the concept 'game', there is no need for us to be able to give a *Merkmal* definition of 'game' to be able to use it. The demand for determinacy of sense is but one demand amongst others. This critique of the demand for determinacy of sense, however, does not rely on the moment of exclusion to think the individuation of identity. This is achieved, for Wittgenstein, by the idea of a series of overlapping resemblances, none of which are essential to the concept, and which makes it into a concept of 'game', and not, for example, 'work'. It is useful to discuss in more detail an example of the deployment of Wittgenstein's work in feminist theory which articulates a non-essentialist conception of 'woman'. Linda Nicholson outlines it in the following manner:

I want to suggest that we think of the meaning of 'woman' in the same way that Wittgenstein suggested we think about the meaning of 'game,' as a word whose meaning is not found through the elucidation of some specific characteristic but is found through the elucidation of some



network of characteristics. ... To give up on the idea that 'woman' has one clearly specifiable meaning does not entail that it has no meaning. Rather, this way of thinking about meaning works upon the assumption that such patterns are found in history and must be documented as such.<sup>55</sup>

It is the absence of such a non-essentialist specifiable meaning or 'minimal remainder' which forces Laclau and Mouffe, contra Wittgenstein, to conflate the moment of individuation of identity and articulation of political frontiers. To repeat, for Wittgenstein it is perfectly possible to think a non-essentialist conception of identity without arguing that identity can only be individuated with reference to what it excludes. A similar argument can be developed from a Derridean perspective. Derrida's discussion of the role of iterability in the constitution of identity, proceeds along similar lines to the argument sketched out above. In the case of iteration, the repeatability of a word is assured by the fact that any repetition involves a repetition of the same. Yet this repetition cannot in any simple manner be regarded as repetition of the same as essentially the same, since every repetition always already involves alteration. Thus, an essentialist form of individuation is avoided, while the minimal remainder forecloses the need to have recourse to pure exclusion as the necessary foundation of any process of individuation.<sup>56</sup>

Once this is accepted, it is possible to retheorise the relation between the process of individuation of identity and the articulation of political frontiers. As I have argued, the process of individuation of identity has to be separated from that of the articulation of frontiers, or the moment of antagonism. That is, while differentiation is a moment in the individuation of identity, the general logic does not require that the critique of essentialism has to be conflated with the political logic of antagonism. Thus, contra Laclau and Mouffe, where the concept of political frontier does *both* the work of individuating identity, *and* indicating the point at which antagonistic relations are constituted, it is my contention that the general *logical* argument concerning the individuation of identity should not be conflated with the specific argument concerning the political logic of antagonism. This conflation

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<sup>55</sup> L. Nicholson, 'Interpreting gender', pp. 60-1, in Nicholson and Seidman, *Social Postmodernism*. Nicholson develops this approach in order to avoid a naturalistic reductionism and reference to a non-historical conception of 'the body' which has tended to ground many feminist arguments.

<sup>56</sup> It could be argued that the idea of the 'constitutive outside' as developed in Staten's reading of Derrida, could act as a counter to the argument presented above. I return to this at a later point in the argument. See, H. Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, University of Nebraska Press, London 1984, pp. 15-9.

tion creates serious theoretical and political problems which can only be resolved by separating the two arguments. This is important, not only for the attainment of conceptual clarity, but also for a clarification of the consequences for political analysis which may be argued to derive from the different accounts offered above. Following Wittgenstein and Derrida, I would argue that the general logic of individuation tells us *nothing* about where and how political antagonisms may arise. That means that the general (logical) argument concerning the necessity of distinguishing the self from an other in order to individuate identity,<sup>57</sup> has to be separated from the *further* question concerning the problem of when such 'oppositions' become exclusionary and antagonistic. It is only once these arguments are systematically distinguished, that we can address the difficult problems regarding *where* and *on what basis* frontiers are and ought to be, drawn. It is only so long as these two dimensions of the argument are kept separate, that we can refine our theorisation of the political logic of frontiers.

In Part 2 I began to outline in what way it is necessary to refine and deepen the important insights developed by Laclau and Mouffe in their work on political frontiers. There is, however, one issue which demands further explication, namely, the question of the 'complexity' of political frontiers. Here many of the issues discussed above come together. I have thus far advanced the argument that the process through which paratactical frontiers are constituted is no less complex than that of fragmented frontiers. However, a further issue needs to be addressed in this respect. It concerns the complexity of the self/other relation at the core of frontiers. The process of production of subjectivity is much more complex than the 'friend/enemy' distinction would lead one to believe.<sup>58</sup> In this respect it may be helpful to turn briefly to the deconstruction of binary relations, and to extend insights drawn from it to the theorisation of that complex relation. Derrida's work on binary hierarchies at the core of the metaphysics of presence - essence/accident, mind/body, speech/writing, and so forth - shows both that the identity of each of the terms is essentially reliant on that of its other, and that the frontier separating the two, is essentially impure. Now, what Derrida says about philosophical texts holds *mutatis mutandis* for all

<sup>57</sup> The general argument is one that is widely accepted in the literature on identity. See, for example, K. A. Appiah, 'African Identities', p. 110, in Nicholson and Seidman, *Social Postmodernism*.

<sup>58</sup> While it has to be recognised that especially in Laclau's recent work there has been a shift towards a more psychoanalytic account of the constitution of the subject, it is not clear that that theorisation has any pertinence for the argument on political frontiers.



identity in general, since the non-closure he describes, is the non-closure of any discursive form. Deconstruction thus not only lays bare the essential violence contained in the conditions under which it becomes possible for dualisms to be established, but also brings into view - and this is what is important for the analysis at this point - the very *impurity* of dualistic thought. It is for this reason that the idea of a 'constitutive outside', as developed by Staten in his reading of Derrida and extended to political analysis by Laclau, should not be taken as a model for the theorisation of political identities.<sup>59</sup> The idea of a constitutive outside is misleading to the extent that it lends itself to be read simply as emphasising the distinction self/other, rather than leading to a deconstruction of that binary.<sup>60</sup> The crucial insight offered by deconstructive analysis is that it uncovers the essential subversion of the 'separate identities' upon which dualistic thought relies. As Derrida argues in *The Other Heading*:

I must nonetheless formulate in a somewhat dogmatic way ... a very dry necessity whose consequences could affect our entire problematic: *what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "me" or "we"; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself* [*avec soi*]. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference *with itself*.<sup>61</sup>

From this, it must be clear that the relation between 'the self' and 'the other' is infinitely more complex than the dichotomous friend/enemy distinction allows. As Derrida argues, the outside infects the inside, and *vice versa*, making any simplistic dualism and either/or thought suspect.<sup>62</sup> The

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<sup>59</sup> Even though I have utilised this idea in my own work, I am now of the opinion that the potential misreadings which it inspires, could be so damaging that the use of the concept for the purposes of political analysis should be abandoned.

<sup>60</sup> Judith Butler suggests one way in which the idea of the 'constitutive outside' could be rendered more sensitive to distinctly political issues. She argues that one ought to distinguish between 'the constitution of a political field that produces *and naturalises* that constitutive outside and a political field that produces and *renders contingent* the specific parameters of that constitutive outside.' Whilst going some way to avoid the problem I have specified, this formulation still leaves too close an association between the individuation of an identity and its political articulation in antagonistic and exclusionary forms. See, J. Butler, 'Contingent foundations', p. 20, in J. Butler and J. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorise the Political*, Routledge, New York 1992.

<sup>61</sup> J. Derrida, *The Other Heading*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 1992, pp. 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> This does not, however, mean that identity is so open that it becomes contradictory to speak of identity at all. Quite the contrary. For Derrida the theme of identity and therefore of stability is always crucial to the treatment of identity, that is, if one understands by that stability not something in the order of absolute solidity, but

full implications of the deconstructive focus on the *subversion* of apparently natural dualisms, thus, have to be taken on board. This means that an adequate theorisation of political frontiers has to show both the *impurity* of all forms of relation identity, and has to make visible the *irreducible multiplicity* of the site in which those violent dualisms are produced. Foregrounding the friend/enemy distinction as the essence of all politics precludes sensitivity to the multiplicity and plurality of the 'between', the fact that there is an 'excess of being' - as Connolly argues - of difference over identity, and it directs attention away from the complexity of the processes in which political identities are forged.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, it could lead one to believe that all identity has to be thought in the form us/them. The consequences of this 'must' for political analysis, if not for practical politics, are potentially very damaging. In terms of political analysis, it tends to direct attention to the moment of exclusion, to the development of antagonisms, that is, to the relation to 'the other' *at the expense of an analysis of those dimensions of identity which cannot be captured in the us/them form*. It is here that the further consequences of following the alternative critique of essentialism outlined above, become apparent. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, it would be important to focus, not only on the moment of differentiation from 'the other' but on the 'minimal remainder' which makes this identity *this* identity and not an other. This insight allows one to acknowledge the importance and specificity of capturing the contextual feature of identity formation, at the same time as it recognises

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rather as standing in the order of historicity, a stability which can always once again be destabilised. However, the question remains as to how identity can be characterised as stable, such that it remains recognisable as the same across many different occurrences. Here the crucial notion of *iterability*, which designates both repetition and alteration, provides a tool with which to account for identity without assuming an eternal essence to be grounding such identity. For Derrida, iterability presumes a minimal remainder which is not reducible to a singular essence, which is repeatable in principle and which allows for such stabilisation to occur. Yet, this element is always impure, its meaning never quite sutured, allowing for it to be altered when grafted onto new contexts. This allows a further deepening of our understanding of the essentially contextual dimension of the formation of identity which, nevertheless, always involves an element of decontextualization. Moreover, it facilitates an understanding of the interplay of both continuities and discontinuities in historical articulation of identity. For a discussion of iterability, see J. Derrida, 'Limited Inc.', *Glyph* 2, pp. 192-254, 1977.

<sup>63</sup> Connolly, 'Review essay', p. 133. Connolly also points out that both Foucault and Nietzsche attempts to foster an ethic of care for abundance, before closing on a fixed, systematic set of limitations.



the role that differentiation from an other plays in the processes constitutive of political identity.<sup>64</sup>

To recapitulate. The core of my argument has been that the general logic of individuation has to be distinguished from the formation of political frontiers (and the constitution of antagonistic forms of identity). One of the consequence of this refocussing is that it then becomes necessary to investigate the specificity of the political logic of frontiers. The constitution of political frontiers becomes one possibility of articulation amongst others, rather than the essence of the individuation of identity. This weakening of the claims for political frontiers, far from invalidating Laclau and Mouffe's argument, in fact reveals their specific contribution to the theorisation of the constitution of *political* identities in its full light. Theirs remains a valuable insight into the constitution of *antagonistic* forms of identification. However, the fact that the stronger claims for political frontiers and antagonism – namely that it is essential to any individuation of identity – has been put into question, allows one to take cognisance of those dimensions of political identity which are equally important in the analysis of ideologies, but which escape the focus on exclusion and antagonism. Finally, it allows one to refine the theorisation of political forms of 'exclusion'.

Concerning the *political logic of exclusion*, it is important to go beyond the argument, put forward by Laclau and Mouffe, concerning the grounds upon which frontiers may be drawn. Laclau has argued that this question can only be answered conjuncturally with reference to a concrete situation.<sup>65</sup> To some extent this is, of course, correct: it is not possible to prescribe, in an *a priori* fashion, on what grounds and where distinctions and frontiers will be drawn; too much depends on political traditions, context and so forth. However, this answer masks two further problems, both of which are linked to a lack of theorisation of different *forms* of exclusion.

The first concerns the issue already raised in different guises throughout this paper, namely the conflation of limits/frontiers and antagonistic relations. If the argument that the structure of identity formation requires that identity is formed through differentiation, but that it does not logically follow that all differences have to be treated as 'evil', as 'other' is accepted, it becomes possible to *theorise* a more nuanced account of relations to the other. On this reading, the site of identity formation can be regarded as one of *indeterminacy*: it is an open space for considering a variety of ways in which

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<sup>64</sup> It is in this respect that some of the formulations drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis become problematic. See my discussion of this problem in *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, pp. 62-4.

<sup>65</sup> Howarth and Norval, 'Negotiating the paradoxes', pp. 46-7.

the relation between self and other may be conceived. From this site, it becomes possible to think of social division in terms other than the friend/foe relation. What is important, from this perspective, is the possibility of relating to those who are 'different' without excluding them as 'enemies'; of consolidating identity through the constitution of difference rather than otherness. This would involve doing justice to both sameness and difference, to conceive and develop practices in which it is possible to recognise the instability of identity, *and* to respect the otherness of the other.<sup>66</sup> Contemporary political theory is replete with examples, systematically drawn from historical cases, which outline different ways of thinking and systematising different relations to 'the other'. Bauman's work on the figure of the figure of the stranger; Dillon's work on the figure of the refugee; and Connolly's writings on relations of agonistic respect. Since all of these are forms of differentiation, are related to greater or lesser degree to political circumstances they avoid the problem of falling into empty formalisms, so missing nuances which are both politically and theoretically important and interesting. These may to a greater or lesser extent be systematised, even if such a systematisation would not occur outside of all context. Indeed, my argument would be that a systematisation outside of all context, will simply lead to an empty and abstract formalism. Rather, it is at this point that sensitivity to historical context and the nature and character of exclusions become crucial.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Once this separation is effected, it may then be possible to articulate a specifically (radical) democratic practice of relating to difference. As Connolly argues, a democratic politics of difference, in which the conventional standards sealed in 'transcendental mortar' are loosened through contestation, is a politics which would refuse to resign itself unambiguously to limits imposed by the structural requirements of any particular order. Instead of succumbing to the temptation to convert differences into otherness, into evil, a democratic politics ought to ensure that as many differences as possible are drawn in, before the inevitable moment of closure arises. Cf. W. E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, Ithaca, New York 1991, pp. 8-9.

<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, as is clear from the work of, for example, Balibar, it may be possible to map something of the complexity of models of racism, and the forms of exclusion which it fosters and sustains: the distinctions between auto-referential (those in which the bearers of prejudice, exercising physical or symbolic violence, designate themselves as representatives of a superior race) and hetero-referential racism (in which it is, by contrast, the victims of racism who are assigned to an inferior or evil race); between a racism of extermination/elimination (an 'exclusive' racism; e.g. Nazism) and racism of oppression or exploitation ('inclusive' racism; e.g. colonial racisms) all give one important insights into the manner in which contemporary exclusions may function. What is particularly striking in Balibar's work is his sensitivity to the fact that these categorisations are not ideally pure structures but they identify historical trajectories which disallows talk of a single invariant racism, or a single form of exclusion. Indeed, what is crucial in his analysis is the emphasis on the intermixing and *impurity* of these



It is finally necessary to consider whether these alternative forms of thinking about differentiation are compatible with Laclau and Mouffe's political account of identity formation. While some dimensions of their account may conceivably be stretched to accommodate those insights, it is my intuition that a Wittgenstinian understanding of the individuation is more open to the issues raised here. This is so since, while it does give attention to differentiation, it does not privilege, in an a priori fashion, the moment of exclusion. Politically, we have seen that the emphasis on exclusion is dangerous in that it leaves us, metaphorically speaking, with white/black choices, and it disallows the theorisation of more complex interweavings which are constitutive of the processes of identity formation. Theoretically, it comes perilously close to that 'red feather' described by Derrida:

The ethic of speech is the *delusion* of presence mastered. ... the delusion or lure designates first a hunter's stratagem. It is a term of falconry: "a piece of red feather ... in the form of a bird, which serves to recall the bird of prey when it does not return straight to the fist." ... To recognise writing in speech, that is to say difference and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure. There is no ethics without the presence *of the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing.<sup>68</sup>

Unless we take this into account, we run the risk of remaining trapped by a conception of frontiers which emphasises closure, antagonism and strict delimitation, instead of that dimension of frontiers which promise a certain opening, a certain lack of definition, which is nevertheless not unusable.

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forms of categorisation in our contemporary world. E. Balibar, 'Racism and Nationalism', pp. 38-9, in Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*.

<sup>68</sup> J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1974, pp. 139-40.





Françoise Proust  
*Résistance et exception*

Toute résistance, pense-t-on, est dirigée contre des états d'exception. Abus de pouvoir, violations du droit, transgression de principes fondamentaux, bref illégalités et illégitimités seraient le motif et la cause des résistances. Adossée à des valeurs et à des normes universelles (Droits de l'homme, République, Démocratie ou Patrie), la résistance surgirait dans des états extrêmes et réunirait autour d'elle tous les hommes de bonne volonté, c'est à dire les hommes animés d'une volonté rationnelle.

Élémentaire et consensuelle, une telle résistance achoppe cependant sur une difficulté immédiate: comment expliquer que certains résistent et d'autres pas, que certains concèdent et d'autres ne cèdent pas? Mieux, comment distinguer entre résistances conservatrices et résistances novatrices, entre résistances réactives et résistances actives? Volonté et raison ici n'expliquent rien: car le moteur de la résistance est affectuel (son affect majeur est l'indignation) et c'est sa conversion en courage, c'est à dire en décision et en persévérance, qui active la réactivité de la résistance. A vrai dire, c'est moins de décision que d'*archidécision* qu'il s'agit. Toute résistance est, en effet, commandée par une archidécision qui lui donne la force et de commencer et de persévérer. L'archidécision est à la fois antérieure et postérieure, à la fois supérieure et extérieure à la décision. Il n'y aurait pas de résistance si la décision de résister n'avait pas déjà été prise bien avant de commencer et si elle ne se poursuivait pas bien après. Force lourde et opiniâtre, une résistance semble défier la coupure entre toujours et maintenant, entre règle générale et situation particulière, entre poussée aveugle et choix tranché. Tout se passe comme si nulle décision et nulle position n'étaient à prendre *maintenant*, parce qu'elles avaient toujours déjà été prises avant moi (ou nous) et à travers moi (ou nous). Et, pourtant, nul doute que résister ne soit un acte qui ne divise et partage: partage entre ceux qui résistent et ceux qui cèdent, entre ceux qui résistent et ceux qui résistent aux résistants, entre activité et réactivité de la résistance elle-même. Résister, n'est-ce pas, par définition, agir à contre-temps, aller à contre-courant et à l'encontre de la tendance dominante? N'est-ce pas se battre et combattre? Et le combat n'exige-t-il pas du courage, c'est à dire de savoir trancher et persévérer?

C'est à Schmitt que nous<sup>1</sup> devons l'idée apparemment paradoxale que la décision est antérieure à la situation dans laquelle elle intervient, comme l'exception est antérieure à la règle à laquelle elle se soustrait. La norme est le normal, c'est à dire l'effet d'une normalisation et celle-ci le fait d'une décision de normalité et de normativité: "Il faut, écrit Schmitt, qu'une situation normale soit créée et celui-là est souverain qui décide définitivement si cette situation existe réellement"<sup>2</sup>. En termes schmittiens, plus juridiques, un ordre juridique et politique, un ensemble de règles définissant et validant une situation, n'est normatif, c'est à dire n'est reconnu comme tel et ne suscite obéissance et adhésion, que s'il puise sa vie et garde trace d'une situation ajuridique et anormale, ni normale ni antinormale, et qu'on peut nommer, pour cette raison, "situation d'exception". Une situation ou un cas d'exception n'est ni un cas d'urgence ni une situation de nécessité (par exemple, des lois d'exception adoptées pour faire face à des actes de terrorisme): il s'agit là de cas particuliers prévisibles et prévus par la Constitution qui, s'ils menacent l'Etat jamais à l'abri d'un coup d'Etat, n'en minent pas les fondements et n'en sapent pas les règles. Un cas d'exception, lui, brise la règle. Non seulement la règle, de droit ou non, avoue son impuissance: elle ne l'a pas prévu pas plus qu'elle ne peut maintenant le régler, c'est à dire en contrôler le développement et l'issue; mieux, l'exception la suspend et l'interrompt, l'invalide et la révoque sinon définitivement en imposant un tout autre type de règles, du moins provisoirement en contraignant à l'invention d'une solution inédite en attendant la restauration des anciennes règles. C'est bien pourquoi l'exception révèle la vérité de la règle: elle dévoile la force et l'irréparable faiblesse, la nécessité et l'insuffisance essentielle, la vie et l'inertie constitutive de la règle: "L'exception, écrit Schmitt, ne fait pas que confirmer la règle: en réalité, la règle ne vit que par l'exception. Avec l'exception, la force de la règle bien réelle brise la carapace d'une mécanique figée dans la répétition"<sup>3</sup>. Le sens d'une règle se perd avec le temps. Ce n'est que face à une situation d'exception qu'elle est appelée à se renforcer ou à se transformer du tout au tout. Au fur et mesure de son institution, la règle tend à se survivre d'une manière fantomale et seules les exceptions qui la menacent la contraignent à se justifier, c'est à dire soit à disparaître soit à reprendre un autre sens et à vivre d'une vraie vie. L'exception nourrit la règle qui vit de ses suspensions.

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<sup>1</sup> Et, avant nous, au premier chef et dans l'ordre, Benjamin et Foucault.

<sup>2</sup> C. Schmitt, *Théologie politique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, trad. J. L. Schlegel, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.



Encore faut-il, pour cela, que l'exception soit reconnue et appelée telle. Encore faut-il que l'exception fasse décision et que le détenteur de la règle prenne une décision. A vrai dire, c'est d'une *double* décision qu'il s'agit: décision de nommer une situation un "cas d'exception", décision donc d'autosuspension et d'autoinvalidation au moins provisoire, et décision de trancher hors et sans règles, c'est à dire de telle manière, ainsi et pas autrement. En ce sens, toute décision est souveraine et absolue: les procédures à suivre pour justifier, argumenter et présenter la décision sont sans doute à disposition dans les règles et les normes, juridiques ou non, qui prévalent actuellement, mais décider ceci, maintenant est un acte singulier et absolu et est, comme tel, un acte d'exception.

Les choses sont cependant plus compliquées peut-être que ne le dit Schmitt et ceci doublement: elles sont à la fois plus radicales et plus biaisées, plus extrêmes encore et plus retorses aussi.

Il n'est, en effet, pas sûr, en premier lieu, que toute décision soit *souveraine*. Si décider n'est pas choisir ou vouloir, mais agir et pouvoir, alors ce n'est pas séparer ou discriminer (*entscheiden*: c'est le terme utilisé par Schmitt et traduit par "discriminer" ou "décider"). Une décision n'est pas une simple coupure ou un seul tranchant. Certes Schmitt le reconnaît: "L'état d'exception est toujours autre chose qu'une anarchie et un chaos et c'est pourquoi, au sens juridique, il subsiste, malgré tout, un ordre, fût-ce un ordre qui n'est pas de droit"<sup>4</sup>. Mais, ajoute-t-il d'une manière qui peut paraître contradictoire, "l'existence de l'Etat garde une incontestable supériorité sur la validité de la norme juridique. La décision se libère de toute obligation normative et devient absolue au sens propre. Dans le cas d'exception, l'Etat suspend le droit en vertu, pourrait-on dire, d'un droit d'autoconservation"<sup>5</sup>. N'y-a-t-il pas, en effet, contradiction à parer l'autoconservation, tendance générale de tout être, de vertu d'exception? N'y-a-t-il pas contradiction à associer l'irruption brute et brutale de la puissance à la majesté "incontestablement supérieure" de l'Etat? C'est que, pour Schmitt, la décision politique n'est autre que l'exercice en acte de la souveraineté de l'Etat. Aussi bien, et d'un seul geste, identifie-t-il la décision à la souveraineté, c'est à dire au monopole de son exercice, et à l'Etat, c'est à dire au pouvoir suprême. Décider serait l'acte suprême et suprêmement personnel, ce serait la réponse à la seule question sérieuse, *quis judicabit?*,

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Quelques lignes plus haut, Schmitt écrivait: "L'État subsiste tandis que le droit recule". Dix ans, plus tard, Schmitt, il est vrai, renverra dos à dos décisionnisme et normativisme au profit d'une pensée de "l'ordre concret" (cf. *Les trois types de pensée juridique*, Paris, PUF, 1995).

la seule manière authentique de trancher dans un conflit de souverainetés, c'est à dire d'affirmer sa souveraineté en se subordonnant un autre prétendant à la puissance suprême.

Si, pourtant, la décision est l'acte qui répond de et à l'état d'exception, n'est-ce pas reconnaître, du même coup, que l'exception fait *d'elle-même* décision? Impersonnelle, et non personnelle, une décision se dit d'une intervention singulière (individuelle ou collective peu importe) qui déplace les rapports de puissance organisant et définissant un état de choses, c'est à dire qui, d'un seul et même geste, en exhibe les règles et en fait voir *objectivement* leur fragilité et leur injustice. Peu importe laquelle, des puissances en présence, triomphe de l'autre ou des autres. Car, d'une manière générale, les grands rapports binaires et massifs qui divisent et discriminent entre les vainqueurs et les vaincus ne recourent et ne recouvrent qu'à des fins identificatoires les turbulences et les agitations qui traversent les mixtes, les agrégats et les congruences des puissances. Ce qui est décisif, par contre, et définitivement, est le coup - coup de dés, coup de main, coup de tête - porté à une situation pour en briser l'éclat et la faire implorer ou exploser. Car, de ce coup, il y a nécessairement trace: soit qu'il se voie réapproprié, recyclé, consommé ou mis en circulation, mais, fût-il retourné ou détourné, il pointe nécessairement çà et là un signe de son existence et s'offre toujours à une reprise, soit qu'il s'inscrive effectivement pour quelques temps, fussent-ils brefs, quelque part et qu'il infléchisse l'histoire, fût-il oublié. Dans les deux cas, c'est un geste *extrême*, et non suprême qui survient aux bords, aux limites, aux marges d'une situation. Il est extrême en un *triple* sens. D'une part, c'est parce qu'une situation est au *bord* du supportable ou à l'extrême du vivable qu'elle se heurte à une résistance, qu'elle suscite une émeute, qu'elle provoque une insurrection. Exceptionnels, à la mesure de l'extrême d'une situation, ces mouvements n'en révèlent pas moins la règle de tout rapport de domination: la puissance en position de domination tend à l'extrême, c'est à dire à la puissance suprême. Aussi bien, ou d'autre part, est-ce en portant une situation à sa *limite* qu'une résistance en extraie la vérité. Ce n'est que du point de son exception, peu importe son nom: urgence, nécessité ou extrémité, que se dévoile une règle. Ce n'est, en conséquence, qu'en agissant *in extremis*, furtivement, à une vitesse infinie, qu'une chance se dessine pour que justice et vérité soient rendues. C'est bien pourquoi, enfin, une intervention ne saurait agir et produire des effets qu'aux *marges* d'une situation. Tel est, nous le savons, ce qui anime une résistance: non pas transformer et réorganiser ce qui est, mais y introduire du jeu, des espaces et des interstices tels qu'un



déplacement infime et un bougé mineur produisent des effets virtuellement infinis.

On détournera donc la célèbre formule de Schmitt qui ouvre la *Théologie politique*: “Est souverain qui décide de l'état d'exception (*Souverän ist, wer über den Ausnahmezustand entscheidet*)”. Et on la réécrira ainsi: “Est décisive toute exception à un état des choses”.

Il n'est pas sûr, en conséquence et en second lieu, que l'exception soit l'autre absolu de la règle ou que la puissance, et a fortiori la puissance de l'Etat, soit supérieure ou antérieure aux normes juridiques ou non qui en émanent. Certes, selon Schmitt, l'exception hante la règle comme sa “possibilité réelle”<sup>6</sup>. Mais il faut être plus rigoureux: d'où survient, d'où surgit l'exception si elle est la possibilité même de la règle? Bien plutôt faut-il dire qu'exception et règle sont données en même temps, qu'elles se renforcent ou s'affaiblissent mutuellement, chacune accompagnant l'autre comme son ombre ou son spectre. Précisons.

Une règle, quelle qu'elle soit, juridique, sociale, morale, scientifique etc... souffre toujours des exceptions. Tels sont ces innombrables cas particuliers qu'elle tolère voire encourage: une règle ne peut pas et n'a pas vocation à tout régler. Elle peut, d'ailleurs, mourir de deux manières: soit par saturation (par réglementations ou régulations généralisées), soit par restriction (par lâcheté et démaillage du réseau). Une règle ne vit et ne respire que si du jeu et de l'espace lui permettent de se déployer et de s'exercer. Loin, en effet, d'être coercitive ou répressive, une règle est stratégique, ouverte à la discussion et au compromis, au calcul et à la négociation. Elle est un partage et une limite, et sa vie s'épuise à tracer et à retracer incessamment cette ligne sinueuse, fuyante et instable qui distingue le dedans (le réglé) et le dehors (le dérégulé). Il n'y a donc jamais un dehors informe et un dedans parfaitement maîtrisé, mais un jeu continué de placements et de déplacements de la ligne qui sépare un espace globalement réglé et un autre libre mais contrôlé. Pas de règle sans un jeu fin et précisément réglé de dérèglements; pas de lois sans une stratégie subtile de

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<sup>6</sup> Après avoir focalisé sa lecture de Schmitt sur la discrimination ami-ennemi, Derrida en vient à écrire: “L'exception est la règle, voilà ce que veut peut-être dire cette pensée de la possibilité réelle. L'exception est la règle de ce qui arrive, la loi de l'événement, la possibilité réelle de la possibilité réelle. C'est l'exception qui fonde la décision au sujet du cas et de l'éventualité” (Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, Paris, Galilée, 1994, p. 151). Sans aucun doute, la décision consiste-t-elle à décider si le cas d'exception, l'événement, est ou non donné, beaucoup plus qu'à décider des moyens d'y parer ou d'y répondre. Encore faut-il élaborer les conditions de possibilité d'une exception qui, elle, n'est jamais donnée et que l'on ne peut se contenter d'attendre ou d'accueillir favorablement quand elle survient.

légalismes et d'illégalismes, comme l'a montré Foucault<sup>7</sup> ; pas de droit sans espaces contrôlés de non-droit, pas d'ordre sans une marge surveillée de désordre.

Une règle ne s'institue donc jamais rationnellement en appliquant à des champs ou à des objets nouveaux des règlements déductibles d'une "règle générale" encore nommée "Idée régulatrice". C'est que tout champ est strié de forces en tous genres et d'intensités variables: tout champ grouille de forces plus ou moins agglutinées, toute vie sociale est continûment agitée de convulsions et de conglomerats, constamment traversée de lignes de fuites et de grappes; et de leur confluences et de leur solidifications à la fois spontanées et forcées, de leur consistance à la fois aléatoire et guidée, naissent des pratiques instables et des *habitus* précaires. Généralisées, modifiées et codifiées selon les résistances rencontrées, selon les rapports de puissances plus ou moins déterminées, ces pratiques deviennent des règles. Une règle s'institue donc à tâtons, ni clairement ni à l'aveugle, mais au fur et à mesure des îlots d'ordre rencontrés et des obstacles affrontés. Procédure de généralisation et de formalisation destinée à se réapproprier des organisations plus ou moins flottantes, une règle n'est jamais ou arbitraire ou de droit. Elle est toujours un mixte de force et de droit, un compromis instable et souvent inconsistant de rationalité et de stupidité. Exceptions et règles ne se distinguent donc pas, mais sont données en même temps. Une règle ne précède pas ses propres exceptions. Schmitt a raison: elle s'en nourrit, elle en vit, elle prélève sur elles à la fois sa raison d'être et son histoire. Mais, inversement, une exception ne s'excepte pas d'elle-même de la règle: jamais à l'abri d'une réappropriation, elle en est davantage le vis à vis que l'autre absolu. Règles et exceptions forment un mixte indémêlable et chacune est le fantôme de l'autre. Etat et révolution, droit et violence, puissance et résistance, sont des doubles: "Que disparaisse, écrivait Benjamin, la conscience de la présence latente de la violence dans une institution de droit et celle-ci tombe en ruine. Les parlements, à notre époque (Benjamin écrit en 1921? cela a-t-il changé à notre époque?), (...) en donnent un exemple. Ils offrent ce spectacle lamentable bien connu, parce qu'ils ont perdu conscience des forces révolutionnaires auxquels ils doivent leur existence". Et, ajoutait Benjamin, la police, au sein de nos Etats

<sup>7</sup> "La pénalité serait alors une manière de gérer des illégalismes, de dessiner des limites de tolérance, de donner du champ à certains, de faire pression sur d'autres, d'en exclure une partie, d'en rendre utile une autre, de neutraliser ceux-ci, de tirer profit de ceux-là. Bref, la pénalité ne "réprimerait" pas purement et simplement les illégalismes, elle les "différencierait", elle en assurerait l'économie générale", Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 277.



de droit, a un visage spectral: la force du droit s'y superpose au droit de la force, chacun constituant comme le voile ou la surface de l'autre; l'exception que devrait constituer l'usage pur de la violence policière, loin d'affaiblir la règle, la renforce en exhibant ce mixte de fait et de droit qu'est le "droit" ou l'Etat.<sup>8</sup>

Quelle exception saura donc se soustraire à la règle de l'exception et saura briser le cercle de la règle et de l'exception? Quelle exception saura être à elle-même sa propre exception? Certainement pas l'Etat, comme le croyait Schmitt, dont la décision d'exception n'est autre que le déploiement de sa souveraine puissance. Pouvoir suspendre partiellement ou non la Constitution, pouvoir déclarer (ou refuser de déclarer) la guerre, pouvoir conduire (ou refuser de conduire) la paix, pouvoir accorder (ou refuser d'accorder) sa grâce....., rien là d'exceptionnel, de rare et d'inédit, mais bien plutôt des décisions conformes à la tendance naturelle de tout Etat, tendance à monopoliser tous les pouvoirs et à faire le plein de sa puissance, tendance à confondre le politique et l'étatique.<sup>9</sup> Si, donc, exception, il peut y avoir, elle devra non pas s'affronter à l'Etat et à tout état de choses en général en vue de le briser, mais le prendre à rebours, de biais et à revers pour le déréguler et le déplacer. Elle devra à la fois jouer et déjouer son jeu, suivre fidèlement et patiemment ses règles, se dérouler dans son cadre et à l'intérieur de ses limites, puis, brusquement et imperceptiblement, avec ruse et naïveté, d'une manière à la fois radicale et furtive, avec tact et sans compromis, se retourner sur et contre lui, le prendre en traître et le piéger au moins provisoirement. Une exception exceptionnelle, une exception décisive, joue toujours double jeu et risque, par conséquent, double<sup>10</sup>. Par

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, *Gesammelte Werke*, Frankfurt am Main, 1976, tome II, p. 190 et 189. Sur ce point, je me permets de renvoyer à mon ouvrage *L'histoire à contretemps, le temps historique chez Walter Benjamin*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1994, p. 89-94.

<sup>9</sup> Schmitt commence pourtant son *Concept de politique* (1932) par la célèbre formule: "le concept d'Etat présuppose le concept de politique" (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1972, p. 60). Mais, comme Schmitt le précise et le répète plus loin, l'Etat, né au XVIème siècle et en déclin à partir du XIXème siècle, est la forme politique la plus rationnelle que les sociétés humaines aient jamais inventée.

<sup>10</sup> Dans son article *Remarques sur le concept de politique de C. Schmitt* (traduit en français par J. L. Schlegel dans *C. Schmitt, Parlementarisme et Démocratie*, Seuil, 1988, p. 187-214), L. Strauss note avec justesse que l'homme schmittien est un être dangereux. Schmitt, il est vrai, le dit expressément: "L'homme est un être de risque et de danger" (*Le concept de politique*, op. cit. p. 105). Détournons légèrement Schmitt: Dans les situations de danger auxquelles ils sont exposés ou affrontés, les hommes n'ont d'autre réponse possible que de voler à leurs adversaires leurs propres armes, de les détourner et de les leur renvoyer, ce qui est le geste même, risqué, de la résistance.

un certain côté, aucune exception n'est pure: purement singulière, purement nouvelle, purement unique. Non seulement, rien ne la prémunit contre une réappropriation toujours possible par les diverses puissances qu'elle combat, mais elle est elle-même multiple et stratifiée, traversée d'affects, de tensions et de directions diverses et parfois incompatibles: toute insurrection est à la fois archaïque et novatrice, réactive (coléreuse) et active (indignée), lâche (craintive) et courageuse (audacieuse), locale (nationale, autochtone) et globale (cosmopolite, métissée) etc...; toute résistance mobilise des affects qui sont à la fois tout autres et les mêmes en miroir, c'est à dire l'envers, que ceux qui soutiennent son adversaire.

Une exception ne s'excepte elle-même et de la règle et de l'exception que si elle joue à la *limite* des deux, là où les frontières se brouillent et s'indécident, là où la règle s'affole et ne sait plus ce qu'elle veut dire et là où l'exception est prête à s'autodissoudre avant de renaître en une autre exception. L'exception ne contredit pas les règles existantes pas plus qu'elle ne nie la nécessité de règles, mais elle montre, par son existence et sa forme même, qu'est possible un autre rapport à la règle et, par suite ou en même temps, un autre type de règle. Il n'y a donc pas, d'un côté, les exceptions *pures*, les radicales et les définitives, et, d'un autre côté, les exceptions *impures*, les timorées et les provisoires. Il n'y a que des exceptions impures parce que toujours déjà partiellement régulées qui, si elles bifurquent, s'emporent et tourbillonnent, si elles creusent un devenir-autre et échappent à leur propre règle, ouvrent, pour un temps un avenir unique, singulier, inédit, bref exceptionnel. Soit, par exemple, la *grève*. La grève est une exception: c'est une cessation rare de l'activité normale et normée qu'est le travail; c'est pourtant une exception régulée, réglée et réglementée: si la grève n'est pas un droit reconnu, l'un de ses buts premiers est de le conquérir et de l'inscrire dans les textes de loi. Mais, il n'y a pas les bonnes grèves, les grèves menées selon les règles en vue de buts justes et justifiés et finalement efficaces, et les mauvaises grèves, inorganisées et injustes et injustifiées et finalement vaincues: il y a plutôt toutes sortes de perturbations, de glissements et de détraquements de l'activité nommée "travail" et si certaines d'entre elles, alors même qu'elles se poursuivent selon leur propre logique (rapports de force, négociation), bifurquent à un moment quelconque (selon un tour à la fois grave et léger des énoncés, grâce à des procédures subtiles et ingénieuses, en vue de fins à la fois folles et praticables), alors elles seront exceptionnelles et décisives: elle ouvrent et dessinent en pointillé une autre manière de travailler ou de se rapporter à soi, aux autres et aux choses dans le travail, une autre manière d'énoncer ce qu'est travailler et donc, du même coup, ce qu'est ne pas travailler, aimer, penser etc..., bref vivre et exister.



Ce qui est décisif, dans ce cas, n'est donc pas l'entrée en grève et encore moins l'appartenance, ou la non-appartenance, à tel ou tel groupe, mais le point de bifurcation et de non-retour, s'il a lieu, qui affecte par le "milieu" la grève (c'est à dire toute pratique étatique ou antiétatique et nécessairement plus ou moins réglée) et la fait sauter dans l'exception. Ce qui fait imperceptiblement mais définitivement décision, c'est accompagner et accélérer une tendance clandestine et sourde, souterraine mais insistante, tendance mineure mais qui double continûment de toute la force de sa faiblesse la tendance lourde et dominante, c'est s'accrocher et se tenir comme à cheval, à une vitesse folle que nul ne pourra rejoindre, sur cette ligne de fuite et déstabiliser toute action, y compris celle de ceux qui l'avaient impulsée.

Dès lors, qu'est-ce que décider? Car, ce point de bifurcation est soit rencontré soit contourné, ce saut est soit recherché soit évité, cette ligne est soit favorisée soit déniée. Certes, ce n'est qu'après-coup que se décidera si une nouvelle voie fut bien ouverte; ce n'est que si des corps mettent leurs pieds dans les traces de l'effraction et en retracent les traits que l'exception se révélera exceptionnelle. Encore, faut-il, avec audace et prudence, filer cette voie, encore faut-il parier pour elle avec aveuglement et lucidité. Jamais l'alternative ne se présente clairement, jamais la décision ne prend la forme du "ou bien... ou bien", s'effectuât-elle dans la crainte et le tremblement, jamais "décider est plus important que comment décider".<sup>11</sup> Entre les diverses possibilités, dont nul d'ailleurs ne peut avec rigueur et d'avance affirmer qu'elles diffèrent entre elles, la différence est infime et à la limite et seul le pari, mixte de calcul et de folie, fait décision et donne sa chance à l'événement d'exception.

Savoir ou pouvoir parier, savoir ou pouvoir prendre des risques demande du caractère: un *caractère d'exception*.

C'est à Kant que nous devons la distinction, banalisée depuis, entre "avoir un caractère" et "avoir du caractère". Chaque homme ou groupe d'hommes a un caractère ou, comme Kant le précise, un caractère "empirique" ou "sensible". Par "caractère empirique", on entendra l'ensemble des inclinations (tendances, dispositions au bien, penchants au mal) que l'homme soit tient de la nature soit a cultivées de telle ou telle manière en lui. Aussi bien ce caractère qui identifie un individu, un sexe, un peuple, une race, voire une espèce (à vrai dire, la seule espèce humaine, seule espèce, pour Kant, capable de culture) est-il aussi bien donné qu'acquis,

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<sup>11</sup> Schmitt, *Théologie politique*, op. cit. p. 64. Schmitt cite d'ailleurs Kierkegaard p. 25 de son ouvrage, à vrai dire sans le nommer explicitement et en le détournant.

naturel qu'historique. Il désigne un instant précis d'un devenir, un état de la sensibilité à un moment ou en un lieu déterminés, une coupe dans un héritage transmis et repris. Il circonscrit un donné, dessine une situation, articule des positions. Il chiffre des régularités et autorise une description, une évaluation, une prospection, voire une prévision. Ensemble de signes et de désignations, un caractère n'est donc autre qu'une *identité*: à la fois particulière, distinctive, propre et commune à tous ceux qui sont ou se sont désignés tels ou tels. Chacun s'identifie par son caractère, c'est à dire son libre-arbitre ou sa capacité à se donner à soi-même toutes sortes de fins possibles. A ce titre, le caractère "empirique" court-circuite la volonté. Il lui est à la fois antérieur et postérieur: antérieur, parce que le libre-arbitre se détermine conformément ou à l'encontre des inclinations; postérieur parce que les choix faits ou non-faits infléchissent le caractère dans telle ou telle direction.

En inventant le concept de "caractère intelligible", Kant introduit, au sein du caractère ou de la sensibilité, la *volonté*. Avoir du caractère, c'est avoir de la volonté: "Etre homme de caractère, sans autre complément, a trait à cette propriété de la volonté selon laquelle le sujet se lie à lui-même à des principes pratiques déterminés qu'il s'est prescrits de manière irrévocable par sa propre raison. Bien que ces principes puissent parfois être faux et erronés, l'élément formel du vouloir qui est d'agir selon des fermes principes (et non brusquement dévier de-ci de-là, comme on le voit dans un essaim de moucheron) a en soi quelque chose d'estimable et d'admirable, tout comme il est une rare donnée"<sup>12</sup>. La volonté n'est pas, chez Kant, on le sait, l'usage de l'arbitre conformément à des maximes arbitrairement choisies. Elle est l'acte par lequel le sujet se lie définitivement et irrévocablement à des maximes qui font désormais loi pour lui et en font un "soi". En l'acte de volonté, réceptivité et spontanéité s'indécident, "inclination" et "raison" se brouillent. Car, si, d'un côté, la volonté précède la loi qui n'est que l'autonomie ou l'autojuridiction de la volonté ou de la raison pratique, de l'autre, c'est au regard de la loi seule que le choix est véritablement un acte de volonté. La volonté n'est ni une capacité (la faculté de dire oui ou non, de donner ou non son accord), ni même un exercice (agir ainsi et pas autrement), c'est un style ou une manière de penser et d'agir. Cette manière, "agir selon des fermes principes", n'est autre que le caractère.

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<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Anthropologie d'un point de vue pragmatique*, IIème partie, A, Kant's gesammelte Schriften, Preussische Akademie Ausgabe (abrèv: A.K.) Berlin, 1922, tome VII, p. 292.



Il n'y a pas, en effet, deux types de caractères: le caractère "sensible" et le caractère "intelligible", ou deux types de volontés: le libre-arbitre et la volonté proprement dite. Il y a un seul caractère, manifeste ou non, une seule volonté qui s'exerce de telle ou telle manière et, en eux, en arrière et en avant d'eux, à leur horizon ou en leur arrière-fond, il y a un ou quelques traits qui, secrètement mais sans aucun mystère, définitivement mais furtivement, les a frappés, marqués, blessés, striés. Ces *traits de caractère* sont la trace inoubliable, fût-elle oubliée, d'événements d'exception. Ces *traits d'exception* qui, par métonymie, forment ce qu'on peut appeler un "caractère d'exception", ne désignent pas un caractère déterminé, à la fois distinct et remarquable. Ils soulignent, et sont la preuve, qu'un événement a strié l'espace et sauté du temps, a divisé l'espace et s'est excepté du temps. Ces traits d'exception ne sont pas un signal de reconnaissance, mais un chiffre secret, un monogramme qui se révèle, sans y préexister, dans des *situations d'exception*. De tels traits ne sont en ce sens ni sensibles ni intelligibles ou plutôt ils sont les deux. Ils ne sont ni la condition ni l'effet d'une situation extraordinaire, "sensible", ni d'une action héroïque, "intelligible", mais surgissent à l'occasion d'un événement d'exception où situation et caractère se reconnaissent et se choisissent, se cherchent et s'élisent mutuellement, comme s'ils s'attendaient et étaient l'un à l'autre destinés, alors que la rencontre était improbable et fut donc une chance par définition rare. Cette rencontre décisive, dont témoignent à jamais un trait de caractère, la "volonté" ou "l'élément formel du vouloir", Kant n'hésite pas à la comparer à l'échange quasi-amoureux d'un serment: "L'homme conscient de la présence d'un caractère dans sa manière de penser ne le tient pas de la nature, il lui faut en tout temps l'avoir *acquis*. On peut admettre aussi que son instauration, pareille à une sorte de renaissance, lui rende inoubliable une certaine solennité de serment qu'il se fait à lui-même et le moment (*Zeitpunkt*) où la métamorphose a opérée en lui, pareil au début d'une ère nouvelle". Et Kant ajoute que l'histoire et ses exemples "ne peuvent pas produire cette fermeté et cette persévérance dans les principes par une démarche progressive, mais par une sorte d'explosion qui fait brusquement suite au dégoût de l'état mouvant des instincts (*die auf den Überdruß am schwankenden Zustande des Instinkts auf einmal erfolgt*)<sup>13</sup>. En un instant implosif ou explosif se noue à jamais entre soi et soi une *alliance* indéfectible et une *promesse* inconditionnée: promesse de "ne plus accepter l'état mouvant des instincts", promesse de ne plus transiger avec les hauts et les bas de l'histoire et les situations continuellement changeantes, promesse de ne plus jamais

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, A.K. VII, p. 294.

céder au destin, promesse de devenir autre que ce qu'on était jusque-là, promesse de filer désormais une autre ligne, droite et infinie, quelque invisible et sinueuse qu'elle paraisse, promesse sans cesse relancée et rappelée parce qu'enchaînée à une alliance d'autant plus serrée qu'elle est ténue et fragile: alliance qui noue une situation et un caractère. Car, c'est d'un seul et même geste que "le dégoût de l'état mouvant des instincts" se "métamorphose" en "fermeté et persévérance" et métamorphose en même temps la situation qui, d'incoutournable et sans issue qu'elle paraissait, libère des perspectives jusque-là inaperçues ou impossibles. Un caractère d'exception n'est pas un donné, fût-il acquis: il est une nouvelle alliance infiniment et chaque fois répétée. C'est, au sein d'un caractère donné, un feuilletage de traits ou de marques en lesquels se signe un événement d'exception et qui, du creux de l'encoche et de l'entame qu'est sa signature, rappelle à soi, en une alliance qui vaut promesse, en un serment qui vaut injonction, toute nouvelle signature.

Ce moment de promesse et d'alliance, d'appel et de rappel, appelons-le *archidécision*. D'un côté, une archidécision est bien une décision: une coupure entre un avant et un après, une séparation (un tranchant, une blessure, une cassure, une révélation, une illumination) entre le même et l'autre, un hiatus entre passé et présent (ou un avenir). Toute décision est un pari, un lancer de dés dans le vide, un "s'élancer" irresponsable et affolé, précipité et vertigineux, une brusquerie qui peut aller jusqu'à la maladresse et la douleur, comme s'il s'agissait d'aller plus vite que soi pour ne pas se faire rattraper par le temps lent de la réflexion, de la patience et de la sérénité. Toute décision est une intervention prise pour une part à l'aveugle: le "pourquoi?" de la décision est toujours en même temps un "pourquoi pas?".

D'un autre côté, toute décision ne fait qu'accompagner une ligne de force qui se cherchait et suivre une pente qui évoluait jusque-là dans l'ombre ou en pointillé; elle se prend lentement, à tâtons, sous l'effet d'un devenir et d'une métamorphose insensibles qui affectent le sujet et l'objet de la décision et qui transforme la situation à trancher, de sorte qu'on se retrouve de l'autre côté de la décision sans pouvoir nommer, marquer et en arrêter l'instant, le *Zeitpunkt*, sans pouvoir dire quand et comment elle fut prise. C'est en ce sens que Kant distingue et *en même temps* ne distingue pas "le caractère sensible" et le "caractère intelligible", la "durée phénoménale" du premier et la "durée nouménale" du second. Car le caractère ne désigne que la trace, irréversible et immémoriale de la césure "intelligible" de la décision, trace insensible et imperceptible dans le "sensible" et qui aura pourtant fait bifurquer et orienté le caractère de manière définitive. Aussi



Kant peut-il à la fois opposer et identifier les modifications progressives de la manière de sentir et les révolutions de la manière de penser. A supposer ainsi que ce changement soit celui du mal pour le bien, comme c'est le cas des changements éthiques ou religieux dont Kant se préoccupe dans *La Religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, celui-ci peut écrire: "Quand, par une unique et immuable décision (*durch eine einzige unwandelbare Entschliessung*), l'homme renverse le fondement suprême de ses maximes, qui faisait de lui un homme mauvais (et revêtant ainsi un homme nouveau), il est dans cette mesure, suivant le principe de la manière de penser, un sujet réceptif au bien, mais ce n'est que dans l'action continuée et dans le devenir qu'il deviendra un homme de bien"<sup>14</sup>. Décision immuable (*unwandelbar*) de "muer", de se métamorphoser (*umwandeln*), décision irréversible et comme toujours déjà prise de toujours décider, décision irrésistible de toujours résister.

On le voit, cette décision (*Entschliessung*) ou archidécision est au plus loin de l'*Entschlossenheit*, de cette résolution que Heidegger définit comme "marche à la mort"<sup>15</sup>: la mort est le possible le plus possible du *Dasein*, le possible qui, dans sa forme ultime d'impossibilité, révèle non seulement le *Dasein* comme être de possibles, mais ouvre au *Dasein* ses possibles les plus propres. Décider, c'est donc, pour Heidegger, se porter en avant et à la pointe de soi, faire face à son destin pour l'endurer et s'y mesurer, et libérer en soi les possibles que la quotidienneté et la préoccupation ordinaires nous fermaient. Décider, c'est être résolu à se tendre et se projeter en avant de soi, à "marcher d'avance" vers ce qui, étant la possibilité de l'impossibilité même de soi, expose et ouvre d'avance le soi à ses possibles, c'est à dire à la liberté: "L'être vers la mort est marche d'avance dans un pouvoir-être de cet étant dont le genre est lui-même la marche d'avance. Quand il dévoile en y marchant ce pouvoir-être, le *Dasein* se découvre lui-même sous l'angle de sa possibilité extrême (...). La marche d'avance se montre comme possibilité d'entendre l'extrême pouvoir être le plus propre, c'est à dire comme possibilité d'*existence propre*"<sup>16</sup>. Inutile, sans doute, de préciser que la mort n'est pas, pour Heidegger, celle qui vous échoit, vous menace et vous attend, mais celle donnée en même temps que reçue dans le combat, celle affrontée et défiée dans le service<sup>17</sup> commandé ou non: à ce prix seul, elle est devancée et *résolue* et vaut comme telle.

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<sup>14</sup> Kant, *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, Doctrine Ière partie, Remarque générale, A.K. VI, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Etre et temps*, § 62.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* § 53.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Discours du rectorat*, trad. G. Granel, TER, Mauvezin, 1982, p. 15-17.

Aux marches en avant des héros qui posent déjà aux martyrs, aux combattants qui prennent une résolution pour répondre à l'appel d'un service qui tranche avec le quotidien et libère de l'ordinaire, à ceux qui se pensent courageux parce qu'ils "affrontent l'angoisse devant la mort" possible et anticipée, on préférera l'attitude à la fois brûlante et froide, à la fois passionnée et sobre, à la fois de feu et de glace qu'est la résistance, y compris la résistance à l'esthétisme de pacotille, à l'héroïsme d'opérette qui finit toujours soit dans la bêtise soit dans la cruauté soit, comme c'est généralement le cas, dans les deux. Au "se porter au devant de son destin", la résistance préfère le pas de côté qui est en même temps un pas "contre". Aux frissons de l'angoisse devant la finitude, elle préfère l'énergie qui naît de l'indignation devant les possibilités de vie comprimées, mutilées, écrasées. Car la mort est une des multiples possibilités de la vie à laquelle le courage ordonne de ne pas céder. Selon les circonstances, c'est à dire selon les configurations nécessairement changeantes d'une situation, on résistera en se mobilisant ou en s'immobilisant, en faisant feu de tout bois ou en restant impassible, en jouant l'urgence ou au contraire le différé. Nulle résistance sans stratégie minutieuse et retorse, sans patience et sans délai. Mais, le moment venu, et décider, c'est décider que le moment est précisément venu, que c'est maintenant ou jamais, la résistance mobilise ses forces et bande son arc. Faussement tranquille, elle préparait ses coups. Portée par l'énergie qu'a levée l'indignation devant les coups portés aux existences possibles, toujours déjà décidée à ne pas céder, une résistance affiche une force sereine et invincible.



Jacques Rancière  
*Onze thèses sur la politique*

Thèse 1. *La politique n'est pas l'exercice du pouvoir. La politique doit être définie par elle-même, comme un mode d'agir spécifique mis en acte par un sujet propre et relevant d'une rationalité propre. C'est la relation politique qui permet de penser le sujet politique et non l'inverse.*

On fait d'emblée l'économie de la politique si on l'identifie avec la pratique du pouvoir et la lutte pour sa possession. Mais on fait aussi l'économie de sa pensée, si on la conçoit comme une théorie du pouvoir ou une recherche du fondement de sa légitimité. Si la politique est quelque chose de spécifique et pas simplement un mode d'agrégation plus considérable ou une forme de pouvoir distinguée par son mode de légitimation, c'est qu'elle concerne un sujet qui lui est propre et qu'elle le concerne sous la forme d'un mode de relation qui lui est propre et qu'elle le concerne sous la forme d'une mode de relation qui lui est propre. C'est bien ce que dit Aristote lorsque, au livre I de la Politique, il distingue le commandement politique de tous les autres, comme commandement sur des égaux ou bien lorsqu'il définit au livre III le citoyen comme celui qui "a part au fait de commander et à celui d'être commandé". Le tout de la politique est dans cette relation spécifique, cet *avoir-part* qu'il faut interroger sur son sens et sur ses conditions de possibilité.

Seulement, cette relation s'offre à deux interprétations radicalement opposées qui définissent deux points de vue antagoniques sur le "propre" du politique. La première interprétation est celle qui s'exprime dans les propositions aujourd'hui répandues sur le "retour" de la politique. On a vu fleurir, ces dernières années, dans le cadre du consensus étatique, des affirmations proclamant la fin de l'illusion du social et le retour à une politique pure. Ces affirmations s'appuient généralement sur une lecture des mêmes textes aristotéliens, vus à travers les interprétations de Leo Strauss et de Hannah Arendt. Ces lectures identifient généralement l'ordre politique "propre" à celui du "eu zen" opposé au zen, conçu comme ordre de la simple vie. A partir de là, la frontière du domestique et du politique devient celle du social et du politique. Et à l'idéal de la cité définie par son bien propre on oppose la triste réalité de la démocratie moderne comme

règne des masses et des besoins. Dans la pratique, cette célébration de la politique pure remet aux oligarchies gouvernementales, éclairées par leurs experts, la vertu du bien politique. C'est à dire que la prétendue purification du politique, libéré de la nécessité domestique et sociale, revient à la pure et simple réduction du politique à l'étatique.

Derrière la bouffonnerie présente des "retours" de la politique ou de la philosophie politique, il faut reconnaître le cercle vicieux fondamental qui caractérise la philosophie politique. Ce cercle vicieux réside dans l'interprétation du rapport entre la relation politique et le sujet politique. Il consiste à poser un mode de vie propre à l'existence politique. La relation politique se déduit alors des propriétés de ce monde vécu spécifique. On l'explique par l'existence d'un personnage qui a le bien ou l'universalité comme élément spécifique, opposé au monde privé ou domestique des besoins ou des intérêts. On explique, en bref, la politique comme l'accomplissement d'un mode de vie propre à ceux qui lui sont destinés. On pose comme fondement de la politique ce partage qui est en fait son objet.

Le propre de la politique est ainsi perdu d'emblée si on la pense comme un monde vécu spécifique. La politique ne peut se définir par aucun sujet qui lui préexisterait. C'est dans la forme de sa relation que doit être cherchée la "différence" politique qui permet de penser son sujet. Si l'on reprend la définition aristotélicienne du citoyen, il y a un nom de sujet (*politès*) qui se définit par un avoir-part (*metexis*) à un mode d'agir (celui de l'*arkheîn*) et au pâtre qui correspond à cet agir (l'*arkhesthai*). S'il y a un propre de la politique, il se tient tout entier dans cette relation qui n'est pas une relation entre des sujets, mais une relation entre deux termes contradictoires par laquelle se définit un sujet. La politique s'évanouit dès que l'on défait ce noeud d'un sujet et d'une relation. C'est ce qui se passe dans toutes les fictions, spéculatives ou empiristes, qui cherchent l'origine de la relation politique dans les propriétés de ses sujets et les conditions de leur rassemblement. La question traditionnelle "Pour quelle raison les hommes s'assemblent-ils en communautés politiques?" est toujours déjà une réponse, et une réponse qui fait disparaître l'objet qu'elle prétend expliquer ou fonder, soit la forme de l'avoir-part politique, laquelle disparaît alors dans le jeu des éléments ou des atomes de sociabilité.



Thèse 2. *Le propre de la politique est l'existence d'un sujet défini par sa participation à des contraires. La politique est un type d'action paradoxal.*

Les formules selon laquelle la politique est le commandement sur des égaux et le citoyen celui qui a part au fait de commander et à celui d'être commandé énoncent un paradoxe qui doit être pensé dans sa rigueur. Il faut donc écarter les représentations banales sur la réciprocité des devoirs et des droits, appartenant à la *doxa* des systèmes parlementaires, pour entendre ce que la formule aristotelicienne dit d'inouï. Elle nous parle d'un être qui, en même temps, est l'agent d'une action et la matière sur laquelle s'exerce cette action. Elle contredit la logique normale de l'agir qui veut qu'un agent doué d'une capacité spécifique produise un effet sur une matière ou un objet, possédant l'aptitude spécifique à recevoir cet effet et à rien d'autre.

C'est un problème qu'on ne résout aucunement par la classique opposition de deux modes de l'agir, la *poiesis*, régie par le modèle de la fabrication qui donne forme à une matière et la *praxis*, soustrayant à ce rapport l'inter-être des hommes voués à la politique. On sait que cette opposition, relayant celle du zen et de l'eu zen, soutient une certaine idée de la pureté politique. Ainsi, chez Hannah Arendt, l'ordre de la *praxis* est celui des égaux dans la puissance de l'*arkheîn*, conçue comme puissance de commencer. "Le mot *arkheîn*, écrit-elle dans *Qu'est-ce que la politique?*, veut dire commencer et commander, donc être libre". Un vertigineux raccourci permet ainsi, une fois seulement définis un mode et un monde propre de l'agir, de poser une série d'équations entre commencer, commander, être libre et vivre dans une cité ("Être libre et vivre dans une *polis* est la même chose", dit encore ce texte). La série d'équations trouve son équivalent dans le mouvement qui engendre l'égalité citoyenne à partir de la communauté des héros homériques, égaux dans leur participation à la puissance de l'*arkhè*.

Contre cette idylle homérique, le premier témoin est Homère lui-même. Contre Thersite, le bavard, celui qui est habile à la parole d'assemblée, alors même qu'il n'a aucun titre parler, Ulysse rappelle que l'armée des Achéens a un chef et un seul, Agamemnon. Il nous rappelle ainsi ce que veut dire *arkheîn*: marcher en tête. Et s'il y en a un qui marche en tête, nécessairement les autres marchent derrière. Entre la puissance de l'*arkheîn*, la liberté et la *polis*, la ligne n'est pas droite mais brisée. Il suffit, pour s'en convaincre, de voir la manière dont Aristote compose sa cité avec trois classes, détentrices chacune d'un "titre" particulier: la vertu pour les *aristoi*, la richesse pour les *oligoï* et la liberté pour le *dèmos*. Dans ce partage,

la "liberté" apparaît come la part paradoxale de ce *démos* dont le héros homérique nous disait précisément qu'il n'avait qu'une chose à faire: se taire et courber l'échine.

En bref, l'opposition de la *praxis* et de la *poiesis* ne résout en rien le paradoxe de la définition du *politès*. En matière d'*arkhè*, plus qu'en toute autre, la logique normale veut qu'il y ait une disposition particulière à agir qui s'exerce sur une disposition spécifique à pâtir. La logique de l'*arkhè* suppose ainsi une supériorité déterminée qui s'exerce sur une infériorité déterminée. Pour qu'il y ait un sujet de la politique, et donc de la politique, il faut qu'il y ait rupture de cette logique.

*Thèse 3. La politique est une rupture spécifique de la logique de l'arkhè. Elle ne suppose pas en effet simplement la rupture de la distribution "normale" des positions entre celui qui exerce une puissance et celui qui la subit, mais une rupture dans l'idée des dispositions qui rendent "propre" à ces positions.*

Au III<sup>e</sup> livre des *Lois* (690 e), Platon se livre à un recensement systématique des titres (*axiomata*) à gouverner et de titres corrélatifs à être gouverné. Sur les sept qu'il retient, quatre sont des titres traditionnels d'autorité, fondés sur une différence de nature qui est une différence dans la naissance. Ont titre à commander ceux qui sont nés avant ou autrement. Ainsi se fonde le pouvoir des parents sur les enfants, des vieux sur les jeunes, des maîtres sur les esclaves et des nobles sur les vilains. Le cinquième titre se présente lui comme le principe des principes, résumant toutes les différences de nature. C'est le pouvoir de la nature supérieure, des plus forts sur les plus faibles, pouvoir qui a malheureusement l'inconvénient, longuement argumenté par le *Gorgias*, d'être strictement indéterminable. Le sixième titre donne la seule différence qui vaille aux yeux de Platon, le pouvoir de ceux qui savent sur ceux qui ne savent pas. Il y a ainsi quatre couples de titres traditionnels, et deux couples théoriques qui prétendent à leur relève: la supériorité de nature et le commandement de la science. La liste devrait s'arrêter là. Il y a pourtant un septième titre. C'est le "choix du dieu", autrement dit l'usage du tirage au sort pour désigner celui à qui revient l'exercice de l'*arkhè*. Platon ne s'étend pas. Mais, clairement, ce choix, ironiquement dit du dieu, désigne le régime dont il nous dit ailleurs qu'un dieu seul peut le sauver, la démocratie. Ce qui caractérise la démocratie, c'est le tirage au sort, l'absence de titre à gouverner. C'est l'état d'exception dans lequel ne fonctionne aucun couple d'opposés, aucun principe de répartition des rôles. "Avoir part au fait de commander et d'être commandé" est alors toute autre chose qu'une affaire de réciprocité. C'est au contraire



l'absence de réciprocité qui constitue l'essence exceptionnelle de cette relation. Et cette absence de réciprocité repose sur le paradoxe d'un titre qui est absence de titre. La démocratie est la situation spécifique où c'est l'absence de titre qui donne titre à l'exercice de l'*arkhè*. Elle est le commencement sans commencement, le commandement de ce qui ne commande pas. Ce qui est ruiné par là c'est le propre de l'*arkhè*, son redoublement, qui fait qu'elle se précède toujours elle-même, dans un cercle de la disposition et de son exercice. Mais cette situation d'exception est identique à la condition même d'une spécificité de la politique en général.

Thèse 4. *La démocratie n'est pas un régime politique. Elle est, en tant que rupture de la logique de l'arkhè, c'est-à-dire de l'anticipation du commandement dans sa disposition, le régime même de la politique comme forme de relation définissant un sujet spécifique.*

Ce qui rend possible la *metexis* propre à la politique, c'est la rupture de toutes les logiques de la distribution des parts dans l'exercice de l'*arkhè*. La "liberté" du peuple qui constitue l'*axiome* de la démocratie a pour contenu réel la rupture de l'axiomatique de la domination, c'est-à-dire de la corrélation entre une capacité à commander et une capacité à être commandé. Le citoyen qui a part "au fait de commander et à celui d'être commandé" n'est pensable qu'à partir du *dèmos* comme figure de rupture de la correspondance entre des capacités corrélées. La démocratie n'est donc aucunement un régime politique, au sens de constitution particulière parmi les différentes manières d'assembler des hommes sous une autorité commune. La démocratie est l'institution même de la politique, l'institution de son sujet et de sa forme de relation.

Démocratie, on le sait, est un terme inventé par les adversaires de la chose: tous ceux qui ont un "titre" à gouverner: ancienneté, naissance, richesse, vertu, savoir. Sous ce terme de dérision, ils énoncent ce renversement inouï de l'ordre des choses: le "pouvoir du *dèmos*", c'est le fait que commandent spécifiquement ceux qui ont pour seule spécificité commune le fait de n'avoir aucun titre à gouverner. Avant d'être le nom de la communauté, *dèmos* est le nom d'une partie de la communauté: les pauvres. Mais précisément "les pauvres" ne désigne pas la partie économiquement défavorisée de la population. Cela désigne simplement les gens qui ne comptent pas, ceux qui n'ont pas de titre à exercer la puissance de l'*arkhè*, pas de titre à être comptés.

C'est très précisément ce que nous dit Homère dans l'épisode de Thersite déjà évoqué. Ulysse donne des coups de sceptre sur le dos de ceux

qui veulent parler, alors qu'ils sont du *démos*; alors qu'ils appartiennent à la collection indifférence de ceux qui sont hors-compte (*enarismioi*). Ceci n'est pas une déduction mais une définition. Est du *démos*, celui qui est hors compte, celui qui n'a pas de parole à faire entendre. Un passage remarquable du chant XII illustre ce point. Polydamas s'y plaint de ce que son avis ait été tenu pour nul par Hector. Avec toi, dit-il, "on n'a pas le droit du parler quand on est du *démos*". Or Polydamas n'est pas un vilain comme Thersite, c'est un frère d'Hector. *Démos* ne désigne pas une catégorie sociale inférieure. Est du *démos* celui qui parle alors qu'il n'a pas à parler, celui qui prend part à ce à quoi il n'a pas de part.

*Thèse 5. Le peuple qui est le sujet de la démocratie, donc le sujet matriciel de la politique, n'est pas la collection des membres de la communauté ou la classe laborieuse de la population. Il est la partie supplémentaire par rapport à tout compte des parties de la population qui permet d'identifier au tout de la communauté le compte des in comptés.*

Le peuple (*démos*) existe seulement comme rupture de la logique de l'*arkhè*, rupture de la logique du commencement/commandement. Il ne saurait s'identifier ni à la race de ceux qui se reconnaissent au fait qu'ils ont même commencement, même naissance, ni à une partie ou à la somme des parties de la population. Peuple est le supplément qui disjoint la population d'elle-même, en suspendant les logiques de la domination légitime. Cette disjonction s'illustre particulièrement dans la réforme essentielle qui donne à la démocratie athénienne son lieu, celle qu'opère Clisthène en recomposant la distribution des *dèmes* sur le territoire de la cité. En constituant chaque tribu par adjonction de trois circonscriptions séparées - une de la ville, une de la côte et une de l'arrière-pays -, Clisthène cassait le principe archique qui tenait les tribus sous le pouvoir de chefferies locales d'aristocrates dont le pouvoir, légitimé par la naissance légendaire, avait de plus en plus pour contenu réel la puissance économique des propriétaires fonciers. Le peuple est, en somme, un artifice qui vient se mettre en travers de la logique qui donne le principe de la richesse pour héritier du principe de la naissance. Il est un supplément abstrait par rapport à tout compte effectif des parties de la population, de leurs titres à prendre part à la communauté et des parts de commun qui leur reviennent en fonction de ces titres. Le "peuple" est l'existence supplémentaire qui inscrit le compte des in comptés ou la part des sans-part. On ne prendra pas ces expressions en un sens populiste mais en un sens structural. Ce n'est pas la populace laborieuse et souffrante qui vient occuper le terrain de l'agir politique et



identifier son nom à celui de la communauté. Ce qui est identifié par la démocratie avec le tout de la communauté, c'est une partie vide, supplémentaire, qui sépare la communauté de la somme des parties du corps social. Identifier ce vide au trop-plein de la populace, des masses, etc...est le tour constant de la critique disqualifiante de la démocratie. Mais avec la disqualification de la démocratie, c'est la spécificité de la politique elle-même qui s'évanouit.

*Thèse 6. L'essence de la politique est l'action de sujets supplémentaires qui s'inscrivent en surplus par rapport à tout compte des parties d'une société.*

La duplicité du peuple et le rapport de cette duplicité à un vide et à un trop-plein sont des constantes de l'interprétation moderne de la démocratie. Ainsi la tradition républicaine moderne insiste-t-elle volontiers sur la distance entre la figure principielle du peuple comme sujet de la souveraineté et la triste réalité du peuple comme monde des intérêts et des besoins, de la faim et de l'ignorance. Plus récemment les bilans des catastrophes du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle ont mis en cause le trouble originaire qui lie l'inscription du sujet "peuple" à l'effondrement de la figure symbolique du "double corps du roi". L'interprétation de Claude Lefort lie le vide central de la démocratie à la désincorporation de ce double corps - humain et divin. La démocratie commencerait avec le meurtre du roi, c'est-à-dire avec un effondrement du symbolique, producteur d'un social désincorporé. Et ce lien originaire équivaldrait à une tentation originaire de reconstitution imaginaire d'un corps glorieux du peuple, héritier de la transcendance du corps immortel du roi et principe de tous les totalitarismes. A ces analyses, on opposera que le double corps du peuple n'est pas une conséquence moderne d'un sacrifice du corps souverain mais une donnée constitutive de la politique. C'est d'abord le peuple, et non le roi, qui a un double corps. Et cette dualité n'est rien d'autre que le supplément vide par lequel la politique existe, en supplément à tout compte social et en exception à toutes les logiques de la domination.

Le septième titre est, dit Platon, la "part du dieu". On tiendra que cette part du dieu - ce titre de ce qui est sans titre - contient en elle tout ce que la politique a de "théologique". L'insistance contemporaine sur le thème du "théologico-politique" dissout la question de la politique dans celle du pouvoir et de la situation originaire qui le fonde. Elle double la fiction libérale du contrat par la représentation d'un sacrifice originaire. Ce qui veut dire aussi qu'elle à supplémente les logiques vulgaires du consensus par une grande dramaturgie du meurtre fondateur et de l'abîme originaire

de la démocratie. Mais la division de l'*arkhè* qui fonde la politique avec la démocratie n'est pas un sacrifice fondateur. Elle est une neutralisation de tout corps sacrificiel. Cette neutralisation pourrait trouver sa fable exacte dans la fin d'*Oedipe à Colonne*: c'est au prix de la disparition du corps sacrificiel, au prix de ne pas chercher le corps d'Oedipe, que la démocratie athénienne reçoit le bienfait de sa sépulture. Vouloir déterrer le cadavre, ce n'est pas seulement associer la forme démocratique à un scénario de péché ou de malédiction originels. C'est, plus radicalement ramener la logique de la politique à la question de la scène originelle du pouvoir, c'est-à-dire ramener le politique à l'étatique. La dramaturgie de la catastrophe symbolique originelle, en interprétant la partie vide dans les termes de la psychose, transforme l'exception politique en symptôme sacrificiel de la démocratie. Elle subsume sous un des innombrables succédanés de la faute ou du meurtre originelle le *litige* propre à la politique.

*Thèse 7. Si la politique est le tracé d'une différence évanouissante avec la distribution des parties et des parts sociales, il en résulte que son existence n'est en rien nécessaire mais qu'elle advient comme un accident toujours provisoire dans l'histoire des formes de la domination. Il en résulte aussi que le litige politique a pour objet essentiel l'existence même de la politique.*

La politique n'est aucunement une réalité qui se déduirait des nécessités du rassemblement des hommes en communauté. Elle est une exception aux principes selon lesquels s'opère ce rassemblement. L'ordre "normal" des choses est que les communautés humaines se rassemblent sous le commandement de ceux qui ont des titres à commander, titres prouvés par le fait même qu'ils commandent. Les différents titres à gouverner se ramènent en définitive à deux grands titres. Le premier renvoie la société à l'ordre de la filiation, humaine et divine. C'est le pouvoir de la naissance. Le second renvoie la société au principe vital de ses activités. C'est le pouvoir de la richesse. L'évolution "normale" des sociétés, c'est le passage du gouvernement de la naissance au gouvernement de la richesse. La politique existe comme déviation par rapport à cette évolution normale des choses. C'est cette anomalie qui s'exprime dans la nature des sujets politiques qui ne sont pas des groupes sociaux mais des formes d'inscription du compte des incompétes.

Il y a de la politique pour autant que le peuple n'est pas la race ou la population, que les pauvres ne sont pas la partie défavorisée de la population, les prolétaires pas le groupe des travailleurs d'industrie, etc... mais qu'ils sont des sujets inscrivant, en supplément de tout compte des



parties de la société, une figure spécifique du compte des in comptés ou de la part des sans part. Que cette part existe, c'est l'enjeu même de la politique. Et c'est l'objet du litige politique. Le conflit politique n'oppose pas des groupes ayant des intérêts différents. Il oppose des logiques qui comptent différemment les parties et les parts de la communauté. Le combat des "riches" et des "pauvres" est le combat sur la possibilité même que ces mots se dédoublent, qu'ils instituent les catégories d'un autre compte de la communauté. Le litige politique porte sur l'existence litigieuse du propre de la politique avec son découpage des parties et des espaces de la communauté. Il y a deux manières de compter les parties de la communauté. La première ne compte que des parties réelles, des groupes effectifs définis par les différences dans la naissance, les fonctions, les places et les intérêts qui constituent le corps social, à l'exclusion de tout supplément. La seconde compte "en plus" une part des sans-part. On appellera la première police, la seconde politique.

*Thèse 8. La politique s'oppose spécifiquement à la police. La police est un partage du sensible dont le principe est l'absence de vide et de supplément.*

La police n'est pas une fonction sociale mais une constitution symbolique du social. L'essence de la police n'est pas la répression, pas même le contrôle sur le vivant. Son essence est un certain partage du sensible. On appellera partage du sensible la loi généralement implicite qui définit les formes de l'avoir-part en définissant d'abord les modes perceptifs dans lesquels ils s'inscrivent. Le partage du sensible est la découpe du monde et de monde, le *nemeîn* sur laquelle se fondent les *nomoi* de la communauté. Ce partage est à entendre au double sens du mot: ce qui sépare et exclut d'un côté, ce qui fait participer, de l'autre. Un partage du sensible, c'est la manière dont se détermine dans le sensible le rapport entre un commun partagé et la répartition de parts exclusives. Cette répartition qui anticipe, de son évidence sensible, la répartition des parts et des parties présuppose elle-même un partage de ce qui est visible et de ce qui ne l'est pas, de ce qui s'entend et de ce qui ne s'entend pas.

L'essence de la police est d'être un partage du sensible caractérisé par l'absence de vide et de supplément: la société y consiste en groupes voués à des modes de faire spécifiques, en places où ces occupations s'exercent, en modes d'être correspondant à ces occupations et à ces places. Dans cette adéquation des fonctions, des places et des manières d'être, il n'y a pas de place pour aucun vide. C'est cette exclusion de ce qu'"il n'y a pas" qui est le principe policier au coeur de la pratique étatique. L'essence de la politique

est de perturber cet arrangement en le suppléant d'une part des sans-part identifiée au tout même de la communauté. Le litige politique est celui qui fait exister la politique en la séparant de la police qui constamment la fait disparaître, soit en la niant purement et simplement soit en identifiant sa logique à la sienne propre. La politique est d'abord une intervention sur le visible et l'énonçable.

*Thèse 9. Le travail essentiel de la politique est la configuration de son propre espace. Il est de faire voir le monde de ses sujets et de ses opérations. L'essence de la politique est la manifestation du dissensus, comme présence de deux mondes en un seul.*

Partons d'une donnée empirique: l'intervention policière dans l'espace public ne consiste pas d'abord à interpeller les manifestants mais à disperser les manifestations. La police n'est pas la loi qui interpelle l'individu (le "hé! vous, là-bas" d'Althusser), sauf à la confondre avec la sujétion religieuse. Elle est d'abord le rappel à l'évidence de ce qu'il y a, ou plutôt qu'il n'y a pas: "Circulez! il n'y a rien à voir". La police dit qu'il n'y a rien à voir sur une chaussée, rien à faire qu'à y circuler. Elle dit que l'espace de la circulation n'est que l'espace de la circulation. La politique consiste à transformer cet espace de circulation en espace de manifestation d'un sujet: le peuple, les travailleurs, les citoyens, etc., sujet dont la consistance n'est rien d'autre que sa capacité de se manifester et de manifester par là-même une autre configuration du commun. Elle consiste à refigurer l'espace, ce qu'il y a à faire, à y voir, à y nommer. Elle est le litige institué sur le partage du sensible, sur ce *nemeîn* qui fonde tout *nomos* communautaire.

Ce partage qui constitue la politique n'est jamais donné sous la forme du lot, de la propriété qui destine ou oblige à la politique. Ces propriétés sont précisément litigieuses, dans leur compréhension comme dans leur extension. Il en va exemplairement ainsi pour ces propriétés qui définissent chez Aristote la capacité politique ou la destination à une "vie selon le bien" séparée de la simple vie. Rien de plus clair, en apparence, que la déduction tirée au livre I de la *Politique* du *semeïon* que constitue le privilège humain du *logos*, propre à manifester une communauté dans l'*aisthesis* du juste et de l'injuste, et la *phônè*, seulement propre à exprimer les sensations du plaisir et du déplaisir subis. Qui est en présence d'un animal possédant le langage articulé et son pouvoir de manifestation sait qu'il a affaire avec un animal humain, donc politique. La seule difficulté pratique est de savoir à quel signe on reconnaît le signe, comment on s'assure que l'animal humain qui fait du bruit devant vous avec sa bouche articule bien un discours, au lieu d'exprimer seulement un état. Celui que l'on ne veut pas connaître comme



être politique, on commence par ne pas le voir comme porteur des signes de la politicité, par ne pas comprendre ce qu'il dit, par ne pas entendre que c'est un discours qui sort de sa bouche. Et il en va de même pour l'opposition, si aisément invoquée, de l'obscurité vie domestique et privée et de la lumineuse vie publique des égaux. Pour refuser à une catégorie, par exemple les travailleurs ou les femmes, la qualité de sujets politiques, il a suffi traditionnellement de constater qu'ils appartenaient à un espace "domestique", à un espace séparé de la vie publique et d'où ne pouvaient sortir que des gémissements ou des cris exprimant souffrance, faim ou colère, mais pas de discours manifestant une *aisthesis* commune. Et la politique de ces catégories a toujours consisté à requalifier ces espaces, à y faire voir le lieu d'une communauté, fût-ce celle du simple litige, à se faire voir et entendre comme êtres parlants, participants à une *aisthesis* commune. Elle a consisté faire voir ce qui ne se voyait pas, entendre comme de la parole ce qui n'était audible que comme du bruit, manifester comme sentiment d'un bien et d'un mal communs ce qui ne se présentait que comme expression de plaisir ou de douleur particuliers.

L'essence de la politique est le *dissensus*. Le *dissensus* n'est pas la confrontation des intérêts ou des opinions. Il est la manifestation d'un écart du sensible à lui-même. La manifestation politique fait voir ce qui n'avait pas de raisons d'être vu, elle loge un monde dans un autre, par exemple le monde où l'usine est un lieu public dans celui où elle est un lieu privé, le monde où les travailleurs parlent et parlent de la communauté dans celui où ils crient pour exprimer leur seule douleur. C'est la raison pour laquelle la politique ne peut s'identifier au modèle de l'action communicationnelle. Ce modèle présuppose les partenaires déjà constitués comme tels et les formes discursives de l'échange comme impliquant une communauté du discours, dont la contrainte est toujours explicitable. Or le propre du *dissensus* politique, c'est que les partenaires ne sont pas constitués non plus que l'objet et la scène même de la discussion. Celui qui fait voir qu'il appartient à un monde commun que l'autre ne voit pas ne peut se prévaloir de la logique implicite d'aucune pragmatique de la communication. L'ouvrier qui argumente le caractère public d'une affaire "domestique" de salaire doit manifester le monde dans lequel son argument est un argument et le manifester pour celui qui n'a pas de cadre où le voir. L'argumentation politique est en même temps la manifestation du monde où elle est un argument, adressé par un sujet qualifié pour cela, sur un objet identifié, à un destinataire qui est requis de voir l'objet et d'entendre l'argument qu'il n'a "normalement" pas de raison de voir ni d'entendre. Elle est la construction d'un monde paradoxal qui met ensemble des mondes séparés.

La politique n'a pas ainsi de lieu propre ni de sujets naturels. Une manifestation est politique non parce qu'elle a tel lieu et porte sur tel objet mais parce que sa forme est celle d'un affrontement entre deux partages du sensible. Un sujet politique n'est pas un groupe d'intérêts ou d'idées. C'est l'opérateur d'un dispositif particulier de subjectivation du litige par lequel il y a de la politique. La manifestation politique est ainsi toujours ponctuelle et ses sujets toujours précaires. La différence politique est toujours en bord de disparition: le peuple près de s'abîmer dans la population ou dans la race, les prolétaires près de se confondre avec les travailleurs défendant leurs intérêts, l'espace de manifestation publique du peuple avec l'*agora* des marchands, etc...

La déduction de la politique à partir d'un monde spécifique des égaux ou des hommes libres, opposé à un autre monde vécu de la nécessité prend donc pour fondement de la politique, ce qui est précisément l'objet de son litige. Elle s'oblige ainsi elle-même à la cécité de ceux qui "ne voient pas" ce qui n'a pas lieu d'être vu. En témoigne exemplairement le passage de l'*Essai sur la révolution* où Hannah Arendt commente le texte de John Adams, identifiant le malheur du pauvre au fait de "ne pas être vu". Une telle identification, commente-t-elle, ne pouvait elle-même émaner que d'un homme appartenant à la communauté privilégiée des égaux. Elle pouvait, en revanche, "à peine être comprise" par les hommes des catégories concernées. On pourrait s'étonner de l'extraordinaire surdité que cette affirmation oppose à la multiplicité des discours et manifestations des "pauvres", concernant précisément le mode de leur visibilité. Mais cette surdité n'a rien d'accidentel. Elle fait cercle avec l'admission comme partage originel, fondant la politique, de ce qui est précisément l'objet permanent du litige, constituant la politique. Elle fait cercle avec la définition de l'*homo laborans* dans un partage des "modes de vie". Ce cercle n'est pas celui d'une théoricienne particulière. Il est le cercle même de la "philosophie politique".

*Thèse 10. Pour autant que le propre de la philosophie politique est de fonder l'agir politique dans un mode d'être propre, le propre de la philosophie politique est d'effacer le litige constitutif de la politique. C'est dans la description même du monde de la politique que la philosophie effectue cet effacement. Aussi son efficace se perpétue-t-elle jusque dans les descriptions non-philosophiques ou anti-philosophiques de ce monde.*

Que le propre de la politique soit d'être le fait d'un sujet qui "commande" par le fait même de n'avoir pas de titre à commander; que le principe du commencement/commandement soit par là irrémédiablement



divisé et que la communauté politique soit proprement une communauté du litige, tel est le secret de la politique initialement rencontré par la philosophie. S'il y a un privilège des "Anciens" sur les "Modernes", c'est dans la perception de ce secret qu'il se situe et non dans l'opposition de la communauté du bien à celle de l'utile. Sous le terme anodin de "philosophie politique", se cache la rencontre violente de la philosophie avec l'exception philosophique à la loi de l'*arkhè* et l'effort de la philosophie pour replacer la politique sous cette loi. Le *Gorgias*, la *République*, le *Politique*, les *Lois* témoignent d'un même effort pour effacer le paradoxe ou le scandale du "septième titre", pour faire de la démocratie une simple espèce de l'indéterminable principe du "gouvernement du plus fort" auquel s'oppose seul dès lors le seul gouvernement des savants. Ils témoignent d'un même effort pour mettre la communauté sous une loi unique de partage et pour expulser la partie vide du *dèmos* du corps communautaire.

Mais cette expulsion ne se fait pas dans la simple forme de l'opposition entre le bon régime de la communauté une et hiérarchisée selon son principe d'unité et le mauvais régimes de la division et du désordre. Elle se fait dans la présupposition même qui identifie une forme politique à un mode de vie. Et cette présupposition opère déjà dans les procédures de la description des "mauvais" régimes, et de la démocratie en particulier. Le tout de la politique, on l'a dit, se joue dans l'interprétation de "l'anarchie" démocratique. En l'identifiant à la dispersion des désirs de l'homme démocratique, Platon transforme la forme de la politique en mode d'existence, et le vide en trop-plein. Avant d'être le théoricien de la "cité idéale" ou de la cité "close", Platon est le fondateur de la conception anthropologique du politique, celle qui identifie la politique au déploiement des propriétés d'un type d'homme ou d'un mode de vie. Tel "homme", tel "mode de vie", telle cité, c'est là, avant tout discours sur les lois ou les modes d'éducation de la cité idéale, avant même le partage des classes de la communauté, le partage du sensible qui annule la singularité politique.

Le geste initial de la "philosophie politique" est ainsi à double portée. D'un côté, Platon fonde une communauté qui est l'effectuation d'un principe non divisé, une communauté strictement définie comme corps commun avec ses places et fonctions et avec ses formes d'intériorisation du commun. Il fonde une archi-politique comme loi d'unité entre les "occupations" de la cité, son "ethos", c'est-à-dire sa manière d'habiter un séjour et son "nomos", comme loi mais aussi comme *ton* spécifique selon lequel cet éthos se manifeste. Cette étho-logie de la communauté rend à nouveau indiscernables politique et police. Et la philosophie politique, pour autant qu'elle veut donner à la communauté un fondement un, est condamnée à

réidentifier politique et police, à annuler la politique dans le geste qui la fonde.

Mais Platon invente aussi un mode de description “concret” de la production des formes politiques. Il invente en somme les formes même de la récusation de la “cité idéale”, les formes d’opposition réglées entre l’apriorisme” philosophique et l’analyse sociologique ou science-politicienne concrète des formes de la politique comme expression de modes de vie. Ce seconds legs est plus profond et plus durable que le premier. La sociologie du politique est la seconde ressource, le *deuteron plous* de la philosophie politique, qui accomplit, éventuellement “contre” elle, son projet fondamental: fonder la communauté sur un partage univoque du sensible. En particulier l’analyse tocquevillienne de la démocratie, dont les innombrables variantes et succédanés nourrissent les discours sur la démocratie moderne, l’âge des masses, l’individu de masse, etc. s’inscrit dans la continuité du geste théorique qui annule la singularité structurelle du titre sans titre et de la part des sans part, en redécrivant la démocratie comme phénomène social, effectuation collective des propriétés d’un type d’homme.

Inversement, les revendications de la pureté du *bios politikos*, de la constitution républicaine de la communauté contre l’individu ou la masse démocratique, et l’opposition du politique et du social participent de l’efficace du même noeud entre l’*apriorisme* de la refondation “républicaine” et la description sociologique de la démocratie. L’opposition du “politique” et du “social”, par quelque bout qu’on la prenne, est une affaire entièrement définie dans le cadre de la “philosophie politique”, c’est-à-dire au sein du refoulement philosophique de la politique. Le “retour de la politique” et de la “philosophie politique” aujourd’hui proclamé mime, sans en saisir le principe ni l’enjeu, le geste initial de la “philosophie politique”. Il est en ce sens l’oubli radical de la politique et du rapport tendu de la philosophie à la politique. Le thème sociologique de la fin de la politique dans la société post-moderne et le thème “politiste” du retour de la politique s’originent l’un et l’autre dans le double geste initial de la “philosophie politique” et concourent au même oubli de la politique.

Thèse 11. La “fin de la politique” et le “retour de la politique” sont deux manières complémentaires d’annuler la politique dans la relation simple entre un état du social et un état du dispositif étatique. Le consensus est le nom vulgaire de cette annulation.

L’essence de la politique réside dans les modes de subjectivation dissensuels qui manifestent la différence de la société à elle-même. L’essence



du consensus n'est pas la discussion pacifique et l'accord raisonnable opposés au conflit et à la violence. L'essence du consensus est l'annulation du dissensus comme écart du sensible à lui-même, l'annulation des sujets excédentaires, la réduction du peuple à la somme des parties du corps social et de la communauté politique aux rapports d'intérêts et d'aspirations de ces différentes parties. Le consensus est la réduction de la politique à la police. Il est la "fin de la politique", c'est-à-dire non pas l'accomplissement de ses fins mais simplement le retour de l'état "normal" des choses qui est celui de sa non-existence. La "fin de la politique" est le bord toujours présent de la politique, laquelle est une activité toujours ponctuelle et provisoire. "Retour de la politique" et "Fin de la politique" sont alors deux interprétations symétriques qui ont le même effet: effacer le concept même de l'exceptionnalité politique, et la précarité qui est inhérente à son principe. Le thème du "retour de la politique", en proclamant la fin des usurpations du "social" et le retour à la politique "pure", occulte simplement le fait que le "social" n'est aucunement une sphère d'existence propre mais un objet litigieux de la politique. L'objet du "mouvement social", c'est en effet le partage des mondes. Aussi la "fin du social" est-elle simplement la fin du litige politique sur le partage des mondes. Le "retour de la politique" est alors l'affirmation qu'il y a un lieu propre de la politique. Mais le lieu propre de la politique ainsi isolé ne peut être autre chose que le lieu étatique. Les théoriciens du retour de la politique affirment en fait sa péremption. Ils l'identifient à la pratique étatique, laquelle a pour principe la suppression de la politique.

La thèse sociologique de la fin de la politique pose symétriquement l'existence d'un état du social tel que la politique n'y ait plus de raison d'être, soit qu'elle ait accompli ses fins en amenant précisément cet état (version exotérique américaine, hegel-fukuyamesque), soit que ses formes ne soient plus adaptées à la fluidité et à l'artificialité des relations économiques et sociales actuelles (version ésotérique européenne, heideggero-situationniste). La thèse se résume alors à déclarer que le capitalisme, poursuivi jusqu'au bout de sa logique, entraîne la péremption de la politique. Elle conclut alors soit au deuil de la politique devant le triomphe du Léviathan capitaliste devenu règne immatériel du simulacre, soit à sa transformation en formes éclatées, segmentaires, ludiques, cybernétiques, etc.; adaptées à ces formes du social qui correspondent au stade suprême du capitalisme. Elle méconnaît ainsi que, précisément, la politique n'a de raison d'être dans aucun état du social, et que la contradiction des deux logiques est une donnée constante qui définit la contingence et la précarité propres à la politique. C'est-à-dire que, par un détour marxiste, elle valide à sa manière la thèse

de la "philosophie politique" qui fonde la politique dans un mode de vie propre et la thèse consensuelle qui identifie la communauté politique au corps social et en conséquence la pratique politique à la pratique étatique. Le débat entre les "philosophes" du retour de la politique et les "sociologues" de sa fin est ainsi un simple débat sur l'ordre dans lequel il convient de prendre les présuppositions de la "philosophie politique" pour interpréter la pratique consensuelle d'annulation de la politique.



Olivier Remaud  
*La question du pouvoir : Foucault et Spinoza*

I.

Dans un texte d'une profondeur remarquable – »Pour une histoire naturelle des normes,«<sup>1</sup> P. Macherey conduit une interprétation spinoziste de la pensée de Foucault qui l'amène à découvrir deux caractères principaux, on pourrait dire deux modes, de la norme : la nécessité et la naturalité. Ni plus, ni moins, l'exigence d'une confrontation des analyses spinozistes du champ politique avec les analyses des relations de pouvoir selon Foucault est acquise. Mais, pour autant, l'exercice lui-même d'une lecture parallèle de Foucault et de Spinoza n'en devient pas plus facile. Cet exercice demeure délicat alors même que, d'une certaine manière, nous y sommes contraints. Il est délicat parce qu'il fait porter nos efforts sur un auteur que Foucault ne mobilise que très peu même si, dans ses derniers jours, à l'hôpital, il relit l'*Ethique*. Et contraints, nous le sommes car loin de signifier l'abandon à un quelconque déterminisme de l'analyse, ces propos veulent plutôt confirmer la *réalité* des rapports entre la philosophie et ce qui apparaît sinon comme son opposé, du moins régulièrement comme une sorte d'épiphénomène gênant : nous voulons parler de la question du pouvoir. On voit alors où peut conduire, en premier lieu, le principe d'une relecture de Spinoza dans laquelle Foucault fournirait une aide précieuse. Il ne s'agit pas de s'interroger sur une intention qui n'aurait pas eu la chance de s'incarner dans la matérialité d'une étude consacrée à Spinoza, contrairement à ce que Foucault a fait avec Nietzsche par exemple, mais de prendre à la lettre l'affirmation du caractère toujours déjà politique de la philosophie. Encore faut-il s'entendre sur la signification que l'on accorde à ce thème.

Il semble à première vue qu'il n'y ait pas, entre les filets du réseau propre à toute communauté, d'îlots intermédiaires de liberté dans lesquels le terme de pouvoir, subitement, ne signifierait plus rien, comme si la liberté pouvait être pensée indépendamment du pouvoir, dans une sorte de socialité

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<sup>1</sup> »Pour une histoire naturelle des normes«, in *Michel Foucault philosophe*, Seuil, 1989, p. 203-221.

faussetment heureuse<sup>2</sup>. » Nous sommes tous des gouvernés, et à ce titre solidaires« s'exclame Foucault dans les pages du journal *Libération*<sup>3</sup>, en une formule qui vaudrait aussi pour Spinoza. Dès cette première approche, il devient clair qu'interroger le pouvoir, c'est d'abord s'apercevoir que nous sommes de façon permanente pris dans ses rêts. Apparaît alors cet étrange sentiment océanique du pouvoir qui s'apparente au sentiment avec lequel *L'ordre du discours* s'inaugure. Mais il y a une telle nécessité du pouvoir que je n'ai pas même, contrairement à ce qui se passe pour le discours, à souhaiter d'être enveloppé par lui, d'être précédé par lui. Je le suis avant même d'entrer en action. Le pouvoir n'a pas de rapports de commencement avec moi de la même manière que je n'entretiens pas de rapports de décision avec lui. Et pourtant, cette fluidité appartient encore, et on pourrait même dire surtout, à un ordre de l'existence qui engendre souvent des effets bien réels. Reste à voir quel type de communauté il est possible d'envisager, engagés que nous sommes dans ce dispositif. Afin de saisir la réalité de cet océan dans lequel je nage à chaque fois que j'agis, penchons-nous sur les thèses majeures de Foucault présentées par lui-même sous une forme concentrée.

Il est ainsi au moins un texte dans lequel Foucault se montre profondément spinoziste. C'est le début de son résumé des cours de 1975-1976 au Collège de France :

» Pour mener l'analyse concrète des rapports de pouvoir, il faut abandonner le modèle juridique de la souveraineté. Celui-ci en effet présuppose l'individu comme sujet de droits naturels ou de pouvoirs primitifs; il se donne pour objectif de rendre compte de la genèse idéale de l'Etat; enfin il fait de la loi la manifestation fondamentale du pouvoir. Il faudrait essayer d'étudier le pouvoir, non pas à partir des termes primitifs de la relation, mais à partir de la relation elle-même en tant que c'est elle qui détermine les éléments sur lesquels elle porte: plutôt que de demander à des sujets idéaux ce qu'ils ont pu céder d'eux-mêmes ou de leurs pouvoirs pour se laisser assujettir, il faut chercher comment les relations d'assujettissement peuvent fabriquer des sujets. De même, plutôt que de rechercher la forme unique, le point central d'où toutes les formes de pouvoir dériveraient par voie de conséquence ou de développement, il faut d'abord les laisser valoir dans leur multiplicité, leurs différences, leur spécificité,

<sup>2</sup> » (...) le pouvoir est coextensif au corps social : il n'y a pas, entre les mailles de son réseau, des plages de libertés intermédiaires«, » Pouvoirs et stratégies«, entretien avec J. Rancière, in *Dits et écrits*, éd. sous la direction de D. Defert et F. Ewald, Gallimard, 1994, T. II, p. 425.

<sup>3</sup> » Face aux gouvernements, les droits de l'homme«, in *Libération* (30 juin-1er juillet 1984), suite à l'affaire des *boat-people* vietnamiens.



leur réversibilité: les étudier donc comme des rapports de forces qui s'entrecroisent, renvoient les uns aux autres, convergent ou au contraire s'opposent et tendent à s'annuler. Enfin plutôt que d'accorder un privilège à la loi comme manifestation de pouvoir, il vaut mieux essayer de repérer les différentes techniques de contrainte qu'il met en oeuvre<sup>4</sup>

Dans ce passage extrêmement dense où chaque mot est important de telle sorte qu'une analytique nouvelle du pouvoir puisse en sortir, on décèle la ferme volonté de ne pas élider la matérialité du pouvoir.

Il n'est pas possible de se risquer à comprendre de manière abstraite le pouvoir. Nous disons »se risquer« car lire le pouvoir comme un abstrait, c'est encourir le danger de se décaler par rapport à l'effectivité belliqueuse du pouvoir qu'il faut néanmoins parvenir à comprendre afin de ne pas se perdre dans son jeu de représentations. D'ailleurs, »le Pouvoir, ça n'existe pas<sup>5</sup>. Et si quelque chose comme le pouvoir n'existe pas, le premier moment du décalage va précisément coïncider avec la décision de forger des modèles de compréhension d'une réalité qui apparaît pourtant rétive à la notion même de modèle. On le sait, le propre d'un modèle, comme construction théorique, est de créer l'espace d'une congruence. Un modèle articule toujours de façon congruente un ensemble explicatif de concepts et de lois avec un autre ensemble de propositions qui témoignent de l'ordre observable des phénomènes et qui y renvoient. Dans l'espace de cette congruence, c'est la mesure précise du degré de reconstruction du donné qui permet de parler de modèle scientifique. Or ce que dit Foucault, c'est que les effets de ce que l'on appelle pouvoir ne se laissent pas reconstruire à partir d'une quelconque essence du pouvoir. Celui-ci ne symbolise pas un noyau de raisons déterminantes qui se cachent derrière le voile des phénomènes. Il ne peut donc pas y avoir de modèle du pouvoir car le pouvoir n'est pas intelligible analogiquement, selon une opération de congruence. Abandonner le paradigme explicatif du modèle, c'est découvrir que le pouvoir n'exprime rien, ne manifeste rien.

C'est pourquoi il faut lire le pouvoir comme un concret, un concret qui ne présuppose rien mais qui oblige à se placer à l'intérieur même des effets de ce qui est analysé. La fiction d'un sujet porteur de droits naturels qu'il remet au souverain au moment même où il le désigne comme tel, est

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<sup>4</sup> »Il faut défendre la société«, in *Résumé des cours 1970-1982*, Conférences, essais et leçons du Collège de France, Julliard, 1989, p. 85-86. Voir aussi *Surveiller et punir*, Tel-Gallimard, 1995, p. 227, et *La volonté de savoir*, Gallimard, 1990, p. 119-120.

<sup>5</sup> »Le pouvoir, comment s'exerce-t-il ?«, in *Michel Foucault. Un parcours philosophique*, H. Dreyfus et P. Rabinow, Folio-essais, 1992, p. 308.

donc inutile. Il en va de même pour cette autre fiction, encore plus légendaire, de la loi. Autrement dit, le pouvoir ne renvoie pas à des déterminations que l'on échange ni à une instance supérieure qui autorise ou censure, distribue le permis et le défendu. Sans système d'échange ni point central vers lequel ces échanges convergeraient, le modèle analogique du pouvoir devient radicalement insuffisant pour comprendre la «nature» et la fonction, c'est-à-dire, la réalité du pouvoir. De cet aveuglement caractéristique touchant la question du pouvoir, Spinoza témoigne déjà et dans les mêmes termes.

On aurait ainsi tort de ne pas rapporter ce discours sur le pouvoir qui retourne les valeurs traditionnelles de l'intelligibilité à un concret, d'une extériorité à un champ d'immanence, c'est-à-dire d'un mouvement par lequel on croit que c'est la loi qui crée le pouvoir au mouvement qui fait de la loi un effet parmi d'autres dans un ensemble de relations, c'est ce que fait Spinoza entre le § 1 et le § 2. Autour d'une nature humaine postulée, accommodée aux propres désirs des «philosophes», les naissances spontanées d'un ensemble de chimères liées à un imaginaire purement «théorique» du pouvoir s'organisent inlassablement pour creuser la différence entre la genèse idéale d'une humanité sociale et la description d'une réalité politique. Mais afin de respecter la *verità effettuale* de toute société, Spinoza se tourne vers la composition concrète et variable du pouvoir et se sépare de son modèle «philosophico-utopique». Reconnaisant la permanence des leçons de l'expérience qui révèle la fonction constitutive des passions dans l'édification de l'Etat, il devient désormais possible pour le philosophe, à la faveur des enseignements des «politiques» (dont Machiavel), de trouver les principes qui «s'accordent le mieux avec la pratique». S'accorder avec la pratique, c'est, pour Spinoza, ne plus concevoir la théorie et la pratique comme deux entités numériquement distinctes. En d'autres termes, c'est comprendre, comme dit Foucault, que «le pouvoir n'existe qu'en acte»<sup>6</sup>.

En posant autrement le problème des rapports entre la théorie et la pratique, Spinoza rompt lui aussi avec une conception juridique du pouvoir. Il faut rappeler ici que le *Traité politique* est l'ouvrage de Spinoza dans lequel la notion de contrat disparaît et celle de loi voit son importance réunie<sup>7</sup>. Dans ces conditions, la question que pose Spinoza est claire: comment penser un exercice non-juridique (au sens traditionnel) mais toujours politique (en

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>7</sup> Voir A. Matheron, «Le problème de l'évolution de Spinoza du *Traité théologico-politique* au *Traité politique*», in *Spinoza. Issues and Direction*, ed. E. Curley & P.-F. Moreau, E. M. Brill, Chicago, 1990, p. 258-270.



un sens cette fois-ci nouveau) de la raison? Quelles en sont les conséquences pour l'analyse du thème de la souveraineté?

Dans sa lettre à Jarig Jelles du 2 juin 1674, Spinoza fixe sommairement mais définitivement le cadre de sa philosophie politique. Il se distingue de Hobbes, dit-il, en ce qu'il maintient le droit naturel, en ce que le Souverain n'a de droits sur les sujets que dans la mesure où il l'emporte sur eux par sa puissance et, troisième point, en ce que cela se produit toujours dans l'état de nature. Le droit naturel se définit donc par une certaine puissance déterminée qui appartient à chaque individu. Le mouvement par lequel la société est engendrée est celui d'une continuité radicale entre l'état de nature et l'état civil de sorte que la société ne se comprend que comme un jeu de puissances continuées.

On peut alors reprendre les catégories que Foucault utilise dans le passage déjà cité du Cours au Collège de France afin de décrire l'espace des relations de pouvoir. De cette manière, il est possible de relire les moments essentiels de l'analyse spinoziste :

– la «multiplicité» : plus qu'un droit de l'individu, le droit naturel concerne une puissance qui est celle des »individus pris ensemble« (c. 16 du *Traité théologico-politique*). L'état de nature n'est donc pas une »nature simple« ou alors la caractéristique du simple, chez Spinoza, est d'être déjà multiple, de cette multiplicité qui concerne, dans l'état de nature, des individus juxtaposés et non encore »policés«. L'état de nature est un état fondamentalement complexe et le passage à l'état civil n'est jamais véritablement un passage. En effet, on ne passe pas de rien à quelque chose, mais de quelque chose de complexe à quelque chose d'encore plus complexe. Le nom de cette complexité, chez Spinoza, est la »multitudo« qui accroît ou diminue, selon les circonstances, sa puissance d'agir. Du coup, la souveraineté se définit elle-même de façon multiple. Elle devient la puissance d'une complexité, celle de la multitude, c'est-à-dire des puissances qui se continuent de l'état de nature à l'état civil.

– les »différences« : ce sont celles du jeu individuel de chacun qui suit les lois de son propre appétit. Autrement dit, autant de puissances singulières, autant d'affections en présence, autant de relations de pouvoir. La théorie des passions ouvre sur une théorie des micro-pouvoirs dans laquelle le droit se mesure et s'égale à la puissance. Tout le problème du politique chez Spinoza est précisément de retourner le discontinu introduit dans le corps social par certaines passions individuelles en un continu de la multitude qui puisse agir comme si elle était guidée par la raison.

– la »spécificité« : chaque concentration de la puissance d'agir n'est pas égale à une autre. Aussi la typologie des gouvernements (chaque

gouvernement étant une concentration spécifique de la puissance d'agir de la multitude) doit-elle se comprendre non pas de manière classique mais dans l'horizon des relations de pouvoirs propres à chaque régime. Pas d'interrogation sur le meilleur des régimes, pas de hiérarchisation mais une analyse fonctionnaliste des différentes relations d'équilibre ou de déséquilibre entre les puissances de la multitude et l'instance politique.

– la «réversibilité» : elle est justifiée par le fait même que l'état de nature comme état de relations de pouvoir se poursuit dans l'état civil de telle manière que le consensus n'est jamais acquis. L'absence d'un droit contractuel au profit d'un déplacement de puissances de l'état de nature à l'état civil permet de penser une autre forme du lien social. C'est montrer que les métamorphoses d'une communauté sont plus complexes qu'un accord nécessaire entre les membres d'un groupe et que les conditions de maintien de l'état politique doivent être renouvelées à chaque instant. Le pouvoir est pris dans la continuité des puissances qui vont du roi à la multitude, à tel point que l'autorité du roi dépend plus de la multitude que de lui seul. Spinoza ne limite donc pas le pouvoir à la seule figure de la domination car la puissance elle-même ne se limite pas à l'appareil d'état.

«Multiplicité», «différences», «spécificité» et «réversibilité» constituent ainsi les relations fondamentales de la conception spinoziste du pouvoir. Et l'on voit combien affirmer l'antécédence et la continuation d'une puissance sur et dans la souveraineté aboutit à rendre impossible toute autonomie du politique qui réduirait ce dernier au schéma de l'autorité. Le pouvoir est fondamentalement l'effet d'un paquet de relations de la même manière que la souveraineté est l'effet d'une puissance multiple. Spinoza comprend que le pouvoir ne se transforme que de lui-même jusqu'à absorber les autorités elles-mêmes.

On observe donc chez Spinoza la première manifestation d'une véritable décision politique qui consiste à lier l'abandon de la notion de contrat et la réduction de l'efficacité du modèle de la loi en s'appuyant sur une autre conception de la souveraineté dans laquelle celle-ci dépend avant tout d'un ensemble premier de puissances. La critique des idéautés juridiques coïncide avec la découverte d'un autre point de vue pour analyser le politique : il faut dorénavant se placer à l'intérieur même des relations de puissances qui agissent au fondement de l'état puisque celles-ci se continuent dans l'état lui-même<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Quiconque connaît le *Traité politique* aurait en effet du mal à ne pas voir dans certains passages de Foucault la figure absente-présente de Spinoza, ne serait-ce que dans ce dépassement de Machiavel qui doit s'opérer dans le champ d'une immanence



Toutes ces remarques nous mènent à la conclusion suivante : il n'y a pas de phénoménologie possible du pouvoir parce que la phénoménologie fonctionne toujours avec une structure de donation minimale, c'est-à-dire, avec un noyau d'analogie fondamentale. Or le pouvoir ne manifeste rien. Il est un ensemble de relations de puissances. C'est en ce sens que le pouvoir relève bien plutôt d'une technologie des affects. Cette question de l'affect est précisément celle par laquelle on va pouvoir expliquer ce que l'on a encore négligé dans le texte du Collège de France : le sujet «fabriqué». Ici Foucault et Spinoza se rejoignent immédiatement car savoir comment un sujet peut être fabriqué par des relations de pouvoir, c'est, pour Spinoza, découvrir le champ d'une pratique, celle de l'obéissance par laquelle on peut «régner sur les âmes», et d'un programme, celui qui consiste à réguler le nombre de la multitude. On découvre alors combien l'état, loin d'abolir les interactions entre les micro-pouvoirs, les poursuit, comme l'état de nature se poursuit dans l'état civil, en les particularisant ou en en créant de nouveaux. Dans les termes de Foucault, il n'y a pas quelque chose comme *le* pouvoir car le pouvoir n'existe qu'en acte, c'est-à-dire dans un espace de multiplicité, de différences, de spécificité et de réversibilité. Mais si le pouvoir n'existe qu'en acte, il est «un ensemble d'actions sur des actions possibles» qui consistent à «aménager la probabilité»<sup>9</sup>.

## II.

D'une nouvelle élaboration de la teneur du lien social (connexion de puissances) et de la transformation du pouvoir lui-même (ensemble de ces connexions), Spinoza déduit une autre métamorphose politique, celle du rapport entre l'instance d'autorité et la société (question de la stabilité de ces connexions). C'est à l'intérieur de cette troisième opération, entre l'instance politique et la société, que se glisse la technologie de l'affect.

Dans son histoire de la gouvernementalité, Foucault lui-même projette d'accorder une place à Spinoza en le citant comme modèle théorique, parmi d'autres, de la volonté de savoir<sup>10</sup>. Est-il donc possible d'identifier la

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radicale : «Ainsi, on échappera à ce système Souverain-Loi qui a si longtemps fasciné la pensée politique. Et, s'il est vrai que Machiavel fut un des rares – et c'était là sans doute le scandale de son «cynisme» – à penser le pouvoir du Prince en termes de rapports de force, peut-être faut-il faire un pas de plus, se passer du personnage du Prince, et déchiffrer les mécanismes de pouvoir à partir d'une *stratégie immanente aux rapports de force*», in *La Volonté de savoir*, éd. cit., p. 128, c'est nous qui soulignons.

<sup>9</sup> Voir Dreyfus et Rabinow, *op. cit.*, p. 313-314.

<sup>10</sup> Voir le *Résumé des cours*, éd. cit., p. 12.

présence, dans son oeuvre, des principaux éléments d'une prise de conscience à l'égard du changement des objets politiques dont témoigne une bonne partie du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, c'est-à-dire du passage de »l'anatomo-politique« au »bio-politique« ?

En décrivant le mode de gouvernement de l'état de Moïse, Spinoza, dans le *Traité théologico-politique*, inscrit la question du gouvernement dans celle de la production de l'obéissance. Une observation générale : un état se maintient en entretenant la crainte mais, en même temps, il ne peut se conserver en usant de la crainte seule. Il doit recourir à l'allié principal de la crainte, l'espoir. C'est ce couple d'affects que l'on peut utiliser à bien des fins. Un exemple : l'état théocratique, très ingénieux en ce sens, a choisi d'« instituer un pouvoir appartenant à la collectivité de façon que tous soient tenus d'obéir à eux-mêmes et non à leurs semblables »<sup>11</sup>. On le voit, selon Spinoza, la force de la théocratie, la condition de son équilibre ainsi que de sa durée exceptionnelle par rapport aux autres régimes, est de se faire passer pour une démocratie et d'engendrer un sentiment de confiance dans le peuple afin de pouvoir retourner, en temps voulu, cette puissance de la multitude contre elle-même. Nombreux sont les passages du *Traité théologico-politique* dans lesquels il s'agit ainsi d'analyser comment la théocratie peut fournir à un peuple les conditions d'une confiance en soi qui frôle (illusoirement) la réalisation d'une autonomie, une confiance en soi que ce régime parvient toujours à convertir en une disposition à l'obéissance et à la dévotion. En conséquence, si l'individu croit, conformément à l'illusion de démocratie qu'entretient le projet théocratique, obéir à ses propres volontés, il n'est pourtant déjà plus lui-même au moment de cette croyance. La théocratie »fabrique« en ce sens un sujet politique en inscrivant la soumission dans son âme comme dans son corps. L'utilisation théocratique des passions, dans le contrat historico-imaginaire (bien plus que juridique) qu'ont passé les sujets avec les autorités, correspond ainsi à ce que Foucault appelle »agir sur les actions«.

Mais la seconde raison de cette nouvelle insertion dans une histoire de la gouvernementalité tient à ce que l'on pourrait appeler »l'effet statistique de la notion de multitude«. On a vu comment Spinoza fondait sa politique sur la notion de multitude. On vient de voir comment celle-ci pouvait être le théâtre des plus grandes coercitions. Une autre entrée dans la politique spinoziste, en accord avec la conceptualité de Foucault, pourrait être l'entrée statistique qui, d'ailleurs, ne serait qu'un effet supplémentaire de la position non-contractuelle de Spinoza. La multitude n'étant pas

<sup>11</sup> *Traité théologico-politique*, trad. C. Appuhn, GF-Flammarion, 1965, c. V, p. 106.



cessible, il ne faut pas en effet s'imaginer la tromper de telle façon qu'on arriverait un jour à la situation dans laquelle elle abandonnerait enfin la totalité de ses puissances à une personne juridique. Il faut bien plutôt commencer d'apprendre à la gérer. Si le *Traité politique* tente d'établir les mécanismes institutionnels qui rendent difficiles les abus de pouvoir, il mobilise, pour ce faire, une catégorie que Foucault fait dépendre de la mutation de »l'anatomo-politique« en »bio-politique«.

La politique de Spinoza rapproche ainsi souvent la notion de multitude de son objectif statistique :

»La puissance du pouvoir politique et, par conséquent, son droit doit être évalué selon le nombre des citoyens (*Nam imperii potentia et consequenter jus ex civium numero aestimanda est*) «<sup>12</sup>

On le voit, la souveraineté dépend toujours d'une puissance antécédente à tel point que son droit est lui-même lié à une autre figure de cette puissance : le nombre. En d'autres termes, toute décision politique effective ne peut s'accomplir qu'une fois le rapport entre l'*imperium* et la *multitudo* numériquement mesuré.

Au moyen de ce nouvel outil, on décline les configurations de chaque gouvernement. La »chance« de la monarchie est d'avoir un Conseil royal qui contrôle le pouvoir du souverain en représentant assez largement toutes les couches du peuple. En revanche, dans l'aristocratie, le nombre fait état d'un paradoxe : il faut une assemblée assez nombreuse pour que les intérêts individuels ne prennent pas le dessus et, en même temps, la présence de cette assemblée permet de ne pas recourir à un conseil, c'est-à-dire de ne pas représenter la multitude. Mais, de la considération du nombre et du rapport entre le pouvoir et la quantité des voix, on peut aussi faire dépendre – et c'est même le principal chez Spinoza – l'exigence d'une égalité entre les citoyens. Dans cette arithmétique politique, le nombre accroît alors la puissance positive d'un gouvernement démocratique qui souhaite, par définition, conserver le bon équilibre entre la légalité de sa souveraineté et sa légitimité.

Sans surprise, le motif de la sécurité publique apparaît sur la base de cette arithmétique. A travers l'opinion de ses correspondants (en l'occurrence, le catholique Nicolas Sténon), il est même inscrit dans le mouvement de naissance d'une nouvelle *épistémé*, une économie politique et »policière«, au sens d'un art rationnel de gouverner qui soit capable de garantir l'ordre intérieur par le bien-être des individus :

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<sup>12</sup> *Traité politique*, trad. S. Zac, Vrin, 1968, c. VII, § 18, p. 130-131.

«Vous rapportez toute chose à la sécurité publique, ou plutôt à ce qui selon vous est la fin de la sécurité publique (...) ce qui équivaut à réduire tout le bien de l'homme à la bonté du gouvernement civil, c'est-à-dire au bien-être matériel.»<sup>13</sup>

La science d'état qui assure la sécurité publique s'accompagne d'une science de la multitude, laquelle est parfois l'équivalent d'une population dont il faut à son tour assurer le bonheur. En ce sens, s'il est quelques vérités fondamentales que l'on puisse trouver dans le *Traité politique* (et parmi celles que Foucault aurait sûrement partagées), il y a celle-ci : que le point de vue de l'*imperium* est indissociable de celui de la *multitudo* au sens où la sécurité du territoire et l'accroissement des forces intérieures de l'état sont étroitement liés aux configurations de la puissance d'agir de la multitude<sup>14</sup>.

D'où, entre les deux, l'invention d'une pratique et d'un projet : l'obéissance et ses mécanismes de contrôle. Les relations entre le pouvoir et la multitude, dont dépend l'obéissance, rendent les actions quantifiables et les transforment en actions sur lesquelles on peut agir. On observe alors les traces chez Spinoza (qu'il ne conçoit cependant que comme instruments pour définir les conditions authentiques du salut commun de tous) de cette «gouvernementalisation de l'état» qui aboutit à transformer l'individu en éléments d'une population quelconque<sup>15</sup>. Cela étant précisé, jamais, chez Spinoza, le rapport entre la notion de multitude et celle de population ne donne lieu à une philosophie de la raison d'état comme projet politique. Si la multitude se voit parfois retournée en son usage statistique pour donner le chiffre de l'état, cela ne signifie pas que la statistique spinoziste devienne un pur instrument de calcul. Au contraire, elle sert à fonder l'ensemble des mécanismes institutionnels par lesquels l'état et la multitude peuvent mesurer leur équilibre ou leur déséquilibre. Elle est l'équivalent chiffré de la médiation politique entre le gouvernement et son fondement. Le nombre devient ainsi la médiation indispensable du vivre-ensemble, l'analogue institutionnel de la multitude<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Lettre LXVII bis, cité par A. Negri dans *L'Anomalie sauvage*, trad. F. Matheron, PUF, 1982, p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> L'analyse de ce point a déjà été menée par E. Balibar qui voit, dans ce jeu entre l'*imperium* et la *multitudo*, «une sorte de comptabilité à double entrée de la politique», in *Les temps modernes*, «Spinoza, l'anti-Orwell», n° 470, 1985, p. 379. Nous ne faisons ici que rapprocher les résultats de cette analyse de la perspective de Foucault.

<sup>15</sup> *La Volonté de savoir*, éd. cit., p. 183-188.

<sup>16</sup> Tout ce développement reviendrait à rendre justice à C. Appuhn – qui traduit «multitudo» tantôt par «multitude», tantôt, au risque de l'anachronisme lexicologique, par «population» – mais aussi à se garder d'assimiler Hobbes et Spinoza, puisque ce dernier ne réduit pas la *ratio* à un calcul.



Ce passage des structures classiques de la souveraineté aux structures d'un gouvernement articulé soit autour de la notion de multitude comme ensemble à discipliner, soit autour de la notion de population comme ensemble à gérer, se mesure, chez Spinoza, à l'aune de la transformation profonde que subit le concept même de souveraineté. Cela signifie-t-il pour autant que les éléments de cette logique du pouvoir ne sont pas convertibles, et sous aucun prétexte, dans le champ d'une autre logique, celle de l'éthique ? Une âme «gouvernée» ne garde-t-elle pas toujours, en elle-même, la puissance de ne plus être «gouvernée» ?

### III.

Lorsqu'on demande à Foucault de donner son avis sur la ligne d'une politique consensuelle que l'on peut trouver à l'oeuvre par exemple dans la pensée de Arendt, il répond avec la plus grande fermeté que cette optique ne liquide pas le «problème de la relation de pouvoir» et qu'il faut, dans une autre direction, se demander au contraire quelle est la part de non-consensualité qui se cache dans les relations de pouvoir<sup>17</sup>. En s'attachant à la relation, Foucault semble bien quitter le terrain classique des philosophies de la substance :

«Le pouvoir n'est pas une substance. Il n'est pas non plus un mystérieux attribut dont il faudrait fouiller les origines. Le pouvoir n'est qu'un type particulier de relations entre individus. Et ces relations sont spécifiques : autrement dit, elles n'ont rien à voir avec l'échange, la production et la communication, même si elles leur sont associées»<sup>18</sup>

De la substance, on passe à un «type particulier» pour qualifier le pouvoir. Autant de pouvoirs, autant d'états, autant d'institutions, autant de singularités politiques dans ce même plan d'immanence qu'est le pouvoir. Mais afin de comprendre cette formule («le pouvoir n'est pas une substance»), ce que Foucault refuse en refusant la substance mais aussi ce qu'il veut dire lorsqu'il pose des règles d'immanence entre ces relations, il faut peut-être s'aider d'un autre texte dans lequel il critique la notion de causalité. Car un spinoziste ne peut que s'interroger sur l'efficacité d'une immanence pensée sans le recours à la notion de substance et à celle corrélatrice, bien qu'en un sens non classique, de cause.

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<sup>17</sup> «Politique et éthique : une interview», in *Dits et écrits*, éd. cit., T. IV, p. 588-590.

<sup>18</sup> «*Omnes et singulatim* : vers une critique de la raison politique», in *Dits et écrits*, éd. cit., T. IV, p. 134-161.

Or, dans sa conférence à la Société française de philosophie (27 mai 1978), «Qu'est-ce que la critique ? (Critique et *Aufklärung*)», Foucault rejette la notion de cause parce qu'elle implique un modèle analogique, pyramidal et originaire, ce que Spinoza rejette également. Et Foucault poursuit son raisonnement en disant que si la notion de cause pose problème, c'est aussi parce qu'elle est inséparable d'un modèle «nécessitant», ce que, là, Spinoza ne peut plus rejeter du fait même que la substance engage, chez lui, un type de nécessité de l'immanence. Il faudrait donc imaginer, dit Foucault, une méthode causale d'un «autre type», qui ne soit pas dépendante de cet ensemble de déterminations et qui légitime le «déploiement d'un réseau causal serré» non saturé par une quelconque origine. Seule une telle conception (qu'il nomme «généalogique») pourrait rendre compte des différentes positivités que l'on examinerait alors non plus comme des produits mais comme des effets<sup>19</sup>. Autrement dit, ce n'est pas la loi qui produit le pouvoir, mais les institutions et les pratiques, pour ne citer qu'elles, sont les effets d'un réseau de relations dont nous avons déjà caractérisé quelques traits. Penser un effet qui n'est pas dérivé d'une source, voilà ce que Foucault tente de faire afin de préserver l'intelligibilité d'une «positivité singulière». Dans ces conditions, le pouvoir n'est évidemment pas une substance, tout simplement parce qu'il ne doit pas y avoir de substance en général dont on déduirait les pratiques. On retrouve, dans cette critique de la cause, la critique du modèle.

Chez Spinoza, c'est au contraire la nécessité causale immanente de la substance qui permet d'analyser et de résorber programmatiquement les pratiques de l'obéissance. C'est parce qu'on peut les «déduire» de ce que Spinoza appelle, dans le *Traité politique* (I, 7), la «nature commune des hommes» – laquelle n'est pas la nature humaine classique mais celle qui est soumise aux passions dans le cadre de la puissance naturelle –, que la politique est possible, qu'on peut la penser et que l'on peut prévoir son action. Autrement dit, le point de vue de la substance permet de comprendre la genèse de la société dans laquelle on vit. La politique spinoziste n'échappe pas à la substance, elle est même en ce sens indissociable d'une ontologie par laquelle on peut convertir les puissances coercitives en puissances propres.

Quel est donc le type d'immanence que mobilise Foucault si ce n'est pas celui de la substance ?

<sup>19</sup> «Qu'est-ce que la critique? (critique et *Aufklärung*)», in *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, 84<sup>ème</sup> année, n° 2, avril-juin 1990, p. 51.



Il est bien évident que Foucault ne peut que refuser la teneur métaphysique que conserve la notion de nature humaine qu'il se borne ainsi à considérer comme un «indicateur épistémologique pour désigner certains types de discours en relation ou en opposition à la théologie, à la biologie ou à l'histoire» mais jamais comme un concept scientifique<sup>20</sup>. Ce n'est donc pas dans cette direction qu'il faut chercher.

Accordons plutôt une importance renouvelée à la notion d'affect. Elle forme, on l'a vu trop brièvement, le pivot du concept de gouvernementalité. Mais ne nous autoriserait-elle pas à interpréter certains enjeux de la question éthique dans la pensée de Foucault ?

On peut d'autant plus proposer cette thèse que la lecture de Foucault par Deleuze, à travers le néo-kantisme non formel qu'il y découvre, est en fait une interprétation radicalement spinoziste de l'oeuvre. Avec ce premier trait singulier, lexical, que, dans son *Foucault*, les termes utilisés sont souvent les termes de Spinoza lui-même. Deleuze tente ainsi un coup de force : malgré le rejet de toute substantialité, il s'agit pour lui de faire apparaître les éléments essentiels d'une sorte de problématique spinoziste qui animerait, de l'intérieur, toute la pensée de Foucault. Deleuze renoue ainsi, et malgré la critique de Foucault, avec le lexique de la causalité puisqu'il identifie, dans la méthode de Foucault, la présence d'une «causalité immanente non-unifiante»<sup>21</sup>. Cette causalité, il faut l'entendre sur un mode résolument spinoziste : la cause passe dans l'effet et réciproquement. Ce qui met Deleuze en passe de réaliser, de façon spinoziste, le programme de la causalité d'un «autre type» dont parlait Foucault dans sa conférence à la Société française de philosophie<sup>22</sup>. Et comme si Foucault ne pouvait être lu qu'avec Spinoza, Deleuze reprend la question du pouvoir («le pouvoir, comment s'exerce-t-il ?») et la déchiffre précisément au moyen du vocabulaire de l'affect alors même que, dans ce texte, Foucault ne l'utilise pas<sup>23</sup>. Du coup, puisque nous avons vu que, chez Spinoza, la puissance est première par rapport au pouvoir de telle sorte que le pouvoir dépend toujours de l'équilibre de la puissance, puisque nous connaissons aussi maintenant la traduction qu'en donne Foucault, à savoir : l'état n'est pas une substance dont dériveraient les

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<sup>20</sup> «De la nature humaine : justice contre pouvoir» (entretien avec N. Chomsky), in *Dits et écrits*, éd. cit., T. II, p. 474.

<sup>21</sup> *Foucault*, Minuit, 1986, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> «Que veut dire ici cause immanente ? C'est une cause qui s'actualise dans son effet, qui s'intègre dans son effet, qui se différencie dans son effet. Ou plutôt la cause immanente est celle dont l'effet l'actualise, l'intègre et la différencie», in *Foucault*, éd. cit., p. 44-45.

<sup>23</sup> Voir, par exemple, les pages 78, 83 et 95 du *Foucault*.

rapports de force parce que les rapports de force sont premiers (raison pour laquelle la notion de gouvernementalité est plus importante que celle d'état), on comprend sans peine maintenant pourquoi Deleuze est amené à écrire à propos des rapports entre le pouvoir et le gouvernement :

«Ce que Foucault exprime en disant que le gouvernement est premier par rapport à l'état, si l'on entend par »gouvernement« *le pouvoir d'affecter sous tous ses aspects* (gouverner des enfants, des âmes, des malades, une famille...)» (p. 83)

Ce qui s'amorce à travers cette métamorphose des concepts, c'est, pour Deleuze, la possibilité d'une détermination spinoziste de la politique de Foucault. L'immanence en question est bien celle de l'affect, c'est-à-dire d'une puissance profondément variable (rappelons que l'*Éthique* détermine la tristesse comme un »passage« d'un plus à un moins d'être, III, déf. 2 et 3), que l'on peut donc faire varier à plaisir en fonction des divers impératifs disciplinaires. L'analyse précédente de la théocratie et de la mutation de la multitude en population nous laisse au moins deviner les effets multiples d'une utilisation possible (et très »stylisée« dirait Foucault) des affects.

Mais s'il est une consistance propre au thème des affects chez Foucault, c'est aussi parce que Deleuze n'hésite pas à lui accorder une valeur systématique. Très naturellement, ce thème réapparaît donc, indispensable au »système« de Foucault, lorsqu'il s'agit de saisir le nouveau mode de subjectivité que les pages de *L'Histoire de la sexualité* décrivent. La notion d'affect plonge au coeur du souci de soi selon Foucault, un souci de soi que l'on peut désormais interpréter comme un mouvement qui replie le pouvoir sur lui-même, c'est-à-dire, comme »un rapport de la force avec soi, un pouvoir de s'affecter soi-même, un affect de soi par soi« (Foucault, p. 108). Cet affect tourné vers soi n'est plus un affect passif ou réactif, c'est un affect actif qui correspond au moment où le rapport de force peut produire un plus d'être.

Sans doute est-ce à ce moment où le pouvoir devient fondamentalement affectif qu'il rejoint également la dimension éthique, Deleuze le sait. D'une technologie des affects à une éthique des affects, on aperçoit ici ce qui rapproche le plus Spinoza et Foucault dans la formule déjà citée mais à laquelle nous pouvons maintenant revenir : »nous sommes tous des gouvernés, et à ce titre solidaires«. Nous sommes solidaires dans les réseaux du pouvoir (c'est-à-dire des puissances) non pas tant parce que, comme masse dominée, nous serions opposés à la classe dominante. Le pouvoir étant un ensemble de relations multiples, gouvernants et gouvernés sont pris ensemble. Mais, plus profondément, nous sommes solidaires face à ce que la politique peut contenir d'éthique. Deleuze nous le dit en s'inspirant beaucoup de l'équation spinoziste entre la politique et l'éthique (par



l'intermédiaire de Foucault, il en donne même une lecture renouvelée) : c'est l'affect qui fait le lien entre la politique et l'éthique, chez Spinoza comme chez Foucault.

C'est cette question de l'affect qui occupe Foucault lorsqu'il apostrophe N. Chomsky sur le désir profond du prolétariat :

»Je vous répondrai dans les termes de Spinoza. Je vous dirai que le prolétariat ne fait pas la guerre à la classe dirigeante parce qu'il considère que cette guerre est juste. Le prolétariat fait la guerre à la classe dirigeante parce que, pour la première fois dans l'histoire, il veut prendre le pouvoir. Et parce qu'il veut renverser le pouvoir de la classe dirigeante, il considère que cette guerre est juste«<sup>24</sup>

Il est particulièrement intéressant de voir Foucault employer une structure de raisonnement spécifiquement spinoziste à la fois pour s'opposer à la conception naïve d'une nature humaine qui défend un finalisme des valeurs et pour continuer à expliquer son rapport conflictuel avec le marxisme. Plus fondamentale qu'une simple logique de la contradiction, c'est une critique des transcendants qui peut rendre compte de l'intelligibilité réelle des affrontements en présence dans les relations de pouvoir. En ce sens, le pouvoir ne peut se réduire à proprement parler aux seules luttes du prolétariat avec la classe dirigeante. Son vrai mouvement, celui qui transforme le pouvoir en un réseau de puissances, est plus profond. La critique spinoziste du finalisme ontologique apparaît comme la seule façon de reconnaître ce mouvement dont le principe directeur serait : le juste n'est pas un être qui est à l'origine des valeurs parce que les valeurs ne se constituent que dans le mouvement naturel par lequel je les revendique.

De cette manière, Foucault semble suggérer que c'est cette critique, et non une autre, qu'il faut prendre au sérieux pour répondre aux impératifs de l'histoire politique de notre modernité. Le modèle antithétique d'une lutte sociale se bornerait à être modèle (on a vu combien Foucault refusait cette notion) s'il ne prenait son point d'appui dans une critique du finalisme des idéautés politiques. Car bien comprendre les relations de pouvoir, c'est dépasser le conflit des intérêts de classes et se placer du point de vue de la dynamique d'une immanence désirante, laquelle suppose de retourner la compréhension traditionnelle des objets de la volonté libre. L'état devient alors ce qu'il est uniquement à partir des tactiques et des stratégies immanentes dans lesquelles, encore une fois, gouvernants et gouvernés sont tous pris : »la nature est une et commune à tous« dit Spinoza (*TP*, VII, 27).

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<sup>24</sup> »De la nature humaine : justice contre pouvoir« (entretien avec N. Chomsky), in *Dits et écrits*, éd. cit., T. II, p. 503.

»Solidaires«, nous pouvons certes l'être en ce que la politique impose précisément ce travail sur les affects et sur la réforme qu'ils doivent subir afin de ne pas entretenir d'illusions sur les objectifs et les mécanismes que cette politique se donne ou qu'elle décrit.

Nous voyons dans la notion de »problématisation« l'équivalent éthique de ce travail politique des affects. *L'Usage des plaisirs* est en effet très clair : la problématisation indique le trajet insistant, quoique variable dans ses expressions, de la formation éthique du sujet par lui-même. Elle renvoie à des nouvelles pratiques que le sujet met en place pour se transformer lui-même et modifier ses conduites, de sorte que le retour, chez Foucault, à une certaine subjectivité n'autorise plus à dissocier l'éthique et le politique<sup>25</sup>. Car si l'éthique n'est pas autre chose que le travail spécifique de la pensée qui analyse le mouvement par lequel une pratique s'est constituée en problème général, Foucault définit précisément ce problème comme étant celui de l'auto-affectation. *L'Histoire de la sexualité* décrit de façon détaillée les diverses voies par lesquelles un »problème« ne se constitue jamais sans l'intervention du couple affecter-être affecté. Ainsi, pour ne citer que cet exemple, la thématique de l'aveu telle qu'elle est présentée dans *La Volonté de savoir* (éd. cit., p. 78-90), peut se comprendre sur le modèle d'une éthique de l'affect. L'aveu est en effet une pratique discursive dans laquelle, certes, je diminue ma puissance d'agir puisque l'on me contraint à avouer mais c'est aussi une pratique dans laquelle, par l'aveu lui-même, j'amorce une »libération«, une espèce d'auto-affranchissement à l'égard d'une forme erronée du pouvoir. On entre bien là dans le champ d'une éthique résolument non-kantienne, une éthique dans laquelle l'introduction d'un troisième niveau apporte la preuve du spinozisme de Foucault. En toute logique, celui-ci se dégage explicitement de l'éthique kantienne à deux termes (l'intention et la loi) lorsqu'il produit une éthique à trois termes mobilisant les »jeux de pouvoir«, les »états de domination« et les »technologies gouvernementales«<sup>26</sup>. Il est clair qu'avec ce dernier niveau, de la même manière que Spinoza, Foucault rend son éthique indissociable de la question de la gouvernementalité dont on connaît maintenant l'essence profondément affective.

Quoiqu'il en soit, retourner les pratiques disciplinaires de gouvernement de l'autre en un gouvernement de soi pour, en retour, mieux contrôler les autres et établir le projet d'une éthique qui porte avec lui l'aspiration vers

<sup>25</sup> Voir »Polémique, politique et problématisations«, in *Dits et écrits*, éd. cit., T. IV, p. 594.

<sup>26</sup> Sur les trois niveaux, se reporter à »L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté«, in *Dits et écrits*, éd. cit., T. IV, p. 728.



une »pratique de la liberté« dont ne pouvaient rendre compte les analytiques précédentes de la vérité, ces deux exigences sont autant de réponses au problème des rapports entre le pouvoir et l'éthique selon Foucault. De cette manière, on peut comprendre que le souci de soi procède à une »conversion du pouvoir« selon l'expression même de Foucault et que le fait de ne pas parvenir à convertir ce pouvoir soit inversement le signe, pour l'individu »devenu esclave de ses désirs«, d'une mauvaise gestion de ses affects, c'est-à-dire d'un oubli du souci de soi<sup>27</sup>. Mais, ne nous y trompons pas, cette conversion ne signifie pas pour autant le congé accordé aux relations de pouvoir elles-mêmes. Et comme si Foucault avait pris acte des objections que, très tôt, on a formulées (il suffit de penser à Leibniz) à l'encontre de la doctrine spinoziste de la substance que l'on pensait nécessitariste, il répond :

» (...) je me refuse à répondre à la question qu'on me pose parfois :  
»Mais si le pouvoir est partout, alors il n'y a pas de liberté«. Je réponds :  
s'il y a des relations de pouvoir à travers tout champ social, c'est parce  
qu'il y a de la liberté partout«<sup>28</sup>.

Dans la transposition du débat classique sur la nécessité et la liberté (Leibniz à Spinoza : si Dieu et la nature sont une seule et même substance, alors il n'y a plus de liberté pour les substances individuelles) vers le terrain de la politique, Foucault parvient donc à penser une sorte de synthèse : entre les mailles du réseau du pouvoir, il existe bien des zones de liberté. La notion de pouvoir reçoit par conséquent un éclairage nouveau : elle n'est jamais séparée de la réorientation possible de ses effets de domination vers ce que Foucault appelle, à plusieurs reprises, un *ethos*, c'est-à-dire un ensemble d'affects qui définissent une conduite comme un véritable mode d'être. Autrement dit, comme une liberté en acte.

Le spinoziste objecterait cependant qu'il n'y a pas de substance chez Foucault et que c'est pour cette raison que le projet de liberté reste difficile à saisir et l'éthique bien maigre. Mais si le pouvoir n'est pas une substance, comme on l'a vu, cela n'empêche pas *L'Usage des plaisirs* de rapporter le travail de soi sur soi à »la détermination de la substance éthique, c'est-à-dire la façon dont l'individu doit constituer telle ou telle part de lui-même comme matière principale de sa conduite morale« (Gallimard, 1984, p. 33, souligné dans le texte) ? Certes la liberté, la sagesse créées par ce travail demeurent à l'intérieur d'un jeu de pouvoir, mais peut-être pouvons-nous voir un programme spinoziste dans cette exigence qu'exprime le souci de soi de se

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 715-716.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 720.

voir rattaché à une »forme universelle«, comme dit Foucault dans *Le Souci de soi*, bref de se comprendre comme une partie de la nature (Gallimard, 1984, p. 272) ? Comme si Foucault acceptait qu'une forme d'ontologie ne soit pas, par définition, contradictoire avec la variabilité infinie des pratiques, il affirme que »le souci de soi est éthiquement premier, dans la mesure où le rapport à soi est ontologiquement premier«<sup>29</sup>. On reste donc sans aucun doute dans le politique lorsqu'on tente de saisir le passage de la question »comment gouverner ?« à celle »comment ne pas être gouverné?«, selon une des articulations centrales de la conférence déjà citée sur la critique et l'*Aufklärung*. Mais dans ce passage d'une question à l'autre, il apparaît que c'est l'éthique qui formule le choix véritable de Foucault. Et c'est avec elle que le vocabulaire (spinoziste) de la substance ressurgit alors même que l'analyse des relations de pouvoir l'avait banni. La puissance éthique des hommes pourrait donc bien être une puissance de se faire dans la nature, c'est-à-dire une pratique de soi qui permette de jouer avec le minimum possible de domination et qui autorise à former une communauté de vie, laquelle serait simultanément connaissance de soi et exercice de cette connaissance. C'est finalement peut-être cela que Foucault entend par *ethos* et qu'il détermine ici par ce que nous pourrions appeler une ontologie minimale du souci de soi.

Analysant le pouvoir, on pourra toujours reprocher à Foucault de ne parvenir que difficilement à imaginer les conditions d'une sortie du pouvoir. Mais il y a deux réponses possibles :

- nous sommes dans l'impossibilité d'imaginer ces conditions parce que »nous sommes tous des gouvernés«. Nous sommes tous, gouvernants et gouvernés, toujours déjà dans le pouvoir.

- nous pouvons néanmoins imaginer les conditions non pas d'une sortie du pouvoir, mais d'un aménagement, au sein du pouvoir, d'un espace de liberté et de résistance active. Car dans ce projet, de »gouvernés« nous devenons aussi »solidaires«. Par où les chemins de la politique et de l'éthique s'entrecroisent.

Il est donc peut-être trop facile de vouloir en rester à l'objection accusatrice : suffit-il de rendre compte des mécanismes du pouvoir pour pouvoir se libérer de sa force d'obligation ? Car l'analyse du souci de soi montre combien il s'agit de maîtriser son *conatus* politique, pour employer un terme spinoziste, et combien il est question d'un devenir adéquat de soi-même. N'avons-nous pas là les éléments d'une sorte de liberté au sein de la nécessité, c'est-à-dire une véritable pensée de l'immanence qui, seule chez

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715.



Foucault, pourrait rendre compte de l'étrange volonté de fonder une éthique au beau milieu de l'omniprésence des relations de pouvoir?

Débarassée de sa formalisation juridique et plus profonde que sa dialectisation contradictoire entre des classes, cette conception du pouvoir n'apparaît donc pas si éloignée d'une théorie spinoziste de la puissance. C'est même probablement pour cette raison que Foucault peut imaginer retourner les relations de pouvoir au profit d'un équilibre de soi à soi, de la même manière que, chez Spinoza, on peut inverser les perfections des puissances politiques jusqu'à devenir *esse sui juris*.

Ceci permettrait également de comprendre un Foucault éternellement inquiet dans sa recherche par son caractère instable, son visage protéiforme, peut-être moins parce qu'il se souciait réellement de la critique que grâce à son activité de philosophe profondément affecté, pris dans la continuité du pouvoir, dans cette sorte de substance qui oblige tout individu à passer constamment d'une perfection moindre à une perfection plus grande, à tout faire pour que de cette nécessité du pouvoir naisse une liberté de penser et d'agir non plus comme un autre mais comme soi-même. Inquiétude et espoir. D'où une dernière phrase, celle de *La Volonté de savoir* : »Ironie de ce dispositif : il nous fait croire qu'il y va de notre 'libération'.





Jelica Šumič-Riha  
*A Matter Of Resistance*

One of the great problems we face today is what we propose to call, by paraphrasing Lacan, the growing impasses of the way out, or, more generally, the problem of resistance. This problem is all the more acute in the present constellation characterised by the worldwide victory of the alliance of capitalism and liberal democracy, insofar as this alliance seems to discredit the very idea of a "way out" as being ideological, utopian and, ultimately, irrational. In a remarkable way, a major shift that has been taking place in contemporary thought over the past two decades - namely, a drift away from an understanding of the way out as emancipation towards an account of the way out in terms of resistance - signals that contemporary theorising about the way out has reached an impasse.

To understand how the shift towards resistance has come to permeate the very activity of thought itself, and how this in turn bears upon our sense of the present deadlock of the way out, it may be helpful to turn to Lacan. His succinct remark gives us a penetrating insight into the problem:

"In relating this misery /caused by capitalism/ to the discourse of the capitalist, I denounce the latter. Only here, I point out in all seriousness that I cannot do this, because in denouncing it, I reinforce it - by normalising it, that is, improving it."<sup>1</sup>

This cryptic remark can be read in two ways. At first sight, it seems to convey Lacan's principled pessimism with regard to possible resistance. Understood in this way, Lacan's remark would seem to gesture towards the well-known postmodernist or poststructuralist critique of Marxism, a series of which appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>2</sup> According to this

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990, pp. 13-14. Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman. This point has been further elaborated in Jacques-Alain Miller's excellent comment on *Television*: "A Reading of Some Details in Television in Dialogue with the Audience", *Newsletter of the Freudian field*, Spring/Fall 1990, Vol. 4, No. 1-2, pp. 4-30.

<sup>2</sup> Lyotard's "libidinal" writings in particular provide a good example of such a critique. See, for instance, his *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*, *Economie libidinale* and *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*. For a penetrating account of Lyotard's early writings, see Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard. Art and Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

critique, the fault of Marxism lies in its blind faith in the inexorable laws of development which will, eventually, bring about the collapse of capitalism. Lyotard, for instance, convincingly shows how Marxism, by trying to find capitalism's weak link, the final stage of its development, in short, by waiting for capitalism to approach "a limit which it cannot overcome", develops a critique that negates capitalism by merely inverting it, thus, paradoxically, remaining within the same framework as capitalism.<sup>3</sup> The lesson to be drawn from this account could be phrased as follows: all critique of capitalism, far from surpassing capitalism, consolidates it. Thus, if capitalism refuses to collapse, to come up against the limit of its own growth and expansion, this is due to its structural "greediness",<sup>4</sup> as Lacan puts it, as capitalism is nothing but the drive for growth: the growth of indifference as well as the indifference of growth.

What we have here, then, is the reversal of the usual "progressist" interpretation of Marx's dictum, according to which "the limit of capital is capital itself, i.e. the capitalist mode of production." As is well known, this definition of capitalism in terms of its inherent limitation is usually read as an announcement of its inevitable collapse: once the capitalist relations of production become an obstacle to the development of the productive forces, capitalism will come up against a limit it cannot overcome and therefore face its own ruin. For Lacan's as well as for Lyotard's account of capitalism, this structural deadlock, this growing impasse of capitalism, is considered as a stimulus rather than as an impediment to its further development. According to this account then, capitalism itself is nothing but the impasse of growth. By misrecognising how every objection, every obstacle to this pure drive for growth immediately simply provides more fuel for it, how such an attempt at impeding growth, instead of constituting a "way out" of capitalism, comes to be its condition of possibility, all critique of capitalism, be it as radical as Marxism, signals its surrendering, unbeknown, of course, to the impasses of growth.

The preceding remarks seem to be pointing to the following conclusion: all resistance to capitalism is vain, since capitalism is capable of overcoming not only its inherent deadlock but also any attempt at resistance or protest. What then, would a way out of capitalist domination be if all solution seems to become entangled in the growing impasses of the capitalist's drive for growth? Instead of a critique which is, by structural necessity, caught in the vicious circle of the drive for growth, Lacan proposes the following solution:

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<sup>3</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Television*, p. 28.



"The more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse - which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some."<sup>5</sup>

How is the position of the saint to be understood in terms of resistance? As evidence that all resistance is illusory? This reading appears to be corroborated by Lacan's rejection of both a critical and an "ethical" "way out": the Marxist approach as well as the currently widespread practice of self-accusation that tends to burden thought itself with crimes it has not committed (Nazism, Stalinism, etc.), an idea that has been shared, as is well known, by the later Adorno and the majority of the leading postmodernist and/or poststructuralist thinkers (from Lyotard and Deleuze to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe). In response to those who would be taking "all the burdens of the world's misery on to their shoulders", Lacan states emphatically: "One thing is certain: to take the misery on to one's shoulders ... is to enter into a discourse that determines it, even if only in protest." What Lacan proposes instead is the following advice: those who are "busying themselves at /the/ supposed burdening, oughtn't to be protesting, but collaborating. Whether they know it or not, that's what they're doing."<sup>6</sup>

Does it mean that Lacan preaches the "heroism" of renunciation and collaboration? Indeed, if we are justified in using this term in connection with resistance, this is only on condition of its radical recasting, which implies the rejection of both classical positions: that of standing up against some immense power, on the one hand, and that of resignation, on the other. Though it may seem that there is no option left, Lacan puts forward a solution which consists, ultimately, in identification with what is left over, with the trash. This heroism, which could be called "the heroism of the trash" and by means of which Lacan designates the position of the saint since, for Lacan, to act as trash means "to embody what the structure entails, namely allowing the subject, the subject of the unconscious, to take him as the cause of the subject's own desire. In fact, it is through the abjection of this cause that the subject in question has a chance to be aware of his position, at least within the structure."<sup>7</sup>

What, then, characterises the resistance of the saint-trash, in particular, since for the saint, says Lacan, this is not amusing? According to Lacan, the saint plays the double role of a reminder/remainder: as "a cog in a machine", the saint, no doubt, "collaborates" in producing an effect of

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

enjoyment, more precisely, the enjoyed-sense /*jouir-sens*/, as Lacan calls it, on condition that the saint herself/himself does not and cannot participate in this enjoyment. On the contrary, her/his role is to remain a mute witness to this enjoyment; indeed, s/he is that instance which resists enjoyment or, with Lacan, s/he is "the refuse of jouissance".<sup>8</sup>

Lacan's observations are important for our concerns here because by designating the saint as the site of resistance he clearly indicates that a resistance to capitalism, defined as a drive for growth that knows no limits, no beyond, can only be theorised in terms of some resistant instance which is, strictly speaking, neither exterior nor interior, but rather is situated at the point of exteriority in the very intimacy of interiority, the point at which the most intimate encounters the outmost. As is well known, the Lacanian name for this paradoxical intimate exteriority is "the extimacy". Conceived in terms of extimacy rather than in terms of a pure alterity, resistance therefore consists in the derivation, from within capitalism, of an indigestible kernel, of an otherness which has the potential to disrupt the circuit of the drive for growth.

There have been several attempts to theorise resistance in terms of the indigestible kernel within capitalism itself, that is, in terms of the real. A solution put forward by Lyotard consists in revealing "another libidinal apparatus, still unclear, difficult to identify.... in a non-dialectical, non-critical relation, incommensurable with that of kapital."<sup>9</sup> In a typically deconstructive move, Lyotard exhibits what we may call the "complicity" of the two apparatuses. This is evident in the capacity of capitalism to maintain itself by drawing on the intensity of the unconscious drives. On the other hand, capitalism can never entirely subjugate the unconscious drives because their polymorphous perversity (i.e. their inherent unruliness) precludes any attempt to bring this heterogeneous multiplicity under the rule of one principle, to subsume it under the law of the One. On this reading, then, the unconscious drives, while constituting a source upon which capitalism draws, an apparatus that capitalism is fully capable of "exploiting", remain an insurmountable obstacle for the rule of capital, an instance capable of subverting it; or, in Derridian terms, the libidinal apparatus represents for capitalism its condition of possibility and impossibility.

Basically, what is problematic about this "libidinal" deconstruction of capitalism is precisely Lyotard's valorisation of the libidinal apparatus for its disruptive, destabilising capacity. As Bill Readings rightly points out, the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



libidinal apparatus, in Lyotard's reading, "produces a transgression for its own sake which is entirely *indifferent* to the structure it opposes."<sup>10</sup> The price to be paid for this valorisation of the libidinal intensities, is, ultimately, a fall back into a pure alterity between the rule of capitalism and the unruliness of the drives: thus, the libidinal apparatus, instead of being theorised in terms of a relation which subverts the inside/outside opposition, comes to be situated wholly "outside".

Though Lyotard's account is not without its merits, the role that the drives play within the rule of capital, as we shall see, is far more complex and ambiguous than Lyotard wants us to believe. By showing how capitalism, in order to preserve itself, must draw on libidinal intensities, Lyotard presents one side of their complicity with capitalism. What remains completely unworked on in his account is the way in which the drives "parasitise" the apparatus of capitalism; or, put differently, Lyotard fails to show how capitalism itself constitutes the condition of possibility for the functioning of the unconscious drives.

This brings us back to Lacan's somewhat enigmatic expression "the growing impasses of civilisation" by which he, in opposition to Lyotard, who insists on the structural incompatibility between the commensurable law of capital and the incommensurable logic of the drives, tries to expose the structural homology between the logic of capital and the logic of drives. While Lyotard theorises the relationship between the two apparatuses in terms of the repression of the drives and resistance to this repression, Lacan, on the other hand, does it by demonstrating how a satisfaction of the drives is paradoxically procured by repression, exhibiting a perfect agreement between the two apparatuses.

In Lacan's reading, the structural homology and, as a consequence, the complicity between capitalism and the libidinal apparatus is therefore grounded in the fact that all obstacles - more precisely, the renunciation of enjoyment, the blocking of satisfaction - instead of impeding the unconscious drive in its blind search for satisfaction or the capitalist drive for growth, constitute that secret "cause" that sets in motion the search for the "satisfaction" of both drives: the capitalist drive for growth and the unconscious drive. In both cases we are dealing with some surplus, surplus-enjoyment in the case of the unconscious drives, surplus-value in the case of capitalist production, intimately tied to the lack or, rather, to the impossibility of satisfaction. What has been designated by Lacan as the growing impasses of civilisation or the greediness of the superego, is precisely this satisfaction

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<sup>10</sup> See Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard. Art and Politics*, p. 91.

in discontent, in dissatisfaction - that is, in the impossibility to satisfy.<sup>11</sup> The growing impasses of civilisation therefore mark a point where the greediness of the superego and capitalist greed converge; more precisely, they mark the conversion of the growing impasses into the impasses of growth. In the light of this convergence it could be said that capitalism is simply another name for the superego.

Once it is accepted that it is through the intervention of an instance that demands a renunciation that the drives, the capitalist drive for growth included, attain their satisfaction, it becomes clear that Lyotard's solution ultimately consists in proposing, as a means of the way out of capitalism, an apparatus which is caught in the vicious circle of growth, entangled in its impasses, or, put another way, an apparatus that is entirely dominated by the paradoxical dialectics of the renunciation of enjoyment and the production of surplus enjoyment.

In the language of Lacan, it could be said that by assimilating resistance to the drive for growth with what Lacan calls the imperative of enjoyment, Lyotard conflates two modes of resistance: on the one hand, that which could be called the resistance of the superego to being integrated in the subject's symbolic universe, since the superego's imperative, Enjoy! or Produce! Be useful! is experienced by the subject as nonsensical, "mad"; and, on the other hand, the resistance that the subject offers to the superego, this being a resistance that has been elaborated by Lacan in terms of the saint-trash. And it is precisely this confusion of the two modes of resistance, a resistance of the superego with a resistance to the superego, which compelled Lyotard in his later writings to theorise resistance in terms of the Law and the call of justice rather than in terms of the Multiple. Before we move on to a consideration of this shift, we must examine another aspect of resistance: the way it relates to thought.

### *A Sublime, Sentimental Mute*

An intriguing account of the transformation of the relationship between thought and resistance as a direct consequence of the ruin of politics can be found in Jean-Claude Milner's recent book, *Constat*.<sup>12</sup> According to Milner, politics maintains its pre-eminence so long as it is grounded in the conjunction of thought and resistance. What is meant by politics, in this reading, is the

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<sup>11</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Television*, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> See Jean-Claude Milner, *Constat*. Paris: Verdier, 1992.



capacity of thought to produce material effects in the social domain, the privileged figure of these effects being the insurrection of the social body. Seen from this perspective, the defeat or retreat of emancipationist politics (in this reading, identified with politics *tout court*) that we have been witnessing for the past two decades signals the incapacity of contemporary thought to translate its effects into resistance.

What is striking about Milner's account is the judiciousness with which the negative implications of the process of dis-union, of the drifting apart of thought and rebellion that we are witness to today, are brought to the fore: thought ceases to be politically subversive; indeed, thought is worth its name only by being conservative, hostile to all forms of rebellion, while rebellion, on the other hand, is true to its nature only by being "brute", unruly. Put another way, thought marks the dissociation from rebellion by its growing powerlessness to produce material effects in the political and the social field, whereas rebellion records its break with thought by turning into a resistance against thought.

The present antinomic relationship between thought and resistance can thus be accounted for in terms of a forced choice between "I am (not)" and "I am (not) thinking".<sup>13</sup> Confronted with the disjunction, according to which I am there where I am not thinking and vice versa, rebellion clearly opts for the "I am" and therefore for the "I am not thinking", suggesting that what is lost in this forced choice in any case is precisely thought of resistance - that is, thought which is appropriate to resistance. This is evident in postmodernist and/or poststructuralist theorising about resistance, insofar as that which is, strictly speaking, a problem (namely, the antinomy between thought and resistance), is proposed as a solution. It should be noted, however, that this idea, according to which resistance is identified by rebellion against thought, is one that has already been announced by Adorno and later picked up and further developed by the contemporary partisans of resistance. Yet this shift of resistance towards unthought is paradoxically accompanied by an almost obsessive concern about the "honour of thinking".<sup>14</sup> In what does this saving

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<sup>13</sup> For further elaborations on the forced choice, see Jacques Lacan, *Logique du phantasme*, unpublished seminar (1966-67).

<sup>14</sup> The most concise definition of the "saving of thought's honour" we owe, of course, to Lyotard. According to Lyotard, this is one of the central stakes of contemporary thought. Consider the following presentation of the problem: "Given 1) the impossibility of avoiding conflicts (the impossibility of indifference) and 2) the absence of a universal genre of discourse to regulate them (or, if you prefer, the inevitable partiality of the judge): to find, if not what can legitimate judgement (the "good" linkage), then at least how to save the honour of thinking." See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1988, p. xii. Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele.

of thought's honour consist? And how does the saving of honour connect with what it means to think and to resist?

Adorno's answer, which will serve as a model for contemporary postmodernists and/or poststructuralist thinkers, consists in assigning to thought the task of bearing witness to that which resists. On the one hand, this task poses an almost insurmountable obstacle for thought, as it is in the nature of thought, says Adorno, to do violence to that which is other than thought - that is, in Adorno's case, to things. On the other hand, Adorno maintains that thought is neither insensitive nor blind to the wrong done to its other: "While doing violence to the objects of its syntheses," says Adorno, "our thinking heeds a potential that waits in the object, and it unconsciously obeys the idea of making amends for what it has done."<sup>15</sup>

In this reading, the capacity of thought to bear witness to "a potential that waits in the object" would reside in the very splitting of thought between the victimising instance, on the one hand, and the instance which testifies to the inflicted wrong, on the other. What Adorno seems to suggest here is the idea that thought is unable to make "amends for what it has done" to that which tries forever to evade it - the unthought, the ungraspable - unless thought turns against itself; or with Adorno, the resistant thought is, ultimately, "thought thinking against itself."<sup>16</sup> Only then can thought assume the task assigned to it: to bear witness to resistance already operating in the world, and, at the same time, to augment this resistance with a resistance of its own. For Adorno, this resistance proper to thought consists essentially in its refusal to give in; in making it impossible for "a desperate consciousness to deposit despair as absolute,"<sup>17</sup> in a positive manner, the resistance of thought is identified with "the resistance of the eye that does not want the colours of the world to fade."<sup>18</sup> This means that thought must not only turn against itself, to reject its temptation to surrender; it must also "objectivise" itself. Adorno's metaphor of the "lingering eye" provides a particularly good example of what is meant here by the objectivisation of thought: "If the thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the object and not on its category, the very objects would start talking under the lingering eye".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, New York: Continuum Publishing, 1973, p. 19. Translated by E.B. Ashton. For an inspiring account of Adorno's conception of resistance, see David Toole, 'Of Lingerings Eyes and Talking Things. Adorno and Deleuze on Philosophy since Auschwitz', *Philosophy Today*, Fall 1993, Vol. 37, No. 3/4.

<sup>16</sup> *Negative Dialectics*, p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.



What strikes us first about Adorno's remark is the very wording used to designate the way in which thought perceives the resistance of things: instead of seeing, the eye is supposed to *hear* things, since Adorno states explicitly: "things would start *talking under the lingering eye*". Instead of showing to the eye or talking to the ear, as one would normally expect, we have "talking" to the eye.

Adorno's enigmatic remark thus seems to suggest that the "objects do not go into their concepts without remainder,"<sup>20</sup> signalling in this way that there is an insurmountable gap between the objects and their conceptual "envelopes" or, to put it in Lacanian terms, between the real and the symbolic. Essential here, as Adorno himself convincingly argues, is that this "something more" in the object which forever tries to evade all conceptualisation is not accessible as such; rather, it is only through the cracks in the conceptual envelope of things that we get a glimpse of the "talking things". It is at this point that the lingering eye intervenes: for this eye is considered as being endowed with a power to separate or, in Deleuze's terms, with "a 'dissociative force' which would introduce a... 'hole in appearances'... a fissure, a crack."<sup>21</sup> Put bluntly, the cracks are not simply there, waiting to be discovered; rather, they testify to the intervention of the eye. Only then can we say that by focusing on these cracks and fissures, the lingering eye not only exhibits the gap between things and concepts, as that which ultimately belies the subjugating identity imposed by the concept, but also allows us to see the thing in its "becoming", as Adorno puts it. To use Deleuze's no less fitting definition, it exhibits a thing "in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustified character."<sup>22</sup>

Instead of staging some fantasy scene of the primal becoming of things in their substantial fullness - a scene in which things expose themselves to our gaze as they "really" are - we will insist that Adorno's theorisation of resistance can only be productive if the idea of such a fullness is discarded. It is true that it is only through cracks espied by the lingering eye in the conceptual envelope of things that we get a glimpse of the "abundance", the reserve of possibilities of what things could have become. Yet these possibilities, as Adorno convincingly points out, are always-already missed opportunities. Thus, to see a thing in its becoming is to glimpse what Adorno calls "the possibility of which their reality has cheated objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Negative Dialectics*, p. 52.

This becoming of things that is, strictly speaking, given only in retrospect, through cracks and fissures in their symbolic envelope, is no doubt a fantasy, a utopia, says Adorno. Nonetheless, this utopia yields hope. This yielding of hope is all the more paradoxical since it is grounded in a fantasy, staging not what a thing could have become but rather what it has failed to become; in short, it is grounded in the thing's failure to become the thing, i.e. in the failed thing.

The evoked failure of the thing as exposed by the lingering eye indicates that the link between the excess of the thing and the dissociative power of the lingering eye is more complicated than may appear at first glance. In Adorno's account, this relationship is represented, enacted, by way of an impossible encounter between the eye and the "talking" things. How are we to account for this "impossible" encounter, an encounter which, because of the incommensurability between the organ of perception and the object of perception, is doomed to failure from the start, and in what way does it relate to resistance?

It is stunning how Adorno's account about thought's bearing witness to the resistance of things seems to anticipate what Lacan theorised in terms of a chasm between the eye and the gaze. As is well known, Lacan, in his efforts to theorise the status of the subject in the scopic field, starts with the assumption that there is a pre-existence of a given-to-be-seen to the seen. In a similar way, by introducing the lingering eye into the picture, Adorno also draws our attention to the fact that, in the scopic field, we are not only the seers who perceive things with our eyes, that is to say, who focus on the concept instead of the thing since, even before the things are looked at by us, they are gazing at us; or, to put it in Lacan's terms, they are showing. Yet we are unaware of this chasm because, normally, we perceive, instead of the things, their "clichés", to borrow Deleuze's term, or, with Adorno, we see them as subjugated, mediated by language, enveloped in the conceptual schemata. Put another way, what we see is how they look; what we do not see is that they also show.

When, then, do things start to show, to provoke our gaze? Only when that which is normally excluded from the picture, i.e. the gaze, is re-introduced into it. This is precisely the function of the lingering eye: the presence of the lingering eye makes it possible for us to take our distance from "normal" perception, to see things in a different light, or, with Adorno, to see them "talking". Thus, strictly speaking, it cannot be said that the things are showing off for the lingering eye; rather, it is the presence of the lingering eye which exposes the showing of things. What Adorno urges us to trace, to



follow, to track is precisely the presence of the gaze in the picture, that which, under normal circumstances, passes unobserved.<sup>24</sup>

But this is only possible if we consider the lingering eye, instead, as an organ of perception, capable of seeing things as they “really” are, as a snare which provokes our gaze. The lingering eye is not there to look for the cracks in the conceptual envelope; rather, it is the cracks themselves, an anomaly in the picture “which is there to be looked at, in order to catch,” says Lacan, “to catch in its trap, the observer, that is to say, us.”<sup>25</sup> The lingering eye is therefore the imagined gaze of the things themselves, yet a gaze endowed with the power to “call us in the picture”, to photograph us. And conversely, insofar as the lingering eye is identified with the “resistance of the eye that does not want the colours of the world to fade”, as Adorno puts it, we could say that the lingering eye is nothing other than our gaze represented as caught, turned into a picture.

In what sense can it be said that the lingering eye is concerned with resistance if, as we have seen, the subject in the scopic field is defined as being under the gaze, as being photographed, in short, paralysed? To answer this question we must return to the relationship between the excess of the things and the lingering eye. The excess of the thing exposed by the lingering eye appears to be ambiguous to the extent that it evokes the cracks, the “hole in appearances”, in short, the void, as it is only through such fissures in the conceptual envelope of things that this excess shows; yet at the same time, its blazing presence, “its excess of horror or beauty”, seems to cover up, to dissimulate this void. This indecidability of the excess, or rather this convergence of the lack and the excess, has implications for our conceptualisation of the way out and of the task of thought.

Rather than reducing it to bearing witness to the excess of the thing, to its resistance, the task of thought consists in exhibiting the thing as a placeholder of the void, since it is only in this way that thought is capable, not only of rendering the installation of things by the “law” of a situation, its particular mode of symbolisation, radically contingent or, to use Deleuze’s term, unjustified, but also of exploring a given situation from the point of view of its inherent void, thus uncovering new, until now unknown, possibilities. This means that while Adorno models the way out on the

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<sup>24</sup> “In our relation to things, insofar as this relation is constituted by way of vision and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it - that is what we call the gaze.”

See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin, 1979, p. 73. Translated by Alan Sheridan.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, op. 92.

resistance of the inexhaustible thing, we propose to conceive of it in terms of a double exposure, the exposure of exposure, since it is not enough to uncover in the conceptual envelope of things cracks and fissures through which things in their "excess of horror or beauty" emanate, as Adorno pretends to claim. What is needed in addition is "one more effort", which consists in exhibiting the void behind this fearful and/or sublime mask of the thing.

Put another way, inasmuch as the way out implies the creation of a new situation, it depends upon a traversing, a shift from the blinding blaze emanating from the thing towards the void that has been dissimulated by this fearful or sublime mask of the thing. Yet it is precisely this second step that Adorno, as well as the contemporary postmodernists and/or poststructuralists, fail to accomplish: blinded by the blaze emanating from the thing, they can only powerlessly testify to that which has shocked them. Illuminating in this context is the way in which Deleuze draws parallels between the position of thought and that of "a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought. Between the two, thought undergoes a strangle fossilisation which is, as it were, its powerlessness to function, to be, its dispossession of itself and the world."<sup>26</sup>

The task that Deleuze assigns to thought consists essentially in its passively bearing witness to the intolerable world. However, this passivity, this powerlessness of thought, according to Deleuze, is not to be seen as a sign of inferiority, since this would still point towards all-powerful thought as a lost paradise. Rather, it should become our way of thinking, insists Deleuze, and therefore a means to restore the belief, not in a better or a truer world, as a Marxist critique would have it, but "in a link between man and the world,"<sup>27</sup> or, in Adorno's terms, a link between thought and things. What is questionable about this conception of resistance is not so much the fact that the saving of thought's honour converts thought into a passive witness to suffering, as in the convergence of impotence and enjoyment: evidence of such a secret, illicit enjoyment that thought draws on its impotence can paradoxically be found in Lyotard's elaborations on the differend, perhaps one of the most accomplished theories of resistance.

It is well known that Lyotard is also concerned with remaining faithful to the rupture, the cleft, though he proposes to call it the differend.

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<sup>26</sup> *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 272.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.



It is defined as “a case of conflict between (at least) two parties that cannot be equitably resolved for the lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments.”<sup>28</sup> As a result, no tribunal can resolve the case, either way, without victimising one side or the other, thus rendering them “mute”. In so far as the victim’s (in)capacity to prove a wrong inflicted upon him/her is constitutive of a differend, it could be said that a victim is, indeed, a double victim: s/he has suffered a wrong, yet is unable to prove it, as it is in the nature of the wrong done to him/her to be “accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage.”<sup>29</sup>

Crucial to our concern here is Lyotard’s thesis that that which, ultimately, testifies to the differend, to the dis-unity, is a feeling, rather than a concept or a phrase.<sup>30</sup> Such feeling, which Lyotard, following Kant, calls the feeling of the sublime, arises when thought finds itself affected by some overwhelming event without being able to seize upon it. Essential here is that such an encounter which shocks thought’s power to grasp is announced by a paradoxical combination of pleasure and pain, exhilaration and frustration. The co-presence of these violent and ambivalent affects in itself evokes enjoyment, a paradoxical pleasure produced by displeasure. What concerns us here is this enjoyment: more specifically, it is the way in which thought secretly feeds on its impotence as manifested in the posture of a passive spectator overwhelmed by the spectacle displayed before his eyes.

In what follows we will enquire into the implications of thought’s illicit enjoyment as it manifests itself at the level of the constitution of the subject. What is important here is that the subject that concerns Lyotard is not simply given in advance; rather, the subject, as Lyotard is right in pointing out, can only emerge in the process of phrasing the wrong done to a victim or, more generally, in the process in which thought attempts to account for that which has shocked it. And it is precisely at this level that Lyotard’s valuation of the feeling proves to be highly questionable: on the one hand, a differend is

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<sup>28</sup> *The Differend*, RD: Title.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> The most persuasive illustration of what it might mean to testify to the wrong done to the victims and to their incapacity to prove it comes in Lyotard’s remarks on Auschwitz. “Auschwitz” is presented as “a non-negatable negative”, an “indigestible remainder” which, paraphrasing Lacan, “remains stuck in the gullet” of speculative logic. As a consequence, “it is not a concept that results from “Auschwitz”, but a feeling, an impossible phrase, one that would link the SS phrase on to the deportee’s phrase, or vice versa” (D, §104). Feeling thus signals that the very capacity to phrase - this being the capacity to speak and to be silent - has been suspended.

designated as a state in which “something ‘asks’ to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away,”<sup>31</sup> thus indicating that the proper way of dealing with differends is to find the appropriate phrase for expressing the wrong inflicted upon the victim. According to Lyotard, the responsibility of thought lies in “detecting differends and in finding the (impossible) idiom for phrasing them.”<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, by designating “Auschwitz” as a case of a wrong beyond repair, a differend which, by definition, cannot be converted into a litigation (that is, into a repairable damage), Lyotard erects an insurmountable obstacle to the injunction that “every wrong ought to be put into phrases”. To make this point clear it suffices to ask this naive question: which phrase is capable of expressing the differend disclosed by the feeling without betraying it or smothering it in litigation? The only possible answer, of course, is none, as no phrase is capable of translating the wrong done to the victim without distortion. Thus, Lyotard’s ambiguous comment that the feeling is, in itself, the impossible phrase should be read in both senses: as a place-holder of such a phrase and, at the same time, as that instance whose role is precisely to prevent such a phrase from “happening”.

It is precisely at this point that the question of the subject of the wrong arises. For Lyotard, as we have seen, the feeling bears witness to the fact that “an ‘excess’ has ‘touched’ the mind, more than it is able to handle.”<sup>33</sup> In addition, the relationship between thought and that which has “shocked” it, as Lyotard posits it, is an antinomic one: “When the sublime is ‘there’ (where?), the mind is not there. As long as the mind is there, there is no sublime.”<sup>34</sup> This “either/or” alternative clearly marks the splitting of the subject: between the affected entity - namely, that which receives the “blow” - and another entity which testifies to the effects of this “blow”. Indeed, this separation is already evoked in Lyotard’s own enigmatic question: “What is a feeling that is not felt by *anyone*? ... if there is no witness?”<sup>35</sup> To whom should we assign feeling, then? And what, on closer examination, is the subject of the differend?

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p. 32. Translated by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Heidegger and “the jews”’: A conference in Vienna and Freiburg,” in *Political Writings*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Translated by Bill Reading and Kevin Geiman.



If the feeling “does not arise from an experience felt by the subject,”<sup>36</sup> as Lyotard maintains, then we might ask where the demand for phrasing comes from. While Lyotard is right in linking this demand for phrasing to the emergence of the subject, thus suggesting that the subject is where there is an attempt to phrase the wrong, he appears to be unable to account for their simultaneity. Basically, the solution put forward by Lyotard can be presented in terms of an irresolvable dilemma: to save the singularity of the differend or the universality of the injunction.

The first option, which insists on the idiosyncrasy of the differend, seems necessarily to condemn a victim to mutism, as the only appropriate expression of the wrong inflicted upon him/her is incommunicable feeling. The problem with this solution resides in the fact that Lyotard, by taking the feeling, the affect, as a criterion of veracity (or, to put it in Lacanian terms, as “that which does not deceive”), Lyotard establishes the body, the suffering matter, as a guarantor of truth, as the Other of the Other. Once the feeling is posited as *index sui*<sup>37</sup>, the injunction that all differends should be phrased is revealed to be an empty one, one which is impossible to satisfy. It is impossible to satisfy, to the extent that a passage through “the defiles of the signifier” necessarily distorts the feeling. If, however, there is no phrasing without the misrepresentation, the “betrayal” of the feeling, this means that a desperate search for the proper phrase is thus revealed to be a barely dissimulated refusal of all attempts at phrasing.

Lyotard’s fear that the feeling of the wrong might be “translated” into an inappropriate phrase (therefore smothered, distorted - in short, betrayed) has radical consequences for the status of the subject: by refusing to assume the distortion that the affect/feeling necessarily endures in the process of phrasing, by refusing to envelope the pain into a phrase, thus making it “speak” in the field of the Other, accessible to others, this pain remains intimate to the victim. And conversely, insofar as Lyotard seems to be unwilling to accept the wrong’s alienation, the fact that it can only emerge in the field of the Other as represented by the signifier, the victim remains forever chained to her/his pain. As a result, the only subject “appropriate” to the differend turns out to be a sentimental, sublime mute, condemned to the role of a “plaything” of the wrong inflicted upon her/him.

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<sup>36</sup> *The Differend*, § 93.

<sup>37</sup> “The feeling is, at the same time, this state and the signalling of this state. The *sensus* is *index sui*.” See Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Sensus communis’ in *Judging Lyotard*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 13. Translated by Marian Hobson and Geoff Bennington.

The second solution proposed by Lyotard seems to be no less problematic. The injunction according to which all differends should be phrased, and which is destined precisely to prevent the psychotic, solipsistic solution evoked in the first answer, is valid only on condition that the feeling testifying to it is conceived as universal, transcendental. But this is only possible if there is some transcendental support capable of receiving the “blow”, to use Lyotard’s more general term which later replaced that of the wrong; that is to say, as something ready to be affected. That is to say, the subject must, in a certain sense, already be there, if only as a material, corporeal support: a suffering matter. Lyotard’s conception of the affect thus implies that before there is a subject of the cogito (“I think”) there is a pure capacity of being affected: a “pre-subject”, a “subject in statu nascendi”<sup>38</sup> as Lyotard describes it.

The problem with this, unquestionably victimising conception of the subject, is that by presupposing an original capacity of being affected, that is, by presupposing an instance of a guarantee that the wrong will be received, the subject of the wrong, which emerges in the process of its phrasing, remains ultimately indiscernible, conflated with the suffering matter. Consequently, both options opened up by Lyotard’s dilemma prove to be problematic: though the first option preserves the wrong in its radically unrecognised nature, this is only possible on condition that the wrong inflicted upon the victim remains “unverifiable”, intimate to the victim; the supposition of a universal, transcendental receptivity, on the other hand, annuls the “blow” and/or wrong as a pure effect of surprise.

From this it follows that there is no universal injunction demanding that a wrong should be “treated”, and consequently there is also no original receptivity destined to be affected by the “blow”. Thus, contrary to Lyotard, who attempts to theorise the subject as divided between a pure receptivity destined to receive the blow and the equally passive witness who registers the effects of the blow, we will maintain that the emergence of the subject coincides with the phrasing of the wrong. Seen from this perspective, there is a simultaneous “birth” of both - the subject and the wrong. This co-birth remains radically contingent and precarious, as no preceding demand universally imposes the task of handling the wrong. This simultaneity can only be explained if we bear in mind that the crucial feature of the wrong is its non-recognition or misrecognition. In order to be recognised, a wrong must be brought to light. However, this can only happen retroactively, with the emergence of an entity which not only designates itself a victim of a wrong,

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



but is also capable of giving voice to it; or, in Lyotard's language, an entity which is capable of inventing the "impossible" phrase to express the wrong. The relationship between the wrong and the subject can thus be articulated as follows: while the emergence of the subject definitely presupposes the existence of the wrong, this can be recognised, established as such, only once the subject that designates itself as the subject of the wrong emerges.<sup>39</sup>

What is lacking in Lyotard's account is precisely the subject which would emerge in the process of handling the wrong. But this subject remains unthought to the extent that Lyotard appears to be reluctant to accept such a solution, as it would put into question both his injunction that all wrongs should be phrased, as well as the victimising conception of the subject and, consequently, the division between a mute suffering "human animal," to borrow Alain Badiou's term<sup>40</sup>, and the compassionate gaze.

This fascination with victimisation, with suffering, indicates the complicity between the muteness of the suffering victim and the passivity of the witnessing gaze. This brings us back to "the saving of the honour of thinking". The "saving of the honour of thinking" evokes a division of the subject, but also a paradoxical division which renders the emergence of the subject impossible, as the subject is divided between two objectified instances: seen from the perspective of the "blow", the subject is reduced to its material support, to nothing but a reminder of the mute, animal suffering; seen from the perspective of the injunction of the phrasing of the differends, however, the subject is reduced to a pure gaze witnessing the inflicted wrong. As a consequence, there can be, strictly speaking, no "it happens" for the subject; on the contrary, the subject remains forever a subject to come, a subject "in abeyance", whose emergence is forever differed.

What, we might ask, motivates the saving of the honour of thinking? As already indicated by Adorno, it is the sense of guilt, insofar as the "smallest trace of senseless suffering in the empirical world" produces a sense of guilt (that is, reminds thought of the wrong done to things). On the one hand, thought seems to be guilty in advance, as it is in its nature to ignore, misconceive or misrepresent the wrong done to the victims; on the other hand, the feeling of guilt yields hope, since it testifies to the fact that thought

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<sup>39</sup> It is along these lines that we propose to read Rancière's thesis, according to which political subjectivisation is "the enactment of equality - or the handling of a wrong." See Jacques Rancière, 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivisation' in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman, London and New York: Routledge 1995, p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> For a penetrating (though biting) critique of the victimising conception of the subject, see Alain Badiou, *L'éthique. Essai sur la conscience du Mal*, Paris: Hatier, 1993.

is aware of suffering, as guilt and “nothing else,” says Adorno, “is what compels us to philosophise.”<sup>41</sup>

What is concealed in this ambiguous account, which simultaneously blames thought for its crimes and praises its feeling of guilt, is the way in which thought depends on suffering, since it is this shock which gives birth to the feeling of guilt and, consequently, to thought itself. From what has been said above, it follows that it is not the case that thought can only testify to the victimisation, to the wrong done to the victim, by converting itself into a passive spectator; rather, it is the “impotent”, powerless thought which, by impotently gazing at the suffering, turns the subject into a mute remainder, a human animal that can only express its suffering by feeling, a sentimental mute - more precisely, it is reduced to nothing but a reminder of the wrong inflicted upon it. The victimisation of the subject hence appears to be a direct consequence of the “saving of the honour of thinking”.

Adorno and Lyotard could then be blamed for disregarding the complicity of the powerlessness of thought with victimisation. Put another way, if the theorists of resistance seem to be all too ready to incriminate thought for crimes it did not commit, this is only to exculpate it for the crime it did commit. In its modesty, which, in fact, is immodest, contemporary thought burdens itself with all sorts of horrible, unspeakable crimes, only to conceal the real one: its unwillingness to abandon its posture of a powerless gazer, which, paradoxically, proves to be yet another disguise of mastery, another figure of mastery. This might seem to be surprising, since it is the position of all-powerful thought, as evidenced by Deleuze’s remark, that has been categorically rejected by contemporary thought precisely because of its pretensions to mastery. Where, then, does the mastery of thought lie? Insofar as testifying to the victim’s misery is considered to be thought’s *raison d’être*, it could be said that thought not only reduces the subject to a victim; in addition, by fixing the subject in the role of the eternal victim, thought also prevents the victim from overcoming this state, thus preventing her/him precisely from becoming the subject.

This implies that thought’s guilt lies not where Adorno or Lyotard locate it; rather, it lies in the very position that the thinkers of resistance propose as the “saving of the honour of thinking”. While thought, in its urge to humiliate itself, is ready to sacrifice all its privileges, it is unwilling to sacrifice this position as the mute, compassionate witness of suffering. The problem with this position lies in the way in which thought, by adopting the passive role, comes to constitute and to sustain the victimisation. Put another way,

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<sup>41</sup> *Negative Dialectics*, p. 364.



fascinated by the horrors of victimisation, thought misconceives its own role in victimisation, and therefore its responsibility for that situation. And conversely, it is only by renouncing such a position of a passive witness, which would, no doubt, strike a fatal blow to the "saving of the honour of thinking", that thought could engage in a practice of resistance whose goal is not to testify to the suffering but, on the contrary, to put an end to it.

The first attempt to account for the shift from emancipation to resistance can thus be conceived in terms of a double defeat: defeated politics is in retreat, while thought, on the other hand, is reduced to being a paralysed witness to victimisation and/or the resistance of the unthought. At this point we might raise a naive, yet obvious question: does the present dissociation preclude all subversiveness of thought, its efficacy in the domain of politics? Could thought still be considered subversive once the site of resistance is located in the unthought? From what has been said so far, it follows that an answer to these questions requires a rethinking of the relationship between thought and resistance, while taking into account the actual state of their dis-unity. Put this way, it appears that both solutions - modernist emancipation and postmodernist resistance - must be discarded from the start. The modernist solution must be rejected because, by insisting on a fidelity to politics, conceived in terms of the conjunction of thought and resistance, politics seems to be converted into a precious treasure, an *agalma*; it ultimately suggests that, in the final analysis, "nothing has happened". As a result of this denial of the breakdown of the link between thought and resistance, the actual "defeat" of politics is left unthought, unthematized. The postmodernist idolisation of resistance, on the other hand, seems to be no less debatable: though it marks the dissolution of thought and resistance, in the end it simply turns resistance against thought and, as a result, values the moment of the real for its intrinsic capacity for resistance, irrespective of the context in which it operates.

What, then, would count as a solution to the problem once both alternatives are rejected? Does this not leave us in an uncomfortable position of the one "going against the flow"? To this end, i.e. towards the goal of sketching our solution, we shall begin with a brief examination of the last figure of resistance, namely that of the remainder that has no proper place.

*"The Jews" and/or "The Saints": Reminder – Remainder*

One of the paradoxes of the ascetic ethics in which the "saving of thought's honour" is supposed to be grounded lies in the fact that such an ethics is far from immune to enjoyment; rather, the contrary is true. Enjoyment, or more precisely surplus-enjoyment, is paradoxically produced by the programmed failure of the phrasing of the wrong. In what follows, we propose to tie this extraction of surplus-enjoyment to Lyotard's radical misconception of the affect. This requires a closer look at the knot which links the subject, the Other and the affect, since it is precisely along these lines that Lyotard tries to account for the relationship between "the jews", as he puts it, and the Law.

Crucial in this respect is his reinterpretation of the Law. In contrast to his earlier writings - where the instance of the Law is conceived as a restriction which limits the free-floating libidinal intensities, the One which strives to subjugate to itself the Multiple - from *Just Gaming* onwards, Lyotard theorises the Law as the place-holder of the Other, i.e. the Law that imposes an obligation which is identified with the call of justice. According to Lyotard, this Law is always already there, yet we do not know what it says, not even from where it comes to us. Yet in spite of that the Law plays the role of the Other that has to be always presupposed and/or invented by our doing and saying. In these terms, one is always in a position of an addressee, of being obliged. One is obliged to act in accordance with the Law, even though the Law does not state what or what not to do. Ultimately, it is up to the subject to decide what the Law demands. The paradox of this enigmatic Law, as Lyotard convincingly argues, resides in the fact that the place of the sender, of the subject of the enunciation of the Law, is left vacant.<sup>42</sup> Where, then, does this obligation come from?

Using Freud's idea of *Nachträglichkeit*, Lyotard offers an account of how this obligation before the Law may have struck us originally with excessive, overwhelming power, and how it continues to have a hold over us. This implies that the obligation must be considered as a fact, suggesting that the source of this obligation calls to us from a "past" that has never been present. In short, the source of obligation remains unconscious. This original encounter with the Law is unique among events in that it can never be known

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<sup>42</sup> "Only if /the position of the sender/ is neutralised will one become sensitive, not to what is, not even to the reason why it says what it says, not even to what it says, but to the fact that it prescribes or obliges." See Jean-François Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 71. (Translated by Wald Godzich.)



directly; we only know it from its effects-affects. It is a traumatic experience, of which the subject shattered by it has no memory. Although the original encounter with the Law remains forgotten, the feeling of being obliged points to it nevertheless.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Lyotard urges us to mark repeatedly the memory of that which cannot be remembered, to incessantly record the traces of this traumatic encounter with the Law. This testifying to that which cannot be integrated into our memory, i.e. this preservation of the traumatic experience in its very “impossibility”, is only possible by converting the subject herself/himself into a living monument of the Forgotten. According to Lyotard, this is precisely the destiny of the “chosen” people, “the jews”.

The tradition of Western thought continually tried to deny this obligation before the Law, to forget the Forgotten. This is done by trying to convert, expel, integrate and finally exterminate those to whom that obligation is due. These others are “the jews”, the forgotten, marginalised people of the world. “They are what cannot be domesticated in the procession to dominate, in the compulsion to control domain, in the passion for empire.”<sup>44</sup>

That is to say, “The jews”, as elaborated by Lyotard, play the role of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, the representative of the lacking, “originally repressed” representation of “the Law”. By filling out the empty place of the missing representation, the signifier (“the jews”) evokes this void and, at the same time, points beyond it to that which is supposed to fill it out and which Lyotard calls the “Unforgotten”. It is precisely this double role of the evocation of the void and its concealment that converts “the jews” into a remainder which does not find its place within a given community and its symbolic universe. Strictly speaking, their role is to bear witness to the original shock, a traumatic experience of the encounter with the Law. In this sense, “the jews” are that instance which embodies the void of reference of this traumatic experience. They are the reminder of the “first blow” and, at the same time, the place-holder of the lacking representation of this blow. As such, “the jews” occupy the place of an instance whose very instance produces disruptive effects in a given community. “The jews” could then be called the impossible community within a community - more precisely, the real of the community or, quite simply, the real community.

Lyotard is right in trying to tie the quantum of the affect which results from the first, “forgotten” blow to some instance whose role is to embody,

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<sup>43</sup> Thus, “the Forgotten is not to be remembered for what it has been and what it is, because it has not been anything and is nothing, but must be remembered as something that never ceases to be forgotten.” *Heidegger and “the jews”*, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, p. 22.

to positivise, the vacuousness of reference of the affect. What Lyotard fails to see is the fact that “the jews” are not disturbing in themselves, for they are a structural effect of specific, singular constellation. Thus, it could be said that “the jews” become “the jews” in Lyotard’s sense because they occupy the place of a remainder that disturbs the coherence of a given situational regime. For Lyotard, on the contrary, “the jews” seem to play this role irrespective of the situation, since that which constitutes their identity of a reminder-remainder is their specific relationship with the Law: to be the reminder of the call of justice, the keeper of the most precious treasure, the *agalma*. Thus, in the same way in which Lyotard chains the subject-victim to the wrong done to him/her, he also rivets “the jews” to the Law: as a living monument, “the jews” are compelled to testify to the shattering encounter with the Law. With respect to the unforgotten Forgotten, they play the same role as the affects with respect to the wrong.

It is at this point that we can show a distinction between the psychoanalytical elaboration of the affect and that provided by the theory of resistance. Lacan as well as Lyotard are interested in affects only to the extent that they “touch the real”.<sup>45</sup> The point of departure of both approaches is the supposition in which the subject is affected by something indefinite, unanalysable, in short, by something that does not work. However, in opposition to the theories of resistance for whom the affect constitutes the beginning and the end of the process, thus ending up in passage to act, in the conversion of the subject herself/himself in the reminder of that which has affected her/him, Lacan requires that the passage of the affect to the saying, in short, to the signifier. Rather than taking the affect as a criterion of veracity, as we have seen with Lyotard, psychoanalysis puts it into question. That is to say, we are dealing here with what we may call the “imperative of saying”, the injunction to grasp that which, by definition, eludes it, i.e. the traumatic experience of the “blow” (traumatic in the sense that it radically affects, shatters the subject, thus making it possible for the emergence of a new subject). Yet Lacan’s imperative of “well-saying”, in opposition to the contemporary theorists of resistance who strive to preserve the unsayable, the unrepresentable, at all costs, invites the subject to seize on and say that which cannot be said.

This “well-saying” definitely cannot be conceived in terms of a speculative dialectics, a procedure which “digests” everything that comes its way. What

<sup>45</sup> Exemplary in this sense is Lyotard’s elaboration of the feeling of the sublime, since it evokes the failure of the power of thought. What is at stake here is the failure, the impasse, to the extent that it evokes the real, that it points to that which forever eludes thought, as Lyotard says, or the symbolic, in Lacan’s terms.



is at stake here is not all-powerful thought; rather, it is thought that passes from impotence and powerlessness to the impossible. And it is precisely by this impossibility that thought “touches the real”, since the real is that mode which manifests itself only through impasse and failures. How, then, are we to account for a “reconciliation” of the real and the symbolic, enjoyment and the signifier? Only by opening space for the real within the symbolic itself. This means that the relationship between the symbolic and the real can only be conceived in terms of extimacy: the real (enjoyment for Lacan) is not wholly “outside”; rather, it is the exterior situated in the very interiority of the symbolic. Thus, instead of saying, as Lyotard does, that the impossibility of representation points to the unrepresentable or, which amounts to the same, that the phrasing of the wrong is structurally impossible, Lacan incites us to say the unsayable, even though the Other of the Other, the guarantor of such a phrasing, does not exist. On the contrary, according to Lacan, the “well-saying” is possible precisely because the Other does not exist, since to express the unsayable involves an invention, a creation of a new idiom which does not exist in the field of the Other. Two conditions must be satisfied in order to invent a new idiom: to evacuate, to empty the substance of the suffering, of the pain; and second, to assume the inexistence of the Other.

Yet it is precisely this inexistence of the Other that Lyotard’s conception of the affect precludes from the very start. At the root of Lyotard’s error lies his conception of the affect as that which does not deceive thus signalling towards the Other. For Lyotard’s subject is wholly dependent on the Other which, although unnameable and enigmatic, is present nevertheless. Thus, it cannot be said that the subject confronts the lack of the Other, for an enigma is not the lack of the Other. In the final analysis, no “well-saying” is possible, for in order to be possible the Other must be suspended, hollowed out. Though Lyotard starts with an unnameable, enigmatic, almost empty Other, he ends up by giving this Other a body, a substance, by riveting the subject to her/his pain, by turning it into a living reminder of the obligation to the call of justice, a living monument of the traumatic encounter with the Law of the Other. This means that, for Lyotard as well as for Lévinas, the subject, insofar as s/he assumes the role of the reminder-reminder, of the witness, remains forever a hostage of the Other.

In what sense can it be said that Lacan, contrary to Lyotard who assigned to “the jews” the role of guardians of the *agalma*, is not duped by the paradoxical functioning of the “objet a”? What makes the saint into that object which is stuck in the “gullet” of the rule of capital, the drive for growth, of incessant production? What makes it possible for the saint to evade the deranged machine of production? It is only the fact that s/he occupies the

position of “useless” trash, a remainder. What this means is that the subject is invited to occupy the position of the object, a position where neither the dialectics of the recognition nor the feeling of compassion with a victim operate or apply, for both of these logics presuppose the existence of the Other, whereas the position of the saint is possible, on condition that the existence of the Other is put into question. By occupying the position of the remainder, of the trash, the subject makes it impossible for the two logics - that of the symbolic and that of the real or, to borrow terms from Rancière’s political theory, that of the police and that of the presupposition of equality - coincide. But the price to be paid for occupying the position of the excessive leftover of that which does not count and which, for that reason, finds no place in the given order, is her/his subjective destitution. Thus, it could be said that the subjectivisation of a given structure or a situation is “paid for” by the conversion of the subject into an object.

Although it might seem that Lyotard also urges “the jews” to assume the position of the remainder and therefore of “subjective destitution”, this is only to remind all the others, not of the inexistence of the Other but of the call of justice, as has been imposed on the subject by the Other. What is at stake in Lyotard’s endeavour is the re-establishment of the reign of the Other, i.e. the Law, rather than its annulment. As a result, “the jews” can never recognise themselves in the “objet a”. That is, no “jew” can identify with the remainder that would evoke both the inexistence of the Other and the vacuous reference of the subject’s desire. Insofar as “the jews” are the guardians of the *agalma*, although the “grave is empty”, there can be no occasion when the “jew”, in opposition to the saint, would say of herself/himself: “Thus, I am that”, namely, useless trash.

How, then, are we to account for the possibility of a way out in the present constellation, characterised by the reign of the domination of capitalist discourse and its drive for growth? Although it is tempting to assign to psychoanalysis the task of opening up the space for resistance, we are reluctant to espouse this solution, especially since Lacan himself predicted the surrender of psychoanalysis to the growing impasses of civilisation. The saint, on which Lacan models the analyst’s refusal to be useful, to surrender to the demands of capitalism, is a singular structural apparatus/effect of the structure rather than a vocation.

Though it might seem that there is a structural homology between the contemporary saint, i.e. the analyst who resists by “doing nothing”, by refusing to satisfy the demand of capitalist discourse to produce and be useful, and the hysterics who resist the existing symbolic order by refusing to assume the role assigned to them by this order, we believe that it would be a serious



error to conflate the resistance offered by the saint with the hysterical “No!” The problem with such a solution, which is premised on hysterical refusal, lies in the very treasuring of refusal for its own sake. What is misconceived by this approach, and this has been clearly pointed out by Lacan, is the fact that the refusal, instead of impeding the drive for growth, sets it in motion. That is to say, the mere refusal of the given order, of the roles and places that have been distributed and fixed by the “police”, to use Ranciere’s term, in itself does not bring about a change in the situation. On the contrary, such an answer may well be expected, if not “orchestrated”, by the “police” itself.

No less contestable is the path of anamnesis, i.e. the approach which strives to keep alive the memory of the intractable, of the Forgotten, be it the Law or Revolution, by converting the subject into a remainder-reminder of the traumatic “blow”, a mute, sublime witness to that which has shattered him/her. Not only is the path of anamnesis illusory, as the cause of the traumatic shattering is, by structural necessity, irretrievable, it also has serious consequences for the subject: the appointed “treasurer”, the keeper of the lost treasure, the subject, remains forever chained to the enigmatic Other, desperately trying to guess what the Other wants from her/him.

Insofar as the two above-mentioned solutions seem to be two sides of the same problem (i.e. the imperative of the continuation of resistance at all costs), we might ask, then, what the “proper” solution would be to the problem of the way out. Since no instance, not even that of the analyst, is predestined to play the role of the privileged site of resistance, the emergence of resistance wholly depends on an incalculable, hazardous, chancy, precarious encounter, on the intervention of some incalculable supplement which Badiou calls the event. It is only in terms of such an unheard-of event that the working-out of a situation in terms of a way out is conceivable. This has radical implications for our understanding of resistance: neither a destiny nor a duty, neither a task nor a right, resistance is “what happens”, i.e. that which is entirely at the mercy, as it were, of the precarious, wholly chancy encounter with the real, or, to use another term, is dependent on the emergence of the event. It could happen, but nothing indicates that it would or should happen, for instance, to this particular subject, or in this particular situation.

Second, this also has consequences for the position of the subject. Insofar as the “blow, the encounter, precedes the subject, and insofar as the subject is not there before the “blow” strikes, it could not be said that resistance is something which “happens” to the subject, since there is no transcendental support, no matter of resistance, to be moulded by the “blow”.

Rather, far from being identified with a “treasurer” of the *agalma*, a keeper of the secret forever chained to the Other, the subject is nothing but the moment in which a given situation is seen in a different light, i.e. from the point of view of the contaminating supplement, a surplus which does not count but which turns everything into a miscount, thus rendering a given situation inconsistent, untotalisable.

At the level of the subject, the only way out should, then, be accounted for in terms of a paradoxical combination of resistance and fidelity, a combination which also calls for a “new” alliance between thought and rebellion. The fidelity at stake here is not to be confused with a fidelity to “the intractable”, to borrow Lyotard’s term, as a place-holder of the *agalma*. Rather, the imperative of the fidelity, which might be spelled out in terms of the ethics of desire (“Do not give in!”) or in terms of the ethics of truth, such as has been elaborated by Badiou and whose fundamental maxim is “Continue!”, aims at that which embodies “nothingness”, the remainder, the place-holder of that which finds no place within a given situation. Although the imperative which demands continuation at all costs is “eternal” and universal, it can only be enacted once the event “happens”, which as such cannot be calculated or prescribed. Hence, it could be said that resistance, insofar as it is combined with fidelity, requires patience.



**Iris Marion Young**  
***On the Politization of The Social in***  
***Recent Western Political Theory***

Political theorists in the last quarter century have been primary custodians of a conception of the political as an active, participatory, and rational activity of citizens. This conception contrasts with the concept of politics usually assumed by popular opinion, journalism, and much political science. By politics these often mean the competition of elites for votes and influence, and processes of bargaining and among those elites about the shape of policy. Hannah Arendt's work remains a milestone in twentieth century political theory because she gave us an inspiring vision of the idea of the political as active participation in public life that many political theorists continue to guard and preserve.

In that vision the political is the most noble expression of human life, because the most free and self-determining. Politics as collective public life consists in people moving out from their private needs and sufferings to encounter one another in their specificity. Together in public they create and recreate through contingent words and deeds the laws and institutions that govern and frame their collective life, the resolution to their ever-recurring conflicts and disagreements, and the narratives of their history. Participation in such public life makes a world for people, where things and ideas are affirmed as real by virtue of appearing in that public affirmed by a plurality of subjects; that same public appearance affirms the reality of the individual person, who acts through speech. Social life is fraught with vicious power competition, conflict, deprivation, and violence, which always threaten to destroy political space. But political action sometimes revives, and through a remembrance of the ideal of the ancient *polis* we maintain the vision of human freedom and nobility as participatory public action (Arendt, 1958).

Arendt distinguished this concept of the political from the social, a modern structure of collective life which she believed increasingly eclipsed the political. In the modern world institutions, economic forces and mass movements collude to create a realm of need, production and consumption outside the family. Government institutions increasingly define their job as managing, containing and attending to this social realm – through education, public health policy, policing, public administration, and welfare.

Political economy grows with a vengeance, the state as a giant housekeeper, with a massive division of labor and social science apparatus. As a result people's lives may be more or less well taken care of, and government more or less efficient in its administration, but genuine public life sinks into the swamp of social need.

Despite wishing to preserve her vision of the political, for the most part political theorists have rejected Arendt's separation of the political from the social, and her backward looking pessimism about the emergence of mass social movements of the oppressed and disenfranchised. The more common judgement is that social justice is a condition of political freedom and equality (Bernstein, 1986; cf. Conovan, 1978), understood as the ability to participate actively in public affairs through word and deed. If we rule out economic issues and issues of social and cultural relations as appropriate to a genuine public discussion, moreover, it is not clear what active citizens have to talk about together (Pitkin, 1981).

In this essay I construct an account of political theory in the last two decades as thinking through the implications not of the eclipse of the political by the social, but rather of the politicization of the social. The story I tell is of course a construction, from my own point of view, which emphasizes some aspects of political theorizing in the last twenty-five years, and deemphasizes others. The theme of the politicization of the social, for example, will lead me to say little about the massive literature in recent political theory which takes some aspect of the historical canon of political theory as its subject. Likewise I will make little reference to recent political theory that makes use of the techniques of rational choice theory. My story partly seeks to construct recent political theory as a response to contemporary social movements. The trends in political theory I reflect on find mass social movements of poor and working class people, movements concerning labor, civil rights, feminism, and environmentalism, as the primary sites of active and participatory politics in the late twentieth century. Most of my attention will be on English-language political theory, though I will refer to some French and German writers.

My account divides the politicization of the social in recent political theory in to six sub-topics: social justice and welfare rights theory; democratic theory; feminist political theory; postmodernism; new social movements and civil society; and the liberalism-communitarianism debate. Recognizing that many works in recent political theory overlap these categories, I nevertheless try to locate most works in one of them.



*I. Social Justice and Welfare Rights Theory*

In 1979 Brian Barry could look back on two decades of political theory and find the first nearly barren and the second producing bumper crops (Barry, 1989). With him I will locate the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) as the turning point. It is no accident that the decade of the 1960's intervened between the barren field of political theory and the appearance of this groundbreaking book. Despite its rhetoric of timelessness, *A Theory of Justice* must be read as a product of the decade that preceded it. Would civil disobedience occupy a central chapter in a basic theory of justice today?

*A Theory of Justice* mapped a theoretical terrain from the thicket of demands and responses to the Black civil rights movement and journalistic attention to poverty: social justice. Whatever Rawls's insistence on the priority of the principle of equal liberty, most attention focused on Rawls's second principle, which referred to social and economic equality. Whether Rawls intended so or not, moreover, most interpreted *A Theory of Justice* as recommending an activist and interventionist role for government not only to promote liberties, but to bring about greater social and economic equality.

Hitherto principled political commitment to social equality and distributive economic justice were most associated with socialist politics. Insofar as commitment to such principles had made their way into public policy in liberal democratic societies, many understood this as a result of the relative success and concessions from the dominant economic powers (Piven and Cloward, 1982; Offe, 1984). *A Theory of Justice* presented norms of social and economic equality within a framework that claimed direct lineage with the liberal tradition.

A major issue of political conflict in the last two decades, as well as earlier, is about whether a liberal democratic state should legitimately aim to ameliorate social problems and economic deprivation through public policy. If Rawls supplied the philosophical framework for one side in this debate, Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Nozick, 1974) supplied a framework for the other. Is a politicized commitment to more egalitarian patterns of distributive social justice compatible with liberty or not? Many articles and collections of essays over this period debate this issue (Arthur and Shaw, 1978; Kipnis and Meyers, 1985).

Several political theorists continue the Rawlsian project of demonstrating that liberty is not only compatible with greater social equality, but requires it. Amy Gutmann adds participatory democracy to the values that

egalitarian liberalism must promote (Gutmann, 1980). Contemporary normative arguments for welfare rights, or a welfare liberal conception of justice, similarly aim to systematize a social democratic political program consistent with liberal values and explicitly refuting more libertarian interpretations of those values (Wellman, 1982; Goodin, 1988; Sterba, 1988). Kai Nielsen argues for the compatibility of liberty and equality in a more explicitly Marxist and socialist vein, devoting a large chunk of his argument to a refutation of Nozick (Nielsen, 1985). Even some Marxist inspired interpretations of justice aim to make an anti-exploitation social and economic theory compatible with a Rawlsian normative theory (Peffer, 1990; Reiman, 1990). Others insist, however, that different social class positions generate different pictures of society, and different incompatible, conceptions of justice (e.g., Miller, 1976). Thus Milton Fisk argues that liberal egalitarianism is a contradictory normative theory responding to the contradictory social formation of welfare capitalism, and that both are the outcome of an uneasy class compromise (Fisk, 1989). I believe that there is considerable truth in the claim that both the liberal democratic welfare state and a normative theory that attempts to reconcile the liberal tradition with a commitment to radical egalitarianism are fraught with tensions. Perhaps the promised third volume of Brian Barry's *Theories of Social Justice* will further clarify the requirements of just economic distribution.

With the publication of Charles Beitz's *Political Theory and International Relations*, (Beitz, 1979), these issues of social justice came to be extended to relations between peoples globally. Beitz argued that Rawls's principles of justice could be used as the basis for evaluating and criticizing the distributive inequality between developed societies of the North and less developed societies of the South. Political theorizing about social and economic inequality across national boundaries remains underdeveloped. Some important work has begun, however, on immigration issues and international justice (Carens, Whalen, 1988); environment and international justice (Goodin, 1990); hunger and obligations to distant peoples (Shue, 1980; O'Neill, 1986).

## II. Democratic Theory

Literature on social justice and welfare politicizes the social by asking whether government ought explicitly to try to ameliorate social oppression and inequality. But Arendt's critique of such expanded attention to the social as conceiving public life as social housekeeping might apply to much of this literature. With some exceptions, this literature tends to conceive citi-



zens as rights bearers and receivers of state action, rather than as active participants in public decision-making.

Nurtured by social movement calls for participatory democracy in the 1960's and 70's, in the last two decades normative theorizing has flowered that takes speech and citizen participation as central. Carole Pateman's still widely cited *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Pateman, 1970), set much of the agenda for contemporary participatory democratic theory. That work criticized a plebiscite and intergroup pluralist conception of democracy, and rearticulated an ideal of democracy as involving active discussion and decisionmaking by citizens. It argued that social equality is a condition of democratic participation, and that democratic participation helps develop and preserve social equality. This means that the sites of democratic participation must include social institutions beyond the state in which people's actions are directly involved, particularly the workplace.

C. B. Macpherson articulated a framework for critique of the passivity and utilitarianism of dominant conceptions of liberal democracy, and for an alternative more active conception of democracy. It is a measure of how much intellectual discourse has changed in the last twenty years that today reflection on conceptions of human nature seems quaint. Yet Macpherson's analysis of political theories according to whether they assume the nature of human beings as primarily acquisitive consumers of goods or primarily as developers and exercisers of capacities remains a useful way to orient democratic political theory. The perspective of possessive individualism will inevitably regard the political process as a competition for scarce goods, where the competitors' desire for accumulation knows no limits. If one redefines the human good as the development and exercising of capacities, however, then democratic theory takes a wholly different turn. Distributive justice becomes only a means to the wider good of positive freedom, which is itself a social good because realized in cooperation with others. Freedom is the opportunity to develop and exercise one's capacities, and actively engaged citizen democracy is both a condition and expression of such freedom (Macpherson, 1973; 1978; cf. Carens, ed., 1992).

Several recent political theorists take as a basic values such an expanded notion of freedom, as an absence of domination and positive capacity for self-realization and self-determination. Equality can be best understood as compatible with freedom in this sense, rather than in the narrower, usually property-based sense of freedom as liberty from interference. Thus one aspect of contemporary democratic theory concerns articulation of the conditions of genuine democratic citizenship. People who are deeply deprived cannot be expected to exercise the virtues of democratic participation, and

are seriously vulnerable to threats and coercion in the political process. Too often wealth or property function as what Michael Walzer (1982) calls "dominant" goods: inequalities in these economic relations will generate inequalities in opportunity, power, influence, and the abilities to set one's own ends. So serious commitment to democracy presupposes social measures that limit the degree of class inequality and guarantee that all citizens have their needs met (Bay, 1981; Green, 1985; Cunningham, 1987; Cohen and Rogers, 1983). Most of those who theorize this relation of social and political equality to democracy concentrate on issues of class. Influenced by feminist analyses, however, a few notice the need to address issues of the gender division of labor to support political equality and participation (Green, 1985; Walzer, 1982; Mansbridge, 1991).

Participatory approaches to democratic theory hold that democracy is a hollow set of institutions if they only allow citizens to vote on representatives to far away political institutions and protect those citizens from government abuse. A fuller democracy in principle means that people can act as citizens in all the major institutions which require their energy and obedience. As I will discuss in a later section of this paper, this conclusion has opened both contemporary political practice and theory to interest in civil associations outside both state and corporate life as the most promising sites of expanded democratic practice. Following Pateman's lead, however, contemporary democratic theory has also shown a renewed interest in workplace democracy. Though practices of workplace democracy, several writers argue, citizens can both begin to realize the social and economic equality that they find a condition for democratic participation in the wider polity, and at the same time live the value of creative self-governance in one of the most regular and immediate aspects of modern life (Schweickart, 1980; Dahl, 1978, Gould, 1988). The relative impotence of political theory in setting the agenda of political debate may be revealed by the fact that such thoroughly articulated arguments have little influence on discussion of workplace practices.

At the beginning of the period I am reviewing, the theory of political democracy was largely identified with a theory of interest group pluralism. Inspired by contemporary participatory democratic experiments and institutions, important critiques of this interest group pluralism emerged with well developed alternative conceptions of democracy based on active discussion. In *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, Jane Mansbridge (1980) argued that conceptualizing the democratic process as the competition among interests is too narrow, and she offered a model of 'unitary' democracy as one in which participants aim at arriving at a common good through discussion. Wisely, she also argued that unitary democracy has limits, and suggested that



both adversary and unitary democracy are necessary in a robustly democratic polity.

Benjamin Barber took up the impulse of this classification and critique, but argued in *Strong Democracy* (Barber, 1984) that an ideal of unitary democracy is too conformist and collectivist. He proposed a model of strong democracy instead, as a participatory model in which citizens form together a public commitment to a common good but where social pluralities of interest and commitment remain. It is not clear to me, however, that Barber's and Mansbridge's models are all that different.

Following these important texts, recent years have seen an explosion of theorizing about democracy as a discussion based form of practical reason. Ideals and practices of democratic decisionmaking that emphasized reasoned discussion have received important further development and refinement (Cohen, 1989; Spragens, 1990; Sunstein, 1988; Michelman, 1988; Dryzek, 1990; Fishkin, 1991). Though I consider this an extremely important trend in contemporary political theory, as currently articulated the notion of deliberative democracy has at least two problems. On the whole the models too much assume the need for a unity of citizens as either a starting point or goal of deliberation (Young, forthcoming). Theories of deliberative democracy, moreover, have for the most part not grappled with the facts of modern mass democracy that led to the development of a theory of interest group pluralism. On the whole they have not considered the question of democratic representation in large-scale mass politics. John Burnheim has put forward some creative ideas about a system of participatory based representation (Burnheim, 1985), and Charles Beitz (1989) and Norberto Bobbio (1984) have also given central consideration to this question. Future work on the question of theorizing of structures of representation in a participatory and deliberative democracy would do well to build on the recent magnum opus of the patriarch of liberal pluralism himself, Robert Dahl (Dahl, 1989).

### *III. Feminist Political Theory*

Civil rights and poor people's movements provide a context for theorizing social justice and welfare rights. Experiments in participatory democratic practices in cooperatives, communes, and neighbourhood organisations fuel reconsideration of ideals of participatory and deliberative democracy. The contemporary feminist movement has inspired perhaps the most sweeping reconceptualizations of political theory. As in every other discipline

in the humanities and social sciences, feminist scholarship in political theory has questioned basic assumptions in the canon discourse itself, and proposed considered reconceptualizations of central ideas in the field. Feminist political theory involves politicizing the social by questioning a dichotomy of public and private and thereby proposing that family relations, sexuality, and the gendered relations of street school and workplace are properly political relations. That gender relations are political implies that they are structured by power, and that they are relations whose institutionalization ought to be subject to discussion, rather than emerging from tradition.

In other disciplines bringing gender into focus meant first making women visible – a historical actors, as writers, artists, and scientists, and as persons with sex and gender specific problems and experiences that merit both empirical and normative study. Whole concern to make women visible has not been absent from feminist political theory, from the beginning the primary direction of gendering political theory has been to make its maleness visible.

Since the groundbreaking publication of a collection of paper by Lorrenne Clark and Lynda Lange (1978) and Susan Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought* (1979), a large and sophisticated literature has grown analyzing and evaluating ideas of the canon writers of Western political theory from a feminist perspective. Most of this has concentrated on classic modern theorists, but some feminist critique has examined ancient writers as well (Saxonhouse, 1976).

Feminist political theory deconstructs the public-private dichotomy that runs through the canon story in the following way. The public realm of politics can be so rational, noble, and universal only because the messy content of the body, meeting its needs, providing for production, caretaking, and attending to birth and death, are taken care of elsewhere. Male heads of households derive their power to make wars, laws and philosophy from the fact that others work for them in private, and it is no surprise that they would model nobility on their own experience. But a modern reflexive political theory should recognize that the glory of the public is dialectically entwined with the exploitation and repression of the private, and the people restricted to that sphere so they can take care of people's needs. However the analysis proceeds, feminist political theory concludes that twentieth century politics requires a basic rethinking of this distinction and its meaning for politics (Elshtain, 1981; Nicholson, 1984; Young, 1987).

Much feminist political theory analyzes the masculinism of a universal reason that abhors embodiment and honors the desire to kill and risk life (Hartsock, 1983; Brown, 1989). Beginning with the ancients, courage tops



the list of citizens virtues, which promotes the soldier as the paradigm citizen. Machiavelli is celebrated as the father both of modern *realpolitik* and republicanism because he fashions the account of political man so clearly relying on images of risk, danger, winning, and the competition of sport and battle. Hannah Pitkin's brilliant study of Machiavelli relies on feminist psychoanalysis as well as critiques of the public-private dichotomy to expose the grounds of this masculinist citizen in a psychic opposition between self and other (Pitkin, 1984).

Many feminist critics focus on the idea of the social contract to uncover different assumptions about human nature, action and evaluation that exhibit masculine experience and develop a one-sided account of the possibilities of political life and political change. Several have focused on the assumptions of individualism, atomistic autonomy and independence that structure the image of this rational citizen in modern political thought. Carole Pateman argues that the idea of the individual assumed by social contract theory carries an image of the person as self-originating, without birth and dependence. If the original dependence of all human beings on others were to replace this assumption of self-generation, then the entire edifice that constructs social relations as effects of voluntary bargains would collapse. Some writers have explored alternative starting points for a conception of society and the political, which begins with premises of connectedness and interdependence rather than autonomy and independence.

Feminist arguments about individualism, the public-private dichotomy, contract theory, and the implicitly bias in Western ideas of reason and universality have influenced some work of male political theorists concerned with contemporary issues (e.g., Smith, 1991). But this work has had little influence on scholarship on ancient or modern political theory. Considering the scope and analytic depth that many feminist scholars have brought to examination of some of the most central ideas of the most central thinkers, it is puzzling why other scholars apparently felt obliged neither to revise their approaches in light of these critiques nor give arguments against them.

Feminist theorists have devoted at least as much scholarly energy to contemporary political theory and practice. Feminists have subjected many of the important terms of political discourse to searching analysis, including power (Hartsock, 1983), authority (Jones, 1993), political obligations

(Hirschmann, 1992), citizenship (Dietz, 1985; Bock and James, ed., 1992), privacy (Allen, 1989), democracy (Phillis, 1991), and justice (Okin, 1989).

The question and conclusions in this conceptual literature are extremely diverse, but the arguments tend to cluster around two projects. First, feminist analysis argues that theories of justice, power, obligation, and so on, reflect male gendered experience, and must be revised if they are to include female gendered experience. Often the criticism takes the form of arguing that the generality that political theorists claim for their concepts and theories cannot in fact be general because the theories do no notice the fact of gender difference and take these into account in formulating their theories. Thus Susan Okin argues, for example, that Walzer's arguments about justice become inconsistent when the facts of male domination within communities are taken into account.

Second, these conceptual analyses often claim that political theory too often tends to disembodiment these central political concepts. Thus Nancy Hartsock argues, for example, that dominant theories of power repress the relation childhood experience of vulnerability, and presume a rigid self-other dichotomy that reduces power to competition and control. Thinking power in terms of embodiment would draw the attention of political theorists to power as power-to and not simply power-over (cf. Wartenberg, 1990). Much feminist discussion about the concept of equality, to take another example, has questioned whether equal respect for women should imply identical treatment to men, because women experience pregnancy and childbirth, and suffer other vulnerabilities because of sexist society (Bacchi, 1990).

#### *IV. Post modernism*

Most of the humanities and social science disciplines have been deeply rattled in the last two decades by the style of thinking usually called postmodernism. Political theory has been affect by this current, though the challenges and questions posed by postmodernism seem to nibble at the edges of the discipline rather than being felt at the core. Much would be gained and little lost, in my opinion, by a more sustained engagement by more political theorists with the implications of postmodern critiques of modern norms and ideals of subjectivity.

The work of Michel Foucault stands perhaps most directly as a towering contribution to political theory, at the same time as it challenges many of its traditional assumptions. Foucault thinks that political theory and discourse continue to assume a paradigm of politics derived from a pre-mod-



ern experience, and that since the eighteenth century a new structuration of power has operated. The old paradigm still assumed by most political theory conceives power as sovereignty: the titular unity of the state, which hands down decrees to its subject that say what is allowed and forbidden. In this regime power is experienced as negative, the repressive force of prohibition and punishment.

Modern political institutions have shifted from a regime of sovereignty to governmentality: the application of principles and techniques of (patriarchal) household management to public institutions. Now the king and his agents do not reach out from the center to control the unruly subjects with fear. Instead ruling institutions percolate up from the ground, in the outlying capillaries of society, which discipline bodies to conform with norms of reason, order and good taste, for their own good. Power proliferates and becomes productive in the emergence of disciplinary institutions that organize and manage people in a complex division of labor: hospitals and clinics, schools, prisons, welfare organizations, police department. Contrary to its self-conception, the scientific mood of Enlightenment rationality does not generate a world of freedom beyond power, but a new set of microprocesses of power, which engage as well as constrain. Scientists and professionals themselves, rather than kings and presidents, are primary agents of this power, exercised through social scientific and managerial knowledge. Power operates less as juridical rules and more as scientifically and professionally defined codes of normal and deviant (Foucault, 1979; 1980; Burchell, et. al., 1991).

Foucault certainly theorizes the politicization of the social. He describes strategies of power throughout the social body, in mundane corners of institutional life such as settlement houses or therapists' offices. His account of how principles of governmentality transfer techniques of home economy to public life has striking echoes with Arendt's story of the emergence of the social; it also resonates with Habermas's notion of the colonization of the lifeworld, that I will discuss below. Political theory has yet fully to absorb and evaluate their picture of power as the productive and proliferating process of disciplinary institutions. William Connolly has taken a leading role in showing Foucault's ideas as a challenge to political theory's uncritical reliance on Enlightenment ideas. He argues that norms are always double-sided and ambiguous, and that we should resist the bureaucratic impulse to discipline ambiguity (Connolly, 1982). A few political theorists have examined the concept of power in light of Foucault's work (Philip, 1983; Smart, 1983; Wartenberg, 1990; Spivak, 1992; Honneth, 1991). More engagement with

Foucault's ideas will require rethinking the concept of state, law, authority, obligation, freedom, and rights, as well.

The critical force of Foucault's analyses is apparent. But this theorizing cries out for normative ideals of freedom and justice by means of which to evaluate institutions and practices. Several political theorists make important arguments that Foucault's theorizing is implicitly contradictory because he refuses to articulate such positive ideals (Taylor, 1984; Fraser, 1989; Habermas, 1990, Chap 9 and 10).

Several other French writers associated with postmodernism have been important for political theory, including Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Kristeva. I will discuss only a few other themes that arise for political theory out of the work of these writers.

Postmodern thinkers have questioned an assumption that unified individual subject are the units of society and political action. Subjectivity is a product of language and interaction, not its origin, and subject are as internally plural and contradictory as the social field in which they live. This ontological thesis raises serious questions for political theory about the meaning of moral and political agency. Interpreting Merleau-Ponty along with some of the others I have mentioned above, Fred Dallmayr offers a vision of political process where a desire to control dissipates (Dallmayr, 1981).

Several writers take up the Derridian critique of a metaphysics of process to argue that a desire for certainty and clear regulatory principles in politics has the consequences of repressing and oppressing otherness, both in other people and in oneself (Young, 1986; White, 1991). In *Identity/Difference* William Connolly gives a twist to this thesis by claiming that such unifying politics produces a resentment too quick to blame and not open enough to ambiguity (Connolly, 1991). Bonnie Honig applies these sorts of arguments to the texts of political theorists such as Kant, Rawls and Sandel; she argues that their desire for a unifying theoretical center in political theory oppressively expels subject who deviate from their models of rational citizen and community (Honig, 1993).

I find the most important consequence of postmodern critiques of identifying thinking to lie in a reinterpretation of democratic pluralism. Democratic politics is a field of shifting identities and groups that find affinities and contest with one another (Yeatman, 1994). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (1985) has been influential along these lines. They argue that the Marxist concept of the revolutionary agency of the working class is a metaphysical fiction inappropriate to the contemporary period of proliferating radical social movements defined by



multiple identities and interests. Radical democratic politics should be understood as the coalescing of plural social movements in civil society, to deepen democratic practice both in the state and society. I heartily endorse a political theory that appreciates social heterogeneity and is suspicious of efforts to unify (see Young, 1990). Much of this writing, however, seems either to identify normative standards of justice and freedom as themselves suspicious, or not to refer to issues of freedom and justice at all. The task for a political theory sensitive to the repressive implications of identifying logic and exclusionary normalization is to develop methods of appealing to justice less subject to these criticisms.

#### *V. New Social Movements and Civil Society*

I have suggested that we might understand many of the important developments of contemporary political theory as expressions of and responses to contemporary political movements that focus critical reflection on social relations not traditionally thought of as political. I have mentioned some of these already, particularly the women's movement. In the last twenty years movements have proliferated whose style and demands go beyond claims for rights or welfare: environmentalism, peace movements, group based movements of national resistance and cultural pride, gay and lesbian liberation. Some recent social and political theory conceptualizes the political styles and implications of these sorts of movements, often called "new social movements" (Melucci, 1989; Boggs, 1986; West, 1990, Moors and Sears, 1992).

These movements are called "new" for at least two reasons. First, on the whole their issues do not primarily concern inclusion in basic citizenship rights nor the enlargement of economic rights. Their issues are more specifically social – respect and self-determination for cultural difference, responsibility and pluralism in everyday lifestyle, reflection on power in social interaction, participation in decisions in social and economic, as well as political, institutions. Secondly, the form of organization of these movements does not replicate the mass movement form of political party or union, a unified bureaucracy seeking power through resource mobilization. Instead, these new social movements tend to be networks of more local groups, each with their own principles and style, that nevertheless act in concern en masse in some protest actions.

Some important political theory reflects systematically on the normative political principles embodied in some of these movements. The envi-

ronmental movement, for example, provides substance for reflection on basic normative issues of value, social rationality, and democratic participation (Sagoff, 1989; Goodin, 1991; Dryzek, 1988; Ekersley, 1993).

Despite the importance of anti-racist social movements emphasizing self-determination, cultural pluralism and reparations for past injustice, there has been surprisingly little work by political theorists about race and racism. In this connection, Cornel West's work must count as making important contributions to political theory (West, 1982; 1992), along with the work of philosophers such as Bernard Boxill (1984), Howard McGary and Bill Lawson (1992). Andrew Sharp's carefully argued book, *Justice and the Maori*, stands as a model of theorizing of indigenous people's movement in the context of advanced industrial society. Some political theorists in Australia and Canada have begun to take up the challenge of normative theorizing about indigenous peoples issues (Carens, 1994; Kymlicka, 1993). Though there is significant work on indigenous peoples issues by legal theorists in the United State (e.g., Williams, 1990), I see few signs that U.S. philosophers and political theorists are reflecting on the specific normative issues concerning Native Americans.

Some recent theorizing about the role of state and bureaucracy in advanced industrial societies helps set a context for understanding the new social services holds that such operations of disciplinary social power also create their own resistances. Along somewhat different lines, Claus Offe gives an account of the modern welfare state as having depoliticized processes of social control and public spending. The state has become an arena where officials conduct their real business more or less behind closed doors, and experts administer policies with a technical know-how that does not bring normative ends into view. Social movements politicize some of this activity from a positions outside state institutions (Offe, 1984).

In his concept of the "colonization of the lifeworld", Jürgen Habermas offers a theoretical context for conceptualizing the meaning of new social movements. State and corporate institutions in the twentieth century, he claims, develop complex production and administrative activities that are guided by technical reason, and increasingly "uncoupled" from the everyday life context of meaningful cultural interaction. The activities and affects of these tehnicized economic and administrative system, further, come back to regulate and restructure the everyday lifeworld in accordance with its own imperatives (Habermas, 1983). The natural wilderness is restructured to a theme park, or everyday consumption is rules by spatial and packaging decisions that serve the interests of profit rather than consumer desire. This theory interprets many new social movements as a reaction to this coloniza-



tion of the lifeworld. People seek through their political action to open greater space for collective choice about normative and aesthetic ends, and to limit the influence of the systemic imperatives of power and profit.

If it is true that state activity is largely technicized, then state institutions cannot function as the site of deliberative politics in advanced capitalist society. Rather, politics, in the sense of people meeting together to discuss their collective problems, raise critical claims about action, and act together to alter their circumstances, happens more in critical public spheres outside the state and directed at its action. Habermas's major work of the early 1960's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1962; 1989), has received new attention by political theorists interested in participatory politics and critical normative discourse in late twentieth century society (Calhoun, 1991).

For the purpose of such theorizing, a concept of civil society as the locus of free and deliberative politics has been emerging. The concept of civil society was used in the opposition movements of Eastern Europe throughout the 1980's, and this usage has influenced some of these theoretical developments. The concept has also been influential in opposition movements in South Africa and Latin America.

Leading proponents of the theory of civil society are John Keane (1984; 1988), Jean Cohen (1983) and Andrew Arato (Arato and Cohen, 1992). These theorists draw on Habermas's analyses of late capitalism to argue that the sphere of civil society, as distinct from both state and corporate economy, as the primary locus of politics, in the sense of people deliberating together about their collective life and raising normative issues about how things ought to be. Civil society consists in voluntary associative activity – the array of civil associations, non-profit service organizations, and so on, in which people participate that are only loosely connected to state and corporate economy. Civil society is the arena in which social movements flower. Activities of civil society do require a strong liberal state that protect the liberties of speech, association and assembly. But the activities of civil society are more directly participatory than the way citizens relate to state decisionmaking apparatus.

Both Cohen and Arato and Keane thus look to civil society as the arena for deepening and radicalizing democracy. The public spheres of civil society can and should be enlarged by pushing back the bureaucratized functions of the state and structuring more areas of social life in terms of voluntary participatory organizations. These civil organizations can also serve as the stage from which to launch criticism of state policy and action. The program of radical democracy can be furthered, finally, by the creation within

corporate institutions of workplace democracy, which have the voluntary and participatory character of civil association. Thus the vision of social change embodied in the theory of civil society sees a proliferation of groups and activities, with somewhat different issues and concerns, promoted limited goals of social transformation all of which involve expanding the possibilities for democratic participation. Such a vision coincides with the ideas of some of the contemporary theorists of participatory democracy and with postmodern theorists like Laclau and Mouffe.

I find the social theory of bureaucratization and commodification that the theory of civil society relies on useful. Thus I find attractive the idea that institutions and movements of civil society are the primary arena for politics in the Arendtian sense of people moving out from preoccupation with their private lives to meet and discuss their collective issues. Looking to civil activity as the place where active deliberation and democratic egalitarianism can be promoted and deepened, moreover, is important.

The political theory of civil society, however, seems to have occluded some concerns that are more apparent when theorizing focuses on what state policy ought to do, namely concerns about economic inequality. New social movement theorizing retains these concerns to same degree. But in their emphasis on cultural issues and the politics of identity, concerns about access to and power over resources seem less salient.

The concept of civil society is also ambiguous about issues of economic justice. Not all theorizing about civil society and political theory distinguishes between the economy and civil society as Cohen and Arato do. Often the theorizing that does identifies the freedom of civil society also with the freedom of the market (see, e.g., Kukathas and Lovell, 1991). Then the theory of civil society emerges as a new form of anti-state liberalism, particularly arguing that state intervention in economic activity for the purposes of redistribution or responding to social needs unjustifiably interferes with freedom. Since all civil society theorizing agrees that modern welfare state bureaucracies tend to be undemocratic and dominative, there is a real question of how a commitment to the active promotion of social justice can be made compatible with this view of politics and democracy (Young, forthcoming).

## VI. Liberalism and Communitarianism

Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982) levelled an ontological critique at the concept of self Sandel claimed Rawls presupposed



in his theory of justice. Rawls's account presupposes a moral self prior to social relationships guided by principles of justice, Sandel argued, a self "unencumbered" by particular culture and commitments into which he or she is thrown. Principles of justice generated from such an abstract notion of self can serve only to regulate public relations among strangers in the most formalistic way. For a robust political theory of social union, Sandel suggested, justice must be supplemented by recognition of particular community bonds and commitments that constitute selves.

In *After Virtue*, Alistair MacIntyre (1983) levelled a more historically oriented challenge to liberalism. The economic and ideological changes of modern society create a modern dilemma of relativism. Religious and moral questions – questions about the good, the just, the virtuous – have become matters of private conscience or contesting political opinion. Liberalism is a system of formal adjudication among such competing and incommensurate opinions among which there is no means of deciding some are right and others wrong. In this modern world-view moral agents are released onto the landscape as disconnected, commodified and often cynical atoms. The late modern malaise can best be treated by looking for living communities of shared values and virtues that can serve as contemporary analogues of medieval guild communities, and other traditional self-ruling communities bound by common commitment to particular excellences.

Communitarianism can be interpreted as a form of politicizing the social. It claims to anchor political values like justice, rights, freedom, in particular social and cultural contexts. Thus it interprets the social as prior to and constitutive of the political. Its ontological critique of liberalism rejects abstract individualism. Its political critique suggests that liberal norms and values implausibly claim to transcend and bracket particular cultural contexts, and to apply to all societies in the same way. But some communitarian discussion suggested that culture shapes moral norms, and that these culturally based values may sometimes conflict with liberal norms. Liberals then wondered whether it wasn't communitarian which sent us down a road of normative relativism coupled with intolerant particularism.

By the mid 1980's the so-called liberalism-communitarian debate was flooding the pages of journals and books in political theory. But the debate was both too abstract and founded on a false dichotomy. Despite the fact that the aim of communitarians was to situate moral and political norms in the particular social contexts of full blooded agents, they rarely discussed any particular communities (cf. Wallach, 1987). It was difficult to find, moreover, any communitarian who would reject liberal values of equal respect, freedom of action, speech and association, or tolerance (cf. Gutman, 1985).

Few self-proclaimed liberals, on the other hand, were ready to deny the power of particular cultural commitment in individual lives, though they might disagree with communitarians about the normative significance of these facts.

The liberalism-communitarianism debate did expose how much contemporary liberal political theory abstracts from social group affiliation and commitment to consider individuals only as individuals. It thus posed individuals. It thus posed an important challenge of whether and how liberal theory ought to include recognition of particular contexts of social and cultural group difference. Will Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1989) represents a turning point in this debate. Unlike many writings in this discussion, Kymlicka is not abstract about community and culture, but rather discusses the particular cultural and political situations of Native peoples in relation to the liberal state of Canada. Staunchly adhering to the values of modern political liberalism, Kymlicka argues that these are not only compatible with, but require, the constitutions of cultural rights that may sometimes imply special rights for endangered or oppressed cultural minorities. The key to his argument that such cultural rights follow from liberalism is his construction of individual rights as including an individual right to cultural membership, and thus to the maintenance of the culture of which one is a member.

Another Canadian contributor to this more contextualized discussion of cultural rights, Charles Taylor, is less certain that a principle of cultural recognition is compatible with at least some versions of liberalism (Taylor, 1992). If we understand liberalism to require a universality to the statement of rights, such that laws and rules should apply equally to all in the same way, then politically recognizing and maintaining particular cultures sits uneasily with liberalism. The recognition and preservation of minority cultures may require special treatment and special rights for which there are good moral arguments, but arguments beyond the liberal individualist tradition (cf. Young, 1989; 1990, especially Chapter 6).

A different set of recent works has also aimed to produce a reconciliation between the stances of liberalism and communitarianism that were posited in the early 1980's. Liberalism has typically been interpreted as neutral among values and equally accepting of ways of life as long as their activities leave one another alone. Communitarianism, on the other hand, especially in MacIntyre's version, takes the good, as the ends of action, and virtue, as the disposition to bring about these good ends, as the moral commitment that liberalism has abandoned to relativism. Some writers have rejected the characterization of liberalism as neutral among ends and virtues, and



have argued that liberalism itself implies particular cultural values, normative ends, and behavioral virtues (Macedo, 1990; Galston, 1991).

It is fitting to end my story of two decades of political theory by referring to the same writer with whom I began: John Rawls. The arguments of *Political Liberalism* (1993) are, to a significant degree, attempts to respond to the liberalism-communitarianism debate and the social context of multiculturalism in liberal society. Rawls moves in the opposite direction from Kymlicka and some of the other writers who aim to reconcile the values of political liberalism with public recognition for particular cultural norms and ways of life. Freedom and respect for particular "comprehensive doctrines," as he calls them, instead requires that they all agree on a set of principles guiding the interaction of distinct communities, but transcending them all. Multiculturalism is possible in a liberal society only if we re-draw a fairly clear border between what is properly public, the business of the constitutional and legal rules governing the whole society, and what is private, in the sense of matters of individual and community conscience and commitment.

Although the overlapping consensus that Rawls believes is produced by the willingness of different cultures and communities of conscience to set fair terms of cooperation retains attention to social and economic inequality as well as liberty, I find this work to constitute a retreat from the social. Rawls thinks that conflicts and ambiguities produced by the being together of concrete communities, about issues of sexuality, family, video content, religious dress in public, and countless other issues, are best handled by reestablishing a legal and political discourse that only admits into its realm issues already framed in terms of generalizable norms. Many today believe that the demands of social need, social context, value conflict, and conflict over public recognition for minority cultures and ways of life, have overloaded political institutions. They thus think that the only solution is for the political institutions to restrict themselves to enforcing the criminal law, protecting constitutional liberties, and organizing small bits of aid for the very needy. The boundary of the political should be redrawn to exclude the social.

While Rawls himself continues to say that the difference principle is important, the emphasis in *Political Liberalism* is on the procedural mechanisms for arriving at and maintaining committed consensus on civil rights and liberties. Proposals to redistribute wealth and income so as to maximize the expectations of the least advantaged are much more controversial today than they were twenty years ago, even as the ranks of the least advantaged have been swelling. Being less advantaged overlaps significantly,

moreover, with social positioning in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, and culture. Thus political claims about family values or recognition for cultural minorities have much to do with claims of social justice. Even where less tied to issues, of economic disadvantaged, the "politics of identity," whereby groups make claims for public recognition of the specificity of their cultural values, are not going away. For all these reasons the current temptation of political theory to retreat from the social threatens to make it even more irrelevant to politics than usual. Fortunately, there are signs that many political theorists will continue engaging these fiercely difficult political issues of the late twentieth century.

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## II.

### *Power and the Limits of Historical Representation*

*A postmodern re-examination of the western obsession with power and time and a reconsideration of western inability to cope with revisionism*

"When a man begins with the pompous formula – 'The verdict of history is' – suspect him at once, for he is merely dressing up his own opinions in big words ... There is no 'verdict of history' other than the private opinion of the individual ..." *was Trevelyan's warning. In his opinion* "history should not only remove prejudice, it should breed enthusiasm ..." *Therefore it should not be* "the light and the truth' but a search therefore, a sermon there-upon, a consecration" (Droysen) ...

*We should be aware that* "historical narrative always depends on the culture in which and from which it springs" (Huizinga), *and that there has always been a struggle for an interpretation of historical facts, a struggle between different social and cultural groups who wanted to establish their vision of historical truth (Voltaire). And finally, Nietzsche has already shown (and Foucault brought it with all the emphasis again) that discourses emerge in a field of relations of power, defying some, supporting others, hardly coming into the scholarly world as innocent pursuits of truth (Poster).*

*Thinking about these dimensions and also about a definition of history given by Keith Jenkins (in which products of history "... once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exist at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along a dominant-marginal spectrum.") we invited historians to participate in a discussion in which the relations between traditional and "new" history or "new philosophy of history" (Ankersmith) is metaphorically situated in a power-resistance relation.*

*We got a response from excellent authors (scholars) such as Keith Jenkins discussing Elizabeth Deeds Ermath's Sequel to History (Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time) as "...one of the most important consideration of postmodernism, history and ethics/morality" and what he "construe as ways of living in time but outside history; in morality but outside ethics." We received the text from Viennese, Reinhard Sieder, who is reconstructing the turn to social history, claiming that in "new" social history, the historian still seeks to attain the truth about the "real".*

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We have a text written by Paul Freedman (*"Peasant Resistance in Medieval Europe"*) in which he is trying – on the basis of a rediscovery of the rationality of the peasant economy, of the 15th and 16th centuries to show how one-sided was Marxist and free-market economists' and historians' view on peasantry as an obstacle to progress. And finally, here is my contribution, in which I discuss the main problem of east and south-east European transitional or post Cold War historical reinterperetations of the past fifty years. It is the problem of the reinterpretation of collaboration-resistance relationships during fascist and (or) Nazi occupation. It is a critique of a recent revisionist attempt to possess the past ... and control the future. It is a critique of the lack of flexibility, openness, and willingness to reflect.

Finally, I would like to thank all who decided to contribute to the "historiographical section" of the *Power & Resistance* volume of *Filozofski vestnik/Acta Philosophica*. I would also like to thank Gabrielle Spiegel who taught me much about the current questions connected to this topic during her visit to Ljubljana in May 1997.

Oto Luthar



Paul Freedman  
*Peasant Resistance in Medieval Europe*  
*Approaches to the Question of Peasant Resistance*

Until recently, peasants of past as well as contemporary times have been regarded by historians and other scholars as lying outside the drama of historical progress. If they *were* involved in important events, it was as uncomprehending victims or as manipulated mobs. Their role in resisting the French Revolution in the Vendée, for example, supposedly epitomized both their attachment to traditional arrangements and the futility of rural organized movements. The disappearance of the peasantry in the twentieth century was thought, by a wide spectrum of learned opinion, to be inevitable. In Western Europe this disappearance has indeed taken place. Ironically (considering the contempt in which they were held for so long), the demise of this ancient class in the West has provoked a good deal of unease, even lamentation. Regional and local identity, national sentiment for the agrarian virtues, and holding back the tide of post-industrial consumer culture are all undermined by the abandonment of the land and its conversion into large-scale corporate farming.<sup>1</sup> From Mexico to Pakistan, however, the contemporary peasantry has shown a degree of resilience not anticipated by most social theorists of either the left or right.

For most of the last century Marxist and non-Marxist social scientists agreed that peasants represented a retrograde factor in economic development and that progress would leave them behind. In orthodox Marxist thinking peasants are either a hinderance to revolutionary progress or at best followers and indirect participants. That the urban proletariat alone could forge a true revolution was reiterated by Stalin, who considered early Russian peasant uprisings as worthy of notice but "tsarist" in motivation hence irrelevant to true revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup> The forced collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union was a logical, if particularly savage, outcome of an atti-

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<sup>1</sup> For France, for example, see Michel Gervais et al., *La fin de la France paysanne de 1914 nos jours*, Histoire de la France rurale, vol. 4 (Paris, 1976); Michael Bess, "Ecology and Artifice: Shifting Perceptions of Nature and High Technology in Postwar France," *Technology and Culture* 36 (1995), pp. 830-862.

<sup>2</sup> Notably in correspondence with Emil Ludwig, cited in Leo Yaresh, "The 'Peasant Wars' in Soviet Historiography," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 16 (1957), p. 241.

tude that saw the proletariat as the vanguard of revolution and industrial modernization as possible in a backward society only by destroying its small agricultural proprietors.

Certain peasant movements of the past have been regarded with favor by Marxist thought. There is a tradition exalting the German Peasants' War of 1525 that goes back to Friedrich Engels, however, he interpreted the struggle as a manifestation of the contradictions feudal society and the transition to capitalism. The peasants could not be said to serve as historical actors in their own right. Following Engels, East German historiography saw the revolts of 1525 as an episode in the "early bourgeois revolution" whose origins and real significance lay in the cities and the impetus of the Reformation. The peasant uprising failed but helped usher in the new mode of production.<sup>3</sup>

For theorists of development in the twentieth-century West, the peasant has also been relegated to a nether-world of historical irrelevance and powerlessness. Progress towards modernity and industrialization is measured by the decrease in rural population and the "rationalization" of agriculture for export and into larger units of cultivation. Experts in the field of economic development viewed with equanimity the breaking apart of the insular world of the village by agricultural, industrial and communications technologies that have reorganized formerly subsistence economies.

Although not conceptually allied with such an aggressive view of progress, historians in the West have agreed with the proponents of industrial development in considering peasant movements as marginal to the real stream of historical change. The German Peasants' War of 1525, according to the once-dominant view, was more a symptom of German political crisis than a peasant movement. The leading historian of the revolt, Günther Franz, regarded it as part of a larger struggle over the fate of the German Reich.<sup>4</sup> Other historians, while not quite so completely minimizing the social aspects of the war, regarded the peasants as acted on from outside by the Reformation and its concomitant subversive ideas that originated in cities.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (New York, 1926); Adolf Laube et al., *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen frühbürgerlichen Revolution* (Berlin, 1974); *Die frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland: Referate und Diskussion zum Thema "Probleme der frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland 1476-1535"*, ed. Gerhardt Brendler (Berlin, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Günther Franz, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*, 12th ed. (Darmstadt, 1984), p. 288.

<sup>5</sup> Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Durham, N.C., 1982); Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven, 1975); A. G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther* (New York, 1974); Heiko Oberman, "Tumultus rusticorum: Von 'Klosterkrieg' zum Fürstensieg," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 85 (1974), pp. 157-172.



Modern attitudes towards the peasantry in a curious way parallel those of the Middle Ages that saw peasants as hapless, inarticulate, capable of dangerous but irrational and unfocused rebellions, but lacking in any sense of program or progress. Peasant resistance thus was regarded as frequent but futile, an instinctual rage rather the expression of any sort of organized plan.<sup>6</sup> Such peasant movements as did seem worthy of notice were either irrational outbursts (of which the French *Jacquerie* of 1358 might be taken as a typical example), or dependent on the enterprise of more articulate classes (especially townspeople).

Much of this, however, has changed in recent years as the resourcefulness and rationality of peasants has come to be more positively evaluated. Some of this has come about as the result of a belated disenchantment with the social costs and ecological effects of development. The spectacular failure of Soviet agriculture or the deleterious effects of disinvestment in agriculture in favor of ill-advised or corrupt schemes (in Africa, for example), have weakened some of the confidence in what is "rational" or "irrational" in agricultural practices. The rediscovery of the work of A. V. Chayanov, for example, has inspired a favorable view of the peasant family economy.<sup>7</sup> Instead of regarding peasants as inefficient or their familial orientation as a bar large-scale mechanized exploitation, Chayanov considered the forms of family agricultural enterprise in terms of perfectly rational and understandable calculations compatible with a self-sustaining working of the land.

But the major shift in how peasant are considered, both in their present and past incarnations, has come about through reexamination of what constitutes peasant resistance. Rather than looking exclusively at rebellions and other overt manifestations, observers of contemporary peasant societies such as James Scott have called attention to the indirect forms of peasant resistance, such things as evasion, foot-dragging, sabotage and other forms of non-cooperation that constitute "everyday forms of resistance."<sup>8</sup> These may not in the long run be particularly effective. Scott's formulations resulted from field work in Malaysia, a country where arguably the small-scale rice farm-

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. Roland Mousnier, *Fureurs paysannes: les paysans dans les révoltes du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (France, Russie, Chine)* (Paris, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> A. V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, trans. Christel Lane and R. E. F. Smith (Homewood, Illinois, 1966; orig. publ. Moscow, 1925).

<sup>8</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985). See also *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, ed. Forrest D. Colborn (Armonk, N.Y., 1989); articles on everyday forms of peasant resistance in Southeast Asia collected in *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13, no. 2 (1986); *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia* (Berkeley, 1992).

ers and others who attempted to resist the consolidation of holdings and changes towards heavy technological inputs could only delay rather than hold off the extinction of their way of life. On the other hand, in his later work, which spans historical epochs and continents, Scott has shown not only how redoubtable peasant resistance could be but also its visible historical effects. Crucial events such as the mass desertion from the Russian army in the First World War and its consequent disintegration (which paved the way for the Russian Revolution) must be understood as large-scale examples of indirect resistance that required no over-arching ideology but rather the desire to survive.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible to criticize the emphasis on indirect resistance as disguising how often peasants cooperate with and accept the terms of their subordination.<sup>10</sup> There are also many divisions within the subordinated who do not present an unambiguously united front against a clearly identifiable oppressor. The tendency to ignore these divisions may be seen as romanticizing peasant resistance.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in another expression of the disillusionment with twentieth century movements in the name of freeing the peasantry, the Subaltern Studies school questions the degree to which the voices of the subordinated can really be recovered without distortion that serves the interests of those purporting to speak for them.<sup>12</sup>

Of course it is true that not all opposition can be regarded as carefully thought out defiance. Gossip, grumbling, satire can accord with deference and even bolster the terms of a dominant discourse.<sup>13</sup> Peasants did not necessarily define themselves under all circumstances in terms of a binary opposition between themselves and their lords.

Yet there really is a long-standing struggle that takes several forms although any fixed boundary between "serious" and "complicitous," or even direct and indirect is not easy to draw. A useful result of the emphasis on

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<sup>9</sup> James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," in Colburn, ed. *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Pelzer White, "Everyday Resistance, Socialist Revolution, and Rural Development: The Vietnamese Case," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13:2 (1986), 56 writes of "everyday forms of peasant collaboration."

<sup>11</sup> Sherry B. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor, 1996), pp. 281-304, especially pp. 287-288.

<sup>12</sup> An overview of Subaltern Studies is given in Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Potcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), pp. 1475-1490.

<sup>13</sup> A point made by C. J. Wickham, "Gossip and Resistance Among the Medieval Peasantry," Inaugural Lecture, School of History, University of Birmingham (printed separately, Birmingham, 1995).



everyday resistance is to revise how peasants are thought to regard their own situation; to emphasize their role as historical actors, as agents in their own destiny. Borrowing a term from E. P. Thompson, Scott described the "moral economy" of the peasants, a subsistence ethic neither immutable nor stubbornly irrational but a local response to adversity (including human exploitation).<sup>14</sup> Central to the moral economy is an emphasis on what Scott elsewhere refers to as "the small decencies" of labor, family, community and a desire for some minimal autonomy and control of one's environment.<sup>15</sup> That these aspirations are not necessarily universal or pure does not render them the figment of a romantic imagination.

Scott has been especially concerned to deny theories of hegemony that assume a deluded acquiescence by the oppressed to their subordination. By attending exclusively to insurrection and other forms of violent resistance, observers wrongly take everything else for acceptance. Behind the formulae of deference there is a rich but hidden vocabulary of resistance. Far from buying into the hegemonic ideology of the dominant classes, the subordinate are capable of creating a space for dissent, forwarding a specifically peasant discourse and action, and even taking advantage of the official justifications for the social order.<sup>16</sup> The claims that the dominant class enjoys its power for legitimate and ethical reasons in the interests of all can be turned against it on the basis of failure to live up to those claims.<sup>17</sup> For example, what Luther and many modern historians have regarded as the German peasants' over-literal understanding of Christian equality and freedom can be seen as a sincere but also opportunistic use of a widely shared system of ideas.

The peasants in 1525 were not, therefore, deluded in believing that the teachings of the Reformation meant that they should no longer be serfs and that they should govern their own communities and elect their own pastors. Rather they made use of ideas of reform as well as taking advantage of the

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<sup>14</sup> James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 350.

<sup>16</sup> Examples of such favorable assessments of peasants' knowledge of their situation and the actions resulting from that knowledge include Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, 1990); Steve J. Stern, "New Approaches to the Study of Peasant Rebellion and Consciousness: Implications of the Andean Experience," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Madison, 1987), ed. Steve J. Stern (Madison, 1987), pp. 3-25.

<sup>17</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990).

confusion of the political order in Germany to press already existing resentments. In this view they are neither passive agents of an essentially urban movement nor naive followers of what they took to be Luther's message of liberation but acted according to passionate but also rational calculation.<sup>18</sup> Similarly peasants in traditional Russia who believed that the tsar would support their rebellions were not simply credulous but rather resourceful in legitimating resistance to authority and fomenting revolts while invoking conservative, pious, traditionalist values.<sup>19</sup>

The whole matter of how to consider peasant resistance is affected by the relation between indirect and direct means (evasion versus insurrection) and peasant self-awareness (whether their revolts are to be understood as calculated, stirred up from the outside, or despairing spasms).

This becomes clearer if we look at typologies of peasant resistance developed by medieval and modern historians. Nearly fifty years ago the Soviet historian Boris Porchnev posited a distinction between what he called "primary" and "secondary" forms of peasant resistance. The primary were open rebellions while the secondary correspond to indirect or everyday forms of resistance, within which Porchnev identified particularly non-cooperation and flight.<sup>20</sup>

For Porchnev the peasants were attacking the feudal system of property holding and exploitation, so that even when disturbances began as protests over royal taxation, they escalated quickly into attempts to end what were regarded as the abusive conditions of the seigneurial regime.<sup>21</sup>

Within the context of Soviet historiography, Porchnev was innovative and courageous in depicting peasant revolts as progressive and motivated by an accurate reading of social conditions. In 1951 this would earn him censure from the historical division of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. He was particularly attacked for minimizing the role of the bourgeoisie and was forced to issue a retraction.<sup>22</sup> Even Porchnev at his most daring, however, considered

<sup>18</sup> The work of Peter Blickle has emphasized the communal and social basis of the German Peasants' War while seeing it as profoundly influenced by the movement of Reform. See, for example, his *Die Revolution von 1525* (Munich, 1975), also published as *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and H. C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore, 1981), and *Gemeindereformation: Die Menschen des 16. Jahrhunderts auf dem Weg zum Heil* (Munich, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Boris Porchnev (Porschnew), "Formen und Wege des bäuerlichen Kampfes gegen die feudale Ausbeutung," *Sowjetwissenschaft, Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Abteilung* 1952, pp. 440-459. First published in *Izvestija Akademii nauk SSSR: seria istorii i filosofii* 7, no. 3 (1950), pp. 205-221.

<sup>21</sup> See Porchnev's studies of the early French peasant revolts, *Die Volkauftände in Frankreich vor der Fronde, 1623-1648* (Leipzig, 1954).

<sup>22</sup> Described in Yaresh, "The 'Peasant Wars' in Soviet Historiography," pp. 255-256.



peasant uprisings lower forms of the class struggle that were not only unsuccessful but led to the perfection of absolutism rather than any progressive change in agrarian conditions.

Most other typologies have tended to minimize the extent to which such revolts really involve peasants rallied against their masters. Roland Mousnier took issue with Porchnev's approach to French revolts by distinguishing between a few that might be said really to be peasant uprisings and a larger number that were either led by nobles, or manipulated by them, and that expressed local grievances against centralized fiscal exactions rather than a class conflict. Peasants in these latter instances enacted as conservative an agenda as that held by their social superiors. Their demands were for the restoration of customs regarded as beneficial, not the abolition of obligations. The enemy was change and fiscal oppression represented by the growing royal absolutism.<sup>23</sup>

This tendency to separate "real" peasant revolts from those that are in fact about something else is at the heart of many typologies. The factor that most appears to vitiate the revolutionary implications of many manifestations of peasant discontent is that demands were traditionalist or reactionary. Invoking "good old law" is thought to imply that a radically different order of things could not be imagined. Demands framed in this fashion would be relevant to only one locality as customs of course changed from one jurisdiction to another. The very frequency and small-scale of early-modern uprisings, for example, might be interpreted as meaning that the grievances behind them were so local as to be incapable of spreading. Peter Burke distinguishes traditional from radical peasant movements, the former amounting to circumscribed demands for restoring the past while the latter envision a new society that ignores custom. The radical movement has more potential to spread, but is less common, certainly in the period after 1525.<sup>24</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels* also describes what are seen as archaic forms of resistance limited both geographically and ideologically.<sup>25</sup> Their significance lies in how they reflect the aspirations of a large, usually inar-

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<sup>23</sup> Mousnier, *Fureurs paysannes*. Discussed in M. O. Gately et al., "Seventeenth Century Peasant 'Furies': Some Problems of Comparative History," *Past and Present* 51 (1971), pp. 63-80; C. S. L. Davies, "Peasant Revolts in France and England: A Comparison," *Agricultural History Review* 21 (1973), pp. 122-134. For a somewhat different French view of Porchnev that even more than Mousnier sees the peasants as frenzied but ineffectual, Robert Mandrou, "Les soulèvements populaires et la société française du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Annales E.-S.-C.* 14 (1959), pp. 756-765.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), pp. 173-178.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, 1959).

ticulate population and only secondarily and exceptionally in any connection to true revolutionary organizations. Hobsbawm identified a few archaic movements (such as millenarian peasant groups) that approach something like revolutionary rather than reformist sentiment as opposed to a majority that are little more than variations on social banditry.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Hobsbawm did acknowledge elsewhere that peasants could create revolutions without intending to challenge the order of society or the structures of property.<sup>27</sup>

In discussing the German peasantry and the events preceeding the great war of 1525, Günther Franz considered all uprisings before the very end of the fifteenth century to have been motivated by a defense of custom, a justification for revolt based on "Old Law". Beginning with the Bundschuh movements in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, reference was made to "Godly Law" arguments born of a more urgent and drastic desire to make social conditions fit not an imagined past happiness but divine and unalterable natural law. What made medium-scale revolts such as the Bundschuh and the widespread cataclysm of 1525 possible was a common program based not on local bylaws but on the teachings of radical religious reform.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the late-medieval peasant uprisings, some of which we will discuss shortly, there has been the same tendency to ascribe the motivation to outside forces, or to deny that they were rebellions altogether. Guy Fourquin, for example, regards these movements either as demands for the social mobility of already affluent elements of the population, or as Messianic (hence irrational), or as the product of extraordinary political crises (a category that would include both the French *Jacquerie* of 1358 and the English Rising of 1381).<sup>29</sup> In their study of late-medieval revolutions, Michel Mollat and Philippe Wolff take the social demands of the peasants more seriously but mingle them with urban movements such as the Florentine *Ciampi* of 1381 or the anti-Jewish riots in Barcelona in 1391.<sup>30</sup>

These observers have very different political and methodological predispositions but agree in defining nearly all peasant uprisings as lacking the revolutionary requirement of imagining a complete break with the past. In

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-8.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1973), p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Franz, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*, pp. 1-91.

<sup>29</sup> Guy Fourquin, *The Anatomy of Popular Rebellion in the Middle Ages* (Amsterdam, 1978; orig. publ. Paris, 1972), pp. 129-160.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Mollat and Philippe Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions of the Late Middle Ages*, trans. A. L. Lytton-Sells (London, 1973; orig. publ. Paris, 1970).



describing movements by lower classes generally, not merely peasants, Barrington Moore made use of a similar distinction. The main way in which oppressed groups contest their situation is to criticize the upper orders of society (most frequently particular individuals in power) for not living up to a social contract that was observed in the past. They therefore accept the legitimacy of the dominant stratum rather than making an issue of the claims of that stratum to exert authority.<sup>31</sup> There is, thus, again an implicit contrast between genuine and traditionalist demands.

Such typologies are undermined by three factors that play an increasingly important role in the discussion of peasants (and broadly the subordinated elements of society): an emphasis on peasant agency (that peasants can act out of a realistic assessment of their situation), on indirect forms of resistance as efficacious rather than as inferior to open defiance, and finally a disillusioned realization of the limitations of radical revolutions. This last deserves some emphasis. In contrast to how things seemed when Hobsbawm or Moore wrote on peasant uprisings, radical revolutions of the twentieth century do not seem to have lived up to their promise, to put it mildly. They have led to disastrous upheavals in which life was transformed, but not for the better and at immense social cost. Where they might naturally have been expected to have the most constructive effects, in the Third World, struggles in the name of the peasantry have singularly failed. The experience of Marxist or *soi-disant* Marxist revolutions has called into question what constitutes effective resistance and false consciousness. As long as we were confident that we knew what a "real" revolutionary ideology looked like, a traditionalist revolt evoking a harmonious past seemed primitive, secondary, or at best a "lower form of class struggle."

Scott's "small decencies" of a modest but sufficient tenure, fixed and reasonable obligations and a modicum of human dignity appear less compromised or insufficiently radical in light of the nightmarish consequences for the peasants themselves of revolutions that claimed to be freeing them. Rather than supposing a Gramscian hegemony that imprisons the oppressed rural class in a false consciousness of deference, their conservative demands can be seen as a strategy, producing what Scott calls "a space for a dissident subculture" and a "political disguise." We have already mentioned Field's analysis of Russian peasant rebels whose exaltation of the tsar was a strategy of legitimation, the seizing of the moral high ground, rather than a literal,

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<sup>31</sup> Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, N.Y., 1987), p. 84, a statement critiqued in Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, pp. 91-96.

childish faith in a beneficent father figure.<sup>32</sup> Far from naive, frenzied or Messianic, the peasant rebels in such circumstances were astute in their expectation that the established order was not likely to be abolished. As Scott points out:

*"So long as that expectation prevails, it is impossible to know from the public transcript alone how much of the appeal to hegemonic values is prudence and formula and how much is ethical submission."*<sup>33</sup>

Ascribing rationality and political or ideological awareness to peasants restores to them a degree of voice, and renders their historical role less helpless or dependent on outside forces. This is important when examining the period of European history with the most serious and widely diffused peasant revolts, that between the Black Death of 1347-1349 and the German Peasants' War of 1525.

### *Late Medieval Peasant Revolts*

Between 1350 and 1515 Europe was convulsed by large-scale peasant revolts. While the medieval agrarian economy, as Marc Bloch remarked, experienced peasant uprisings as frequently as stikes characterize the world of industrial capitalism,<sup>34</sup> the geographic extent, scale and duration of the late-medieval revolts was more extensive than those during the earlier periods and would never be repeated after 1525.

These revolts were not the only form in which a space for dissidence was created. The medieval system of exploitation was effective but organized around small-scale units both of cultivation and of jurisdiction. The opportunities for indirect resistance hence were numerous given the absentee nature of lordship. There were also direct actions possible that do not appear as full-scale rebellions but that achieved a certain measure of success. In a study of the occasional murder of lords in medieval France, Robert Jacob has shown that it was surprisingly widely recognized that grossly unjust lords deserved to be resisted, even violently, even by peasants, as long as this was not the signal for some general disobedience.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, local uprisings could be presented even by non-peasants as representing a com-

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<sup>32</sup> Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*.

<sup>33</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> March Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics*, trans. Janet Sondheim (Berkeley, 1966; orig. publ. Paris, 1931), p. 170.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Jacob, "La meurtre du seigneur dans la société féodale: la mémoire, le rite, la fonction," *Annales E.-S.-C.* 45 (1990), pp. 247-263.



mendable desire for liberty. The revolt of 1476 by villagers of Fuenteovejuna in the region of Córdoba resulted in the death of their oppressive lord, the commander of the Order of Calatrava. Fuenteovejuna would become an emblem of anti-seigneurial rebellion and the defense of liberty, later furnishing the subject for a celebrated play by Lope de Vega.<sup>36</sup> Finally there are instances of the establishment of self-governing peasant communities such as the rural cantons of Switzerland.<sup>37</sup> Less well known is the creation of a peasant republic at Dithmarschen along the North Sea coast of Holstein. First recognized in the thirteenth century, the *terrae universitatis Dithmarsiae*, as it was known, would last until the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Its liberty was defended against the rulers of Schleswig and the king of Denmark so that, like the Swiss, the inhabitants of Dithmarschen formed an effective armed force aided by familiarity with a difficult terrain. That the Swiss conflicts with the Hapsburgs or the Dithmarschers battles with the Danes are not considered peasant revolts is due both to their success and to the eventual recognition accorded to their polities.

There were still other form of medieval rural conflicts in addition to the large, well-known late medieval wars and the peasant confederations. There were frequent local and regional peasant uprisings especially beginning with the fourteenth century. For the German Empire alone Peter Bierbrauer has counted 59 peasant insurrections between 1336 and 1525.<sup>39</sup>

In what follows, some attempt is made to assess peasant motives and justifications for resistance. The rebellions that have left at least indirect evidence of motivations tend to be those that attracted the more than glancing attention of chroniclers. Therefore, although the distinction between small local revolts and large regional ones is somewhat artificial (a matter of scale more than qualitative difference), I have limited the following discussion to

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<sup>36</sup> Emilio Cabrera and Andrés Moros, *Fuenteovejuna: La violencia antis señorial en el siglo XV* (Barcelona, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> Peter Blickle, "Das Gesetz der Eidgenossen: Überlegungen zur Entstehung der Schweiz, 1200-1400," *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1992), pp. 561-586; Guy P. Marchal, "Die Antwort der Bauern: Elemente und Schichtungen des eidgenössischen Geschichtsbewusstseins am Ausgang des Mittelalters," in *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Hans Patze, Vorträge und Forschungen 31 (Sigmaringen, 1987), pp. 757-790.

<sup>38</sup> On Dithmarschen see William L. Urban, *Dithmarschen: A Medieval Peasant Republic* (Lewiston, N.Y. 1991); Walther Lammers, *Die Schlacht bei Hemmingstedt: Freies Bauerntum und Fürstenmacht im Nordseeraum*, 3rd ed. (Heide im Holstein, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Bierbrauer, "Bäuerliche Revolten im alten Reich. Ein Forschungsbericht," in *Aufbruch und Empörung? Studien zum bäuerlichen Widerstand im Alten Reich*, ed. Peter Blickle et al. (Munich, 1980), pp. 26, 62-65.

the better-known conflicts of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries while at least setting them in the context of a climate of frequent smaller revolts.

### *The English Rebellion of 1381*

The immediate cause of the English Rising was the imposition of a poll tax by the royal government. Resistance to the tax began in May of 1381. Rebels from Kent and Essex marched on London in June, congregating at Blackheath and Mile End. The most dramatic phase of the rebellion—the execution of Archbishop Simon Sudbury, the burning of John of Gaunt's palace, the invasion of the Tower of London and the death of Wat Tyler at Smithfield—took place on and around the Feast of Corpus Christi. The festive inversion of social power and propriety that took place during the rebels' brief hold on the capital has been linked, both by contemporaries and by recent observers, to the traditional celebrations of Corpus Christi.<sup>40</sup> The significance of the date may have also affected the planning of the convergence on London, which was more a planned, coordinated movement than a spontaneous mob activity.<sup>41</sup>

What were the demands of those who revolted? On the one hand they seem to involve a radical political restructuring that would have, in effect, abolished the nobility. Rodney Hilton describes the rebels' goal as that of imposing a state ruled by a king but without nobles and a very circumscribed church, thus essentially the king and common people with few intermediaries.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the agenda of the local rebels (those who did not flock to London to confront the king), was not so different from that of earlier movements that had aimed at restoring a supposed earlier just relation between lords and men without eliminating lordship altogether.<sup>43</sup> Recent scholarship has tended to emphasize not only the coher-

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992); pp. 45-56; Margaret Aston, "Corpus Christi and Corpus Regni: Heresy and the Peasants' Revolt," *Past & Present* 143 (1994), pp. 3-47; Stephen Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 156-176.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Brooks, "The Organization and Achievements of the Peasants of Kent and Essex in 1381," in Henry Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985), pp. 247-270.

<sup>42</sup> R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry of the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Especially important in this regard is Rosamond Faith, "The 'Great Rumour' of 1377 and Peasant Ideology," in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 43-73.



ence of peasant aims but also their connections to older ideas of justice, especially complaints against arbitrary lordship. We can reconstruct some idea of peasant ideology even from the works of hostile chroniclers who were intent on portraying the peasants as unreasoning savages, a disorganized mob.

While the demands of the peasants in London were for the abolition of lordship, movements in places such as St. Albans were considerably more moderate challenges to onerous and arbitrary incidents and rights of lordship: rights to the use of common woods and meadows, rights to hunt game, an end to monopolies (such as the abbot's prohibition on tenants' possession of hand-mills), an end to death-duties.<sup>44</sup> What unites these local demands is the revolt against the arbitrary perquisites of lordship. Even seemingly moderate demands, such as over the hand-mills, had radical symbolic (as well as practical) significance and imagery. In an earlier rebellion the abbot of St. Albans had confiscated hand-mills that had allowed tenants to escape his right to compel the milling of grain at his mill (which required a fee), and used them as paving for the floor of his parlor. In 1381, they were dug up and split into fragments to be given out as proof that the rebels (towns-men and peasants) had accomplished their goal and also a symbol of their solidarity, a token of communion.<sup>45</sup> With the suppression of the rebellion, the millstones were returned.

Studies of the rebels who did not march on London show that their demands concerned seigneurial and manorial jurisdiction and administration, in particular serfdom and claims to levy exactions by reason of lordship over villeins.<sup>46</sup> Similar to other great rebellions of the period, opportunities afforded by the weakness of government or alliances with other groups did not obscure the issues of status and rural lordship that most concerned peasants. Those who came to London and held the young King Richard II hostage went beyond the expression of grievances against taxation and the corruption of royal officials to demand the abolition of servi-

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<sup>44</sup> Faith, "The 'Great Rumour'", pp. 62-70.

<sup>45</sup> Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp. 168-176; Faith, "The 'Great Rumour'", p. 66 (translating from the *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*): They took the stones outside and handed them over to the commons, breaking them into little pieces and giving a piece to each person, just as the consecrated bread is customarily broken and distributed in the parish churches on Sundays, so that the people, seeing these pieces, would know themselves to be avenged against the abbey in that cause.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the case of Essex in L. R. Poos, *A Rural Society After the Black Death: Essex 1350-1525* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 231-252.

tude and a radical alteration of lordship.<sup>47</sup> The revolt resulted from a combination of what might be called "political" circumstances, involving grievances against governmental administration, and tensions in the relationship between landlords and tenants.

The Black Death and the consequent radical diminution of population had altered the economic and social relationships in rural society. Landlords were squeezed by rising wages and falling prices for agricultural products and attempted to control more closely those tenants who remained by limiting wage increases, restricting freedom of movement, and levying exactions that could be claimed from servile tenants. Not only were peasants' expectations of improvement thus frustrated, but in many instances their social condition was lowered as lords either imposed servitude on those previously considered free, or coerced those who had previously been allowed to escape supervision. The seigneurial reaction was motivated by economic considerations rather than a desire for social control, but its effect was to sharpen the resentment of tenants against servitude. Those who were legally of villein status now saw a real disparity between their opportunities and obligations and those of their free neighbors more able to take advantage of a favorable labor and rental market.<sup>48</sup> Christopher Dyer, a careful observer of the entire sweep of medieval English social and economic history, writes of a "second serfdom" imposed by lords in the years leading up to the great rebellion.<sup>49</sup> The conjunction of expectations of improved negotiating positions for peasants and attempts of lords to preserve or reimpose servile dues and arbitrary lordship must be seen as the primary motor of revolt.

Questions of freedom and servitude were not exclusively focused on matters of legal status, but neither were they mere rhetorical masks for other demands. What was at issue both before and after 1381 was the ability of lords to constrain their tenants by overturning or undermining traditions and practices favorable to peasants. This gives a seemingly conservative

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<sup>47</sup> On the English Rising and its causes, see Christopher Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381," in *The English Rising*, pp. 9-42; E. B. Fryde and Natalie Fryde, "Peasant Rebellion and Peasant Discontents," in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 3, ed. Edward Miller (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 744-819; Rodney Hilton, *Bondmen Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (New York, 1973); John Hatcher, "England in the Aftermath of the Black Death," *Past & Present* 144 (1994), pp. 3-35.

<sup>48</sup> J. H. Tillotson, "Peasant Unrest in the England of Richard II: Some Evidence from Royal Records," *Historical Studies* (Melbourne) 16 (1974), p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Dyer, "Social and Economic Background", p. 25.



character to the English Rising (as is the case elsewhere), with the peasants defending the “good old law” against attempts to consolidate holdings or to regularize obligations. As argued earlier, it is not profitable to formulate a typology of “reactionary” versus “progressive” social movements. Radical means (violent insurrection) were sometimes deployed toward conservative ends, to restore what was perceived as an earlier just order. It did not require a paradigm shift or a revolutionary religious sentiment to desire the overthrow of at least certain aspects of the seigniorial regime. Only a minority of peasant movements envisioned the complete end of lordship, including some clearly inspired by religious reform. Nevertheless, it is worth taking seriously the range of peasant grievances which made use of commonly agreed definitions of liberty, servitude, human equality and Christ’s sacrifice.

To distinguish sharply between 1381 as a unique occasion and earlier local revolts makes obvious sense in terms of scale, but not ideology. Long before 1381 there had been persistent lawsuits and revolts concerning local grievances that anticipate the agenda of the 1381 rebellion, grievances related to changes in manorial custom imposed by landlords that bolstered their arbitrary power over tenants.<sup>50</sup> In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, before the economic consequences of the disaster of 1348-1349 were felt, lords attempted to rationalize their holdings and to define their tenants as villeins. In the mid-thirteenth century, Robert de Mares and then his widow, Sibyl, attempted to reduce the status of the villagers of Peatling Magna in Northamptonshire to villeinage, asserting the right to tallage at will and the collection of merchet.<sup>51</sup> The inhabitants of Peatling Magna won their case in 1261. Not so fortunate were their neighbors in Stoughton who lost their claims to freedom to Leicester Abbey in 1276.<sup>52</sup> A poem written at the Abbey on that occasion asked, “What can a serf do unless serve, and his son?” It continued:

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<sup>50</sup> Rodney Hilton, “Peasant Movements in England Before 1381”, in Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History* (London, 1985), pp. 122-138; Barbara A. Hanawalt, “Peasant Resistance to Royal and Seigniorial Impositions”, in *Social Unrest in the Late Middle Ages: Papers of the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*, ed. Francis X Newman (Binghamton, 1986), pp. 30-40.

<sup>51</sup> D. A. Carpenter, “English Peasants in Politics, 1258-1267,” *Past & Present* 136 (1992), repr. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III* (London and Rio Grande, Ohio, 1996), pp. 325-326 (of reprint).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342; R. H. Hilton, “A Thirteenth-Century Poem on Disputed Villein Services,” *English Historical Review* 56 (1941), pp. 90-97, repr. Hilton, *Class Conflict*, pp. 108-113.

*He shall be a pure serf deprived of freedom.  
The law's judgment and the king's court prove this.*

Beginning in around 1277, the men of the villages of Darnell and Over in Cheshire quarrelled with their lord, the abbot of Vale Royal, over his claims that they owed huge death-duties, *leyrwithe* upon marriage of a daughter, and various annoying services (feeding the abbot's puppies, keeping his wild horses and bees).<sup>53</sup> The villages had formerly belonged to the crown, and the conditions under their new master were perceived as dramatically inferior. The Darnell villagers had complained to King Edward I shortly after the gift was made. The king is supposed to have told a throng of men carrying plowshares "As villeins you have come, and as villeins you shall return." There ensued a long series of suits and acts of violence. The villagers rose up against the abbey in 1336, complaining that they were free and that the abbot had imposed on them the obligations of villeins. They petitioned the justice of Chester, (Sir Hugh de Fren), King Edward III, parliament, and Queen Phillippa. The queen ordered the abbot to restore what he had despoiled, but after the abbot appeared before the rulers, the villagers were once again declared villeins. They ambushed the abbot in Rutland on his way back from the court, managing to kill a groom before being captured. They threw themselves upon the abbot's mercy and were compelled to perform repeated ceremonies in church demonstrating their unfree status. One is struck not only by the persistence of the unfortunate tenants of Vale Royal but their touching faith in the judicial process of the realm.

Peasant movements to seek legal redress were organized before 1381. Opposition to arbitrary treatment in the fourteenth century is evident in the petition of the villagers of Albury in Hertsfordshire to parliament in 1321-2 over seizures and imprisonment perpetrated by their lord. Numerous complaints were registered by tenants attempting to prove their free status against lords' claims to hold them as serfs, as at Elmham in Suffolk (1360), and Great Leighs in Essex (1378).<sup>54</sup> No less than forty villages in the south of England in 1377 were swept by what a contemporary called the "great rumor": a movement to assert personal liberty and oppose labor service demands by reference to Domesday Book.<sup>55</sup> By purchasing certified copies of Domes-

<sup>53</sup> On these disputes and the uprising of 1336, *The Ledger-Book of Vale Royal Abbey*, ed. John Brownbill, *Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society* 68 (1914), pp. 37-42, repr. G. G. Coulton, *The Medieval Village*, (Cambridge, 1925, repr. New York, 1989), pp. 132-135; also in *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. R. B. Dobson (London, 1970), pp. 80-83; also in H. E. Hallam, "The Life of the People", in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* vol. 2, ed. Hallam (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 846-849.

<sup>54</sup> Examples cited in Dyer, "Social and Economic Background", p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Faith, "The 'Great Rumour'", pp. 43-73; Tillotson, "Peasant Unrest", pp. 1-16.



day (exemplifications) referring to their tenancies, the villagers attempted to prove that they formed part of the ancient demesne of former crown lands whose tenants should be protected by the royal courts. The peasants who submitted Domesday exemplifications considered them as proving freedom from villein status altogether. Parliament and the Royal Council rejected attempts to use Domesday in this fashion, but the effort shows the peasants' knowledge of law and belief in its efficacy. There was a continuity between actions at law and local organized opposition which brought pressure by extra-legal means once the courts and appeals seemed fruitless.

Many of the locales involved in the 1381 revolt had experienced earlier suits or acts of insubordination, and a sample of individuals identified as rebels in 1381 shows that many of them already had experienced confrontations with their lords over fines or servile status.<sup>56</sup> At issue in 1381 and before were questions of rent, service and other obligations of tenants that lords had attempted either to impose, reimpose or preserve in an environment of what can fairly be termed rising expectations. Questions of status were inextricably linked with these quarrels over revenues because if lords could show that those who complained of arbitrary violations of favorable customs were villeins, they could prevent them from appealing to the public courts.<sup>57</sup> The petitions for freedom from servitude in 1381 were not a cover for more practical, economic conflicts but the point at issue for opposition to arbitrary seigneurial power.

Such demands were couched in conventional terms but the conclusions and programs that followed might be more radical. At the sermon given to the peasants assembled at Blackheath on the day of Corpus Christi itself, the renegade priest John Ball is reported by Thomas Walsingham to have argued on the basis of the well-known couplet "when Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" that all were created equal by nature. Servitude had been introduced contrary to God's will, by the wickedness of men (thus not by some primordial, divinely punished trespass). Had God

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<sup>56</sup> Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background", pp. 34-35; John F. Nichols, "An Early Fourteenth Century Petition from the Tenants of Bocking to their Manorial Lord", *Economic History Review* 2 (1929-1930), pp. 300-307. Tillotson, "Peasant Unrest", notes (pp. 7-8) the importance of Wiltshire in the 1377 disturbances, a region that was relatively quiet in 1381.

<sup>57</sup> Hilton, "Peasant Movements", pp. 127-138 (of reprinted ed.). On the centrality of the demand for the end to serfdom, see also Hilton, "Social Concepts of the English Rising of 1381", in *Class Conflict*, pp. 216-226 (originally published in German in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft 4 [Munich, 1975], pp. 31-46); Hilton, "Popular Movements in England at the End of the Fourteenth Century", in *Class Conflict*, pp. 152-164 (originally in *Il tumulto dei Ciompi* [Florence, 1981], pp. 223-240).

wished to create serfs, He would right at the beginning have established who was a serf and who was a lord.<sup>58</sup>

Steven Justice has shown how Ball's sermon and letter fit with five English letters preserved in Henry Knighton's chronicle rallying peasants to the cause. They were probably not all written by John Ball, as used to be believed, but by other rebel spokesmen. Justice argues that the very act of fomenting rebellion by means of circular letters and broadsides is a defiant gesture against those who regarded peasants as little better than animals, announcing "the documentary competence of the insurgent population, a determination not to be excluded from documentary rule."<sup>59</sup> One may not completely accept this valuation placed on literacy as the crux of rebellion. Nevertheless, Justice allows us to appreciate not only that the chroniclers' insistence that the peasants were unreasoning savages is false, but that much of what they report in the way of the burning of documents was something other than the act of frenzied mobs intent on destroying education along with lordship.<sup>60</sup> Not only were the rebels rather selective in what they destroyed (Walsingham and the author of the *Westminster Chronicle* acknowledged that the burning of the Savoy Palace was carefully policed and that looting was strictly forbidden), they also did not assume that all written records were tools of their subjugation.<sup>61</sup> An exaggerated reverence for charters and ancient documents that inspired earlier movements is apparent again in 1381. The rebels at St. Albans burned charters and rolls listing obligations but demanded an older parchment with azure and gold capital letters that they believed had established their freedom. One can at a safe distance be amused at the villeins' belief that the Mercian King Offa was the author of such a charter and at the abbot's rather bewildered promise to search although he had never seen nor heard of it. Similarly we can be confident that Bury St. Edmunds did not, in fact, have a charter of liberties issued by the monastery's founder King Cnut as the rebels there claimed.<sup>62</sup> The same reverence before writing is found in the insistence of the rebels when they had the king in their power that he write a charter freeing them of service to their lords and pardon-

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, Rolls Series 28, part 1, vol. 2 (London, 1864), p. 33 and Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliae*, ed. Edward Maunde Thompson, Rolls Series 64 (London, 1874), p. 321.

<sup>59</sup> Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> A point argued strongly in Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp. 43-51.

<sup>61</sup> Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> Described from the works of Thomas of Walsingham by Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp. 47-48.



ing them. Dissatisfied with the document they obtained, they then are supposed to have ordered that men of law and others familiar with legal documents be executed.<sup>63</sup>

The peasants also appear to have been capable of using to their own purposes arguments made with a different intention to a different audience by Wyclif and Langland. This was a process of deliberate shaping, not of ill-digested misunderstanding. Thus Wyclif himself was careful to join his denunciations of excessive church property-holding with provisions for its orderly transfer to secular rulers while the peasants could enunciate his program in terms of a more literal understanding of the canon-law phrase (which Wyclif frequently invoked) that the goods of the Church belong to the poor (*bona ecclesiae sunt bona pauperum*). Wyclif may have meant his words to inspire the king and the great men of his realm to action, but his address to the laity was, as Steven Justice put it “overheard” by the peasants.<sup>64</sup> Similarly the figure of Piers Plowman could be taken from Langland to serve as a vivid emblem of the virtuous countryman and Langland’s allegory of “Truth” could be adapted to a more activist idea of imposing a new and just social order.<sup>65</sup>

Protection of traditional local rights and protection (or freedom) from servile status were the substance of the revolt. Despite the radical means by which the rebels’ demands were put forward, one observes the same faith in written documents and legal concepts that informed earlier movements such as the “Great Rumor” of 1377. In discerning (if not actually reconstituting) a peasant “voice” from the hostile texts that have survived, recent scholars have often wanted to see an authentic peasant alternative ideology, what Justice calls the “idiom of rural politics” and Strohm refers to as “rebel ideology.”<sup>66</sup> Such ideas were sufficiently antithetical to the dominant ideologies so that contemporary observers regarded them with fear mingled with ridicule.

Strohm and Justice agree on the chroniclers’ ignorance (willful or otherwise) with regard to peasant demands but I question whether they were indeed so unaware. Naturally it would be hard to argue that Walsingham, Knighton or Froissart displayed any “sympathy” for the rebels, but they put into their mouths arguments that were neither novel nor incomprehensible. Froissart says that the people of Kent, Essex, Sussex and Bedford stirred

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 49-50.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-90.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-139.

<sup>66</sup> Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp. 140-192; Strohm, *Hochon’s Arrow*, pp. 51-56.

because they were kept in servitude and declared that no one should be a bondsman unless he betrayed his lord (as Lucifer betrayed God). They were not of this nature for they were men, formed in the same fashion as their masters and so should not be kept like beasts.<sup>67</sup> That bondage violates divine law, that it was instituted by force, that it amounts to treating humans as animals – these are by no means new ideas and were comprehensible to peasant and lord alike.

It was possible for the chroniclers to imagine the terms in which peasant insurrection would be justified and expressed. This does not minimize their scorn and in some cases hysteria, their portrayal of the rustics as domestic animals who have gone wild, or as vermin. Of course they were aghast at the danger to order and hierarchy but they did not live in a world completely innocent of what the complaints of those under them would be were they to be voiced. Their reports depict this voice in stylized terms, yet authentic details are revealed through chinks in what might seem to be an effective hegemonic discourse.

How hegemonic that discourse was in the first place is open to question. It has been argued that the English chroniclers were more objective in their opinions than the historians of the French *Jacquerie* of 1358 who described this peasant uprising as an act of unmitigated savagery.<sup>68</sup> Yet even contemporary historians of the *Jacquerie* were varied in their attribution of rational motives for the revolt or the blame to be attached to the nobility for causing the uprising in the first place.<sup>69</sup> Walsingham, Knighton, Froissart, or the *Anonimale Chronicle* did not have to acknowledge the legitimacy of peasant demands to reproduce them in a way that is legible not only to the modern critic or historian inclined to be sympathetic to the rebels' cause but to contemporary members of the literate elite who were not.

### *The Catalan Civil War, 1462-1486*

This protracted conflict, the only successful peasant revolt on a large scale in late medieval Europe, involved a process of appropriation, contestation and comprehensibility in peasant demands which quite clearly

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<sup>67</sup> Froissart, *Chroniques* X, pp. 97-107, trans. Berners, as reproduced in Dobson, ed., *The Peasants' Revolt*, pp. 369-372.

<sup>68</sup> Neithard Bulst, "'Jacquerie' und 'Peasants' Revolt' in der französischen und englischen Chronistik", in Patze, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung*, pp. 791-817.

<sup>69</sup> As shown in Marie-Thérèse de Madeiros, *Jacques et chroniqueurs: une étude comparée de récits contemporains relatant la Jacquerie de 1358* (Paris, 1979).



centered on the abolition of servitude.<sup>70</sup> The servile peasantry of northern Catalonia ("Old Catalonia" as distinguished from the territories conquered from Islam to the south and west in the twelfth century) were known in the late Middle Ages as *Remences*, a Catalanized version of the Latin "redemption" (*redimencia*). These tenants made up about one-half the rural population of Old Catalonia and had been subordinated in several stages, beginning perhaps as early as the eleventh century but culminating in the decades around 1200 when restrictions on their freedom were first effectively defined and enforced.<sup>71</sup> They were subject to a group of customary levies that included a redemption or manumission payment that gave the name to their condition. The exactions were collectively known as the "bad customs," (*mals usos*) even in official documents. The bad customs included the right to require heavy death payments in the event of there being no adult male heir (*exorquia*) or of intestate death (*intestia*). In addition, lords could confiscate as much as one-third of the property of a peasant whose wife committed adultery and left him (a right with the humiliating name of *cugucia*, i.e. cuckoldry).

The Catalan lords also held a legal right to "mistreat" their servile tenants. The *ius maletractandi* constituted not only a seigniorial right to confiscate and coerce without royal interference but implied a vocabulary of oppressive gestures. In 1462, on the eve of the outbreak of the conflict, a failed attempt at a negotiated settlement produced a list of peasant grievances (drawn up in Catalan) that included the right to "*maltractar*", compulsory wet-nurse service and the unique example of a complaint by tenants of the *droit de seigneur*.<sup>72</sup> The lords offered to accept the abolition of the right to mistreatment (a major concession) and renounced any claim to require wet-nurse service. They expressed disbelief that anyone had ever really claimed a right of the first night, but if so abandoned it without further ado. It was the group of "bad customs," however, that proved intractable because they were valuable rights and also included the key provision of redemption that bound tenants and on which lordship itself seemed to depend.

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<sup>70</sup> Paul Freedman, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 179-202.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-118.

<sup>72</sup> The document is El Escorial, Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo d.II.15, ff. 27r-31v, ed. Eduardo de Hinojosa, *El régimen señorial y la cuestión agraria en Cataluña durante la Edad Media* (Madrid, 1905); repr. in Hinojosa' *Obras*, vol. 2 (Madrid, 1955), appendix 11 (pp. 313-323 of repr.).

The actual success of the sustained peasant revolt is due to the complicated circumstances of the Catalan Civil War that pitted an alliance of urban, noble and parliamentary groups against an unpopular ruler whose political and military survival depended in significant measure on the support of peasant armies.<sup>73</sup> The political context of the struggle does not obscure the consistent purpose of the peasant demands over an end to servitude. Indeed, much of the unpopularity of the king was due to a policy instituted by his predecessors that favored the peasants and opportunistically, inconsistently but nevertheless dangerously (from the nobles' point of view) raised the possibility of their liberation. As early as the turn of the fifteenth century the queen of Aragon had attempted to have her kinsman the Avignonese Pope Benedict XIII abolish servitude on Catalan church lands. Even earlier King Joan I in 1388 attempted to find proof in his archives that servitude had been imposed (perhaps by Charlemagne) for a limited time that had by now come to an end.<sup>74</sup>

What we lack from this war (as from every peasant movement before 1525) is substantial evidence of how peasants might have framed their objections to the moral implications and context of their subjugation beyond the general complaints expressed in their position during the 1462 negotiations. There is a curious document from shortly before 1450 regarding the organizing of peasant syndicates. It begins by invoking a familiar excerpt from a letter of Pope Gregory the Great: that Christ assumed human flesh in order to restore to us that original liberty that had been taken from us by the bond of servitude.<sup>75</sup> The document then refutes a common aristocratic myth attributing serfdom to the cowardice of Christian peasants who failed to aid Charlemagne by the counter-claim that the ancestors of the *Remences* had not been Christians at all but in fact Muslims.

As an argument against serfdom, the prologue follows the pattern of much of the rest of Europe in pointing to Christ's sacrifice (especially as interpreted through the letter of Gregory the Great) as the basis for a Christian liberty that servitude violated. Catalonia as a whole demonstrates the possibility of constructing a moral argument against servitude in the absence of a religious reform movement. Unlike Germany in 1525 or England (if one accepts the connection between Wyclif and the 1381 Rising), there was no

<sup>73</sup> On the war, J. Vicens Vives, *Historia de los Remensas (en el siglo XV)* (Barcelona, 1945); Santiago Sobrequés i Vidal and Jaume Sobrequés i Callicó, *La guerra civil catalana del segle XV: Estudis sobre la crisi social i econòmica de la Baixa Edat Mitjana*, 2 vols. (Barcelona, 1973).

<sup>74</sup> Freedman, *Origins of Peasant Servitude*, pp. 172-173, 179.

<sup>75</sup> Girona, Arxiu Històric de l'Ajuntament, Secció XXV.2, Llibres manuscrits de tema divers, lligall 1, MS 8, fols. 1r-2v, ed. Freedman, *Origins of Peasant Servitude*, pp. 224-226.



religious revolutionary sentiment in fifteenth-century Catalonia. The Church was, to be sure, a large owner of unfree peasants, but the revolt neither targeted churches nor was it accompanied by any particular anti-clericalism. The Catalan peasant movement shows the possibilities for achieving a radical agenda within a traditional vocabulary.

Catalonia also shows more clearly than anywhere else the fissures that undermined the unity of the powerful classes. The crown was not consistently on the side of the peasants but ultimately its grudging support and dependence on peasant armies led to the abolition of servitude in 1486 after the resolution of the civil war. Even without the opportunistic alliance, however, there were serious doubts among members of the royal court and jurists about whether servitude could be justified and a widespread suspicion that it violated religious, natural and national law.

### *The Hungarian Revolt of 1514*

In a volume dedicated to the memory of the late Bogo Grafenauer, I attempted to describe the course of the Hungarian Peasants' War of 1514 and to use it as an example of peasant ideology.<sup>76</sup> Not wanting to repeat myself here excessively, I would simply reiterate that this conflict shows quite clearly how a legitimate, in fact reactionary idea, the crusade, could be used to justify an anti-noble uprising. The peasants appropriated the crusade against the Turks proclaimed by Pope Leo X at the instance of the ambitious archbishop of Esztergom. Denouncing the Hungarian nobility for its failure to support the crusade and to allow their tenants to participate, the forces gathered to answer the military appeal at Buda turned their wrath from the Turks to the nobles. The scale of the revolt differentiates it from previous unrest but there are clear connections with earlier ideas. Accusing the nobles of dereliction in the war against the Turks was also a feature of the Belgrade Crusade of 1456.<sup>77</sup>

Although very close in time to the German Peasants' War, the Hungarian uprising has left much less evidence of anything amounting to a peasant program. The Cegléd Proclamation may reflect the ideas motivating György Dózsa, the noble leader of the revolt, but it is not the text of an actual speech in the manner of John Ball's sermon at Blackheath. A letter issued by lead-

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<sup>76</sup> Paul Freedman, "The Hungarian Peasant War of 1514," in *Grafenauerjev Zbornik*, ed. Vincenc Rajsp (Ljubljana, 1996), pp. 431-446.

<sup>77</sup> As reported by Giovanni de Tagliacozzo, *Annales Minorum seu trium ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*, ed. Luke Wadding, vol. 12, pt. 3 (Quaracchi, 1932), p. 793.

ers of the crusade (who call themselves the "*principes cruciferorum*") purporting to be the text of the papal proclamation, roundly condemns those lords who continue to extort unjust revenues from their peasants and calls for their excommunication and rebellion against them.<sup>78</sup>

Themes that are repeatedly underscored insofar as the grievances of the peasants can be reconstructed are the un-Christian behavior of the nobility, its cowardice in face of the Turks, and the injustice of serfdom. As in England, Germany and Catalonia, the rebellion was at least in part directed against the constraints of servile subordination and a response to a seigneurial attempts to use reimpose servitude in order to increase rents and obligations. After the failure of the 1514 revolt, the Hungarian laws ordained permanent servitude for the Hungarian peasantry.<sup>79</sup>

The Hungarian revolt also shows connections between elite and popular concepts of justice. Jenő Szűcs demonstrated that Franciscans in the first years of the fifteenth century elaborated condemnations of seigneurial oppression that appear to have influenced those who led the revolt of 1514.<sup>80</sup>

### *The German Peasants' War of 1525*

Even more than with the English and Catalan revolts, there has been a desire to see the German Peasants' War as something more than merely a peasant insurrection. This stems from several factors, among them an assumption that peasants were unlikely to have acted on their own initiative, and concentration on the two dramatic and lasting aspects of sixteenth-century German history: the Reformation and the inability of the emperor (or anyone else) to achieve a unified rule over German-speaking lands. Regarded as a crucial event in the overall history of the German nation, the 1525 uprising was until recently annexed to the perennial question of the origins of German disunity and early-modern backwardness.

The rediscovery of peasant agency has tended to put back the actual demands of those who revolted to the center of the discussion. Neverthe-

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<sup>78</sup> *Monumenta rusticorum in Hungaria rebellium, anno MDXIV*, ed. Anton Fekete Nagy et al. (Budapest, 1979), no. 49, p. 95.

<sup>79</sup> István Werbőczy, *Tripartitum* (= *Werbőczy István Hármaskönyve*), ed. Sándor Kolosvári and Kelemen Övári (Budapest, 1897), part I, tit. 3, pp. 56, 58 and part III, tit. 25, p. 406.

<sup>80</sup> Jenő Szűcs, "Die oppositionelle Strömung der Franziskaner im Hintergrund des Bauernkrieges und der Reformation in Ungarn," in *Études historiques hongroises 1985*, vol. 2 (Budapest, 1985), pp. 483-512.



less, it is still often maintained that the revolt of 1525 was not really about agrarian grievances, or that it was touched off by the more progressive and articulate forces of society.

The event that inevitably colors any interpretation is of course the Reformation. The teachings of Luther, Bucer, Karlstadt and Zwingli emphasized the dignity of the laity, the ability of ordinary people to interpret Scripture, the right to question authority and tradition, and a more favorable view of the common man. The Reformation is thought to have galvanized peasant resentment, already prepared by the long habit of anticlericalism.<sup>81</sup>

The charged climate of religious ferment that accompanied and immediately preceded 1517 is supposed to have produced a crucial change in the nature of peasant demands. Rather than taking up arms in defense of what were perceived as traditional relations with their lords that protected communal rights ("Old Law"), the peasants were now acting under the influence of more abstract (hence universal), ideas of social-religious justice ("Godly Law"). Instead of defending local privileges or custom, they now demanded a reordering of society in accord with divine justice. Long before the sixteenth century, however, it was possible to imagine justifications for revolt that centered around divine law or that combined particular grievances against exactions, servitude, and arbitrary lordship with a general statement of human liberty. Servitude was among the most important issues in 1525 and the nature of complaints over it was not completely new nor completely dependent for its formulation on the radical energies and vocabulary released by the Reformation.

Servitude and seigneurial rights attendant on serfdom were the major issue in a large number of German revolts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that antedated 1525. What might seem purely economic struggles over taxes or seigneurial revenues were enmeshed in questions of status. Thus, for example, lords attempted to increase revenues by reimposing large succession fines, but to do so required depriving peasants of the right to inherit freely, which in turn meant placing them in servitude. The extension of territorial lordship, the demands of lords in the face of declining revenues, and questions of servile status were intermingled.

As with the English and Catalan rebellions, the German Peasants' War was connected to an earlier accumulation of grievances and attempts to act on them. There were a large number of similar revolts in small south-

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<sup>81</sup> Henry J. Cohn, "Anti-Clericalism in the German Peasants' War, 1525", *Past & Present* 83 (1979), pp. 3-31; Heiko A. Oberman, "Tumultus rusticorum," pp. 157-172; Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Pfaffenhass und gross Geschrei: Die reformatorischen Bewegungen in Deutschland, 1517-1529* (Munich, 1987).

German territories where feudal dues were the principal source of revenues for petty secular and ecclesiastical landlords: Weingarten (1432), Schlussenried (1438), Weissenau (1448), Staufen (1466), Salem (1468), St. Peter (1500), Habsburg lands of Triberg (1500), Ochsenhausen (1501-1502), Berchtesgaden (1506), Rufach (1514), Solothurn (1513-1515).<sup>82</sup> The conflicts between 1442 and 1517 that go under the name of the "Bundschuh" uprisings also concerned servitude.<sup>83</sup> Freedom of movement, inheritance taxes, and the right to impose new seigneurial levies figured in the revolt of Appenzell against the monastery of Saint Gall at the opening of the fifteenth century, an example of a successful radical result stemming from what was perceived as a defence of Old Law (resistance to the monastery's right to change its exactions.)<sup>84</sup>

Seigneurial economic pressure on tenants increased, especially in Swabia and the Upper Rhine, during the fifteenth century aided by a reimposition of servile status, resisted in many cases but with limited effect.<sup>85</sup> The abbey of Kempten in Upper Swabia attempted to degrade its free tenants (*Muntleute*) to the level of those paying tributes in acknowledgment of lordship (*Freizinser*), and to reduce the latter in turn to the level of serfs (*Eigenleute*).<sup>86</sup> The peasants were able to obtain a hearing at the imperial

<sup>82</sup> Peter Blicke, "Peasant Revolts in the German Empire in the Late Middle Ages," *Social History* 4 (1979), p. 232.

<sup>83</sup> Their demands are in *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Bauernkrieges*, ed. Günther Franz (Munich, 1963), no. 12, pp. 59-61 (Schliengen, diocese of Constance); no. 13, pp. 61-62 (Hegau); no. 15, pp. 67-70 (Schlettstadt/Seléstat, Alsace); no. 16, pp. 70-76 (Untergrombach, diocese of Speyer); no. 17, pp. 76-79 (Freiburg im Breisgau); no. 18, pp. 79-81 (Upper Rhine).

<sup>84</sup> Blicke, "Peasant Revolts," pp. 230-231; Walter Schläpfer, "Die Appenzeller Freiheitskriege," in *Appenzeller Geschichte* 1 (Appenzell, 1964; repr. 1976), pp. 123-225.

<sup>85</sup> Claudia Ulbrich, *Leibherreschaft am Oberrhein im Spätmittelalter* (Göttingen, 1979); Walter Müller, *Entwicklung und Spätformen der Leibeigenschaft am Beispiel der Heiratsbeschränkungen: Die Ehegenossame im alemannisch-schweizerischen Raum* (Sigmaringen, 1974); Peter Blicke, "Agrarkrise und Leibeigenschaft im spätmittelalterlichen deutschen Südwesten," in *Studien zur geschichtlichen Bedeutung des deutschen Bauernstandes*, ed. Blicke (Stuttgart, 1989; article originally publ. 1975), pp. 19-35; Werner Rösener, "Zur Sozial-ökonomischen Lage der bäuerlichen Bevölkerung im Spätmittelalter," in *Bauerliche Sachkultur des Spätmittelalters*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Kl., Sitzungsberichte 439 (Vienna, 1984), pp. 9-47; Renate Blicke, "Leibeigenschaft: Versuch über Zeitgenossenschaft im Wissenschaft und Wirklichkeit, durchgeführt am Beispiel Altbayerns," in *Gutsherrschaft als soziales Modell: Vergleichende Betrachtungen zur Funktionsweise frühneuzeitlicher Agrargesellschaften*, ed. Jan Peters (Munich, 1995), pp. 53-79.

<sup>86</sup> On fifteenth-century struggles between Kempten and its tenants, see Franz, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*, pp. 11-13.



court in Ulm in 1423 but were defeated when the abbot produced a forged charter of Charlemagne purporting to define *Freizinser* as the equivalent of *Eigenleute*. The peasants appealed successfully to Pope Martin V. Here again, as with the tenants of Darnell and Over in England or the syndicates of *remences* in Catalonia, the peasants' willingness and ability to argue their case through direct but official forms of resistance is striking.

The struggle at Kempton was renewed in 1460 over marriage and death taxes and labor obligations claimed by the abbot. A rebellion in 1491 was defeated and 1,200 *Freizinser* were degraded to servitude. Complaints were renewed in January 1525 when a register of no less than 335 complaints (representing 1,220 individuals) was drawn up, centering around arbitrary fines and imprisonment, restrictions on marriage and on movement off the abbey's lands.<sup>87</sup> The Kempton peasants participated in the general revolt later in 1525, but it should be obvious that they were not suddenly inspired by external ideological stimuli.<sup>88</sup>

Throughout Germany in 1525 many sorts of long-standing grievances came together, from objections to war levies to violation of fixed rents, but the most common issue across the widest territory was serfdom. In an analysis of 54 grievance lists from Upper Swabia (consisting of 550 individual grievances), Peter Blickle found that 90% denounced servitude and frequently demands for its abolition were among the principle articles in petitions. Serfdom, Blickle concludes, was the single most important grievance.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, this was not merely a negotiating strategy but a crucial demand. Of 20 such texts concerning ecclesiastical jurisdictions in Upper Swabia, 15 (18 articles) call for the abolition of serfdom. Only one envisions its diminution.<sup>90</sup> Serfdom was the key to other more economic grievances over taxes, exactions or control over hunting, fishing and the collecting of wood. The arbitrary control of the lord and his ability to change the conditions of tenure at will were the essence of servitude as control over the local environment and security in perpetuating what were seen as hallowed customs was the essence of freedom. While the greatest concentration of complaints over servitude comes from southwestern Germany, it was also important in re-

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<sup>87</sup> "Die Kemptener Leibeigenschaftsrodel," ed. Peter Blickle and Heribert Besch, *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 42 (1979), pp. 567-629.

<sup>88</sup> Greivancs presented by Kempton tenants during the revolt are edited in Franz, *Quellen*, no. 27 (pp. 128-129).

<sup>89</sup> Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525*, pp. 26-27, 202-205.

<sup>90</sup> André Holenstein, "Äbte und Bauern: Vom Regiment der Klöster im Spätmittelalter," in *Politische Kultur im Oberschwaben*, ed. Peter Blickle (Tübingen, 1993), p. 264.

volts in the diocese of Augsburg, Alsace, and the archepiscopal principality of Salzburg.<sup>91</sup>

The peasants of Stühlingen in the Black Forest, where the first revolts began, described their opposition to servitude in these terms:

*"We are by right born free and it is no fault of ours or of our forefathers that we have been subjected to serfdom, yet our lords wish to have and to keep us as their own property, and consider that we should perform everything that they ask, as though we were born serfs; and it may come in time to pass that they will also sell us. It is our plea that you adjudge that we should be released from serfdom, and no one else be forced into it, in which case we will perform for our lords what we are obliged to perform of old, excepting this burden"*<sup>92</sup>

Here the idea that servitude is punishment for some past or present transgression is rejected and it is the fact of unfreedom, not the payment of seigneurial dues that is at issue. The other articles of the grievance list deal with specific exactions, but they follow from the ability of the lords to treat servile tenants with greater harshness and arbitrariness.

The peasants of Stühlingen were not attacking servitude as such but rather denying their particular liability. Their justification for revolt thus combines divine law (the injustice of servitude) with custom (their exemption from servile impositions). While firmly rooted in local history, the Stühlingen grievances, like those of other communities, were intelligible to peasants throughout Germany and facilitated the spread of revolt.

One finds broader complaints against the very nature of servitude based on its arbitrariness. To hold another in subjugation violates Scripture and the unity of all in Christ, for example at Embrach (near Zürich) and in rural lands subject to the imperial city of Rothenburg ob der Tauber.<sup>93</sup>

Human freedom was defended against servitude without specifically invoking Christian doctrine at Altbirlingen (part of the Baltringen alliance), Wiedergeltingen, Rheinfelden, and Mühlhausen (in Hegau).<sup>94</sup> Other grievances against serfdom were framed in a more religious language, that only

<sup>91</sup> Franz, *Quellen*, no. 70 (p. 239), no. 94 (pp. 305-309), no. 112 (p. 343); *Quellen zur Geschichte des Bauernkriegs in Deutschtirol 1525*, ed. Hermann Wopfner (Innsbruck, 1908), pp. 46, 61, 134-135; Albert Hollaender, "Die vierundzwanzig Artikel gemeiner Landschaft Salzburg, 1525", *Mitteilungen der gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde* 71 (1931), pp. 65-88 (especially p. 83).

<sup>92</sup> Franz, *Quellen*, no. 25 (pp. 121-122).

<sup>93</sup> Embrach: Walter Müller, "Wurzeln und Bedeutung des grundsätzlichen Widerstandes gegen die Leibeigenschaft im Bauernkrieg 1525," *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung* 93 (1975), p. 12; Rothenburg: Franz, *Quellen*, no. 101 (p. 329).

<sup>94</sup> Franz, *Quellen*, no. 23 (pp. 97-98); Günther Franz, *Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg*, vol. 2 Aktenband (Munich and Berlin, 1935; repr. Darmstadt, 1968), pp. 149, 164, 180.



God can licitly own a person; He alone is really Lord. Peasants of the *Gemeinde* of Attenweiler (Baltringen) complained against the abbey of Weingarten that they were:

... burdened with servitude for they wish to have no other lord but Almighty God lone who has created us. For we believe Holy Scripture, which is not to be obscured, that no lord should possess others (*kain Aigenmensch haben soll*), for God is the true Lord.<sup>95</sup>

In the region of Schaffhausen (now part of Switzerland) villagers complained that Scripture prohibited anyone other than God Himself from possessing "*Aigenleute*".<sup>96</sup>

Justifications for open resistance and the self-awareness of the peasants were obviously forwarded by Reformation but not completely dependent on it. The scale of the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 in contrast to earlier local movements or the Bundschuh campaigns may be due as much to the advances in inexpensive printing and the proliferation of pamphlets (*Flugschriften*) as to the Reform itself, although the stimulus to reading and disputation can hardly be separated from the impetus given by the religious upheaval itself.<sup>97</sup> The language of resistance and the context of its demands remained oriented toward the local community (the *Gemeinde*) even as insurrection became generalized throughout territories beyond individual lordships.<sup>98</sup> Above all, there is a theological, moral and legal background to the peasants' demands in 1525 that antedates the Reformation. Peter Bierbrauer has argued that the Reformation did not by itself inspire a Godly Law peasant argument in contrast to earlier Old Law local challenges.<sup>99</sup> The

<sup>95</sup> Franz, *Quellen*, no. 34b (p. 153): Die seint beschwert mit der Lûbaigenschaft, wann sie wellent kain andern Her haben, dann anlain Gott den Allmechtigen, wann der hat uns erschaffen. Wann mir vermeinden auch, das die gotlich Geschrift, das nit auswisse, das kain Hern kain Aigenmensch haben soll, wann Gott ist der recht Her.

<sup>96</sup> Franz, *Quellen*, no. 87 (p. 263).

<sup>97</sup> A recent study of the complicated problem of literacy and the Reformation is Bob Scribner, "Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print in the Early German Reformation," in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 255-278.

<sup>98</sup> The importance of strong local communities in furthering the revolt has been emphasized by Peter Blickle, *Gemeindereformation*.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Bierbrauer, "Das Göttliche Recht und die naturrechtliche Tradition," in *Bauer, Reich und Reformation: Festschrift für Günther Franz zum 80. Geburtstag am 23. Mai 1982*, ed. Peter Blickle (Stuttgart, 1982), pp. 210-234. Also important in noting the precedents to the Peasants' War antedating the Reformation are Brecht, "Der theologische Hintergrund", pp. 174-208; Müller, "Wurzeln und Bedeutung", pp. 1-41; Herbert Grundmann, "Freiheit als religiöses, politisches und persönliches Postulat im Mittelalter", *Historische Zeitschrift* 183 (1957), pp. 49-53; Hartmut Boockmann, "Zu den geistigen und religiösen Voraussetzungen des Bauernkrieges", in *Bauernkriegs-Studien*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Gütersloh, 1975), pp. 9-27.

real separation was between two types of Christian natural law, relative and absolute; capable of modification (hence legitimating servitude) or inflexible (in which case arbitrary lordship and holding Christian as serfs could not be licit). Controversies over how much divine and natural law might be modified by circumstance, the Fall, human necessity, or sin antedated the Reformation.

For example, the third of the fundamental "Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants" (March, 1525) denounces serfdom in terms similar to what we have seen:

*Third, it has until now been the custom for the lords to own us as their property. This is deplorable, for Christ redeemed us and bought us all with his precious blood, the lowliest shepherd as well as the greatest lord, with no exceptions. Thus the Bible proves that we are free and want to be free.*<sup>100</sup>

The text is accompanied by marginal citations to the Bible (Isaiah 53:1; I Peter 1; I Corinthians 7; Romans 13; Wisdom 6; I Peter 2). But, as Walter Müller has suggested, the language invoking Christ's sufferings that purchased human freedom is more closely derived from the German vernacular law books (the *Sachsenspiegel* and *Schwabenspiegel* notably), along with the *Reformatio Sigismundi* and Erasmus.<sup>101</sup> Bierbrauer points to the *Schwabenspiegel* as especially influential, not only because it was widely circulated and accessible in South Germany, but because of its specific formulations. Comparing the south-German lawbook to the articles of the peasants of Äpfingen (part of the Baltringen group, dating from February of 1525) and the Twelve Articles, Bierbrauer notes two key reworked *Schwabenspiegel* passages: 1) that nowhere in Scripture does it say that one man can own another; 2) that God created man after His image and saved him with His sufferings. In addition, the Äpfingen demands repeat the context for the passages in the *Schwabenspiegel* (and its source, the *Sachsenspiegel*), to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Mark 12:17).<sup>102</sup>

The "Twelve Articles" and the complaints of the Äpfingen *Gemeinde* recall venerable themes in discourse about equality in servitude, now in a more urgent key. Without in any way minimizing specific socio-economic pressures

<sup>100</sup> Franz, *Quellen*, no. 43 (p. 176): Züm dritten ist der Brauch bisher gewesen, das man für ir aigen Leüt gehalten haben, wölchs zu erbarmen ist, angesehen das uns Christus all mit seinem kostparlichen Plutvergüssen erlöst und erkauft hat, den Hirten gleich als wol als den Höchsten, kain ausgenommen. Darumb erfindt sich mit der Geschrift, das wir frei seien un wöllen sein. The translation is from Blickle, *Revolution of 1525*, p. 197.

<sup>101</sup> See the table assembled on p. 29 of Müller, "Wurzeln und Bedeutung."

<sup>102</sup> Bierbrauer, "Das Göttliche Recht", table, p. 226.



or the ideological impact of the Reformation, it can be argued that medieval concepts of justice played a role in the German Peasant War, as with those large-scale insurrections that preceded it. Such notions as the ultimate equality of humanity, Christ's sacrifice to release humanity from bondage, the obligation placed upon humanity to labor, and the mutuality of social orders could be brought from the realm of speculation and seemingly remote or self-serving arguments in defense of society as it had been imagined for centuries, and made to serve rather more revolutionary aims which therefore did not depend entirely on a radical new way of looking at the world. In this sense Luther was correct, not that the peasants ignorantly mistook his teachings concerning Christian liberty, but that they applied them in a more immediate way, along with the disquisitions of others who commented on the breakdown of mutuality and the difficulty of explaining the servitude of Christians.

### *Conclusion*

The conceptual means of resistance is not only a product of the delegitimation of authority, but also what Barrington Moore refers to as "the creation of standards of condemnation for explaining and judging current sufferings," and "a new diagnosis and remedy for existing forms of suffering."<sup>103</sup> That the diagnosis need not be completely new is essentially what I have been arguing. I have tried to show a substratum of resistance to arbitrary lordship that anticipated the great conflicts of the late Middle Ages rather than viewing those conflicts exclusively as the immediate product of particular circumstances. I would also observe that in this era of great political and economic instability, indirect and direct means of resistance were related. The transition from one to the other depended more on perceived opportunity and expectation than the degree of oppression. Finally the evidence from the fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries suggests that local disputes were not so conceptually different from larger conflicts (or at least there is some connection between them) and that peasants did not require an outside stimulus from towns or religious reformers in order to mobilize.

In classic models of peasant insurrection there is little that stands between meek acceptance of a dominant ideology and revolutionary activity born of a sudden collapse of that ideology's inevitability and legitimacy.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

Rather than the sudden frenzy of an essentially subjugated population, or the reflection of an apocalyptic irrationality, medieval uprisings should be seen as more planned, opportunistic and even optimistic (if in most instances wrongly so).

The origins of rebellion ceases therefore to be a search for a sudden shift from acceptance of hierarchical legitimacy to revolutionary sentiment, but rather a more continuous change from everyday evasion to public challenge; indirect resistance by other means. The standards of condemnation are key aspects in the construction of a revolt, but those standards develop only secondarily out of religious upheaval, the export of subversive ideologies from the towns, or an internal collapse of the state. They are produced by ideological appropriation and reorientation in the direction of immediacy.

Not every peasant war involved the same set of justifications for rebellion. In England original equality was a way of attacking the servile condition of peasants and what was regarded as the unjust lordship that it made possible. For Catalonia it was argued that servitude violated divine and natural law, in at least one case using the words of Gregory the Great's well-known passage on Christ's sacrifice that liberated all humanity.<sup>104</sup> For Hungary the justification for revolt was linked to accusation of betrayal of mutuality and functional orders. The nobility should be eliminated, having failed to defend the faith and the kingdom. For Germany both equality at Creation and the meaning of Christ's sacrifice were deployed.

What all these wars share (and this is true for many of the smaller conflicts mentioned here only in passing), is the importance of serfdom as a major grievance of the rebellious peasantry. Servile status was either among the direct causes of the conflict in the eyes of chroniclers and the peasants themselves, or provided the point of argumentation against more concrete conditions of lordship perceived as unjust, from restrictions on common lands to the imposition of taxes to attempts to reimpose requirements such as residence or death-duties that had fallen into desuetude. This is because servitude was the point of material and symbolic conflict over human dignity, a practical means as well as symbol of degradation.

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<sup>104</sup> Gregory I, *Registrum epistolarum*, Corpus Christianorum 140 (Tournholt, 1982), 6:12, p. 380: "Cum redemptor noster totius conditor creaturae ad hoc propitiatus humanam voluit carnem assumere, ut divinitas suae gratia, disrupto, quo tenebamur capti vinculo servitutis, pristinae nos restitueret libertati." For its use, see Paul Freedman, "The German and Catalan Peasant Revolts," *American Historical Review* 98 (1993), pp. 47-51.



Servitude was important, and in attacking it peasants made use of a vocabulary comprehensible to their masters. What they were saying was not unthinkable across the divide of class or order and did not derive entirely from an autonomous or completely hidden peasant way of reasoning about the world. Peasant resistance did entail a set of everyday evasions, but the extent of the late medieval rebellions and a certain degree of (perhaps indirect) success were due to the ability of the dominant elements of society to comprehend and be intimidated by their subordinates.

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Keith Jenkins  
*Living in Time But Outside History, Living in Morality  
But Outside Ethics*  
*Postmodernism and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth*

In those Sophist days before the 'start' of the Western Tradition, the suspicion that the finite and the contingent was all that there was; the idea that the phenomenal world was the only actual world; the understanding that the basis for living finite lives was the aleatory and the ludic, led to attitudes and theorisations expressed in varieties of ontological, epistemological and ethical relativisms *vis a vis* the significances and meanings conferred on the 'metaphysics of existence'. And why not? If from the 'facts' of the 'evidence' no non-contingent, absolute 'ought' unequivocally emerged, if individual and political life – past, present and future – seemed interpretable interminably (you can talk about politics forever...); if there seemed no rhyme nor reason to anything or anybody in themselves (indeed, if it was realised that the 'secret' of the essence of the 'thing in itself' was that there was no such essence) then no other viable conclusion seemed available other than a relativistic 'anything goes' coupled with the ultimate acceptance of the idea that 'might is right'. Consequently it is here, against these conclusions, that the Western Tradition begins; in the refusal, by Plato, to see sophist scepticism and relativism not as *solutions* to the problem of the finite, the contingent and the aleatory (a way to live with these actualities, to put your feet up and be relaxed about them) but rather as continuing *problems* (seen now precisely as 'the problems of scepticism and relativism') still to be solved. Accordingly, because sophists and, later and differently, pyrrhonists and other sceptical solutions for living life 'here and now' were not deemed to be solutions at all, so the finite world – whose anti-logic articulations Plato well recognised as providing no basis for anything other than various relativisms – had to be supplemented/supplanted by something 'beyond the reach of time and chance', an 'infinite fix' to bring temporary/temporal chaos into permanent and absolute order. Living in the shadows of Plato, the history of the Western Tradition has thus overwhelmingly been the history of various articulations of this apparently necessary, stabilising fantasy – this infinite fix – in the guise of eternal verities expressed either in the anglicised upper case (Forms, God, Essence, Nature, Human Nature, The Categorical Imperative, Spirit, Class Struggle, Dialectic, Market Forces, Reason, History...) and/or in older linguistic expressions all suggesting

immanence and centerings that had an invariable presence: *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia ousia* etc., imaginaries all bearing down upon us wearing the insignia of Truth.<sup>1</sup>

It is a curious fact, but a fact nevertheless, that such a variety of infinite fixes was not immediately regarded with widespread incredulity (as opposed to local, marginalised and shadowy scepticisms and relativisms – critiques overwhelmingly recuperated by the dominant tradition to be construed as its ever-threatening ‘other’). One might have thought that the very fact that, ‘historically speaking’, there have been so many expressions of such upper case demands, would have made people immediately consider such eternal imperatives as mere reified projections of their own interpretive (relative) desires and that to obey such chimeras was to chase themselves back into their own logically tautological and solipsistic lairs. But again, historically speaking, this fact – of one thing to be expressed but so many narrative/metanarrative expressions – seems only to have convinced adherents of them that, strange though it may seem, their own preferred interpretations were not really interpretations at all but *the* Truth. Thus we have witnessed – restricting ourselves now to fairly recent historical articulations of this ‘existential metaphysic’ though one very obviously based on much ‘older frames of mind’ – various foundational progressivisms, positivisms, Marxisms, Whiggism, Fascisms, etc., metanarrative fixes ultimately of the ‘ends justify the means’ type. To banish the finite and contingent and to turn such phenomena into some kind of demanding necessity, these formulations we have died for.

Contemporary postmodernism is a phase – however hesitatingly and qualifyingly specified as non-teleological, non-stagist, and as merely a ‘different’ moment/condition from and/or after modernity – postmodernism has finally, I think, ended the plausability of such metanarratives. Today there seems to be everywhere that incredulity towards them which Lyotard famously essayed: few if any of us believe in such fantasies any more. Through the efforts of various linguistic, narrative, deconstructive and discursive turns, we now realise that there never has been, and there never will be, any ‘knowable’ forms, essences, natural natures, histories, etc., beyond contingency. That we will never have access to a founding originary, and hence to no inevitable destinations, teleological trajectories or dialectics of closure; that we have no conduit to any kind of extra-discursive transcendental signifier, full-presence or omniscient narrator/narrative. In fact, we postmodernists have now just about unpacked the imaginaries of the non-

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1 J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Routledge, London 1978, p. 289.



relativist Western Tradition so that we are effectively 'back at the beginning': rhetorical neo-sophists. For we *post*-modernists are, in an interesting reversal, also *pre* Western Traditionalists, *pre* modernists. In a very precise way we are now *pre*-platonic, *pre*-christian, *pre*-kantian, *pre*-hegelian, *pre*-marxist, *pre*-market, *pre*-fascist, in the sense that these attempts to put us in touch with various foundations having failed, then we now have to face – at the end of the Western Tradition – the same existential/metaphysical problems the sophists faced before it began. Accordingly, we now have the chance to consider contemporary takes on sophist-type sceptical and relativistic *solutions* to the metaphysics of existence precisely as solutions and not at all as problems 'still to be solved' Such solutions to finiteness and the endless equivalences of anti-logic may not be the same type of solutions as Plato's or Kant's or Marx's or contemporary 'certaintists', but they are solutions nevertheless - and ones which the actuality of living in postmodernity is forcing upon us whether we like it or not.<sup>2</sup> These solutions suggest – at least to me – that we can now live *pre/post* modern lives in ways which have no need for any infinite fix to stabilise contingency and chance; no need for any upper case, metanarrative history (or lower case professional/academic histories – but that is another story)<sup>3</sup> to stabilise time in a particular temporality, and no need for a capitalised Ethics – an Ethical System – to stabilise 'disinterestedly' the 'interested' tastes and styles of our own personal and public morality: that we can forget these sorts of history and ethics altogether.

To any remaining non-sophists, this may seem to be a rash move to make, but my thinking on the non-rashness of it might seem less reckless if I briefly reformulate some of what I have just said and so further prepare the ground for what all these preliminary remarks are actually leading up to; namely, an examination (expository much more than critical) of a text by Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth – *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*<sup>4</sup> – wherein she essays, in what I will argue is one of the most important considerations of postmodernism, history and ethics/morality available, what I construe as ways of living *in* time but *outside* history;

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2 I am indebted to Peter Brickley for convincing me that relativism was the solution to, and not the problem of, existence and morality; also to Philip Jenkins whose various arguments on Baudrillard I have drawn on in passing.

3 See the Introduction to my *The Postmodernism History Reader*, Routledge, London 1997.

4 E. D. Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and The Crisis of Representational Time*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992. Rather than footnoting my references to Ermarth, I have inserted them paranthetically in the paper.

in morality but *outside* ethics. My reformulation of our current condition – my further stage setting for Ermarth – can be put as follows.

It still seems rather obvious and commonsensical to say that perhaps the main reason why historians study the past is because they think that what this work may produce – a historical consciousness – is a good thing. Yet beyond this minimalist intention common endeavour and agreement tend to collapse. For given that it is the idea of the good which defines the desired type of consciousness; that is to say, if a good historical consciousness is anything the definer so stipulates – which it is – then because ‘we’ live amongst so many competing notions of the good with no universally acceptable/neutral criteria for adjudication between them, so not only does any ultimate closure become endlessly deferred, but the very idea of a good historical consciousness is similarly affected: we now have no clear sense of what a good history/historical consciousness is. There are various contemporary reactions to this ‘relativist’ conclusion, but perhaps the most popular is not to try – and keep on trying – to find a ‘real’ history/historical consciousness beyond constitutive interests, but to admit one’s position (one’s interests) so to be as reflexive, ironic (apres, say, Richard Rorty) and as ‘open about one’s closures’ as one can be. Thus we witness increasingly historians quite openly flagging their positions – feminists and post-feminists, post-marxists, post-colonialists, neo-phenomenologists, neo-pragmatists, etc. – and, at the level of the lower case, umpteen ‘revisionists’. But my argument is that this positional explicitness is still ‘too historical’. For I think that we are now at a moment when we might forget history altogether and live our lives without reference back to a past tense articulated in ways which we are historically familiar with. Maybe we can forget the historicised past and – because we do still have to (temporarily) live together – just talk about that : ethics talk. And yet, this alternative may also be, in turn, too ethical. Why can’t we forget ethics too?

Here, in distinguishing ethics from morality, a little bit of arbitrary defining (there is no other) may be useful. For the problem with ethics is that normally we link up that notion with the idea of a system : an ethical system. Such an idea of an ethical system – say Kant’s – has, at its centre, the further notion of universalism; that is, an ethical system is one which, if universalised, would allow ethical judgements to be made about all and every contingent situation when one has to make a choice – when one has to decide what one *ought* to do. But such a total, transcendental system is an impossibility and, in the event that this should be held not to be so, actually not ethical anyway. For if there was such a thing as a total ethic so that in every situation one only had to apply it, then one would not be making a



choice at all but merely applying a rule – in which case the implementation of such a rule absolves the subject from actually making a decision. Consequently, there is no morality (choice) involved here, but just the application of a necessity. But if, as I am assuming, morality involves choice in such a way that a system of ‘ethical necessities’ would not be moral at all, then free choice, untrammelled by reference back to any ‘system’, would just have to be subjective, contingent, situationist, pragmatic, aleatory, and thus always ultimately unsystematizable and ungroundable, i.e., sophist-like. It is this situation, the situation where every moral choice is ultimately undecidable (the *aporia*) but where decisions always have to be made, which makes Derrida talk about the ‘madness of the decision’, Baudrillard the ‘radical illusion of morality’, Levinas the ontological violence inflicted on the other to make it the same, and Laclau talk about the ‘philosophy of the undecidability of the decision’.<sup>5</sup> The upshot of all this – to cut a long story very short – is that we are now all left within an unbounded space-time, with nothing certainist to fall back on to underwrite our public/private self-styling, and with no fixed horizons (common skies) to guide us...with no ultimate ethical stabilisers....least of all any stabilisers we may have thought issued from a past constructed historiographically by us but in such a way so to render forth the illusion that that past/history was self-constituting so to help us live better lives, the (historicised) past as the great pedagogue, always teaching us ‘its’ lessons *as if* they were not always only our own projections. Consequently, that illusion now transparently obvious, so the suggestion that we ‘forget history and ethics’ for ‘temporality and morality’, postist/sophist-style, now forces itself upon us – or rather – we now force it upon ourselves.

As already suggested, Ermarth addresses both facets of the postmodern condition I have been discussing; to recall, the question of what would it be like to live *out* of history but *in* time; *out* of ethics but *in* morality. As I read her, I think that she is much more successful arguing for the former rather than the latter, where she seems to perhaps not fully recognise the problems or, if she does, to be insufficiently relativist about them, needlessly drawing back from where I take the logic of her argument to be driving her. But I return to this criticism after my reading of Ermarth’s text which, it must be reiterated, has a richness and suggestiveness which defies easy summary and which I urge readers to go to and appropriate for their own purposes, as I have done here. Relative to the above stage setting, then, my own take own on (just aspects of) Ermarth runs as follows.

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5 See the various arguments of Rorty, Derrida, Lyotard, Laclau, et al, in C. Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, Routledge, London 1996.

Let us stipulate, as *metaphysics*, the givenness of existence (the *gift* of the world, being) as something which just existentially *is* (I mean, we don't have a choice about unconditionally accepting these gifts). And let us say that this given, this thing-in-itself, is actually eternally unfathomable. Then let us stipulate *ontology* as the effort to bring this given within the closure of meaning, to very precisely try to make it fathomable and known (epistemological). Let us go on to say that this restriction, once on-going, then performs that constant (violent) appropriation by which we seek to enlarge our meanings until the metaphysical is exhausted and 'its' meaning reduced to 'ours'; its 'otherness' now 'corresponding' to the 'same': to us. Then let us say that, of course, this attempted closure can never fully occur; that what Bataille calls the 'general economy' of existence resists our most persistent cultural drives towards the production of meaning and the grounding of such meaning (the attempt to eliminate the *excess*) within our 'restrictive' productionist economy. And then let us recognise this struggle between the metaphysical and the ontological/epistemological – between the unrestricted (infinite) general economy and the restrictivist productive one – constitutes at one and the same time both the possibility of meaning and the guarantee that a full meaning (total presence, self-identity, etc.) is unachievable; that the gap between the thing-in-itself (the other, radical alterity etc.) and our theoretical appropriations of it remain, no matter how apparently close(d), infinitely and eternally apart...but that 'the rhetorical beat must go on, endlessly repeating the sequence by which the lure of solid ground is succeeded by the ensuing demystification.'<sup>6</sup>

Now, all this can be read as simply saying that, in a culture, 'nothing is of a natural kind.' Everything to be meaningful and productive has to be within the 'productivist economy', its excess cordoned off and kept on the outside (from there to haunt it...haunt it with the thought of its always imperfect closures), an economy which, to be communicable, is necessarily coded. Accordingly, to be in a culture is to live in and through a code, a language, to be within the (theoretical) imaginaries (metaphysical, ontological, epistemological) which constitute reality (the 'effects of the real') so that 'residence in a language' is residence in reality (the real *is* imaginary, the imaginary *is* real), this including, of course, that metaphysical imagining of what, theoretically outside of the productivist economy, the excess may be like (ie, the excess isn't any more 'really real' than the cultural inside, it's just a regulative idea, a potentially productive silence; another simulacra).

6 S. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989, p. 493.



The imaginary which Ermarth is most interested in is the discursive production of Western time. We don't know what the stuff we call time actually is; time, to be 'time', always has to be timed (given temporality). And it is the peculiar way in which Western time has been timed in what Ermarth calls its modern, linear, historical form (which she traces back to at least as far as the Renaissance), the capsizal of that (arbitrary) form in 'postmodern times', and its replacement by a timing of time that is precisely not 'historical' but is rather conceived in feminist friendly, chaos friendly, hopscotch, figural, *rhythmic* timings, that is the concern of her text.

Ermarth is of the opinion that postmodernism has just about got all the imaginary formulations needed to end modern linear history and begin rhythmic time, and she's glad. For whereas modernist discourse has got used to its imagining of time so to regard it as 'real time' – has forgotten its inventedness (its temporal fix) so regarding it as a neutral, objective phenomenon – postmodernism urges us to recall that such a reality is always the 'mediated construct of a founding subject'; that time is a function of position. (p. 18) For Ermarth, 'objects', including phenomenal timings, are best seen not as 'objectively' there but rather as the 'subject objectified' or, better still, as the 'subject performatively objectifying' from specific enunciative locations (the '*locutions* of culture'), this latter construal giving impetus to the move away from a fixed Cartesian ego/subject in favour of a subject-in-process, performatively and playfully constituting then living within such constitutiveness whilst interminably unsettling such temporary shelters/residences seen now as old metaphors congealed into the appearances of literal truths and awaiting dissolution by new, more pragmatically useful ones ('the beat goes on...'), ones opening up – as Ermarth construes postmodern potentiality – erotic possibilities. These possibilities, not being within the restricted economy of linear history, thus effectively draw on the (metaphorical) resources of the general economy, the metaphysical excess, it being the (counter) penetration of that excess, imagined by Ermarth as feminist friendly, rhythmic time, into the male (phallogocentric) productivist historical economy, that potentially destabilises it, this explaining, not least, the opposition, fear and indeed intense hatred postmodernism often engenders amongst modernists/'historians'. For Ermarth, postmodern rhythmic critiques of modernist linear histories involve a critique of everything within the moribund productivist, modernist economy:

What postmodernism supplants, then, is the discourse of representation characteristic of the long and productive era that produced historical thinking... Across a broad range of cultural manifestations a massive re-examination of Western discourse is underway: its obsession

with power and knowledge, its constraint of language to primarily symbolic function, its ethic of winning, its categorical and dualistic modes of definition; its belief in the quantative and objective, its linear time and individual subject, and above all its common media of exchange (time, space, money) which guarantee certain political and social systems...There are some who fear that postmodernism, by depreciating traditional causalities, portends an end to morality itself [Ethics] and the fear is not unfounded so far as traditional morality [Ethics] is concerned. (pp. 5-9).

Unlike so many postmodern historians, then, who, as I have noted already, see postmodernism as the beginning of new kinds of history (post-feminist, post-colonial, etc.) Ermarth isn't interested in interpreting the past 'rhythmically', rather she sees it as offering a present and a future without history 'as we know it' but with a new type of existential temporality. At times she is guarded about this, 'my intention', she writes, 'is not to lobby for postmodernism at the expense of history', but to locate 'a major discursive shift in our understanding of temporality and to explore some of its implications'. (p. 10) Again she writes: 'Whether or not it is meaningful to speak of a "new" history remains an open question, although the term "history" has become so saturated with dialectical value that it may no longer be very bouyant...I attend mainly to how postmodern narrative time works, what it offers, and what its implicit requirements, gains, and losses may be. The work that undermines history also opens new questions and provides new opportunities in practice.' (pp. 14-15). But these (unnecessary) qualifications noted – these bits of modernist nostalgia which will resurface in her hesitation over accepting the relativising logic of her position – on the whole Ermarth is up-beat:

My thesis in brief is this: postmodern narrative language undermines historical time and substitutes for it is a new construction of temporality that I call rhythmic time. This rhythmic time either radically modifies or abandons altogether the dialectics, the teleology, the transcendence [the infinite fix] and the putative neutrality of historical time; and it replaces the Cartesian *cogito* with a different subjectivity whose manifesto might be Cortazar's "I swing, therefore I am." (p. 14).

Against this general thesis, then, Ermarth's text is composed of a series of densely elaborated arguments which, ironically, have the overall form of an old binary opposition. Ermarth's text is basically structured around the attempt to show (a) what is wrong with modern(ist) linear, phallogocentric *history* and (b) what is right with *rhythmic time* and what are its possibilities.

Ermarth's accusations against 'history' add up to a catalogue of faults that is heavy indeed. Modernist historical sequencing, patterning, rationalising and 'accounting for', converts chance into causality and, often,



into demanding necessities that justify sometime ends-mean scenarios of a totalising, totalitarian kind. Tamers of the contingent and the ludic, their (generally) narrative encased accounts function to make us feel at home in the existential givenness in the way that 'legends always have, as collective myths that confirm various primary "truths" about "the way things are"'. Belief in a temporal medium that is 'disinterestedly natural' and homogeneous consequently makes possible those mutually informative measurements between one historical moment and another that support most forms of knowledge so that 'History has become a commanding metanarrative, perhaps *the* metanarrative in Western discourse.' (p. 20) It is here, in narrative/metanarrative that the mythical figures of 'historical objectivity' and 'true meaning' appear, articulated typically through the disinterested narrator/omniscient narrator, 'the Narrator as Nobody', issuing forth the illusion of 'History Speaking'. This achievement – of naturalising the imaginaries of realistic time and space and of a commonly recognised set of continuities and of neutrality – enable 'us' to 'arrive at' our hypotheses, formulate our laws, produce our experiments, 'our capital and our knowledge', so producing 'an invariant world'. Here, any dissenting voices, any excessive interpretive play, are marginalised as pathological: it is only the 'accidents' of language, nationality, gender and ideology, that obscure 'objective truth' and a potentially 'cosmic vision'. These conditions notwithstanding, 'if each individual could see all the world...all would see the *same* world...in this, perhaps, temporal realism or history betrays its religious origin.' (p. 30). And this tendency to go cosmic, to universalise, is political:

Considered historically the present requires a future to complete or at least improve it, and consequently a dialectical method for getting there just as this same present has been produced dialectically by the past. By emphasising what is linear, developmental, and mediate, historical thinking by definition involves transcendence of a kind that trivialises the specific detail and finite moment. In the mobile culture of historicism every moment *has* to be partial so that we can pursue development, so we can seek a completion that, by definition and paradoxically, we can never actually find but that has emblems along the way: more information, more clarity, more money, more prestige, more of the constituents of heaven (p. 31).

And, of course, such destinations, heavily Western and heavily male orientated, have just about excluded nine-tenths of the world, a fraction which includes most women. Consequently it is this 'fact', the exclusion of this fraction from history, that makes Ermarth's discarding of history not only

one to be at ease with but a necessary one : 'Is it possible to exist *outside* history? [Yes] Women know; they have existed there'. (p. 17).

For those precisely excluded by the Western myth of history, postmodernism thus ushers in, in its potentially new timings, potentially new emancipations. Unlike historical emancipations – always then not now, always there not here – postmodern emancipatory imaginaries are 'presentist'. Thus postmodernism,

calls our attention *not* to fictions of origins and ends but to the process of consciousness itself as it constructs and deconstructs such fictions and, most importantly, as it enables readers to perform those new acts of attention required by a writing [and a practice...for to be in language is to be in 'reality'] that is going nowhere because it has already arrived. (p. 86).

As opposed to the heavy seriousness of history, then postmodern timings are altogether lighter and more bearable by comparison. Accordingly the bulk of Ermarth's text is taken up with the general possibilities of residing in a postmodern language/practice and, more particularly, of the possibilities for women: the benefits seem enormous.

As I read her, Ermarth's positive arguments start from the same sort of assumptions that I briefly alluded to in my preparatory remarks; namely, that the world (and the world gone by) is neither significant or absurd: it just *is*. We kid ourselves if we think that through our 'scripture, literature, picture, sculpture, agriculture, pisciculture, all the tures in this world', we've ever really got it taped. (p. 98). The world, the past, existence, remain utterly problematic, and exhilaratingly so : 'All our literature has not succeeded in eroding their smallest corner, in flattening their slightest curve.' (p. 97). For it is this sublime otherness which 'springs up before us' in those 'exciting moments of danger' when the covers are blown. The point here is not simply that this destroys habitual practices, the point is now to make 'a deliberate action of what has heretofore been automatic, a political agenda'. (p. 99). Such an agenda will retain its metaphorical status upfront; if we can never know literally what the world is 'in itself', then our appropriations of it are always metaphorical, rhetorical: the past *as if* it was history. Yet – and I return to Ermarth's failure to happily accept any metaphors – not any old imaginary will do for her. After clearing the decks, a specific agenda which on occasion *seems* to suggest that it is itself a necessity (given the way the world actually is) is outlined. Here is a bit more of the deck clearing:

The most subversive theory is the one that resists the habit of Western knowledge to totalise, to go for first and final cause. In Western epistemology, for example, the structure of induction and deduction... implies that theory must somehow be adequate to practice, or that



practice must conform to theory. The postmodern idea of theory as a guerrilla tactic - if you haven't got one make one up - flies in the face of this...centuries-old discursive habit. The practice of postmodern theory...requires a fine sense of play and a total willingness to live without discursive sleep... (p. 99).

So, what does playing guerilla with Ermarth theoretically entail; how does she carve out of an indifferent time a feminist friendly temporality? Put skeletally, I would portray Ermarth's near two-hundred page celebration in the following two or three page way.

Rhythmic time is her favourite trope. As opposed to modernist history/'tellable' time, rhythmic time has no time for transcendence : it has no essences, no universals, no immanence; no point. Rather rhythmic time – parataxis on the move – depends on local arrangements whose 'amplifications' are unpredictable. Rhythmic sequences fork and re-fork, ex-foliating, proliferating thematic threads which come to arbitrary ends, a chaotic coming together of 'details patterned paratactically, which is to say, asyntactically, which is to say meaninglessly'; details are unexpectedly complex and rich without becoming 'information'. This way of reading the world is essential equipment for a postmodern at ease with herself. Ermarth elaborates:

The...paratactic moves forward by moving sideways. Emphasising what is parallel and synchronically patterned rather than what is linear and progressive...Paratactic narrative [and lives] move...in several directions at once. (p. 85).

Such stylistic self-fashioning (to reside in a language is to reside in 'reality') offers new discursive practices, multi-level thinking which makes available multiple beginnings and endings; which pluralises perspectives, mixes and remixes, dubs and redubs those interpretive frames that subjects-in-process live through so as to make the past – including those causal powers which have blindly impressed thus far her behaviors, bear her impress: to be free of the 'burden of history' is the aim: to be in control of her own discourse, to be a happy *cronopios* (p. 35) (Ermarth's text is dedicated 'to cronopios everywhere'), who, refusing histories of infinity and dialectics, face with joy finite lives. Postmodern time is thus cronopios time : it's performative, it's improvisation, it's individual and collective, it's bricolage, it's jazz. Forget the 'conditionings' of history; make the event.

Drawing on the semiotic dispositions of language (after Kristeva) and coupling it with Derrida's notion of the endlessly ludic character of language (and thus life...), Ermarth extols the possibilities of that play which, in its endless deferments, prevents systems ever becoming closed. It is this sort of

play that ruptures modernist history, dependent as it was/is on ontological axioms to keep the system secure and safe from the (feminine) excess:

Derrida's argument has the implications that *structure itself is referential* in the sense that it always depends for its stability on reference elsewhere to some justifying absolute that exists 'beyond' the structure and exceeds it. It is *this referentiality* to an Elsewhere - to a 'full presence'...that validates the structure and justifies its effort to achieve maximum rigidity or... completeness. By reference to something outside it... 'truth' or 'natural law' or 'reality' or ...'history' - structure depends on something...that limits absolutely its play of differentiation. However, to the extent that a structure limits play...it becomes 'ruined'...no new formulations, no new experiments or adventures are possible. By contrast, the incompleteness of living systems guarantees... play remains open...systems that seek to exclude play are also seeking death. (p. 148).

Ermarth is seeking life. Utilising the concept of the figure (*figura*) Ermarth hints at a future of play where meanings remain open. Events may be congruent but they don't necessarily connect, may be adjacent but not related, may be sequenced but are not synthesisable. Things just don't add up, they are not aggregatable; no dialectical closure is possible. Postmodern figures – temporary meanings in a chaos that makes such meanings self-referentially meaningful, makes unequivocal truths, meanings and purposes, non-permanent:

This disorientation for its own sake is very unlike the effect of medieval *figura*, which makes truth only temporarily inaccessible...Postmodern *figura* makes univocal truth permanently inaccessible. On the 'other side' of a medieval figure is a clarifiable structure and a stable, cosmic meaning. On the 'other side' of postmodern figures is the marvellous mystery consisting of the fact that these figures *are* the tangible world, and that the tangible word is discourse, is language, is figure...There are no messages...only messengers. (p. 184).

It is this endless play of a 'meaningful meaninglessness' – being on the edge of the abyss but not regarding this as abysmal - that arouses eroticism. Not, Ermarth hastens to add, eroticism in the 'narrow, shabby sense', but in the sense of having the capacity to surprise – forever. This is subversive. In a productive culture which lives in the linear, the purposeful, then play conjures up notions of waste : of wasting time, squandering, of time mispent. Digressive, paratactic play defying dialectics, however, confers for Ermarth 'an exquisite pleasure by relieving the mind of its already recognisable...meanings...To restore to language its electricity...its power to shock, to derail it from the track of conventional formulas', is to be postmodern. This isn't easy. It involves a capability for the kinds of play 'not currently



primary values of the cultural formation in which we presently operate our universities, watch our markets, and pursue our careers.' But it can be done: 'Once we have given up antidotes to finitude – Kantian categories and vodka – we face finitude and its opportunities.' (p. 193).

This challenge to history, to the closure of systems, to live a life that is alive rather than a living death, this is what makes rhythmic, ludic time, the future Ermarth wants: for this you can forget history and (I think) systems *per se* – including Ethical ones:

This maneuver of imagination in play in language [in a life] is one that does without history, without a millenary kingdom, without Kantian categories or vodka, without Marx, Freud, or 'all the religions dreamt up by man'...In their place this postmodern writing [living] offers its precision, its erotic (chance) conjunctions, its rhythmic series: the coloured bits or elements of kaleidoscopic arrangements, and whatever patterns emerge. These are the materials for the anthematic figure, a mandala, a polychromatic rose design, a rhythmic, momentary, fleeting, life-affirming arrangement. Trying to give these arrangement fixity, or to control this rhythm in advance, would be like trying to redirect the arrow after it has left the bow. (p. 210).

This essaying of existential-type, postmodern possibilities *after the end of history* seems exhilarating; if nothing else Ermarth's optimism displaces those more common, mournful musings on the loss of one of the West's most potent, organising mythologisations – history – articulated not least by those who have most to lose. It may therefore appear churlish to now level against Ermarth's 'visions' some concluding criticisms, thereby remaining trapped within the ritualistic (modernist) convention of the expositor turning critic as he or she – having lived parasitically off the text – has the 'correcting' last word. But I 'intend' my criticisms to be constructive. It seems to me that Ermarth succeeds in her critique of modernity's way of organising temporality – linear history – such that it is indeed possible to conceive of a life without it; to live *outside* that history and *within* a new rhythmic temporality where 'history as we have known it' has no more relevance; is *passé*. This signals the end of history as modernists have conceptualised the past and thought they had 'known it'. But – and this is my 'but' – I think that it is also possible to live *outside* of Ethics (Ethical systems) and *in* the type of morality suggested by Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Rorty, Fish *et al*; namely, that of the 'undecidability of the decision', the force of which suggests the acceptance of a pragmatic, sophist-type relativism. For I think that Ermarth, despite the drift of her argument, draws back from this; in the end her notion of rhythmic time has the ring of truth about it.

At various points throughout her text, then, Ermarth draws back from embracing the relativism which I think her arguments propel her towards. Thus, for example, whilst insisting that there is nothing outside of language (the text, simulacra) such that 'nothing exceeds its practices or its play, nothing escapes its limitations, nothing acts as a cosmic or natural "ground" and justification' including, obviously, the linguistically constructed concept of time (including, obviously, rhythmic temporality) this fact, she adds, this recognition, 'is quite far removed from any relativist catastrophe'. (p. 140) Again, in relation to the historicised past, whilst the idea that the past is invented 'threatens the moral universe with total solipsism', the reader/writer of the past, no more than the reader/writer of any text, cannot do what he/she likes with it; in fact, its existence demands a 'disciplined' reading/writing because it – texts and the past as a text – 'requires new acts of attention.' (pp. 71-2) Postmodernism, whatever else it is, she warns, is not some sort of cultural and moral bonfire.

Now, one of the reasons why Ermarth seems to be saying these things is something which suggest that she is still within the grip of the Western Tradition where relativism is seen – and this goes back to my comments at the start of this paper – not as the sophist-like solution to the problems of living in an indifferent world, but as a problem still to be solved (hence her comment, above, wherein relativism is seen not as a happy solution but rather as a 'catastrophe'). What Ermarth seems to be seeking is a nice consensus around the erotic possibilities of postmodernism (basically one where everyone imagines reality as she does) for without 'consensus available as a basis for conducting affairs, what is there but force?' (p. 61). This is a fear which has standing behind it that typical 'modernist' objection to postmodern relativism; namely, that such a relativism leaves us helpless before another holocaust:

Practically speaking, the debates about postmodernism come down to discussion about what, if anything, provides a reality principle for any construct. Postmodern writers and theorists do not deny the existence of the material world...nor, so far as I know, does anyone familiar with the issue seriously deny the exclusiveness of discursive languages to which we necessarily resort in order to say anything 'about' either the material or the discursive worlds - statements that inevitably are interpretations and, consequently, a pre-interpretation of an apriori formulation. But if discursive rules provide untranscendable constraints, what constrains the discursive rules? The question is haunted by the specters of holocausts which, in various national forms, have already demonstrated what appears to be no restraint. If anything can be justified in some Name, is there no way to choose between justifications? If every interpretation, every system, every set of laws is



a closed, inertial system and if there is no longer validity for any privileged position...how can a person or polis choose between....this or that course except by chance? (p. 59).

Well, chance may, Ermarth allows, have much to do with it, and she will go on to consider surrealist pronouncements in favour of 'objective chance' (basically choosing between things once such things have been put 'under a description'), but, leaving that aside in this paper (as Ermarth herself does at this point in her text) I want to concentrate, as she does, as to whether there are any general grounds for constraint. Here, Ermarth reviews and rejects 'answers' given by, variously, Rorty, Jameson, Lyotard, Katherine Hayes and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, the reason for their failure seeming to lie in the fact that they don't comprehend the way postmodernism has changed our understanding of 'reality'; like the concept of history, 'reality' doesn't mean what it used to. Classically, explains Ermarth, reality implied something stable and self-identical, but 'physical reality' (which non-idealist postmodernists do not doubt) has been redescribed in postmodern idioms by people like Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, whose treatment of reality as 'chaos as a phase of order' means 'reality' is in a 'constant process of fundamental redefinition, so that the term "fundamental" does not even really apply.' (p. 62) Consequently, to give up on 'classical' reality does not mean we give up on postmodern 'chaotic' notions of reality as things which *actually* constrain us :

The fears of moral catastrophe that postmodernism raises in some are usually posited on classical assumptions...[But] nobody denies the presence of conditions external to our descriptive and linguistic systems, nobody hopes for complete solipsism of the kind that some ascribe, completely wrongheadedly, to postmodernism and that would in any case only be possible in a classical system...To give up the 'reality' or 'realities' that constrain behaviour and inscribe value does not mean anarchic [sic] relativism in which 'everything is permitted' and brute power rules...The failure of a totalising absolute like historical time may raise the fear [sic] that 'everything is permitted' but...there is no such thing [as that]. (p. 62).

Rather, the chaos theory and the 'dissipative structures' described by Prigogine and Stengers introduce us to a 'new concept of matter' that suggest a 'new conception of order that is independent of the closures and finalities of classical dynamics and that permit us to see how "*nonequilibrium brings order out of chaos*".' (p. 63) Thus, for example, the element of chance in a stochastic (probabilistic) process – where an 'end' becomes the possibility of a new 'beginning' which is not controlled in the classical sense by that 'end' – opens up new sources of life, new rhythms of continuance in ever-

new states and modes: 'The more determinist laws appear limited, the more open the universe is to fluctuation and innovation.' (p. 63). Without wanting, as Ermarth puts it, to draw 'facile political analogies' from Prigogine and Stenger, this is what she does indeed go on to draw. In a probabalistic process, she argues, things must be considered in the context of the moment when individual behaviour can be decisive or ineffectual but not predictable:

Even small fluctuations may grow and change the overall structure. As a result individual activity is not doomed to insignificance. On the other hand, this is also a threat [sic] since in our universe the security of stable, permanent rules seems gone forever. What social (that is, moral) implications this may have remains to be seen, but it is not clear that there is any greater threat of moral catastrophe [sic] in probabalistic social descriptions than has already been shown in logocentric ones. (p. 65).

Postmodernism thus acknowledges not single but multiple constraints; postmodern time and space are warped and finite by 'the play of chance and necessity in the processes of life themselves...' "Reality" ...never stays "the same"; it is not inert but interactive... This awareness of finitude, of limit, is the basis of an entirely new aesthetic and provides the main restraint on construction that postmodernism respects'. (pp. 65-6).

Now, this seems to me to be a most peculiar argument. One can see why Ermarth is running it, of course, probabalistic/chaos theory seems to be another way of talking about rhythmic time. But whilst this certainly undercuts 'classical' moral foundations (ie the 'chance' to draw a stable *ought* from a stable *is*) we Rorties and Lyotards have given up on trying to draw any entailed ought from any is, stable or unstable. I mean, let us say the 'actual' physical world is like Ermarth's (moral) rhythmic description of it apres Prigogine and Stenger. And say everyone accepts this : liberals, marxists, feminists, neo-nazis; everyone. What difference would it make? Is a political, constrained consensus between Ermarth and neo-nazis going to be arrived at because the way an (indifferent) world is in terms of physics? This seems unlikely, not least because, irrespective of physics, their moral differences remain incommensurable simply because they're 'moral' all the way down. Whilst views on the physical world may by chance affect politics it is difficult to see how they can determine them in any sort of is - ought way that involves entailment : Prigogine and Stengers are red herrings in this respect.

There is another point here too with regard to closure. For it looks as if Ermarth, in following Prigogine and Stengers, is saying that chaos theory/ rhythmic time are somehow closer to the way 'reality' actually is than other metaphoric 'correspondences' are. But surely she can't be saying that.



Because if she is, her notion of rhythmic time as being nearer to actuality and therefore the best (true) basis for a life better than old modernist, historical life, is just as much a closure, albeit of a different substantive 'content', as the historical was. I mean, what if we don't want to embrace rhythmic time even if it can be shown to be nearer to actuality, to 'nature'; what if we don't want to embrace a 'naturalistic fallacy' but want to retain our freedom to choose; to choose, say, a newly constructed, emancipatory linearity? If Ermarth is being faithful to her own creative theorising, then presumably she ought not to *care* if anybody chooses to live non-rhythmically in non feminist-friendly ways. Or is she saying that we ought to be rhythmic because linear time is somehow *intrinsically* repressive, *intrinsically* masculine; that rhythmic time is *intrinsically* feminist friendly, and that these connections cannot be reversed; that rhythmic time just cannot be repressive in its experimentations, as if from the activity of postmodern 'play' we couldn't all end up temporarily playing neo-nazi? But what could stop this? Something *intrinsic* to 'play'? It would seem that here Ermarth is simply substituting one closure (linear history) with another (rhythmic time) which we ought to follow because it is nearer actuality and thus, presumably, nearer to actualising emancipation.

To be sure, Ermarth says she isn't doing this. As she writes at the end of her text (repeating earlier, similar disclaimers), the 'multilevel play described in this book belongs to an effort to renew social codes by restoring powers that have been repressed...not... to enforce another repression'. (p. 212). But I think that she can only say this because she *knows* what is best for us and knows we won't necessarily feel it as repression. Thus, for instance, seeing human beings as subjects-in-process just is a better way of seeing them as opposed to seeing them in terms of the Cartesian *cogito*; thus, postmodernism and feminism have an affinity because of their joint insistence that the chief political problems (of language...to have residence in a language is to have residence in 'reality') can 'only [sic] be solved by writing a new language, one uncontaminated by the old, radioactive terms, so that one thing 'seems *certain*: no effort to come to terms with social agendas will succeed without the recognition that history itself is a representational construction of the first order, and that new social construction cannot [sic] take place until history is denaturalised'. (p. 56). These seem fairly certainist, non-relativistic remarks to me, thus raising the question of how reflexive Ermarth has been about the status of the closures she is suggesting for others; I mean, for a linearist to be trapped in rhythmic time could be a nightmare. But maybe Ermarth has thought of that; she admits a revision of existing hegemonic arrangements of the type she is suggesting may hurt.

So alright. But arguably what isn't alright is where she seems to forget that such new arrangements are nothing more than her own personal preferences, ungroundable in either chaos theory or ethics in any way whatsoever.

The reason for me saying this is because I think that this sort of personal relativism is the only position postmodernism makes available. This way of putting things may make it look as if I'm committing a 'performative contradiction' (of saying that you must absolutely believe me when I say that the only truth is relativism which then appears to be an absolute truth, etc.) but I think this old 'contradiction' is not a contradiction at all but a paradox and paradoxes, unlike contradictions, can be resolved. This particular one as of follows.

In the restricted, modernist economy, it seemed that symbolic value was based on use value, that there really were real intrinsic needs, capacities, meanings and so on, and these stabilized symbolic exchange mechanisms. In the postmodern (restricted) economy, however, having shed every last notion of intrinsic value (*use* value) exchange takes place at the symbolic level only - at the level of the simulacra. Thus, unrestricted by use/intrinsic value, any symbolic value can be exchanged with any other, in effect, 'anything goes'. Any-thing can be exchanged with any-thing else because things themselves (and certainly 'things - in - themselves') quite 'literally' don't enter into it; any equivalence will do. So, for example, you can, if you like, exchange love and justice for Ermarthian feminism (make them equivalent) or, staying with her allusion to the holocaust, exchange love and justice for it ( make them equivalent). Again, rhythmic time is equivalent to a type of liberation for Ermarth which for a non-Ermarthian might be equivalent to, as she puts it, a catastrophe. So which is it? Well, 'it' isn't either; 'it' isn't anything until it is given a value, and any value can be given to anything. We may wish that this was not the case, but it seems to me that it is.

From my point of view, then, I think it could be said that the transcendent has taken its revenge on Ermarth. On the one hand it has allowed her to have her way with history - who knows or cares what it means any more - letting her concentrate on organising the future in desirable, rhythmic forms. But, on the other hand, Ermarth seems to have been seduced into thinking that there could be something in rhythmic time that isn't just convenient for her own political desires but is actually closer to the way the world actually is, thus heading off relativism. But the idea 'behind' the notion of simulacra that we can know the gift of the world, etc., beyond endlessly interpretable mediations, is a radical illusion. A simulacra is not something which conceals the truth, it is the most plausible truth we have. Indeed, it is this 'truth'



which hides the fact that there is no truth, so that in that sense we can say, paradoxically, that the simulacra is 'true'. In *The Perfect Crime*<sup>7</sup>, Baudrillard argues that whereas the old philosophical question used to be, 'why is there something rather than nothing?', the postmodern question is, 'why is there nothing rather than something?' The acceptance of the latter formulation suggests to Baudrillard (and to me) that if we are bound only to the interminably unstable equivalencies of signs and appearances self-reverentially spinning around themselves (Baudrillards 'orbital culture') then relative value runs - forever. Yet, this is not a problem. For maybe we can relax about this and agree, with Wittgenstein, that the fact that there has never been the sorts of foundations we once thought there were (but that we humans have still created moral discourses) means that we never needed such foundations in the first place, nor will we, so that the very idea of foundationalism is 'one well lost'. Besides, that absolutist conceit has caused too many problems – not least those of the certaintist holocaust, that supreme *modernist* event.<sup>8</sup> For as Richard Rorty has pointed out:

Anti-pragmatists [and anti-postmodernists and anti-relativists] fool themselves when they think that by insisting...that moral truths are 'objective' - are true independant of human needs, interests, history - they have provided us with weapons against the bad guys. For the fascists can, and often do, reply that they entirely agree that moral truth is objective, eternal and universal... and fascist...Dewey made much of a fact that traditional notions of 'objectivity' and 'universality' were useful to the bad guys, and he had a point.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to say, Rorty adds, that this inability to answer 'the bad guys', is the result of pragmatism or relativism being wicked or inadequate theories, but that philosophy is just not the right weapon to reach for when trying to resolve, when all discursive attempts have failed, such moral and political differences. Thus, the inevitability of moral 'philosophy of the decision' relativism needn't be any more of a problem for us that it was for the sophists, and it shouldn't be one for Ermarth. But I think it is. Yet, though arguably 'still in the grip of the tradition', Ermarth's text is nevertheless one which enables us to imagine the possibility of living our lives not only *outside* history and *in* time, but *outside* ethics and *in* morality in quite self-conscious ways. *For in fact, if only we had known it, this is the way we have always had to live our*

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7 J. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, Verso, London 1996, p. 2.

8 On the holocaust as a modernist event, and the problem of its representation see, for example, Hayden White's, 'The Modernist Event', in V. Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History*, Routledge, London 1996, pp. 17-38.

9 R. Rorty, 'Just One More Species Doing Its Best', *London Review of Books*, vol. 13, no. 14, 25, July, 1991, pp. 3 - 7, p. 6.

*lives.* In this respect - and it is in this respect that postmodern reflexivity is so useful - we might just as well relax and say, with Baudrillard: "Nothing" hasn't changed.'



Oto Luthar  
*Possessing the Past:*  
*The Problem of Historical Representation in the*  
*Process of Reinventing Democracy in Eastern Europe*  
*The Case of Slovenia*

*"Each of us promenades his thought, like a monkey on a leash. When you read, you always have two such monkeys: your own and one belonging to someone else. Or, even worse, a monkey and a hyena. Now, consider what you will feed them. For a hyena does not eat the same thing as a monkey ..."*

Milorad Pavić  
*Dictionary of the Khazars*

*Introduction*

During my recent perusal of the collection of articles, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, edited by Saul Friedlander and discovery of the forum "Representing the Holocaust"<sup>1</sup>, I noticed with some surprise how many similarities can be drawn between the Holocaust debate on the one hand and discussions on "rewriting national history projects" which are unfolding in almost of all the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

The reinterpretation of the events of World War II, the renewed exploration of the relationship between resistance movements and collaboration units, along with the need to critically analyze post-war revolutionary changes; all these factors not only force us to reevaluate neo-Marxist and positivist conceptual models but also call for a new understanding of our attitude toward the historical truth.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank friends and colleagues for their advice and comments on this article; in particular Erica Johnson and Aleš Debeljak for their translation and detailed readings. I would also like to thank Tomaž Mastnak who has been constructively critical. *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997) edited by Keith Jenkins prompted me to compare the representation of the Holocaust with the reconstruction of national history in Eastern European countries after 1990. *The Reader*, together with other key texts in the contemporary theory of historiography drawn from *History and Theory* and *Past and Present*, offers a radical perspective not to be found elsewhere in historiographic writings. The study of the history of historiography after 1970 should become much easier from this vantage point.

On top of it, we are compelled to reflect on the development of local historiographies after a long period with no continuous discussion of this kind. This reflection is all the more urgent in light of the ever growing scope of theoretical debate in the West about the status of historical interpretation. This debate emerges from 'the linguistic turn' which challenged "the classical concept of mediation and...the ethical foundation for the practice of history by problematizing...the very notion of the past as a recuperable object of study"<sup>2</sup>. If this reflection is not done in a certain time period by East European historiographers and philosophers, our colleagues from the West will move in to fill up the empty niche. The result is likely to be no different from what can be observed in the interpretations of recent political developments in this part of Europe dominated as they were by the one-dimensional Western objectification of these tumultuous events.

I presented the partial results of the analysis of the Yugoslav historiographical discussion at the international congress in Spain in 1993 while the revised version of my paper was published in 1995<sup>3</sup>. Given that I will be bringing a comprehensive research about historiographic debate taking place in Belgrade, Ljubljana and Zagreb to an end next year and given the enormous material and nuanced differences between the various national discussions, I shall refrain from addressing this topic in the present text. However, I would like to draw attention to three essential characteristics of neo-Marxist historiography which are encountered in the historiographies of all socialist countries: first, the Aesopian language of more ambitious reconstructions of twentieth century history; second, the adjustment of the terminology to conform to respective systemic theorists (in the case of Yugoslavia, the systemic theory was the theory of principles of self-management as developed by leading ideologist in late sixties and seventies, Edvard Kardelj), and; third, the ideological periodisation of human history (prehistoric communities, slave-ownership, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism) which was grounded in Marxist economic determinism. In Yugoslavia, historiographic questions were until the mid-sixties led by Bogo Grafenauer and Fran Zwitter in Ljubljana and by Mirjana Gross in Zagreb, while the beginnings of deconstructive history may be detected in

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<sup>2</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel "History and Postmodernism", in: Keith Jenkins (ed.) *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), pp. 262-263. Some of the other texts relevant for the present discussion may be found in the aforementioned Reader.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Barros (ed.), *Historia a Debate. Historie a Debat. History under Debate*. Coruna 1995, pp. 279-289.



Belgrade and Zagreb<sup>4</sup>. Sarajevo-based historian Branislav Djurdjev has, in the period between the late sixties and the mid-eighties, produced some of the most characteristic neo-Marxist definitions of "the beginnings of new Marxist conceptions of history"<sup>5</sup>. By the end of the eighties and in the early nineties this debate shifted toward the north of this former shared land and the differences between existing orbits of debate have deepened. On the other hand, we must also keep in mind surprising similarity in methodologies used to advance the reinvention of national myths. In the field of history, the discussion flourished the most in Slovenia and resulted in the introduction of two study courses (Theory of History and Philosophy of History) offered by the history departments at both Ljubljana and Maribor Universities. The question, however, should be framed in a comprehensive analysis of methodological streams within post-war Yugoslav historiography.

In the following paragraphs, I will address two main topics. Within a discussion of the power and powerlessness of historical representation and its objectivity, I will address: 1) recent discursive types of rewriting history specific to East European countries, and; 2) problems of representation of resistance versus collaboration which are, as noted above, similar to the problems of representation of Holocaust. Above all, I would like to emphasise that reinvention of tradition which may be traced in almost all historiographies of former socialist countries that supports the claim that "the representation of past 'reality' is closely connected to problems that lie outside the sphere of purely scholarly activity...". It supports the argument that "...problems of historical representation are politically and socially significant in the individual and communal search for legitimation..." and that "...the past...is granted its own legitimation by the authority of the present."<sup>6</sup>

It seems that the newly established nation-states have to go through an intensive period of reconstruction of past reality. It also appears that, not unlike the Holocaust, the reconstruction of national history which goes hand in hand with the reconstitution of national identity is such "a boundary event"

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<sup>4</sup> I borrowed the term "deconstructive" history from Alan Munslow, the UK editor of a new historical journal *Rethinking History*. Munslow discusses three methodological currents in contemporary writing about the past, including what he calls the constructionist approach.

<sup>5</sup> The profile of Djurdjev's construction of "Beginnings of a New Marxist Conception of history" which may be monitored between 1983 and 1993 was outlined in my "The Possibilities of a Theory of Modern Historiography in Changing (Eastern) Europe: The Case of Yugoslavia" published in *History under Debate* (Coruna 1995), pp. 282-286.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Braun, "The Holocaust and the Problems of Representation", in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 421.

in which "lived reality" has to be "...mediated through an intense moral, political, and intellectual perception..." In this case, scholars are particularly concerned with "the public use of history" and "...with substituting the absent past with a historical text. "In the realm of politics", as Robert Braun puts it, "...this means attending to questions of identity, communal and individual searches for legitimation, and culture understood as power."<sup>7</sup>

In reconsidering certain events that occurred during World War II, particularly the episode of resistance versus collaboration, what is quickly revealed is the clear intention to secure an exclusive interpretation which in turn once again demonstrates the way historical representation can be instrumentalized. What is at issue is not merely the standard mode of operations like the one in language games in general. Instead, it is a mode of emplotment that leads to the one-dimensional political reconstruction of our understanding of identity, community, and culture. This attitude does not facilitate human solidarity. Rather, it gives birth to a construction of such political import that it no longer welcomes free and open encounters. This type of reconstruction is intimately linked to a creation of the kind of meaning and an audience which is emphatically not the result of negotiation between a number of different social forces.

Before entering the discussion of specific aspects of the Slovenian case, I would like to stress some theoretical foundations which helped me design my "objectifications" in reconstructing the discourse about projects whose aim is to rewrite history. To begin with, I must refer to White's comment on Friedlander in which White also discusses epistemological and ethical questions "...raised by the rise of such representations like Nazism". White is further wondering whether ethical modes of emplotment upon which this representation is based are really so unacceptable as it is believed. He concludes by saying: "

"Obviously, considered as accounts of events already established as facts, 'competing narratives' can be assessed, criticised, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain. But narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 423.

<sup>8</sup> Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth", in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 393.



Thus, White has, at least to some extent, softened the position which had confused Friedlander. Specifically, his position was that "language as such imposes on the historical narrative a limited choice of rhetorical forms, implying specific emplotments, explicative models, and ideological stances." White, however, remains convinced that "these unavoidable choices determine the specificity of various interpretations of historical events". We concur with White in this regard. After all, we do not know if "there is no 'objective' outside criterion to establish that one particular is more true than another..."<sup>9</sup>

The only claim lending itself to certainty in representing a given event is that the representation of such a boundary event like collaboration with the Axis Forces during World War II also becomes, to paraphrase Hans Kellner's sceptical words, a representation of the process of "coming to know the collaboration". As we understand this term, it refers first and foremost to the so-called "secondary referent...which historians employ to insert ...different events within general interpretations of the respective historical processes." According to White, this level differs from "a primary referent" because of the truthfulness of its meanings "...conveyed by specific narrative structures depends on the interpretive tropological tastes which prevail in the scientific and social community."<sup>10</sup>

In a general frame of "history and the post-modern debate", I am inspired by Gabrielle Spiegel's theoretical 'middle ground' and "'mixed' reading attentive to the differential linguistic practices and registers of past languages"<sup>11</sup>. Equally convincing is Spiegel's emphasis on the text's social site which makes it possible to argue "...that the power and meaning of any given set of representations derives in large part from its social context and its relations to the social and political networks in which it is elaborated."<sup>12a</sup> In addition, I agree with her saying that "text, as material embodiments of situated language-use, reflect in their very materiality the inseparability of material and discursive practices and the need to preserve a sense of their

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<sup>9</sup> Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: The Holocaust Debate*, in "Editors' Introduction" to chapter "History and Theory", *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 384.

<sup>10</sup> Wulf Kansteiner "From Exception to Exemplum: New Approaches to Nazism and the 'Final Solution'", in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 413.

<sup>11</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, "History and Postmodernism", in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 268

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 266.

mutual implication and interdependence in the production of meaning.<sup>13</sup> Spiegel is also very convincing in her elaboration of the use of deconstructive strategies which have proven "...to be powerful tools of analysis in uncovering and dismantling the ways in which texts perform or elaborate ideological mystification of which it is proper to be suspicious and which texts themselves inevitably betray through their fracturing of meaning, once we have learned to read them deconstructively."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, deconstruction not only helps us to "heed the silences within language, to search out the unsaid..." but is also very good tool for searching out what has actually been said. This is especially true in the highly contaminated ideological discourse which was characteristic of neo-Marxist objectifications in the sixties and seventies as well as in the process of rewriting history in the nineties; namely, in the wake of the breakdown of the socialist order in which history has emerge anew as a basis for moral choice.

Again, we must face the traditional or reconstructionist slogan claiming that *historia magistra vitae*. Once again, we must face an ideological approach which is acutely aware that the reinterpretation of the past contains great power. Thus, in this framework, the question "What is History?" goes hand in hand with a question "Why is History?". History with a mission is again gaining credibility and so is a reconstructionist searching for and a description of arguments for the formation or destruction of empires, states, ethnic and political groups and individuals. It is therefore no surprise that the slogan of history as the teacher of life is frequently heard while only very rarely do we hear the claim that history may be liberating, reduce prejudices and help people to become and remain autonomous. Or, if we put it in Munslow's terms, there is almost no interest in history as a form of knowledge, almost no operationalisations of themes related to the connection between history and ideology, power and its social, institutional, and material manifestations. And there are almost no "...wider implications of the debate over history's epistemological status but a clear domination of modernist scientific humanist paradigm with its investment in rationality, objectivity, truth, proof, progress, the possibility of an ethical life, as well as certainty of representation."<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, the discussion needs to be started about "the nostalgic reassessment of modernity" or, as Jenkins would put it, we have to rethink all stages of upper case historiography which uses the past for "...a trajec-

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 267.

<sup>15</sup> Alun Munslow, "Editorial", *Rethinking History*, p. 3.



tory into a different future.”<sup>16</sup> We have to analyze historiography which seeks the ultimate frame of description. This is then a historiography which formally denies that it is a historian who tries to determine what the past “really” looks like but which is otherwise very much aware that “...normal history orders the past for the sake of authority and therefore power.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, we need to expose those who attempt to establish “a single interpretive coding of the past (because) otherwise the arbitrary nature of the produced history becomes so evident that it loses its intended natural effect and thus its privileged position as having represented the past as it actually was.”<sup>18</sup>

In problematizing the relationship between the resistance movement and collaboration which is not unlike the debate on Holocaust, on the other hand, it is prudent to prevent when possible the development of a dilemma similar to the one raised by Norman Geras who in 1945 stated:

“If there is no truth, there is no injustice...if truth is wholly relativised or internalised to particular discourses or language games...final vocabulary, framework of instrumental success, culturally specific set of beliefs or practices of justification, there is no justice...The victims and protestors of any putative injustice are deprived of their last and often best weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story, which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes.”<sup>19</sup>

Applied to the case of Slovenia, this would seem to suggest that it is possible to advance even such a radical interpretation of the collaboration (at first neighbourhood militias, then homeguard units<sup>20</sup>) with Italian (1941-43) and German (1943-45) occupation forces which argues that “the resistance to the revolutionary terror was...morally justified and did not, despite a liaison with the occupier, betray or jeopardize the vital interests of the Slovenian nation”<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Keith Jenkins, “Introduction: On Being Open about our Closures”, in: Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997), p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Berkhofer, “The Challenge of Poetic to (Normal) Historical Practice”, *Poetics Today*, 9, 2, 1988, pp. 435-52. Quoted in Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (Routledge, London-New York 1997). p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Geras, “Language, Truth and Justice”, *New left Review*, No. 209, 1995, pp. 110-35. Quoted in Jenkins, loc. cit. p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> The homeguard (“domobranci” in the Slovenian language), established in 1944, was made up of different Slovenian combat groups which collaborated with the occupying forces rather than resisting them. Homeguard leaders claimed that they were fighting against “the communist revolution” even though it was, until 1943, impossible to speak of the communist takeover of the various resistance groups which as early as April 1941 formed an anti-fascist coalition named The Liberation Front.

<sup>21</sup> Janez Zdešar, “Razmišljanje o nekaterih ključnih dogajanjih v letih 1941-1945” [Reflexions on Some Key Events in 1941-1945], *Dogajanja in dognanja* [Events and Findings], pp. 56-64.

This position is in many ways congruent with a professed politics of waiting and a concomitant loyalty to the occupying forces<sup>22</sup> which was articulated in keeping with the instructions of the Yugoslav government-in-exile. This politics has hardly differed from the activities of many other political groups in then-occupied Europe. Perhaps the most important distinction and at the same time a problem for Slovenian anti-revolutionary camp may be viewed in that "...the centrist political leaders in Slovenia did not remain only passive, but have very early on begun to collaborate with the occupying forces in a political (for example, consulting councils) and in a military sense (Italian-sponsored Militia voluntaria anticommunista)".<sup>23</sup>

This key argument was not acknowledged among the revisionist writers. They typically fail to take into account the combined Italian, German and Hungarian occupation of Slovenian lands as well as the fact that the ensuing conflict established a frontline between the aggressors and the defenders and that the existence of Slovenian nation was at stake in the conflict<sup>24</sup>. To the contrary. The militant behaviour of the Catholic camp which has, to a large degree, made it possible for communist ideas to gain ground, has been interpreted by revisionists as an answer to "the communist terror... (and)... communist subversive activism."<sup>25</sup> Revisionist even speak of a latent civil war which was belived to have reached its "acute" phase during the occupation.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Bojan Godeša: *Slovenski izobraženci med okupatorji, OF in protirevolucionarnim taborom* [Slovenian Intellectuals between the Occupying Forces, the Liberation Front and the Anti-Revolutionary Camp], Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1995, p. 200.

<sup>23</sup> Doroteja Lešnik & Gregor Tomc: *Rdeče in črno* [Red and Black], ZPS, Ljubljana 1955, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> Draga Ahačič, *Osvobodilna ali državljanska vojna?* [The Liberation War or the Civil War?] Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1992, pp. 15. This book is paradigmatic for the initial stages of the revisionist debate. Not unlike most responses to the revisionist rewriting of the critical stage in the Slovenian national history, this book was penned by a non-historian. Professional historians themselves have at first remained cautiously silent. Some of those historians that have possessed the most comprehensive knowledge about the said period have kept their distance largely because their past writings tended to over-emphasize certain aspects of the war, while cautiously remaining silent about the others. Here again a typical atavistic attitude characterised by a lack of self-reflexivity, can be detected. Particularly historians were known for this kind of symptomatic behaviour under the socialist regime.

<sup>25</sup> Draga Ahačič: *Osvobodilna ali državljanska vojna?* [The Liberation War or the Civil War?], Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1992, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Contemporary revisionism also fails to acknowledge the diplomatic and ideological offensive conducted between 1924-1937 by Vatican whose politics was close to that of Slovenia. At least five circular letter by the Pope Pius XI. have during the said period called for a struggle against "godless communism and prohibited a collaboration with communists even for humanitarian purposes." (Ahačič, loc.cit., pp. 29). That



The advocates of this position are not concerned with the fact that the Catholic political right during the nineteen-thirties, in its fear of communism, promulgated the re-Catholisation of Slovenian public and private life. In addition, such writers are uneasy about the right-wing demands to establish a Christian schools and to pass a concordate before the World War II, just as they neglect right-wing claims to a larger influence in the Academy of Arts and Sciences, the university, and in the economic life.

It must be said, of course, that the communist movement was excessively doctrinaire in nature and extremely contaminated by the stalinist exclusivism of proletarian revolution. This is, however, hardly a reason for a contemporary revisionism to put the so-called "functional collaboration" on equal footing with the resistance movement and goes on to simply claim that the representatives of the latter are responsible for "the fratricidal civil war".

Ever growing visibility of these and similar interpretations one can witness in recent years overlooks a distinctly pro-Nazi character of Slovenian homeguard. Passivity of historians, alas, is a contributing factor in this regard. Pro-Nazi character is manifest in certain typical elements, including anti-Semitism and the cult of the leader. In addition, the homeguard's discourse is replete with slogans with key words such as "order", "work", "combat", "ancestry", "people", "fatherland", etc. These were used in Nazi discourse, too. There is a difference, though. Slovenian homeguard has, instead of glorifying the leader<sup>27</sup>, emphasized the commitment to the Christian faith and belief in God. Where Nazism employed the word "fuehrer", Slovenian homeguard typically used "God" (for example, slogans like "For

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the Pope's proclamations were taken seriously by Slovenian clerics is revealed in the discourse used by then-bishop Gregorij Rožman. He had in 1939 attempted to convince the Slovenian Catholic youth that it has to heed the Pope's words even in cases when they do not expressly refer to the Pope's infallibility (ibid, p. 30). Slovenian Catholicism has gone as far as propagating the ideas of *Ecclesia militans* and *Ecclesia triumphans* /military and triumphant Church/ which are exemplified by Christ-the Dominator. By doing so, the Catholic Church in Slovenia has lost support of its most creative and European-inspired group of intellectuals and cultural writers. Among them, the most prominent was Edvard Kocbek (1904-1981), a poet, essayist and fiction writer, the editor of "Dejanje" (The Action), one of the best Slovenian journals between the two wars. Kocbek was a member of the Liberation Front and after the World War II assumed a position of a minister in the Yugoslav government only to have later fallen out of favor with the authorities because of his critical attitude toward the regime. Kocbek was subsequently forced into "internal exile".

<sup>27</sup> The formal leader of Slovenian homeguard units, general Leon Rupnik, made efforts to fill this role by having imitated fuehrer's public performance, attributed great importance to propaganda and supported mass rallies of his sympathisers.

the faith-God-home and ancestry" and "Mother-Country-God", etc.) God figured even in an official greeting of the homeguard!

As far as "damned Jews" are concerned, classic patterns were manifest: "Jews are out to enslave the world"<sup>28</sup>. Following the establishment of Slovenian homeguard, its leader Leon Rupnik also spoke according to this precept. He liked to tell his listeners that "the partisans were drugged and bought by Jews in order to make partisans destroy the Slovenian nation while on the side of the Slovenian homeguard stands a German soldier fighting against world-wide Jewry."<sup>29</sup> Rupnik's collaborators have as late as 1945 claimed that they "honestly fight side by side with Germany against the greatest enemy of humanity – communism", or, "Jewish communism".<sup>30</sup>

In shaping their arguments, the defenders of collaboration of course fail to acknowledge this anti-Semite current in Slovenian homeguard units, and time and again invoke the anti-revolutionary, i.e. anti-communist nature of the movement while they interpret the post-World War II killings of homeguard members more as a moral than a legal precedent<sup>31</sup>. Above all, they intentionally omit the fact that homeguard units in 1944 in the heart of Ljubljana publicly swore to fight side by side with Germans against partisans as well as against any common enemy, that is, against the allied forces. The collaboration is repeatedly presented as a marginal segment of "civil war". They meticulously avoid the use of the term "resistance", replacing it instead with "revolutionary terror" which forced the collaborators to accept weapons from the occupiers<sup>32</sup>. Responsibility for the victims of World War

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<sup>28</sup> Consider the following example: "...most committed executors of Jews orders are communism and liberal democracy. Both ideas were created by Jews for the non-Jewish nations. Jewry attempts to bring Slovenian nation, too, to its knees by fostering moral decay and impoverishment..." (quoted in Tomc & Lešnik, loc.cit., pp. 123-4)

<sup>29</sup> Tomc & Lešnik, loc. cit., p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Ljerk Urbančič in "Na okope" [To the Barricades], published in the journal "Slovensko domobranstvo" [Slovenian Homeguard], No. 15. Quoted in Tomc & Lešnik, loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> The estimated number of homeguard members and their sympathizers who were, in various parts of Slovenia, killed by the victors without or on the basis of deeply flawed due process immediately following the end of the World War II, is placed between 10,000 and 15,000. Regardless of differences in the estimated number of victims, contemporary Slovenian historians are of one mind: this was a case of unjustifiable physical destruction of political opponents. Revisionist interpretation, on the other hand, continues to either ignore or dismiss the victims of Nazism and Fascism as well as those of the homeguard's terror. The same dismally or ignorance is extended to the 60,000 Slovenian inmates of concentration camps, 10,000 of whom perished in the crematoriums of Buchenwald, Dachau, etc.

<sup>32</sup> Janez Zdešar, loc.cit., p. 62



II on Slovenian, and, indirectly, on Yugoslavian soil as well must thus be borne not by the Axis Forces and their collaborators but by the communists who have "split" and "divided" Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, etc. "The total armed resistance" was, according to the revisionist writers, meaningless and incommensurable with the final accomplishment. One of the most baffling arguments used by revisionists to demonstrate the totalitarian character of the resistance movement was the frequency of elections in various representative bodies of the Liberation Front which was established on April 27, 1941, three weeks after the Axis's attack on Yugoslavia<sup>33</sup>.

Like the majority of revisionists, Slovenian writers in this vein believe in objectified historical truth. Yet they condemn the call for historical interpretation and debate as historical and moral relativism<sup>34</sup>.

Here, I would like to explain the above-mentioned problems in a larger context. First, I will attempt to discuss the rewriting of the collaboration through certain crucial methodological questions which have also occurred in the Holocaust debate. Second, I will analyze this process in a larger Yugoslav frame.

In order to introduce a factual reconstruction, I will make use of the language of partisan movies. I will try to refer to the most typical pop textuality in former Yugoslavia<sup>35</sup> in order to reveal the entire process of contextualisation. Or, to use Kellner's terms again, I will try to represent the way of

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<sup>33</sup> First elections were conducted in 1942 and then each subsequent year.

<sup>34</sup> Janez Zdešar, loc.cit, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> I do not use the descriptions of some scenes from this film only as a metaphorical material. Instead, I consider them to be an additional type of objectification of the past. I support the argument that the literary works of art (in this regard the script is understood as a literary genre, literature in pictures, as it were) may also introduce modes of objectification of the past. Let me demonstrate this by drawing on two books I happened upon by accident: Saul Bellow's *More Die of Heartbreak* and Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar*. I found out how Bellow has suffered on his visit to Kyoto in the early seventies when his Japanese hosts took him to a local strip-tease show. He described his feelings through the feelings of his main character ("Dr. Ben Crader, the well-known botanist") in his *More Die of Heartbreaks* published a decade following his visit. The book is, of course, a work of fiction yet it reveals more about Bellow's emotional state than Theroux's travel writing, a declared work of non-fiction, in which he tries to convince us how Bellow was supposed to have been enthusiastic about Kyoto only after having visited "girlie show". Bellow gives us an account of the visit in his book's Penguin edition of 1987, pages 106-111 while Theroux offers "real information" in the 28th chapter of his book entitled "Hikari (Sunshine) supper train to Kyoto." Quoted in the Slovenian translation of the book, Ljubljana 1997, p. 338.

“coming to know” the resistance and collaboration in a broader cultural context.

I chose to discuss the most symbolically loaded scenes drawn from the film, *Battle on the River Neretva*, the most ambitious project of its kind conceived in the entire history of Yugoslav cinematography. Its ambitions are well-evidenced by both the fact that the cost for its production was never an issue and that it featured a number of internationally famous actors and other creative minds: Yul Bruner, Orson Welles, Franco Nero, Hardy Krueger<sup>36</sup>, etc. The production of this film consumed enormous sums of money as well as the lives of several extras who did not manage to avoid the pyro-technical effects used on the set or drowned in the half-frozen river Neretva.

One of the most typical and dramatic scene shows us the Italian captain, captain Riva was his name, who was – like all the characters in this specific genre – taken aback when he got shot. He had had a hunch that he would be shot and perhaps he even saw it coming. Yet, nevertheless, he looked overwhelmed by surprise when it happened as if he was trying to say: “Not now...”. That emotion lasted only an instant. The next moment, we could perceive a new horror in his watery eyes, watery for tears of self-pity and regret ran down his cheeks, regret that at that moment the partisans were just barely hanging on. But presently we realize the real reason for his tears. He sees fire consuming his lover who has tossed a molotov cocktail at a nearby tank. Yet because the tank was so close, she is blinded by the flames of burning metal and runs screaming around the battlefield... The end.

For both of them. They never saw the battle charge or heard the songs of the wounded cheering the fighters along the mountain pass. They missed the real action. Danica, Ivan and Novak, along side other brave fighters of both sexes, advancing up the pass, making mince mint of the German and *ustasha* units and, in tears (yes, tears again), listening to the echo of their songs. The songs and Martin’s battle orders: “Fire! Fuoco!”. And again: “Fire” and “Fuoco!”, the orders shouted this time to his fellow soldier who would

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<sup>36</sup> The movie was shot in 1973 and represents the pinnacle of Yugoslav production of war movies dealing with the resistance, i.e. the partisan movement. It is a movie of spectacle which was supported by the entire Yugoslav leadership with Tito at its head. The project which gobbled up unheard of amounts of money, was a huge hit in all socialist countries, particularly in China. The project was not overshadowed even by a subsequent movie with Richard Burton as Tito. To the contrary, this homage to Josip Broz was one of the biggest flops in the history of national cinematography that not even names such as Irene Papas and Nikos Theodorakis could save from its doomed fate.



be killed in the next instant. In his mind's eye, Martin held the image of the dying Capitan Riva, the new artillery man, who had, following the battle of the previous day, deserted his Italian compatriots and joined the partisans. On top of it, just before his death Riva had given Martin a letter for his wife... aaah!... and now he was overcome with emotions. The Slovenian, had, up to this very moment, represented the idealized image which southerners have about Slovenians, the embodiment of understatement. Yet now he had revealed his heart.

What perfectly executed stereotypes! Simple and effective. The Italian remains Italian – a sentimental charmer, always on the lookout for an attractive woman, and an idealist to boot; the Montenegrin – stubborn and madly courageous; the Croat – a sceptic, yet loyal to his best friend, a Serb, who leads him in an almost paternal fashion... This relationship was particularly well conceived.

The film, taking each of the Yugoslav nationalities as reflected in the specific attitude of each and frequently even as reflected in that which each nationality lacks, carries the message of the post-World War II period. Time and again, the emphasis on particularities and differences is complemented with the solution in the form of general notions of humanity and brotherhood. In a characteristic manner, the opposite side is equally well-drawn. Germans are destructively principled. Italians boastfully display their inefficiency while the most pernicious representation focuses on the *ustasha* and *chetniks*. The demonization is accomplished entirely through the manipulation of emotions. It is enough to recall the grand scene of Danica's and Novak's demise. In itself, it guaranteed that the Neretva River would remain famous not only because of the fourth German offensive in the Balkans but also because of the film "The Battle of the Neretva" from which, as it may be surmised, the above references are drawn.

For the present essay, these stereotypes and references are more valid than the actual history of the event. Our perceptions of the history of World War II are rooted in such interpretations. The film affects us powerfully regardless of the fact that we are keenly aware of the ideologically contaminated character of the work. Nevertheless, the basic facts are immediately recognizable. All the aspects of the historical events – the resistance, the collaboration, the infighting – appear to be possible. Moreover, historians needn't answer to the relativism of sceptics or respond to the interpretation of the other side which, in any case, was not articulated with any frequency nor was it radically different from our own. This is, however, an altogether different problem and one which holds our interest only tangentially. The struggle for survival which raged intensely within the partisan resistance

movement, the behind-the-scene events which guided its political development has been and will remain the principal subject of empirical research projects addressing the history of World War II in the Balkans.

Our interest here, however, focuses on the question of whether the past interpretation, regardless of its ideological character, actually enabled the real historical existence of the resistance movement: in other words, whether it was, despite this perceptive bias, objectively plausible. Conversely, we must also ask whether its interpretive negation will, by way of relativizing the resistance movement to the point of impossibility, rob it of its specific existence. Having recently seen the film "The Battle of the Neretva", I was reminded, as I often have been in recent times, of the law prevailing in France today which penalises the negation of the Holocaust. I was also reminded of the comments the French philosopher Jacques Rancière wrote on this law<sup>37</sup>. Among other things, I thought of this law because it is to a large degree related to historiography and its helplessness in the face of the revisionist babbling of those attempting to relativise each and every responsibility and guilt emerging from World War II, including those which do not adhere to the Germans in the least.

I thought of the intuition of Habermas. In the mid-eighties he had used the pages of the German newspaper, "Die Zeit", to attack historians and Russophobes like Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber for their attempted relativisation of the nationalist period. Many readers believed that Habermas's rebuke was an exaggeration in keeping with his characteristic *engage* positions. Such readers opined that the apology for national socialism is nothing more than an exaggerated expression for certain marginal reflections on the period. They went on to argue that at issue is merely a peculiar historical argumentation and not a political manifestation, even less so a possible turn in the politics of Bonn. Less than a decade later those voices have grown quiet and historians see in the work of Nolte, and even more so in that of Hillgruber, the beginnings of the revisionism of Nazism.

This revisionist movement became evident in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union with the growing credence of Nolte's claim that national socialism represented only an extremely radicalised imitation of the Soviet politics of destruction. Telling references to the Christian ethos, the repeated recounting of the number of Holocaust victims<sup>38</sup> and dubious

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Über den Nihilismus in der Politik*, Turia & Kant, Vienna, 1997, pp. 123-146.

<sup>38</sup> Relativisation and the denial of the victims' numbers are dishonourable while those that carry them out do not make use of any valid arguments. Above all, this kind of enterprise is absurd. A revealing illustration may be found in the fact that the Old



geopolitical concepts became ever more frequent. The unbelievable report, which emerged from a Spiegel poll in 1994, that one out of every eight Germans between the age of eighteen and twenty-nine is an avowed anti-Semite made the picture only too clear. It has become evident that German "de-Nazification" has not proceeded in the same methodical manner as "de-Stasification" i.e. the revelations as to who, in what capacity and to what extent, was working for the former East German secret service. From this angle, it seems truly bizarre that the strongest anti-Semitism in contemporary Europe would be most deeply rooted in the country with the least number of Jews<sup>39</sup>.

Instead of "de-Nazification", what has occurred is the repression of memory. Indeed, the Austrian rejection of anti-Nazism and the shift toward including former NSDAP members is even more cynical than the German formalist recognition of culpability. The latter bears witness to the fact that the process of forgetting arguably goes hand in hand with the actual development of events. It is unlikely that Hannah Arendt was mistaken when she stated that people must almost immediately forget the crimes they have committed; she felt that it was not possible that they could go on living with the burden of what they had done.

One of the theories of modes of forgetting was articulated by Nietzsche in his description of the victory of pride over memory ("I have done this, says my memory. I could not have done this, says my pride.... In the course of time, memory gives in...). However, it should be emphasised that this does not hold true for the Germans only. Among recent victims of such amnesia are not only "neo-Nazis" but also university professors, poets and writers, leading politicians, etc. This reveals how pointless and myopic was the effort made two decades ago to marginalise the reinterpretation of Nazism

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Church Slavic language the number "ten" had the same name as the word for "darkness", demonstrating that the figure was incomprehensible. Small wonder, then, that nowadays many people have difficulties comprehending the magnitude of six million. It makes it even more odd that this historical fact is being relativized since it cannot be comprehended in the first place.

<sup>39</sup> Similar phenomena may be witnessed in Austria and Slovenia. According to the representative public opinion poll (Slovensko javno mnenje, 1994), more than 20% of Slovenians do not want to have Jews as neighbours regardless of the fact that only 4% of those polled ever had any contact with Jews. An almost identical picture can be found in a slighter older Austrian case, analyzed by Helmut Gruber in his work "Antisemitismus im Mediendiskurs. Die Aeffere 'Waldheim' in der Tagespresse" (Wiesbaden 1991). The case is also clarified in Simon Wiesenthal's "Justice, Not Revenge" (Slovenian translation published by Enotnost, Ljubljana 1994), particularly in chapter 36 ("This is the punishment for Warsaw's children", pp. 286-291) and in chapter 39 ("The brown victim of Kreisky", pp. 296-301).

and how dangerous may be the oversight of the present-day attempts to rehabilitate the concept of collaboration. As demonstrated by Nietzsche, the procedure is quite simple: what is incredible is impossible, and what is impossible does not exist.

Rancière in the above-mentioned text reasons along similar lines. He links his meditation with the "dehistoricised historiography" of French historians who write of history yet are unable to pin down the reality of a certain event (namely, the Holocaust). He substantiates this claim by referring to the argument put forth by Lucien Febvre in his work *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI: La religion de Rabelais*. He goes on to ask a famous question: Is the subjective vision of non-belief congruent with the man of the sixteenth century? Since Febvre discussed Rabelais the question should be rephrased: Is it possible that the celebrated author from the dawn of the modern era could possibly be a non-believer? Such questions are, according to Rancière, most enlightening. They help us to understand why the science of historical facts is unable to attain the central core of revisionist interpretation. Even more relevant is Rancière's claim that the revisionist provocation radicalises the categories of plausibility; that is, the categories upon which the contemporary scientific history of the present is based.

The above paragraphs serve as an expanded introduction into the theory of historiography and is necessary to the extent that it enables us to refute Rancière while at the same time agreeing with his claim that history, with the emergence of revisionism, finds itself in a predicament.

One cannot deny the definition of the impossibility of history insofar as one deals with the situation in which law and science interchangeably attribute to each other the task of uncovering the evidence of a crime. The impression of impossibility is illustrated by this example of a former deportee. Rancière employs a set of questions and answers which, through the interpretation of the victim, prove time and again that even when we see all the elements of a situation, the totality of it can never be fully reconstructed. And neither can its subjective meaning.

The example is drawn from the book *"The Lie of Odysseus"* (1950). The author, former camp prisoner, Paul Rassinier, strings together a series of questions and answers:

*"First question: Did the Nazis provide explanations for the destruction of all Jews? Answer: Yes, but explanations themselves never killed anybody. To wit, the untarnished humanists on the opposite side of the fence also claimed that the entire German nation must be destroyed and this attitude has had no consequences. Second question: Were there actual blueprints for the gas chambers? Answer: Yes, but the blueprint for the gas chamber and the gas chamber itself are two separate things*



just like one-hundred counterfeit toalars does not make one-hundred real toalars. *Third question:* Were there actual gas chambers in the concentrations camps? *Answer:* Yes, but the gas chamber is nothing more than a gas factory, the output of which can be used in any number of ways and therefore cannot alone be seen as evidence of murder. *Fourth question:* Did the regular selection of inmates occur in the camps and did those selected later disappear without a trace. *Answer:* Yes, but nothing can prove that the disappeared have actually been gassed. Perhaps they were sent to a different camp, beaten to death or simply died of starvation. *Fifth question:* Were there victims of the gas chambers? *Answer:* Yes, but there is no evidence that these people were murdered systematically, following orders from above. They could have been killed by an individual sadistic officer..."

And on and on, ad nauseam. One may order the sequence of questions and answers in such a way that they bear witness only to the powerlessness of law and historiography and reveal the mode of negativist argument employed by the revisionists. Something so incredible, so extreme, simply could have not happened.

Here, I am reminded of a certain illustration Slavoj Žižek utilised in order to demonstrate the method of human imagination. The story, elaborated in a newspaper article (1993)<sup>40</sup>, relates an anthropological expedition during which researchers attempt to make contact with indigenous tribes in the jungles of New Zealand. According to certain information, the members of one of the tribes perform a fearful dance while wearing death masks. The researchers ask them to perform the dance. The tribe performs the dance and thus satisfies the anthropologists' expectations. The satisfied researchers return home to write reports about the wild customs of this primitive tribe. After some time passes, another expedition makes its way into the jungle to find the tribe. Having learned its language, the new researchers discover that the indigenous people who were in contact with the first group of researchers guessed what was expected of them and then delivered the dance based on the researchers' descriptions. In short, the researchers received from the tribe precisely what they expected. Žižek uses this example to illustrate the "evil gaze" of the West upon the South and the Balkan crisis of recent years. The West, in other words, only responds to what it wants to see. Likewise, the denial of the Holocaust reveals a conscious cultivation of a certain imagery of the possible. For some, this imagery then becomes the truth about the event.

This operation not only discredits countless projects, including numerous documentation centers for the research of the Holocaust as well as

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<sup>40</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Der Stoff, aus dem die freunde Traume sind", *Du*, No. 5, May 1993, p. 27.

several national Holocaust studies but the focus also shifts towards the mere validation of the status of the event itself, its plausibility, that is the definition of whether or not it belongs to the images of the real. On the other hand, revisionism with its "rational" belief in the non-existence of the impossible actually represents the core of the prevailing "realist" attitude. This is the attitude against which the French Parliament passed the above-mentioned law that more than anything else reveals the nature of jurisprudence under current political conditions. In this case, according to Rancière, what is at issue is the example of a law which is a witness to changing roles: depoliticised jurisprudence and dehistoricized historiography attribute to each other the responsibility for the definition of reality robbed of its essence, i.e. reality without real political and historical meaning. According to Rancière, this is how we can measure the stand-off between two types of scandal: the scandal of a legal system which prohibits scholars to lie about a given event, and the scandal of the lawyers who would have to transform themselves into historiographers in order to prove the existence of a given event about which they are either unable or unwilling to assume an articulated position.

It is of course even more problematic when similar things happen to historiographers: that is, when troubles arise proving the truth of a given event. They are, as Rancière would have it, unable to refute the claim that something did not happen simply because it is impossible or unimaginable. Rancière goes on to say that this kind of claim cannot be refuted precisely because it is part and parcel of the dominant historiographical discourse, a segment of anti-event rationality. This position seems to be fundamentally correct though it cannot be attributed only to the redistribution of priorities within contemporary (and not only French) historiography as Rancière attempts to do. The study of longitudinal processes (that is, the study of history in its *longue durée*) is not the same as the equalisation of events with the infinitesimal quantity. Equally problematic is the claim that the historiographical rationality of the *Annales* tradition requires the subservience of processes to the conditions of their value. The supporters of *nouvelle histoire* find this position sacrilegious. Among defenders of *nouvelle histoire*, a position diametrically opposed to this one has gained prominence: namely, the argument that it is precisely this new historiographical mode which captures events through the lens of *longue durée* which makes possible the common rationalist reconstruction of the past.

This may hold true more for that segment of historiography which discusses the end of history, a concept which is, alas, about as real as the belief that history might be an appropriate site for the validation of reality



within the political. It is from this interpretive model that an unusually forceful negative interpretation of democratic periods has emerged, an interpretation which has labelled itself revisionism. Revisionism directed most of its energies, prior to its transformation into a predominantly negativistic enterprise, toward the transvaluation of revolutionary democracy. In other words, it focused on claims that political subjects are not social groups and that political struggle is not a conflict of interests between such groups. Thus, it is no wonder that revisionism ended in generalizations and futile meta-politics, committing itself to the unending task of erasing all that does not exist and escaping the rational calculation of the segmentation and interests of society. Even worse, revisionism disintegrated into the well-known realism of "the politics of the possible" which, according to Rancière, must be taken seriously precisely because it is not an expression of the real. Rather, it is the expression of the possible. In other words, it is realism which has launched a hunt for "non-existing entities". What is possible is, in this interpretation, put on a par with that which is *exclusively possible* which, in turn, equals that which is *necessary*. Such a viewpoint has difficulties with the real. As Rancière says, it is sick with the real.

This sickness manifests itself through two symptoms. The first may be seen as a return to the excluded real, the real which cannot be symbolised, the real which assumes forms of racism and xenophobia. The second symptom is nothing but revisionism itself. Both are politically intertwined. However, to the extent that the symptom of attacking foreigners is also a harbinger of negativist claims, it is more than the simple consequence of mutually enforcing racisms of all kinds. Instead, it provides evidence to support the thesis that both dimensions belong to the same problem, i.e. the problem with the real which is the problem with realist politics. Both display the nihilist logic characteristic of the dominant realism. The hunt for "non-existing entities" of political subjectification gets honed into a demand that words fit things squarely, while the things themselves are permitted to exist only as a totality or as a condition of their possibilities. According to Rancière, the racist symptom is a symptom of words glued to things, the symptom of identity glued to skin. The revisionist symptom, on the other hand, is a symptom of events which are "impossible" because the totality of their conditions can never be developed to the point where the sequence of beliefs about the impossibility of the impossible can be refuted.

The working of this logic was and still is possible to monitor in Slovenian life. One of the typical positions of Slovenian revisionism, which has attempted to prove the impossibility of error on the part of the Nazi collaborators, simply maintains that "it is impossible that fifty percent of the

Slovenian nation could have lived in error". Rather, it sought refuge under the wings of the occupying Nazi's in order to fend off the dangers of communism. The last chapter of this narrative may be seen in extreme revisionist voices which in recent years attempted to proclaim the activities of MVAC (Milizia volontaria anticomunista) as "national-liberating and heroic".<sup>41</sup> The same interpreters equalize the resistance movement across the board with communism despite the fact that less than one tenth of the resistance fighters were actually card-carrying members of the Communist Party.

According to this logic, almost anything can be argued including the sophistic claim that fascism and Nazism were never as deeply rooted among Slovenians as communism and the claim that the commissars of the resistance movement killed hundreds of Slovenian families at the outset of World War II. In this context, what is actually said ceases to be relevant. What is important is only the claim which people are prepared to accept as plausible, as part of the real. The facts alone are of little assistance and thus it is difficult to agree with Rancière's otherwise excellent argument. One must take into account a series of interpretative processes derived from examples drawn from the most diverse environments. The most stubborn problem effecting any arguably objective historical presentation has always been local character. French historians studied French conditions while Slovenian historians naturally focused on Slovenian conditions.

The only element which can lend itself a conceptually distinct status – albeit in an interdependent way – is the difference between events which take place at the center versus those which take place on the periphery. As a rule, the periphery has adapted individual phenomena (e.g. racism) to their extreme form. Racism, of course, is not unique in this context. At issue is anti-liberalism in the most general sense. Nineteenth century Europe has seen the rise of numerous racist and anti-Semite theories, those of Renan<sup>42</sup>, Gobineau, Lapouge, Wagner, Wärmund<sup>43</sup>, Winiger and

<sup>41</sup> Draga Ahačič, loc.cit., p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Max Muller (1823-1900) has, without any malicious intent, chosen an Indian word "aryan" to designate Indo-European languages groups. The word has subsequently been used to name groups speaking "proto-aryan" language. A similar process was at work in the term "Semitic language", a phrase coined in 1787 by J.C.Eichorn in order to enrich the then-common term "Oriental language". The problem occurred the moment Ernst Renan (1823-1892) in his work *Historie Generale et Systeme compare des langues Semitiques* (Paris 1847) introduced a principled distinction between "Teutons" (or Aryans) and "Semites".

<sup>43</sup> The image of the "perennial Jew", the representative of those against whom the state should defend itself in an organised way, was outlined in the works of Robert



Rohling<sup>44</sup>. This wave of thematisation of racial inequality was, in part, triggered by post-Darwinist confusion (Spencer, Haeckel<sup>45</sup>) while, in a larger context, it can only be viewed as part of general xenophobia that emerged at the end of nineteenth century with the onset of contemporary migration patterns.<sup>46</sup> Women and men not only crossed oceans, migrating from one country to another, but they also moved from the provinces to the city, from one part of the country to another. In short, people left "home" behind and set off to the land of "foreigners". Or more precisely, as foreigners they entered the homes of others. Nearly fifty out of every hundred Poles, according to Hobsbawm, left their country permanently and another half million sought seasonal jobs abroad, joining foreign work forces. Thus, turn-of-the-century attitudes were marked by the routine practice of xenophobia in the form of racism (read: the protection of poor domestic workers against the contamination and even subversion brought by the invasion of sub-human hordes). The power of this process can be inferred from the fact that even the great liberal sociologist Max Weber, among others, feared Polish immigration and found refuge against such in the Pan-Germanic League.

The universal "glue", as Hobsbawm put it, of this and similar movements was the reaction of the common man in society who was "pushed against the wall of big business on one hand and pressured by the harsh occurrence of the emerging movement of mass workers on the other". That is, society has robbed him of the privileged position which he has occupied and which he believes belongs to him in spite of dynamic development. Later, disillusioned sentiments found their voice in anti-Semitism which, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, began to inform specific political movements. Jews were indeed present everywhere and, as such, conveniently symbolized everything which represented an unfair world. In addition, the commitment of Jews to the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French revolution made them all the more suspect. They also served as a symbol of the

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Wahrmund (1827-1913) including *Das Gesetz des Nomadentums und heutige Judenherenschaft*, 1887.

<sup>44</sup> August Rohling (1839-1931), a Prague-based professor of theology, characterized the Talmud as a brevarium of injustice since it allows Jews to do anything including fighting against Christianity and taking control of the world. The only solution in his view was the expulsion of Jews from Europe.

<sup>45</sup> Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) was the most powerful social Darwinist in Germany committed to the idea of class struggle leading to domination. His essay is entitled *Die Weltraetzel* (1899).

<sup>46</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London 1994, pp. 116-124.

hated capitalists-plutocrats, of revolutionary agitators, of rootless intellectuals and competitors who, of course, could not be "fair".

That Slovenians, with a help from the Catholic Church, have adapted well to this kind of public image of "perennial Jew" is revealed in recent research into the ideology of political catholicism in the Slovenian lands at the turn of the century and in the first four decades of twentieth century<sup>47</sup>. Most fundamental features of this public image are akin to the "spirit of liberalism". It is thus no wonder that Jews were typically painted in the company of liberals, freemasons, and Protestants. The adaptation to modern antisemitism was therefore an adaptation to "individualistic, materialistic, egotistic" nature of "Jewish spirit" which Jews cannot shed even with after the conversion.<sup>48</sup> This image has been in 1860s and 1870 complemented with a national aspect as well, as demonstrated by Vasilij Melik, one of the best experts on the Slovenian national history of nineteenth century<sup>49</sup>. When Jews began taking up membership in the Austrian-German Liberal Party, Slovenian public opinion viewed this as a Jewish antagonism toward the Slovenian national movement. Thus, Slovenian newspapers of the time "...constantly wrote of German-Jewish journalism"<sup>50</sup>. The implications of the term "German-Jewish journalism" were clearly illustrated by the following smearing song which was popular at the turn of the century:

"Die Presse führt das Publikum  
gemütlich and die Nas herum,  
die Loge führt hinwiederum  
die Presse und das Publikum.  
Und Presse, Loge, Publikum  
wird rumgeführt vom Judentum."<sup>51</sup>

Given this constellation, Jews in the Slovenian lands, besides having played the role of the perennial foreigner, assumed the role of the first national enemy, too. The Slovenian public sphere was also familiar with the notorious slogan claiming that in case Jews did not exist, they would have to be invented.<sup>52</sup> This

<sup>47</sup> Egon Pelikan, *Akomodacija ideologije političnega katolicizma na Slovenskem* [The Accomodation of the Ideology of Political Catholicism in Slovenia], Založba Obzorja, Maribor 1997.

<sup>48</sup> "Not even a converted Jew is really trustworthy", Pelikan, loc.cit., p. 97.

<sup>49</sup> Vasilij Melik "Slovenci o Germanih, Slovanih in Romanih pred 120 leti" [Slovenians about Germans, Slavs, and Romans 120 years ago], in: *Zgodovinski časopis* [Historical Journal] Vol LI, No. 1, 1997, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Peter G. Pulzer, *Die Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland und Oesterreich 1867 bis 1914*, Guterschloch 1966, pp. 145. Quoted in Pelikan, loc.cit., p. 97.

<sup>52</sup> Hermann Rauschnig, *Conversations with Hitler*, sine loco, no publisher, 1940, pp. 121. Quoted in Pelikan, loc.cit., p. 98.



“nationalist” anti-Semitism in Central Europe was in a way more pernicious than the “industrial” anti-Semitism. Since then, Jews remained codified as an unredeemable cause of national danger regardless of actual processes of national emancipation at the end of nineteenth century in Central Europe. As such, Jews were seen as co-responsible for all the later national calamities from communism to the German occupation of this territory. The latter assumed in radical interpretations but a reaction to “Asiatic bolshevism”.<sup>53</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In using the Slovenian case of rewriting the history of collaboration, this paper attempts to demonstrate that (at least here) recent revisionism is based on an archaic reconstructionist approach which claims that it is possible to reestablish the truth about a past reality. On the other hand, we also see the modernist constructionist method (both examples are a clear case of “upper case historiography”<sup>54</sup>) which, with its seemingly benign tolerance, allows different modes of interpretation though it never ceases to emphasise that those falling outside the modernist frame no longer belong to historiography. This pell-mell of interpretive modes have has their main shared feature, to use Jenkins’s terms, their effort to find meanings, purposes, teleologies, etc. in the past because they put them there...for present-centered and/or future programs which shape generally radical (mostly right-wing) political agendas. All this is, as said above, taking place in the shadow of an attempt to create “objective” or “true account of the past”. What we can see, however, when it is put in practice is its utter lack of flexibility, openness, willingness to reflect, and tolerance of the unconventional. In respect to its methodological strategy, this is a typical “normal historical practice” whose goal is, as Berkhofer would have it, “...to make its representations appear to present information as if it were a matter of simple referentiality, indicating that the premises of realisms are basic to the paradigm. Realism enters (this) historical practice to the extent that historians try to make their structure of factuality seem to be its own organizing structure and therefore conceal that it is structured by interpretation represented as (f)actuality.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lešnik & Tomc, loc.cit., p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> It was in Robert Young’s *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge, London-New York 1990) that I came across the distinction between *upper* and *lower case* versions of expressing certain segments of the recent past in the West. Latter, I found this kind of distinction in Keith Jenkins’s “Introduction” to his *Postmodern History Reader*.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Berkhofer, “The Challenge of Poetic to (Normal) Historical Practice”, *Poetics Today*, 9,2, 1988. Quoted in Jenkins, loc.cit., p.20.

Without entering into a deep analysis of the ideological background of revisionist attempts, it is possible to perceive that this kind of interpretation comes close to be "the present and future oriented" history which uses the past to reconstruct "the true future". As such, historical representation has, during this period of transition, become a battlefield where political power may be gained. In Slovenia, as elsewhere, efforts are made to conquer the past since those who possess the past control the future.

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Reinhard Sieder  
*Social History: on the Way to Becoming a Historical  
Cultural Science?\**

Since the mid-1980s, terms such as “the everyday” (*Alltag*), “experience”, “life-world” and “culture” have achieved a meaning and significance which have come to define the new direction taken by social history in the last decade.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I will first of all outline the conjunctural links between these new or renewed concepts and the criticisms that have been directed at objectivist structural functionalism in historical social science. I will then go on to ask whether labels such as “the history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*), the “history of experience” (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*) or “historical anthropology” (*Historische Anthropologie*) are able to symbolise and develop further post-structural changes in social history. Or might it not be more appropriate to speak about the beginnings of a new historical cultural science (*Historische Kulturwissenschaft*)? Are we dealing with the belated introduction of a qualitative paradigm<sup>2</sup> in the field of historical social science (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*)? Do the exponents of the new approaches already constitute a “third generation” of historical social scientists, successors to both the first generation, who formulated their conception of an historical social science in the 1960s and 1970s and defended it against the mainstream of the time,<sup>3</sup> and the second generation, who spread its new social scientific paradigm in the 1980s? Finally, I will ask where all this fits into the discourse of post-modernism.

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\* Original German version published in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 20 (1994), pp. 445-68.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Ulrike Döcker and Erich Landsteiner for their comments and criticism on this article.

<sup>2</sup> For an introductory overview, see: U. Flick et al. (eds.), *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, München 1991; S. Lamnek, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, vol. I: Methodologie, vol. II: Methoden und Techniken, München 1988/89; A. Giddens, *Interpretative Soziologie*, Frankfurt 1984.

<sup>3</sup> H-U. Wehler, *Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, Frankfurt 1973; J. Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme*, Göttingen 1977, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1986.

*Structure instead of culture – a categorical confusion.*

During the founding period of historical social science in the 1960s and 1970s, those members of the German historical profession who were more open to innovation and new theoretical developments – at that time, a group very much in the minority – focused on the structures behind social, economic and political phenomena. Partly, this was done by employing statistical data or by converting other kinds of documentary material, such as nominative sources, into statistical data, using statistical techniques which operated far more descriptively than analytically. The initial work in this direction was carried out above all by French historians of the so-called “*Annales* school”. After a certain interval, the ideas of the *Annales* historians came to heavily influence historians in West Germany (and later still, in Austria), who began to employ structural paradigms, albeit in modified form and – after the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust – in a politicised manner.<sup>4</sup> The subsequent years witnessed a large amount of research in this vein, which provided new and interesting insights into such areas as household and kinship systems, family structures, property or labour relationships and yields on landed and feudal estates, changes in prices and wages, the social structure of the memberships of political parties (such as the NSDAP) and so on.

From today’s point of view, the greatest weakness in the first wave of German-language structural historical research (as was the case with comparable work undertaken in France, Britain and the U.S.) was its thoroughgoing neglect of the supposed subjects of the work in question. That is to say that the interpretations, actions and experiences of the historical actors themselves tended to be ignored, because of the specifically structural perspective adopted when investigating such themes as households, families, feudal estates, firms, associations, political parties or whatever, even if the concern was not simply to construct “structural models”, but also to write history – a new, social scientific history.<sup>5</sup> Just as Fernand Braudel’s grand

<sup>4</sup> A more extensive discussion of these issues is given in: R. Sieder, “Was heißt Sozialgeschichte? Brüche und Kontinuitäten in der Aneignung des Sozialen”, in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (ÖZG) 1 (1990) 1, pp. 25-48. On some of the differences between the use of structural concepts in the social history practised by the French *Annalistes* and that of German-speaking historical social scientists, see (among others): H. Kaelble, “Sozialgeschichte in Frankreich und der Bundesrepublik: Annales gegen historische Sozialwissenschaften”, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (GG) 13 (1987), pp. 77-93.

<sup>5</sup> My own earliest scientific research at the end of the 1970s was very much in line with this structural functionalist tradition. For example: R. Sieder, “Strukturprobleme der



narrative *La Méditerranée* (1949) had begun to treat time and space as subjective actors,<sup>6</sup> so a number of structural-analytical studies located themselves within the same categorical shift: the logic of structures replaced the social logic of the actors. To give just one example, the following citation from Arthur E. Imhof's article on "Rural family structures" stands as a typical example of 1970s social history (both in terms of its title and content):

"Malthusian shocks were greatly feared long before Malthus; overpopulation and its reduction by means of positive checks (famine, plague, war) hit large sections of the population directly and severely. There were constant efforts to prevent such a development, in that the potential fertility of women was restricted, be it through the control of marital fecundity (lengthening of the intervals between conception, lowering the age at birth of the last child) or through increasing the proportion of unmarried adults in the population, extending widowhood or, finally, by means of raising the marriage age for women."<sup>7</sup>

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ländlichen Familie im 19. Jh.", in: *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 41 (1978), pp. 173-217; see also: R. Sieder and M. Mitterauer, *Vom Patriarchat zur Partnerschaft. Zum Strukturwandel der Familie*, (1977), 4<sup>th</sup> edition, München 1991; engl.: *The European Family*, Oxford 1982, 4<sup>rd</sup> edition 1989.

<sup>6</sup> F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949. So far as I know, the earliest reception of Braudel's ideas in the German-speaking countries was W. Conze in: *Historische Zeitschrift* (HZ) 172 (1951), pp. 358-62. In retrospect, it now seems understandable precisely why the group associated with the *Annales* and later, the first generation of historical social scientists associated with *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* in West Germany, turned away from the subjective in order to draw attention to the "structures" and "conjunctures" at work behind the subjects themselves. This was very much a reaction to what they saw as the hegemony of an historicist tradition which was oriented around politics, states and great individuals. Yet in effect, this move away from the idealistically conceived subject merely ended up throwing out the baby with the bath-water: in Braudel's work, people find themselves in a form of prison, where the sentences are of different length; they act and make decisions only at the uppermost and more superficial of the three levels into which he divides historical time, namely that of *l'histoire événementielle*. As the older Braudel wrote, "history" on the contrary is made "far removed from our persons and our daily misery [...], shifting slowly, as slowly as the ancient life of the Mediterranean", see: F. Braudel, "Personal Testimony", in *Journal of Modern History* 44 (1972) pp. 448-67. In the following decades, historiography increasingly lost sight of the individual as a "societal being" (Karl Marx). Social history was written virtually without people, in terms of data; or to borrow the chic phraseology of its French originators, the structural approach represented the death of the subject.

<sup>7</sup> A. E. Imhof, "Ländliche Familienstrukturen an einem hessischen Beispiel: Heuchelheim 1690-1900", in: W. Conze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas*, Stuttgart 1976, p. 206.

This sample text shows just how easily historians fell into the trap of reifying these kinds of structures. These narratives (which actually aimed to be anything but “narratives”) removed the actual impact of structural changes either to the realms of the general consciousness of anonymous historical actors (“Malthusian shocks were greatly feared...”) or else structures were assigned the status of quasi-actors. In doing so, historians blurred the difference between a scientific classification system based on collected data and the social specificity of what they thought they were observing. This was a result of the heady euphoria created by the belief that historians had attained a greater degree of scientific exactitude through their statistical measurement of certain phenomena, rather than comprehending the meaning of what people tell about themselves (their “statements”). I would describe this substitution of the social logic of the actors with the logic of a specific kind of structures, or the attribution of subjective characteristics to these structures, as *structural realism*. This constituted a disciplinary variation on the structural functionalism predominant in all the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s. Within that genre, historical subjects only appear – if at all – as puppets on the strings of structures. They occupy social positions and use interpretations which are already predetermined: for example, they alter their fertility patterns as if they were already obeying Malthus’ theory long before Malthus himself. In practice, however, this methodology contradicted in one central respect the – at the time oft proclaimed – desire to stimulate an emancipatory and illuminative social science: the new direction failed to provide adequate empirical insights into the processes whereby historical actors contributed actively to the formation or alteration of the relationships within their particular space for acting (*Handlungsspielraum*).

### *An alternative: the praxiological approach*

Around the mid-1980s, a number of social historians began to study the works of the French cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His critique of structural functionalism and structuralism (as practised in the disciplines of sociology and ethnology) proved to be of greatest interest, because Bourdieu’s arguments provided the basis for an effective and theoretically well-versed critique of the latent attachment to structural realism displayed by so many works of historical social science. It now became clear that a significant consequence of the one-dimensionality present in historical social science was that societies and their sub-systems (political parties, associations, firms, bureaucracies, households, families etc.) were treated as socio-



structural “facts”, as “things” in pure Durkheimian fashion.<sup>8</sup> Partly drawing on the arguments of Max Weber’s interpretative sociology, Bourdieu demonstrated that these socio-structural “facts” actually only become *social reality* when they are appropriated by historical actors. In systemic terms, the appropriation of social conditions can mean either the continuation (the reproduction) of those conditions or their alteration. In both cases, the situation derives partly from individuals (through the decisions and actions pertaining to their personal life-course) and partly from the context of social action in which social groups and classes, societies or international organisations are involved. In all these situations, people are very much *actors*, rather than simply being the mere puppets of external conditions or prisoners of structures. In the social theoretical approach offered here, individuals are no longer determined from above, but neither are they “free” to act in completely autonomous fashion, in line with their conscious actions, knowledge and intentions (as in the idealist conception of history).

A new social theoretical conception of social history’s general object developed on the basis of Bourdieu’s arguments. Where Braudel, Conze and others had viewed social history as the investigation of the hierarchical, structural orders determining human action, whose conjunctural variations consisted of mid- to long-term trends and short-lived events,<sup>9</sup> this new conception understood its subject-matter to be a *dialectical process* between whatever conditions for action existed in a particular time and place and the actual practices of historical actors. “Social reality”, a central notion taken on board from interpretative sociology, now seemed to be constituted in a dual way: on the one hand, “social reality” consisted of a set of given factors, which could be described in terms of social, economic and political structures. On the other hand, it also comprised the actions and interpretations of actors, who produce, extenuate or change those given, structured conditions for action; in other words, social agents “structurise” social reality. Contrary to the practice of structural social history, conditions for action no longer took pride of place in historical analysis, because they were not now considered

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<sup>8</sup> E. Durkheim, *Die Regeln der soziologischen Methode* (Paris 1895), Frankfurt 1984, p. 115: “The first and most basic rule is to treat sociological things as facts”.

<sup>9</sup> See, F. Braudel, “Histoire et sciences sociales. La longue durée”, in: *Annales* 13 (1958), pp. 725-53; German: “Die longue durée”, in: H.-U. Wehler (ed.), *Geschichte und Soziologie*, Köln 1972, pp. 189-215; also in: C. Honegger (ed.), *Schrift und Materie der Geschichte. Vorschläge zur systematischen Aneignung historischer Prozesse*, Frankfurt 1977, pp. 47-85. For a comparatively positive treatment of (political) action, see: W. Conze, *Die Strukturgeschichte des technisch-industriellen Zeitalters als Aufgabe für Forschung und Unterricht*, Köln 1957.

to be any more "real" than the actions, interpretations, ideologies and discourses.<sup>10</sup> Myths, mentalities and behaviour ceased to be a kind of intellectual mist obscuring historical reality and became instead its constitutive components, and thus a central part of the subject-matter of social historical research. For this reason, it is possible to speak of a "cultural theoretical change" in social history, whereby "culture" is understood as being inclusive of actors' viewpoints, meanings and interpretations, as well as their structured symbolic expression in texts, images, objects, rituals, gestures and so on.<sup>11</sup>

Admittedly, even within the framework of a *post-structural*<sup>12</sup> and cultural theoretically expanded interpretation of social history, it is still necessary to pose the question as to what possibilities historical actors actually have to shape and change circumstances according to their own interests and preconceptions. In other words, we must ask if, and how, actors succeed in creating a consciousness of common interests and perceptions (for example, of "justice"), and which alliances they enter into on the basis of such a consciousness. If the consciousness of historical actors can no longer be more or less deduced from structures (as in structural functionalism) nor always be described as a "false consciousness" that will necessarily be corrected in the course of history (as in objectivist marxism), then we are obliged to raise again the question first posed by E. P. Thompson<sup>13</sup> at the end of the 1970s: is it possible to talk about present or historical societies in terms of the classical sociological terminology of "class" or "estate"? And what is the relationship between these analytically conceived schemas and what was perceived as social reality at any given moment in time? How can we avoid the

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault tried to draw the attention of "reality obsessed" historians to this issue, albeit with seemingly little success. See: M. Foucault, "La poussière et le nuage", in: M. Perrot (ed.), *L'impossible prison. Recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1980, p. 34.; see also, M. Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens*, Frankfurt 1973.

<sup>11</sup> For an informative overview of the changing conceptions of the term culture in the historical and social sciences, see: U. Daniel, "Kultur" und "Gesellschaft". Überlegungen zum Gegenstandsbereich der Sozialgeschichte, in: GG 19 (1993), pp. 69-99.

<sup>12</sup> Not "post-structuralist", because neither French nor German-language social history or "structural history" was ever "structuralist" in the sense of Lévi-Strauss or any other structuralist concept in the field of ethnology or sociology. As an introductory essay see: A. Honneth, "Ein strukturalistischer Rousseau. Zur Anthropologie von Claude Lévi-Strauss", in: idem., *Die zerrissene Welt des Sozialen. Sozialphilosophische Aufsätze*, Frankfurt 1990, pp. 73-92.

<sup>13</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Das Elend der Theorie. Zur Produktion geschichtlicher Erfahrung*, Frankfurt 1980.



by now notorious mistake of equating historical reality with our preconceived theoretical schemas, or to put it another way, of confusing social logic with the logic of the (social scientific) question? Bourdieu suggested that in logical terms we should think of class as an "ensemble of actors with similar attitudes [...], similar conditions and conditioning [...], to all intents and purposes similar dispositions and interests [...] and consequently similar practices and ideological positions". "Classes" of this kind are primarily theoretical in nature, not real, effective classes "ready for struggle". Yet at the same time, the above-mentioned similarities would lead us to expect that a consciousness of these similarities might develop among actors under certain circumstances. Adequately constructed theoretical classes are thus "probable classes", and in no sense "automatically necessary".<sup>14</sup> The differences between theoretical and actual classes are thus no longer blurred. This represents an effective break with marxist tradition, which equated constructed and real classes with one another, or declared both "virtual" and "actual" classes to be real phenomena, with the transition from one to the other being described in either deterministic or voluntaristic terms.

The quality of a theoretical framework such as "social classes" can be measured according to the degree of precision and complexity with which it constructs the relationships within the order of praxis. In this respect, Bourdieu argues that it is necessary to define the actor's "position" and "place" in social space as precisely as possible. An actor's place and position result from their relationship to the respective positions of the other actors in whichever social space has been constructed, because "what really exists is a relational space".<sup>15</sup> These relationships are defined in terms of the different sorts of capital that the actor brings into play, be they material, spiritual, or intellectual, forms of gender capital (which always place the actor in a relationship with the *other* gender) or physical attraction and physical strength (whose worth is defined in relation to competing actors in the same field), and so on. Which kinds of capital will predominate at any given moment or effectively define social relationships (social inequality, distribution of power, chances for success) depends upon the type of social field that we construct: education, knowledge and academic grade or title predominate in the scientific field, speed and physical strength in the area of sport, material capital and business know-how in the economic sphere, and so on. As a rule, it is a particular accumulation of *several* types of capital that defines the actor's position and place in a given social space. However, all sorts of capital

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<sup>14</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Sozialer Raum und Klassen*, Frankfurt 1985, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and the various combinations between them only become socially relevant when they are recognised by other actors, or in Bourdieu's words, when they become effective as *symbolic capital*.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, this also means that the actor's actions, interpretations and experiences should form a central part of our general research focus, because they define the capacity to accumulate particular types of capital, to assert oneself through them in a given sphere and to exert control and power over others. At the same time, actors can be seen to produce and structure social space through their actions and interpretations, given that we understand social space as constituted by social relationships and interactions. We attain information about actors' actions, interpretations and experiences essentially by means of interpreting their *statements* (understood in the broadest possible sense). That is the reason why the methodology of text interpretation and text production (such as various kinds of memory-based interviews) play such a central role in post-structural social history.

Historians' confrontation with questions relating to texts as forms of written, acoustic or audiovisual statements by historical actors on the one hand, and the historiographical texts written about those actors (and their texts) on the other hand, have followed two rather different paths in recent years, despite the fact that both directions are frequently described in undifferentiated fashion as a single "*linguistic turn*". In the first place, adherents of "Intellectual History" in the U.S.A. were influenced by the methods and practices of literary theory (history and literary theory having always been much closer disciplinary neighbours in terms of university organisation there than in Europe). The main consequence of this trend has been the extensive discussion surrounding the fictional (that is to say, the literary) nature of historiography, as part of the critical confrontation with Hayden White's theory of historiographical tropes.<sup>17</sup> Secondly and by way of contrast, German-language social history came into contact with social scientific

<sup>16</sup> On the concept of "sorts of capital", see: P. Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital", in: R. Kreckel (ed.), *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (= Soziale Welt, Sonderband 2), Göttingen 1983, pp. 183-98; P. Bourdieu, *Rede und Antwort*, Frankfurt 1992, esp.: Raum und symbolische Macht, pp. 135; for an introduction to Bourdieu's cultural sociological thinking, see again: A. Honneth, *Die zerrissene Welt der symbolischen Formen*, Frankfurt 1990, pp. 156-81.

<sup>17</sup> See: H. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore 1973; German: *Metahistory. Die historische Einbildungskraft im 19. Jh. in Europa*, Frankfurt 1991; idem., *Die Bedeutung der Form. Erzählstrukturen in der Geschichtsschreibung*, Frankfurt 1990. For discussions of White's theories, see "Metahistory: Six Critiques", in: *History & Theory* (HT) Beiheft 19 (1980); B. D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History*, Philadelphia 1990; G. Brude-



theories and models of text analysis. By the very nature of their disciplines, social scientists working in the fields of sociology, psychology, pedagogy and psychoanalysis always deal with texts and the problems of their analysis. The methods of text analysis and production developed in this sphere were therefore taken over, adapted and developed further by a number of social historians.<sup>18</sup>

The areas of research where these social scientific models of text analysis have most frequently been employed in the last decade or so have been the history of National Socialism and the post-war era, a number of themes pertaining to the history of everyday life and regional history, and most recently of all, the history of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) and Stalinism.<sup>19</sup> Based on the research methods just mentioned, social history has joined the ranks of those social and textual sciences which employ an explorative social scientific research methodology to try and appropriate a sense of "what the actor in a given historical sphere of action already knows and has to know, in order to 'get his or her bearings' in the daily activities of social life".<sup>20</sup> It is at this point that social history becomes an interpretative social science (*verstehende Sozialwissenschaft*), to borrow a phrase coined by Max Weber.

At the same time, however, it is not enough for an interpretative historical social science to confine itself to the textual analysis of subjective statements, because these cannot be properly explained in terms of themselves alone, but only with reference to the structure of social, economic and cultural relationships as well, together with the conditions for action present

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Firnaue and K. MacHardy (eds.), *Fact and Fiction. German History and Literature 1848-1924*, Tübingen 1990; K. MacHardy, "Crisis in History, or: Hermes Unbounded", in: *Storia della Storiografia* 17 (1990), pp. 5-27; H. Nagl-Docekal, "Läßt sich die Geschichtsphilosophie tropologisch fundieren?" In: *ÖZG* 4 (1993), pp. 466-78.

<sup>18</sup> See H.-G. Soeffner (ed.), *Interpretative Verfahren in den Sozial- und Textwissenschaften*, Stuttgart 1979; G. Landsteiner, "Zum Stellenwert linguistischer Modelle in einer wissenssoziologischen Textanalyse", in: *Wisdom* 6 (1992), pp. 49-78; R. Sieder, "Geschichten erzählen und Wissenschaft treiben. Interviewtexte zum Arbeiteralltag. Erkenntnistheoretische Grundlagen, Quellenkritik, Interpretationsverfahren und Darstellungsprobleme", in: G. Botz et al. (eds.), *Mündliche Geschichte und Arbeiterbewegung*, Wien 1984, pp. 203-31; R. Sieder and Ch. Gerbel, "Erzählungen sind nicht nur „wahr“. Abstraktionen, Typisierungen und Geltungsansprüche in Interviewtexten", in: G. Botz et al. (eds.), *„Quantität und Qualität“. Zur Praxis der Methoden der Historischen Sozialwissenschaft*, Frankfurt 1988, pp. 189-210.

<sup>19</sup> See Footnotes 63-68.

<sup>20</sup> A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge 1984; German: *Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft. Grundzüge einer Theorie der Strukturierung*, Frankfurt and New York 1988, p. 338.

in a particular social space. As is already implicit in the theoretical formulation of the dual construction of social reality, social historical analysis must therefore also examine the historical conditions for social action (conditions which have been structured by social practices). Post-structural history thus reconstructs external structures too, albeit without any longer believing that these structures strictly determine social actions and interpretations: the "structural" is seen instead as characteristic of the *relationships* produced by social interaction. Post-structural social history thus has a variety of methods at its disposal, including both techniques of statistical and demographic research and those of discourse and text analysis,<sup>21</sup> in order to illuminate the conceptual space with which actors are confronted when making their interpretations, and to understand the changes that those spaces undergo.

The kind of post-structural social history proposed here is in this respect differentiated from strictly phenomenological sociology or ethnomethodology, which confine their research programmes to the investigation of social interaction, rituals, gestures, interpretations and meanings.<sup>22</sup> From the same standpoint, a number of works of the so-called "new cultural history"<sup>23</sup> would appear to be overly "culturalistic" in focus, to the extent that they reify symbolic forms and ignore the ontological difference between surviving texts and past practices. They focus too narrowly on the meanings of symbolic forms, without fully recognising that the latter can also be appropriated and used by actors in various ways.<sup>24</sup> I would therefore argue for a social history capable of overcoming the varieties of objectivism, subjectivism and culturalism in equal measure. Bourdieu has suggested that we call this a *praxiological mode* of knowledge,<sup>25</sup> and it is precisely this kind of approach that many social historians are now attempting to apply to the history of everyday life, historical anthropology or micro-history, whatever their differences and disagreements on points of detail.

<sup>21</sup> See, above all: M. Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens*; idem, *Die Ordnung des Diskurses*, München 1974, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Frankfurt 1991; a recent critique of Foucault's authorial interpretation of discourse, as if the latter were itself a social actor, can be found in: V. Biti, "Geschichte als Literatur – Literatur als Geschichte", in: *ÖZG* 4 (1993), pp. 371-96.

<sup>22</sup> See: E. Weingarten et al. (eds.), *Ethnomethodologie. Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alltagshandelns*, Frankfurt 1976.

<sup>23</sup> See: L. Hunt, *History, Culture, and Text*, in: idem (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, London 1989, pp. 1-22.

<sup>24</sup> See R. Chartier, "Text, Symbols, and Frenchness", in: *JMH* 57 (1975), pp. 682-95, esp. p. 690.

<sup>25</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabyllischen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt 1979, pp. 146.



*The argument about labels*

The terms “everyday life” (*Alltag*) and “experience” respectively refer only to certain aspects of the dual constitution of social reality that I have just described. “Everyday life” and the resultant label, “the history of everyday life”, point to the constant reproduction of social realities and the fact that social realities are constructed day in, day out by interpretations and actions. In common with the first generation of historical social scientists, therefore, social historians working on the history of everyday life reject the limitation of research to specific or unusual events and extraordinary personalities. At the same time, however, there is a frequent misconception that the history of everyday life is bound up with a concrete place, “the everyday”, which differs from other concrete realities. As with the term ‘structure’, it is again possible to observe a tendency towards objectification and reification, in the sense that the way in which actions and interpretations appropriate circumstances (the *modus operandi*) is often objectified as a definite object (an *opus operatum*). Moreover, to rely on an actor’s “intuitive” knowledge and actions remains within the limits of the phenomenological mode of recognition. Therefore, many historians of everyday life have already moved onto a praxiological mode. They oscillate in hermeneutically analytical fashion between the actors’ manifest and latent meanings and their structured circumstances.

Within the overall conception of the “history of everyday life”, the “everyday” refers not to any particular well-defined object, but instead to the analytical focus on social actors’ living and working relationships, and the ways in which those relationships are “experienced” (reception, interpretation, action etc.).<sup>26</sup> What is more, the term frequently used as a synonym for the “history of everyday life”, the “history of experience” (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*), also gives rise to misunderstanding. If this were interpreted absolutely literally, it would refer to a sub-discipline dealing with social actors’ historical experiences. Yet experience – the gradual building up of interpretations, feelings and memories that accompanies social action – constitutes only one of the two aspects of social reality formation. The term, “history of experience”, thus actually comprises neither the deeds and actions preceeding and accompanying experience, nor the external circumstances in which actors are located. To lose sight of the activities and conditions for action would mean culturalistically reducing social historical reality to mere interpretation, consciousness and mental processes.

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<sup>26</sup> See my discussion with A. Lüdtkke, “Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Aneignung der Verhältnisse”, in: *ÖZG* 2 (1991), 2, pp. 104-13.

Of late, increasing numbers of social historians have turned enthusiastically towards historical anthropology, a new label for which Rebekka Habermas and Nils Minkmar have recently tried to define a clear research paradigm (in the introduction to a volume of collected essays<sup>27</sup>). It is particularly noteworthy that they try to do so almost exclusively by differentiating themselves from “the history of everyday life” and “the history of mentalities”. Without at any point going into the historical and methodological variations or differences between these two approaches, they indiscriminately accuse them of treating “people” as “objects determined by their material conditions” and argue that historical anthropology should “strongly dissociate” itself from such kinds of approach.<sup>28</sup> Even if the criticism that Braudel’s *Méditerranée* (cited by Habermas and Minkmar as representative of the history of mentalities) is overly deterministic is more or less justified, the same can certainly not be said for other exponents of the so-called “history of mentalities”. Rather like historical anthropology, the latter is in practice so varied and at the same time so vaguely defined in social theoretical terms that the assertion, that it rests on deterministic foundations, is certainly unjustified and implies a kind of uniformity which does not actually exist.<sup>29</sup> Even more unjustified is the claim that leading historians of the “history of everyday life” (such as Hans Medick and Alf Lüdtke<sup>30</sup>) are likewise overly deterministic, particularly when it is considered that it is precisely historians such as these who have sought most to avoid the pitfalls of determinism by employing the concepts of appropriation and social practices. After such strenuous efforts to distance themselves from other labels by accusing them

<sup>27</sup> R. Habermas and N. Minkmar (eds.), *Das Schwein des Häuptlings. Sechs Aufsätze zur Historischen Anthropologie*, Berlin 1992, pp. 7-19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 ff. By way of contrast to Habermas and Minkmar, Wolf Lepenies has written that the history of mentalities stands at the very centre of historical anthropological research. See: W. Lepenies, “Geschichte und Anthropologie”, in: *GG I* (1975), p. 331.

<sup>29</sup> See: U. Raulff (ed.), *Mentalitätengeschichte. Zur historischen Rekonstruktion geistiger Prozesse*, Berlin 1989, esp. pp. 7-15; P. H. Hutton, “Die Geschichte der Mentalitäten. Eine andere Landkarte der Kulturgeschichte”, in: U. Raulff (ed.), *Vom Umschreiben der Geschichte. Neue historische Perspektiven*, Berlin 1986, pp. 103-31; E. Schulín, “Geistesgeschichte, Intellectual History und Histoire des Mentalités seit der Jahrhundertwende”, in: *idem*, *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch*, Göttingen 1979, pp. 144-62.

<sup>30</sup> See: A. Lüdtke (ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen*, Frankfurt 1989, esp. the introduction and the reprint of an influential article by H. Medick, “Missionare im Ruderboot? Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte”, pp. 48-84. Both articles contain fundamental statements about the “history of everyday life”, which in fact coincide in many points of detail with the conception of historical anthropology proposed by Habermas and Minkmar.



of determinism, Habermas and Minkmar only succeed in ending up at the point which the "history of everyday life" (*Alltagsgeschichte*) has already reached: thus we learn that historical anthropology (*Historische Anthropologie*) deals with "social processes as a form of interaction between structures on the one hand and perceptions, interpretations and actions on the other".<sup>31</sup> So where exactly does historical anthropology differ from the history of everyday life? Do they both have the same program after all?

I have in fact found little or no difference amongst authors who have written conceptual pieces on historical anthropology. André Burguiere has described those French social historians interested in the qualitative methods used for analysing "systems of representation" as "historical anthropologists", as opposed to the numerous historians (including a great many in and around the *Annales* school) who have devoted themselves to the investigation of the "serial sources" to be found in rural history, demographic history and so on. Burguiere thus considers Marc Bloch's *Les Rois thaumaturges*<sup>32</sup> and Georges Duby's study of demonstrative profligacy in the high middle ages<sup>33</sup> to belong to the field of historical anthropology. But couldn't we equally as justifiably consider these works to be part of the history of everyday life, rather like numerous other examples of French social history dealing with social, economic, religious and political relationships in a particular region and their appropriation by historical actors? Burguiere himself is reluctant to describe historical anthropology as an "independent branch of historical research".<sup>34</sup> Michael Mitteraurer, for example, confines the anthropological side of his research on the history of the family to social history's interdisciplinary contact with "social anthropology, ethnology" and the "individual ethnographies of different European countries", together with themes "which can be broadly understood as anthropological, in that they are of fundamental relevance to research on the family".<sup>35</sup> What is more, Anthony Giddens rightly points out that "any form of social research" possesses "a cultural anthropological aspect".<sup>36</sup>

Historical anthropology would not therefore appear to be a clearly defined field of historical science, distinguishable from the other mentioned labels in terms of questions, theory or method.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, there is nothing very

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<sup>31</sup> Habermas and Minkmar (eds.), *Das Schwein des Häuptlings*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> M. Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges*, Paris 1961.

<sup>33</sup> G. Duby, *Guerriers et Paysans*, Paris 1974, German: *Krieger und Bauern*, Frankfurt 1977.

<sup>34</sup> A. Burguiere, "Historische Anthropologie", in: J. Le Goff et al. (eds.), *Die Rückeroberung des historischen Denkens*, Frankfurt 1990, pp. 62-101.

<sup>35</sup> M. Mitteraurer, *Historisch-anthropologische Familienforschung*, Wien 1990, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Giddens, *Konstitution der Gesellschaft*, p. 338.

<sup>37</sup> H. Wunder comes to the same conclusion in: *Kulturgeschichte, Mentalitätengeschichte, Historische Anthropologie*, in: R. van Dülmen (ed.), *Fischer Lexikon Geschichte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Frankfurt 1990, p. 80.

new about the aim of looking at European history through social or cultural anthropological eyes.<sup>38</sup> However, if one wants to make an impact or stake a claim in the academic world, it is necessary to present what one is doing under a new label. We are thus dealing with a kind of conceptual slogan, which – like the terms “history of everyday life” or the “history of experience” – is intended to help force through a cultural theoretical change within social history. If there is one thing that various attempts to formulate an historical cultural anthropological methodology have in common, it is undoubtedly the employment of the praxiological mode of knowledge mentioned above. That, however, is something that historical anthropology shares in common with the history of everyday life and micro-history, women’s and gender history, ethnographers who interpret their discipline as an historical cultural science<sup>39</sup> and post-structural variations of ethno-history,<sup>40</sup> to mention only the historical disciplines within the social sciences.

Be that as it may, by no means all practitioners of historical anthropology adhere to the post-structural, praxiological maxims implicit in the dialectical analysis of conditions for action and social practices. Some of their number have not followed the post-structural trend, keeping instead within the structuralist tradition of Lévi-Strauss.<sup>41</sup> Others are unable to apply praxiological maxims, because they remove marriage, birth, family, death, nutrition, etc. from their immediate socio-cultural or socio-economic context, such that they are studied as isolated phenomena and subjected to sweeping comparisons with other societies and continents,<sup>42</sup> similar to the

<sup>38</sup> Compare the extensive bibliography in: U. Daniel, „Kultur“ und „Gesellschaft“, pp. 82; M. Sahlins, *Inseln der Geschichte*, Frankfurt 1992; N. Z. Davis, “Die Möglichkeiten der Vergangenheit. Geschichte und Ethnologie: Neue Blicke auf vertraute Landschaften”, in: Raulff (ed.), *Vom Umschreiben der Geschichte*, pp. 45-53.

<sup>39</sup> See: W. Kaschuba and C. Lipp, *Dörfliches Überleben. Zur Geschichte materieller und sozialer Reproduktion ländlicher Gesellschaft im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 1982; W. Kaschuba, *Lebenswelt und Kultur der unterbürgerlichen Schichten im 19. und 20. Jh.*, München 1990; idem, *Volkskultur zwischen feudaler und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft. Zur Geschichte eines Begriffs und seiner gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt 1988, esp. p. 31; R. van Dülmen and N. Schindler (eds.), *Volkskultur. Zur Wiederentdeckung des vergessenen Alltags*, Frankfurt 1984.

<sup>40</sup> See: K.R. Wernhart und W. Zips, “Ethnohistoire und Kulturgeschichte. Diskussion der theoretischen und methodologischen Grundlagen”, in: W. Schmied-Kowarzik and J. Stagl (eds.), *Grundfragen der Ethnologie. Beiträge zur gegenwärtigen Theorie-Diskussion*, 2nd edition, Berlin 1993, pp. 259 and 264.

<sup>41</sup> For an introduction, see: A. Honneth, “Ein strukturalistischer Rousseau. Zur Anthropologie von C. Lévi-Strauss”, in: idem, *Die zerrissene Welt des Sozialen*, pp. 93-112.

<sup>42</sup> Compare the criticism made by J. Kocka, “Historisch-anthropologische Fragestellungen – ein Defizit der Historischen Sozialwissenschaft? Thesen zur Diskussion”, in: H. Süssmuth (ed.), *Historische Anthropologie*, Göttingen 1984, p. 77: “In order to



way as the doctrine of cultural circles (*Kulturkreislehre*) was employed in the nascent ethnology of the start of the century.<sup>43</sup>

It is not easy to define the relationship between the concept of the history of society (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) and the terms just mentioned, because there are a number of contradictory conceptual definitions in existence. In the introduction to his *History of German Society*, Hans-Ulrich Wehler formulates a program for a "socio-structural" history of modern German society and the "changing impact of economy, power, culture and the social inequalities which go to make up that society".<sup>44</sup> For Wehler's pupils, however, the term *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* defines a much broader church, under whose roof it should be possible to "integrate" the history of everyday life, historical anthropology, womens' and gender history, the history of mentalities, a new interpretation of political history and the history of ideas, and even a "historicism redefined for the present day".<sup>45</sup> If this were really the case, then the term *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (history of society) would serve no other purpose than to act as a short-hand for the sum total of quantificatory and interpretative approaches belonging to the historical social sciences.

In practice, terms like history of experience, history of everyday life, historical anthropology or history of society (in so far as it is not conceived of as a catch-all concept), are fairly indistinguishable, more or less interchangeable rallying cries. Like all rallying cries, they have their logical weaknesses and give rise to misunderstandings. There are nonetheless good reasons for continuing to employ terms like history of everyday life, due to their

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bring out particular aspects of a situation or forms of behaviour which change only very slowly, broadly extended conceptions of space and time are employed, which almost necessarily means that social phenomena (for example, such as youth protest) are taken utterly out of their specific historical context (societal, cultural, political and so on), thereby automatically ignoring the usual strictures and rules implicit in historical analysis. For this reason, the approach conflicts with certain key principles of historical social science (above all, the importance of context and basic historical methodology)."

<sup>43</sup> See K. E. Müller, "Grundzüge des ethnologischen Historismus", in: Schmied-Kowarzik and Stagl (eds.), *Grundfragen der Ethnologie*, pp. 197-232, esp. p. 202.

<sup>44</sup> H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Bd. 1: Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur Defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära 1700-1915, München 1987, esp. pp. 7-12.

<sup>45</sup> M. Hettling et al. (eds.), *Was ist Gesellschaftsgeschichte?* München 1991, Vorwort, pp. 9-10; see also: H. Wunder, *Kulturgeschichte, Mentalitätengeschichte, Historische Anthropologie*, and J. Mooser, "Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, Historische Sozialwissenschaft", in: R. van Dülmen (ed.), *Fischer Lexikon Geschichte*, pp. 65-85 and pp. 86-101, esp. 101: „Die Gesellschaftsgeschichte ist daher angewiesen auf die Kulturgeschichte und Historische Anthropologie, ebenso wie auf die Politische Geschichte“.

function as a kind of signal enabling us to point to the neglect of social actors' perspectives and actions in the more objectivist variants of social history and the "history of society". If these efforts eventually achieve their aim – and a number of signs indicate that they will – then the battle slogans themselves will become obsolete. Having become "sociologised" in the 1970s and 1980s, social history will thus be expanded into an historical social and cultural science. Historical actors' viewpoints will be integrated into social historical research in a way that has long been true for social structures (incidentally, the latter being a shift that occurred without the label "social history" being replaced by "structural history", as Werner Conze once suggested should happen). At the same time, it is only to be expected that new labels will repeatedly crop up in the future, in order to mark out new territories and proclaim one's own approach as "new", "nouvelle" or "neu", in contrast to well-established approaches. Social science achieves its dynamic as a societal institution not least through the constant struggle between those already in possession of jobs and positions and those striving after them, as well as the respective efforts of such groups to build up power and influence by forming research groups and methodological schools. But unfortunately, academic self-reproduction has – up until now – not been subjected to the same careful examination as that which is applied to the subject-matter of social science, a fact that necessitates critical reflection about the latter's programmatic statements and the labels it employs.<sup>46</sup> In my opinion, the frequently confusing impact of the – often quite aggressive – use of rallying cries is carried out for reasons of academic politics, in order to establish differences between certain groups and to exclude others. On closer inspection, however, most of these differences prove to be unsubstantiated both in terms of social scientific theory and the actual history of the disciplines concerned.

### *A return to narratives without theory?*

Members of the first generation of historical social scientists have repeatedly accused the history of everyday life and the history of experience as "completely lacking in theory" and its practitioners of being "hostile to theory",<sup>47</sup> and it can be supposed that the same accusations will be levelled

<sup>46</sup> See: P. Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, Frankfurt 1988; idem, "Narzißtische Reflexivität und wissenschaftliche Reflexivität", in: E. Berg and M. Fuchs (eds.), *Kultur, soziale Praxis, Text. Die Krise der ethnographischen Repräsentation*, Frankfurt 1993, pp. 365-74.

<sup>47</sup> See J. Kocka, "Zurück zur Erzählung? Plädoyer für historische Argumentation", in: GG 10 (1984), pp. 395-408; idem, "Klassen oder Kultur? Durchbrüche und Sackgassen in der Arbeitergeschichte", in: *Merkur* 36 (1982), pp. 955-65.



against the proponents of historical anthropology. Admittedly, there are a few historians amongst those choosing workers, peasants, serfs and slaves as their subjects who claim to get by without employing any theory. But a good proportion of social historians interested in the history of the everyday life, historical anthropology and so on, base their approach precisely on the above-mentioned social theories pertaining to the dual constitution of social reality.<sup>48</sup> Hostility to theory is thus directed only at those theories which adhere to objectivistic paradigms. On the basis of their criticism of both the one-dimensionality of structural functionalism and culturalistic narrowness, the new generation of social historians has been able to develop a more advanced theoretical understanding.

Accusations as to lack of theory are closely bound up with talk about a lapse back into historical narrative (which also lacks theory). This has stimulated a highly productive debate and, above all, has illustrated that the creation of a binary opposition between narrative and explanation misses the point about the very nature of historical scientific discourse. Or as Roger Chartier has formulated the problem, the specificity of historical knowledge consists "in the narrative and the construction of that narrative"; the degree of historical intelligibility is measured by the plausibility of the given narrative.<sup>49</sup> Jörn Rüsen has argued in much the same way. For him, narrative is nothing less than the actual means by which historical explanation takes place, on condition that the narrative goes beyond the purely mimetic to a level of construction which is then testable, reflective and theorising.<sup>50</sup> The accusation that the history of everyday life or the new cultural history represents nothing more than a lapse into narrative without theory proves untenable, because it relies on an artificial dichotomy between narrative and explanation and refuses to confine its criticism to particular authors who are in fact decidedly antitheoretical in their approach. In all its various shapes and sizes, be it structural analytical, quantificatory or qualitative, the writing of history is inherently narrative in form because it is always based on the construction of links in time and space, which cannot be presented in

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<sup>48</sup> Above all, see: Lüdtke, "Einleitung, and Medick, 'Missionare im Ruderboot?'" both in: A. Lüdtke (ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte*; R. Sieder, "Zur Theoriebedürftigkeit der Neuen Alltagsgeschichte", in: H. Nagl-Docekal and F. Wimmer (eds.), *Neue Ansätze in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Wien 1984, pp. 24-41.

<sup>49</sup> R. Chartier, *Die unvollendete Vergangenheit. Geschichte und die Macht der Weltauslegung*, Berlin 1989, p. 35.

<sup>50</sup> J. Rüsen, *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens*, Frankfurt 1990; for a criticism of Rüsen, see: R. Possekel, "Die Widersprüche der Geschichtswissenschaft. Überlegungen zu Jörn Rüsen's Historik", in: *ÖZG* 4 (1993), pp. 479-91.

any other way than by *narrative explanation*. Seen from this point of view, historical argumentation – which, as Jürgen Kocka has emphasised, represents the distinctive, excursive style of historical social science – constitutes one of several different types of textual forms within historiographical narrative, along with description, evaluation, numeration and so on. The main thing for social historians – and especially those concerned with the history of everyday life or interested in cultural anthropological approaches – to learn from this debate is that they must avoid placing a naive trust in the directness of mimetic approaches. The desire to be the mouthpiece of the “voiceless” oppressed, as was constantly proclaimed in the nascent phase of “the history of everyday life”, potentially ignores the constructive, fictional element in historiographical narrative and averts the focus onto the ideals, processes of idealisation, norms and values that are thereby set in motion.<sup>51</sup>

### *Some methodological consequences*

A number of methodological conclusions must be drawn from these theoretical considerations. The first and most basic of these is that – in their absence – we must empirically investigate historical actors’ viewpoints by analysing in a social scientific manner those texts which record relevant statements on their part. That is equally as true for the interpretation of surviving texts (such as diaries, autobiographies, travelogues, police reports) as it is for texts generated during the research process itself, as is the case with the technique of narrative or other kinds of interview. The problems of text analysis raise the question as to how historical actors’ interpretations and actions can be understood and explained when the researcher belongs to another time, another society and to other systems of knowledge, belief, sensibility and certainties. If *culture* is understood in accordance with our hypothesis concerning the dual construction of social reality, then it follows that culture is also produced by social actors’ daily activities, rather than simply being a system of given symbols, norms and values that are external and pre-existing for each member of society. Every culture is thus bound up with a specific life-world, through which it is created *in praxi* and for practical purposes. If, however, we want to *study* a past life-world, we are obliged – *volens volens* – to take up the position of *observer*. Bourdieu has argued that ethnologists and anthropologists are frequently in danger of becoming culture-centric because of their theoretical standpoints and reflexive distance

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<sup>51</sup> On the fictional character of historical writing, see: V. Biti, “Geschichte als Literatur”.



from the field of investigation.<sup>52</sup> That is undoubtedly a criticism that can also be applied to social historians, given that the surviving textual sources are even less likely to provide counter-arguments to the researcher's interpretation than the living subjects studied by ethnologists and anthropologists. If a contemporary life-world is to be studied, we can enter into a communicative relationship with its participants, and thus ourselves become virtual participants in this foreign life-world.<sup>53</sup> This can result in a lengthy (and only partly successful) "second socialisation" process, in which we are gradually able to accumulate experience of the rules, meanings and characteristics of the life-world in question. In most social historical research, however, it is usually the case that the life-world no longer exists: all that remains are written or oral narratives, data, objects and pictures. This greatly widened epistemological gap forces us to recognise the different characteristics of the past life-world and to draw methodological consequences from that fact. The Italian social historian Carlo Ginzburg has gone so far to develop a radical maxim on this basis: "The fundamental technique of research is that of distancing oneself from the subject-matter, the ability to make things seem distant and incomprehensible – and not the other way round, as historians usually try and do. Historians frequently turn to the past with a purely retrospective projection of how the past might have been, [...] in a way that does not see or seek out what is different, but on the contrary, excessively strives after identification with the past!"<sup>54</sup>

The fact that everything cultural is inherently bound up with signs (symbols) implies that in methodological terms, we should make sense of these signs by processing them hermeneutically *and* analytically. Moreover, Ginzburg's hypothesis about the different nature of past cultures means that historical science's traditional hermeneutic approach is no longer sufficient. Historicism was premised upon the idea that there was *one* single history of humanity, whose meaning could be concluded from the historian's *intuitive* interpretation of the sources.<sup>55</sup> However, cultural anthropologists and social historians influenced by them no longer assume that they share *one and*

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<sup>52</sup> Bourdieu, *Theorie der Praxis*, p. 142.; idem, *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*, Frankfurt 1987, p. 63.

<sup>53</sup> See: J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Bd. 1, Frankfurt 1981, p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> C. Ginzburg, "Geschichte und Geschichten. Über Archive, Marlene Dietrich und die Lust an der Geschichte", in: idem, *Spurensicherungen. Über verborgene Geschichte, Kunst und soziales Gedächtnis*, Berlin 1983, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> For a critique of German historicism's basic theory of knowledge and philosophy of history, see: W. J. Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus*, Düsseldorf 1971; idem, "Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft", in: P. Rossi (ed.), *Theorie der modernen Geschichtsschreibung*, Frankfurt 1987, pp. 107-46.

the same world with the actors who form the subject-matter of their research. The more historians open themselves up to the viewpoints of historical actors, the more it becomes clear that those actors' perspectives belong to different life-worlds, or to put it another way, occupy a different horizon of meaning.<sup>56</sup> It is therefore necessary to recognise that we can no longer trust in a common horizon of meaning, as Dilthey and other "hermeneutic idealists"<sup>57</sup> did. Nor can we draw conclusions about historical actors' experiences on the basis of our own experiences, "imagine ourselves" to be in the same situation as people in the past, or trust in an almost secretive kind of "intuitive understanding". That would inevitably lead to our projecting onto the past the experiences and interpretations formed in our own life-world and transposing them to different life-worlds.

Yet what other methodological alternatives are open to us? As long as we dispose of texts that allow us to reconstruct the viewpoints and experiences of historical actors, we are able to employ a systematically reconstructive hermeneutic-analytical approach. By this I mean forms of text analysis which analyse the multi-layered, context dependent nature of texts (and to a certain extent, visual images as well) as precisely as possible, in a way that reconstructs the original narrative along the lines of how it originated in the past.<sup>58</sup> Whether it be an oral narrative, a diary entry, court record or whatever, the text will be treated as the protocol of a par-

<sup>56</sup> The term "life-world" derives from the phenomenological sociology of the 1930s and 1940s (E. Husserl and A. Schütz) and became commonly used in social history in the 1980s, opposing the dominance of structural functionalism. In contrast to its phenomenological meaning (i.e. the subject's "horizon of meaning"), social historians frequently equate "life-world" with local or regional societies. In doing so, however, they lose both the constitutive meaning of life-world, which is bound up with the way actors' interpret and make sense of their life-world, and the methodological necessity of exploring the entirety of its meaning through interpretive social science methods. On the phenomenological concept of "life-world", see: A. Gurwitsch, "Problems of the Life-World", in: M. Natanson (ed.), *Phenomenology and Social Reality. Essays in memory of A. Schütz*, Den Haag 1970, pp. 53-61; A. Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt. Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie*, Frankfurt 1974; B. Waldenfels, *In den Netzen der Lebenswelt*, Frankfurt 1985; R. Grathoff, *Milieu und Lebenswelt. Einführung in die phänomenologische Soziologie und die sozialphänomenologische Forschung*, Frankfurt 1989. On the sociologisation of the concept, see: Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*; for a critique thereof, compare: A. Linkenbach, *Opake Gestalten des Denkens. J. Habermas und die Rationalität fremder Lebensformen*, München 1986.

<sup>57</sup> W. Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Frankfurt 1981.

<sup>58</sup> An overview of reconstructive analytical methods as they have developed up until now is provided by: Lamnek, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, vol. II.



ticular action,<sup>59</sup> and interpreted in accordance with our social historical knowledge of its context (contrary to the purely textual models of interpretation employed by linguistics).<sup>60</sup> In this kind of text analysis, subjects actually come into view as *actors*, that is to say that their interpretations are not treated independently of their actions or conditions for action, just as the conditions for action are always viewed in connection with their appropriation by historical actors.<sup>61</sup>

In doing so, it is necessary to consider that the possibility for individuals to change a given situation through social action exists up to a certain point, but this is something often only available to social groups, who can coordinate their actions to a particular end and define a common goal on the basis of common interests (which does not necessarily mean that that goal will always be achieved). If we speak about actors in Bourdieu's sense of the term, then we do not really mean individuals acting alone, but rather, people who exist and act in communicative and interactive relationships. Or to put it more precisely, the actor is our intellectual construction, through which we hope to express accurately aspects of an historical person who communicated and acted in concert with others. At the same time, it seems worthwhile – wherever possible – to take individual actors as case studies,

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<sup>59</sup> H.-G. Soeffner, "Prämissen einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik", in: idem. *Auslegung des Alltags – Der Alltag der Auslegung. Zur wissenschaftlichen Konzeption einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt 1989, pp. 66-97.

<sup>60</sup> For attempts at this kind of textual interpretation, see my articles, "'Vater, derf i aufstehn?'" Childhood experiences in Viennese working-class families around 1900", in: *Continuity and Change* 1 (1996) 1, pp. 53-88; "A Hitler Youth from a Respectable Family: The Narrative Composition and Deconstruction of a Life Story", in: D. Bertaux and P. Thompson (eds.), *Between Generations. Family Models, Myths and Memories*, Oxford 1993, pp. 99-120; "Freisetzung und Bindung. Eine Fallstudie zu aktuellen Dynamiken im Ehe- und Familienleben", in: J. Ehmer et al. (eds.), *Historische Familienforschung. Ergebnisse und Kontroversen, Michael Mitterauer zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt and New York 1997, pp. 229-255.

<sup>61</sup> Compare the technique applied by Gabriele Rosenthal for the sequential analysis of data and texts. By adapting the ideas developed by F. Schütze and U. Oevermann, Rosenthal essentially takes two main analytical steps: firstly, the analysis of what the author of the text wants to say, and secondly, the experimental weighing up of all possible meanings (*Lesarten*) that are additionally conceivable. The systematic investigation of the differences between the intended and latent sense of a text seems to be one way of acknowledging the cultural difference between historical actors and the scientific interpretation of their statements, as well as of employing that difference heuristically in the search for historical scientific truth (which is always a truth concerned with difference). See: G. Rosenthal, *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte. Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen*, Frankfurt and New York 1995, esp. pp. 186-226.

in order to side-step the frequent pit-fall of structural functionalist social history whereby social groups, collectivities and classes are ontologised as "the family", "the household", "the workforce", "the proletariat", "the bourgeoisie" etc.. By avoiding the attribution of collective characteristics to such groups prior to the research actually taking place, as well as the temptation to smooth over the internal differences within a group (e.g. between men and women, young people and adults, skilled and unskilled workers and so on), it is possible for us to undertake a full social historical investigation on the basis of analytical case-studies, thus improving the empirical quality of our research. In other words, our hypotheses and arguments will be tied to an analysis of empirically reconstructed cases, which can then be tested by comparison with other cases and examples.<sup>62</sup>

Admittedly, there are a number of important questions for which there are no, or hardly any, relevant surviving statements from historical actors, and without there being any possibility of generating statements by means of interviews, because the interval of time is simply too great. In such instances, we only dispose of statements *about* the actors, be they from the side of the authorities, contemporary observers, or proto-sociologists, such as the society writers of the 18th and 19th centuries. These texts can be subjected to discourse analysis, which is still able to treat the text's author as an empirical case-study, even if it is unable to do so for the actual actors themselves. The author's interests, social position, education etc. must be reconstructed with the greatest possible attention to detail, in order for that text to be "deconstructed" and for the observations and claims made about "the bourgeoisie", "the peasants", "the people", and so on, to be interpreted as contextually dependent social actions with their own particular perspectives.

This does not necessarily mean stopping at the construction of case-studies: a number of cases can be compared, and the typology resulting from that comparison (whether systematic or unsystematic) can provide insights into the actual workings of specific periods and cultures. This

<sup>62</sup> It is often claimed that such a high level of empirical accuracy can only be attained by social historians working on near-contemporary history, because they are able to employ qualitative research techniques, such as narrative interviews. However, it is also the case that sources from much more historically removed periods can be successfully analysed in terms of the dialectic between conditions for action and social practices, as some stimulating works on the social history of the early modern period have shown. See, for example: E. Landsteiner, "Einen Bären anbinden", in: *ÖZG* 4 (1993), pp. 218-52; Michael Stolberg, "'Mein äskulapisches Orakel!' Patientenbriefe als Quelle einer Kulturgeschichte der Krankheitserfahrung im 18. Jahrhundert", in: *ÖZG* 7 (1996), pp. 385-404; and many others.



case-study and comparative typology based approach has in fact already been employed in many fields of interpretative social history. Social historians have tried to use case-studies in their research on the history of social groups (such as a factory work-force<sup>63</sup>), socio-cultural milieus (for example, youth groups engaged in political resistance in the Third Reich<sup>64</sup>), village micro-societies,<sup>65</sup> means of survival in National Socialist concentration camps,<sup>66</sup> and the political behaviour and everyday experiences of particular generations or social classes,<sup>67</sup> to name but a few. Social scientific biographical research should also be included here, given that it occupies an interdisciplinary middle-ground between sociology and social history and is concerned with the detailed reconstruction of individual lifestories, which can then be contrasted, compared and presented in typological form.<sup>68</sup>

Contrary to the claims made by its critics, all these variants of a cultural scientifically expanded social history do not represent a conception opposing historical social science (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*). They are very much a part of historical social science, albeit one which avoids reduc-

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example: I. Bauer, "Tschikweiber haum's uns g'nennt..." *Frauenleben und Frauenarbeit an der „Peripherie“: Die Halleiner Zigarrenfabriksarbeiterinnen 1869 bis 1940. Eine historische Fallstudie auf der Basis lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews*, Wien 1988.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example: Ch. Gerbel, A. Mejschke, R. Sieder, "Die 'Schlurfs'. Verweigerung und Opposition von Wiener Arbeiterjugendlichen im 'Dritten Reich'", in: E. Tálos et al. (eds.), *NS-Herrschaft in Österreich*, Wien 1988, pp.243-68.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example: D. Sabean, *Power in the Blood. Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge 1985; German: *Das zweischneidige Schwert. Herrschaft und Widerspruch im Württemberg der frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 1986; idem, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870*, Cambridge 1990; R. Beck, *Unterfinning. Ländliche Welt vor Anbruch der Moderne*, München 1993.

<sup>66</sup> Among others, see: M. Pollak, *Die Grenzen des Sagbaren. Lebensgeschichten von KZ-Überlebenden als Augenzeugenberichte und als Identitätsarbeit*, Frankfurt 1988.

<sup>67</sup> See: L. Niethammer (ed.), "Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute einsetzen soll". *Faschismus-Erfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet*, Bonn 1983; idem and A. von Plato (eds.), "Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten", Bonn 1985; L. Niethammer et al. (eds.), *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR*, Berlin 1991; L. Passerini (ed.), *Memory and Totalitarianism*, Oxford 1992; idem, *Torino operaia e fascismo*, Roma 1984; English: *Fascism in Popular Memory*, Cambridge 1987.

<sup>68</sup> For biographical studies relating to research on the Third Reich, see: G. Rosenthal (ed.), *Die Hitlerjugend-Generation. Biographische Thematisierung als Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Essen 1986; idem, "Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nichts mehr zu tun". *Zur Gegenwärtigkeit des "Dritten Reiches" in Biographien*, Opladen 1990; idem, "Wenn alles in Scherben fällt..." *Von Leben und Sinnwelt der Kriegsgeneration*, Opladen 1987; W. Fischer-Rosenthal et al. (eds.), *Biographien in Deutschland*, Opladen 1994; a comprehensive bibliography is given in: *BIOS* 1 (1988) and 2 (1989).

ing its subject-matter either objectivistically (to the external conditions for social action and interpretation) or subjectivistically (to “lived experience”). It is not the case – as is all too often asserted – that this form of social history abruptly swaps subjective viewpoints for objective structures. Instead, as I have tried to show, it investigates the *dialectical connection* between structured conditions for action and social practices, which structurise relationships within certain social spaces.

In view of the overwhelming occupation of the “social” by structural functionalism, it seems to me an interesting strategic question as to whether we should consider returning to the term “culture” – much as it was used as a conceptual battle slogan in the late 19th century, as a means of combating the primacy of the political – and term the approach outlined above historical *cultural science*. Ute Daniel has put this subject up for discussion, whilst simultaneously showing just how much the concept of “culture” has changed since the earliest attempts to formulate approaches to cultural history in the 18th century.<sup>69</sup> From today’s perspective, for example, cultural history as practised by someone like Karl Lamprecht seems too objectivistic and heavily influenced by psychological theory, that of authors such as Breysig, Toynbee or Morgan as overly evolutionistic in approach, and the works of Jacob Burckhardt too narrow in scope.<sup>70</sup> It is nevertheless necessary for historical science to engage with these older approaches, if it is to overcome different configurations of objectivism, idealism and culturalism and move in the direction of a putative historical cultural and social science. After all, it is only possible to overcome what has first been acknowledged as necessary to be overcome.

### *Trends and future perspectives.*

By way of conclusion, I would like to discuss the future perspectives that are opened up for social history by the adoption of the praxiological mode of research outlined above and its move in the direction of an historical

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<sup>69</sup> Daniel, “Kultur” und “Gesellschaft”.

<sup>70</sup> For some important comments on this topic, see the still relevant discussion by: T. Nipperdey, “Kulturgeschichte, Sozialgeschichte, historische Anthropologie”, in: *Vierteljahrsschrift für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte* 55 (1968); idem, “Die anthropologische Dimension der Geschichtswissenschaft”, in: G. Schulz (ed.), *Geschichte heute*, Göttingen 1973, pp. 225-55; see also: Daniel, “Kultur” und “Gesellschaft”, p. 84.



cultural science. What changes have been displayed in the theoretical conception and planning of social historical research?

A social history which interprets itself as an historical cultural science cannot proceed in a culture-centric fashion, but will be obliged to recognise a *plurality of cultures* and the respective differences between them, based on the different social logics constructed by their constituent actors. In addition, social history will no longer appear to be gender-neutral, but will take *gender relations* as one of its central themes in any given area of research, reflecting as it must the impact of the researcher's own gender on the investigation, interpretation and analysis of historical texts, pictures and data.

Cultural scientific social historians are in a position to break with the universalistic categories ("man" or "people", "the world", "reason" etc.) of idealistic, male-dominated historical science, insofar as they thematicise both their own standpoints and social interests and those of the historical actors they are investigating (which does not mean that they are obliged to lose themselves in those viewpoints!). When seen in this light the hegelian and marxist conception of a historical meta-narrative, which tells history in the form of humanity's gradual emancipation, appears as an unconscious and unthinking interpretative framework for the historiography of "the modern". The teleological conception inherent in this meta-narrative might thus be replaced by a *plurality of histories* possessing open-ended futures. In doing this, however, social historians will no longer be able to conceive of their own role as a normative one (in the tradition of the "late Enlightenment"), whose evaluations of historical processes have recourse to a universal sense of meaning attached to human action.<sup>71</sup> In practical and moral terms, this form of social history undoubtedly can have a thoroughly political, emancipatory impact, as long as it provokes discussion about the actions, experiences and interests of social groups, classes and genders, together with the different forms and scope of power exercised by historical actors. Metaphorically speaking, this kind of social history will not be speaking over people's heads. The investigation of historical actors' appropriation of relationships

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<sup>71</sup> Representatives of a "late Enlightenment", such as Jürgen Habermas or Jörn Rüsen, see themselves as obliged to refer to a totality, which can be defined as the utopic end-product of a successful discourse. In my opinion, this has been justifiably criticised from the feminist and cultural scientific standpoint as a "utopic pre-creational scenario" and an academic vision of free dialogue relating to those obligatorily interested in knowledge. See: P. Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, vol. I, Frankfurt 1983, p. 47. For a feminist critique, compare the contribution by J. Held and U. Frevert in the volume by J. Rüsen et al. (eds.), *Die Zukunft der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt 1988.

and circumstances brings their actions, interpretations, ideas and physical experiences to the fore.

Ever since the first attempts at defining and practising social history, there has been a tendency to focus on the regional and local level. This is mainly due to the more intense empirical nature of social historical research and will probably increase with the proliferation of more culturally scientific oriented works. However, the regionalisation of research themes does not exclude their being brought together into compilation volumes for the purposes of providing overviews and making comparisons over a broader area. Nonetheless, it does present specific problems. Chief among these is that the increasing variety of theoretical approaches and methods increases the likelihood of results that are incompatible for comparative purposes. For that reason, theoretical discussion among researchers and agreement over the meaning of concepts, terminology and methods employed, will be that much more important, particularly between specialist researchers and those presenting comparative synopses of social historical research.

The current trend should also lead away from deductive or inductive closed, homogeneous "grand theories" towards the construction of hypotheses with more modest theoretical claims, which are stimulated and abductively developed by the data and texts.<sup>72</sup> In place of puristic attempts to keep the old grand theories intact has come an ever more positively evaluated eclecticism. Historical interpretations premised upon continuity and coherence will decline in importance in the face of the loss of meaning experienced by "grand theories" and their respective meta-narratives. In their stead approaches are beginning to appear which stress *discontinuity* and *difference*, although that by no means implies that social or cultural historical science has renounced its claim to be an autonomous discipline, on the basis that it focuses on historical change. The theoretical construction and descriptions of "historical developments" as "secular trends", something which has enjoyed great popularity amongst academic researchers and their public in recent years (to name but one example, Norbert Elias' by now famous theory of civilisation<sup>73</sup>), can in many ways be considered somewhat

<sup>72</sup> Although as yet scarcely noticed by social history, see the "classic" studies by C. S. Pierce, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge 1931. For an introduction to Pierce's work, see: L. Nagl, C. S. Peirce, Frankfurt 1992; see too the discussions of "qualitative social research" in (among others), B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago 1967; J. Reichertz, *Probleme qualitativer Sozialforschung*, Frankfurt 1985; P. Zedler and H. Moser (eds.), *Aspekte qualitativer Sozialforschung*, Opladen 1983. See also the references given in Footnote 2.

<sup>73</sup> N. Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, 2 vol., Frankfurt 1976, esp. vol. 2: *Wandlungen der Gesellschaft. Entwurf zu einer*



suspicious in ideological terms, because of its insistence on a clearly directed developmental path. Theoretical analyses stressing continuity and coherence favour the suppression of contradictions and the smoothing over of breaks and fissures; developmental theories presumably owe their persuasive force to their ability to raise hopes about gaining an overview of the broken landscapes of the historical world. As long as they are plausible in their formulation, teleological models frequently allow their authors to pass over gaps in empirical knowledge or tempt them to offer a "tendentious" interpretation of texts, images and objects in line with the "developmental path" being followed. Thanks to its greater empirical strengths, however, cultural scientific social history will be able to point up more breakages, interruptions and turning-points in the past, than these "lines of development" can cover over. And as the historical philosopher Frank R. Ankersmit has recently put it, social history will not so much contribute to a consolidation of identity than to making questionable identities more uncertain.<sup>74</sup>

A thoroughly cultural scientific social history will not be working alone in applying the approaches sketched here. The trends mentioned above are immanent, if not present already, in all the cultural and social sciences and humanities disciplines, albeit with different degrees of intensity. Indeed, these changes are visible beyond academic disciplines, being apparent in architecture, literature, philosophy, and not least, in our experiences in daily life: whether we agree with the term or not, they are characteristics common to the post-modern period,<sup>75</sup> a time when modernity is increasing its efforts to think critically about its forms of knowledge, not least its idea of history.

*Translation from the German by Laurence Cole/London*

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Theorie der Zivilisation. For a critique of the teleological nature of this "theory of civilisation", see H. Kuzmics and I. Mörtz (eds.), *Der unendliche Prozeß der Zivilisation. Zur Kulturosoziologie der Moderne nach N. Elias*, Frankfurt 1991.

<sup>74</sup> See the discussion with Frank Ankersmit in: *ÖZG* 4 (1993), pp. 457-466.

<sup>75</sup> See: W. Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Weinheim 1991.

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Sue Golding

*Poiesis and Politics as Ecstatic Fetish: Foucault's Ethical Demand*

Relying on the form of the matter, as well as the content, this article is a playful and lyrical re-thinking of Foucault's radical move to re-claim 'otherness' and the 'other' as 'ecstatic' fetish. Posed as such, 'otherness' and the technologies of identity this implies, neither stands as an opposition to Being/being nor as the 'that' which does not fit in. In this move, something rather peculiar also comes to light: a politics of the ethical that no longer relies on the mastery of logos. Indeed, it relies, on a radical 'non-mastery', a 'beheaded mastery'; a kind of 'coming' without 'be'. Could it be said that therein lies the beginning threads for a wholly different conception of freedom and democracy, not to mention the 'I' of this 'me'?

Kate Nash

A "Politics of Ideas" and Women's Citizenship

The question this paper will address is that of the role of ideas in the development of the social and political institutions of women's citizenship, historically and in the future. It considers the distinction made by Anne Phillips in *The Politics of Presence* between a conventional "politics of ideas", in which political representation is taken to involve the representation of party policies and voter preferences and beliefs, and a "politics of presence" in which democratic procedures are held to require the physical presence of members of social groups. For Phillips, the latter is preferable because while political equality entails both the inclusion of voices previously excluded from the political process, it also involves an informed judgement of the probable outcome of that process, and she believes that the presence of women could contribute positively to the development of social rights for women as women. In this paper I will take issue with Phillips' view by way of a discussion of feminist theories of the relation between liberal political ideology and women's citizenship. On the basis of this discussion I will suggest that the theory of hegemony developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe is the best way of understanding this relation and that the rather different politics of ideas it proposes is at least as important to feminist strategies to end the secondary status of women's citizenship as Phillips' "politics of presence".

Aletta J. Norval

*Frontiers in Question*

This article investigates the theoretical arguments concerning political frontiers as they arise in the work of Laclau and Mouffe. The question of political frontiers emerges in the context of their anti-essentialist, post-Marxist theorisation of the division of political space, the constitution of political antagonism and the individuation of identity. The article traces the genealogy of the concept of frontiers through an investigation of its Marxist and non-Marxist intellectual roots. It argues that Laclau and Mouffe conflate two separate questions concerning political identity in their arguments on political frontiers, namely, the individuation of identity and the constitution of antagonistic relations. Through a deconstructive reading, it proposes an alternative conceptualisation which would allow one to retain the important insights offered in their theorisation, while separating those distinctive questions.

Françoise Proust

*Résistance et exception*

La résistance ne mobilise pas la règle ou le droit contre un état d'exception. Car règle et exception forment toujours un mixte confus, un mélange instable. Les exceptions se

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produisent continûment et la règle les utilise au moment même où elle les sanctionne. Comment donc faire décision dans une situation et la faire bifurquer dans un sens exceptionnel? C'est tout l'enjeu de la résistance qui à la fois cherche à parer les coups mortels du couple infernal de la règle et de l'exception en maintenant le *statu quo* et invente une issue inédite à la situation en la contrant brusquement et décisivement de part en part.

Olivier Remaud

*La question du pouvoir: Foucault et Spinoza*

Sur la question du pouvoir, il est possible de lire conjointement l'oeuvre de Foucault et celle de Spinoza. On retrouve, chez ces deux auteurs, une même critique des théories juridiques du pouvoir et, par conséquent, un même effort pour fonder, à l'inverse, l'exercice d'une raison non-juridique qui puisse nous renseigner, plus en profondeur, sur le fonctionnement de la société. Cette nouvelle orientation, à la fois théorique et pratique, impose de ne plus substantialiser le pouvoir et de se placer au niveau même de la «relation de pouvoir». C'est elle, en effet, qui détermine les diverses stratégies par lesquelles des systèmes de contrainte, qui «fabriquent» ou qui «affectent» l'individu, se créent. De cette transformation du concept même de pouvoir en une micro-physique du pouvoir, Spinoza témoigne déjà avec sa théorie des «puissances» qui se continuent de l'état de nature à l'état civil. Mais sans doute est-ce à ce moment où le pouvoir devient un ensemble de relations, c'est-à-dire un jeu de puissances continuées, qu'il libère la possibilité d'une éthique. Le souci de soi, dans les dernières oeuvres de Foucault, ne serait-il pas l'exact équivalent de la quête spinoziste d'un devenir adéquat de soi-même? La question, philosophique par excellence, est toujours la même : comment au sein d'une nécessité, celle des pouvoirs, est-il possible d'inventer une liberté radicale?

Jelica Šumič-Riha

*A Matter of Resistance*

In this essay the author takes issue with postmodernist and/or poststructuralist theory of resistance. In the course of discussing what the author calls "the impasses of the way out", she divides her analysis into two parts: one devoted to an exposition of the collapse of the emancipationist paradigm and to the impasses of the "way out" generally, and one devoted to the conception of the subject attuned to resistance. As a consequence of this discussion, the author argues that the pre-eminence of resistance, advocated by the postmodernists and/or poststructuralists, has serious implications for our understanding of the way out in the present constellation, but also for contemporary thought itself. In the course of tracing the experience of post-emancipationist thought in its attempt to deal with the impasses of the "way out", the author shows how postmodernist thought, by declaring that "the intractable" has fallen silent in the present social and political struggles, has largely contributed to the depoliticisation that has come increasingly to characterise our daily lives. Second, it has been shown how postmodernist and/or poststructuralist thought, in its desire to yield hole of a "way out", turned out to be one of the most insidious ways of surrendering to the "growing impasses of capitalism".

Paul Freedman

*Peasant Resistance in Medieval Europe*

Marxist and free-market economists and historians have tended to agree in regarding the peasantry as an obstacle to progress, hence doomed to vanish. Rediscovery of the indirect resistance (as opposed to insurrection) has revised this tendency to underestimate the resourcefulness of peasants.



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In view of this more favorable estimate of peasant resistance, the article examines peasant revolts from the fourteenth to early-sixteenth centuries. The best-known of these is the German Peasants' War of 1525, a failure that had permanent effects on the nature of the Lutheran Reform and the internal politics of the Empire. Other revolts were rather more successful. The peasants' uprising in Catalonia (1462-1486) led to the abolition of serfdom as did the English Rising of 1381 which was put down but which marked the beginning of a precipitous decline of servitude.

Such revolts should not be seen as spasmodic manifestations of despair but rather as perceived opportunities that went beyond the everyday means of peasant evasion of the seigneurial system. The ideological context of these insurrections is more sophisticated than normally thought. Peasants were not trapped in a mentality that was closed off from all elite influence. An investigation into the nature and formulation of their grievances shows an ability to appropriate notions of Christian equality and human liberty that were widely shared and argued over by the higher order of society.

Keith Jenkins

*Living in Time But Outside History, Living in Morality But Outside Ethics: Postmodernism and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth*

Postmodernism has, with its radical scepticism and relativism, arguably undermined the last, certainist tendencies of the Western Tradition, including those of history and ethics as expressed in the upper case - as History and Ethics. In this paper it is argued that in her brilliantly suggestive book, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth successfully critiques modernist, linear histories through the use of her notion of rhythmic time, but unfortunately fails to embrace what the logic of her argument seems to be driving her towards, the deconstruction of Ethics. Taking my leave from Ermarth's position, I argue that there is no need to be timid in this area, and that postmodernism signals both the 'end of History as we have known it' and Ethics, this opening up a discursive space not only to replace History with new modes of Ermarthian-type temporalities but also to accept a Derridean-type of morality ('the madness of the decision') in place of an Ethics no longer able to withstand the 'happy solution' of relativism.

Oto Luthar

*Possessing the Past: The Problem of Historical Representation in the Process of Reinventing Democracy in Eastern Europe – the Case of Slovenia*

Using the Slovenian case of rewriting the history of collaboration, this article attempts to demonstrate that recent European revisionism is based on an archaic reconstructionist approach which claims that it is possible to reestablish the truth about past reality. It also tries to be an analysis of its local characteristics based on its present and future centred orientation. Besides this author also tries to show that this kind of historical presentation, during period of transition of the political system, becomes a battlefield where political power may be gained.

Reinhard Sieder

*Social History: On the Way to Becoming a Historical Culture Science*

The reception of concepts and notions as perceived by those involved in sociology of knowledge, cultural anthropology and modern sociology, has triggered the critical responses of the first generation of social historians in the 1980s. The labels such as "history of everyday life", "history of knowledge" and "historical anthropology" which had been by then put into

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force, were scrutinized. On the other hand the label "social history" surfaced as all-embracing *Passepartout*. Instead of inventing all over again new fashionable labels that cause more confusion than clarity, the author proposes to stick to social history and to broaden it to cultural history or historical cultural science. Instead of laying stress on structures we should finally emphasize "meaning" or sense, which accompanies the activity of historical actors. This approach mainly anticipates the use of the relevant methods of textual analysis within the methodological repertoire of "historical social science".



















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