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# Key Words

A JOURNAL OF CULTURAL MATERIALISM

3

(2000)

edited by

**Macdonald Daly**

**Jim McGuigan**

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and

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***Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism***

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*Key Words* is a publication of The Raymond Williams Memorial Trust Society, Postgraduate School of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, United Kingdom.

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Cover design by Andrew Corbett.

Printed by Antony Rowe Ltd., Chippenham, Wiltshire.

ISSN 1369-9725

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## Editorial

Jeff Wallace

What's 'new'? How far is the present a moment of genuine rupture and radical possibility, and how far a perpetuation of the same by other means? *Key Words* 3, published in the year 2000, addresses itself to 'Futures', critically examining rhetorics of the new, and contributing to widespread current debates on the conceptualisation of, and relationship between, modernity and postmodernity. The inevitable backward glance to *Towards 2000* (1983) finds Raymond Williams initially in party-poopier mode, reminding us of the arbitrariness of '2000' — 'The chronologies of a developed industrial world still follow Dionysius Exiguus' — and connecting millennial fears to the 'extending irrationalities' of our time, 'many of them flourishing in the most developed centres of advanced industrial civilisation.'<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to reflect here on how effortlessly the Millennium hype has faded into the background of public (media?) consciousness, as we find that 2000 is the same world after all — a recognition crystallised, perhaps, in the fortunes of London's Millennium Dome.

At the same time, as all dates are arbitrary, all are moments of opportunity. Williams's scepticism formed the dialectical basis for deriving genuine 'resources of hope' out of a thoroughgoing assessment of the political and material realities of the present. Typically, such structural analysis resolves itself into a question about human agency and affect. What 'state of mind' are we in? How do we think the future? (Readers may refer to Steven Connor's essay in *Key Words* 1, for an extended meditation on the meanings of temporality and futurity in and for Williams).<sup>2</sup> *Towards 2000* proposes the cultivation of three already emergent 'changes of mind' for a future, 'unified' and 'alternative' social order. First, change our view of the world and ourselves as raw material. Second, and closely related, challenge the pre-eminence of our idea of 'production', in favour of a 'broader sense of human need and a closer sense of the physical world' (266). Finally, move beyond the binary framing of human subjectivity in terms of contrasting 'emotion' and 'rational intelligence'. Any advanced socialism would, Williams insisted, have these changes at the centre of self-governing societies based on 'new kinds of communal, co-operative and collective institutions' (123). Williams located three contemporary movements which were already acting out these changes, and thus promising to cut across the inherent inertias of the party political system: ecology, peace and feminism.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (1983; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 3. Page references to this edition hereafter are cited within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Connor, 'Raymond Williams's Time', *Key Words* 1 (1998), pp. 12-27.

Each previous issue of *Key Words* has highlighted the growing significance of ecocritical debate. The lead essay in this issue turns to the future(s) of feminism, and is joined in the 'Futures' section by critical reflection on two further, prominent aspects of the new: the concept of information society, as articulated in the highly influential work of Manuel Castells; and the role of critical theory in the development of literary studies. The essays together suggest that in each case — feminism, ICTs, theory — any trace of triumphalist rhetoric should be submitted to the closest scrutiny if true emancipatory potential is to be unlocked. For Lynne Segal, today's feminist activities take place in a 'post-political' context which has included, as one of its manifold features, the uncoupling of feminism from the Left. Thus, while the individual lives of many women have improved, economic and racial inequalities between women have steadily widened. The fruits of postmodernity are decidedly ambivalent: in the case of the 'flexible', casualised labour of postindustrialism, for example, it is women who are 'pushed into the future first'; while the shift in emphasis from women's shared needs, in the feminism of the 1970s, to the deconstruction of all gendered identities and differences in the 1990s, may have created an opportunity for the resurgent essentialisms of Darwinian evolutionary psychology. It is possible to detect a parallel here with Terry Eagleton's recent, trenchant critiques of postmodern identity politics and an attendant, unexamined 'culturalism'.<sup>3</sup> Yet Segal strongly contests the desire of some on the feminist Left to uncouple politics from the domain of the 'merely' cultural, arguing that feminism's distinct legacy lies in its ability to 'connect personal and cultural issues to political and economic affairs'.

Manuel Castells has been able to categorise the transformation of women's condition, in 'dialectical interaction' with feminism, as 'one of the two central movements of the information society', along with environmentalism. He finds this especially evident in the cities, where the extensive feminisation of labour markets weakens the traditional sexism of the labour movement, radicalizes urban policy of childcare and transport, and promises a 'new informational labour movement... based on women's rights and concerns'.<sup>4</sup> His definition of the information society is here 'a social structure where the sources of economic productivity, cultural hegemony and political-military power depend, fundamentally, on the capacity to retrieve, store, process and generate information and knowledge'. However, while Lynne Segal disputes the benefits of the new flexible economy for women, Nicholas Garnham and John Downey ask more fundamental questions about the assumptions behind

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the chapter 'Culture Wars' in Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 51-86.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Castells, 'European Cities, the Information Society, and the Global Economy', *New Left Review* 204 (March/April 1994), pp. 18-32; 24-5.

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Castells' conceptualisation of the information society. Garnham detects 'huge epochal and totalizing claims' in Castells' work, betokening a structuralism which is also, in the case of ICTs, effectively a technological determinism, despite Castells' best efforts to retain a workable sense of human agency. The central claim that information society constitutes a profound change in the capitalist mode of production is, argues Garnham, unsustainable, and predicated upon an exaggeration of the novelty of networks. Markets have always been networks. IT networks are an extension of the 'long term nature of the capitalist market system', and nineteenth-century socialists could not have been surprised by the restructuring of capital-labour relations under globalisation. Castells' projection of the end of class struggle and the disappearance of capitalists thus relies on the mystificatory categories of 'faceless collective capital' and a certain 'spirit of informationalism'; Garnham is equally sceptical of comparisons between ICTs and the invention of the alphabet — are we, he asks, in the grip of a Baudrillardian 'Culture of Real Virtuality', or a 'tired nominalism' deriving from a deconstructionist overestimation of the indeterminacies of communication? John Downey's broad assessment finds room for both structure and agency in Castells' view of information society, in a position which is ultimately traceable to Marxist humanism. Yet he coincides with Garnham in finding 'inexplicable' Castells' contention that class politics is dead, transcended by informational capitalism and displaced positively by the new social movements of ecology and feminism. As Garnham concludes, in a quotation from Fernand Braudel, capitalism continues to monopolize the 'immense privilege' of being 'able to choose the area where it wants and is able to meddle', endlessly assimilating the new at the same time as it remakes the chosen structures in its own image. This warns us, perhaps, against any too glib adoption of Raymond Williams's insistence that the moment of any new technology is a moment of choice.

As in Segal, Garnham and Downey, Andy Mousley dwells on a discourse, in this case modern literary theory, some versions of which have laid claims to a 'clean and decisive break with the past'. Equally, Mousley's cautions relate to the fact that capitalism has not been displaced, and that no theory of shared human needs can be safely relinquished until it has. Despite its provocative designation of 'Post-Theory', therefore, Mousley's analysis does not 'renege' on literary theory. It seeks, rather, in a way reminiscent of Garnham's scepticism about contemporary models of communication, to question those versions of linguistic and social constructionism which 'eradicate the possibility of seeing language as the *expression* of 'prior' human needs.' Mousley finds in Marxist humanism a challenge to radical anti-humanism and anti-essentialism, and the basis of an '*objective* ethical norm of a human *subject*'. At one level, his intriguing reading of *Macbeth* reopens a

sense in which literature operates as 'the site of an intense and meaningful human encounter' — a kind of language about texts which some of today's younger, professionalised theorists may find alien or embarrassing. At another level, the reading draws on conceptions of *subject* and *object* in Marxist theorists as diverse as Lukacs and Adorno to arrive at a conception of the aesthetic which again throws the human subject into crisis, as 'both determinate and indeterminate, art being the place where the human subject is saved from erasure *and* at the same time put into process'. This is a timely reminder that within the cultural materialist project — the struggle and contestation over signs and meanings — the category of the 'human' is as open as it ever was, the recuperation of 'humanism' jostling in Mousley's analysis with the 'posthuman' perspectives of Bataille.

There is a consistency in Raymond Williams's analysis of the process of 'modernization' in British politics since the 1960s. In the *May Day Manifesto* of 1968, Labour's call to build a 'New Britain' was redefined by Williams and his colleagues as 'really the adaptation of the Labour party to the needs of British capitalism'. Modernization was the "theology" of the new capitalism', opening up the prospect of change yet mystifying and setting limits to it; alternatively, it was 'the ideology of the never-ending present', a 'technical means for breaking with the past without creating a future'.<sup>5</sup> In *Towards 2000*, it resurfaces as 'Plan X', the 'emerging rationality of self-conscious elites', a politics of short-term strategic advantage which prevents the imagination of the future. And then: New Britain, New Labour? Rhetorics of the new and the modern remain as obfuscatory as ever. Class politics is still with us; inequalities widen; 'what we have yet to see,' argues Lynne Segal, 'is real movement towards fairer and more caring societies' — yet 'the world really has changed'. In many areas of contemporary cultural debate, attempts are being made to acknowledge and criticise the endurance of traditional structural inequalities, while at the same time grasping the real possibilities for radical transformation of globalisation, the new technologies and social movements — both sides of this equation obscured by the blandness of New Labour's 'politics without adversaries'.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Bruno Latour, we must reinvent modernity, not simply 'modernize', a task more appropriate for the European Left than for British socialists alone.<sup>7</sup> Our not-too-distant relation, the journal *Soundings*, has recently pursued its agenda of 'transversal politics', defined as 'the practice of crossing (and re-drawing) the borders that

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<sup>5</sup> *May Day Manifesto 1968*, ed. Raymond Williams (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 44-5.

<sup>6</sup> See Chantal Mouffe, 'The Radical Centre: A Politics without Adversary', *Soundings* 9 (Summer 1998), pp. 11-23.

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Latour, '*Ein Ding ist ein Thing* — A Philosophical Platform for a Left (European Party)', *Soundings* 12 (Summer 1999), pp. 12-25.

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mark significant politicized differences'. The work of a critic like Arjun Appadurai on globalisation takes 'media and migration' as the main sources of modern rupture, exploring their effects on what he calls 'the imagination as a social practice'. Electronic media provide opportunities for self-making and social identity which are 'neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined', but which allow groups and individuals to 'annex the global into their own practices of the modern'.<sup>8</sup> Wendy Wheeler's reflections on 'A New Modernity' incorporate an assessment of work in neuroscience which radically unsettles the reason/emotion, brain/body dichotomy, in precisely the sense that Raymond Williams had intended as the basis for a new political dispensation.<sup>9</sup> *Key Words* will continue to contribute to the process of thinking or imagining such futures into being.

*University of Glamorgan*

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<sup>8</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Wheeler, *A New Modernity? Change in Science, Literature and Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999).

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## Feminist Futures

Lynne Segal

There is one thing we can be sure of, feminism will always be contentious — whatever form it takes. Nowadays, it is hardly news to suggest that there is a contradiction at the heart of feminism. Most have seen its dilemmas as flowing from the confusions generated by competing objectives. The first goal has been to improve the lives and status of the majority of women, especially where they have appeared most vulnerable in their sexual, reproductive, working or social lives. It is in campaigning for gender justice or equality that feminism presents itself in its decisively activist mode, most reminiscent of the perspectives of the women's liberation movement when it flourished in the 1970s. The second objective was expressed in the newly confident embrace of the hitherto demeaned descriptions of womanhood by women's liberationists, 'we are the women your mothers warned you about': 'viragos', 'witches', 'bitches', 'dykes' and 'madwomen' would soon make their appearance on countless banners, T-shirts and badges. That goal would later metamorphose into the more abstract imperative of feminist theory to imagine or reinvent the 'feminine' in ways which radically subvert existing symbolic binaries of sex, gender and sexuality. The latter task became the principal stance of a self-declared 'nineties' feminist project, which drew upon poststructuralism (confusingly also often labelled 'postmodernism').

In trying to understand the trials and tribulations of feminism in my last book, *Why Feminism?*, I pointed out that the women's movement had begun to grow too big for its marching boots by the close of the 1970s. Those slogans chalked on the walls of the first Women's Liberation Conference at Oxford (again exactly 30 years ago) sound pretty weird now: *Women in Labour Keep Capitalism in Power* alongside *Down with Penile Servitude*. Both of these suggest to me more about the effects of economic change and the significance of ageing on women than anything else right now. It is currently women in the workforce who seem to keep profits afloat, and job-assessment criteria, more than penile servitude, that exhaust older women today. Replacing the demonstrations and the slogan writing, a rich diversity of political and cultural objectives has drawn feminists along many different pathways.

### Disciplining Feminism

Some feminists would enter the academy, as the rise of Women's Studies began to provide one of feminism's continuing, if increasingly elite, strongholds. At first it was at the cutting edge of very little at all, other than women's self-exploitation, putting in extra hours not recognized as real

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academic labour within institutions of higher learning. But that would begin to change with the growing acceptability of gender scholarship, especially within expanding departments of English, the Humanities, Cultural and Media Studies, as differing forms of post-structuralism became the cutting edge of 'high' theory. This would accompany a turn amongst more radical academics, away from Marxism, and its former home in Sociology and Politics. It encouraged feminist academics, and students interested in women's or gender issues, to produce ever richer and more sophisticated (if more enigmatic and perplexing) theories of subjectivities, identities and differences. These complexities only intensified when issues of place, 'race' and ethnicity, sexualities and other particularities loomed ever larger as differences between women were increasingly analysed.

Other feminists, however, were soon complaining that they no longer read such scholarship, like the well known feminist activists in the USA, all with links to Women's Studies, writing for a special issue in *Signs*, in 1996. They claimed they could no longer connect recent feminist theorizing to the complexities of analysing the actual struggles led by the women they supported, often for something they called 'human' rights (rather than specifically women's concerns): for health, housing, educational or welfare improvements.<sup>1</sup> One problem here is that these struggles all tend to require a vision of building a radically egalitarian society, in tension with the positioning of much recent feminist theory as anti-humanist, post-Enlightenment, post-nation-state. Feminist scholarship thus needs to be both more broadly critical and more widely cross-disciplinary than it often appears in today's academy.

An alternative pitfall comes from those academics now making a name for themselves through an anti-theoretical populism. Some feminists in Women's Studies (again mainly in the USA) have been dragged into the damaging and impoverished political and cultural debates of the 1990s – on opposed sides of what is tellingly known as the Culture Wars, crossing the Atlantic from their recent prominence in the USA. This heightened after the physicist Alan Sokal enjoyed his moment of fame four years ago when (supported by two feminist academics) he hoaxed the cultural studies journal, *Social Text*, attacking, so he claimed, 'obscurantist, theory-mongering'.<sup>2</sup> He posed the 'real' Left against a 'phoney' cultural Left. On this terrain, all the weary political antagonists are regrouped for further theoretical battle: class struggle *versus* identity struggle; scientific understanding *versus* narrative or aesthetic understanding; material analysis *versus* semiotic analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Heidi Hartmann *et al.*, 'Bringing Together Feminist Theory and Practice: A Collective Interview', *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 21, 41 (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Alan D. Sokal, 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', *Social Text* 46 (1996), quoted in Ellen Willis, 'My Sokaled Life', *Village Voice*, 25 June 1996, pp. 22-3.

Other feminists, however, would enter mainstream politics, with its harsh vicissitudes as inequalities of all sorts have continued to rise since 1979. Indeed, what we find today, under New Labour, is the 'mainstreaming' of a type of equal opportunities feminism. Some feminists sought to pursue earlier objectives inside the caring professions or within the ever-expanding alternative and therapeutic arenas. A minority simply stayed put. This meant campaigning and working to prevent violence against women, fighting racism or working in solidarity work with women around the world — most recently through the ever-growing expansion of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with their remarkable gathering in Beijing in 1995.

Overall, nothing is more certain than that feminism has continued to act as a catalyst for struggles for change to improve the lot of women, as well as to rethink the meanings of womanhood, personal life, sexuality, pleasure and violence. Yet, it is equally clear that all this activity today occurs in a climate of declining passion for politics. Disillusion is as evident in veteran women's liberationists as in the rejection of feminism by many young women. It reflects the political malaise which grew steadily over the last two decades of the twentieth century — in times often described as 'postsocialist', if not 'post-political'.<sup>3</sup> There was a strong consensus by the close of the twentieth century that little remained of any socialist Left which may be capable of winning popular support for its vision of a more egalitarian future (however much some campaigners and activists still struggle to challenge it). Meanwhile, the verdict on feminism, and its now diverse aspirations, remains far more ambivalent. The lives of many women have improved, but the inequalities and divisions between women themselves — primarily along class, ethnic and 'racial' lines — have steadily increased (which suggests immediately the problems of separating feminist and Left visions). Moreover, many of the problems which energised feminists into collective action in the 1970s everywhere persist. This is both despite, and also sometimes because of, the many gains achieved by women throughout the century: some consciously fought for, others the more ambiguous, unintended consequences of changes in capitalism — pushing women into the future first, as its exemplary low-paid, overworked, flexible workers.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, one may think surpassingly, as more women enter the same spaces once reserved for men, the world at large is only ever more obsessed with gender difference and conflict (often to the detriment of 'race' and class

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<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'The New Obscurity and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies', in *Observations on the Spiritual Situation of the Age*, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), quoted in Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Post-Socialist' Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Juliet Mitchell, 'Reflections on Twenty Years of Feminism', in *What is Feminism?* ed. J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.36.

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issues). On reflection, this is not so odd, since it is the shake-up of old hierarchies in the labour market and professional world which has provided the most provocative challenges to cherished images of gender — even if, anti-feminist backlash to the contrary, much of it bears so little relation to earlier feminist visions. Today, gender anxieties seem ubiquitous: whether triggered by family breakdown, new 'laddism', teenage pregnancy or some other form of sexual or social panic. Here, feminism is often indicted as the cause (most recently broadcast here in Melanie Phillips's treacherous *The Sex-Change Society*: haranguing the successes of feminism for destroying the family, neglecting children, marginalizing men, and making the world a worse place for women as well).<sup>5</sup>

Such a backlash takes many forms. It is also evident in the return to Darwinian fundamentalism and the rise of evolutionary psychology. In Britain this has meant promoters like the philosopher Helena Cronin regularly appearing in the media to describe our basic evolved human natures. Here we find both women and men reductively stereotyped as almost opposed species, with their own distinct agendas, endorsement for the traditional male-headed family and explanations of social violence in terms of men's frustrated breeding habits.<sup>6</sup> Unconnected as these prescriptions are to any likely or even possible social shifts, they do provide a diversion from any analysis of actual social problems, while holding women responsible for generating them. The turn to genetic reductionisms, old and new, also reflects a cultural resurgence of authoritarian belief in experts: promoting science, and in particular, molecular biologists, as the latest Gods of change, dismissing as irrelevant people's engagement in collective struggle for change.

Yet, when not being reproached as the author of social problems, feminism, or at least the forces of feminisation, are sometimes called upon as the solution to social problems, in a world seen as overly commercialised, competitive and uncaring. Thus feminism's promotion of women's interests may be endorsed in mainstream politics (although fewer and fewer women MPs — like Tessa Jowell and Margaret Jay, charged with overseeing women's affairs in the Cabinet — like to call themselves 'feminists'), even as it remains anxiously traduced on all sides. Consistent with this ambivalence, when we do hear about talk of gender today, it is most often of the problems of boys and men: problems, however, overdetermined by the now neglected issues of class and 'race'.<sup>7</sup> Such public contention means that, as any sort of feminist, it

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<sup>5</sup> Melanie Phillips, *The Sex-Change Society: Feminised Britain and the Neutered Male* (London: The Social Market Foundation, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Helena Cronin and Oliver Curry, 'Pity Poor Men', *The Guardian*, 28 February 2000, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> See Debbie Epstein (ed.), *Failing Boys: Issues in Gender and Achievement* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998).

can be hard to remain detached from the political arena, whether or not we feel able to preserve or refashion our political visions or collective engagements.

## Gains and Losses

It would seem that neither changing times, nor new conceptual tools for analysing relations between women and men have brought us any nearer agreement on women's (or men's) place in the world. Whether in popular understandings, theoretical scholarship or differing political trajectories, impassioned rejection of traditional gender identities has accompanied staunch re-affirmation of them. Today the backlash against feminism, growing steadily from the 1980s, is unmistakable. It is most explicit in the popular dissemination of controversial claims by evolutionary psychologists, presupposing antithetical genetic blueprints for men and women: 'Feminists Meet Mr Darwin', as North American science writer Robert Wright taunts feminism, in articles widely circulated in England in the 1990s. The recent entry of women into almost every public arena which once excluded them has undoubtedly served to fuel much of the apprehension in what some now see as very troubled times.

Roy Porter and Sarah Dunant opened their collection of essays published to mark the end of the twentieth century, *The Age of Anxiety*, by noting that half the adult population in England seemed to believe that things were only getting worse, and what many of them had in mind were gender matters: family breakdown, working mothers, single parents (largely reflecting changes in women's choices and objectives); fear of crime and violence (primarily reflecting men's increasing levels of destructive behaviour — both against themselves, and others).<sup>8</sup> In close agreement, when Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels carried out a survey of fourteen different psychotherapy organizations in the early 1990s, he found that gender concerns were the primary political issues brought into therapy for every professional body he contacted, across all countries — first of all, and usually overwhelmingly, gender issues for women, followed by gender issues for men.<sup>9</sup>

Arguments about women nowadays call upon curiously competing narratives of their lives. Depending on our framing, we find two deeply contrasting images. One is gloomy. In the current era of economic globalisation, there has been a huge expansion in low-waged, insecure jobs worldwide, including Britain. This has occurred alongside determined efforts to cut-back welfare benefits over the last two decades, with the specific targeting of state assistance for single mothers and the disabled, in line with widespread

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Dunant and Roy Porter (eds.), *The Age of Anxiety* (London: Virago, 1996), p.

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Samuels, *The Political Psyche* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 223-4.

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government promotion of the low-tax, free market tenets of economic neo-liberalism. The ideological attack on social welfare has in turn incited a renewed emphasis on the importance of traditional family life and, in particular, of father's rights and responsibilities. Women, overall more engaged in the work of child-care and nurturing, suffer specifically, or disproportionately, from welfare cutbacks and can all too easily become the scapegoats of paternalistic rhetorics. Many women also remain at the harshest end of deepening social inequalities, especially in the low-paid, low-status jobs in the service sector or on the factory floor.

Those who have researched the effects of the last two decades of change on women in England report that while many women have made considerable progress since the 1980s, the lives of other women were getting worse and worse — especially single parents and the elderly.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, receding expectations of social provision have served to undermine precisely those goals for which the women's movement in the 1970s fought so vigorously, leading to a turning away from militant protest and the disparaging of collective action. Thus, organized resistance to changes in government spending dramatically decreased over this period. Sylvia Bashevkin summarises what she calls the 'triple whammy' effect on many women in Britain, the USA and Canada: 'Work pressures, cuts to government spending, and the advocacy crunch — taken together — meant many women faced low pay, no job security, less of a government safety net on which to rely when they were old, sick or unemployed, and fewer opportunities to protest. Those facing the harshest extremes of poverty were also less and less likely to be white, as racial disadvantage deepened in more unequal times.'<sup>11</sup>

Back to basics, women's pay as a percentage of men's has remained relatively stable in England, at about 60%, for most of this century — despite a sharp rise following the Equal Pay Act of 1970, which began to reverse by 1977. Women's average earnings are still at least a third less than men's (women working part-time average only 58% of men's hourly earnings; full-timers' hourly average has risen to 80% of men's, but their weekly wage remains far less, owing to men's longer hours, overtime and additional benefits).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, women's lower wages relative to men persists throughout the world, and where women's share has risen (from around 62% to 72% in the USA, in three decades) it is mainly attributable to the decline in men's wages.

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<sup>10</sup> Caroline Glendinning and Jane Miller (eds.), *Women and Poverty in Britain* (London: Harvester, 1992)

<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Bashevkin, *Women on the Defensive: Living Through Conservative Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> These figures for February 1999 come from the Incomes Data Service, 77 Bastwick Street, London EC1V 3TT.

Meanwhile, housework and childcare are still primarily seen as women's responsibility in the majority of households – including dual-income families. A more demanding workplace makes it harder than ever to harmonise jobs and outside commitments, especially for mothers. Thus, research consistently indicates that women have far less leisure time than men, and many feel guilty about neglecting their children's needs because of the demands of their jobs. Even in the poorest families living on benefit, men still have pocket money for themselves, while women do not, according to a recent report from the Policy Studies Unit in Britain.

Men's violence against women and sexual abuse remain endemic. Indeed, the reporting of rape, child sexual abuse and serious violence against women has been increasing in Britain since the mid-1980s, yet conviction rates have been decreasing. (At the same time, funding for rape-counselling, women's refuges and the re-housing of battered women and their children has shrunk).<sup>13</sup> Even feminist campaigns against violence, rape and child sexual abuse have, when absorbed into mainstream political agendas, often been twisted to accommodate more traditional moral crusades waged in the name of the intrinsic vulnerability of women and the sexual innocence of children, both in need of 'protection' from predatory male sexuality. (Here, certain forms of radical feminist analysis – especially that borrowed from North American anti-pornography campaigners, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon — bear some responsibility for the appropriation.) Overall, this picture has led some people to wonder whether the struggle to improve the lot of women over the last three decades has led us nowhere, or even rebounded against women.

But that is too simple. Tilt the frame just a little, and a second, very different picture comes into focus. Welfare reform, new policies for single mothers, and an emphasis on paternal duties are characteristically couched in the language of personal freedoms and responsibilities, which so many young women were seeking for themselves from the 1960s onwards. Indeed, as others have noticed, and the mass national mourning for princess Diana encapsulated, a new belief in the importance of sharing feelings and emotions, in ways traditionally associated with women, abounds today on radio, TV, and self-help books — appropriating earlier feminist discourses of collective aspirations and disclosures of pain and frustration. Moreover, the choices open to women have increased remarkably in recent decades, nearly all undermining former patriarchal presumptions and dramatically reducing women's economic dependence on men. Government statistics here show that many women now delay motherhood until they feel economically secure; more cohabit and marry later; more divorce and separate; more remain

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<sup>13</sup> Sue Lees, *Carnal Knowledge: Rape on Trial* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996).

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childless and more raise children on their own or outside traditional nuclear families.

This has all been made possible primarily by what has been called the 'feminisation' of the economy — with full-time jobs in manufacturing industries disappearing, as jobs in the service sector expand. Clerical jobs still account for the largest group of women workers in developed countries, but women have also made rapid progress within most professional and managerial jobs, especially as doctors, lawyers, accountants and business administrators — even if rarely reaching the top levels. Indeed, rather than flaunting any observable or intrinsic 'difference' from men, childless young professional women are working longer hours, and earning slightly more (104%) of equivalent men's earnings.<sup>14</sup> As many others have noticed, young women especially are becoming the most sought after workers in a range of professional jobs. Meanwhile, the domain of women's lives, once near-invisible, has moved closer to the forefront of both national and international politics, in dialogue which has become more blind to the dynamics of class, and more equivocal about ethnic and immigrant issues.

It would be foolish not to accept that the once prevailing assumption of women's inferiority to men has been decisively overturned in the wake of second-wave feminism. Blatant sexism and violence against women still make their repellent presence felt in the daily lives of many women. But they are less and less likely to remain invisible or free from condemnation and resistance in the way they once were.

## **The Future of Gender**

What are we to make of these radically contrasting configurations? How we respond — whether we see little significant progress, or believe that women have now gained all that they may reasonably expect and need — will depend upon our particular political, ethical and psychological convictions. Visions of the fate of women have long been emblematic of the future. Either the externalisation of differences between the sexes or, more often, their final elimination, has filled the minds of men and women with anxious dread and active longing. Given the progressive decline of absolute inequalities of power between the sexes (whatever their continuing particular manifestations), we may presume to find here male dread, female optimism. But again things are not quite so simple.

It is not only men who mourn what they see as the collapse of sexual difference, like those cultural critics — the modish Jean Baudrillard for one —

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<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Franks, *Having None of It: Women, Men and the Future of Work* (London: Granta, 1999), p.7.

lamenting that we are now all accelerating into a void where nothing is either masculine or feminine.<sup>15</sup> So too does the media's favourite feminist, Germaine Greer. Writing apocalyptically in the latest book, *The Whole Woman*, she insists that women have colluded in their own 'inevitable extinction'. Settling for equality with men has meant that 'real women are being phased out': a process which, like Baudrillard, she sees as 'almost complete'. Still programmed to serve, women have allowed themselves to become nothing more than replaceable body parts — For His Eyes Only. After all these years of feminist protest, Greer argues, all too many women, especially young women, retain the meretricious ways she has always tended to see in the more frivolous members of her sex. Women still face painful contradictions, she asserts, quite reasonably; indeed, the problems they face 'have never been more bruising than they are now', she adds, much less convincingly.<sup>16</sup>

However, other forecasters see things very differently. Some celebrate the collapse of sexual difference as an increase in the endless possibilities for self-fashioning – prosthetic or otherwise. There are feminists who replace Greer's dystopian dream with a utopia of their own, declaring these days the dawning of the millennium of women. 'Young girls, especially, seem to be a new breed of women,' Natasha Walter applauds in her millennial reflections, *What is the New Feminism?* Walter is herself one of the highly successful new breed of women journalists, now regularly appearing in the up-market English broadsheets and talk shows, where she expresses great optimism about the younger members of her sex: 'Not only do they surpass boys in examinations at all levels, they have begun to speak a new language, and it is one of buoyant confidence'; they can now combine 'traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine work and clothes and attitudes'. What a burden of significance these young women bear for so many today! However, in contrast to Greer, Walters observes something that does not seem to trouble her older counterpart, 'besides women's freedom lies another truth: the truth of their continuing inequality'.<sup>17</sup>

## Embracing Complexity

Back in the nineteenth century, it was socialist thinkers who first used the emancipation of women as the measure of human progress. Given the traditional vulnerability of women and children as the primary victims of

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<sup>15</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'Transpolitics, Transexuality, Transaesthetics', in *The Disappearance of Art and Politics*, ed. W. Stearns and W. Chaloupka (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 20-22.

<sup>16</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Transworld, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Natasha Walter, *What is the New Feminism?* (London: Little Brown, 1998), p. 4.

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society's failure to care and protect, it made sense to do so. Some of the time, it still does. But the trick is to understand the complexity of the problems surrounding the changes in women's lives, and to avoid collapsing them into any linear narrative: whether of advance or retreat. In my view, we would also do well to avoid making presumptions about either the maintenance or the final transcendence of gender polarities. We may, however, want to ask why it is always women who must remain the symbolic carriers of both continuity and change in the march of history; we may want to ask, as well, why it is women who routinely bear the blame for the anxieties attending social transformation. Can the altruism and compassion once attributed so peculiarly to women really hold back the risks and injuries inflicted on societies with the near universal ascendance of ideological commitment to the pursuit of wealth and subservience to market forces?

My own thoughts have always been that while women's understanding of their specific circumstances may indeed at certain times inspire important solidarities and struggles (as when mothers have joined together to fight for the welfare of their own children, or their communities) it can hardly be relied upon to sustain a progressive politics, let alone change the course of history. With conceptions of a nurturing femininity always at least partially at odds with women's pursuit of their own freedom and authority, women are often as ensnared as men in self-serving evasions of the afflictions of others. Childless women today, for example, are said to be particularly hostile to mothers gaining concessions in the workplace, while Ruth Lea (currently the leading spokesperson for the Institute of Directors) battles all-comers (who are sometimes men, like Richard Reeves, from the progressive Industrial Society), in her opposition to any and all concessions around shorting working time or employment legislation which recognises people's domestic requirements and responsibilities.

Such thoughts, one may think, hardly need repeating today. The seductive author Adam Phillips recently expressed his own wariness, still so uncharacteristic of his fellow psychoanalysts in Britain, about answering questions concerning the differences between the sexes: 'It feels to me that when I start talking about gender I start talking in clichés'. He sees gender as referring to the ways in which we become used to dividing up emotional labour between women and men, ways of thinking in allegories, which tend to be either 'too comforting or too oppressive'.<sup>18</sup> Far too comforting, it seems to me. Many women in Britain have proved themselves adept handmaidens of recent managerial manipulations in the latest restructuring of labour.

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<sup>18</sup> Adam Phillips, 'Being Alive', in *The Art of Life* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), p. 181.

## Unfinished Business

It is time for greater realism all around. We still live in a world haunted by cultural and personal fixations on sexual difference. Yet, at the opening of the twenty-first century, few of the patriarchal presumptions of old have unquestioned legitimacy. In the West, women are everywhere visible in the public domain as men's equals and partners. In private, those women who can are increasingly choosing if, when, and for how long they wish to live with men; and whether and when they wish to have children – and who to employ to care for them and do the housework if they do have children. Technologies, so feared by those who would stay true to Mother Nature, have continued to remove some of the worst burdens and pains that were once the inescapable fate of female experience.

Nevertheless, women in general, but especially women who (willingly or unwillingly) take on the domestic responsibilities of caring for dependent people, remain at the cutting edge of the contradictions of capitalist economies – not because they are born female, but because they often are overburdened by their responsibilities. In today's 'flexible' labour market, where only a minority of the workforce have well-paid and secure jobs, a punishing work ethic has almost erased demands for shorter working hours. Fast movements of capital, in search of cheap labour, has threatened to destroy local communities, boosting a culture of privacy where joining the local gym replaces the expansion of democratically run resource centres. Visions of a society which takes greater collective responsibility for the welfare and security of others are disarmed by the relentless promotion of self-help and individual therapies. The fear and contempt of the 'feminine' which men once brazenly espoused is now often replaced by superficial accommodation to it, in hollow mimicry of older feminist discourses of compassion and equality.

Overall, what women have gained, in relation to the dreams that the feminists I knew best once shared, as we fought for a more egalitarian, caring world, remain meagre. Some things have changed utterly. Others have proved obdurate. This is why we still need a feminism which is serious about both the potential for and the obstacles to political change, and which knows that we are never outside either the personal or the cultural. For certain, the political never simply reduces to the personal, nor to the unfettered analysis of culture; even though attention to desire, discourse and the promotion of caring and responsible sexual politics remain one of the crucial resources feminism delivers to politics. But it is only by finding ways to renew commitments to effective vehicles for change that feminists can hope to open spaces for more women to flaunt the diverse pleasures, entitlements and self-questioning, to which recent feminist thinking has encouraged us all to aspire (often, disconcertingly, in line with late capitalist consumerism). In my view, this

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means women collectively cherishing the existence of the Left: whether in alliance with whatever social democratic forces survive within the bias of New Labour (fighting to preserve redistributive egalitarian instinct, while opposing traditional paternalism); with trade unions (continuing to overturn their erstwhile straight, white, male hegemony); with whatever manifestations of local or international solidarities emerge to defend those at the sharpest end of market forces or regressive nationalisms, persisting racisms and xenophobia.

We do still need the continuing provocation which feminist inquiry can arouse. We need its collective efforts to find solutions when the dreams and realities of specific groups of women (and men) are most awry. We need its potential, at its most thoughtful, to embrace complexity and conflict in the experiences of individual women and men, as the resilience of images of masculinity as power are shaken up by the actualities of shifting gender dynamics and the fragilities of gendered and sexual identities. Above all, we need what were once its goals for equality and for more collective responsibility for all human life. There is still everything to fight for in drawing out the potentialities and the pitfalls of differing versions of feminism.

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## Information Society Theory as Ideology: a Critique

Nicholas Garnham

The term communication can legitimately be used to cover a wide range of phenomena in both the natural and human sciences, from genetic codes to neurological processes, from the pragmatics of interpersonal communication to the Internet. Indeed this very malleability of the concept has been repeatedly used in the past within what Miege has dubbed 'la pensée communicationelle' to make imperialist claims for communication theory as the master theory explaining all human life from the cell to global society. I would wish to resist such hubris. However given the role of symbol making, especially language, and the culture making ability based upon it, as a characteristic that defines the human species, it is certainly true that no theories of human social, life can bypass communication as integral to constructing any description or explanation of the nature of human social life.

Within the broad field of what can be described as communication I wish to focus on the study of social communication defined as the structures and processes in and through which humans create/produce, distribute/exchange and appropriate/consume symbolic forms. I take communication in this sense to be an indispensable, but analytically distinguishable and historically evolving, level of any social formation.

I do not believe that there is A theory of communication any more than there is A theory of society. Rather there are theories of communication which are descriptions and explanations of a given range of social phenomena based upon empirical evidence and focused on the solution of a given problem of social understanding. Such theories will be necessarily historical because the only evidence we have for social practices and structures is the past — even if it is the recent past. This as we shall see has extremely important consequences for contemporary theoretical debate, much of which is about the historical temporality within which we construct our explanations as well as the epistemological validity of historical accounts. The two dominant theoretical paradigms in the field — The Information Society and Postmodernism (in some versions these are co-terminous) — in large part stand or fall on a judgment of the nature and speed of historical change. Are we or are we not experiencing an epochal break and if we are what is the nature of the new type of society into which we are moving?

The history of the study of social communication has been characterised by a series of dominant paradigms which are themselves the product of wider historical currents — effects and functionalism, dominant ideology, audiences/consumption. In this socially and historically determined series it is arguable that Information Society theory is now taking its place as

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the dominant paradigm. Confrontation with the theory of the Information Society, both as science and ideology, is now unavoidable. Here is a theory of communication massively presenting itself as both a way of understanding the present historical moment and the dominant development trends in society and at the same time as the favoured legitimating ideology for the dominant economic and political power holders.

The term Information Society is now used in the policy arena — for instance in European Commission documents<sup>1</sup> — more as a mantra to justify whatever policy is proposed than as a substantive analysis. However, lying behind the term is a real theoretical construct. For the purpose of both exposition and critique I will focus on the version of this theory laid out by Manuel Castells in his recent *magnum opus* *The Rise of the Network Society*.<sup>2</sup> I do this because Castells's is the most sophisticated version available and it is always most productive to critique a theory in its strongest version. Tilting at straw men may occasionally be fun but it is not ultimately very productive. Based upon a wide range of research and empirical evidence from around the world it far out distances the juvenile *aperçus* of the Negropontes<sup>3</sup> and Tofflers<sup>4</sup> of this world. Furthermore Castells firmly situates his theoretical project within the Enlightenment tradition of critical emancipatory social science.

## Communication Theory as Emancipatory Social Science

Since we all have limited endowments of time and energy, the exercise of human curiosity alone is, in my view, insufficient to justify the choice of a field of study or the questions to be pursued within it. We cannot justify the effort of communication theory merely in terms of the pervasiveness, even less the modishness, of some of the epiphenomena we study, such as television or the Internet. The study of communication as I have defined it has to be seen as part of the Enlightenment project of the human sciences to understand our social world in order, in so far as possible, to free humans from oppression, by nature or their fellow human beings, experienced as fate.

This project has insistently raised and attempted to answer a number of key questions. The most important of these is the question of social order. What is it that enables social formations characterised by increasing complexity and specialisation of social functions — especially the division of labour — and spatial extension to be co-ordinated to the extent that we can talk about a

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *Europe and the Global Information Society* (Brussels: European Council, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995)

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (London: Collins, 1980).

society or a culture at all? The second key question is the obverse of that of order, namely that of social reproduction, development or change; the attempt to specify the conditions and forces that lead either to the reproduction of such social forms or to their replacement by new social forms. The third key question is what, within this process of social co-ordination and reproduction, is the relationship between structure and agency and, as a related question, how does agency work? Given that we are culture-creating animals — that we inescapably endow our actions with meaning — what weight are we to place respectively on coercion, the rational calculation of self interest, or on legitimising cultural norms in our explanation of social co-ordination and reproduction?

It is clear that human social development has been, from a very early stage, in part dependent upon the development of technologies and institutions of social communication which break out spatially and temporarily from face-to-face interpersonal communication based upon speech and gesture. How we choose to explain that relationship between communication and other social structures and practices is precisely a key matter for theoretical dispute. But we do not necessarily need to follow those theorists who make communications the primary explanatory variable — such as Innis<sup>5</sup> or contemporary Information Society theorists — to draw three important lessons for current theory. First, that social communication becomes dependent upon the mobilisation of and access to scarce resources, including human capital resources. For instance, all humans are equally endowed with the capacity for speech, but literacy requires training and thus has been historically, and is still, differentially distributed. This leads inexorably to the need to understand how a given mode of production structures control over these resources and with what effect on what is communicated by whom to whom and for what purpose. Second, all social communication depends upon and is shaped by technology from iconic representation and above all the invention of writing onwards. We thus need to see the development of these technologies within the wider history and sociology of technology — its genesis, deployment and use. Again, this is a crucial element in the assessment of the validity of Information Society theory. Third, that the development of systems of mediated social communication was accompanied — and, it can be argued, produced — by a class of communication specialists. Most social theories in effect have embedded within them — and Information Society theory is no exception — a theory of the role of these specialists, whether identified as priests, intellectuals or knowledge workers. Certainly no theory of social communication can bypass analysis of the formation and social function of this group.

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (1950; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

## **Information Society Theory as Ideology: a Critique**

### **Castells's Information Society: the Argument in Outline**

How then does Information Society theory address these issues? What kind of explanation for social structure and dynamics is being offered?

Although Castells attempts to retain a notion of human agency and is careful to point to the importance and possibility of differing national policy responses and to the growing importance of social movements and local forms of cultural resistance, in the end the Information Society, as he presents it, is technologically determined. The source of the dynamic of social change and what are seen as epochal and global transformations in the structure of the economy, in social stratification, politics and culture, is a technological paradigm based upon a cluster of innovation in information and communication technology largely stemming from Silicon Valley in the 1970s. Drawing on Innis, McLuhan and Bell, while acknowledging the influence of Schumpeter and Weber, his argument is that a small group of innovators responded to capitalism's crisis of profitability by introducing a set of new technologies that massively raised productivity. This then had three major impacts on the economy: (a) it led to the creation of the so-called network firm as a response to increased levels of competition induced by accelerated innovation and thus product cycles (through a process of what he calls 'knowledge working upon knowledge'); (b) an increased level of globalization — particularly for finance capital — was made possible by the ability to operate globally in real-time computerised telecommunication networks; and (c) there arose a new division of labour, polarised between knowledge workers who have the skills and adaptability to operate in networks (what he calls the interactors) and the increasingly fragmented, insecure industrial and service workers who are fixed in location and at the margins of the networks and at the mercy of network flexibility (what he calls the interacted). These developments in turn work their effects, as we shall see, in culture and politics, with the end of class struggle and the national politics based upon it, on the rise of new social movements, and in the creation of a 'culture of real virtuality'.

While I would not wish to deny the reality of some of these developments in economic structure, the labour market, politics and culture to which Castells points, there are serious problems with the theoretical explanation of them which has, as always, implications for political action.

In analysing Castells's theory of the network society we need to pose three questions.

- (a) what kind of explanation of social restructuring is being offered?
- (b) does the evidence support such explanations or can we draw different analytical conclusions from the same evidence?
- (c) are the processes identified sufficiently novel to justify the claim that we are entering a new era of informational capitalism, the network society and the information age?

## A New Mode of Production

The general structure of Castells's argument is clear. It derives from the classic tradition of political economy and deploys both an expressive totality and base/superstructure model to explain the relationship between changes in the mode of production and changes in society at large, particularly culture and politics. Castells claims that we are entering a new information age characterised by a new mode of production, informational capitalism, and a new global social structure, the network society. This transformation is driven, or determined at the base, by a change in the mode of production from industrial to informational capitalism which, in its turn, is technologically determined by developments in information and communication technology, which exercises its effect primarily by raising productivity. That this process is technologically determined is made clear when Castells defines Informational as 'a specific form of social organisation in which information generation, processing and transmission become the fundamental sources of production and power because of new technological conditions emerging in this historical period'.<sup>6</sup> This process of dynamic change produces changes in the organisation of production and the structure of the market on a global scale, creating the network enterprise and the network society within which domination is exercised via information flows through global communication networks.

There are then two alternative, although not necessarily incompatible, explanations of the effect of these developments on the superstructure of culture and politics. On the one hand informational capitalism restructures the labour process and the labour market and by so doing restructures class relations, while at the same time spatially rearranging global power relations, in what Castells calls a space of flows, such that the power of territorially based and politically accountable entities, especially nation states, are undermined. On the other hand the development of information and communications technologies in the form of the multi-media potential of the Information Superhighway have a direct impact on culture and thus on our understanding of the world and thus on politics by creating a 'culture of real virtuality'.

Huge epochal and totalizing claims are being made here and a technologically determinist theory of communication has become *the* theory of society with a vengeance. Not only is it technologically determinist but it is also structuralist. For all Castells's attempts to keep the flame of political hope and action and his attachment to social movement theory alive, in the end it is the logic of the structure that determines because the network constitutes a new social morphology and 'the network society (is) characterised by the pre-eminence of social morphology over social action'.

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<sup>6</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 21.

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### Castells's Argument in Detail

Let me now turn to look in more detail at the structure of Castells's argument and the evidence adduced to support it.

Following Daniel Bell, Castells argues that societies are characterised by what he calls modes of production (but would more usually be called relations of production), which determine the distribution of the surplus, and by modes of development (which would more normally be called forces of production), which determine the level and quality of the surplus. The *primum mobile* of the system is productivity, the level of which is technologically determined:

The social relations of production, and thus the mode of production, determine the appropriation and use of the surplus. A separate yet fundamental question is the level of such surplus determined by the productivity of a particular process of production, that is to say by the ratio of the value to each unit of output to the value of each unit of input. Productivity levels are themselves dependent on the relationship between labour and matter, as a function of the use of the means of production by the application of energy and knowledge. This process is characterised by technical relations of production, defining modes of development. Thus modes of development are the technological arrangements through which labour works on matter to generate the product, ultimately determining the level and quality of the surplus. Each mode of development is defined by the element that is fundamental in fostering productivity in the production process.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the shift from industrial to informational capitalism is driven and explained by the new sources of productivity growth, 'the technology of knowledge generation, information processing and symbol communication'. There are a number of problems with the way Castells conceptualises the informational mode of development and its relation to the mode of production which produce a serious fault line at the very heart of his theoretical argument.

### Productivity

The first, and this is common to the whole post-industrial, information society tradition stemming from Bell, relates to the concept of surplus, which in turn affects the meaning of the concept productivity. The issue is, first, whether we define surplus in technical terms as a relation between inputs and outputs

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<sup>7</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 16.

within the production process, or in social terms as a relation between consumption and investment; and, second, what numerator we use to measure differences and thus the level of productivity. This is a problem that the rather outmoded concept of the labour theory of value and the related concept of surplus value were designed to address. This is particularly important because, as Castells and others who think like him are forced to admit, the available statistics on productivity do not support the revolutionary claims being made for the impact of information and communication technology.<sup>8</sup> As productivity is currently measured, in input/output terms, the productivity of the system is independent of distributional relations — that is to say labour has to be seen as homogenous and measurable, however crudely, in terms of hours worked aggregated over the economy as a whole. If one thinks of an economy as a producer of human material welfare in conditions of material scarcity and in the context of the non-expandable real biological time of human producers and consumers, then measuring productivity in terms of human time inputs makes crude sense, since what is at issue is the level of goods and services, we can consume during a given real life time, including non-work time. For both individuals and society as a whole, hours worked (accepting the problem of measuring non-paid work hours) compared with levels of consumption, whether measured in monetary terms or in terms of a consumption bundle, remains the best available measure of our standard of living and the extent of our freedom from the realm of necessity. The problem here for the information society thesis is that the model is essentially thermo-dynamic. The labour theory of value works as a model for the process so long as labour time is largely a matter of energy expended and consumption largely a matter of energy reconstituted or saved. This model has worked because historically the major rises in productivity have come directly or indirectly through the technological harnessing and application of energy and rises in welfare have been rises in energy consumed and a decline in hours worked. The problem with the productivity as driver model is the question of whether this can meaningfully be applied to non-material production, to a non-entropic economy of bits as opposed to an entropic economy of atoms. This may indeed be why we cannot measure the claimed productivity growth derived from the information and communication technology revolution, but then the proposed technologically determined explanation does not work either.

If we look, on the other hand, at surplus as a relation between consumption and investment, then it is determined historically not by the forces but by the relations of production. This failure adequately to conceptualise the

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<sup>8</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 74; see also Jeff Madrick, 'Computers: Waiting for the Revolution', *New York Review of Books* XLV, 5 (23 March 1998), pp. 29-33, and Daniel Sichel, *The Computer Revolution: an Economic Perspective* (New York: Brookings Institute Press, 1998).

## **Information Society Theory as Ideology: a Critique**

relations of production flows through, as we shall see, into a failure, crucially damaging to the structure of the theory, to understand the relation between technology, the labour process and labour market re-structuring, the relation between technological innovation and competition, and the relation between production and circulation, in particular finance capital.

### **The Impact of ICTs**

In fact, hidden within Castells's definition of the new informational mode of development lie three quite different explanations for its impact, each of which will have different consequences for social structure and process.

(a) the impact of ICTs directly, as both product and process innovation, on material production: if there are productivity improvements there should be no problem of capturing them in existing measures and they do not show up;

(b) the impact on productivity through the impact on the organization of production: here the network enterprise is seen as the driver of productivity growth. There are two problems. First, there is the need to separate organizational structures and costs, which are overheads and may indeed lower productivity, from those which do raise productivity. The second is to distinguish the contribution of productivity enhancing organizational change, which depends upon ICTs, from that which doesn't. A major problem for Castells's argument, as he himself admits, is that two of the most successful world economies in terms of productivity growth, Japan and Germany, have a relatively low level of ICT uptake in production.

c) the impact of the informational mode of development lies in 'knowledge working upon knowledge', what Bell called theoretical knowledge, which he placed at the heart of his explanatory framework.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Role of Theoretical Knowledge**

This important confusion then works its way into the next stage of the argument. The confusion surrounds, first, the definition of the informational mode and the nature of the determinations at work. There is here, as in Bell and other information society theorists, an ambivalent shifting between explanation in terms of information and communication technology and its impact on the organisation and output of material production on the one hand,

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society : a Venture in Social Forecasting* (London : Heinemann Educational, 1974).

and on the other an explanation in terms of the information, where the key source of increased productivity and added value (these are often confused) is what is described as 'knowledge working on knowledge'. Here an important distinction needs to be made between the following:

- (a) knowledge production processes that raise productivity by feeding into the material production process, such as developments in computer-aided design or robotics;
- (b) knowledge production processes which improve the quality of the product or service. These will have a differential impact on productivity and welfare in products and service. For instance, innovation in medical science may raise either some or all people's welfare by improving the quality of the medical services they receive without raising the productivity of health workers;
- (c) knowledge production as a source of competitive advantage via product or service innovation.

While knowledge working on knowledge, or theoretical or specialised knowledge as it is sometimes called, has clearly contributed over a long historical period to increasing productivity, it is not clear either that the trend has been raised by the development of ICTs or that the productivity of knowledge production itself has been increased.

In fact Castells, and others who argue like him within a Schumpeterian paradigm, place great stress on innovation. Indeed one of the major political arguments he draws from his analysis is that the major remaining role for the nation state is the creation of innovation clusters in order to enhance national competitiveness. In so doing he fails to distinguish the role of innovation within inter-firm competition and its role in enhancing system wide productivity. Here we come to a major problem with the technological determinism of the system.

### **Informationalism**

Each mode of development has also a structurally determined performance principle around which technological processes are organised: industrialism is oriented towards maximising output; informationalism is oriented towards technological development, that is towards the accumulation of knowledge and towards higher levels of complexity in information processing. While higher levels of knowledge may result in higher levels of output per unit of input, it is the pursuit of knowledge and information that characterises the technological production function under informationalism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, pp. 17-18.

## **Information Society Theory as Ideology: a Critique**

Thus Castells formulates a tautology which not only does not explain anything, but in fact abandons the previous explanation in terms of productivity growth. It stems from a misunderstanding of the so-called performance principle of capitalism, which in its turn stems from the original mischaracterization of the relation between forces and relations of production. Capitalism's performance principle is *not* maximisation of output, although this may or may not be the end result. It has been a system oriented to and producing economic growth because its performance principle is accumulation through competition. It is competition that drives innovation and productivity growth across the economy as a whole. Indeed for both Schumpeter and Hayek the case for capitalist competitive markets rests upon their efficiency as search mechanisms and creators of innovation rather than upon their efficiency creating characteristics in the sense of minimising the ratio of inputs to outputs. But at the level of the firm innovation may not raise productivity at all. Its profits may derive from capturing market share and the rent that derives from a temporary monopoly of unique product or service characteristics. Castells claims without producing any evidence that the network economy has become more competitive on a global scale and that the mobilisation of the informational paradigm has both caused and is a response to this growth in competitiveness. While the increased openness of national markets will induce a temporary rise in the level of competition, the resulting competition for global market share is likely to create oligopoly at a higher level. In short, the system as a whole does not become more competitive. The problem is that there is much evidence of increased concentration, and an accompanying rise in levels of corporate profitability, which does not usually mean an increase in competitiveness. This increasing concentration is in part attributable, not to increased competitiveness, but to the increasing returns to scale and resulting rent capture in high-tech innovation. Thus developments in organisational and market structure may have more to do with innovation as a barrier to market entry in technology market than it has to do with raising productivity.

But this misunderstanding of the role of competition as a driver of the capitalist accumulation process also undermines Castells's explanation of the structure of the new network society and the labour market restructuring that accompanies it. At issue here is not only the nature but the novelty of these processes since a claim is being advanced, as we should remember, that we are entering a new age.

### **The Role of Networks**

As I have explained, the concept of the network lies at the heart of Castells's theory. The argument is that it is the growth in the speed, reach and

functionality of communication networks that is driving economic and social development. This leads to:

- (a) organisational change — the rise to dominance of the network enterprise;
- (b) changes in market structure — globalization and the dominance of finance capital;
- (c) changes in the nature of labour and the structure of labour market on a global scale;
- (d) resulting changes in the nature of class power and class conflict;
- (e) a changing role for the nation state and other geographically situated centres of political power.

The concept of the network is used to mobilise three quite different arguments. The first, in some ways the most important for Castells, and at the same time the weakest, relates to globalization and finance capital. But all of them exaggerate the novelty of networks as forms of social and economic organisation within which power is exercised, and thus at the same time exaggerates both the extent and the novelty of the impact of ICTs. 'The network society is, for the time being, a capitalist society ... But this kind of capitalism is profoundly different from its historical predecessors. It has two fundamental distinctive features: it is global and it is structured to a large extent around a network of financial flows.'<sup>11</sup> Leaving aside what is meant by 'for the time being', we need to ask what is meant by this and is it novel enough to be described as a new form of capitalism?

Castells argues that the capitalist mode of production and the informational mode of development are articulated by finance capital's need for the knowledge and information generated and enhanced by information technology. Note that we are a long way here from productivity in the process of labour working on matter as the *primum mobile*. Now there is no question that a major driver of the global development of information and communication networks has been finance capital nor that it can sensibly be argued that the rise of a global financial market based upon high speed communication networks should raise productivity by accelerating the turnover time of capital. Nor is it in question that these developments have both increased the instability of the financial system and caused problems for the exercise of economic power by nation states and other politically accountable instances of power. The question is the extent of its novelty and the wider determining power Castells attributes to it.

Let us start with the concept of networks. The capitalist mode of production and its organisational forms have been underpinned by communication networks of remarkable extension and speed since at least

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<sup>11</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 471.

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Roland Hills hub and spoke reorganisation of the British postal service in the early nineteenth century. The system of monetary market exchange is itself such a network, in Castells's terms, a space of information flows. In neglecting this Castells is forced to argue that the capitalist class no longer exists because the network has created 'a faceless collective capitalist made up of financial flows operated by electronic networks'. But was this not precisely Marx's concept of the nature of capital? Castells's failure to understand the long term nature of the capitalist market system is underlined when he argues that this faceless collective capitalist 'is not simply the expression of the abstract logic of the market, because it does not truly follow the law of supply and demand: it responds to the turbulence and unpredictable movements of non calculable anticipation induced by psychology and society as much as by economic processes'. But have any serious analysts of the political economy of capitalism ever seen markets simply following the laws of supply and demand? Ever since finance capital broke free of industrial and mercantile capital by means of a long historical process of the creation of faceless collective capital through a banking and credit system, joint stock companies, stock, futures and insurance markets, capital flows have been subject to speculative turbulence and rent taking on the part of financial intermediaries. Keynes, among others, wrote of the impact of social psychology on this process. More damagingly, Castells seems to think that capital can induce production (whatever exactly that means), and that value can be created within the autonomous flows of capital on a global network without passing through a process of real production and consumption.

'Capital accumulation proceeds, and its value making is generated, increasingly, in the global financial markets enacted by information networks in the time-less space of financial flows.'<sup>12</sup> But of course capital has to invest if value is to be appropriated. In the words of Saskia Sassens, global capitalism has always to come down to earth.<sup>13</sup> Castells turns the relation between finance capital and the rest of the economy on its head: 'What is sometimes called the "real economy" and what I would be tempted to call the "unreal economy" since in the age of network capitalism the fundamental reality where money is made and lost, invested and saved, is in the financial sphere'. Even a swift glance at the list of the world's richest men would soon disabuse him of this fact. This failure to see that markets have always been networks also leads him to overestimate, in my view, the significance of the network enterprise and the role of circulation in relation to production.

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<sup>12</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 472.

<sup>13</sup> Saskia Sassens, *The Global City* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

## The Network Enterprise

But the concept of the network enterprise represents an important step in Castells's causal chain of determination between technology and culture. 'It is the convergence and interaction between a new technological paradigm and a new organisational logic that constitutes the historical foundation of the information economy.'<sup>14</sup> The thrust of the argument is a familiar post-Fordist one. It concerns the move from mass production to flexible production and an accompanying shift from 'vertical bureaucracies to the horizontal corporation'.<sup>15</sup> This new organisational form is structured around networks and appears to involve the dissolution of the firm or corporate unit as we have known it in favour of a constantly 'varying geometry' of horizontal relationships and alliances which go beyond and escape the managerial control of the firm.

However, it is at this point that the argument becomes most problematic. Here we need to distinguish between the organisation of the firm as a set of property relations and control over income flows, a set of principle/agent relations directed at accumulation through profit on the one hand, and the organisation of a specific production or labour process on the other. The relationship between the two has always been variable, both as between firms and sectors and historically. But its dialectic is contained, and has to be so contained for a capitalist mode of production to continue, within the bounds of property relations. Thus, whatever the flexibility of the network enterprise, the flexibility and porosity of organisational boundaries must always be limited. Once again it is not the technical but the social relations of production that are determinant. That is to say, the informational mode of development is developed for and put at the service of a set of property relations and the goal of accumulation, not *vice-versa*. Indeed, this is why networks have always presented a problem within a competitive market based economic system, as we can see now with Internet. Networks are essentially collaborative rather than competitive systems. They operate as a shared resource rather than a system of resource exchange. Because of network externalities they operate optimally as a monopoly. Everyone is connected, and without internal barriers to the interactive flows within them. Markets, on the other hand, need barriers because it is only at barriers, where exchange can be stopped or diverted, that prices can be charged and a share of value captured. As the future development of the Internet will undoubtedly demonstrate, using a network for the mutual exchange of information with seamless interconnection of all with all is inherently incompatible with using the network as a technical infrastructure for competitive market relations.

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<sup>14</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 164.

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The same dilemma is illustrated by intellectual property. Studies show that knowledge production is highest with free exchange. The problem is that in a society where the incentive structure is based upon extracting differential rents or profits on a market, it is necessary to create artificial intellectual property rights and thus barriers to the free exchange of knowledge. Thus Castells's dismissal of the classic theories of the modern corporation, whether Chandler's economies of scale and scope model,<sup>16</sup> or Williamson's transaction costs model,<sup>17</sup> are misplaced. It is true that new technologies of production and organisational co-ordination will change the trade-offs involved in maximising economies of scale and scope and minimising transaction costs. This may indeed effect the optimum size of the firm, the benefits to be derived from horizontal or vertical integration, the desirability of outsourcing and so on, although Castells's own statistics show an increase in multinational corporate concentration on a global scale. For property ownership reasons outlined above, these corporations must be vertical hierarchies, even if the production and circulation processes they control and from which they derive the necessary profits are more horizontal; even if, that is, the pyramid of power and control is flatter.

### The End of Class Struggle

This thesis of the rise of the network enterprise is then used as one of the bases for the argument of the end of class struggle between capital and labour. As we have seen, the first argument is that global financial networks have created 'a faceless collective capital' and thus there are no longer any capitalists. The problem with this argument is that it neglects the problem of human agency. Even if we accept a structural argument concerning the determining effect of the logic of capital, we are left with the problem of how this is operationalised in the actions of individual human agents. Class theory, in both its Marxist and Weberian forms, proposes a theory of interests as the motivating relay between structure and agency. It is assumed that there is struggle over scarce resources even if, in the Weberian version, this is not just confined to material resources, but includes the social and cultural resources covered by the term status. Thus the logic of capital only works its invisible magic as a social logic so long as individual capitalists, or the institutional agents of capital, are driven to accumulate through the search for profit on competitive markets. Similarly the Schumpeterian model of 'creative destruction', which in part underlies Castells's vision, depends upon the figure

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand: the Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> Oliver E. Williamson, *Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Implications: a Study in the Economics of Internal Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

of the entrepreneur as its *deus in machina*, and we are left with the problem of what drives the entrepreneur.

Because Castells, in common with many Information Society theorists, is forced to dispense with competitive property relations as the main driver, since it is technological change that is the explanatory variable, he is also forced to descend into mysticism to explain the power and actions of his new ruling class, the networkers. They are the carriers of a 'spirit of informationalism'. Overtly taking his cue from Weber and his conception of the Protestant Ethic as the Spirit of Capitalism Castells argues as follows:

... for the first time in history the basic unit of economic organisation is not a subject, be it individual (such as the entrepreneur or the entrepreneurial family) or collective (such as the capitalist class, the corporation, the state). The unit is the network ... What glues together this network? ... The networking form must have a cultural dimension of its own. Otherwise economic activity would be performed in a social/cultural vacuum.<sup>18</sup>

This is, in my view, a false question. It is not clear that new forms of economic organisation need — there is certainly no evidence that they now have — a new form of ethical justification. But Castells argues that the network is underpinned by the 'spirit of informationalism' which is 'the culture of creative destruction' accelerated to the speed of opto-electronic circuits that process its signals.<sup>19</sup> Descent into this kind of hyperbolic language, a form of rhetorical bullying, is a sure sign that the writer is on shaky theoretical and empirical ground. In describing the nature of this culture, the link between Information Society Theory and Postmodernism becomes clear. 'It is a culture, indeed, but a culture of the ephemeral, a culture of each strategic decision, a patchwork of experience and interests rather than a charter of rights and obligations. It is a multi-faceted, virtual culture'.<sup>20</sup> As we shall see, this spirit of informationalism then acts as an important determinant at the cultural level. But, perhaps most interesting of all, by drawing upon Weber Castells is in fact proposing a different explanatory model of social development. When he argues that Weber's work 'still remains the methodological cornerstone of any theoretical attempt at grasping the essence of cultural/institutional transformations that in history usher in a new paradigm of economic organisation', it is cultural/institutional transformation — the spirit of informationalism — that is the driver rather than technological change or productivity.

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<sup>18</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, pp. 198-9.

<sup>19</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 199.

<sup>20</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 199.

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### Labour

Leaving that question to one side Castells moves from the network to labour as the next step in the explanatory chain: 'The technological and managerial transformation of labour, and of production relationships, in and around the emerging network enterprise is the *main lever* by which the informational paradigm and the process of globalization effect society at large'<sup>21</sup> (my italics) ; 'Down in the deep of the nascent social structure a more fundamental process has been triggered by informational work, the disaggregation of labour, ushering in the network society'.<sup>22</sup>This is a classic argument from Marxist political economy and none the worse for that. The question we need to ask, however, is whether the picture of the restructuring of labour relations is realistic, and if so, is it a new phenomenon and are the conclusions drawn in terms of the changing nature of global power relations justified?

In the description of labour restructuring are embedded two different arguments. First, that there is a new global division of labour that decisively shifts power away from labour. Where it shifts power to — whether to capital or to the network — is precisely a matter of dispute. But labour loses power because it is individualised and disaggregated. 'Labour loses its collective identity, becomes increasingly individualised in its capacities, in its working conditions and in its interests and projects'.<sup>23</sup>

### The Networker

At the same time the labour market is dualised and characterised at the top by the rise of what are variously described as networkers, interactors, deciders, also often called knowledge workers or symbolic analysts. Castells is ambivalent as to whether these developments express an inescapable structural logic and whether this logic is or is not capitalist: 'Notwithstanding the formidable obstacles of authoritarian management and exploitative capitalism, information technologies call for greater freedom for better informed workers to deliver the full promise of its productive potential. The networker is the necessary agent of the network enterprise made possible by new information technologies.'<sup>24</sup> Here the networker is seen as a technologically determined social role but at the same time the potential hero of a new, freer and more flexible social order, which would or will supersede capitalism. This is a familiar argument from Bell and chimes well with the argument that a de-massified

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<sup>21</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 201.

<sup>22</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 279.

<sup>23</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 475.

<sup>24</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 223.

culture is the superstructural effect of the creation of this new type of worker. Perhaps most interestingly, it is a reworking of Marx's argument for the proletariat as the vanguard of history, but born this time round from technology and the network, not the contradictions of the relations of production.

On the other hand Castells argues that these trends do not stem from 'the structural logic of the informational paradigm, but are the result of the current restructuring of capital- labour relations, helped by the powerful tools provided by new information technologies and facilitated by a new organisational form, the network enterprise'.<sup>25</sup> Precisely, but this is not an argument for a new era but for a continuation of a long struggle between capital and labour within the labour process, of the separation of mental and manual labour and of what Beninger has called The Control Revolution.<sup>26</sup> That global capitalist organisation and the resulting international division of labour poses problems for the organisational co-ordination of labour and for the development of a common class consciousness would hardly have been news to nineteenth century socialists.

But there is also an argument about a shift of power from capital to information labour because, it is argued, 'the deployment of information technology increases dramatically the importance of human brain input into the work process'. The crucial points to be made here are:

(a) The need to distinguish between the growth of forms of mental labour and the shift from energy to brainpower as the dominant form of labour's human capital input into the production process as a long term process, and its impact on the capital labour relation. In short, the shift from energy to brainpower does not necessarily change the subordination of labour to capital.

(b) The need to distinguish between types of mental labour — for instance, between mental labour employed within the material production process, within circulation, within services, each with different effects on the over-all economic system and in its turn different from mental labour within public bureaucracies such as education, which have a socially mediated relationship to the production process.

(c) The need to distinguish between the indispensability of a certain factor of production — in this case information workers — and the exercise of strategic power.

In short, the argument about the changing nature of work, the structure of the labour market and their impact on culture and politics need to be integrated into

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<sup>25</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 273.

<sup>26</sup> James Beninger *The Control Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

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a wider ranging sociology of what I will call intellectuals — for instance, the work of Bourdieu, or Perkin's historical analysis of the Rise of Professional Society (Perkin, 1989),<sup>27</sup> which interpret the rise of information work and its place within the structure of stratification and power in a non-technologically determined and more fruitful way, but which do not invest the present moment with the weight of epochal revolutionary change nor invest the information workers with power they evidently do not exercise.

### The Superstructure

Let me now turn finally to the effect of this supposed transformation in the economic base to its effect at the level of the superstructure. I make no apology for using this old-fashioned terminology precisely because, as I have already argued, Castells himself is working within just such a framework. The superstructural effects of the new informational mode of development are explained in two different ways. These are by no means necessarily mutually incompatible, but they do need to be distinguished for the purposes of analysis and critique.

The first argues that the effect comes via the labour process and the resulting restructuring of the global division of labour and of the relationship between geographical territories or places that results. Here the explanation for a changing cultural and political process is sought in a polarisation between a cosmopolitan global elite on the one hand and locally, grounded, but trapped labour and its experiences on the other, between the spaces of flows and places. 'Labour loses its collective identity, becomes increasingly individualised in its capacities, in its working conditions and in its interests and projects'.<sup>28</sup> The old struggle between capital and labour is replaced by 'a more fundamental opposition between the bare logic of capital and the cultural values of human experience'. We see here a close relationship between Information Society theory and the postmodernist stress on the culture of difference, the politics of identity and social movements.

Common to much current information society theorising is a failure to distinguish between the effects of new ICTs on the economy in general, which then may or may not have significant effects in the spheres of politics and culture, and the effects directly on politics and culture themselves — witness, for instance, the claims made for Internet as an agent of democratic renewal and the 'reinvention' of government or the supposed de-massification and globalization of the media. Crucially, for example, statistics purporting to

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<sup>27</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London, Routledge, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 475.

demonstrate the growth of the media and its importance as a source of employment creation fail to distinguish between producer services, the use of ICTs within the process of production and circulation (which in general have shown dynamic growth), and final demand, the domestic consumption of media products and services. These last have certainly grown, but not spectacularly, and, as recent broadband trials have shown, the willingness to consume new services is highly constrained by disposable income.

Within Castells's theory there are three distinct types of explanation of the effect of the informational mode of development on politics and culture. The first, as we have already seen, is, in effect a classic class consciousness effect. Changes in the labour process and the division of labour produce a 'spirit of informationalism' which favours a culture of the ephemeral, what Castells calls 'timeless time'. Here we can see quite clear relations with certain versions of postmodern theorising which celebrate the pleasures derived from a constantly shifting play of unanchored signifiers. Apart from the key question of whether we can empirically demonstrate the existence of this 'spirit of informationalism' and if so, whether culture really is dominated by the cultural forms hypothesised as its effect, we need to go on to ask whether this cultural form is liberating, as is often implicitly assumed, or ideological in the sense of distracting attention from underlying, more deeply rooted, structures of interest, and whether one of the ways in which this ideological process works is by favouring the entertainment over the pedagogic mode of media function to the detriment of social learning processes and social cohesion. It is to this question, for instance, that critics such as Neil Postman have addressed themselves.<sup>29</sup> Here we also need to make a connection with the post-Habermasian debate on the Public Sphere. Does democracy itself require a rational mode of discourse to which the very ephemerality of this new culture is inimical? This line of reasoning also shares some points in common with Bourdieu's arguments concerning the new media culture as the culture of a new petit-bourgeoisie which, far from possessing the high levels of cultural capital possessed by the networking knowledge workers, lacks cultural capital and therefore requires a high turn-over culture which does not require a long apprenticeship for either its appreciation or production. These are all important questions for current communication theory. But in terms of the claims for epochal change we need also to ask whether these characteristics are new or whether on the contrary they are the product of the problems of creating value with information commodities which drives a constant search for novelty and new cycles of cultural consumption of commodities which are not destroyed in use. The pursuit of the ephemeral and the pleasures of the fashionable in the

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<sup>29</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

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sphere of consumption among all classes was noted at least as early as Voltaire's observations on eighteenth century Britain. It would appear to be just as much the spirit of capitalism as Weber's celebrated Puritan abnegation.

### De-massification

The second claimed impact on culture and politics within Castells's theory is that of de-massification — what he describes as 'the present and future of television's decentralisation, diversification and customisation'.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand it is argued that the restructuring of work has created individualised workers who then demand a more individualised cultural product and reject mass political parties in favour of a range of issue-based social movements. On the other hand the revolution in information and communication technology, by lowering the cost and extending the range of alternative distribution networks, has massively extended the range of choice open to cultural consumers, and at the same time and as a consequence, fragmented the audience. This extended choice and fragmentation is then seen as liberating.

There are a number of problems with this de-massification thesis. The first is empirical. Is it in fact taking place, and if so to what extent? The second is causal — is technological change in the system of distribution a cause or necessary condition of the restructuring of the audience? Looked at empirically, de-massification trends can be exaggerated. In cinema and recorded music a small number of titles continue to capture a high proportion of revenues, both nationally and globally. The audience share of network TV has declined in the face of competition from cable, satellite and video, but this decline has not been dramatic and the number of channels watched on a regular basis has only modestly expanded. There is a general and continuing trend towards concentration in the newspaper market. If one factors in globalization, one of the supposed effects of the technological revolution, then the situation is more complicated. At one level the spread of global media products, services and producing conglomerates is a deepening of massification. After all, one of the logics driving globalization is economies of scale. Secondly increased choice at a local level may coincide with, even be bought at the expense of, massification at the global level. The problem remains not primarily distribution costs and bottle necks, but the relation between the costs of production and potential revenues and between hits and flops. Neither is significantly effected by the technological revolution. Indeed it is significant that the new audio-visual distribution technologies of cable and satellite are not diversifying production but fighting to obtain, and thus pushing up the price of, the major global mass audience pullers, feature films and selected high profile sporting events.

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<sup>30</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 340.

However, the countervailing trends also need to be borne in mind, and again they have little to do with technology. Rising standards of living enable consumers to afford a greater choice and the exercise of this choice may take the form of a realisable demand for local material, thus counteracting globalizing trends. Indeed we can hypothesise that the reason the more lurid versions of the US cultural imperialism thesis have not come to pass is that this thesis was based upon the empirical observation of a period before locally generated revenues reached a level at which local production could be supported. Rather than point to a technological process of de-massification, historical evidence supports the idea of a continual dialectic within cultural production and consumption between massification and fragmentation, between the general and the particular, as there is more generally between the individual and society, the citizen and the state, the agent and the structure, a dialectic inflected by technological change certainly, but not determined by it.

### **A Culture of Real Virtuality**

Finally, most ambitiously but also most problematically, Castells proposes an alternative explanation of the effect of the informational mode of development on culture and politics that is both more systemic and more direct: 'The convergence of social evolution and information technologies has created a material basis for the performance of activities throughout the social structure'.<sup>31</sup> Here, the relation of technology to culture is seen as acting directly within the field of culture itself. Current developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) are compared in their revolutionary cultural impact to the invention of the alphabet. 'Because culture is mediated and enacted through communication systems, cultures themselves, that is our historically produced system of beliefs and codes, become fundamentally transformed and will be more so over time, by the new technological system'. As a result Castells argues, drawing upon McLuhan and theories of de-massification, 'we can hardly underestimate the significance of the Information Superhighway'. Why? Because 'the potential integration of text, images and sounds in the same system, interacting from multiple points, in chosen time (real or delayed) along a global network in conditions of open and affordable access does fundamentally change the character of culture'.<sup>32</sup>

It is, he argues, creating a 'Culture of Real Virtuality'. This is an argument familiar from Baudrillard and other postmodernists. 'Cultures are made up of communication processes. And all forms of communication, as

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<sup>31</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 471.

<sup>32</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 328.

## Information Society Theory as Ideology: a Critique

Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard taught us many years ago, are based on the production and consumption of signs. Thus there is no separation between “reality” and symbolic representation’.<sup>33</sup> This tired nominalism, derived from semiology’s misreading of the nature of language, elides a number of distinct relations:

- (a) between communication systems and communication media: for example, the same audiovisual text can be distributed on networks with different structures and technical characteristics;
- (b) between media and language: a range of audio-visual texts can employ a range of languages or codes of representation;
- (c) between language and culture: communication takes place in and through symbols but it is neither exclusively or even mainly about symbols. This is the great deconstructionist fallacy of infinite interpretative regress. A large part of any life is involved in engagement with non-symbolic realities, including other human beings, and symbols are used to communicate about, to represent, to reflect those realities. Of course there is always a disjuncture between symbol and represented reality, but, while human users are aware of this, the functional fit has been good enough over evolutionary time for humans to act on the correct assumption that, while communicated reality and symbols are distinct, one can communicate accurately about the other. This in its turn is a different issue from the relation of concepts or cultural meanings, also communicated through symbol systems, to any underlying ‘truth’, universal or otherwise.

In conclusion, what I have attempted to argue here is that the serious, concentrated analysis and critique of Information Society theory has been placed unavoidably at the centre of scholars of communication by history itself. It is the dominant ideology of the current historical period. It raises questions which are unavoidable for anyone who wishes to understand the relationship between the structures and processes of social communication and social structure and processes more generally; in short if we wish to understand and intelligently act upon the world in which we actually live. These questions concern:

- (a) impacts at the general level of the mode of production, in particular the relation between forces and relations of production;
- (b) impacts at the level of the organisation of production itself and thus on the structure and consciousness of labour and on social stratification. This in particular will include an analysis of the social position and function of information workers;
- (c) impacts on the spheres of politics and culture.

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<sup>33</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 372.

No relation between these levels, and thus no theory of the totality, can be assumed, but must be empirically demonstrated. The answers to these questions, both theoretical and empirical, offered by Information Society theory are inadequate and unconvincing. In particular the claim of novelty, and thus of revolutionary change, is made for what in fact are long-term structures and processes. In particular, as Braudel has reminded us in relation to the flexibility of capital within a space of flows, the answers are more likely to be inscribed in the *longue durée* of capitalist development than on the Information Superhighway: 'Capitalism alone has relative freedom of movement ... faced with inflexible structures (those of material and, no less, of ordinary economic life) it is able to choose the area where it wants and is able to meddle, and the areas it will leave to their fate, incessantly reconstructing its own structures from these components, and thereby little by little transforming those of others ... The choice may be limited, but what an immense privilege to be able to choose'.<sup>34</sup>

*University of Westminster*

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<sup>34</sup> F. Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973) p. 405.

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# Inequality and the Information Age: the Recent Work of Manuel Castells<sup>1</sup>

John Downey

## Introduction

Manuel Castells has achieved due recognition for his studies of urban society from his sociological peers over the course of a career spanning three decades and continents. In 1998 he received the Lynd Award from the American Sociological Association in respect of his distinguished career. He has also contributed to policy development concerning information and communication technologies at national and international level. In 1996 he became one of the European Commission's high level policy advisers on the 'information society'. The publication of his three volume magnum opus *The information age: economy, society and culture* in 1996, 1997, and 1998, in addition, was greeted with a good deal of interest in newspapers.<sup>2</sup> He became, for a while, a public intellectual whose name and work may be read by a broader cross-section of the population than is normally the case with authors of weighty academic tomes. The purpose of this necessarily selective review of these three volumes is to assess Castells' contribution to our attempt to understand contemporary economy and society. I will concentrate on the three essential components of Castells' work: the rise of the global informational economy, the decline of nation states and the rise of cities, and new social movements and politics in the informational age. The discussion will be sympathetic in character for there is a certain backlash against him — he has, for instance, been grouped together with neo-conservatives — and I believe that this is largely misplaced.

In a 1994 article Castells writes briefly of the evolution of urban sociology (and more precisely his intellectual evolution) over the last twenty years beyond the Chicago School that affected urban sociology and Castells' work so substantially.<sup>3</sup> First, there was a move towards structuralism. Castells was influenced by Althusser, Poulantzas, and structural Marxists generally. Then, there was a move away from structuralism towards subjectivism. This period saw the development of postmodern geographies and the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Jim McGuigan, Jason Toyne, and Jeff Wallace for their comments on a draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), and *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Castells, 'European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy' in *New Left Review* 204 (March/April 1994), p. 19

cultural geography. Finally, there has been an attempt to recognise the role of both structure and agency in urban change. This is where Castells now places himself and he traces this back to a Marxist humanist position, so famously presented by Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, of people making their own history but not in circumstances chosen by themselves. In contrast, Frank Webster can still discern traces of the thought of Althusser in Castells' work, and Nicholas Garnham, finds Castells' arguments still have much to do with structuralism.<sup>4</sup> He is at root, they claim, a technological determinist, and this has adverse consequences politically in terms of thinking about agency, about what is to be done, in the present context. I am sure that this interpretation would sadden Castells, who writes emotionally about Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach in the conclusion to *The Information Age*.

It is tempting to compare the work of Castells with that of the much better known Anthony Giddens in order to give some understanding of the scope of Castells' project. They are both intent, no less, on understanding the present condition of the world and insist that an holistic approach is essential in order to understand the particular. The precise relationship between Castells' work and that of Anthony Giddens' nevertheless remains unclear (Castells acknowledges Giddens as an essential element of his intellectual development). For example, Castells does not (to the best of my knowledge) refer to structuration theory. They are both, however, grand synthesizers of other positions and both are interested in understanding and explaining the shape and texture of contemporary society as a result of the restructuring of capitalism (however it may be labelled) since the 1970s. This project necessarily transcends subject disciplines and national boundaries: it is genuinely global in ambition.

It is becoming difficult to see Castells as primarily an urban sociologist as the scale and scope of his work is so grand. A key difference between Castells and Giddens is that Castells spends more time analysing economic factors in explaining cultural and economic change: 'this technological informational revolution is the backbone (although not the determinant) of all other major structural transformations'.<sup>5</sup> This is rather difficult. It sounds quite like a base-superstructure Marxism. Witness the backbone metaphor in place of the base. Castells insists that this is not the case. Informational revolution is just the biggest factor in a complex of causes that leads to the restructuring of capitalism. The difficulty, of course, is in analytically separating these causes from each other. Essentially, it is an empirical rather than theoretical argument. This may give one reason to suspect that Castells is a technological determinist despite himself. However, the value of Castells' work

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (London: Routledge, 1995); see also Nicholas Garnham's article in the present volume.

<sup>5</sup> Castells, 'European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy', p. 20

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lies not in whether he has managed somehow theoretically to overcome this old chestnut of Marxism and neo-Marxism (it is unfair to expect him to provide us with something that philosophers have consistently failed to do) but rather in whether his substantive explanations of the network society based on empirical evidence make sense to us. Instead of arguing that theoretical considerations are unimportant, I will maintain that pointing out theoretical inconsistency or slippage does not necessarily discredit all the work of Castells. He is theoretically at his most palatable when he sees technological change as a major cause amongst a complex of causes. He slips from this occasionally and sounds like a determinist. On the other hand, he sometimes sounds like a subjectivist, particularly when writing about political agency (see, for example, his discussion of the Zapatistas).<sup>6</sup> When Garnham points out the slippages in Castells' work between structure and agency, between Marx and Weber, and points to inconsistencies in the way Castells seeks to explain economic development, he is correct. This does not devalue Castells' work entirely, however, and it does not make him an ideologue of the network society akin to Daniel Bell, Nicholas Negroponte, or Alvin Toffler. What fundamentally concerns Castells, as a member of the '68 generation grown old, is how to address inequality and win greater democracy.

Technological determinism is susceptible to criticism from both an epistemological and ethico-political standpoint. The denial of human agency undermines the possibility of improving the world either through reform or revolution. While there is some slippage in Castells' work in his stance towards the causal primacy of technology, he nevertheless consistently analyses how social movements have intervened in the world. Indeed, he may be more susceptible to the charge that he overestimates the power of these social movements. As an individual he has served on groups informing the development of policy. The EC's High Level Group of Experts (HLEG) has contributed to a subtle shift in policy emphasis in the EU away from Bangemann's techno-boosterism towards a policy that acknowledges how information and communication technologies (ICTs) exacerbate inequalities on a number of levels. Castells' Marxist humanism is accompanied by a social democratic approach that appears to have more in common with Jospin than with Blair and Schroeder.

### **The global informational economy**

It is essential in order to understand Castells to grasp his vision of the pervasiveness of the information technology revolution. There has been a revolution not only in the mode of development within the computer hardware

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<sup>6</sup> Castells, *The Power of Identity*, pp. 71-83

and software industry and the service industries that it has spawned, but also within manufacturing and service industries in general in advanced capitalist economies. This has been accompanied by such things as the rise of new social movements, the decline in the power of nation states and the breakdown of the Soviet Union, all of which have been fuelled by information and communication technologies. ICTs underpin everything. They are, to borrow Castells' quotation from Confucius, with which he opens his book, 'one thread which links up the rest'. This sets off the technological determinist alarm bells ringing loudly. There is a descending order of credibility here: everyone accepts the astonishing development of information technology, some accept the degree of impact on the economy as a whole that Castells' sets out in terms of productive forces, few see ICTs as central, for example, in the rise of feminism or the downfall of communism. While sympathetic to Castells' project of attempting to extend the thesis of the pervasiveness of ICTs to social, cultural and political realms, it is important to see ICTs as a tool used by social actors, in other words ICTs as part of a complex causal matrix. Castells' book is really about understanding the present age in its economic, social, cultural and political dimensions and sometimes the thread is stretched very thinly. Webster and Garnham take Castells to task in a similar way. Castells is criticised for being a 'traditional' Marxist (the emphasis on technology), a closet Althusserian Marxist, someone who misuses, or at least confuses us with, a Marxist-sounding vocabulary, and a neo-conservative of Daniel Bell's ilk despite himself.

Castells is probably all of these things at any one time, but they are not all he is. When Castells writes of an informational mode of development he is referring to a revolution in what are usually termed forces of production in Marxist economics. The concept of mode in Marxist economics refers to both forces and relations of production. Thus, a Marxist economist may speak of a revolution in the forces of production associated with information technology but not of a revolution in the mode of production because the relations of production have not fundamentally altered. Capitalists still extract surplus value from wage labourers. When Castells argues that the relations of production are dependent upon, using his terms, the mode of development, he sounds like a technological determinist of the 1859 *Preface to a Critique of Political Economy* persuasion.

Garnham is quite right to criticise the use of the labour theory of value by Castells (he sometimes argues that surplus value is determined by the productivity of the input alone) and to emphasise the importance of the relations of production, in addition to the forces of production or mode of development, in determining the level as well as the appropriation of surplus value. Castells does not, however, consistently present a technological determinist position and grants, for example, a good deal of agency to

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capitalists and states in their response to the oil price increases of the 1970s that obviously affected the level of surplus value:

when the oil price increases of 1974 and 1979 threatened to spiral inflation out of control, governments and firms engaged in a process of restructuring in a pragmatic process of trial and error that is still under way in the mid-1990s with a more decisive effort at deregulation, privatisation and the dismantling of the social contract between capital and labour that underlay the stability of the previous growth model.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, one may not like Castells' confusing development of Marx's vocabulary, or his tendency to slip into and out of technological determinism, but in terms of substantive analysis Castells and many of his left-wing critics are in much the same explanatory boat. Since the 1970s there has been a restructuring of capitalism and this has been caused largely by the actions of capitalists exploiting both high levels of unemployment and advances in information technology. This has seen a reorganisation of production processes, an increasing globalisation of capital, a consequent diminution of the power of nation states, and the growth of economic, and hence other forms of, inequality within cities, nation states, regions and the global economy.

Whether this restructuring process is called post-Fordism or an informational mode of development depends upon the degree of emphasis placed upon the causal power of ICTs in this process. For Castells, this emphasis is obviously very pronounced. He sees ICTs as providing the motor of economic development in that they drive the rise of productivity in the economy and the growth of globalisation, allowing the metropolitan centre (particularly the major financial centres of New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London and Tokyo) to command and control production on the periphery as well as flows of finance capital.

Here there is a problem, as Castells clearly recognises, since productivity growth in advanced capitalist economies appears to have slowed down during the restructuring of capitalism since the 1970s. Even allowing for the very substantial technical difficulties in measuring the impact of ICTs on productivity growth on some sectors of the economy, this is a major problem for Castells' thesis. The empirical evidence does not live up to the logic of the argument that ICTs, because of their information handling potential, must allow capitalism to operate more efficiently. Castells falls back on the future when the empirical evidence, he asserts, will have caught up with his logic:

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<sup>7</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 19

what is distinctive is the *eventual* realisation of the productivity potential contained in the mature industrial economy because of the shift toward a technological paradigm based on information technologies.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the obstinacy of the evidence and only partially convincing reliance on the productivity counting problem, the logic of the argument is persuasive. However, it may be wise to play down the causal primacy of a factor that is not supported by the evidence. Thus, the concept of post-Fordism that foregoes technological determinism in favour of a multi-factor approach may be more advisable.

Castells distinguishes between the global economy, and thus globalisation, and Braudel and Wallerstein's concept of the world economic system. A global economy is 'an economy with the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale'.<sup>9</sup> This is a helpful distinction that allows us to conceptualise transitions in the development of economic activity from the early modern period through colonialism to the present post-colonial day, or the transition from a world to a global economy. Castells is careful to point out that globalisation is limited by the interests of capital and the more powerful nation states. This has led to an international division of labour with ICTs also contributing to a transformation of the nature of work.

Castells traces an historical evolution of employment structures in G7 states away from manufacturing industry towards service industries as manufacturing employment is replaced by technology or exported to states where the labour is cheaper (and where manufacturing employment has expanded in contrast to advanced capitalist economies). G7 states are not, however, post-industrial à la Bell, but rather informational. This points to the logical underpinning of both manufacturing and service industries of ICTs and also to the importance of manufacturing industries for the economy as a whole irrespective of the decline in manufacturing employment. This shying away from the concept of the post-industrial is eminently sensible but the caveat remains about the use of the over-arching concept of informational capitalism. The G7 states have experienced a more or less rapid reduction in manufacturing employment as a percentage of the labour force since the 1970s and a growth in the share of service industry employment. This period has also been characterised by high levels of unemployment. The key change to the occupational structure as a result of this shift in employment from manufacturing to service industries has been 'the shrinkage of the middle' as the number of professional, technical and managerial jobs and unskilled and semi-skilled jobs has increased while the number of skilled jobs has

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<sup>8</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 91 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 92.

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decreased. As a consequence, there has been since the 1970s a polarisation of income distribution. In the U.S. between 1973 and 1993, for example, the family income of the lowest 40% declined in real terms while the income of other groups grew in ascending order, that is, the richest did the best economically.

The social contract between capital and labour established after the Second World War was arguably based on manufacturing industry, high levels of employment and a strong labour movement that could win better conditions for its adherents. In a situation where capital is more mobile and labour has been weakened by the transition to a service economy, the social contract is under strain. The contradictions within the Labour Party in the UK and the SPD in Germany between their economic policies and the traditional values of social democracy are evidence of this profound shift in advanced capitalist societies. There was a modest idea of progress attached to social democratic parties' ideology in the post-War period to do with creating a more equal, more democratic society through reform of capitalism and the state. This was sustained by the social contract between capital and labour. Such a vision of modest progress simply cannot be sustained after twenty years of increasing inequality. Assuming that income inequality has some bearing on politics, a key question for the future of democracy is surely how both governments and the people respond to the increasing polarisation of advanced capitalist societies.

The rise of the informational economy, however, not only creates greater inequality within advanced capitalist states but throughout the world. With the economic differentiation of the so-called Third World, and hence the beginning of the end of this concept as an economic signifier, there is, according to Castells, the creation of a Fourth World, that is, the bits of the world *wherever they may be* that can characterised by economic and social exclusion. Thus, while the level of inequality has narrowed between the USA, Japan and Western European states over the last 50 years or so, the level of inequality between the USA and Latin America and African states has widened (Asian states such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have made remarkable progress in terms of narrowing the gap). The poorest 20 percent of the world's people have seen their share of global income decline from 2.3 percent to 1.4 percent in the past 30 years. Meanwhile, the share of the richest 20 percent has risen from 70 percent to 85 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Just as rising income inequality has consequences for democracy within advanced capitalism, rising income inequality between states has consequences for the creation of a more democratic and just global order. Increasingly, some economies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, find themselves out of the loop. They are bypassed by the global economy, they

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<sup>10</sup> Castells, *End of Millennium*, p. 80.

are excluded from the information society, and thus find themselves inside a vicious downward spiral (incidentally exacerbated by the IMF's love affair with neo-classical economics). The people of sub-Saharan Africa are in a similar position, Castells argues, to the inner-city ghetto poor of the USA. The ghetto poor may have access to work but this is often in insecure, poorly paid service jobs. Inequality is reproduced across the generations because of the relatively poorly funded public school system that restricts class mobility. Moreover, the issue of 'race' is intertwined with class as the ghettos are composed of large percentages of people belonging to ethnic minority communities when societies are considered as a whole. Here the USA is perhaps just an extreme case of a general phenomenon in advanced capitalist societies:

American inner-city ghettos, and particularly the black ghetto, have become part of the earthly hell being built to punish the dangerous classes of the undeserving poor. And because a large proportion of black children are growing up in these neighbourhoods, America is systematically reproducing its deepest pattern of social exclusion, inter-racial hostility, and interpersonal violence.<sup>11</sup>

This is the key insight of Castells' work. Informational capitalism is producing and reproducing widening levels of economic inequality that in turn have consequences for social and political life at the level of cities, nations, regions, and indeed globally. The choice from the perspective of the privileged members of the information society seems to be between promoting informational capitalism and building large fences to keep people out (concepts such as 'Fortress Europe' and the 'carceral city' are used to analyse what are effectively the same processes but at different levels) or of finding some way to control or combat the global operations of capital in order to be able to redistribute resources to the socially excluded. From the perspective of the socially excluded, there seems to be little possibility of joining the information society given the current order of things. This may help to explain the attraction of the criminal economy and it may help to explain the growth of radical political movements in the future. Of course, there is the much debated recent notion of Giddens of 'the third way' that seeks to develop policies consistent with the ethic of equality that eschews the methods adopted by traditional social democrats and that also steers clear of the economic neo-liberalism of the New Right.<sup>12</sup> The globalising trend of capitalism combined with the changing occupational structure of advanced capitalist societies, the

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<sup>11</sup> Castells, *End of Millennium*, pp.144-5.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: the renewal of social democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

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decline of power of nation states and the variable geometry of globalisation do not bode well in terms of reversing the trends of growing income inequality (at least using the methods currently available) and this must have implications for the political cultures of advanced capitalist societies.

### **Decline of the state and the reinvention of the city-state**

This brings us to the role of the state in the information society. It is clear that the relative power of nation states has diminished with respect to capital although it is unclear by how much it has diminished. Not only is this empirically difficult to verify but also politically controversial. There are contrasting arguments on both the right and left of the political spectrum concerning the pace of globalisation and the appropriate role of the state. On the left, on the one hand, there is the argument that globalisation is primarily an ideological concept designed to persuade peoples and governments of whatever persuasion that they need to roll with the punches and accommodate themselves to this irreversible trend by trying to create conditions as favourable to capitalist accumulation as possible in their domestic economies. There is evidence to support this case. There has been a regionalisation of trade within the EU, for example, that has been more pronounced than globalisation. Here, it is claimed, traditional social democratic policies could work as long as they are implemented in most of the EU states, however difficult it may be to agree given the variable geometry within regionalisation itself. On the other hand, there is an acceptance that globalisation is happening rapidly. This position splits into two groups. The first group thinks that as a consequence social democratic parties need to become more accommodating to capitalism by moving to the right in terms of taxation, employment law, and so on. Social democratic parties, it is true, are speaking less and less about reducing inequality and more and more about wealth accumulation. The state's income may be increased through increasing wealth and this allows improvements to be made in public services. This obviously, however, has implications for the traditional social democratic project of reducing inequality. The second group believes that social democracy domestically is powerless to do anything about globalisation and that global associations of nation states are relatively powerless to do much about it as they are split and have different interests. Therefore, a growing number of activists claim that a more radical international anti-capitalist solution is required irrespective of the experience of communist states in the twentieth century. Of course, the diverse groups of protesters against economic globalisation are just as divided as the nation states themselves. It could hardly be otherwise.

Nation states have sought to associate themselves in order to exert more leverage upon capital at the same time as attempting to exploit their places as sites of global capitalism. Nation states wish, of course, to reap the perceived benefits of globalisation in terms of trade, inward investment and the like while holding at bay other consequences of globalisation. This has led to the wide scale adoption of neo-liberal economic policies attached to neo-conservative social policies of the New Right once embodied by Thatcherism and Reaganism but now presented by Centre-Left governments in the West (for example, the UK, Germany, USA). A consequence of the globalisation of capital is its increasing power over labour and over nation states. Thus nation states have responded to protect their sovereignty and sphere of influence by associating together. These associations are rather loose, as nation states are positioned differently by the globalisation of capital. Castells refers to this as the variable geometry of globalisation while Doreen Massey refers to it as the power geometry of globalisation.<sup>13</sup> The interests of 'the West' are clearly to the fore in organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations. There is also intra-regional co-operation and competition in the global economy (for example, the UK and Germany cannot agree on the harmonization of tax levels in the EU because the UK recognises that its lower tax levels are attractive to capital from both inside and outside the EU). In terms of resisting the development of this variable power geometry, of this globalisation of capitalism, it is clear that both labour and nation states need to organise on a supra-national level in order to increase their ability to control or influence but that this is beset with difficulties precisely because of the variable geometry.

As the power of nation states has declined with the development of globalisation the power of some cities has, as a consequence, increased with respect to nation states. Castells draws here on the work of Saskia Sassen that highlights the dominance of New York, London and Tokyo in international finance and as the command and control centres of transnational corporations.<sup>14</sup> The importance of London for the UK domestic economy is shown by the way that the UK government, for example, considers the needs of the capital's economy before those of other regions in the UK, resulting in a situation where the policies followed may be to the advantage of London while severely restricting the operation of the 'real' economy elsewhere. All this is bound to encourage moves towards a devolution of power to the regions as citizens in the badly affected regions recognise what is happening. The

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<sup>13</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p.145; Doreen Massey, 'A global sense of place', in Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (eds.), *Studying Culture: an introductory reader* (2nd ed.; London: Arnold, 1997), p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

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traditional centres of finance capital are also joined by regional centres in emerging economies such as Singapore and Sao Paulo. These cities are characterised by high levels of income inequality and the reinforcement of the dual city phenomenon where wealth and poverty are spatially adjacent but worlds apart. The global centres of capitalism are globally connected and internally divided: 'it is this distinctive feature of being globally connected and locally disconnected, physically and socially, that makes megacities a new urban form'.<sup>15</sup> The interests of the financial elites in these cities may not only be at odds with those of other regions in the domestic economy but also of citizens within the metropolis itself. These globally connected cities emerge as stronger than nation states financially when they operate together and assume such importance for the domestic economy that governments gear economic policies accordingly to the detriment of other regions.

## **New social movements and the end of class politics**

The rise of informational capitalism results, Castells contends, not only in a diminution of power of nation states and consequently a crisis of democracy but also a fragmentation of social and cultural identities. The social glue that bound people together in the past (class, nation, gender identity) is torn asunder by changing economic circumstances. We are left largely with markets and individuals and the 'dissolution of society as a meaningful social system'.<sup>16</sup> All is not lost, however. While the traditional political institutions may be losing their legitimacy we are witnessing the rise of new social movements which are resisting the spread of informational capitalism. Castells writes about both 'good' and 'bad' social movements (ecologists and American militias). I want to discuss here only the good ones as Castells places great importance on them as positive forces.

The two key positive social movements for Castells are the ecological movement and the feminist movement. Castells' work here is very much influenced by Alain Touraine's research on the identities of new social movements. According to Castells, these social movements may be characterised as mostly concentrating on single issues, as being quite exclusive in composition, and as essentially possessing resistant identities rather than project identities. Castells points to the conflicting interests of these groups. He argues that 'all these elements do not glue together, their logic excludes each other, and their coexistence is unlikely to be peaceful'.<sup>17</sup> This is obviously true when one considers the good and the bad new social

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<sup>15</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, p. 404.

<sup>16</sup> Castells, *The Power of Identity*, p. 355.

<sup>17</sup> Castells, *The Power of Identity*, p.356.

movements. It is still true when one considers the protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organisation in November 1999. The car workers threatened with unemployment were in the same demonstration as the people dressed as turtles but for very different reasons.

The fundamental political question for Castells is whether these good social movements can develop project identities that set out how society ought to be and a plan for how to bring that about rather than simply resisting. This move to project identities would necessarily involve single interest groups in dialogue with fellow travellers as their purpose is effectively to reconstitute a new civil society and ultimately a new state. Although Castells is determined to stick as close to his empirical observations as possible and avoid prescription and prophecy, it is very difficult not to hear this as *Zukunftsmusik* (music of the future), a rather disparaging German concept.

To follow Castells' wish of sticking to empirical observation, let us take the example of the most developed Green movement in advanced capitalism, die Gruenen in Germany. This movement and party emerged out of the disappointments of the '68 generation in Germany. The movement migrated from a resistant identity to a project identity in the 1980s and 1990s, developing a platform across a wide range of issues (the Green party opposed, for example, the 1993 change in the German constitution concerning the right of asylum). The party was successful in both local and national elections, first becoming a coalition partner at the federal state level and then joining the SPD to form a coalition government at national level in 1998. As such, they have undoubtedly influenced government policy in a number of spheres (doing so from within the traditional structures of industrial society that Castells claims are draining away). However, it is clear what the limits are to their influence and how the interests of the SPD and the Greens diverge on economic policy. As a consequence, the Greens are increasingly split between the leadership, the 'realist' faction that sees compromise as necessary in order to achieve anything, and the grassroots 'fundamentalist' faction that sees the leadership as contributing to the problem rather than addressing it (for example, the party was severely split over German military participation in the 1999 NATO war against Serbia that was supported by Fischer, the German foreign secretary and leader of the Greens). The Green party is also doing very badly in opinion polls and they are at risk of not achieving the 5% of the vote that is necessary for political parties to achieve representation at both local and national level partly as a consequence of their accommodation with the 'establishment'. Thus, the progress from a resistant to a project identity is fraught with difficulty. It is far easier to be unified in resistance than unified in a project.

The growing opposition from diverse quarters to global capitalism is attracting media attention and sympathy precisely because of its catch-all

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nature. The move to a project identity will serve only to highlight the contradictions that are present between and within the various resistant identities. This sounds far more pessimistic about the ability of people to resist global capitalism and create a better society than Castells is. My problem with Castells is that he puts all of his eggs in one basket. As a thinker who still relies largely on an explanatory framework derived from Marx's work in political economy, he somewhat inexplicably argues that class politics is dead, transcended by informational capitalism.

To be sure, there is frequent abuse and exploitation of individual producers, as well as large masses of generic labour, by whoever is in charge of production processes. Yet, segmentation of labour, individualisation of work, and diffusion of capital in the circuits of global finance have jointly induced a gradual fading away of the class structure of the industrial society. There are, and will be, powerful social conflicts, some of them enacted by workers and organised labour, from Korea to Spain. Yet, they are not the expression of class struggle but of interest groups' demands and/or revolt against injustice.<sup>18</sup>

Now there are undoubtedly some indications that class may be becoming less important. Evidence suggests that, as part of a process of detraditionalisation, voting habits in advanced capitalist societies are less influenced by social class than they used to be. It also is true that labour movements in the West have lost some of the power that they held in the 1960s and 1970s as a consequence of high levels of unemployment and the transition from manufacturing to service industry employment. However, I am tempted to argue precisely the opposite to Castells. The number of workers engaged in manufacturing industry outside of the OECD states is increasing. Why will this not lead to the development of class struggle in newly industrialising states in a similar manner to the class struggles during industrialisation in the West? Will the workers in OECD states not respond as a class to the exporting of their jobs? Will not the inhabitants of the socially marginalised districts in dual cities (whose presence is determined partly by their place in the relations of production) resist the increasing polarisation of their societies? We can see evidence of all three. My problem with Castells, then, is not so much that he is a determinist Marxist in terms of economic analysis but more that he seems to ignore Marx entirely in his social and political analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> Castells, *End of Millennium*, p. 366.

## Conclusion

Castells' work is a great synthesis, pulling together a vast range of literature and original empirical research, aimed at providing a new way of understanding the depth and breadth of the changes wrought by the global restructuring of capitalism since the 1970s. The inconsistencies of theoretical approach that may sometimes be discovered in his work, while important, do not demolish substantially the fecundity of his thesis. His notion of an informational mode of development may place too great an emphasis on ICTs as the motor of change. However, his key contentions that the globalisation of capitalism is simultaneously creating an increasingly polarised world and that nation states as individual entities do not have much power to influence this are surely correct. The thesis of the loss of legitimacy of nation states and the decline of class politics is far more contentious and difficult to sustain. The rise of new social movements, Castells argues, provide the best hope of creating a better world. Such an analysis is problematic as it does not fully recognise the contradictions between and within new social movements and inexplicably consigns class struggle to the dustbin of history at precisely the point in time at which inequality is increasing between rich and poor at both the local and global level. Castells has devoted his life to the analysis of these great questions of our age in the spirit of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, and has produced a novel and important way of understanding the world that deserves both praise and sustained critique.

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## Post-Theory, Literature, Marxism

Andy Mousley

During its euphoric heyday, in the 1970s and early 1980s, a certain kind of literary theory often told a grand and dramatic narrative about itself — this despite the suspicion of grand narratives in some theoretical quarters. The narrative pivoted around the idea that the advent of modern theory constituted a climactic turning point, a moment of complete rupture, a clean and decisive break with the past. Literary theory, ran the narrative, was the brave new world, and all that went before it old, bad and usually bourgeois. This is more or less the story told by Terence Hawkes in his general editorial preface to the *New Accents* series which began in the 1970s and contributed to the mission to package and popularise theory:

In various parts of the world, new methods of analysis have been developed whose conclusions reveal the limitations of the Anglo-American outlook we inherit. New concepts of literary forms and modes have been proposed; new notions of the nature of literature itself, and of how it communicates are current; new views of literature's role in relation to society flourish.<sup>1</sup>

In Hawkes' version of the seductive narrative which this kind of literary theory constructed about itself during its High Period, theory represents the good new days which will supersede the bad old days of the limited 'Anglo-American outlook'.

This article will not renege on literary theory. It will not attempt to displace theory by something called post-theory. It will not, in other words, propose another radical break, this time with literary theory itself. It will nevertheless point to the shortcomings of a narrative which tended to see the resources of the present as unambiguously progressive and those of the past as unambiguously exhausted. I will, in effect, be attempting to salvage concepts such as humanism, and literature as a form of human testimony, from their endangered existence within some versions of modern critical theory. However, I also want to suggest that continuities, based upon the persistence of humanist categories, can be traced between so-called 'traditional criticism', 'theory' and 'post-theory'. Alongside the more iconoclastic anti-humanist pronouncements of the 1970s and 1980s, which decentred the human subject in the name of structuralist science or the primacy of language and society, there were other inflections of theory, which can retrospectively be understood as having not so much destroyed the

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Hawkes, 'General Editor's Preface', in Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. vi-vii.

human subject, as returned him/her to language. This is the point where literature is also implicated in my argument, for if literature was once understood to be the site of an intense and meaningful human encounter, because of its supposed capacity to reveal us to ourselves, then language, history and society can now be seen as occupying that meaningful and experientially charged space. Language, history and society thereby become expressive instead of mute, inexpressive and/or impersonally indifferent to the subject. At its worst, then, theory simply repeats a long-standing antagonism between signs and psyche, society and individual, subject and object. At its dialectical best, however, theory can be said to have written language back into subjectivity and subjectivity back into language.

This dialectical tendency has nevertheless frequently been obscured or overpowered by those more overtly anti-humanist and anti-essentialist wings of theory which insist that the human subject is always and everywhere a social and linguistic construct, lacking its own distinctive characteristics. The extreme linguistic and social constructionism which has from time to time threatened to dictate the direction of theory does not so much return signs to subjectivity and subjectivity to signs, as entirely void the subject of any essential qualities. Marxism has often been enlisted as an ally to this way of thinking, and especially Marx's famous dictum that social being determines consciousness and not the other way round. It is, in other words, the perceived anti-humanism of Marx and Marxism, which have more often than not found favour at both the popularising and more erudite ends of the spectrum of modern critical theory, at the expense of that equally important strain of dialectically oriented Marxism in which humanism and anti-humanism are 'thought together'.<sup>2</sup> This article will attempt to reinstate the importance of Marxist-humanist thought and show how it can help to reanimate questions of human involvement in the reading of literature.

However many varieties of Marxism there have been and still are, a feature common to many of them is the desire to make the world a better place for people to live in and the conviction that for this to come about capitalism will have to be superseded. For Marxism to think that society could be made a better place for people to inhabit, it has to have some notion of what 'people' and their needs are like. On the whole, it assumes that people would rather not be hungry, exploited, lonely, uncared for, or oppressed. If such human needs seem so basic as to be incontrovertible, then this speaks to that important aspect of Marxism which concerns itself with such humdrum but necessary basics. But the conception of the human within Marx and

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of anti-humanist Marxism which shaped modern critical theory in its formative years are: Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971); and Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

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Marxism simultaneously moves beyond those 'basics' to which it thinks any self-respecting humane society should attend, in order to address the more difficult questions of what may constitute human happiness. Such is Marxism's desire for a society which is expressive of the full gamut of human needs – basic and otherwise — that it must needs be at some level a humanist discourse; it must needs be concerned with the nature of that human being and of those human values which it thinks of as being alienated or ignored or threatened or only partly expressed within capitalist society. Such concerns make Marxism an unfashionably normative discourse, for whereas the tendency of modern critical discourses is to celebrate difference and heterogeneity, Marxism tempers its own embrace of heterogeneity with a normative notion of human being.<sup>3</sup>

It is not difficult to find examples of Marxism's humanism. Marx himself, for example, together with Friedrich Engels, appeal in *The Communist Manifesto* to the future enrichment, within communism, of human beings both in general and as individuals: 'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' They also speak of that false individualism of bourgeois society – 'In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality' – which will be replaced with the more authentic individuality released by communism.<sup>4</sup>

Marxism after Marx takes a variety of different forms, but some of these retain a humanist dimension by maintaining as well as subtly developing the distinctively Marxist inflection of the concepts of subject and object. Within humanist traditions of Marxism, I take subject and subjectivity to mean such variously human, but nonetheless alienable, attributes as feeling, need, desire, sensuousness, spontaneity, individuality, consciousness, experience, creativity and so forth. Meanwhile, I take the object to refer literally to a thing or commodity, but beyond this to any phenomenon which approximates the status of a thing because of its tangibility and/or solidity. Thus a concept can be referred to as an object or as object-like because a concept pins down what may otherwise remain elusive to thought. The social and material conditions of our existence are likewise 'objective' in that they suggest an 'external', given state of affairs which we may not change. It is clear from this brief outline, then, that just as there may be different inflections of subject and subjectivity, so there are different kinds of object and objectivity. Some of

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<sup>3</sup> The stimulus for some of these ideas is Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). See especially pp. 219-26 for discussion of the relationship of Marx to Romantic humanism.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (1888; London: Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 105, 98.

these objects may be more or less amenable to what Marxism means by the subject. Objectivism or reification or objectification are the terms which Marxism uses to describe that state of affairs in which an inanimate and immutable world of things subsumes the animate, human world of subjects. Conversely, the term subjectivism is sometimes used to describe the narcissistic absorption of the object world by the subject. Such, in summary, is the charged significance of the vocabulary of subject and object within humanist varieties of Marxism.

In working this kind of vocabulary, humanist Marxism can be differentiated from those semiotically informed perspectives which in only emphasising the way that subject and object are both constructed within language eradicate the possibility of seeing language as the expression of 'prior' human needs. Within humanist traditions of Marxism, the subject is not only what one or another culture makes it. Rather, the human subject is assumed to possess certain attributes to which any given society may or may not give expression. Marxism's use of a vocabulary of subject and object which does not comprehend either as purely linguistic phenomena thus affirms the objective ethical norm of a human subject. This norm allows Marxism to measure the extent of the subject's oppression, alienation, dehumanisation and objectification (objectification being that bad form of objectivity which makes of the subject a mere object). Given this kind of humanist agenda, it is not surprising that Marxists should turn their attention to that form of discourse, called literature, which has often been seen as the locus of the human.

The work of Georg Lukács may serve as one preliminary point of access into humanist Marxism's persistent use of the categories of subject and object to think through questions about human fulfilment and alienation. Lukács defended realist literature against modernism because for Lukács realism, unlike modernism, achieves an ideal balance between subject and object. The objectively given social world into which human beings are born speaks to what Lukács sees as our innate sociability, for 'man' he claims, following Aristotle, is 'zoon politikon, a social animal'.<sup>5</sup> Society, as represented in realist literature, is not something imposed upon us from without, but comes instead from within. The external and the internal are thus reconciled. Modernism, by contrast, disregards the 'dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and objective reality' by privileging one side only of this equation through its indulgent use of, for example, stream-of-consciousness techniques which champion subjective impressionism and sensory data.<sup>6</sup>

Lukács thus turns to literature, and specifically realist literature, to find

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<sup>5</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1963), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Lukács, p.24.

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an image of a non-alienated human consciousness able to express itself through the object world. Rather than finding the external world antipathetic towards or negligent of the human subject, society in the realist novel nurtures subjectivity. As Adorno, a critic of Lukács, succinctly puts it, Lukács opposes to the 'official objectivism' of the Stalinist era an 'aesthetic concept of objectivity which is altogether more in tune with the dignity of man'.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent Marxist thinkers, like Adorno himself, will work further variations upon the subject/object dialectic and as a result arrive at very different reasons for valuing one kind of literature over another. So whereas Lukács champions realism, Adorno himself champions modernism. What both share in common, however, is the conviction that literature can put us in touch with an endangered sense of the human.

Adorno values modernist art for the very same reason – namely its subjectivism – for which Lukács castigates it. For Adorno, the increasingly ubiquitous and invasive 'organized culture' of commodity capitalism prohibits the possibility of authentic subjective experience. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno gives as one example of the commodification of contemporary life the popularisation of Freudian 'depth-psychology':

Now that depth-psychology, with the help of films, soap operas and Horney, has delved into the deepest recesses, people's last possibility of experiencing themselves has been cut off by organized culture. Ready-made enlightenment turns not only spontaneous reflection but also analytical insights – whose power equals the energy and suffering that it cost to gain them – into mass-produced articles and the painful secrets of the individual history, which the orthodox method is already inclined to reduce to formulae, into commonplace conventions. Dispelling rationalizations becomes itself rationalization. Instead of working to gain self-awareness, the initiates become adept at subsuming all instinctual conflicts under such concepts as inferiority complex, mother-fixation, extroversion and introversion, to which they are in reality inaccessible. Terror before the abyss of the self is removed by the consciousness of being concerned with nothing so different from arthritis or sinus trouble. Thus conflicts lose their menace. They are accepted, but by no means cured, being merely fitted as an unavoidable component into the surface of standardized life.<sup>8</sup>

For Adorno, one of the few places where subjective experience does survive

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<sup>7</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Reconciliation Under Duress', in Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 65.

is in the modernist – but not only the modernist — art-work. The modernist text is sufficiently removed from social reality, by virtue of its difficulty, that it cannot easily be absorbed into ‘organized culture’. Thus where the actual world of commodities reduces the human subject to the status of yet another object (as in the example of depth-psychology), art is the place where we may begin to know and experience a more complex, as well as less alienated kind of subjectivity. What prevents art from being merely consolatory, however, is that we are made painfully aware of the rift between art and social reality. ‘Art’, writes Adorno, speaking now of art in general rather than modernist art in particular, ‘is the negative knowledge of the actual world’, meaning that art makes us acutely aware of the shortcomings of commodification through its difference from it.<sup>9</sup> If in actual capitalist society we stand helpless before economic and social forces whose *object-like* existence seems far beyond our capacity to alter, then art is that *subjectively* oriented, human-friendly playground which does allow us to intervene in a more malleable world. In Adorno’s terms, art allows the ‘object’ to be ‘spontaneously absorbed into the subject’:

In the form of an [aesthetic] image the object is absorbed into the subject instead of following the bidding of the alienated world and persisting obdurately in a state of reification. The contradiction between the object reconciled in the subject, i.e. spontaneously absorbed into the subject, and the actual unreconciled object in the outside world, confers on the work of art a vantage-point from which it can criticize actuality.<sup>10</sup>

As for Lukács, so also for Adorno – though in a different way – the aesthetic is the place where beleaguered human values survive.

It would be utterly simplistic to suggest that Marxist theories of the aesthetic have always and everywhere located themselves on the side of the subject, or indeed that those thinkers (such as Lukács, Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and others) who do look towards art to recuperate a non-alienated form of human being, *only* locate themselves in this way. Lukács, as we have seen, is suspicious of that abstract, solipsistic form of subjectivity which sets itself apart from all tangible objects, concrete social settings and so forth, while Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory*, affirms in typically dialectical fashion that the work of art is itself both a tangible, irreducible object set apart from the subject *and* the occasion for less tangible – because difficult to express — subjective responses:

If it is essential to artworks that they be things, it is no less essential

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<sup>9</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 160.

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that they negate their own status as things, and thus art turns against art. The totally objectivated artwork would congeal into a mere thing, whereas if it altogether evaded objectivation it would regress to an impotently powerless subjective impulse and flounder in the empirical world.<sup>11</sup>

I take this to mean that if a work of art were such a subjective phenomenon that nothing definite or objective could be said about it, then art would be incapable of taking its place within — and changing — the empirical world of objects. At the same time, if the work of art were to become a static, immovable, fully known quantity then it would lose its fascination for, and openness to interpretation by, the subject. The balance between the subjective and the objective sought after here recalls the similar equilibrium advanced by Lukács. Art for Lukács and for the Adorno of *Aesthetic Theory* thus works towards a reconciliation of principles which in real capitalist or Stalinist life are torn apart from one another.

Where Adorno (in some of his work) and Lukács (in most of it) attempt in different ways to preserve a dialogue between subject and object, there are plenty of other Marxist thinkers who seem less inclined towards such dialogues and reconciliations. For Bertolt Brecht, for example, in 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', the subject is more the bourgeois Enemy and/or Illusion that it will subsequently become in certain varieties of modern literary theory. If bourgeois art and the bourgeois theatre have traditionally been the places to which the individual escapes to restore his or her wounded human sensibility after a hard day's utilitarian, alienated labour, then Brecht's theatre further alienates the subject. Instead of salvaging the human in the face of dehumanisation, Brecht's theatre estranges its audiences from 'what they think of as "the" human experience' in order to make them aware of change, history-as-difference, and the objective social conditions of their existence.<sup>12</sup> However, if Brecht's emphasis upon social science, anti-illusionism and critical distance places him on the side of objects and objectivity (Brechtian theatre being the place where one can acquire objective knowledge of social reality), then this objectivity is not totally deprived of subjective content. Contrasting old types of alienation effects or 'A-effects' with their new Brechtian counterparts, Brecht writes:

The old A-effects quite remove the object represented from the spectator's grasp, turning it into something that cannot be altered ...

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<sup>11</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press), p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 192.

The new alienations are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today.<sup>13</sup>

To see a supposedly objective, predetermined state of affairs as changeable is to release human creativity. Brecht is not simply eradicating the human subject but replacing a static with a more dynamic version of it:

Our own period, which is transforming nature in so many and different ways, takes pleasure in understanding things so that we can interfere. There is a great deal to man, we say; so a great deal can be made out of him. He does not have to stay the way he is now, nor does he have to be seen only as he is now, but also as he might become.<sup>14</sup>

As with nature so, too, with human nature. Both are pliable. Art is still, after all, humanist, in that it shows us the many different selves that lie buried or repressed within us, but now the human is an altogether more open-ended signifier.

I suggested earlier that for Marxism to imagine a future in which people live fulfilled, non-alienated lives it has to have some idea of what 'people' and their needs are generally like. However, like other historically oriented theories, Marxism, especially in the hands of a Brecht, is a discourse of difference, one consequence of which is to make sweeping generalisations about the nature of human beings problematic. The strategy of dialectically oriented Marxism is to think of the human as at once closed and open, determinate and indeterminate, finite and infinite, normative and transgressive. As Terry Eagleton puts it, 'a certain open-endedness and transformability is part of our natures, built into what we are'. He continues:

that the human animal is able to 'go beyond', make something creative and unpredictable of what makes it, is the condition of historicity and the consequence of a 'lack' in our biological structure which culture, if we are to survive at all, has at all costs to fill. But such self-creating is carried out within given limits, which are finally those of the body itself.<sup>15</sup>

For Eagleton the human is open-ended but not so open-ended as to become an empty, utterly contingent concept. The aesthetic, as we have seen via Adorno, Lukács and Brecht, contributes to this conception of the human as both determinate and indeterminate, art being the place where the human

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<sup>13</sup> Brecht, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Brecht, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup> Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 409-10.

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subject is saved from erasure *and* at the same time put into process.

Such is literature's humanist provenance that the literary text is itself often anthropomorphised. The extreme version of Adorno's conception, in *Aesthetic Theory*, of the work of art as a *pliable object* is to think of it as a kind of *subject*, an animated, multi-faceted being with its own interior life. Hélène Cixous writes:

Everything begins with love. If we work on a text we don't love, we are automatically at the wrong distance. This happens in many institutions where, in general, one works on a text as if it were an object, using theoretical instruments. It's perfectly possible to make a machine out of the text, to treat it like a machine and be treated by it like a machine. The contemporary tendency has been to find theoretical instruments, a reading technique which has bridled the text, mastered it like a wild horse with saddle and bridle, enslaving it. I am wary of formalist approaches, those which cut up structure, which impose their systematic grid.<sup>16</sup>

To tame the text would be to refuse literature's invitation to constitute oneself as a certain kind of subject, a subject who resists objectification, who refuses the consumption of the subjective by the objective, the private by the public, the personal by the impersonal. Opposed both to anti-humanist 'sciences' of the text and to that aloof form of historicism which puts texts in their ideological places, Cixous' perception of the work of art as a kind of living, breathing subject recalls the eighteenth century/Romantic discourses of the aesthetic explored in Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. 'What emerges ... in the late eighteenth century,' writes Eagleton 'is the curious idea of the work of art as a kind of *subject*.'<sup>17</sup> This conception of the aesthetic coincides with the development of bourgeois society which, according to Eagleton, is a society of *consent* rather than *coercion*. Within such a society, claims Eagleton, 'the aesthetic moves into the foreground', since the mysterious individuality or genius of the work of art provides bourgeois society with a model for the way it should ideally express the individuality of its members:

Like the work of art as defined by the discourse of aesthetics, the bourgeois subject is autonomous and self-determining, acknowledges no merely extrinsic law but instead, in some mysterious fashion, gives the law to itself. In doing so, the law becomes the form which shapes

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<sup>16</sup> Hélène Cixous *et al.*, "Conversations", *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, in Mary Eagleton (ed.) *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 117.

<sup>17</sup> Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 4.

into harmonious unity the turbulent content of the subject's appetites and inclinations. The compulsion of the autocratic power is replaced by the more gratifying compulsion of the subject's self-identity.<sup>18</sup>

The qualification to be made here is that if bourgeois culture is built upon the 'turbulent content of the subject's appetites and inclinations' then it is at the same time indifferent to them in its tendency to objectify, commodify, reduce, alienate and rationalise.

Like other Marxist thinkers before him, Eagleton is at once redemptive and critical of concepts like individualism, humanism and the aesthetic. That these concepts are questionable does not mean that they are totally beyond redemption. For Eagleton, as for other Marxist critics, bourgeois capitalist society paradoxically provides resources which may eventually lead to its overthrow.

The final part of this article is devoted to a reading of a play by Shakespeare, for Shakespeare has often been taken to epitomise the humanist essence of literature. This section will attempt to show how the artwork, to borrow Adorno's terms, works 'to gain self-awareness' for its protagonists and audience/readers, thereby challenging the safety as well as the convenience of ready-made, objectified thought.<sup>19</sup>

The world of *Macbeth* is traumatic. Killer soldiers are rewarded for their acts of 'bloody execution' (I.ii.18) in the war-zone.<sup>20</sup> Because the war-zone will not stay within its prescribed boundaries, a child is stabbed and murdered onstage in the presence of the child's mother, and men – one of whom happens to be the king – are butchered in their sleep. I am made complicit with the murder of the king. I want it to happen. Thus another boundary – the moral boundary separating me from a transgression – is eroded. The woman partly responsible for the murders is subsequently traumatised. The man partly responsible for the murders is himself murdered.

Some recent theoretically informed criticism has tended to avoid the play's emotional impact in favour of a more distanced location of the ideology of the play. Peter Stallybrass, for instance, thinks that the concepts of 'witchcraft, sovereignty, the family ... map out the ideological terrain of *Macbeth*';<sup>21</sup> Malcolm Evans explores the 'instances of disruption to the harmonious, univocal discourse of Tudor and Stuart absolutism' which

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<sup>18</sup> Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1951), I.ii.18. All subsequent references to this edition are given within the text.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Stallybrass, 'Macbeth and Witchcraft', in Alan Sinfield (ed.), *New Casebooks: Macbeth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 36.

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'proliferate in the early scenes';<sup>22</sup> Alan Sinfield suggests that modern theoretical approaches to *Macbeth* in particular and to literature in general question the assumption of older criticism that 'the characters are actual people' by treating them instead as 'textual arrangements which involve ideas about people'.<sup>23</sup>

Modern theoretical criticism, as represented here at least, thus tells us not to get too *involved*. It tells us to keep our distance, to be dispassionate, lest we make the humanist error of mistaking ideology (that which societies construct and naturalise as the 'truth' about human being) for the thing — human being — itself. Characteristically the insistence is upon: the social construction of reality; the importance of realising that the social construction of reality is not 'reality' itself (which does not exist in any ontological sense because it is only ever socially constructed); and the priority of 'textual arrangements' over people ('textual arrangements' — social constructions — come *first* and 'people' *second* because people are the effect of social constructions). I do not want to deny the importance and necessity of locating texts in their ideological contexts. However, if we are to countenance the notion that literature is a non-prescriptive humanist discourse, then the hierarchical relationship between 'textual arrangements' and 'people' needs to be reversed, or equalised or, ideally, considered more *dialectically*. For what if 'textual arrangements' were the product of 'people' who then somehow lost sight of the fact that these textual arrangements were originally their own creations? One of the outcomes of this loss of symbiotic relationship between creator and creation, producer and produced would be to call the alienated creation something like a 'textual arrangement'. We create but we forget why we created and thus our creations seem alien and inhuman.

Let me put this once again in explicitly Marxist-humanist language. In *Capital* Marx writes relentlessly of the way capitalism renders human values and processes indecipherable because of the way capitalism attaches value to *things*. I buy a jar of coffee from a supermarket but such is the distance between the point of production and the point of consumption that I have no immediate knowledge of the human conditions under which the coffee was produced. *Things* thus appear to exist independently of the human beings who labour to create them. Such is the reification of human processes and human value that both become invisible. 'Value' writes Marx 'does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic'. He continues:

Later on, men try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of their own social product: for the characteristic which objects of utility

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<sup>22</sup> Malcolm Evans, 'Imperfect Speakers: the Tale Thickens', in Sinfield (ed.), p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Sinfield, 'Introduction', in Sinfield (ed.), p. 6.

have of being values is as much men's social product as is their language. The belated scientific discovery that the products of labour, in so far as they are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labour expended to produce them, marks an epoch in the history of mankind's development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labour.<sup>24</sup>

We belatedly discover that commodities are the product of human labour and human arrangements even as the capitalist system still feels precisely like an impersonal system which is alien and impervious to human projects and realities. Capitalism still appears, to use Marx's term, 'objective' (meaning reified), rather than subjective (meaning something to do with human values and choices — including choices about what we make of ourselves). Creations are in other words still alienated from their creators. Products are still indecipherable as *human* products. Objects are still set over against subjects.

*Macbeth* can be seen as an attempt to recover the putatively inner, human, experiential dimension of otherwise external and alien phenomena. The dagger, for instance, is the *thing* whose origin in human processes the play seeks to disclose even as Macbeth contributes towards its reification. It is all too tempting for Macbeth to alienate the murder which he is about to commit from himself and treat the dagger as though it represented a purely external compulsion. 'Thou marshall'st me,' Macbeth says to the dagger as though it has nothing to do with him — only to admit in the next breath that it is signposting 'the way that I was going' (II.i.42).

Murder cannot be disowned by Macbeth because the play eroticises it. Murder of the king and father figure is taboo and what is taboo is treated by the play with awe, fear and fascination. Taboos forbid but in forbidding they excite interest in what lies beyond the limits which they impose. This is what I take Georges Bataille to mean when he suggests that '*transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it*'. Taboo and transgression in other words *imply* as much as they *oppose* one another, for the taboo creates the desire to transgress it. In Bataille's words again: the 'taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it'.<sup>25</sup> What, then, could excite more fear and erotic fascination than the prospect of murdering the king?

The eroticism of taboos and transgressions is more fully realised by Lady Macbeth than it is by Macbeth. This is perhaps because Macbeth, prone as he is to the externalisation of internal phenomena, cannot immediately see

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<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Pelican, 1976), p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Calder and Boyars, 1962), pp. 63, 68.

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the erotic implications of the taboo. The name that he initially gives to his murderous impulse is ambition – ‘vaulting ambition’ (I.vii.27). This seems a fairly reserved, alienated way of thinking about the taboo he is contemplating breaking. The appeal to ambition functions like the dagger, as a way of avoiding personal confrontation with murder’s inner erotic implications.

Macbeth is schooled in the art of the erotic by the better versed Lady Macbeth. It is she who sees more clearly the erotic potential of the taboo. It is she who more daringly relates murder to the senses. Perhaps this is because, as a female outsider to a male-dominated society, she is less given to the externalisations and displacements of that masculine culture. Compared with Lady Macbeth’s imaginative foreplay, Macbeth’s seems dull and inhibited. In response to Macbeth’s worry that their enterprise may fail, Lady Macbeth imagines for him and for herself the sexual scene of the murder:

We fail?  
But screw your courage to the sticking place,  
And we’ll not fail. When Duncan is asleep  
(Whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey  
Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains  
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,  
That memory, the warder of the brain,  
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep  
Their drenched natures lie, as in a death,  
What cannot you and I perform upon  
Th’unguarded Duncan?

(I.vii.60-71)

The place of murder will be a scene of carnivalesque excess to which drunken chamberlains with fumed memories will be made to contribute. In such a situation of unfastened boundaries what are the limits of the possible? What are the limits of the self? ‘What cannot you and I perform?’ That ‘you and I’ becomes an irresistible prospect of potent indivisibility.

*Macbeth* may thus be understood as an attempt to overcome the alienation of a culture which has forgotten or which only half remembers its own subjective erotic investment in the creation of taboos. ‘There’s no art,’ says Duncan of the deceitful Macdonwald, ‘To find the mind’s construction in the face’ (I.iv.12-13). Duncan’s words testify to the rift which exists in the play between surfaces and depths, outer and inner worlds. Shakespeare’s tragic protagonists are nevertheless sufficiently agitated and disquieted to want to at least try to decipher the ‘social hieroglyphic’. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are the names we give to the desire to restore objects to the subject. Insofar as

we identify with them, their disquiet becomes ours and we are encouraged to discover the human creators whose physiognomy cannot be immediately recognised in their alienated creations. Duncan is therefore wrong. There is a (Shakespearean) art which at least tries to find 'the mind's construction in the face' and restore inner to outer, private to public, creator to created.

I do not want to overstate the idea that taboo and transgression are implied by one another and that failure to recognise this truth constitutes a failure to acknowledge the inner erotic component of such seemingly outer phenomena as social taboos. Alongside the notion that some taboos may incite transgression, another perspective should be added. This is that taboos and boundaries are as necessary to the individual in their moral and prohibitive aspect as they are integral to his/her erotic life. This is emphatically not to suggest that morality is always and everywhere the spontaneous expression of individuals who freely choose to, say, honour their country or the institution of marriage as though such socially constructed moral agendas were natural. Because morality is on trial, like virtually everything else in Shakespeare's tragedies, such obvious social constructions of morality are severely tested. The illusion of morality – that which passes for morality in the form of the ostensibly just war represented in the first act of the play, for example – does not survive tragedy's search for more authentic values.

Tragedy's drive towards authenticity involves placing people in such extreme situations that they – and we – are forced to confront the question of what ultimately matters. The notion of *subjective experience* is once again all-important here for only by seriously contemplating the breaking of a taboo is the taboo experienced as an *internal* rather than simply *external* necessity. Here is Georges Bataille again:

We must know, we can know that prohibitions are not imposed from without. This is clear to us in the anguish we feel when we are violating the taboo, especially at that moment when our feelings hang in the balance, when the taboo still holds good and yet we are yielding to the impulsion it forbids.<sup>26</sup>

This perfectly captures *Macbeth's* intense evocation of pain and pleasure, anguish and fascination. That these emotions have to be felt on the pulse by the tragic protagonist and through him/her by the audience constitutes a privileging of the human witness, a privileging of the idea of subjective testimony. It is through this insistence upon human testimony that tragedy in particular and literature in general attempt to 'get behind the secret' of the alienated social products of men and women.

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<sup>26</sup> Bataille, pp. 38-9.

## Post-Theory, Literature, Marxism

It would not do to be dogmatic about such matters. I cannot know *for certain* the human impulses which underlie the social hieroglyphic. Perhaps there *is* only the hieroglyphic. Perhaps there is nothing beneath it. Perhaps the human is after all too indeterminate and ambiguous a thing to be located. At the close of *King Lear* Edgar says to the surviving characters of the tragedy:

The weight of this sad time we must obey;  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.<sup>27</sup>

These words from the closing speech of *King Lear* resonate across the Shakespearean canon. Tongues and hearts are so often alienated from one another that the task of putting them back together seems as urgent as it seems monumental. For, to quote another Shakespearean *locus classicus*, if the self has that 'within which passes show', then how can that recessed interiority ever be brought to language?<sup>28</sup> How can the heart and tongue, the private and the public come together? The difficulty of answering these questions does not stop Shakespeare from asking them.

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<sup>27</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1972), V.iii.322-3.

<sup>28</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), I.ii.85.

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## Keywords: 'Gender'

Deborah Cameron

The 1983 edition of Raymond Williams's *Keywords* does not contain an entry for *gender*. Williams does briefly discuss the word in his entry for *sex*, noting that after the emergence of a critique of sexism in the 1960s, 'some writers began using the alternative *gender*'. He adds an etymological note: 'This had its root in *generare*, L — to beget, but with the related *genre* and *genus* had acquired a specialized meaning, in the case of *gender* almost exclusively grammatical'. The motivation Williams suggests for the post-1960s adoption of *gender* as an alternative to *sex* is to avoid 'the C20 associations now gathered around *sex* (cf. the rejection of views or presentations of women as *sex objects*'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, *sex* had acquired a primarily erotic meaning, and speakers felt the need for another word to refer to the difference between men and women.

This account is at odds with the story most feminists would tell. It makes no mention at all of the *theoretical* motivation for the sex/gender distinction, namely the idea that the social condition of being a woman or being a man is not the same thing as, and does not follow 'naturally' from, the biological condition of being female or male. Although the opposition between sex (biologically given) and gender (socially constructed) has been subject to various kinds of deconstruction,<sup>2</sup> the insight that we are dealing with a phenomenon of culture rather than nature remains fundamental to just about every kind of feminism. It is this that underpins the preference for talking about *gender* rather than *sex* in many contexts; and it implies also that the two forms are not 'alternatives' in the sense of being synonymous and interchangeable, for their meanings differ in a way that is theoretically consequential.

But perhaps the most striking thing about the feminist sense of *gender* is the precariousness of its hold on the usage of the wider linguistic community. The word itself has become common enough, but often it is used simply as a substitute for *sex*, with no necessary implication that the phenomenon denoted by the term is social rather than biological. Sometimes, indeed, the implication is the opposite. For instance, I once heard a biologist on TV explaining that there was still no reliable DNA test for 'gender'. If *gender*

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations in this paragraph are from Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1983), p.285.

<sup>2</sup> The best-known instance of this deconstruction occurs in the work of Judith Butler (e.g. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990)), but Butler is not the only or indeed the first critic to make the point that gender is not merely the cultural elaboration of a pre-existing category of biological sex; rather, it is already established cultural beliefs about men and women that make biological differences meaningful. See also note 6 below.

## Key Words: 'Gender'

is understood in the feminist sense then this observation is redundant. What he meant, of course, and in context it was quite clear, was that contrary to popular belief, scientists still cannot categorise individuals as biologically male or female with 100% reliability by inspecting their chromosomes. The avoidance of the word *sex* in this context is remarkable. (If a biologist cannot talk about biology, who can?) It suggests that *sex* has become some sort of 'dirty word', whether because of its strong association with the erotic or because of a perception that *gender* is to *sex* as *Black* or *African American/Caribbean* is to *coloured*, i.e. the preferred term of radicals within a subaltern community and thus more 'politically correct'. (In the case of *sex/gender* this perception is inaccurate, but one can see how it may arise.)

Another example comes from a letter to *The Guardian* in which the writer Adam Mars-Jones draws attention to the incidence of what appears to be homosexual behaviour in colonies of King Penguins, noting: 'Courtship activities such as "bowing" and "dabbling" take place between males, as well as between penguins of different genders'.<sup>3</sup> Penguins of different *genders*? Here, presumably, the use of *gender* is not motivated by squeamishness about sex in the erotic sense (since this is in fact the subject of the letter). So, is Adam Mars-Jones just following the trend towards using *gender* as a polite/politically correct synonym for *sex*? (The politeness in this case would of course be directed towards the sensibilities of *Guardian* readers rather than penguins.) Alternatively, since he is well known as a gay intellectual and activist, who may therefore be expected to have some familiarity with academic debates on gender, is Mars-Jones seriously suggesting that we can (should?) distinguish sex and gender in non-human animals? May he even be implying that the 'homosexual' courting behaviour of King Penguins, which cannot be dictated simply by the 'natural' instinct to procreate, constitutes evidence for their possessing gender?

Most likely Adam Mars-Jones is just caught up in the general confusion about whether to use *sex* or *gender*. The result is itself confusing: you could read it as an anti-Cartesian defence of penguin culture, but it is more plausibly read as a contribution to the political discourse that defends homosexuality as a 'normal variation' rather than a 'perversion' or a mere 'lifestyle choice'. Within that discourse, it is rhetorically useful to be able to point to examples of homosexual behaviour across cultures, historical periods and indeed species. But the 'normal variation' discourse on homosexuality is not a social constructionist discourse (it is an essentialist discourse, though not all versions entail specifically *biological* essentialism). The use of *gender* in this context tends therefore to confuse the issue and undermine the logic of the argument — at least for a reader who understands *gender* in its social

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Mars-Jones, 'For the Birds', *Guardian* Letters, August 21 1999.

constructionist sense.

It is evident that cultural understandings of gender (both of the word and of what it denotes) have been influenced by the emergence and increasing salience of a politics of sexuality which, like feminism if not always for the same reasons, questions the assumption that particular characteristics, desires and behaviours follow 'naturally' from the possession of particular kinds of sexed bodies. If Adam Mars-Jones's letter represents one current within that politics, there is also, of course, a radically anti-essentialist ('queer') current. This current has recently added a new term to the social constructionist vocabulary: the word *transgender(ed)*. *Gender* provides the root from which this term is derived, while the *trans-* prefix echoes two older words, namely *transvestite* (someone who cross-dresses) and *transsexual* (someone who changes sex). In current (activist and scholarly) usage, *transgender* is an overarching term which encompasses these already familiar possibilities — but importantly, it is not limited to them. Whereas *transvestite* suggests a fairly superficial and temporary kind of 'crossing', and *transsexual* an absolute, permanent switch (living as someone of 'the other sex' and re-sexing the physical body by way of surgical procedures and hormone treatment), *transgender* is potentially more complex and ambiguous.

For example, the Brazilian transgendered prostitutes who are the subject of anthropologist Don Kulick's absorbing study *Travesti* are born male;<sup>4</sup> they adopt women's names and dress in women's clothing; they take hormones and inject silicone into their breasts, buttocks and thighs to produce a feminized body-shape; they are erotically attracted to (non-feminized) men; they retain their male genitals and penetrate their sexual partners as well as being penetrated by them. Unlike those transsexuals who seek surgical reassignment on the grounds that they are suffering from the clinical condition of 'gender dysphoria',<sup>5</sup> they do not regard themselves as 'women trapped in men's bodies' or seek to pass as women. For all that they adopt many markers of 'feminine' social self-presentation, they do not claim the subjectivity of women, saying clearly that they are homosexual men; the bodies they construct so painstakingly have both male and female characteristics (e.g. a penis and breasts). 'Transgendered' is an apter term for this than 'transsexual', which tends to connote switching rather than mixing. For similar reasons, 'transgendered' is also used in relation to those 'gender outlaws' who

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<sup>4</sup> Don Kulick, *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> 'Gender dysphoria' is itself an example of the semantic recuperation of *gender* to *sex*, since what causes the 'dysphoria' of the people this term is applied to is their conviction that they have the wrong *body* for their preferred social role and identity. Typically they have to prove to the doctors that they are *not* ambivalent or confused about their 'true' gender.

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undergo sex-change operations but refuse (as an act of conscious political subversion) to categorize themselves as 'women' or 'men', to adopt all the conventional markers of one gender or to position themselves as heterosexual. The law such individuals are breaking is the one that enjoins congruence between sexed bodies, gendered subjectivities and erotic desires — and this in a framework where there are always exactly two positions (male/female, masculine/feminine, hetero/homo). *Transgender* challenges the presupposition of a pure, two-term system in which every individual is (whether 'naturally' or not) 'either one thing or the other', by allowing people to position themselves as neither, or both at once.

But, hang on a minute: wasn't challenging the presupposition of an absolute and immutable binary opposition part of the business of the word *gender*, part of the reason for using it as an alternative to *sex*? Although feminists were bound to acknowledge the overwhelming social fact of two genders as well as two sexes, there was nothing in the feminist definition that ruled out the possibility of gender 'crossing', or of a future society with more than two genders or of one with no gender at all.<sup>6</sup> So why do we need to refer to people who are anomalous within the binary system as *transgendered* rather than just *gendered*? One may suggest, of course, that 'trans' foregrounds the processual aspect, the 'becoming' that is evident in transgendered life stories: but again, 'becoming' was one of the things feminists had tried to build into their theory of gender, where it applied to everyone, not only the 'anomalous' cases. (In Simone de Beauvoir's classic formulation, one is not born but *becomes* a woman.)

Arguably, *transgender* is needed because *gender* has failed: at best it is understood as a sort of cultural frosting on the biological cake, while at worst (which is even more common) it is understood as synonymous with *sex*. It seems possible that *transgender* itself may meet a comparable semantic fate as it is taken up by a wider speech community. Perhaps it will come to be equated with the phenomenon most people currently call *transsexualism* (altering the body to fit the man/woman you always knew you 'really' were). In that case a new term will be needed for cases that stir up more serious gender trouble.

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<sup>6</sup> Both 'more than two' and 'none at all' have been adopted as ideals by currently existing political tendencies — respectively, queer politics and materialist feminism of the kind associated with Christine Delphy and (early) Monique Wittig. At a conference held in Paris in January 1999 to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Delphy pointed out that some feminists had deconstructed the sex/gender distinction long before queer theorists, but from a totally different political standpoint: her observation may be rendered loosely as 'they want to proliferate genders, whereas we want to get rid of gender entirely'.

The insight that women and men are made rather than born, and that their social relations are a matter of culture rather than nature, is both enormously significant and, it seems, enormously troubling. *Gender* is the (English) keyword in which that insight is embodied most directly; the fortunes of the term over the past 30 years illustrate both the significance of the original idea and the degree to which English speakers continue to resist its radical implications.

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## The gorgeous contributions of India': Ruskin, Owen Jones and Oriental Art

Simon Dentith

Ruskin's Inaugural Lecture as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford in February 1870 has, in an age of postcolonial awareness, acquired a prominence that it certainly has not enjoyed for most of the time since the lecture's delivery. Seized upon by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* in order to assimilate Ruskin to the more obviously imperialist writing of Carlyle, the lecture's concluding exhortation to England (in the persons of the undergraduates at Oxford) has been made to stand as a symptomatic expression of imperialist sentiment.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Ruskin's rhetoric now appears irredeemable:

And this is what [England] must either do, or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea ...<sup>2</sup>

The remainder of the lecture is devoted to explaining that England should and can be worthy of the high destiny that her colonial duty imposes upon her. Following Said, the Lecture's peroration now features in Elleke Boehmer's useful anthology *Empire Writing*, where it figures as an early exhibit of a cast of mind in which there is 'mutually reinforcing aesthetic, moral and patriotic responsibility'.<sup>3</sup> The lecture's conclusion is impossible to defend, especially when Boehmer can quote Cecil Rhodes as testimony to the impression it left, and Ruskin himself on the centrality of it to his teaching. However, we can still ask how integral to Ruskin's thinking as a whole is this peroration on the benefits of colonialism — how mutually reinforcing, in fact, are the 'aesthetic' and the 'patriotic' aspects of Ruskin's thought in this area? What kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993). See also Elizabeth Helsinger, 'Ruskin and the Politics of Viewing: Constructing National Subjects', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18 (1994), pp. 125-146; and Patrick Brantlinger, 'A Postindustrial Prelude to Postcolonialism: John Ruskin, William Morris, and Gandhism', *Critical Inquiry* 22, 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 466-485.

<sup>2</sup> John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), vol. 20, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Elleke Boehmer (ed.), *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

reassessment of Ruskin's writing is forced upon us by this renewed attention to aspects of his writing largely glossed over in the last century or so?

This is in part a familiar but nevertheless troubling question — do readers have to agree with everything that a writer writes? The obvious answer to this question is *no*; but it remains troubling because ugly attitudes expressed in one place can seem to invalidate more attractive attitudes expressed elsewhere. Put the question another way — is any writer's work fundamentally consistent? One may return a less confident *no* to this question also. Given this, it is possible — and indeed salutary for any too hasty *post hoc* condemnation of Ruskin — to recall that two of Ruskin's most fervent late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century disciples, William Morris and J.A. Hobson, were in their different ways leading opponents of imperialism. Clearly what these two people took from Ruskin was not the peroration on colonialism, which they might have claimed to be aberrant, but a wholly different ethics and politics. But Said's challenge would still, in a more fundamental sense, remain. He even acknowledges the peculiar swerve taken by the lecture as it lurches into its exhortation to go forth and found colonies. For all the unfairness of Said's assimilation of Ruskin to the wholly rebarbative writing of Carlyle's 'Nigger Question', the fundamental contention of *Culture and Imperialism* remains untouched by these recognitions of the complexities and contradictions of Ruskin's writings and his influence. This is the view that nineteenth-century culture, in its ambition to bring into its purview the various arts of the world, was fundamentally complicit with imperialism, especially in providing a mental disposition or map of the world in which the superiority of Europe was taken for granted.

We can approach these large issues from another and less rarefied direction, considering Ruskin's writing on art from an earlier decade, the 1850s, and contrasting them with the work of the architect Owen Jones (1809-1874), whose assessments of Arab and Indian art and decoration differed profoundly from Ruskin's. On 13 January 1858, Ruskin gave another inaugural lecture, this time at the opening of the Architectural Museum in South Kensington — funded, of course, by proceeds from the Great Exhibition. Among the assembled dignitaries was almost certainly Owen Jones, who had been responsible for some of the exhibits in the Crystal Palace seven years previously, who had written extensively about the exhibition, and whose *magnum opus*, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), took as its starting point the extraordinary range of design materials gathered together for the great occasion of 1851. Ruskin's lecture, which is now the first piece in the collection *The Two Paths*, might have been written directly at Owen Jones, so exactly does it contradict some of Jones's central aesthetic tenets. Above all, the two writers differed on the question of non-European art; Jones was its principal champion in mid-century England, while *The Two*

## 'The gorgeous contributions of India'

*Paths* opens with a withering assault upon Indian art. Ruskin, indeed, saw this art as symptomatic of the atrocities committed by the Indian Mutineers, and contrasted it with the absence of art in the Scottish Highlands — those same Highlands which, despite their rude artlessness, nevertheless produced the heroic defenders of European women and children in the course of the Mutiny. Better this artlessness, in his view, than the artful cruelty of the Sepoys.

Ruskin's case in his lecture is simple enough. He poses to himself, and to his audience, the apparent paradox that art has always been associated with national decline: 'the apparent connection of great success in art with subsequent national degradation'.<sup>4</sup> The contrast between India and Scotland makes this paradox appear especially starkly, given Ruskin's rhetorical powers in emphasising the artistic achievements of the former:

Among the models set before you in this institution, and in others established throughout the kingdom for the teaching of design, there are, I suppose, none in their kind more admirable than the decorated works of India. They are, indeed, in all materials capable of colour, — wool, marble, or metal, — almost inimitable in their delicate application of divided hue, and fine arrangement of fantastic line. Nor is this power of theirs exerted by the people rarely, or without enjoyment; the love of subtle design seems universal in the race, and is developed in every implement that they shape, and every building that they raise; it attaches itself with the same intensity, and with the same success, to the service of superstition, of pleasure, or of cruelty; and enriches alike, with one profusion of enchanted iridescence, the dome of the pagoda, the fringe of the girdle, and the edge of the sword.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this level of artistic achievement, Ruskin is unrelenting:

Since the race of man began its course of sin on this earth, nothing has ever been done by it so significative of all bestial, and lower than bestial, degradation, as the acts of the Indian race in the year that has just passed by ... Cruelty stretched to its fiercest against the gentle and unoffending, and corruption festered to its loathsomest in the midst of the witnessing presence of a disciplined civilization, — these we could not have known to be within the practicable compass of human guilt, but for the acts of the Indian mutineer.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 16, p. 263.

<sup>5</sup> Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, pp. 261-2.

<sup>6</sup> Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, pp. 262-3.

Hence the paradoxical association of artistic achievement with national degradation. Ruskin, however, can resolve it readily enough: '*no great school ever yet existed which had not for primal aim the representation of some natural fact as truly as possible*'.<sup>7</sup> Indian art, by this criterion, is clearly not a great school:

It has one curious character distinguishing it from all other art of equal merit in design — *it never represents a natural fact*. It either forms its compositions out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line; or, if it represents any living creature, it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form. To all the facts and forms of nature it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself; it will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster; it will not draw a flower, but only a spiral or a zigzag.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, the three great schools of Italian art, the Venetian, the Florentine and the Roman, all spring from a fundamental choice, to make the representation of some great natural fact the basis of their art. Hence the 'two paths'; on the one hand the path which leads to life via the representation of nature; on the other hand, the path which leads to death when the artist becomes enamoured of his own skill and subordinates nature to conventionalism. Ruskin thus emerges, not only as the rhetorical scourge of the Indian mutineer, but as the grand opponent of all conventionalism in design. Here at least the component parts of his argument are closely allied — and it is worth noting that he himself was an all-or-nothing man, scorning those readers who would take from his arguments only what they pleased, and scorning those buildings which adopted the outward form of the Gothic but left out the soul.

Ruskin restated his case with still more vigour a year later, in an address at Manchester on 'The Unity of Art', which subsequently formed the second lecture in *The Two Paths*. However, to realise the full force of his argument, it is necessary to supplement the lecture as printed in the 1859 volume, with the verbatim record of the address, printed as a separate pamphlet; Cook and Wedderburn helpfully include substantial excised paragraphs as footnotes in the *Complete Works*. The association of skill in decorative art with barbarism could not be more emphatic:

You will find this kind of formal ornamentation, especially in what I have in *The Stones of Venice* called ... that 'detestable' ornament of

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<sup>7</sup> Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, p. 270.

<sup>8</sup> Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, p. 265.

## 'The gorgeous contributions of India'

the Alhambra. All ornamentation of that lower kind is pre-eminently the gift of cruel persons, Moorish, Indian, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, and so on. I say it is their peculiar gift; not, observe, that they are only capable of doing this, while other nations are capable of doing more; but that they are capable of doing this in a way which civilized nations cannot equal. The fancy and delicacy of eye in arranging lines and interweaving colours — mere line and colour, observe, without natural form — seems to be somehow an inheritance of ignorance and cruelty, belonging to men as spots to the tiger or hues to the snake. I do not profess to account for this; I point it out, and you will find it true if you look through the history of nations and their acquirements. I merely assert the fact. Get yourselves to be gentle and civilized, having respect for human life and a desire for good, and somehow or other you will find that you will not be able to make such pretty shawls as before. You know that you cannot make them as pretty as those sepoys do at this moment. You will find yourselves, as you make yourselves more kind and good, more clumsy in that sort of ornament. If you want a piece of beautiful painted glass at this moment, you do not find that any benevolent Christian can produce it; you have to go back to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, to the days of those precious sovereigns when the Black Prince killed two thousand men, women, and children before breakfast because he got in a passion. This you will find to be a general description of the moral character of those who produce ornamentation dedicated to pleasure only.<sup>9</sup>

Ruskin is in danger of stumbling into a serious difficulty here, in seeming to suggest the inevitable association of artistic skill with cruelty; indeed, one could instance this passage, and the cognate argument in the first lecture of *The Two Paths*, as evidence to suggest that there is a real anxiety on Ruskin's part about the moral value of art in general. Thus here, when he asserts that it is impossible to obtain beautiful glass at the moment, but has to return to the barbarous thirteenth or fourteenth centuries for it, he is close to suggesting the fundamental incompatibility of artistic success with moral and social progress. To be sure, he rescues his case by insisting, at the end of this extract, that his strictures apply to 'ornamentation dedicated to pleasure only'; nevertheless, the possibility of a too sweeping inclusiveness of argument is certainly a real one.

Here, then, is an especially categorical association of decorative art with barbarism and cruelty, explicitly condemning the decorative arts of

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<sup>9</sup> Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, pp. 306-7n.

'Moors, Indians, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, and so on.' Doubtless some of Ruskin's peremptoriness can be explained by the moral panic brought on by the Indian Mutiny; certainly that Sepoy keeps making his way into Ruskin's prose, in the first lecture decorating the blade of his sword, in the second, somewhat implausibly, weaving pretty shawls. But Ruskin's suspicion of decorative art for its own sake emerges from the very centre of his aesthetics, and was certainly expressed before these post-Mutiny lectures. This suspicion takes as its characteristic example the ornamentation of the Alhambra ('Moorish'), about which Ruskin first complained in *The Stones of Venice* in 1851, and to which he alludes in the passage above.

However, it is certainly the case that the references to Arabian decoration in the earlier volume are more nuanced than they are in *The Two Paths*. While the Alhambra itself may be 'detestable', it is not characteristic of Arabian art more generally, about which Ruskin writes with some ambivalence. In a discussion of colouring, for example, and its place in architectural ornamentation, he notes that Arabian architects were forbidden to introduce animal forms; nevertheless:

...the Arab, therefore, lay under no disadvantage in colouring, and he had all the noble elements of constructive and proportional beauty at his command: he might not imitate the sea-shell, but he could build the dome. The imitation of radiance by the variegated voussoir, the expression of the sweep of the desert by the barred red lines upon the wall, the starred inshedding of light through his vaulted roof, and all the endless fantasy of abstract line, were still in the power of his ardent and fantastic spirit. Much he achieved; and yet, in the effort of his overtaxed invention, restrained from its proper food, he made his architecture a glittering vacillation of undisciplined enchantment, and left the lustre of its edifices to wither like a startling dream, whose beauty we may indeed feel, and whose instruction we may receive, but must smile at his inconsistency, and mourn over its evanescence.<sup>10</sup>

Ruskin's commentary here is consistent with his later denunciations, since Arabian art is to be praised in so far as it takes its inspiration from natural forms, and pitied in the limitations imposed by the ban on imitation. The passage that I have just quoted is served by an Appendix in which the condemnation of the Alhambra occurs:

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<sup>10</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vols. 9-11 of *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, pp. 234-5.

## 'The gorgeous contributions of India'

I do not mean what I have said here of the inventive power of the Arab to be understood as in the least applying to the detestable ornamentation of the Alhambra. The Alhambra is no more characteristic of Arab work, than Milan Cathedral is of Gothic: it is a late building, a work of the Spanish dynasty in its last decline, and its ornamentation is fit for nothing but to be transferred to patterns of carpets, or bindings of books, together with their marbling, and mottling, and other mechanical recommendations. The Alhambra ornament has of late been largely used in shopfronts, to the no small detriment of Regent Street and Oxford Street.<sup>11</sup>

In this text from the early 1850s, then, the Alhambra is certainly condemned, but it is offered as uncharacteristic, and does not lead to that general and peremptory association of ornamental skill with Oriental cruelty which it will provoke later in the decade. Unlike in his commentary on European art, moreover, Ruskin had not actually seen the buildings which he perforce imagines so eloquently; he has to rely on the work of European copyists, one of whom he acknowledges in a footnote to this Appendix: 'I have not seen the building itself, but Mr. Owen Jones's work may, I suppose, be considered as sufficiently representing it for all purposes of criticism.' Ruskin acknowledges Jones's work on another occasion in the 1850s, as we shall see; on both occasions the fundamental differences which divide the men are barely visible in the careful politeness of Ruskin's acknowledgement.

A further reference to the Alhambra, wholly consistent with those that we have already noted, occurs in the 1850s, in yet another Inaugural Lecture, this time at Cambridge. The recurrence of the palace on such occasions is perhaps not accidental; the large laying down of principles, to which the givers of Inaugural Lectures are drawn, seems consistently to lead Ruskin to the Alhambra as one extreme example of bad art. In his 'Inaugural Address at the Cambridge School of Art' in 1858, Ruskin reverts to the distinction between art pursued for moral purposes, and art pursued for the sake of pleasure merely. The comparison is perhaps less apt than others that he makes:

Compare the feeling with which a Moorish architect decorated an arch of the Alhambra, with that of Hogarth painting the 'Marriage à la Mode', or of Wilkie painting the 'Chelsea Pensioners', and you will at once feel the difference between Art pursued for pleasure only, and for the sake of some useful principle or impression.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 9, p. 469.

<sup>12</sup> John Ruskin, 'Inaugural Address at the Cambridge School of Art', in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 16, pp. 197-8.

This is not a happy injunction to his listeners; the thought of them approaching the decoration of the Alhambra with a consciousness of its moral inferiority to Wilkie's 'Chelsea Pensioners' is not one which inspires confidence in them or their teacher.

The Alhambra, then, appears in Ruskin's writings in the 1850s as an extreme example; it exemplifies art pursued for pleasure only, as opposed to art made for moral purposes. There is another opposition at work in his writing also, which includes more of the art of the East, namely the contrast between art based upon natural forms, and that based upon mere conventionalism. In his most categorical assertions, Ruskin associates art based upon conventionalities, or pursued for merely pleasurable ends, with the cruelties of 'Moors, Indians, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, and so on', and indeed with the cruelties of feudal Europe.

All of these pronouncements, it may perhaps be asserted, are the disposable outworks of what is valuable in Ruskin's writing. This, however, is exactly what is at issue. We can certainly recognise that Ruskin drew upon examples of Oriental art as categorical extremes; we can also recognise that in the 1850s he was feeling his way to a general case about the relation of art to society which was in many ways benign. He expresses it forcibly and pithily in the Oxford lecture with which I began: 'The art of any country *is the exponent of its social and political virtues*'.<sup>13</sup> In this case, Said's insistence on seeing Ruskin's lecture as the 'exponent' of British nineteenth-century 'social and political virtues' marks him perhaps as the true Ruskinian.

This general account of the relation of art to national life, articulated during the key decade of Ruskin's life when he began to work out from aesthetics to accounts of the social world and thus to his critique of contemporary bourgeois society, is diametrically opposed to the aesthetics of Owen Jones, whose *Grammar of Ornament* preceded Ruskin's lectures in *The Two Paths* by only a couple of years, and whose detailed drawings of the ornamentation of the Alhambra provided the only knowledge that Ruskin had of that building.<sup>14</sup> We can begin by noting the striking contrast in the two men's estimates of Indian art. While the ambivalence of Ruskin's praise was always apparent, and while for him technical brilliance was anyway equivocal, Jones writes in the following way in his section on Indian ornament:

The Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all nations in 1851 was barely opened to the public ere attention was directed to the

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<sup>13</sup> John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 20, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra, from drawings taken on the spot in 1834 by the late Jules Goury in 1834 and 1837 by Owen Jones, Arch<sup>t</sup>*, 2 vols. (London: Owen Jones, 1842, 1845); Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856; London: Omega Books, 1986).

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gorgeous contributions of India.

Amid the general disorder everywhere apparent in the application of Art to manufactures, the presence of so much unity of design, so much skill and judgment in its application, with so much elegance and refinement in the execution as was observable in all the works, not only of India, but of all the other Mohammedan contributing countries, — Tunis, Egypt, and Turkey, excited a degree of attention from artists, manufacturers, and the public, which has not been without its fruits.

Whilst in the works contributed by the various nations of Europe there was everywhere to be observed an entire absence of any common principle in the application of Art to manufactures, — whilst from one end to the other of the vast structure there could be found but a fruitless struggle after novelty, irrespective of fitness, that all design was based upon a system of copying and misapplying the received forms of beauty of every bygone style of Art, without one single attempt to produce an Art in harmony with our present wants and means of production — the carver in stone, the worker in metal, the weaver and the painter, borrowing from each other, and alternately misapplying the forms peculiarly appropriate to each — there were to be found in isolated collections at the four corners of the transepts all the principles, all the unity, all the truth, for which we had looked elsewhere in vain, and this because we were amongst a people practising an art which had grown up with their civilisation, and strengthened from their growth. United by a common faith, their art had necessarily a common expression, this expression varying in each according to the influence to which each nation was subject. The Tunisian still retaining the art of the Moors who created the Alhambra; the Turk exhibiting the same art, but modified by the character of the mixed population over which they rule; the Indian uniting the severe forms of Arabian art with the graces of Persian refinement.<sup>15</sup>

Some words of explanation are perhaps required here. The 'isolated collections at the four corners of the transepts' refer to the exhibits of India (split in two), Persia and Tunis, which, it so happened, were placed at the corners of the central transept of the Crystal Palace in 1851 — around, that is, the most central open area of the Exhibition. And Jones's assumption that Indian art must necessarily be 'Mohammedan', is partly explained by a further chapter in *The Grammar of Ornament*, which is devoted to 'Hindoo ornament'.

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<sup>15</sup> Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, pp. 77-8.

These are nevertheless striking paragraphs, and they both contrast and overlap with Ruskin in a number of ways.

It is hard not to be struck, in the first place, by the generosity of Jones's judgment by comparison with Ruskin's. Even making allowance for the intervention of the Indian Mutiny between the publication of *The Grammar of Ornament* and *The Two Paths*, Jones's judgments seem unclouded by the Eurocentrism which manifestly affects Ruskin. The praise of Islam, clearly central to Jones's conception of Indian and North African art, is also noteworthy, and certainly Ruskin's religious commitments serve to explain some of his hostility to both Moorish and Indian art. This feature of Jones's writing is first adumbrated in his commentary on the Alhambra, where, in this Ruskinian context, he makes a striking comparison:

The architecture of the Arabs is essentially religious, — the offspring of the Koran, as Gothic architecture of the Bible. The prohibition to represent animal life, caused them to seek for other means of decoration, — in scriptures from the Koran, interwoven with geometrical ornaments and flowers not drawn decidedly from nature, but translated through the loom.<sup>16</sup>

So the Alhambra is to the Koran as the Gothic is to the Bible; it is not hard to estimate the awkwardness of such an assertion for Ruskin, nor hard to see how the religious ban on natural forms in Islamic art effectively precluded such art from sympathetic consideration.

But we must also note the ways in which Jones resembles Ruskin, for the former also wishes to connect the characteristics of art — in this case, the highly formal characteristics of non-figurative decorative art — to a 'civilisation'. The peculiar strengths of Islamic art, in Jones's account, its notable capacity to marry decoration to purpose, spring in some way from the strength and unity of its civilisation, held together by a common faith. While Ruskin clearly could not have endorsed the faith in this way, we may say that the impulse to connect together art, faith and civilisation is a profoundly Ruskinian one.

We can go further than this and recognise a common response in the hostility to the European goods on display in the Great Exhibition. Ruskin's hostility to the Exhibition is well known. In a postscript to Part II of *Modern Painters*, he refers scornfully to 'the great bazaar of Kensington', and indeed in 1854 he wrote a pamphlet on the Opening of the Crystal Palace, disdaining the exhibition of 'the paltry arts of our fashionable luxury — the carved

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<sup>16</sup> Jones, *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra*, commentary on Plate 1 (no page numbers).

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bedsteads of Vienna, and glued toys of Switzerland, and gay jewellery of France'.<sup>17</sup> Jones's hostility to many of the exhibits on display at the Great Exhibition may seem more surprising, given that he was one of the organisers. However, many of the comments on the Exhibition were critical of the mismatch between technical accomplishment and design — even the official comments; what is striking about Jones's remarks is his readiness to cast his hostility as a contrast between European and Indian design.

These similarities should not mislead us into thinking, however, that Jones had somehow applied Ruskinian principles to Indian art in a more consistent and generous spirit than Ruskin himself. Some fundamental differences, at the level of principle, remain to be explicated. Jones conveniently sets out his 'General Principles in the Arrangement of Form and Colour' at the beginning of *A Grammar of Ornament*, which enables the reader to contrast them readily with Ruskin's ideas on these matters. There are thirty-seven propositions in all, the first thirteen of which are devoted to form, with the remainder devoted to colour. The first thirteen propositions are the ones that concern us here; they resemble Ruskin's ideas in some respects, though in total they amount to a very different aesthetic. Let us begin with the resemblances.

The second proposition reads as follows: 'Architecture is the material expression of the wants, the faculties, and the sentiments in which it is created'.<sup>18</sup> This is evidently a sentiment with which Ruskin could agree, though we must not underestimate the extent to which this kind of historicising generality may have been subscribed to by most people in the mid-nineteenth century. At all events, it is immediately glossed by Jones (in smaller type) in a way that somewhat reduces the scope of the proposition: 'Style in Architecture is the peculiar form that expression takes under the influence of climate and materials at command'.<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps an appropriately materialist correction to the first sentence, depending on how far 'climate and materials' are to be understood as setting limits to 'faculties and sentiments' or serving as a mere adjunct to them. In general, however, this proposition can and does lead Jones to read the ornament he discusses in terms of the 'civilisation' of the peoples who produce it.

The eleventh and twelfth propositions also seem cognate with some Ruskinian notions, though the exemplary practice brought forward to support them is exactly that to which Ruskin is most opposed, as we have seen:

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<sup>17</sup> See John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 3, p. 631; and *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 12, p. 420.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, p. 5

PROPOSITION 11

In surface decorations all lines should flow out of a parent stem. Every ornament, however distant, should be traced to its branch and root. *Oriental practice*.

PROPOSITION 12

All junctions of curved lines with curved or of curved lines with straight should be tangential to each other. *Natural law. Oriental practice in accordance with it.*<sup>20</sup>

These propositions appear to conform with Ruskinian notions of organic form, though it is evident that it is just the accordance of 'oriental practice' with any such ideas which is the central disagreement between the two writers. However, although Jones appears to approach Ruskin here, he starts from very different premises; the invocation of 'natural law' in Proposition 12 does not spring from a belief that ornament should be based upon the imitation of natural forms (like plants or flowers), but rather that these organic forms themselves obey a more fundamental law to which they conform.

This leads us to the most striking difference in aesthetic doctrine, best expressed in Jones's eighth Proposition: 'All ornament should be based upon a geometrical construction'.<sup>21</sup> Such a sentiment is anathema to Ruskin, and opens Jones precisely to the charge of conventionalism. And indeed, it is in this area that the most important aesthetic difference between the two writers emerges; Jones proposes an aesthetic based upon notions of 'harmony' and 'proportion' (Proposition 3) which are ultimately neoclassical in origin, while Ruskin sought to supersede such ideas — indeed, his aversion to them was a leading characteristic of his aesthetics throughout his career. In Jones's view, then, there are some fundamental laws of aesthetics, based upon notions of fitness, proportion and harmony; decoration should flow naturally from adherence to these congruities, and the most successful decorative practice — the oriental — achieves its success by doing so.

It is therefore tempting to see Jones and Ruskin as simple inverses of each other, the former associating neoclassical notions of harmony and proportion with a high estimation of oriental art, while the latter elevates the imitation of organic forms, and bases his condemnation of oriental art on its conventionalism. There are some reasons for hesitation before this conclusion is embraced, notably the fact that, as we have seen, some of Jones's propositions sound surprisingly Ruskinian — in particular his eleventh, in which an organic metaphor ('flow out of a parent stem') is precisely used as his basis for a defence of oriental practice. However it does seem to me to be

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<sup>20</sup> Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, p. 6

<sup>21</sup> Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, p. 5.

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striking that, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, there should be two writers on oriental art making such evidently opposed judgments of it.

Is it therefore possible to draw the further conclusion that these opposite aesthetic judgments are closely related to their authors' politics — that, to repeat Elleke Boehmer's words, the aesthetic and the political are 'mutually reinforcing'? Actually, the answer seems to me to be that we cannot. It is not hard to see that there is a very much less necessary connection between aesthetic and political conviction than Boehmer, Said and Ruskin himself affirm. It would be perfectly possible, after all, for a writer with Jones's aesthetic sympathies to have Ruskin's apparent politics, or for a writer to embrace Ruskin's aesthetics but also to be strongly anti-imperialist — indeed, that is not only a possibility, but a realised historical fact in the person of William Morris. However, this would scarcely be a cultural materialist conclusion, since such a disarticulation of the aesthetic from the social or political would be less radical even than the opinion of that 'Tory of the old school', John Ruskin himself. Let us consider instead some alternative possibilities.

Daryl Ogden has suggested, in an article on 'oriental' Gothic with respect to *The Stones of Venice*, that since Ruskin so greatly admired a style of Gothic in Venice that was in fact deeply influenced by oriental architecture, the apparently 'Northern' style of architecture that he advances as exemplary was already imbued with the spirit of the east — exactly the spirit which elsewhere he is keen to deprecate.<sup>22</sup> This line of argument can be extended; in the manner perhaps of Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* (1992), it may be argued that the long pressure of British engagement with India, in both pre-colonial and then colonial relations, had infiltrated a range of attitudes, including aesthetic ones, which testify to the persistence of that pressure even as they seek to establish their distance from the colonial other. On this reading, Ruskin's attempt to drive a clear categorical line between the two paths, the (eastern) path leading to death and the (western) path leading to life, is bound to be undermined from within by the presence of oriental art on the occidental side of the divide.

Such a deconstruction, it may be felt, does not go far enough to restore a fully historical sense of what holds together the aesthetic and the political in Ruskin's and Jones's writings. To do that we should return to Said and *Culture and Imperialism*; in this perspective, both Jones and Ruskin, despite their opposing judgments about oriental art, are equally complicit in a wider discursive configuration which disposes the arts of the imperial

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<sup>22</sup> Daryl Ogden, 'The Architecture of Empire: "Oriental" Gothic and the Problem of British Identity in Ruskin's Venice', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25,1 (1997), pp. 109-20.

dominions for metropolitan judgment. Oddly enough, such an argument applies better to Jones, the champion of oriental art, than it does to Ruskin, its opponent. This is because of Jones's involvement with the Great Exhibition, aptly described by its most recent historian as glorifying the empire, 'conveying the rich diversity and fascination of different imperial territories'.<sup>23</sup> Even here we must note a complexity; Jeffrey Auerbach records two contradictory attitudes towards the imperial displays at the Crystal Palace, since its organisers were divided between those who wished to present the colonies as sources of raw materials, and those, like Jones, who wished to bring forward oriental art as an inspiration for the reform of industrial design in Britain.<sup>24</sup> But in the wider sweep of an argument inspired by *Culture and Imperialism*, Jones's enthusiasm for oriental art is as suspicious as the attitudes of its denigrators.

There is an evident force to this line of argument, but it suffers from being too epochal; there is surely something unsatisfactory about a position which is insufficiently fine-grained to recognise differences between sympathetic critics and hostile ones. A more narrowly historical or conjunctural approach is required to supplement that epochal perspective; one which recognises, as I have sought to do, such matters as the Indian Mutiny and the moral panic it caused in the late 1850s as influencing Ruskin's judgments. Such an approach would also help us describe the reception history of Ruskin's writings. Given the inevitable contradictions and inconsistencies of such a large body of writing, we can see the process by which his writing has been used over the last one hundred and fifty years as one in which its emphases and priorities have been constantly reformed and realigned as the exigencies of historical and political circumstances have demanded. Thus the particular meanings taken by Morris or Gandhi, or indeed the more suspicious hermeneutics of contemporary postcolonial critics, are part of an inevitable and ongoing re-accentuation (in Bakhtinian phrase) of a diverse body of work.

This is not to wish away the problem; all serious readers of Ruskin will have some painful negotiations to make as they seek to position themselves with respect to his writing. In this respect, perhaps, he is no different from any other past writer connected to and separated from us by a complex and fraught intervening history. What makes it worth the challenge is not only the value of the aesthetic judgments that one may wish to 'rescue'; it is that he himself provides some of the terms by which a materialist criticism could be conducted. But one can only reach that conclusion by making an inevitable selective appropriation from his work. Following Morris, I would wish to stress

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851; A Nation on Display* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> Auerbach, p.100.

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not Ruskin's narrowly political judgments, but the fundamental emphasis he makes, in such writings as 'The Nature of the Gothic' chapter in *The Stones of Venice*, on the social character of art. It is the conditions of labour under which it is produced that determines the character of art, and which enables one to read back from the art-object to the moral and social conditions of its provenance. If that means that the same must be done for Ruskin, and that one must read back from his own writing to the imperialist discursive dispositions which enable them, then so be it — but one must not imagine that this will be the last word to be said about Ruskin, if only because, to make another Bakhtinian point, there is never a last word.

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# Modernism and the Suffragette Prison Narratives

Howard Finn

How many of these peaceful, rational suffragists would face prison, face forcible feeding through a clumsily, agonizingly mutilated nostril? Would I? Have I the right to speak for the militants?

Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*<sup>1</sup>

Given that the emergence of literary modernism in London shared the same time and space (geographic and social) as the suffragette agitation, how is suffragette history represented in the canonical works of modernism? The simple answer would be that it is barely represented at all. Before the war a manifesto in *Blast* from 1914 by Wyndham Lewis 'blesses' suffragettes as the only people (along with Vorticists) truly alive in England.<sup>2</sup> After the war a broad range of feminist positions can of course be discerned in Woolf and others but compared, for example, to the New Woman furore of the 1890s, few contemporary novels of any type actually represent the Votes for Women campaign (the meetings, marches, demonstrations, imprisonments and so on) or engage with its significance beyond the passing suffragette cameo.<sup>3</sup> Even those few popular novels to address the suffrage issue, such as the pro-suffragette *The Convert* (1907) by Elizabeth Robins and the anti-suffragette *Delia Blanchflower* (1917) by Mrs Humphrey Ward, soon fell into relative obscurity. There are various reasons why the suffragette movement, with its unparalleled festival of representation in terms of mass media spectacle and propaganda, biographies and memoirs, didn't translate into widespread novelistic representation. Most obviously, perhaps, the usual lag between an event and novels about that event was further prolonged by the war. In this article I want to read some suffragette narratives, specifically suffragette prison narratives, alongside some novels which are concerned with the suffragette period such as H.G.Wells's *Ann Veronica*, May Sinclair's *The Tree of Heaven* and, particularly, Dorothy Richardson's modernist *Clear Horizon*, book eleven in the *Pilgrimage* series. The aim will be to uncover motifs, connections and

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (London: Virago, 1977), vol. IV, p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'To Suffragettes', *Blast* 1, June 20th 1914 (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), pp. 151-2.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of suffrage fiction see Jane Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago, 1994), especially chapter 4, 'Suffragette Stories', pp. 125-62. See also Maroula Joannou and Jane Purvis (eds.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), especially chapter 7, 'Suffragette Fiction and the Fiction of Suffrage', pp. 101-115.

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tensions which may enable us to trace the lost relationship between an individualistic modernist self and its suffragette other.

It will be useful to begin by doing what one should always be wary of doing with a novel as artful as *Pilgrimage* and that is to sketch the biographical dimension of the text. The central character of *Pilgrimage*, Miriam Henderson, is based on Dorothy Richardson herself, and the character Hypo Wilson is based on H.G.Wells, with whom Richardson had a very long intellectual and political relationship as well as the obligatory affair. The affair seems to have begun in 1905 and continued fitfully until 1907 when Richardson miscarried a child by Wells, an affair coinciding with an intensification in their political relationship: Richardson — at the time a radical socialist — was supporting Wells's ill-judged attempt to radicalize the Fabian society, an attempt which ended in Wells's loud resignation of 1908. In 1906 Richardson met Veronica Leslie-Jones (a character called Amabel in the novel), a twenty-one year old militant suffragette. All this is obliquely treated in *Pilgrimage*, according to which Hypo seduces Miriam, Miriam has a false pregnancy, Miriam introduces Hypo to her young suffragette friend Amabel and a politically disillusioned Hypo and Miriam resign together from the reformist 'Lycurgan' society.

The deadlock of Richardson's and Wells's personal relationship and their relationship with socialism coincided with an impasse in the Votes for Women campaign, an impasse resulting from Parliamentary and Party intransigence following the return to power of a Liberal Government (to be headed by the anti-suffrage Asquith). 1906 saw a division over strategy open up between suffragist constitutionalists and militant suffragettes, with the initiative passing from Millicent Garrett Fawcett's National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies to Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union. Both the suffragist NUWSS and the suffragette WSPU held great marches, in the years 1906 to 1913, which passed into history almost in the moment of their occurrence, not least in the representations of the suffrage press itself. The latter was extremely conscious of what one may call the aura of the grand historical narrative and the events have come down to us with their mythological names: the 'Mud March' of February 9th 1907; 'Women's Sunday' of June 21st 1908; 'Black Friday' of 18 November 1909, the 'Women's Pilgrimage' of July 1913, and so on. Among the many demonstrations and actions of these years were several WSPU-led attempts to 'rush' or 'raid' (the militaristic terms favoured by Christabel Pankhurst) the House of Commons. These were generally marches, some large, some small, some pre-planned, some more or less spontaneous, most of which began as a meeting in Caxton Hall or Hyde Park and ended in attempts to 'rush' Parliament, that is to say ended in violent confrontations with the police outside and sometimes inside the Commons. It is suffragette actions of this kind and their typical consequence — imprisonment — that feature in the novels under discussion.

In *Clear Horizon* (set in 1907), Hypo tells Miriam and Amabel of his curiosity about the independent lives they lead as (new) New Women and he seems fascinated if perplexed by Amabel's suffragette activism — hence his enthusiastic suggestion, often taken as a statement of intent for *Pilgrimage*, that Miriam 'document' in a novel her life amid these changing times for women.<sup>4</sup> In 1908-1909, however, H.G.Wells wrote his own document of the new era for women, *Ann Veronica*. Wells's heroine was ostensibly and scandalously based on the young Fabian Amber Reeves with whom he was having an affair, but readers of Richardson cannot help but notice that entire episodes from *Ann Veronica* crop up in the Hypo-Miriam-Amabel sections of *Pilgrimage*, albeit from a radically different perspective.<sup>5</sup> This seems to go beyond mere intertextuality since those familiar with Richardson's biography will also notice that many details of the character, Ann Veronica, seem to correspond to Richardson and Veronica Leslie-Jones rather than Amber Reeves (even the names suggest some conflation: Amber becomes Veronica in Wells, Veronica becomes Amabel in Richardson).

At the centre of Wells's novel, the eponymous heroine takes part in a suffragette raid on the House of Commons, recognizably a representation of the so-called 'Trojan Horse' incident of 13 February 1908, in which a unit of twenty-one suffragettes entered the Commons yard hidden in two furniture removal vans while a large march from the Women's Parliament at Caxton Hall distracted the police in Parliament Square. In Wells's account Ann springs from a furniture van, leading her comrades, is accosted by a policeman, arrested and removed to prison. Through such an action Ann exploits herself, offering that self up to something greater: the Cause and beyond that, history itself: 'Ann Veronica [...] mingled with the stream of history'.<sup>6</sup> In suffragette descriptions of militant actions the loss of individual selfhood in a collective moment of transcendence is always celebrated. As Sylvia Pankhurst puts it in her description of Women's Sunday 1908 (still reputedly one of the largest political gatherings in world history): 'Self was forgotten; personality seemed minute, the movement so big, so splendid. What an achievement!'<sup>7</sup> And this is Christabel Pankhurst describing her release from Holloway Prison in December 1908:

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<sup>4</sup> Richardson, IV, p. 397.

<sup>5</sup> For an influential reading of correspondences between *Ann Veronica* and *Pilgrimage* see Stephen Heath, 'Writing for Silence: Dorothy Richardson and the Novel', in Susanne Kappeler and Norman Bryson (eds), *Teaching the Text* (London: Routledge, 1983), chapter 8, pp. 126-147.

<sup>6</sup> H.G.Wells, *Ann Veronica* [1909] (London: Dent-Everyman, 1966), p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement* [1931] (London: Virago, 1977), p. 285.

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Mother and I were drawn in procession from Holloway to a gathering of welcome. One of the happiest days in the whole movement was this. Confidence, unity, enthusiasm were complete. A great year had ended. The beloved WSPU had winged its way through storm and stress, further and higher towards its great aim. Each woman in our army of justice had done, had given, had been her best. All had known the pure delight of a self-regardless service and a self-transcending purpose.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, in novels informed by modernist sensibilities the relationship between the individual and the mass movement is presented as one of tension. In *Clear Horizon*, Miriam Henderson questions the way Amabel the suffragette 'exploits' herself in the movement of transcendence from 'self to selflessness'.<sup>9</sup> And the self is lost in the collective, not in the sublime way experienced by Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst, but in an alienated way, by the heroine of May Sinclair's 1917 novel *The Tree of Heaven*:

For Dorothea was afraid of the Feminist Vortex [...] She was afraid of the herded women. She disliked the excited faces, and the high voices skirling their battle-cries, and the silly business of committees, and the platform slang. She was sick and shy before the tremor and the surge of collective feeling; she loathed the gestures and the movements of the collective soul, the swaying and the heaving and rushing forward of the many as one.<sup>10</sup>

This fraught interrogation of the individual's relation to the mass movement and the collective identity of women, the subject position of woman, becomes central to texts like *The Tree of Heaven* and *Pilgrimage*, a sign of a shift to a critical, recognizably modernist individualism informed, for women modernists, by a complex reaction to the suffragette experience.

In suffragette narratives first-hand accounts of demonstrations and marches are for obvious reasons often accompanied by a description of the arrest of the writer and her subsequent experience in Holloway Prison. Notwithstanding the common motifs such as the cell, the plank bed, the coarse garb, the wardress etc., suffragette prison narratives differ somewhat depending on which division (status) the particular prisoner was classed as and on the date of imprisonment (Government policy on treatment of suffragettes changing on an almost week by week basis). The following is an account

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<sup>8</sup> Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, IV, p. 345.

<sup>10</sup> May Sinclair, *The Tree of Heaven* (London: Cassell, 1917), p. 110.

written for the *Penny Magazine* by Christabel Pankhurst upon release from Holloway after two weeks imprisonment following her arrest on the 13 February 1907 'rush' on the Commons. I've selected this account because it is contemporary rather than from a later memoir and because it comes from the moment at which Richardson's *Clear Horizon* and Wells's *Ann Veronica* are set. Although many accounts are much more vivid, emotive and horrific, this account illustrates the stoical tone common to suffragette prison narratives: this is not a martyrdom of the weak but rather a martyrdom of the strong, or at least morally and psychologically superior; there is the superior air of an almost objective observer, describing in a matter of fact manner the horror in which the prisoner finds herself. Christabel writes:

In the old part of the prison the cells are gloomy in the extreme. A perpetual twilight reigns there. [...] The arrival of more than fifty Suffragettes means that some of them do not reach their cells on the first night until midnight or after. Hastily, therefore, each prisoner lays on the floor the plank bed which she finds reared up against the wall. On this is placed a mattress stiffed with cocoa-nut fibre. Coarse sheets, two blankets and a rug complete the bedding.

Before breakfast, cells are cleaned and beds are made. That meal consists [...] of a brown loaf and a pint of tea. The bread is fairly good, the tea very much the reverse. At half-past eight comes the summons to chapel. Here a suffragist prisoner sees not only her colleagues but all the other inmates. In chapel, before the chaplain enters, smiles are exchanged and attempts at conversation are made. [...] After chapel all return to their cells. Later in the morning the prisoners enter the yard for exercise. Round and round they march in single file, a considerable space between each for the sake of preventing conversation. To do that is a matter of some difficulty but prisoners manage to exchange a word now and then. Soon after the return from exercise, dinner is brought to the cells. Brown bread and potatoes form part of every midday meal, but the third factor varies. On Monday it is boiled beans with a small piece of bacon. On Tuesday and Friday it is plain unsweetened suet pudding. On Wednesday and Saturday it is soup, on Thursday it is boiled beef and on Sunday tinned meat, having a pronounced odour and evidently hailing from Chicago. [...] At four o'clock comes supper, consisting of brown bread and cocoa which is even more undrinkable than the tea. At eight o'clock all lights are turned out and all prisoners go to bed.

Some of the more objectionable features of prison life are the provision of a very unwholesome wooden spoon which is handed down from prisoner to prisoner, the scanty supply of water for

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washing, the use of cold water only for cleaning purposes, the use of tins more or less unclean for serving soup and other food; the supply of food of very inferior quality. [...] No nightdresses are provided and the clothing might be better adapted than it is to secure the health and comfort of the wearers.<sup>11</sup>

The tone of the narrator here is so impersonal, so objective, that it is as if Christabel is not a prisoner giving an account of her ordeal but is rather a prison inspector making an official report with its criticisms and recommendations. This tone is a rhetorical feature of many such prison narratives. The experience of being sent to Holloway soon became in itself a crucial one for suffragettes, an experience of sacrifice and martyrdom having a propaganda value in challenging politicians, press and public opinion and, in addition, helping to forge a militant solidarity within the movement — upon release from Holloway suffragettes would be given a triumphal ('breakfast') reception at which they would be awarded medals and honours and thereafter have the privilege of marching in the prisoners' contingent on future processions and demonstrations. Imprisonment also came to have great personal significance for the individual suffragette, being (in the terminology of another era) a consciousness-raising experience — the prison cell becoming a site of revelation and vision. The pre-eminent icon for the suffragettes was Joan of Arc, whose image appears on countless posters and banners between 1906 and 1913 and who would be elaborately represented by a suitably attired suffragette (usually on horseback with sword) on marches and processions. The figure of Joan embodies not only martyrdom but the ecstatic and visionary combined with extreme purity and asceticism. It is this ascetic Joan-in-her-cell with which prison narratives identify, as caricatured by May Sinclair in *The Tree of Heaven* when the suffragette heroine Dorothea is met outside Holloway by her unsympathetic lover Frank, who greets her by saying:

'First of all I want to tell you that you haven't taken me in. Other people may be impressed with this Holloway business, but not me. I'm not moved, or touched, or even interested.'<sup>12</sup>

To which Dorothea replies:

'Sympathy? I don't need your sympathy. It was worth it, Frank. There isn't anything on earth like coming out of prison. Unless it is going in

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<sup>11</sup> Christabel Pankhurst, *Penny Magazine*, February 1907, in Antonia Raeburn, *The Militant Suffragettes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Sinclair, p. 186.

[...] You'll not believe this part of it, but I was absolutely happy in that cell. It was a sort of deep-down unexcited happiness. I'm not a bit religious, but I *know* how nuns feel in *their* cells when they've given up everything and shut themselves up with God. The cell was like a convent cell, you know, as narrow as that bit of shadow there is, and it had nice whitewashed walls, and a plank bed in the corner, and a window high, high up. There ought to have been a crucifix on the wall above the plank bed, but there wasn't a crucifix. There was only a shiny black Bible on the chair.<sup>13</sup>

Dorothea is then taken to the traditional newly-released prisoners' breakfast where she is confronted by a large crowd of suffragette supporters and she feels a 'terror of the collective soul' and its all-consuming 'Vortex'; she longs instead for the sanctuary of her prison-cell, with its 'hardness, its nakedness, its quiet, its visionary peace.'<sup>14</sup> Such was the power of this rhetoric, which Sinclair is documenting, that suffragettes were often shocked to find that cells in Holloway did not resemble this image of whitewashed convent cells but (at least for those in the second and third divisions) were actually dark, dingy and filthy. May Sinclair was a novelist, a suffragist luminary, an early advocate of psychoanalysis, a contributor to the radical feminist *New Freewoman* and modernist *Egoist*, and the strongest early supporter of Dorothy Richardson's writing.<sup>15</sup> *The Tree of Heaven* precedes Sinclair's own experiment in Richardsonian high modernism, *Mary Olivier*, by a couple of years and stylistically, despite its 1917 date, resembles *Ann Veronica* and the Edwardian and Georgian novel of contemporary ideas and social manners. However, the way in which *The Tree of Heaven* counters the ideal of self-transcendence through suffragette collectivism for the Great Cause with an opposing 'new idealist' (Sinclair's term) self-transcendence through pure embodied *individualism* is very much of a piece with the individualist line pursued by Sinclair's ex-suffragette colleagues on *The Egoist* of 1917, a line which also runs through *Pilgrimage*.

It was of course the treatment of suffragettes in prison that really polarized public opinion and in *Ann Veronica* Wells devotes a chapter to his heroine's prison experience, eschewing melodrama in favour of a naturalistic account of banal discomfort. But in this Wells is complying with the early convention of the suffragette prison narrative, set by Christabel Pankhurst, in which the suffragette soberly and stoically recounts her experience, usually

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<sup>13</sup> Sinclair, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair, p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of Sinclair especially relevant to the concerns of the present paper see Diane F. Gillespie, "'The Muddle of the Middle': May Sinclair on Women", in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 4:2, Fall 1985, pp. 235-250.

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including, as we have seen, a description of her daily routine, the meagre eating and washing facilities, her cell, her prison garments, and her wardress. This style naturally changed with the more extreme horrors of force feeding which began in late 1909 just after *Ann Veronica* had been published. At the end of Wells's prison chapter the heroine, thanks to solitary confinement, sees the error of her ways:

One day the idea of self-sacrifice came into her head, and she made, she thought, some important moral discoveries.

It came with an extreme effect of re-discovery, a remarkable novelty. 'What have I been all this time?' she asked herself, and answered: 'Just stark egotism, crude assertion of Ann Veronica, without a modest rag of religion or discipline or respect for authority to cover me!'

It seemed to her as though she had at last found the touchstone of conduct. She perceived she had never really thought of any one but herself in all her acts and plans.<sup>16</sup>

So, in an ironic reversal, this suffragette visionary in her cell experiences a revelation not of higher self-transcending suffragette purpose but of the falsity of that very purpose, that vision. In other words, Ann realizes that her desire for independence and even her courageous suffragette activity, *her martyrdom*, have all the time been self-serving — her selflessness has actually been a 'crude assertion' of self — and from now on she vows to cease being so selfish and to instead respect authority as personified both by her long suffering father and her gallant husband to be. This happy ending seems and is ludicrous: an unconvincing disavowal of the preceding radical narrative and of a piece with reactionary opinion of the day to the effect that suffragettes were driven by masochism — were seekers after martyrdom for essentially egoistic reasons — and that such hysteria could be cured by the love and authority of a good man, albeit in Ann Veronica's case a progressive free-thinking one.<sup>17</sup>

Like May Sinclair's Dorothea and H.G.Wells's Ann Veronica, Dorothy Richardson's Amabel ends up in prison and *Pilgrimage* rejoins her in Holloway receiving a visit from Miriam Henderson. As well as the accounts of prisoners themselves, the literature of the suffrage movement contains many narratives of the prison visit, most of which celebrate the solidarity between inmate and visitor. The questioning version in *Clear Horizon* is rather different. Before looking at this let us, for comparison, look at an example from the longstanding

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<sup>16</sup> Wells, p. 207.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this ending and a comparative reading of *Ann Veronica* with Sinclair novels, see Jane Miller, 'New Wine, New Bottles: H.G.Wells and May Sinclair', *Rebel Women*, chapter 5 (see footnote 3 above).

leader of the suffragist movement, Mrs Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who visited a small group of militants (including Mrs Pethick-Lawrence and Annie Cobden Sanderson) arrested and sent to Holloway after staging a demonstration in the Central Lobby of the House of Commons at the Opening of Parliament on the 23rd of October 1906. Although opposed to the methods of the WSPU, Mrs Fawcett was greatly troubled by the treatment of the suffragettes in prison and gives the following account of her visit to Cobden Sanderson:

I was put in charge of a wardress, who had orders to show me everything in the prison. I was first taken to a cell exactly resembling the one in which my friend was shut up — a long narrow slip of a room; the bed and bedding were rolled up in a tight bundle and placed perpendicularly against the wall, so that the bed could not be used as a couch; the window was small and very high up, just under the ceiling, so that little or nothing was visible from it; there was no chair, only a small narrow bench without back or sides. I asked the wardress if a chair was never provided. She replied with some asperity that the ratepayers (pronounced ritepires) could not be expected to provide 'luxuries' for the prisoners, adding, however, as an afterthought, that the prisoners were provided with luxuries; I made no comment on this, but I did not forget it. I saw the workroom, the chapel, the infirmary, the exercise yard, and then was taken for my interview with Mrs Cobden Sanderson. I had brought her a few flowers; she was not allowed to accept them, but I observed with satisfaction that the mere handling of them for a moment appeared to give her pleasure. The wardress of course was present all through. My friend, whom I had always seen most daintily and charmingly dressed, was in the coarse and clumsy prison garb marked with a broad arrow. [...] There was a light in her eyes, a self-forgetting enthusiasm in her voice that cheered and refreshed me. She had done nothing morally wrong, and was sustained by the belief that what she was enduring would hasten the day of women's freedom. When I left her the wardress asked me if there was anything else I wished to see. 'Yes,' I replied, 'I should like to see the luxuries you spoke of just now.' The woman was for the moment taken aback, but could not deny her statement that prisoners were provided with luxuries. She stammered that the luxury provided for the inhabitants of Holloway was cleanliness.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: John Murray, 1931), pp. 213-214.

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This account catalogues all the motifs we have been looking at and describes how the visitor is 'refreshed' by the prisoner's 'self-forgetting' and disdainful of the wardress (and her class inferiority). The account foregrounds, to great rhetorical effect, the question of cleanliness and, as mentioned earlier, the lack of cleanliness in Holloway was a common cause of complaint amongst the always hygiene-conscious suffragettes — one could cite almost any suffragette prison narrative on the topic of (the lack of) cleanliness. In *Ann Veronica* H.G.Wells has his heroine register the horrified reaction as follows:

She had imagined that prisons were white-tiled places, reeking of lime-wash and immaculately sanitary. Instead, they appeared to be at the hygienic level of tramps' lodging-houses. She was bathed in turbid water that had already been used. [...] Then they dressed her in a dirty dress of coarse serge and a cap, and took away her own clothes. The dress came to her only too manifestly unwashed from its former wearer; even the under-linen they gave her seemed unclean. Horrible memories of things seen beneath the microscope of the baser forms of life crawled across her mind and set her shuddering with imagined irritations.<sup>19</sup>

The figure of the wardress looms large in suffragette prison narratives and, as in Mrs Fawcett's account above, is usually singled out as a particular object of hatred and derision. In Richardson's *Pilgrimage* the naturalistic description of Holloway, with which the Amabel-in-prison chapter from *Clear Horizon* opens, also gives way to a lengthy portrait of the wardress. For Miriam it is the symbolic power of the wardress, rather than the surroundings, that separates prison life off from the world outside, and the real horror of the wardress is precisely that she lacks any self, any individuality, there is nothing behind her facade — she is the living dead:

Her [the wardress] atmosphere was totally unlike that produced by other women in uniform, servants or hospital nurses, who always suggest a distinction between themselves and their office, an unbroken consciousness of a personal life going on behind their appearance of permanent availability. This woman seemed undivided, as if she had been born in prison uniform and had never done anything but stalk about, a gaunt marionette and, like a marionette, because of its finality, because of the absence of anything to appeal to, a more horribly moving spectre than is a living being. No appeal. That, her mechanical non-humanity, was what made this

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<sup>19</sup> Wells, pp. 198-199.

woman so perfect a representative of prison life.

Stone walls do not a prison make; but this woman could make a prison anywhere.<sup>20</sup>

*Clear Horizon* alludes to all the common tropes of the suffragette prison narrative, including the stoical heroism of the prisoner and the awed visitor who is there to bear witness, only to throw such tropes into doubt. Mrs Fawcett had been 'cheered' by Annie Cobden Sanderson's 'self-forgetting' embodiment of stoical resistance but, though Miriam accepts that Amabel as an individual and feminist is 'worthy of an audience', she begins to resent the performance of martyrdom. It is precisely the self that Miriam believes in and the self-forgetting that she abhors. Face to face with Amabel in the Holloway visiting room, overlooked by the wardress, Miriam thinks:

But why all this drama? And *why*, in the presence of the wardress, this tragic, martyred air? It was not only the prison dress, it was also partly her [Amabel's] desire to make an impressive entry in the character of a prisoner that had made her unrecognizable. [...] But the entry she [Amabel] had devised apparently precluded speech.<sup>21</sup>

So, Miriam would like to speak freely but realizes that anything she says will be appropriated by Amabel's performance:

A series of remarks passed through Miriam's mind, each unsuited to the occasion as Amabel wished it to appear, each revealing herself as insufficiently impressed. She remained silent, watching Amabel's face for a change of tactics.

'It was kind of you to come,' said Amabel, isolating each word by a little pause, as if speech were a difficult, long-forgotten art.

'I wanted to come,' said Miriam, wondering with the available edge of her mind what kind of truth lay behind her words, whether she had wanted most to see Amabel or, most, to achieve the experience of visiting an imprisoned suffragist; while the rest of her mind remained tethered and turning round and round in the effort to decide whether after all Amabel was staging her drama wholly for her benefit, or whether it was part of a week-old campaign against the inhumanity of the wardress.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Richardson, IV, pp. 357-358.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson, IV, p. 358.

<sup>22</sup> Richardson, IV, pp. 358-359.

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In interrogating Amabel's motives Miriam is of course interrogating her own: is she here simply to see a friend in need or to enjoy some kind of vicarious pleasure? Is she already complicit with Amabel's performance in that her motivation for coming may have been to 'achieve the experience of visiting an imprisoned suffragist' — the word 'achieve' suggesting not so much the arranging, the practicalities, of the visit but the effort and participation required in the achievement of the *experience*. The experience gains its added frisson from locating itself within a drama of history — the role-playing, the performance, points to the narcissism inherent in placing oneself in the moment of history — something that should, for the sake of decency, be done after the event by someone else. The scene ends:

'I shall see you again before long,' she [Miriam] added lamely, acutely aware of the difficulty of projecting emotion across the long waste of table, and saw Amabel register, by a perfectly normal glance of disapproval directed away from their colloquy, side-ways towards the observant, long-suffering universe, impatience with her [Miriam's] failure to play a suitable part.<sup>23</sup>

Miriam cannot play her part in the performance and anyway, to whom is Amabel's performance addressed? To Miriam? Or is it for the benefit of the 'marionette', the inhuman wardress? Is it a statement against the prison system? In which case it would be churlish for Miriam to resent playing what is, in every sense, a supporting part. According to the anti-Pankhurst line developed in 1913 by the ex-suffragettes on the individualist *New Freewoman* paper, martyrdom is addressed to society and the 'Great Cause', in this case the suffrage campaign — and the mode of address is masochism, that is to say the alienation projected onto the Other also returns, is internalised; the martyr addresses herself with her own suffering. It is worth noting that Amabel's 'impatience' with Miriam's 'failure to play a suitable part' is expressed by 'a perfectly normal glance of disapproval' directed *not* at the other, Miriam, or even the wardress-as-personification-of-society, but to the truly big, indeed universal, Other: 'a glance of disapproval directed [...] towards the observant, long-suffering universe'; the universe itself a precise combination of the voyeur and the masochist.

The Amabel-in-prison chapter from *Clear Horizon* is clearly a rewriting of the Ann Veronica-in-prison chapter from Wells's novel. Richardson writes back at Wells's analysis of suffragette psychology, recognising the charge of egoism but giving it a radically different spin. Where Wells is alternatively ironic and patronising and then finally dismissive of that psychology, Richardson

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<sup>23</sup> Richardson, IV, p. 359.

takes it extremely seriously, hence her honesty in representing Miriam's uncomfortable response to Amabel's genuine plight. Although the narrative is set in 1907 Miriam's critical attitude towards Christabel Pankhurst's cult of martyrdom-for-the-Cause belongs to later stages of the suffragette campaign, an attitude hardened by events: hunger strikes, force-feeding, death. As already mentioned, this eventual reaction against Christabel's political and moral line would receive its clearest expression from the likes of Dora Marsden, Rebecca West and others in the pages of *The New Freewoman* of 1913, Richardson, Wells and Sinclair being part of the *Freewoman* milieu.

We therefore have a crucial moment, 1913, when the suffrage campaign reaches a watershed from which the years from 1905 can be reassessed as a period or phase now passed. On one side, the moderate side, 1913 is the year in which Mrs Fawcett's NUWSS organize the 'Women's Pilgrimage' in which thousands of plainly-attired 'pilgrims' set out from all parts of the country on June 18 to converge on eight main routes across England leading to London and a mass meeting in Hyde Park on July 25. With the Women's Pilgrimage events have turned full circle and the dominance of the constitutionalists over the now exhausted and faction-riven suffragettes is re-established — something manifested in the eschewal of the elaborate pageantry associated with WSPU processions. This is symbolized by the imagery inherent in the idea of pilgrimage itself, as Lisa Tickner points out in her study of suffragette imagery:

A pilgrimage refused the thrill attendant on women's militancy, no matter how strongly that militancy was denounced, but it also refused the glamour of the orchestrated spectacle. If, from 1908, the suffragettes had learned to put themselves on show, the Pilgrimage suggested that they were deliberately divesting themselves of their status as processionists. It was a return — marked by much of what had been learned in the intervening years as to the production of political meanings on the streets — to the earnest simplicity of 1907. The narratives woven around the Pilgrimage are in their medieval references ascetic rather than courtly, and if there is talk of spirit and dedication, there is none of pageantry, of silken banners and pennons flying.<sup>24</sup>

And on the other side, on the ex-WSPU left, 1913 is the year in which feminist militancy gives way to anarchism; *The Freewoman* becomes *The New Freewoman* and an ideology of individualist libertarian feminism (inspired by

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<sup>24</sup> Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 142.

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Max Stirner and Nietzsche) briefly flourishes in an extreme form. The thoroughgoing individualism of *The New Freewoman* will eventually lead its ex-suffragette editor Dora Marsden to reject not only the 'Women's movement' but the very category of 'Woman' as a misleading abstraction and oppressively collectivist. At the close of 1913 *The New Freewoman* becomes *The Egoist*, the most important vehicle of literary modernism in London — of Pound, Eliot, HD, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and, via May Sinclair's seminal article on Richardson and the stream of consciousness, an important critical forum for the early reception of *Pilgrimage*.<sup>25</sup> This is also the moment at which Richardson begins to write *Pilgrimage* and the moment at which the narrative of *Pilgrimage* ends. But the writing of *Pilgrimage* will continue for many more years and the eleventh book *Clear Horizon* is not written until 1935. In several respects *Clear Horizon* reflects the time of its writing but not as far as this representation of an episode from suffragette history in 1907 is concerned. However, I would argue that this is itself a radical gesture. By the mid-1930s high modernists, suffragettes and Stirnerian Egoists could vie for unfashionability. Richardson is now that other person writing long after the event who can decently adopt the superior guise of the historical novelist. Instead she attempts an extreme fidelity to both the militant and the self-critical character of suffragette experience. The idea of a radical modernist and suffragette novel of the First World War now seemed an embarrassingly dated enterprise on the eve of World War Two, and as Queenie Leavis writes in her *Scrutiny* review of *Clear Horizon*:

[Richardson's] preoccupations date already as those of a period when Woman — as distinct from individual women — was a matter for defiant assertion of interest [...] and the impression one accordingly gets is of a failure to mature. [...] The demand for mass rights can only be a source of embarrassment to intelligent women, who can be counted on to prefer being considered as persons rather than as a kind, just as they will wish to work out individual solutions to their problems, if they have any; nor are they likely to have more sympathy with the implicit appeal to 'We Women' than intelligent men have for the equivalent appeal to 'We men'. [...] This kind of obsession [in *Pilgrimage*] demands a forbearance on historical grounds that it will take all the reader's patience to maintain.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', *The Egoist*, V, April 1918, pp. 57-59.

<sup>26</sup> Q.D.Leavis, 'Review of *Clear Horizon*' [1935], *Collected Essays*, edited by G.Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 281-283.

It could be argued that Leavis, with the distortion of hindsight, of her historical moment, is projecting back a caricature of the suffragette movement and then reading it into *Clear Horizon* as a 'failure to mature', thus missing all the nuances of Richardson's *modernist* text — and the irony is that it is precisely the conflict between women as individual and collective subjects that runs throughout *Pilgrimage* and feeds into early modernist individualism as, in part, a reaction to the successes and failures of the suffragette struggle. It is an Egoist-inflected critique of the strategies of mass political movements that informs the young Miriam's unease with Amabel and the suffragettes in *Clear Horizon*. In other words, the individualist view to which the mature Leavis is subscribing is actually rather close to that of the immature Miriam Henderson.

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## The Cultural Theory of Bourdieu and Williams

Bridget Fowler

Both Pierre Bourdieu (born 1930) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) have been ‘miraculous survivors’<sup>1</sup> — men of working-class origins who have risen within great scholastic institutions, like the exceptional peasant in the medieval church. Both came from the rural periphery: Williams from the borderland between England and Wales, Bourdieu from the rural Béarn in the extreme South West of France, with its equally distinctive dialect. Yet neither of their fathers in these agricultural areas were farmers: instead they were in rule-governed jobs at the base of the modern system of communications, Williams’s father as a signaller, Bourdieu’s as a postman. There are other parallels. Raymond Williams and Bourdieu were both plunged into the searing personal contingency of war — in France or in Algeria. Both writers contested the argument for ‘rural idiocy’ or the irrationalism of the peasant.<sup>2</sup> Both have spent much of their lives making sense of the contrast between pre-capitalist and capitalist worlds and through it have forged a sociology of culture. Hence Williams’s words may stand for either:

Before I had read any description and interpretation of the changes and variations of settlements and ways of life, I saw them on the ground and working with unforgettable clarity.<sup>3</sup>

There is a point in his essay on Timpanaro at which Williams discusses his distance from mechanistic materialism:

Meanwhile, and for a start, how is Materialism? How is our brother Historical and those quarrelling great-uncles, Dialectical and Mechanical? We do not mention Vulgar...<sup>4</sup>

For both Bourdieu and Williams the issues provoking these quarrels are still central concerns in their cultural sociology. They will seek to forge a new

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, trans. Laetitia C. Clough (1989; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 104-5.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973; London: Hogarth Press, 1985) and *Politics and Letters* (1979; London: New Left Books, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, *Le Déracinement* (with A. Sayad; Paris: Minuit, 1964), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), and *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 121.

method which is determinist but not economic; which is able to recognise creative innovation but without attributing it to a narrow conception of genius or individualism. In other words, both seek to situate the literary works within wider social relations — not only in elucidating the field of other writers but also in exploring readers' perspectives: how, say, an informal style and change in tone, such as in Dickens' prose, fitted the interpretative needs and hurried leisure of recently-literate publics,<sup>5</sup> or a play satirising the foibles of the intelligentsia may be ideally tailored to the prejudices of the bourgeois public.<sup>6</sup>

Bourdieu's sociology seeks to uncover through socioanalysis the unconscious and semi-conscious aspects of action, much on the model of psychoanalysis for the individual. The most extended example of his socioanalysis is his study of Flaubert, and it is this which I will use to serve to discuss his theory of practice as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Williams' 'cultural materialism' at its most mature emerges not just in *The Country and the City* or the analyses of science fiction and utopia but especially in his study of the Bloomsbury Group,<sup>8</sup> which he contrasts with other literary groups or schools. I want to stress the points of identity between the methods both men have deployed, and their incompatibility with a formalist ideology of Literature<sup>9</sup> and with what Bourdieu calls the pure angelism of the spiritualistically conceived 'love of art'<sup>10</sup>. But in the course of the article, I shall also raise some doubts about

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 87-91.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 84-93 (on Françoise Dorin's *Le Tourant*).

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production, The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> See Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso 1980), pp.148-169 and his *Culture* (London: Fontana,1981), pp. 74-83.

<sup>9</sup> Both Bourdieu and Williams link the defects of the formalist approach to its rootedness in a selective, minority culture. Williams's response to formalism is located especially in his dissatisfaction with New Criticism's bid to theorise a place for literature distinct from the instrumental use of language. However, Williams extended his critique of Wellek and Warren (and others) to include the earlier approach to literature and art of the first generation of Russian Formalists, Shklovsky and Eichenbaum, and also to analogous elements of structuralism, notably its explanatory focus purely on textual factors; see his *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) pp. 148-53, and *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 203. For a useful comment on Williams's repudiation of the 'imprisonment of formalism', see Christopher Norris, 'Keywords, Ideology and Critical Theory', in Jeff Wallace, Rod Jones and Sophie Nield (eds.), *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits and the Future* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Derek Robbins's thoughtful and stimulating comparison of Bourdieu and Williams, 'Ways of Knowing Cultures: Williams and Bourdieu' (in Wallace *et al.* [eds.], pp. 40-56) addresses different issues to my own. I can only concur with him when he says that Bourdieu's assessment of the craft of sociology requires a more systematic juxtaposition of the statistical 'objectivation' of the social with the phenomenological

## The Cultural Theory of Bourdieu and Williams

Bourdieu's response to popular art.

### Space as a neglected dimension of social relations

*The Rules of Art* contains an inventive analysis of Flaubert's imaginative geography in his *Sentimental Education*, reminding us, as Eagleton has pointed out, that space is a neglected but 'sexy' dimension for reading social relations.<sup>11</sup> By literally mapping *Sentimental Education* onto the streets of Paris, Bourdieu will reveal the divergent urban worlds of Flaubert's characters, divided in effect by the two axes of power and art which totally separate the haute bourgeois world of the Dambreuses with the underworld of Rosanette. In the Dambreuse banking and bureaucratic world, art and religion — especially saintliness — are absent. Yet capital accumulation in the new industrial enterprises (mines, ironworks, chemical factories) is thriving whilst old money buys political sinecures. The geographically segregated world of Parisian Bohemia, in which are placed Frédéric and his group — Cisy, Sénécal, Dussardier, Martignon and Hussonet — is linked to the Dambreuses only through Frédéric himself. Frédéric is the go-between who reveals through his actions the basic structural principles on which these protagonists operate but which they themselves repress. Thus by refusing Louise Roque and married life in the provinces, whilst acting as the point of intersection of these

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analysis of agents' subjective experience. However, I do not interpret Williams as hostile to statistical analysis of objective trends: indeed historical sociology is enriched by his own undertaking of precisely such a study, in which he addresses the social backgrounds and education of writers from the sixteenth century on, a study which reveals that the periods in which the greatest number of writers came from a lower-class background were those of 1530-80 and post-1920; see his *The Long Revolution* (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 254-70. Robbins also goes on to make the claim that Williams's search for a method permitting interpretation of the most profound level of emotional and intellectual response is one which is inevitably led to 'set culture on a pedestal as ungraspable — as beyond understanding as art for art's sake' (p. 50). But it is difficult to think of anyone less committed to the purely stylistic assumptions of aestheticism than Williams, who did more in practice to forge a sociology of literature than any British academic sociologist has ever done. On the evidence of his non-fictional texts, I would certainly challenge the view that Williams had a purely psychological perspective, or an arrogance towards the social sciences. Few who read his dissection of Goldmann, the impressive sociological history of (say) *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), or the choice of publication in journals like *Sociology* would come to that conclusion.

<sup>11</sup> Terry Eagleton, cited in Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1999) (back cover). *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996) was anticipated by *The Field of Cultural Production*, which rehearses much of the argument in the later and more detailed work.

divergent social circles — bohemia, the demi-monde of Rosanette, the field of economic power — Frédéric retains his freedom but at the cost of a pathological refusal to act. Frédéric's little group of young men will be revealed to have futures sketched out for them already, that is, encoded within their habituses: Martignon becomes an energetic and successful lawyer; Cisy marries, inherits a huge estate and has a great brood of children; the only working-class man, Dussardier, is killed by accident on the barricades. Thus given their initial 'capital' — their landed inheritance or economic capital, the social networks their families possess — their dispositions are shaped. Their destinies are literally incorporated into their bodily responses and into their will or energy. Frédéric moves through a Manichean universe, either into a conservative world with no principles or a revolutionary working-class world with no education or insight. This opposition between bourgeois opportunism and the dialectics of resentment is matched also at the level of desire in Frédéric's alienated response to the female protagonists — his pure love for Mme Arnoux; his sensual but non-intellectual pleasures with Rosanette; his misconceived passion for the illusory image of Mme Dambreuse.

In brief, *Sentimental Education* is for Bourdieu the story of Flaubert's own education — one in which social structures exert their pressures like a time-bomb as the fleeting indeterminacy of youth is ended. As a novel, it is therefore the consequence of an extraordinary objective understanding — a new 'paradoxical realism' akin to sociology.<sup>12</sup> Flaubert's cultural production is *not* in itself sociology because his writing illuminates through images: compared to all the other writers in the bohemian and journalistic field, his is a singular voice. Moreover, Flaubert's letters, Bourdieu tells us, are testimonies to his profound sense of disenchantment with the social world, but they also reveal his subjective awareness of a new status for the novel form. Flaubert explains his unusual intention to write novels with the dignity of poetry, but also his disillusionment with both haute bourgeois and workers' worlds, as well as his acute sense of deracination in time. Despite this penetration, Bourdieu will argue that ultimately there is a further demystification of the social world which only a historical socioanalysis can supply. Taking the cases of Baudelaire and Manet, as well as Flaubert, a genetic socioanalysis can reveal that behind these writers' perspectivism and Manet's formal innovations there lies a common experience of belonging to a sustaining bohemian world, based on an economy of symbolic goods. This systematically inverts the principles of the economic economy, substituting symbolic capital in place of money. By denying the importance of money, worldly status and uneducated

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<sup>12</sup> To the extent that an aesthetic argument is an element of his socio-genetic analysis, Bourdieu goes beyond Lukács, whose well-known account of the weaknesses of Flaubert's (and Zola's) static, non-historical naturalist method is not one that he accepts.

## The Cultural Theory of Bourdieu and Williams

rebellion, it sets itself up as an 'empire within an empire' grounded in its rigorous double refusal of the goals of either great social class. As we shall see, bohemia is the arena of a specific social group within modernism, that of the dominated fraction of the dominant social class. This social group is like the dominant fraction in every aspect except one: possessing overall more capital than the subordinate class, it is nevertheless short of economic capital.<sup>13</sup> Hence, in Bourdieu's eyes, the grounds for a profound antagonism and rivalry between the two, but also for the fragility of any political alliance between the working-class and the artist, which, as we shall see below, is often tenuous, short-lived and uneasy.<sup>14</sup>

### Time

Bourdieu will go on to reveal that there are hidden determinants of social experience in the phenomenology of time.<sup>15</sup> Classes, in particular, are differently placed in relation to the bohemian world of modernism. It is not just that Mallarmé will produce a pessimistic symbolist poetry that relates to the generations in which his own family has been on a descending trajectory within the social structure, giving him high symbolic capital, untethered to material capital. It is rather that *time* penetrates all the lived experience of bohemia, so that those whose families have invested — because of their older money — in the education of their offspring will produce a divide between those writers who give up and those who can afford to hold out. Those who hold out, moreover, do so with an inner sense of superiority, free from all taint of commercial commissions. Such writers, usually Paris-based, will have the time, the feel for the game and the energy to pioneer, in a world where success is defined precisely in terms of *distance* from the 'well-made play' or the respectable romance. Thus the lower-class writer from the regions learns that he lacks both experimental time and the timeliness of the Parisian avant garde. Bourdieu will reveal that these marked and marking experiences of space and time derive from the peculiar place of bohemian writers within modernity: being *educated* just when the market has liberated new competition, they come from the most privileged minor aristocracy, higher professional and higher public service families.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.146.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, passim.

<sup>16</sup> There is clearly a need to theorise deviant cases here: Bourdieu analyses for this reason Renoir, Zola and (le Douanier) Rousseau. Also relevant in this respect is T.J. Clark's recent exploration of the case of Pissarro's pastoral peasant paintings: striking in that Pissarro's material predicament was intensified by both his Jewish origins and his

Bourdieu leans here on the phenomenological exposition of time of Edmund Husserl. Time, then, can be simply the 'protension' of the present into the future, as a pre-reflexive continuation ('à venir'); it can, by contrast, pose a 'futur' as marked by an active, reflexive transformation, or it can be experienced rather through a sensation of absence or blankness succeeding the present.<sup>17</sup> These contrasting responses to the future can be linked to the fact that the future has a quite different meaning for agents with an assured or comfortable expectation of the social world, who anticipate rational rewards for a period of prolonged education and deferred pleasures, and those who, like the subordinate class, possess an acute sense of the contingency of things, and of every undertaking as invoking possibly crushing risk. This is a habitus which produces a sensation of dead time and of the collapse of all coherent targets. It should be added that whereas Husserl's understanding of experience within the epoché is based on a method of philosophical introspection, Bourdieu's sociological method relies on a qualitative analysis to explore his subjects' experience and especially their fine-tuned responses to time. His socio-genetic approach to the historical field of cultural production hypothesises that these major differences in collective experience operate as the origin of different literary or artistic strategies. These are, of course, the root of the stereotyped, common-sense dichotomy between 'serious literature' and 'entertainment'.

### **Williams and the structures of social space**

Space has been a fundamental concern for Williams since on it has been overlaid the dualistic melodrama of the organic gemeinschaft country and the alienating gesellschaft of the city, of which he has written with such power.<sup>18</sup> Williams, too, has an analysis parallel to Bourdieu's of the centrality of *metropolitan* space, especially in his writing about the sites of modernity and modernist movements. Thus, although he does not explore in detail any of the novels by Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster or David Garnett, it is essential to see

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anarchism, while he lacked the secure economic background that characterised innovative modern painters such as Manet or Cezanne; see Timothy Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 118-22.

<sup>17</sup> *Méditations Pascaliennes* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), pp. 250-2, 262-4.

<sup>18</sup> Williams explores spatial perceptions throughout his works — obviously in his triptych of 'known communities', 'unknown communities' and 'deeply unknowable communities' as in, for example, *The Country and the City*, pp. 165-81; but also in his conception of the material and psychological importance of the former colonial territories as spaces for both the impoverished rural poor and outsiders: see *The Long Revolution* (1961; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 83, and *The Country and the City*, pp. 279-85.

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how he analyses the distinctive experiences of space and time possessed by these and other members of the Bloomsbury Group.<sup>19</sup> Williams's Bloomsbury could be regarded as equivalent to Bourdieu's bohemia, only even more clearly linked to haute bourgeois 'old money' and the aristocracy.

First, there is his need to typify the group comparatively. Perhaps the crucial contrast in literary terms is with Godwin and his circle, the latter being insecure lower professionals (or perhaps plebeian intellectuals) whose novels and political writing made them risk prison.<sup>20</sup> Truth became for them, literally, a threat to life. Second, the works of the Bloomsbury Group in the 1920s and 1930s have a certain affinity with each other in terms of style and meaning. Williams explores their space as that of a group of male friends, drawn together from the University of Cambridge and further bound together through marriages to their sisters. Note the significance of education or what Bourdieu entitles 'cultural capital' here. There are two stages of the exploration. Williams shuttles between an *objectivist* account of the social origins and gender of the writers and their own *subjective* analysis of their concerns. This is done through isolating an emergent yet unifying structure of feeling running through the group, which Williams identifies with a rhetoric of Enlightenment liberation — civilisation, freedom and rationality — filtered through a

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<sup>19</sup> The crucial point here is that the literary group possesses itself a shaping cultural influence, which mediates the phenomenological experience of space and time within the field of power. Throughout his works, Bourdieu will stress this, criticising Goldmann (somewhat unfairly) and other Marxists (more justly) for their 'short-circuit effect' in renouncing analysis of these alliances within the literary field itself. He stresses that the effect of the habitus is dependent on the particular 'magnetic' fields within the literary world at different times. Despite the outer limits set by the field of power, in other words, there are the shaping cultures of these literary or political groups which structure agenda, styles, and so on: 'This refutes for a start the tendency to make of social origin an independent and transhistorical explanatory principle [...] If one ceaselessly has to combat the tendency to reduce an explanation relying on the relation between a habitus and a field to a direct and simple explanation by social origin, it is undoubtedly because this form of simplistic thinking is encouraged by the habits of ordinary polemic that make frequent use of the genealogical insult ("son of a bourgeois!")' (*The Rules of Art*, p. 83).

<sup>20</sup> I have no space to remark here on the fascination of Bourdieu with this category. It fulfils many of the characteristics of the working class as historic agent in his writings, as a social group capable of great heroism within a revolutionary agenda. It also serves as a category to identify a potentially regressive group. Leaning heavily on the work of Chartier and his historical analyses of French society, Bourdieu notes the especial importance of defrocked priests in the late medieval and early modern period and the significance of unemployed or insecurely rewarded intelligentsia in European history after the French Commune. One crucial study of the significance of this stratum is his assessment in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

*paternalist ethos* towards the underdog.<sup>21</sup> As he says, the crucial stress is on social conscience, not social consciousness:

a fraction of an upper class, breaking from its dominant majority [...] relates to a lower class as a matter of conscience, not in solidarity nor in affiliation but as an extension of what is still felt as [...] small group obligations against the system's otherwise helpless victims....<sup>22</sup>

The liberalising ethos creates an underlying pattern of homologies within different specialised fields. It deals with the *contradictions* of a class structure so that this same dominant class can better adapt to the future. Yet at the same time its actions lead to a modern 'cult of conspicuous aesthetic appreciation'. Roger Fry's aestheticism, with its stress on 'significant form', could be regarded as typical of this intellectual class fraction. Williams sees them as drawing certain collective group benefits from specialisation within the new division of mental labour, to which Freud, and the recent field of psychoanalysis were later added:

Thus to the impressive list of Virginia and Morgan for literature, Roger and Clive and Vanessa and Duncan for art, Leonard for politics and Maynard for economics, they could, so to say, add Sigmund for sex.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, underlying the distinction of each member, there is also a structure of feeling that they share with the dominants. I am reminded here of Bourdieu on the fragility of the alliance between the avant garde and the working-class.<sup>24</sup>

There are, then, two or three major lines of convergence between Williams and Bourdieu. I am suggesting that Williams's 'structure of feeling'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> It is not without significance here that Bourdieu has often described paternalism as the first form of symbolic violence; see *La Domination Masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, p. 155.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> It is the absence of this kind of paternalism which Williams traces out in other spatial contexts, especially the writing from the periphery where a more recent memory of a move from the land is retained. I refer to the final part of *The Country and the City* (chs. 22 and 24); see also the subsequent writing of Edward Said, influenced by Williams, especially *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), as well as the literary mappings undertaken by Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling' is defined most fully in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, p. 10 and in *Politics and Letters*, pp. 156-7. He identifies the concept with Lucien Goldmann's 'world-vision' but minus his idealist remnants. On 'structure of feeling' and other key concepts in Williams, see J.E.T. and L. Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections* (London: Routledge, 1994).

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is very close to Bourdieu's 'habitus', that set of dispositions, sometimes actually bodily in their incorporation, which are a group's ways of seeing, and evaluating the world.<sup>26</sup> Fundamental to the habitus is what Williams calls *perspective*. Such a distance is evident for him in the massive gap between, say, the seventeenth century country house poetry of Carew and Johnson as against the eighteenth century Stephen Duck's first poems (before his lionisation) and Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*. Such a fundamental clash of perspective also emerges throughout Bourdieu's work. It is perhaps at its most stark in *Distinction* (1979).<sup>27</sup>

Again, like Williams, everything Bourdieu has written about the modern capitalist world stresses the importance of the *mandarins* or homo academicus, especially as the guardians and the embodiments of the selective literary tradition: the canon. They could be seen as today's equivalents of the church, for the 'spiritual soul' of the bourgeoisie has now this very precise connotation: its 'love of art'. Thus despite the impact of capitalism, the social order still has some of the main features of medievalism; while it used to have a class that fought and a class that prayed and a class that worked, it now has a class fraction whose paternalist aestheticism or academic distinction plays a somewhat similar role to that of the monks' former virtuoso service to god. But the consequence, for Bourdieu, is that, outside the world of sport, the modern working class has been dispossessed of its culture, as though through the colonising impact of an alien power. Williams's depiction of the split between minority and mass culture in his epoch-making *Culture and Society* makes a similar move. The modern working-class have been denied their cultural heritage, which has become diverted instead into a mere minority form. Nevertheless they have become active makers of their own culture, which has been incorporated in their bodies and objectified in the dazzling institutional constructions of unions, co-operative movements and political associations.

The genetic or historical analysis of modernism for both thinkers also contains certain very close parallels, as we see in *The Politics of Modernism* and *The Rules of Art*. Bourdieu distinguishes between the seizure of autonomy in the heroic modernist period with its long gap between supply and demand, as against the cultural field of today with its built-in expectation of 'permanent revolution'.<sup>28</sup> Art and literature are spheres where each avant

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<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 54-6.

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (1979: London: RKP, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> One may think of Terry Eagleton's similar account of a heroic period in his analysis of the emergence of an early twentieth century Irish modernist movement within the works of Yeats, Joyce, Markiewicz and Synge; in the absence of a strong Irish tradition of realism, this fused politics and art, Celtic revival with experimentation; see *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995).

garde challenges the earlier generation to acquire its artistic recognition but this becomes a progressively bureaucratised and routinised *process of social ageing*. Bourdieu will also stress the significance of the restricted field (Williams's selective minority tradition or — in *The Country and the City* — 'poesy') — and its Chinese walls against the incursion of capitalist values. He will reveal what Williams also acknowledges, that in our period this is often merely a question of longer-term rather than short-term profitability. The good dealer or publisher can ensure a commercial return *in the long run*. It is fundamental to Bourdieu to demystify the magical 'social alchemy' that dignifies the dominants, who are assumed to inhabit a lofty sphere where they pursue only ideal ends. In this process, the material interests of modernist writers and their publishers can be concealed from view, under the guise of a type of gift exchange in which the extraordinary talents of the writer are acknowledged in deferential acts by readers and publishers alike. The knowledge that that the risks of the literary undertaking progressively decrease as the works pass, first, into the realm of consecrated writings and, then, into the classics, assures the publishers of high returns for the later negligible outgoings. Were it not that there is also evidence of a lesser rhythm, of discoveries and rediscoveries of taste, we may conceive this as the 'eternal recurrence' of the assurance of profits for the publisher who specialises in legitimate texts. Thus rather than disavow the often objective relations of literature in its commodified form, we may refer as Bourdieu does, to the careful concealment of surplus-value, operating behind the backs of literary critics, who give aesthetic value to any given work by their act of favourably reviewing it. This received view — stripped of its accompanying perspective — is then translated into exchange-value.<sup>29</sup> More precisely, there are variations in social ageing which permit the distinction of three main types: the best-seller, with high immediate sales but a short life, the consecrated modernist text, with very poor initial sales compensated for by a slowly rising circulation volume which is steadily maintained after the writer's death, and the prize-winning novel, which occupies a zone intermediary between the two. In late modernism, *unlike the heroic age* — aesthetic or use values become directly translatable into exchange values. In other words, there is a tendency for the period of investment without return of the future classic writer to be progressively reduced. However, this accelerated consecration should not be confused with any identity with popular needs. They are premised still — as in

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<sup>29</sup> The processes are most graphically described for the visual arts by Raymonde Moulin, *Le Marché de la Peinture en France* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), illustrating the role of writers like Herbert Read in creating rationales for abstract painters. Read acknowledges that the system may be open at the margins to forms of corruption and collusion between critics and dealers (p. 183). The theory of habitus makes such obvious corruption unnecessary, although this by no means eliminates it.

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the spectacular case of Picasso's mutilated women — on a rupture with popular taste.

Williams's *The Politics of Modernism* makes similar moves, despite a more internally differentiated account of the types of modernist movement.<sup>30</sup> He also argues about the narrowing concern with linguistic and symbolic forms of artistic revolution, which become, over time, unyoked to social revolution. The structure of feeling of subjective expressionism, in its stress on fragmentation, angst and isolation becomes a convention, gradually orchestrating the collective producers of popular cinema and television as well.<sup>31</sup>

We can now approach the crux of the difference between Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams. In what is, in effect, a coda to the Brecht-Lukács debate, Williams points out that the twentieth century identification of the modern with modernism has eclipsed from view those cultural forms that have been emergent in the industrial and rural periphery. From the still durable, settled, community- and collectively-based experiences, realist forms persist and are taken up to be extended for innovative achievements, remote from the dizzying perspectivism developed by the incomers and exiles in the metropolis. But with some exceptions these modes — realist, polyphonic, even epic — are marginalised forms. These points are made well with respect to Gwyn Thomas's *All Things Betray Thee* (1949):

there was one major achievement which in effect, stands quite alone, although its general connections with the underlying structure of feeling ....are very close. Gwyn Thomas's *All Things Betray Thee* is a remarkable creative achievement. Its inner movement is the possibility of writing — singing, playing — this general experience: the first movement of art away from a turbulent involvement; the succeeding movement towards its deepest and most inevitable fidelities. [...] The deep structure of the novel is indeed very general: that awareness of light, of song, of human liberty, which are there close enough to grasp yet seemingly always out of reach, in the harsh, close-up world of deprivation and struggle.<sup>32</sup>

The issue then is: popular culture or popular art? Bourdieu tells us at one time that he used to believe in 'the illusion of cultural communism' but that

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<sup>30</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 54-6; Tony Pinkney, 'Williams and the Two Faces of Modernism', in Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 12-33.

<sup>31</sup> To use his distinctions of 1981, we may refer to modernist forms as now reproductive or re-productive, with the loss of their former innovative force.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, p. 228.

there is in fact no such thing as popular art — not even (with a swipe at his critics) in rap.<sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams's practice, however, was always quite different. His work lays bare the recent historical tension over forms of social memory: between literature and drama that is professional, sponsored and. Ultimately, consecrated, and other responses and representations *outside* that professional or later bohemian world, from the eighteenth century Crabbe to the twentieth century Gwyn Thomas.

Throughout his life, Williams explored the works not just of full-time writers but also of those who wrote in the margins of their lives, like Tressell, whose daughter produced for the publisher his pink-ribboned manuscript of the *Ragged-Arsed Philanthropists* after his death.<sup>34</sup> He also explores forms that do not succeed in their authors' time, such as British radical melodrama, which was briefly staged and then collapsed in the London theatre of the 1850s. We can see his mode of approach most clearly in his Welsh industrial novel, where he argues that the conventions of middle class realism — the inheritance plot, or the tension between arranged and romantic marriage — are displaced by quite different social experiences. Working-class novels appear just as forms of association wider than the family or the local neighbourhood emerge into popular consciousness and also just at the time when more Welsh speakers learn to write in English.<sup>35</sup> In these ways he goes far, I think, to repudiate E.P. Thompson's jibe on *The Long Revolution* that he never went beyond dominant class culture, and that he showed only a 'whole way of life', not a 'whole way of struggle'.<sup>36</sup> In Williams, there is a sense of the active creative achievement of very divergent writers.

There is nothing that Bourdieu is disliked for as much as his theory of the absence of popular art. It is my view that his critics have not fully understood his reasons, especially since Bourdieu *does* accept willingly that there is a working-class habitus and popular language which is the antithesis of bourgeois culture. There is an implicit clash here over the theory of fields. For Bourdieu popular art is impossible because *all* art now takes place within the restricted field of production. The cost of the struggle for autonomous production on the part of Flaubert, Baudelaire and Manet was that innovative form could be accepted only within the art-world of bohemia and not *outside* it.

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<sup>33</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 2; see also Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 81-5.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, *Writing in Society*, pp. 238-56.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, pp. 213-229; *Writing in Society*, p. 227-38.

<sup>36</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'Review of Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution*', *New Left Review* 9 (May-June 1961), pp. 24-33, and 10 (July-August 1961), pp. 34-9.

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The test of the seriousness of the writer and artist was his differentiation from writers who wrote entertainments for commercial theatre and from the journalist-writers who turned out hack novels as public bestsellers.

To distil his theory swiftly: there is no writer without a collective supporting art-world. In other words, a set of *critics* is needed to provide a rationale for their works, that is, to signify and classify aesthetic value. By the 1920s, living modernists' works had achieved exchange value — hence the transmutation described above of aesthetic (use-values) into exchange (market prices) by the critics' symbolic alchemy or magic. But popular artists, as outsiders, have no such supporting network. Thus, just as Labov asserts that Afro-Americans are excellent grammarians but Bourdieu responds that, despite this, on the linguistic market their speech is still deprived of value, so, similarly, he insists sharply on *the absence of symbolic capital* of regional/uneducated writers.

Further, Bourdieu argues that the search for popular art represents a hideous misuse of the 'scholastic attitude' in the form of a class ethnocentrism. It is an *epistemocratic* or *scholastic fallacy* to attribute to the 'good old peasant' or the working-class the same conditions of leisure and education that create the disinterestedness and universalistic concerns implicit in the Kantian category of art or judgement. This, I think, is a fundamental stumbling-block.

How could we not see [...] that the disinterested game of sensitiveness, the pure exercise of the faculty of feeling ...presupposes historical and social conditions of possibility and that aesthetic pleasure, this pure pleasure which "every person ought to be able to experience", is the privilege of those who have access to the conditions in which such a pure disposition can be durably constituted? <sup>37</sup>

It may have been because Williams was himself a critic and a novelist that he did not see things quite like this. Since he also possessed the nominated responsibility on the part of 'society' to say what was 'literature' and what was not, he had an opportunity for fresh judgments which Bourdieu fails to theorise. Unlike Bourdieu, he refuses to see art as entirely a professional or vocational activity of writing, although he is all too aware of the costs of such part-time commitments. Williams had always insisted on the importance of those *not paid to be writers* in the early period of the novel — Austen, of course, the Brontes, and also Mrs Gaskell, whose reputation owed much to his championing of her work. But he also insisted that there were those like Lewis Jones, the Welsh miner, whose work may be marred sometimes by

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<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 134.

'proletarian pieties', yet who were nevertheless serious writers. Thus we find him advancing the same kind of analysis as Bourdieu: there is writing that merely reproduces, writing that re-produces, and there is innovation. But, unlike Bourdieu, he refuses to locate the latter merely in the sphere of those who choose to make a bid for creative status. Instead he chooses also those who, as it were, write as witnesses to great events of their lives, who create representations (or misrepresentations) to pass on to others. It is as though initially the Leavises and then Williams accomplished a kind of transformation or 'Protestant reformation' in Britain that was different from the symbolic revolution of modernism in France: the British dissent ushered in a 'long revolution' which arguably forged an even more fundamental, sect-like attack within the field of literary criticism itself. This permitted a channel for the possible inclusion of popular writing from outside the 'reversed' bourgeois world of bohemia.

Bourdieu is certainly right about the precariousness of existence outside the restricted intellectual sphere. But I believe he is profoundly wrong about art and literature. Not all of it — even in the modern period — has to be self-consciously created with Kantian criteria in mind.<sup>38</sup> Consider, for example, the poetry and the novels of war, which often simply give voice to the incredulity of the soldier that they should have been permitted to serve as lambs fit only to be slaughtered. Was Isaac Rosenberg in his trench thinking with the scholastic attitude that Bourdieu says is necessary for all great literature in the period after the conquest of autonomy? In my view Bourdieu is himself guilty at this point of an unacceptable theoreticism.<sup>39</sup>

A word of clarification is necessary here. I am not arguing that Rosenberg's most powerful poems, such as 'Dead Man's Dump', 'Daughters of War', or 'Break of Day in the Trenches', were written spontaneously, or in ignorance of poetry as a craft. Indeed Rosenberg tells us that

I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation shall not master my poeting: that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right. I will [...] saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life and it will all refine itself into poetry later on.<sup>40</sup>

But there is a tension between Rosenberg's perceptions, ideas and the creative expression of these, which cannot be conveyed in the disinterested game of sensitiveness Bourdieu identifies with Kant. Neither Rosenberg nor

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<sup>38</sup> Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron also contend that Bourdieu fails to address these questions adequately, especially in relation to the working-class novel; see their *Le Savant et le Populaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> For his attack on theoreticist or scholastic fallacies, see *Méditations Pascaliennes* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), pp. 80-88.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Jon Silkin's Introduction to Jon Silkin (ed.), *First World War Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 39.

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the working-class novelists, such as Gwyn Thomas, possess the uninvolved distancing of themselves in which Eliot's leisured few may write. They lack the preference for lofty universal phrases, evident occasionally even in the vivid writing of Wilfred Owen: Rosenberg's language, in contrast, has all the historical specificity of the particular and the detailed. Ultimately, Rosenberg chooses for his 'poeting', a particular set of social meanings, with a precise intellectual substance, and thus goes beyond a detached concern with pure poetry. Bourdieu is clear that in an epoch when the poem risks becoming a pure commodity, it can sometimes only be protected in the name of pure poetry or pure signification. Nevertheless, on the question of popular art he himself seems to veer dangerously close to the aestheticism of the professoriat that he has satirised elsewhere.<sup>41</sup>

### Cultural Materialism and the Theory of Practice

Bourdieu and Williams share certain key features in their reworking of Western Marxism and sociology. First, they are resolutely opposed to the idealist method of the formalists and of discourse theorists, such as the later Foucault. Second, they have both been affected deeply by the habits of thought of genetic structuralism. One may mention Williams's stress on the eighteenth century as a key period for the 'invention' of a certain concept of literature (conceptualised in terms of its fictional character and in opposition to history). Despite the roots of literature in earlier genres and forms of writing, this is in effect a new division of mental labour. Equally, Bourdieu has stressed the invention of the author and the artist as a key element of modern society, a development which requires, as its context, a decline of feudal communal cultural forms. In fact, in this respect, there was an interweaving of the ideas of Williams with Bourdieu and his fellow-workers, in a framework of historical constructivism. Williams's critique of the ideological separation of city and countryside, once printed in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, sparked off French research on the invention of the peasant and the construction of nature.<sup>42</sup> Finally, both theoretical frameworks possess a bitter hostility to the conception of agents as the mere bearers of structures, as in the ideological modelling of Althusserianism. Actors, for Bourdieu, engage in strategic practices rather than operating as mere 'calculators without a history'.<sup>43</sup> The stress on strategies rather than rule-following can be interpreted as an active materialist attempt to contest this Althusserian

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<sup>41</sup> See the post-script to *Distinction*, entitled 'Towards a "Vulgar" Critique of "Pure" Critiques' (London: RKP, 1984), pp. 485-498.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Claude Chamboredon, 'Peinture des Rapports Sociaux et Invention de l'Eternel Paysan', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 17-18 (November 1977), pp. 6-28.

<sup>43</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 53.

heritage of passive compliance. It is just this practical sense which can easily be mapped onto Williams's notion of experience. For 'experience', with its stress on directly-felt patterns of work, time and money, operates as a harsh solvent of all dominant and facile rhetorics. The resulting sense of emotional contradiction and blockage is the generator of new, emergent ideas.

Yet there are unsatisfactory elements in their own fresh syntheses. Williams does not always achieve total clarity in his defence of cultural materialism, perhaps most evidently in his *Politics and Letters* interviews. While it is incontrovertibly true that both painting and writing transform the objects of nature as one of their attributes, Eagleton is right to note that Williams ends up 'collapsing the cultural into the base', and Norris is right that

if you define all cultural practices as 'materialist', then you will tend to use the term culture in a vague and undifferentiating sense and the word 'material' effectively becomes emptied of all determinate meaning.<sup>44</sup>

Equally, there are gaps in Bourdieu's conceptual armoury. In particular, the concept of 'cultural capital' ought not to be used in a glib analogy with Marxist models of economic capital, which, of course, depend on systematic relations of surplus extraction. Cultural accumulation does not necessarily occur in a parallel relation to surplus-extraction carried out on the level of knowledge. We can certainly conceive of everyone's cultural capital increasing in a non-antagonistic fashion. At the same time, the guts of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which implies a set of latent interests that, *in certain circumstances*, are actualised as a set of socially exclusive practices, should be actively preserved.<sup>45</sup>

But there is another tension in late Bourdieu which is worth addressing. For there is a recognition of the fact that an accumulation of cultural 'capital' may sometimes result in the advancement of the general interest despite the emergence of distorting group interests. See, for example, the penetrating conclusion of *The State Nobility*, where Bourdieu concedes that in instances where there are conflicts within the dominants, elite

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Norris, 'Keywords, Ideology and Critical Theory', Wallace *et al.* (eds.), pp. 22-39, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> In this sense, John Guillory is absolutely correct to note that the canon wars cannot be portrayed — as certain well-meaning liberal pluralists do — as mere contingencies of value. Rather, from the twelfth century, canon wars have their origins in group privileges from which those authors who lack complex language skills and elevated styles (such as poetic diction) are effectively excommunicated. The legitimate genres now are organically linked to the educational and literary practices of a small minority and there is a constant potential for the conversion of their spiritual or cultural assets into material goods; see John Guillory, *Cultural Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 73, and also Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*.

## The Cultural Theory of Bourdieu and Williams

knowledge may advance universalistic interests. Despite this possibility, he moves decisively beyond Hegel and Weber's theory of bureaucracy. There is always a need to contest and to demystify ideological claims to embody universal reason or knowledge of the public good.<sup>46</sup> For in practice these claims tend to represent distinctive ethical and political perspectives that are confused with 'the rational' as a result of the elite's cohesion and their effect on the masses.<sup>47</sup> In particular, the state nobility, which straddles both private and public spheres, appears serenely impartial and above the fray. They possess a *magical grace* that derives from their educational legitimation as a nationally examined 'elect'.

### Millenarian hopes: reproduction or transformation?

Both Williams and Bourdieu have written works in their maturity on the social conditions for transformation: *Towards 2000*, and *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* and *Acts of Resistance*. These texts display an acute sense of the limitations of social democratic institutions at the end of an era. Bourdieu notes the contradiction between the 'Right hand' and 'Left hand' of the State, the one at present enacting neo-liberal fiscal austerity or the cult of capital flexibility, and the other heavily involved in education, welfare and penal institutions. Here the actual economic and social costs to citizens of an increasingly individualised and market-based economy in terms of suicide, ill-health and delinquency are totally removed from accountability. Williams once wrote memorably of the 'industrial and political' wings of the labour movement failing to flap in unison.<sup>48</sup> *Towards 2000*, aiming to confront the renewed Plan X of Hayekian market freedom, makes a stand very similar to Bourdieu's appeal for a 'reasoned utopia' — a utopian social order that is *feasible* in the sense of being compatible with the expert knowledge of the specific, scientific intellectual.

Bourdieu has argued powerfully about the need for a 'Realpolitik of Reason'.<sup>49</sup> He captures in this the need for a Machiavellian understanding of the diversity of social perspectives, interests and modes of symbolic violence. But such an awareness is combined with the pressing necessity for transformation within the public sphere, and for general access to the leisure and material ease in which communicative rationality flourishes.

For Bourdieu, sociology itself fosters a 'generous resentment' which allows one to free oneself from the intense emotions of envy which have dogged other revolutionary projects.<sup>50</sup> It is with the hope that knowledge may

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<sup>46</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, trans. Laretta C. Clough (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 396.

<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, p. 376.

<sup>48</sup> *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 248'

<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu, *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>50</sup> Bourdieu, *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 212, 254.

ultimately forge an *emotional* understanding that we should grasp the clear and definite limits to Bourdieu's pessimistic determinism. At the same time, his sociological awareness of the frequent potential for bias denotes an unusual breadth, encompassing not just the classic agenda of class justice and relative deprivation, gender and ethnic oppression but also an awareness of the distortions within the academic world itself. Unlike Williams, Bourdieu has a very acute sense of academics' conflicting interests — indeed *Homo Academicus* offers a model of the difficulty of achieving permanent change (as opposed to a carnival-like holiday from normal academic time). More acutely, since the sixties, a 'new mode of reproduction' — based on the training of technocrats rather than on the independent intellectual of the Sartre type — has instituted an education system in France which increasingly removes that earlier space for the development of academic learning based on autonomous scholarship (classically embodied in science). Alongside this, other Republican achievements are now threatened, including the degree of democratization already achieved in the third republic for upward mobility of the bright working-class or primary school teacher's child. The conclusion is inexorable: the preservation of such civic Republican reforms now requires a new *corporatism* of the intellectual and artist as well as trade-unionists. But it is a corporatism which needs to extend from the threatened historic acquisitions of a social Europeanism towards a rejuvenated internationalism. The new internationalism — unlike the old — should break irrevocably with all the nomenklatura privileges which allowed former State elites to confuse their own narrow interests with those of humanity.

Bourdieu has seen more clearly than many radicals the *interests* in recognition and power that lie hidden behind the idealised disinterestedness of academic position-taking within their fields. Such concerns, which ought not to be confused with economic advantage, animate academics as strongly as do the material competitive struggles of the industrialist.<sup>51</sup> In this sense the path to Bourdieusian reflexivity is even more difficult to follow than is Williams's appeal for democratic participation within socialism. Moreover, in terms of the humanities/literary field, it means a refusal of any kind of analytical 'short-circuit'. It thus requires an uncomfortable questioning of the artists' and critics' position-takings within the field's own internal 'dialectic of distinction and disqualification'.

But if Bourdieu has written more sharply about literary and artistic interests, I have argued above that it is Williams who has a more lively sense of the dynamics of popular and high art. For there are unexpected and unorganised literary worlds, just as there are strange universities (prisons, Gorkii's streets). Williams presents us with a model of literature which extends

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the depiction of the Barthes-Picard conflict, which has its roots in a conflict between new structuralist-based literary struggles versus the defence of more traditional 'new criticism'; Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 115.

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the break with the patrician elite started by the Leavises.<sup>52</sup> Like them, and also like Bourdieu, he is powerfully alert to the strength of this Institution and the potential for literature to be narrowly constructed via the taste of a social minority. Yet, for him, literature also emerges from sites outside the space of its consecrated buildings and the geographical bounds of bohemia. Of course, Williams is not so naive as to think that writing can survive when it goes entirely unrecognised. At the same time he does raise our awareness of how literary conflicts can have their origins in unanticipated places. For alliances emerge between new young writers and new young critics, in a process which can have its final outcome in the 'canonisation of the junior branch' (Shklovsky). In my view this requires a different theorisation of popular writing and its worlds than Bourdieu has yet given.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> I note here Q.D. and F.R. Leavis's critical analysis of the Oxbridge-metropolitan 'Literary Racket and the power and vindictiveness of the gangs', in *A Selection from Scrutiny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 160. The 'gangs' refers especially to Auden's public-school/Cambridge group (see p. 189). Note also an acidic reverie in their account of the Bloomsbury 'club' as to whether there may not be some underlying connection between Keynes's speculations and the art he patronised (p. 195).

<sup>53</sup> I should clarify here that this approach is conceptually-distinct from the aesthetic populism proposed by Fiske and other 1980s' writers (see, on this, Jim McGuigan's excellent critique, 'Cultural Populism Revisited', in M. Ferguson and P. Golding [eds.], *Cultural Studies in Question* [London: Sage, 1997], pp. 138-54). I would agree with Neil Lazarus that Bourdieu's theory can fruitfully be elaborated along these lines (*Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], pp. 4, 110-13. See also B. Fowler, 'A Sociological Analysis of the *Satanic Verses* Affair', *Theory, Culture and Society* 17,1 (February 2000), pp. 39-61.

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### **Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*.**

Verso, 1998. 206pp. ISBN 1859841821 pb.

### **Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*.**

Verso, 1998. 143pp. ISBN 1859842224 pb.

Postmodernism emerged, as if full-blown, in English Literature and Humanities departments in the early 1980s and at the time it was celebrated by its advocates as a radical political and cultural project. Many on the 'traditional' Left, however, viewed postmodernism with a certain suspicion, identifying uncomfortable similarities between postmodernism and the economic and political agendas of the Reagan and Thatcher era.<sup>1</sup> The more elaborate sociological theories saw postmodernity as marking the emergence of a new historical epoch, as the end of the Promethean dreams of modernity and the transformation of advanced capitalism into a post-industrial, post-ideological world of information technology, service industries and high finance. As fast as it had appeared, though, postmodernism seemed to disappear, supplanted by notions of space and globalization in the social sciences and a host of ever more rapidly proliferating research agendas in cultural studies: new historicism, post-colonialism, Queer theory, the body. As if by its own inner logic of fragmentation and particularism, postmodernism was dissipated and displaced by those very discrete identities and phenomena that it had sought to identify as specifically postmodern. In short, postmodernism has become *passé*, it is now to be found located on the university curriculum somewhere between feminism and post-colonialism as just one more optional course rather than the more overarching conception that was supposed to transform our very understanding of the relationship between the social and the cultural. The value of these two related volumes from Verso is that they remind us that there was also something else at stake in all the hyperbole and vitriol that was spent over postmodernism and that was the historical fate of Marxism itself.

The critique of Marxism tended to fall into two distinct but broadly related forms; first, an epistemological critique of Marxism's account of historical agency and change, second, an undermining of any causal or deterministic, especially economic, theory.<sup>2</sup> According to Jean-François

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> For a wide ranging defence of Marxism against the epistemological critiques of

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Lyotard's oft repeated formulation, postmodernity was characterised by an incredulity to all grand, universal, or master narratives: the Enlightenment narrative of the progress of instrumental reason, the psychoanalytic narrative of Oedipal desire, and above all the Marxian narrative of human emancipation. In its stridently nominalist and anti-foundationalist rhetoric, postmodernism rejected all universal explanatory systems and the privileging of homogenised groups, such as the working class, in favour of the analysis of discrete micro-narratives and particular identities. Secondly, postmodernists such as Baudrillard claimed that a radical break had taken place within capitalism itself whereby we now existed in a hyperreal world of cyberspace, free-floating images and mediated events. Marxism, with its nostalgia for the historical referent, was quite simply no longer appropriate for the analysis and critique of the "unreal" reality of the postmodern world. Anderson eloquently draws out this strand of postmodern theorising where, on the one hand, postmodernism emerged against the conservatism of New Criticism and the conformity of a now institutional and canonical Modernism, and on the other, was defined explicitly *against* Marxism.

*The Origins of Postmodernity* was originally commissioned as an introduction to the Jameson volume of selected writings, and its core chapter presents an intellectually and politically sympathetic overview of Jameson's work in this area. In its clarity and evenness of tone it also provides one of the best short introductions to Jameson to date. But, as one would expect from a piece originally conceived as an introduction to the work under consideration, Anderson does not give full weight or adequately address some of the problems raised by Jameson's theorisation of postmodernism as the cultural expression of a globalized market economy, issues we will return to below.

Some of the most interesting aspects of Anderson's narrative lie in its opening and concluding chapters, where he traces the vicissitudes and political ambiguity inherent in the concept of postmodernism. The concept first emerged out of debates around literary modernism in Latin America in the 1930s; here it was used to describe a conservative reflux with modernism itself and was contrasted to the radicalism of *ultramodernismo*. The notion was to resurface in the work of the North American Black Mountain poets of the 1950s, particularly Charles Olson, but here the term was to take on a more affirmative character as a continuation of the political radicalism and anti-capitalist tendencies of modernism. It was in part through the re-evaluation of the work of the Black Mountain poets that the literary critics associated with the journal *boundary2* took up the concept, but when they did,

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postmodernism see Ellen Meiksins Wood and John Bellamy Foster (eds.), *In Defense of History: Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

it had undergone a significant alteration. Whilst 'Olson's call for a projective literature beyond humanism was remembered and honoured ... his political attachment to an unbidden future beyond capitalism ... passed out of sight' (p. 16). *Boundary2* was by no means completely devoid of radicalism, but for early postmodern taxonomists such as Ihab Hassan, any movement to the social was barred. Through the literary and architectural debates of the 1970s and 80s the concept of postmodernism became ubiquitous, but its inherent tensions and paradoxes were never far from the surface.

With the exception of Baudrillard, perhaps, no major postmodern theorist appeared to like postmodern culture. Hassan himself quickly became disillusioned with the kind of work produced under its rubric, while Lyotard's own aesthetic tastes, like that of most post-structural theorists, remained firmly within modernism. He had little or no knowledge of the kind of postmodern culture celebrated in North America and when he did he despised it. What none of these theorists had attempted to date was a serious historical analysis of the emergence and context of postmodernism.

It was at this juncture that Fredric Jameson made his first interventions in the postmodern debate. Up to this point in his career Jameson's primary theoretical interest had lain with literary modernism, and his call in the 1971 'Preface' to *Marxism and Form* for a renewed form of dialectical criticism fully adequate to the contemporary historical situation had yet to be realised. Jameson's insistence on the vital significance of the old themes of Hegelian Marxism: the relationship between part and whole, the concept of totality, the opposition between concrete and abstract and the dialectics of subject and object, appearance and essence all seemed so many residues of a bygone era. Furthermore, his theoretical wager in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) of Marxism as the untranscendable horizon of all interpretation was also, at a stroke, apparently invalidated by the postmodern critique. His theorisation of postmodernism, therefore, was at once the attempt to address a deferred encounter with the contemporary in his own work and at the same time a defence against some of the most sustained criticism his political and theoretical project had been subjected to to date.

Jameson initially mapped the distinctive characteristics of postmodern culture in his 1982 Whitney Museum lecture — 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' — and also turned his attention to the politics of postmodernism in 'The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodern Debates', both collected here in *The Cultural Turn*. These two essays provide the theoretical background and, in the case of the former, the nucleus of Jameson's seminal 1984 article 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', which as Perry Anderson puts it 'redrew the whole map of the postmodern at one stroke — a prodigious inaugural gesture that has commanded the field ever since' (p. 54). This essay, considering its

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importance in Jameson's *oeuvre* as well as postmodern debates in general, is noticeably absent from this selection, and for anyone unfamiliar with Jameson's work on postmodernism this is a serious loss as it remains perhaps his best 40 pages written on the subject. Most significantly these earlier essays lack the key category of 'late capitalism', which Jameson borrowed from Ernest Mandel's work, and which facilitated his grounding of the primarily cultural and aesthetic conception of postmodernism pervasive in the early 80s in the objective transformations of capitalism itself. In these early essays Jameson was still deploying the rather unsatisfactory notions of 'consumer society', with its resonance of Baudrillard's work and the notion of the post-industrial society more generally associated with a Right-wing critique of industrial capitalism. However, the two subsequent essays in this collection, 'Marxism and Postmodernism' (1989; Jameson's concluding response to a series of essays on his work)<sup>3</sup> and 'The Antinomies of Postmodernism' (1991; the first of his Welleck lecture series),<sup>4</sup> make up for this deficiency by providing an account of Mandel's three stages of capitalism and some of the inherent contradictions of postmodern conceptions of time and space.

Anderson sees the importance of Jameson's intervention in relation to five strategic moves:

(1) the anchorage of postmodernism in the objective alterations of the economic order of capital itself. According to Jameson, culture has now expanded to the extent that it is virtually co-extensive with the economy, and the commodity form has penetrated cultural artefacts to such a degree that any modernist aspiration to resist commodification through art must be abandoned. The dialectical correlative of this, however, is that the economy and politics have become aestheticised. There has been what Jameson calls an 'acculturation' of everyday life.

(2) there has been a radical transformation of our experience of time and space. Postmodernism marks the ascendance of the category of space over time — the experience of history, narrative and memory have all waned in the postmodern world. As a correlative to this our subjective experience has undergone a significant transformation, and traditional notions of a centred autonomous subject have been replaced by decanted, fragmented, and schizoid subjects.

(3) Jameson expanded the term postmodernism beyond the narrow confines of architectural and literary debates to cover virtually the field of contemporary arts and theoretical discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique* (Washington, DC: Mouton de Gruyter Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

(4) He insisted that postmodernism did not represent an epochal break with capitalism but rather that late capitalism provided the social base for its emergence.

(5) Finally, Jameson refused to resort to moral judgements on whether or not postmodernism was good or bad, progressive or reactionary, but insisted that it must historically situated and analysed.

Jameson's achievement was breathtaking. In a characteristically bravura performance of dialectical prose Jameson confronted postmodernism on its own terms, acknowledging and granting many of its insights into contemporary experience whilst simultaneously subsuming it within the very historical paradigm, Marxism, that it had supposedly invalidated. Jameson's intervention was received critically, not only from the postmodernists but also from the Marxist cultural left. The essay raised a number of critical issues that it failed adequately to address: economically, culturally, and historically.<sup>5</sup> Above all Jameson's theory of postmodernity as the cultural logic of late capitalism was achieved at too great a level of abstraction. On the one hand, he presented a persuasive account of a subject's individual experience of the disorientating world of globalized capitalism, and, on the other, a very generalised theory of the structural transformations of capital itself. What this work lacked, and the monumental *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) conspicuously failed to deliver, was any systematic account of the mediations between the individual subject and the world system.

The key categories of mediation employed here, as with his previous work, were commodification and reification. Postmodernity was seen to mark a further expansion of an essentially Lukácsian conception of reification whereby the commodity form had now penetrated the last enclaves of resistance to capital, that is, the aesthetic, the Third World and the Psyche. Capitalism, in other words, has become the first truly universal system and postmodernism its cultural expression. One of the problems with this account, however, was that it appeared to rule out the possibility for any form of resistance to the new global market and hence the possibility of historical change. The dilemma posed for our present political imagination was starkly revealed in Jameson's notion of a new postmodern political aesthetic of

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<sup>5</sup> For criticisms of Jameson's economic account of postmodernism see Mike Davis, 'Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism', *New Left Review* 151 (1985), pp. 67-72; for the cultural specificity of postmodernism see Fred Pfeil, 'Making Flippy-Floppy: Postmodernism and the Baby-Boom PMC', in *Another Tale to Tell: Politics and Narrative in Postmodern Culture* (London: Verso, 1990); and for its historical location see Edward, W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989) and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

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'cognitive mapping', or something we might have termed 'class consciousness' in pre-postmodern times.

Jameson borrowed the concept of cognitive mapping from the urban studies of Kevin Lynch, where it designated a subject's ability to cognitively locate themselves in the new urban landscapes of post-war North America cities. Jameson expanded the concept to include a subject's ability to similarly map their experience on a global scale. That this project remains to be realised testifies to the daunting and inherently impossible nature of the task it presents. Indeed for Jameson himself postmodern spatiality seemed to remain 'alarming' and 'disorienting' and, faced with the 'horror of multiplicity' of contemporary space, he was unable to perceive of any form of its transcendence or negation. What was missing from this dialectic of immediate perception and ungraspable totality was an indication of the group, institutional, regional or national forms of mediation that might intervene between them; that is to say, forms of mediation that at once shape individual identities and subjectivity and at the same time provide the space for political resistance to the otherwise relentless logic of reification. What will be of interest for those familiar with Jameson's work therefore will be the essays collected in the second half of this volume, three of which — "End of Art" or "End of History", 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity' and 'Culture and Finance Capital' — have not previously been published.

These more recent essays do not offer us anything new in the sense of a revision or further development of his earlier thesis concerning the nature of postmodernity, the key features of which have remained constant since the 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' piece. These essays do, however, begin to flesh out and substantiate the central problem of the cultural logic thesis, that is, how do the transformations in the economic realm of late capitalism find expression in the cultural artefacts of postmodernism? In other words, what are the relations and mechanisms of mediation between the globalized economy and discrete cultural artefacts? As with his original conception of the cultural logic, Jameson finds his ideas at once confirmed and facilitated by a recent work of economics, Giovanni Arrighi's (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century*. Ostensibly a history of capitalism, Arrighi's book in fact provides 'a new structural understanding of features of capitalism not yet fully elucidated' (p. 136), that is, the problem of *finance capital*. For Jameson, Arrighi's elaboration of the nature and operation of finance capital serves to crystallise all the problems and questions that have arisen from the early 80s onwards and especially in the relationship between economics and culture. Finance capital does not mark a complete break with previous modes of capital investment but rather a dialectical expansion of capital itself based on Marx's famous formula, 'M-C-M':

The first phase of the tripartite process has to do with trade which in one way or another, and often by way of the violence and brutality of primitive accumulation, brings into being a quantity of money for eventual capitalization. In the second classic moment, then, that money becomes capital, and is invested in agriculture and manufacture: it is territorialized, and transforms its associated area into a centre of production. ... [In its third stage] Speculation, the withdrawal of profits from the home industries, the increasingly feverish search, not so much for new markets (these are also saturated) as for the new kind of profits available in financial transactions themselves and as such — these are the ways in which capitalism now reacts to and compensates for the closing of its productive moment. Capital itself becomes free-floating. (pp. 140-1)

For Jameson, the advantage of Arrighi's work, over his previous use of Mandel, for example, is that it forestalls the unfortunate teleological implications of the classical, monopoly and late capitalism model whilst retaining a conception of capitalist development as discontinuous and expansive. It also provides us with one of the keys to understanding the recent transformations in culture the intensification of *abstraction* from money through investment capital to finance capital. In other words, a theory of abstraction that closely follows Jameson's own odyssey of the image or sign from realism (whereby the image is still tied to its referent), to modernism (when the image becomes severed from its referent), to postmodernism (where reification penetrates the image itself and rents signifier and signified asunder).<sup>6</sup> The essays in the latter half of this collection present an extraordinary elaboration of these ideas in relation to the postmodern image, the return of aesthetics in contemporary film, and the relationship between land speculation and contemporary architecture. If the moment of postmodernism has passed, as it could well have done, these two volumes testify to the continuing force of Marxist criticism to give us an historical account and analysis of the contemporary world second to none.

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<sup>6</sup> For his most extensive exposition of the reification of the sign in relation to the ternary schema of realism-modernism-postmodernism, see Fredric Jameson, 'The Existence of Italy', in *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990)

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### Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science*.

Sage, 1998. 262 pp. ISBN 0761959238 pb.

Tony Bennett's latest book is an elegant and informative contribution to the debate over what he sees as the necessary relationship between cultural studies as a medium of intellectual critique and cultural policy as a discourse of governance. In three sections Bennett sets out a theoretical definition of cultural studies; a genealogical account of cultural policy as engine of social reform; and a series of interventions that explore the implications of these for cultural studies. For example, he explores re-fashioning the uses of *resistance*, re-modelling cultural policy and reflecting upon the pedagogy of cultural studies.

Whilst acknowledging the extra-mural origins of cultural studies as an intellectual practice, Bennett soberly disavows the outsider status adopted by many practitioners as unsustainable and, although he does not say this, the implication is clear that it could also be considered dishonest. It is unsustainable because, in dismissing any claim to disciplinarity, cultural studies exposes itself to attack in, for example, the bureaucratic world of student numbers, research assessment and modularisation. It is potentially dishonest because it fails to acknowledge that it is precisely the increasingly centralised Higher Education sector that has hitherto sustained cultural studies as a curriculum option and maintained its practitioners, fractious and oppositional though they may be, in gainful employment.

If cultural studies is to establish itself as a discipline, in Bennett's view it needs to confront a number of shibboleths. These include not only the self-mythology of privileged outsider critic, but also the political premium attaching to theoretical purism, the belief that cultural policy is synonymous with political complicity and simplistic models of state and civil society configured around 'centre-periphery', 'centre-margin' and 'top down-bottom up' models of power relationships. That Bennett sets his critical sights upon the more explicitly Marxist progenitors and exponents of cultural studies (the Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci, Michel de Certeau and Fredric Jameson are all mentioned at various points) should therefore come as no surprise. That he also extends this critique to Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and much of the work of the now defunct Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies identifies the seriousness of Bennett's belief in the necessity of revision. What *Culture: A Reformer's Science* offers, therefore, is both a justification for cultural studies' claim for disciplinary status and Bennett's own contribution to what he sees should be its pragmatic focus. On both counts Bennett argues serious political questions need resolution.

It would be false to conclude from this that Bennett's preferred engagement with political issues errs on the side of quietism. In his four

elements of a definition of cultural studies the necessity of politics is writ large. These are, that cultural studies is an interdisciplinary subject; that its objects are the ways in which 'culture' (howsoever configured) patterns the thoughts, beliefs, routines, and so on of a given population; that it operates with an interventionist view of the multiple, interactive and overlapping relationships between culture and different regimes of power; and that as its institutional site is typically the academy, its practitioners have a responsibility to develop appropriate mediating links with the world of practical political engagement. There are, therefore, a plurality of political agendas that Bennett's account of cultural studies could serve, including those associated with the new social movements and to which cultural studies has traditionally committed itself. The second, however, concerns itself with cultural policy, including its formulation, implementation and monitoring within a range of institutions, programmes and fields of policy intervention. According to Bennett, it is this latter field of culture that has been under-worked in the practices of cultural studies. The reason for this, he argues, is that its excavation requires a disavowal of foundationalist models of social causation, 'be it that of a mode of production, the principles of structural causality, patriarchy or, for that matter, the putative unity of culture as a whole way of life' (p.30). Bennett's proffered mode of analysis is explicitly based upon Foucault's work on the historical development of the instruments and ends of liberal governance.

The proper context for an examination of the relationships between culture and power is the increasingly governmentalised nature of social relationships. Culture is but one of the spheres in which governance takes place. In particular, by adopting this Foucauldian perspective, cultural studies can focus upon the ways in which relations between persons and various cultural resources are structured by cultural technologies and involve the various and multiple ways in which such technologies work on the subjectivity of persons. Part II of the book is given over to detailed illustrations of this model. For example, Bennett illustrates the range of ways in which the nineteenth century 'technology of the self' included the gallery, the museum, the exhibition and the reading room, all sites operating within the liberal governmental logics of self-regulation, orderly governance and moral improvement. In a particularly engaging discussion, Bennett shows how museum curatorial practice appropriated Darwinian evolutionary theory as the biological analogue of the liberal model of political development. What characterises Bennett's approach to such manifestations of encultured power is that he engages with its productive dimension as much as its potentially oppressive character.

The emphasis Bennett places upon the governmental instrumentalities of cultural policy is timely. Since its election in May 1997, the government of New Labour has sought to raise the profile of culture through,

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as Bennett has it, 'the multiplication of culture's utility'. Whether it is in the marketing of competitive nationhood ('Cool Britannia'), the adherence to the civic utility of free museums or the more ambitious synthesis of culture with education, training and job creation (as in the thinking of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and replicated in dozens of schemes around the country), New Labour has, perhaps more than any previous government in the U.K., given explicit voice to the idea of culture as a means to a political end.

Bennett develops and illustrates his arguments through examples that are either historical (drawn from nineteenth century cultural policy in the U.K., the U.S.A. and Australia) or contemporary (particularly recent developments in Australian cultural policy). It is when his approach is applied to contemporary developments in the U.K., however, that its limitations become apparent. Two issues in particular stand out. These are, first, how the approach deals with recent changes in U.K. urban governance that have a direct bearing upon the relationship between culture and power and, second, how the particular character of recent cultural policy can be explained without reference to underlying structural foundations — in this instance, the globalisation of capital.

Any number of culture's utilities within contemporary policy discourse could be used to illustrate these difficulties. One that has particularly discursive qualities is the role of culture in urban place-making and image-building. One strategy for the urban regeneration of industrial towns and cities has been to foster a new urban imaginary involving an emphasis upon the dynamic aspects of a city's industrial past; inventing reified (and incidentally saleable) traditions and heritage; cultivating a leisure economy (cafés, clubs, 'the 24 hour city'); diversifying into the new industries (new media, information technology, 'the creative industries',); and competing to provide homes for the flagships of Western high culture (concert-halls, national arts companies, orchestras, museums).

The need to re-fashion the images of former industrial towns and cities has been seen as the necessary 'soft' economic correlate to the hard economics of down-sizing, labour-market flexibility, capital flight, dual-city configuration and the fictive valorisation of the property market. However, in the context of re-fashioned urban governance (the twin impacts of 'competitive bidding' and nearly twenty years of hostile central government), the ability to orchestrate the necessary alliance on behalf of a given locality has become of paramount political importance. The interesting point, as a range of commentators in the areas of urban and regional studies, economics, cultural policy and political studies indicate, is that the success of such strategies has, against the economic background described above, been compelled to be measured in economic terms. For evidence, just consider the angst that the

subsidised arts world exhibits every time the question if its 'impact' is raised. Bennett is certainly correct to argue that these are profoundly political questions. What is now needed is an understanding of the local political contradictions and tensions that inhere in such encultured responses to global capital re-composition. And Foucault does not supply the answers.

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**Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945-65: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question.***

Lawrence and Wishart, 1997. 217pp. ISBN 0853158266.

It is a truism that cultural studies was seeded in the experience of its so-called founders during their time as tutors in university extra-mural departments. It is a truism because as a point of origin it is regarded as self-evident and because, after the various facts about who taught what and where have been trotted out, it is usually taken that there is little more that needs to be said. This implication is particularly marked in accounts which manifest a barely disguised impatience with the pre-emergent elements of British cultural studies in a rush to move on quickly to more heroic moments in the development of the field. It is to Tom Steele's credit that he refuses this rapid jump over what was involved in the general experience of adult education as precursory to the formation of cultural studies itself. Though Raymond Williams's particular role in postwar adult education has already been critically examined in a useful collection edited by John Mcllroy and Sallie Westwood,<sup>7</sup> Steele provides the first full account of the roots of cultural studies in adult education and in debates about the question of English as an academic subject.

Where I offered a comparative discussion of the prehistory of British cultural studies and the formation of English studies in a section of my own recent book on the relationship of history and cultural studies,<sup>8</sup> I can now only wish in retrospect that I had had Steele's study in front of me. For what he adds to the picture I only sketched is a store of detail drawn from archival sources, private papers and interviews, and forgotten articles in various professional and academic journals. This historical detail fleshes out a much

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<sup>7</sup> John Mcllroy and Sallie Westwood, *Border Country : Raymond Williams in Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Pickering, *History, Experience and Cultural Studies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

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fuller account of the ways in which adult education formed such an important antecedent of cultural studies, especially in its interdisciplinarity, its turn to popular culture, and indeed its own cultural turn in beginning to think about the relatively autonomous specificities and effectivities of symbolic values. A major aspect of this turn was the friction generated between its literary and sociological components in debates that took place in the 1930s. *Plus ça change ...*

The book moves from the more general background of adult education to the work within adult education of certain key individuals. This is perhaps too neat a summary, for in the more general chapters certain fascinating figures swim prominently into view – G.D.H. Cole, George Thompson, W.E. Williams, J.F.C. Harrison and A.D. Lindsay among them – while the second half of the book does not focus exclusively on Hoggart, Thompson and Williams but brings in people like Frank Jacques and Sidney Raybould. There is also a welcome chapter on Mannheim. One thing which now becomes clear in reading through the book is that the possibility of the emergence of cultural studies was initially due to the shift from workers' education to popular education, albeit with a progressive edge. This shift also had its roots in debates during the 1930s, where the conflict between humanities and social science approaches to the arts was central. Much of this conflict was associated with broader and more difficult questions of engagement with cultural change, not just in the early postwar period that saw the emergence of cultural studies itself, but also in the longer period from the later nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century when the first developed responses to 'mass' culture were being set out. Here the dates cited in the book's title are somewhat misleading, for Steele is just as much concerned with this longer period during which some of the issues first crystallised that were later to be formative for cultural studies. He thus gives chapter-length treatments to the class/nation relation, the formation of English studies, and the politics of culture, along with the various problematics associated with them. The longer term role of 'popular front' political values in preparing the ground from which cultural studies emerged could perhaps have been given greater attention in respect to this secondary historical perspective, but what Steele has identified are many of the key elements in the development of a new structure of feeling, in the sense of a long-building, yet nascent formation rather than a settled disposition and fuller objectification of purpose and practice.

In reconstructing the gradual move towards the coalescence of this structure of feeling, it is good to see Karl Mannheim's challenge to empiricist British sociology brought back into the frame. The contribution of émigré intellectuals like Mannheim to an interdisciplinary, cross-national sociology of knowledge has been too easily relegated to the footnotes and narrative asides

of cultural studies' resumé of its own emergence, and not only because the totalising study of society which Mannheim advocated is now distinctly unfashionable. It is a virtue of Steele's book that it is not easily fazed by sure-fire denunciations of modernist sociology. What Steele also brings to the chapters on the more familiar triumvirate of Hoggart, Thompson and Williams are the fruits of empirical research – including archival ferreting among the recently acquired correspondence of Hoggart with Bonamy Dobrée in the Brotherton Collection – as well as informed discussion of their different contributions to the early development of cultural studies in the 1950s and early 1960s. Steele is obviously concerned to underwrite the significance of these contributions, and it is perhaps because of this that there is a touch of historicism in his study. This leads to the view that the book would have been improved if he had attempted a sharper weighing up of the accounts. For instance, it would perhaps have benefited from a more developed analysis of the losses entailed in the rise of the 'phoenix of cultural studies' from 'the embers of the independent workers' education movement', as he puts it, while greater comparative consideration could have been given to the way cultural studies has been shaped by its lack of attention to areas of enquiry, such as economics or the biological and physical sciences, that were part of a broader agenda in adult education. If one of the criteria of early postwar adult education was 'social relevance', this could certainly be applied to such considerations today, now that genetics and evolutionary theory are once again firmly back on the academic map.

Though he always tries for a balanced assessment, there is more than a whiff of antipathy to theory in the story Steele has to tell. This is a tricky issue in that it can clearly be argued that the turn to theory in a big way led not only to the idealism and subjectivism of more recent cultural studies, but also led cultural studies away from a concern with history and from the democratising pedagogy that marked its emergence in the British context of the 1950s. But the difficult task of evaluation here is not helped by the empty rhetoric of phrases like 'the hermetically sealed rituals of the academy' and 'scholastic dimensions of dizziness', or overwrought references to theory as 'an extremely ripe mound of manure' which was dumped unceremoniously on the fragile shoots of early cultural studies. A final note of criticism that needs to be made is that Steele tends to give the impression of adult education as *the* single matrix of an emergent cultural studies, whereas there were of course other progenitors of the new field, in particular the Mass Observation movement in its most vibrant period from 1937 to the Second World War. No doubt Steele is aware of the significance of Mass Observation in this respect, yet it does not figure even once in his text. There is clearly a bigger story to tell of the emergence of cultural studies. Steele has nevertheless produced a well researched and tidily written slice of this story. It is one that should be on the

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bibliographical plate of all the courses in higher education that now offer one or other version of it.

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### **Angela McRobbie, *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?***

Routledge, 1998. 208pp. ISBN 0415057817.

### ***In the Culture Society: Art, Fashion and Popular Music.***

Routledge 1999. 164pp. ISBN 0415137500 pb.

Angela McRobbie has been very busy lately. Publishing two single-authored books in just over a year is very reckonable output for the Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London. On its publication last year, *British Fashion Design* was the object of a scathing and unfair review by Will Self in the *New Statesman*. This was out of order since *British Fashion Design* is a diligent and illuminating sociological study of the careers of fashion designers, albeit reading like a Ph.D thesis. *In the Culture Society* is a collection of McRobbie's recent essays, including academic articles and semi-journalistic pieces.

A short review cannot do justice to all the issues raised by these two books. I shall confine my remarks, then, to McRobbie's research on the fashion industry; some of the political and policy implications of her work; and, very briefly, comment upon her defence of cultural studies and the 'New Times' agenda against criticism.

*British Fashion Design* is a monograph of qualitative sociology in the old Chicago School tradition. That is where to place it in spite of the fact that McRobbie is a well known graduate of what American academics like to dub the 'Birmingham School' of cultural studies, which was inspired and led by Stuart Hall in the 1970s. The 'Hall tradition', as McRobbie calls it, is a school of thought on contemporary culture that was originally framed by anti-economistic Marxism and later modified by feminism and a politics of 'race' and ethnicity. McRobbie herself was heavily involved in the feminist turn in cultural studies with her writings on the masculine bias in subcultural theory, working-class girls and magazines, most notably *Jackie*.

Like Paul Willis, her cultural analyses took the form of a politicised symbolic interactionism, stressing how people actively negotiate their identities in power relations through the expressive forms of everyday life. McRobbie's empirical sociology is not of the social survey and numbers-crunching variety. Instead, she converses with the subjects of her research, teenage girls in the

past and young female fashion designers in the present. This enables McRobbie to provide an account of lived experience, specifically in this case how fashion designers make sense of what they are doing and struggle to make a living.

Fashion, according to McRobbie, is a tough business. Britain is renowned for its design education. Yet, McRobbie uncovers a fundamental flaw in the curriculum. Would-be fashion designers are taught fine art values rather than the craft skills of cutting and sewing. That is considered to be merely dress-making. Moreover, students do not learn about the exploitative economy of manufacturing garments, the sweat shops at home and abroad. Some of them, on graduation, swan off to the great fashion houses of continental Europe where they themselves may be and usually are badly exploited. On returning to Britain, they typically set up in business themselves, marketing and sometimes making their wares. Very often this amounts to back-breaking work and self-exploitation. Most apparently successful designers do not, in fact, make much money and many of them go broke. Free-lancing for big firms or simply giving up the ghost by, for instance, entering management in department stores are common outcomes of a stressful and poorly rewarded career trajectory.

So, when fashion design, like so many other forms of cultural work, is extolled as constitutive of 'creative Britain', do not be fooled. Also, the sheer creativity which does exist owes more to popular culture, in effect, dance music, the club scene and so forth, than to 'art' as narrowly conceived. The Tories' small business schemes helped designers try to make it. New Labour should take note. McRobbie is calling for a reconciliation of commerce, culture and cultural policy.

It is this reconciliatory attitude which typically underlies so much of the analysis when McRobbie discusses her favourite forms of popular culture: fashion, magazines, music, especially drum'n'base, and sensationalist art. Two such reconciliations are, for instance, to do with feminism and femininity, firstly, and, secondly, cultural consumption and production. At various moments in *In the Culture Society* McRobbie traces the transformations of feminist analysis and feminine culture, from outright denunciation of oppressive texts of femininity to, for instance, embracing the pleasures of shopping. However, McRobbie is not happy with a simple celebration of active consumption and its self-validating features. A trace of Marxism remains here: specifically, the argument that in a capitalist economy the realities of production are effaced at the point of consumption. What McRobbie seems to want — and quite rightly in my opinion — is a complex understanding of the dialectics of production and consumption.

This is what makes McRobbie's angry outbursts, unsubstantiated assertions and fierce denunciations of both what she calls 'enemies' of 'New

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Times' and 'critics' of cultural studies so baffling to the disinterested reader. On the academic terrain of cultural studies, there has been a certain amount of sympathetic criticism of a one-dimensional attention to consumption, which was more prominent a few years ago than it is now. The notion that the evidently active and expressive features of popular consumerism render the social inscriptions of production and circulation somehow irrelevant for cultural analysis and political argument was quite properly questioned. Such critical questioning of aspects of cultural studies tends to be over-simplified, however, by self-appointed 'defendants' of a 'post-Marxist' politics of culture. For instance, those interested in how relations and processes of production interact with and affect consumption are too easily pigeonholed and caricatured as masculinist, unreconstructedly Marxist and Old Leftist. Concentrating upon consumption, on the other hand, is regarded as much more in tune with postmodernism, feminism and, latterly, New Labour. This is the set of binary oppositions, by and large, that structures McRobbie's collection of recent essays, quite perversely, though, since she herself actually makes out a strong intellectual, political and substantive case for attending more closely to cultural production in some of the essays and, of course, in her book-length study of fashion designers.

*[This is the original version of a heavily edited review which appeared in New Times, August 1999.]*

*Jim McGuigan, Loughborough University*

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## Endpiece: What's in a Name?

Rod Jones

For some time now universities have been introducing anonymous marking and anonymous examination boards into their assessment procedures in order to prevent the possibility of personal or structural discrimination against students, especially women.

I think back to my time in the sixth form at grammar school in the late 1950s, and I think about those women students who were so obviously gifted in physics and mathematics. They became teachers or minor functionaries in the operational research departments of the then thriving local industries. We men – one clever, most fairly ordinary and a couple of us who had no natural aptitude for science – went on to university, Cambridge or Manchester or Newcastle. Three of us went up to Imperial College in London, but only one of my friends managed to graduate. I often wonder about what happened to Sandra Williams and Gillian Crook and the thousands of other women who suffered the same fate at the hands of such a blatantly prejudicial system.

Times change. Now we are much more ready to examine our own prejudices and we recognize the importance of needing to provide safeguards against these in the different sectors of our lives as we regulate them. We no longer feel confident about being able to effect a proper separation between the different activities of the one self and consequently we can no longer separate ourselves from what intellectuals in the past once took to be the unfortunate majority whose feelings, mode of perception and capacity for response are welded to their opinions about the world. In this post-Freudian age we have become acutely conscious of the fact that we can never be entirely certain that we are what we think we are. We are dogged by an awareness of that rapacious and self-seeking part of ourselves which lies always on the other side of reason and reasonableness. Because of this beneficent uncertainty about our own powers and a general recognition of our unsurpassable limits as human beings, and mindful of and even chastened by the sorrowful history of women's education and the education of black people and the working class in this country and the over-weaning confidence and even arrogance of our predecessors, we have fallen back on as many safeguards against our own failings as we can muster. This includes student anonymity in assessment procedures.

Student assessment seems to be beset with difficulties at the present time. From one direction we have the growing controversy over what is revealingly described as 'degree inflation' and instances of what appear to be mounting institutional pressure to compromise academic standards for

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economic reasons. From another, a record number of university students who are currently engaged in judicial or other action over issues relating to assessment obviously feel that we are still failing to do the right thing despite our best efforts. Rightly, students are now much more ready to take on the system if they feel they have been treated unfairly or unjustly. At the same time, as the education sector becomes progressively more commercialized and as expectations of a favourable return on both academic and financial investment inevitably begin to grow in a world increasingly concerned with 'customer care', marketing, service-level agreements and the like, there seems to be more likelihood of dissatisfaction with assessment of whatever kind. But are these actions symptomatic of some more deep-seated disaffection or resentment originating from within the system itself which is likely, rather perversely, to be exacerbated rather than alleviated by the deployment of student anonymity in assessment procedures?

In their final phases the forms of student representation within assessment schemes and classification processes can be exceptionally truncated and reductive. Each student is limited to his or her profile, indicating the courses taken (probably represented by a code) and the standard achieved, based on degree classification which is probably then subdivided into upper, middle and lower bands. Although the profile condenses a whole teaching and learning experience, including various kinds of assessment, it's worth noting that students are never again likely to be subjected to such an extreme form of symbolic violence. In whatever field of endeavour they choose to work, they will be judged, ranked, praised and blamed as whole human beings with human attributes and skills, strengths and failings all of which will be deemed to be indispensable to their make-up.

As with all forms of representation, the profile plays two roles. In one it resigns itself to be like the student in his or her entirety but must then discard the claim to know him or her in favour of attempting to mirror what it images. In the other, as a system of signs, the profile resigns itself to calculation in order to know the student and consequently it must discard the claim to be like that which it represents. What then seems like a serious weakness or distortion – the highly abstracted character of the profile in comparison with the student whom it represents – becomes a positive attribute in its role as a source of knowledge about the student. The more abstracted the profile in the sense of the more unlike the student it becomes then the more it is able to realize the student as an object of knowledge subject to strictly objective processes of rational calculation.

Naming the student does more than simply redress the balance just a little towards the image, since it claws back and partially recuperates what is already massively abstracted information as experience and history. In the name we hear a faint echo of the messy, open-ended and unresolved human

striving that unfettered calculation seeks to eradicate. Naming allows human presence to cling on to make the truth both meaningful and worthwhile. The shift then towards anonymity has to be seen for what it is. What begins as a generous and altruistic relinquishing of our limited and questionable human powers, becomes its opposite – a reckless reach for the limitless power of abstraction which can finally secure the separation of subject and object.

In a memoir of F.R. Leavis, Raymond Williams writes about this sudden and exhilarating sense of empowerment among some of his colleagues as they entered into a kind of frenzy – marking, grading, ranking to such an extent and with such intensity that the process of assessment became progressively detached and self-contained, the original purpose of the exercise entirely lost sight of. But the power of abstraction comes at a heavy price since we can only free ourselves from the bad conscience brought on by the fear of not being fully in control of ourselves by willingly acceding to our own obsolescence. By restricting its final stages to purely mathematical procedures to secure against human frailty, assessment puts an absolute block on thought, as language resigns itself to calculation in order to know the student. Thinking objectifies itself in an impersonation of the machine that will eventually replace it. To a considerable extent assessment has already become an automatic and self-activating process evidenced only by the barely audible hum of that same machine as the results are downloaded at the dead of night.

In these procedures, and ironically for the most laudable of reasons, we enact precisely what we have all along attempted to avoid. By replacing the student with their profile we configure the world to abstraction's likeness by bringing about the separation of subject and object that it presupposes. Thus we ground abstraction's purpose in the now unbridgeable distance from the student herself. Domination in the conceptual realm represented by abstraction can only be achieved by a complete disempowerment of its object in its attempt to quantify the world and thus to know and to master it. To know what we take to be the student through abstraction can only be realized by a scenario of mastery.

If we are to avoid the catastrophic loss of experience and dominative and coercive effects of purely quantitative methods of assessment then we have to struggle against that disenchantment with ourselves that motivates us to know and control the world by means of an abstract principle which is superior to and independent of human existence. If we need to measure ourselves, as clearly we sometimes must, then we have to devise ways of doing this which are fully consonant with our beliefs in and desire for self-determination, since to do otherwise is to abandon ourselves to a state of helplessness in a wholly determinate world. But abject powerlessness is simply the practical corollary of absolute transcendence. As Adorno and

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Horkheimer have argued, by whatever means, in our attempt to become the measure of all things in the world, we inevitably come to measure and thus nullify ourselves as one of those things.

Rather than rely on these powers of abstraction it would be better to divide what we mistakenly take to be the infinite possibility of purely mathematical procedures by the realization of their absolute limit, which would then furnish one useable means among others of dealing with the world. Only by following Hegel's injunction, 'to penetrate into the immanent content of the matter' can we prevent that shift to dismal method which is currently afflicting education as it afflicts all other spheres of our lives.

But then I think back to the 1950s and about the extent of the crime that was committed against those women who never even took their rightful places at the local grammar school although they qualified to do so. Since it was discovered that more girls than boys were gaining access to superior educational provision within the new meritocracy it was decided to raise the standard of entry for girls in order to ensure that at least equal numbers of boys would enjoy the same benefits. What a difference anonymous marking would have made to all those women who were deliberately set aside for the sake of their less gifted male counterparts.

Things change and they have changed a great deal since those dark days nearly half a century ago. The trouble is, of course, that they have not changed sufficiently to be able to abandon anonymous marking as a defence against discrimination in education. My point is simply that anonymous marking is not, in itself, a panacea. It is bought at a price and the price is a general dehumanization of all those involved in assessment procedures. To be aware of this is simply to be aware of the enormous benefits to be gained from making ourselves more human. Progress is a matter of seizing on those opportunities that present themselves in the long march towards the good society. Finding ourselves in the position of being able to abandon anonymous marking — when the considerable cost of defending against structural discrimination seems finally to offer few compensating benefits — is one such instance of this.

*University of Glamorgan*

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**Douglas Dunn (ed.), *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry.***

Faber, 1992. xlvii+424 pp. £17.50 hb. ISBN 0 571 15431 X.

## Other

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