

Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought



Post-Marxism

An Intellectual History

Stuart Sim

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Post-Marxism

Post-Marxism is now a well-established theoretical position concerned with rescuing aspects of Marxist thought from the collapse of Marxism as a global cultural and political force. Marxism has come to be regarded by some as a discredited system of thought, carrying with it a burden of authoritarianism and totalitarianism which is at odds with the current commitment to cultural pluralism and libertarianism.

This book traces the crystallisation of post-Marxism as a specific theoretical position in its own right and considers the role played in its development by poststructuralism, postmodernism and second-wave feminism. It examines the history of dissenting tendencies within the Marxist tradition, stretching from Rosa Luxemburg through the Frankfurt School to more recent theorists such as Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, Rudolf Bahro, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and considers what the future prospects of post-Marxism are likely to be.

A comprehensive account of the development of post-Marxist thought, *Post-Marxism: An Intellectual History* is an invaluable resource for students and scholars of Politics, Philosophy, Literature, Sociology and Gender Studies.

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An Intellectual History
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Introduction

Marxism's 'disenchanted'

Post-Marxism is now a well-established theoretical position that, as in the work of such major theorists as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, attempts to rescue aspects of Marxist thought from the collapse of Marxism as a global cultural and political force in the later twentieth century, and reorient them to take on new meaning within a rapidly changing cultural climate. Marxism is now generally regarded in the West as a discredited system of thought, carrying with it a burden of authoritarianism and totalitarianism at odds with the current commitment (theoretical as well as political) to cultural pluralism and libertarianism. This study traces the crystallisation of post-Marxism as a specific theoretical position in its own right in the work of Laclau and Mouffe, going on to consider how such a development came to be all but necessary in the wake of the growth of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and second-wave feminism (with a certain amount of help from movements within the classical Marxist tradition itself). It examines, in other words, the growth of both *post-Marxism* (those thinkers who, however regretfully, have rejected their Marxist past) and *post-Marxism* (those who, like Laclau and Mouffe, have set out to reformulate Marxist theory to encompass new movements such as poststructuralism, postmodernism, and second-wave feminism). The distinction is one that Laclau and Mouffe themselves venture in their best-known, and highly controversial work, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), in order to insist that Marxism still does inform their thought in a critical manner: 'But if our intellectual project in this book is *post-Marxist*, it is evidently also *post-Marxist*'.¹ Marxism is, at the very least, the point of departure for their theoretical speculations. *Post-Marxist* in this study, however, will have the harder-edged interpretation of 'rejection', rather than simply 'going beyond', as in Laclau and Mouffe's usage.

The narrative presented here works as follows: after situating Marxism and post-Marxism in today's cultural climate, with specific reference to Laclau and Mouffe and the reception accorded *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, we proceed to consider whether we can identify a tradition of scepticism within Marxism itself. In the first instance this means exploring closely the work of Laclau and Mouffe's contemporaries Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst (and others in their orbit) to observe Marxism being subjected to uncompromising critique by professed adherents, the logical outcome of which would seem to be post-Marxism. Figures like Hindess and

2 Introduction: Marxism's 'disenchanted'

Hirst in England, and André Gorz and Rudolf Bahro on the Continent, reveal the considerable degree of unease Marxists themselves are beginning to feel about their theoretical heritage by the closing decades of the twentieth century. Then we delve further back in time to assess whether we can identify, as it were, a post-Marxism at work *within* classical Marxism. This involves searching for post-Marxist tendencies within the work of such theorists as Lukács, Luxemburg, the Frankfurt School, Bloch, Sartre, and, somewhat unwittingly perhaps, Althusser. We then move on to consider the growing disenchantment being expressed towards Marxism from the postmodernist and feminist camps from the 1960s onwards, before confronting classical Marxist principles with what has been dubbed 'postmodern' scientific thought – quantum mechanics, chaos theory, complexity theory, the anthropic principle, etc. Developments in the latter area would seem to undermine Marxism in its nineteenth-century scientific guise (the teleological dialectic with which it is traditionally associated, for example), while simultaneously offering new possibilities for reformulating the dialectic in a non-teleological manner which jettisons the deterministic side of Marxist thought. If the universe really is, as much current scientific thought suggests, 'open' as far as future developments go, then there is once again a real point to human action. The nature of that openness can be gleaned from the comments of physicists such as Paul Davies:

there is still a sense in which human mind and society may represent only an intermediate stage on the ladder of organizational progress in the cosmos. To borrow a phrase from Louise Young, the universe is as yet 'unfinished'. We find ourselves living at an epoch only a few billion years after the creation. From what can be deduced about astronomical processes, the universe could remain fit for habitation for trillions of years, possibly for ever.²

This is to introduce the anthropic principle into the exercise – a resource scrutinised in more detail in chapter 9.

Ultimately, the argument is that Marxism can survive as critique, if admittedly in what to a classical Marxist could only appear as a severely limited form; but that the critique must not be taken to entail the authoritarian and totalitarian political system favoured by most classical Marxists. Whether Marxism is to be regarded as 'plural' or not, it has to take its place in a plural world – if only to be part of the debate about the limits of pluralism. It would be a great pity if its analytical powers were to be lost because of a refusal by its diehard supporters to give up its totalitarian political principles or pretensions to universal explanatory status. A limited Marxism can still be a vibrant one, both politically and culturally, but only if it remains in dialogue with other theoretical developments in an open-minded, non-doctrinal fashion, that seeks to persuade rather than dictate. The rather obvious conclusion to draw from this line of enquiry is that socialism only works when the populace *is* persuaded by its arguments rather than forced into compliance with it by a political elite, but it is a sad fact of communist history that this obvious point has gone largely unheeded.

The study makes a point (as did my recent *Post-Marxism: A Reader*³) of maintaining a sense of tension between the *post-Marxist* and *post-Marxist* positions, arguing that

it is only by drawing on the – often conflicting – insights of both, that Marxist thought can continue to have any significant cultural impact. While sympathetic to post-Marxism in a general sense, I want also to work out a position that involves a certain amount of shuffling between the two variants, as a way of deciding what is retrievable from the Marxist canon in the aftermath of its implosion as a political force in Europe (with evidence that its days may be numbered in Asia, too). There will also be a certain amount of sympathy expressed with postmodern thought, which post-Marxism in both its main guises draws heavily upon; but the study is insisting that post-Marxism in general has to maintain a critical stance towards postmodernism, and that it should not simply be conflated with the postmodernist cause.

There are numerous studies defending Marxism from within the classical tradition, and, of course, polemical studies from a post-Marxist position; but less seeking to trace the intellectual history of post-Marxism, or mapping out what its role might be in a postmodern world. While I dealt with some of these issues in my introductory essay to *Post-Marxism: A Reader*, the present volume is designed to cover considerably more ground historically speaking, as well as ranging through the work of a far larger group of theorists than the earlier project was able to encompass.⁴ Its objective is to present a much fuller picture of what post-Marxism is, why it came about, and what its future prospects are likely to be in the new millennium.

As we work our way through the narrative of post-Marxism, certain defining characteristics will become apparent. Post-Marxists dislike the control aspect of Marxism (particularly as exercised at party level), totalising theories in general, the deification of Marx, and the subordination of the individual to the system that communism demands. They favour pluralism, difference, scepticism towards authority, political spontaneity, and the cause of the new social movements. The image of Marxism that prevails is of a system that is authoritarian, totalitarian, control-obsessed and hypocritical. Post-Marxists have given up trying to bridge the gap between theory and reality that in their eyes makes a mockery of Marxism's liberationist political pretensions, and studiously avoid being dragged into those interminable internal debates about what Marx really said or really meant, that classical Marxists have such an insatiable appetite for. They have become impervious to excuses for Marxism's poor performance, and have given up trying to reconstruct the theory from within. Post-Marxism is born of disillusion, although it can express optimism about a political future free from the constraints of Marxist orthodoxy.

The present study is just as keen to avoid being dragged into those interminable internal debates, and steers clear of direct engagement with Marx himself. What is being offered here is not a history of Marxism, but a history of Marxism's 'disenchanted'.

1 Marxism in a ‘post-’ world

A ‘grand narrative’ theory such as Marxism has a problematical status in a cultural climate, such as ours, favouring scepticism towards grand narratives in general. To the extent that theories like poststructuralism, postmodernism and second-wave feminism represent direct challenges to traditional notions of intellectual and political authority, we now live in a world that is ‘post-’ most of what modernity stood for as a cultural movement. Marxism’s continuing commitment to material progress and universal solutions to political problems marks it out as a theory still essentially rooted in modernity and the ideals of the ‘Enlightenment project’, thus out of step with the generally sceptical – and often highly pessimistic – tone of recent intellectual enquiry. There is also the considerable problem of Marxism’s political heritage of communism to be taken into account. The excesses committed in the name of communism can be explained away in a variety of ingenious ways – Stalin as non-typical, Eastern bloc communism as a perversion of Marxist theory, communism and Marxism as related, but not identical, entities, etc.; but the possibility has to be faced that the excesses are natural consequences of the totalising imperative that is a defining characteristic of Marxism.¹ Our current intellectual, and political, climate is decidedly inimical to the whole project of totalisation on which Marxism is structured.

Marxism in the West has become progressively more embattled, and the rise of post-Marxism represents an attempt to revitalise the theory in the light of such dislocating cultural events as the break-up of the Soviet empire and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Post-Marxism might also be seen as a response to one too many ‘false dawns’, as in Perry Anderson’s mid-1970s’ pronouncement that, ‘The chance of a revolutionary circuit reopening between Marxist theory and mass practice, looped through real struggles of the industrial working class, has become steadily greater’.² Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but Anderson was merely the latest in a long line of Marxist commentators to claim that we were on the verge of a breakthrough into real socialism, and for many on the left the hopes of the late 1960s/early 1970s proved one false dawn too many. Since that time the traditional Western left has been on the defensive from a combination of a newly resurgent right and a rise in nationalist sentiment. The remainder of this study is concerned with analysing the likely success of that attempted revitalisation, across the major fields of intellectual enquiry, given its daunting task of rendering an absolutist theory acceptable to a pluralist-conscious world.

One of the things that will have to change is Marxism's attitude towards pluralism, although it is possible to argue that, *de facto*, Marxism always *has been* pluralist – it just has not officially *wanted* to be. Alvin Gouldner has posited two major schools of Marxist thought, the 'scientific' and the 'critical'; Michael Ryan has put the case for 'three, four, or even more "marxisms"'.³ What is clear is that most of the participants are unwilling to accept that state of affairs. The history of Marxism has been riven by dispute, with various schools trying to establish a definitive reading of the theory, and little spirit of compromise in evidence in the ensuing debates. As Slavoj Žižek has commented, we note in Stalinism, for example, an

obsessive insistence that whatever the cost we must *maintain the appearance*: we all know that behind the scenes there are wild factional struggles going on; nevertheless we must keep at any price the appearance of Party unity . . . This appearance is *essential*: if it were to be destroyed – if somebody were *publicly* to pronounce the obvious truth that 'the emperor is naked' (that nobody takes the ruling ideology seriously . . .) – in a sense the whole system would fall apart.⁴

The rise of post-Marxism signals a determination to bring that hidden history of pluralism to the surface; to reveal what lies behind the facade of unity.

It is not just our intellectual and political climate that is inimical to Marxism, a series of radical cultural changes have occurred (most usually grouped under the heading of 'postmodernism') that have left Marxism at a loss as to how to respond effectively. One of the most striking features of such a world has been the decline in importance, both socially and politically, of the working class. A series of causal factors can be identified behind this phenomenon: the shift towards a post-industrial society since the post-war period, and the rise of the political right across Western Europe and America between the 1970s and the 1990s – with its clear agenda to diminish trade union power as much as possible – being amongst the most insidious. Various commentators have remarked on the phenomenon, which has obvious implications for the growth of a post-Marxist consciousness, given the critical role that classical Marxism had allotted the working class as the 'gravediggers of capitalism'. Any decline in the power of that class has to give Marxist theorists serious pause for thought. Some theorists have seen this decline as irreversible and the signal for a realignment of socialist policies, André Gorz being a case in point. *Farewell to the Working Class* (originally published in France in 1980) ushered in the 1980s – a decade of some considerable trial for the left in Western Europe with right-wing governments such as Margaret Thatcher's in Britain appearing to have a stranglehold on the political process – with the provocative argument that the working class no longer formed an unequivocal reference point for socialist action. Not only that, but it was unlikely ever again to do so. Gorz claims that the left has no alternative but to face up to some unpalatable facts:

A society based on mass unemployment is coming into being before our eyes. It consists of a growing mass of the permanently unemployed on one hand, an

aristocracy of tenured workers on the other, and, between them, a proletariat of temporary workers carrying out the least skilled and most unpleasant types of work.⁵

This is a less than congenial scenario for Marxism, but Gorz argues that we can turn the situation to account if we are willing to rethink the theoretical base to our socialism. He puts the case for the emancipatory potential of the abolition of work, seeing the way in which this process (an inevitable one in his opinion, given the new technology at our disposal) is handled as the ground for political struggle in the immediate future: 'The choice is not between the abolition of work and the re-establishment of well-rounded trades in which everyone can find satisfaction. The choice is: *either* a socially controlled, emancipatory abolition of work *or* its oppressive, anti-social abolition.'⁶ The former leads to 'post-industrial socialism', or, as Gorz would have it, proper communism. If this is the choice facing us in a post-industrial world, then the left is confronted by an unfamiliar agenda which runs counter to its instincts to defend the right to work and the actions of the trade union movement that backs this up.

For Gorz, the decline of the working class, specifically the industrial proletariat that constituted the focus of Marx's attention, undermines the basis of Marxism and forces a radical reassessment of the theory's objectives. Post-industrial society has created a 'crisis of the proletariat' in all but wiping out the working class as Marx himself understood the term:

That traditional working class is now no more than a privileged minority. The majority of the population now belong to the post-industrial neo-proletariat which, with no job security or definite class identity, fills the area of probationary, contracted, casual, temporary and part-time employment. In the not too distant future, jobs such as these will be largely eliminated by automation.⁷

As Gorz repeatedly points out, classical Marxism really has no answer to such a situation, which lies outside the parameters of its conceptual scheme. The post-industrial neo-proletariat does not even constitute a class, and the extent of its alienation from the world of work is such that it is impervious to all appeals to its class consciousness or sense of solidarity. Given the onward march of post-industrial society, the neo-proletariat is on its way to becoming 'a non-class of non-workers': a category that can have no place in any Marxist scheme.⁸ There is no point trying to arrest this process and turn the clock back to a simpler societal model; what we ought to be doing is taking advantage of the opportunities it offers to free ourselves as individuals from an activity which has depersonalised us. Only in a society where work has been reduced to a minimum will real communism occur: to that extent Gorz still has a Marxist objective, although not one to be reached by Marxist means.

Post-industrialism and the decline of the working class lead Gorz to question some of the main assumptions on which Marxism is based; such as the belief that the development of the forces of production will create both the material and social preconditions for the development of socialism. The reality is very different:

a neo-proletariat unable to take over the means of production, and possibly even uninterested in doing so. Whereas Marxism has made almost as much of a fetish out of work as capitalism has, Gorz argues that socialist rationality should incline us towards work's abolition. Work is at best a necessary evil; a part of our lives that should be minimised as much as possible. Post-industrial society provides the means to do so and should be embraced by the left, rather than criticised for bringing about the end of labour as the 'subject of history'. Not that Gorz believes the proletariat ever really was the subject of history in any meaningful sense. Marx's belief that it was is no more than an unverifiable philosophical construct leaving his followers in an untenable position: we have only Marx's word for it – and Marx's word, significantly enough, as a *prophet*. The coming of post-industrial society enables us to realise the extent to which Marxism is an *eschatology*, so that we are wasting our time looking for a theory of the proletariat in Marx's work.

Given that there is no Marxist theory of the proletariat, various other aspects of Marxist thought can be called into question – such as the belief that there can be a 'collective appropriation' of the means of production by that proletariat. This is dismissed as a 'myth', and a myth with some unfortunate side effects. Under the Soviet system, for example, it could be assumed that such collective appropriation had taken place, with all proletarians being entirely committed to serving the means of production. Soviet theorists, Gorz points out, effectively separated the *proletariat* from actual *proletarians*: a state of affairs which led to considerable abuse in the way it imprisoned individuals within an assumed class character. Gorz is adamant that our working selves do not exhaust our identities, that large areas of human endeavour ('of an aesthetic, erotic, cultural or emotional sort'⁹) exist outside of the political realm. These 'existential' needs have a relative autonomy that should not be subsumed under overarching political imperatives in the manner of totalitarian communism. Militants may be able to achieve this repression, but it is unreasonable to expect all proletarians to force themselves within the character assigned to the proletariat by orthodox Marxism, where 'Class being was the intolerable and ubiquitous external limit to the activity of each and every class member'.¹⁰ Such a vision is now obsolete. Something in us as individuals escapes the totalising imperative of a theory such as Marxism, to render the notion of an undifferentiated mass of class-conscious proletarians untenable. Put simply, and contentiously to the more militant believer, 'Contrary to what Marx thought, it is impossible that individuals should totally coincide with their social being.'¹¹ Gorz here extends a point made as far back as the 1930s by Karl Mannheim, who, despite the generally sympathetic treatment accorded Marxism in his study *Ideology and Utopia*, nevertheless felt moved to assert that,

the investigator who, in the face of the variety of types of thought, attempts to place them correctly can no longer be content with the undifferentiated class concept, but must reckon with the existing social units and factors that condition social position, aside from those of class.¹²

We have now a post-industrial neo-proletariat whose cultural situation precludes the development of class being; as a result of which it can challenge the tyranny of work:

The neo-proletariat is no more than a vague area made up of constantly changing individuals whose main aim is not to seize power in order to build a new world, but to regain power over their own lives by disengaging from the marker rationality of productivism.¹³

'Power over their own lives' becomes the watchword of Gorz's argument: that being what old-style communism actively prevents individuals from realising. Gorz refuses to believe that human nature is so homogeneous that it can take on an undifferentiated class being of the kind that classical Marxism demands, or that politics alone can ever circumscribe our lives. We are not mere cogs in a production-oriented machine – as it has been Marxism's error in the past to insist. Production must be subordinated to human needs; a situation where we make 'a conscious decision to do more and live better with less'.¹⁴ When we have made that decision we shall be on the way to post-industrial socialism – in Gorz's scheme of things, real communism. As Laclau and Mouffe will do after him even more forcefully, Gorz puts his faith, not just in the post-industrial neo-proletariat, but in the 'new social movements' (feminism, ecology, etc.) that emerge from this discontented constituency.

Farewell to the Working Class represents an argument against Marxism's excessive rationalism, and its well-documented tendency to force reality to conform to its dictates. In common with the ethos of a post-world, Gorz emphasises the factor of difference:

The beginning of wisdom lies in the recognition that there are contradictions whose permanent tension has to be lived and which one should never try to resolve; that reality is made up of distinct levels which have to be acknowledged in their specificity and never reduced to an 'average'.¹⁵

To a Marxist this will sound like an admission of defeat (as will Gorz's enthusiastic espousal of a pluralist politics), but in the post-world it marks a welcome move away from the totalising imperative. The gist of Gorz's argument is that Marxism no longer *has* a proletariat on which to build a grand narrative, and that the existence of a Marxist-style proletariat had always been an illusion. It is a typical conclusion to reach in a post-world, where, as we can see from the enquiries of assorted post-structuralists and postmodernists, scepticism, and particularly scepticism about the intellectual certainties of the recent past, is very much in the ascendancy. In such a climate Marxism goes the way of structuralism and patriarchy. We note an erosion of belief in the power of any grand narrative to fulfil its claims, to the point where the Marxist grand narrative of the coming 'dictatorship of the proletariat' no longer has a receptive audience (certainly not a receptive *mass* audience), and the political centre shifts. Political theories such as Marxism are addressing the past rather than the present, and, 'Once abandoned by political parties, the site of the political tends to move elsewhere'.¹⁶ Gorz sees that other site as being inhabited by various 'new social movements', and we shall be hearing much more about their significance when we turn to the work of Laclau and Mouffe.

One way of abolishing work is by refusing to do it; which was one of the solutions put forward by the Italian Autonomy movement of the 1970s. Their objective was to destabilise capitalism by a policy of non-cooperation, although the unorthodox methods of the movement also signalled a rejection of traditional communism with its hierarchical structure and authoritarian manner.¹⁷ Michael Ryan's theory of 'enclaves' working within capitalism to bring it down is a more benign version of the Autonomy project. Enclaves are conceived of as parasitic entities, 'pockets within the body of capitalism which work against the principles of capitalism', thus representing a significant move away from dependence upon the working class.¹⁸ A consensus is emerging that it is indeed time to bid farewell to the traditional working class, and to explore non-standard methods of engineering the downfall of capitalism.

Something of Gorz's radicalism, and ability to think the unthinkable about the working class, can be found in a British context in the work of Stuart Hall. In *The Hard Road to Renewal*, for example, there is a strong sense of the need to break with a past history of belief that no longer seems to have much relevance to the left's current plight under a populist right-wing government:

I am struck again and again by the way in which socialists still assume that somehow socialism is inevitable. It is not coming perhaps quite as fast as we assumed: not trundling along in our direction with quite the speed and enthusiasm we would hope; but nevertheless, bound sooner or later to take command . . . I have to confess I no longer subscribe to that view. I think perhaps I once did; but I believe now that if socialism is not *made* by us, it certainly will not be made *for* us, not even by the laws of history.¹⁹

It is a case of 'back to the drawing board', with as few preconceptions as possible. 'Socialism', Hall warns us, 'carries no absolute guarantees' any more.²⁰ Many of the essays in *The Hard Road to Renewal* appeared in *Marxism Today* and *The New Socialist*, and the former in particular very much pursued a 'back to the drawing board' policy regarding socialist beliefs, which helped to establish a climate receptive to the development of post-Marxism in Britain throughout the 1980s, with Hall one of its most influential contributors.²¹

Hall is concerned to explode the myth of working-class unity and solidarity. Working-class experience is not homogeneous, and can no longer be relied upon to constitute the core of socialism: the 'undifferentiated class concept' has no more place in Hall's scheme of things than in Mannheim's. It may even be necessary to criticise the beliefs and practices of the working class (often deeply prejudiced and insular) if we want to escape from the toils of Thatcherism and the resurgent new right. Hall admits this is a notion likely to offend most socialists, with romanticisation of the working class being all too prevalent an attitude, especially amongst the intellectual class. Put bluntly, the British working class does not have the sense of vision to lead a revolution aimed at changing the fundamental structure of society. Hall sees it as basically defensive in character, committed to reformism rather than outright revolution, and he wants to make a firm distinction between reformism

and socialism. In the former case we have some tinkering with the worse abuses of capitalism, 'socialism without tears'; whereas the latter involves 'a fundamental reshaping of the social relations and the institutions in which men and women live'.²² Working-class experience may even constitute a barrier to the achievement of the latter.

Hall identifies three main reasons for socialism falling on hard times in the 1980s: Stalinism, an ideological paradigm shift, and the rise of the radical right. Stalinism, and the 'actually existing socialism' of the Eastern bloc, carries with it the depressing message that socialism can go badly wrong; the social democratic consensus that led to the establishment of the welfare state has become complacent, and thus vulnerable to attack from the right; the radical right has made a sustained effort to turn itself into a populist force once more by appealing to many of the prejudices that are still buried deep within working-class experience. '[T]he people can be colonized by the right', as Hall neatly puts it, in a process whereby we can observe, in another neatly turned phrase, 'the naturalization of the right'.²³ Ideological struggle has begun again in earnest – and it may even be necessary to learn from the success of the radical right in our reconstruction of the socialist cause, rather than, as all too often happens when socialism comes under stress, 'to fall back on The Faith as we know it'.²⁴ If the people can be colonised by the right, then they can be colonised also by the left; but this will not work unless it is under the aegis of a socialism which has shed its belief in historical destiny. As socialists, we are thrown back on the need to argue for our ideas, as the Thatcherite right has so successfully done for theirs, instead of believing that we can rest on past successes and the existence of a working class permanently well disposed towards us. Even our attitude to the state must be re-examined, since it appears that socialist states are just as capable of oppressing their citizens as capitalist ones are. With the example of 'actually existing socialism' before him in the Soviet bloc, Hall is unwilling to take anything on trust any longer.

Hall is representative of a new mood of realism making itself felt on the British left, although his own vision of socialism still has a certain utopian feeling to it. The colonisation of the people by the left is still regarded as an achievable objective, for example, no matter how difficult it may be to engineer in the aftermath of a socialism minus guarantees; socialist values are strongly defended, even if they no longer have a ready-made 'class' constituency to appeal to; and it is insisted that class has not disappeared from British life, despite all the populist arguments of the right to that effect. The moral agenda of Marxism remains, but the theory's categories are beginning to look more than a little frayed at the edges. The sense of destiny so often associated with the Marxist social vision is signally missing from Hall's account of 'the hard road to renewal'. What the left has to face is the unpalatable fact that a market-led society can exert an appeal in its own right, irrespective of its role in right-wing ideology:

If 'people's capitalism' did not liberate the people, it nevertheless 'loosed' many individuals into a life somewhat less constrained, less puritanically regulated, less strictly imposed than it had been three or four decades before. . . . Thus the left has never understood the capacity of the market to become identified in

the minds of the mass of ordinary people, not as fair and decent and socially responsible (that it never was), but as an expansive popular system.²⁵

The challenge for socialism is to engage with the aspirations that are aroused by the market, without reverting to an older, more puritanical vision of society which preferred its 'working class poor but *pure*: unsullied by contact with the market'.²⁶ Given that a 'pure' working class is a fallacy, socialism has no real option but to enter into the debates of the post- world with as much spirit, and as few concessions to traditionalism, as it can – especially the traditionalism (still flourishing on the 'hard left') that specified a unity of approach to politics in both class and party terms, and where that unity was not found simply labelled the result 'false consciousness'. In what will become almost an article of faith for the post-Marxist cause, Hall points out that 'Pluralism . . . is not a temporary visitor to the socialist scene. It has come to stay.'²⁷

Hall has also been one of the moving spirits behind the development of 'Cultural Studies', a discipline centrally concerned with the negotiations that take place between individuals and the mass cultural industries. Adorno and Horkheimer saw those industries as oppressive only (see chapter 5), but in keeping with the suspicion shown of the concept of false consciousness in Hall, Cultural Studies posits a dynamic relationship in which we are not to regard the audience as mere objects of manipulation from above. Such an approach, with its refusal to read off individual behaviour according to the set theoretical categories so beloved of the hard left, represents yet another threat to the orthodox Marxist world view, and further proof of the period's growing sense of scepticism towards grand narratives.²⁸

2 ‘An intellectual malady’?

The Laclau–Mouffe affair (I)

We turn now to the debate sparked off by Laclau and Mouffe’s highly controversial study *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, including their rancorous exchange with Norman Geras in the pages of *New Left Review*. The book sought to redefine Marxism in the context of the rise of several new protest movements around the globe, as well as that of new cultural theories such as poststructuralism and postmodernism, and provided a focal point for the development of post-Marxism as an important theoretical position in its own right: as one critic put it, the project was ‘beautifully paradigmatic’ for its time.¹ To characterise the authors, as one recent reviewer of a study of their work dismissively has, as ‘relatively minor thinkers’, is drastically to miss this ‘beautifully paradigmatic’ moment and all that it meant (and continues to mean) on the left.² The synthesis of Marxist, poststructuralist, and postmodernist thought that Laclau and Mouffe put forward, has a genuinely innovatory quality that deserves to be scrutinised in some depth.

It was Geras who dubbed the post-Marxist project ‘the very advanced stage of an intellectual malady’, thus signalling in no uncertain terms the gulf separating the classical Marxists from the reformers, and turning his exchange with Laclau and Mouffe into a heavily symbolic one for the late twentieth-century left.³ The Laclau–Mouffe affair, which involved a variety of responses from a wide range of left-wing theorists, demonstrates how Marxism is fracturing in the face of widespread cultural change. Geras’s defence is after the event in that respect; the genie is already out of the bottle as he writes. The affair proceeds to become a microcosm of the modernity/postmodernity debate that is taking place in the larger cultural sphere.

The debate over *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* will be contextualised within the longer-term career trajectories of Laclau and Mouffe, tracing their debt to such thinkers as Luxemburg, Gramsci, Althusser and Derrida, as expressed in a series of works both before and after that crucially significant volume. We shall also be situating Laclau and Mouffe within the wider currents of intellectual experiment and reorientation on the left in the period. It is possible to discern post-Marxist tendencies developing in a complementary way to Laclau and Mouffe, and the latter should be seen, not as isolated figures, but as high-profile representatives of a growing trend on the left. Hindess and Hirst, for example, although still professing Marxist allegiance, reach broadly similar conclusions to Laclau and Mouffe, as we shall discover in chapter 4.

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy wastes no time in establishing its post-Marxist credentials, making it clear, in apocalyptic-sounding tones, that the left must change its ways:

Left-wing thought today stands at a crossroads. The 'evident truths' of the past – the classical forms of analysis and political calculation, the nature of the forces in conflict, the very meaning of the Left's struggles and objectives – have been seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical mutations which have riven the ground on which those truths were constituted. . . . a question-mark has fallen more and more heavily over a whole way of conceiving both socialism and the roads that should lead to it.⁴

The years that have passed since these sentiments were expressed have seen the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the virtual demise of communism in Europe – further proof of the acuteness of Laclau and Mouffe's analysis of the situation confronting contemporary Marxism in the mid-1980s. Pluralism is to play a central role in the proposed reformulation of the Marxist project, with Laclau and Mouffe complaining that much of the debate over Marxism's validity is a debate over the theory's obsession with unity. In textbook deconstructive style, the concept of unity is called into question, and diversity, even paradox, pursued instead. To follow the deconstructionist line of thought on such issues, there is no centre to discursive phenomena, therefore unity is an illusion: the centre is never wholly present; always partly somewhere else; never graspable in its entirety. The notion that such unity *is* possible is usually an ideologically motivated ploy: it is to someone's advantage for it to be perceived to be so, with a desire for domination hovering around in the background. The spectre of Stalinism reminds us of how such a belief can be abused. Prefiguring Derrida's insistence on Marx as 'plural' (*Specters of Marx*), we have here the hypothesis that Marxism's continuing relevance *depends* on its very lack of unity, its capacity to inspire multiple interpretations. To a deconstructionist this is no more than stating the obvious: given the fractured nature of the linguistic sign, what else can texts do *but* invite multiple interpretation? To a classical Marxist, however, this is to court heresy.

Plurality is to be realised best in a 'radical democratic politics': an alliance between socialism and special interest groups of the kind that had become more prevalent in the course of the twentieth century's ethnic, ecological, sexual and gender struggles. A new 'articulation' is needed to move on from the current cultural crisis, a crisis of which Marxism is a constituent element rather than a potential cure. To that end, Laclau and Mouffe analyse the genealogy of the concept of hegemony in some depth, destabilise it in its classical Marxist sense, and then reformulate it for their own radical purposes. The pair scent something of a conspiracy in the way that hegemony has been deployed by classical Marxist theorists. From Gramsci onwards, hegemony describes how a bourgeois capitalist social formation is able to curtail the build-up of revolutionary opposition by propagating its ideals in subtler ways than the use of armed force. Thus in the work of Althusser we have the concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, or the cultural institution (such as the educational

system or the media) which passes on approved models of bourgeois behaviour – that is, those geared to restrict the growth of dissent. Armed force remains in the background as a last resort (the Repressive State Apparatus). In Laclau and Mouffe's reading of its classical role, however, hegemony is a concept designed to disguise a gap in Marxist theory.

It is the problematical status of the category of 'historical necessity' that is the source of a crisis in Marxism from the Second International onwards, creating the need for the reinforcing concept that is hegemony. Marxism's apparent predictive failure, with capitalism stubbornly resisting its allotted fate of collapse under the weight of its internal contradictions, led to a need '*to think those discontinuities*' that the application of the theory to the real political world was giving rise to, and, by doing so, to reconstitute the unity of the theory.⁵ Hegemony is brought into play to explain away such 'discontinuities', where historical necessity is not working in quite the way that Marxist theory claims it should be: that is, constructing class unity amongst the working class in the face of the exploitative, and entirely predictable, development of capitalism such that a revolutionary situation inevitably must arise. Laclau and Mouffe find a particularly striking example of the gap this leaves in the Marxist scheme of things in the work of Rosa Luxemburg, whose notion of 'spontaneism', later to be vilified by most classical Marxist thinkers, seems to undermine the unity of the Marxist world-view. Spontaneism describes what happens in a proto-revolutionary condition, such as that prevailing in Russia in the early twentieth century. The extreme political repression that characterised the Tsarist regime encouraged resistance in a wide variety of forms, which did not necessarily conform to any pre-set revolutionary programme. Such spontaneism did not exist in Germany, where capitalism was far better organised, indicating that revolution was even further off there than in Russia, whose working class became something of a model for the rest of Europe in terms of their militancy. Contingency and unpredictability pose considerable problems for Marxist theory, however, and Luxemburg deploys historical necessity as a means of bridging the gap between the apparently differing experiences of the Russian and German working classes. Class unity is achieved by common exposure to the 'necessary laws of capitalist development', thus overcoming the contingency implied by spontaneism; although this unity is, as Laclau and Mouffe point out, largely symbolic in Luxemburg, which distinguishes her from 'the orthodox theoreticians of the Second International (for whom class unity is simply laid down by the laws of the economic base)'.⁶

Luxemburg is one of the few Marxist thinkers to confront the issue of contingency head on, and we find her thinking through the discontinuities with more rigour than most. Generally speaking, contingency is marginalised as a significant factor in cultural development by classical Marxism. To allow contingency into the social equation is to suggest that Marxism is less than a totality of thought, and that its logic of operation is flawed in some significant way. Spontaneism clouds the issue even further by implying a lack of control – or, more worryingly, an *inability* to control – on the part of the Marxist political apparatus. Laclau and Mouffe are unphased by that prospect, regarding it as liberating rather than problematical. They are clearly drawn to the concept of spontaneism, which forms some kind of

model for their ‘radical democratic politics’; the difference being that Laclau and Mouffe see no need to process it through Marxist historical necessity, or the supposed laws of capitalist development entailed by this. Their post-Marxist bias is apparent in the way that the link between spontaneism and necessity is severed, with the objective of letting hegemony operate in an unfettered fashion minus the constraints placed upon it by Marxist principles. Free-floating signifiers are not, however, what classical Marxists want, since they raise, yet again, that spectre of a loss of control. For Laclau and Mouffe, that is just another instance of the ‘Stalinist imaginary’ in action.

The conclusion drawn from the analysis of Luxemburg’s *The Mass Strike* is that

the logic of spontaneism and the logic of necessity do not converge as two distinct and positive principles to explain certain historical situations, but function instead as antithetical logics which only interact with each other through the reciprocal limitation of their effects.⁷

The argument is that Luxemburg unwittingly reveals a gap at the heart of Marxist theory, throwing into doubt the notion of class subject positions on which so much of Marxist politics depends (Laclau had earlier taken issue with the tendency towards ‘class reductionism’ in Marxism in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*⁸). Class subject position is to remain one of the riskiest areas of enquiry in classical Marxism, as Lukács is soon to discover to his cost.⁹ In common with the majority of post-structuralist thinkers, Laclau and Mouffe are deeply suspicious of fixed subject positions, with their essentialist bias (elsewhere we find Laclau, following on from the work of Lacan and Žižek, arguing the case for ‘the subject as the subject of the lack’¹⁰). Challenge the notion of a fixed *class* position for subjects, and it becomes much easier to explain the emergence of the new social movements. Far from being a solution to a theoretical crisis, hegemony is the product of a social fragmentation that these new forms of political action further confirm, and it is on this terrain that Laclau and Mouffe’s enquiry is being prosecuted.

Historically speaking, therefore, hegemony is to be seen as a political response to what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as ‘the double void that emerged in the essentialist discourse of the Second International’.¹¹ This double void is the result of several factors, but primarily of the conflict between necessity and human agency. As Laclau and Mouffe note, room must be made for formulations such as the following: ‘the infrastructure does not determine everything, because consciousness or will also intervenes in history’, and ‘the general theory cannot account for concrete situations, because every prediction has a morphological character’, in order to ameliorate some of the more deterministic imperatives of Marxism – even though, in their interpretation, determinism continues to be the underlying driving force of classical Marxist thought.¹² Marxism, in Laclau and Mouffe’s reading of its history, ‘loses its innocence’ when it comes to realise those deterministic imperatives can be deflected, or even blocked altogether, by a series of unforeseen historical tendencies (such as the unexpected resilience displayed by capitalism). The objective then becomes to ensure that the theory can act as ‘a guarantee that these tendencies will eventually

coincide with the type of social articulation proposed by the Marxist paradigm'.¹³ Orthodoxy becomes a matter of protecting the status of Marxism as a 'science'. We might see it in retrospect as yet another instance of a science engaged in the game of 'saving the phenomena', aware as we are that there is always a price to be paid for that procedure: in this case the return, with a vengeance, of determinism. The divorce of theory from reality that is one of the most damning features of later Marxism to its post-Marxist critics, has its beginnings in just such manoeuvres.

What this all amounts to is a dangerous simplification of a very complex cultural picture that is plainly not conforming to the Marxist paradigm – even in the period *before* the Soviet Revolution. A gap opens up between those espousing the 'logic of necessity' and those 'the logic of contingency', with hegemony being one of the key strategies devised to close that gap – to the advantage of the former position in real terms.¹⁴ What Laclau and Mouffe refer to, tellingly enough, as 'the quietism of orthodoxy', is the winner of that struggle – to the detriment of the socialist cause in the long run.¹⁵ The point of hegemony is to forestall all departures from economism, such as are found in Luxemburg, by subordinating the logic of contingency to the logic of necessity; but it is precisely such departures that attract anti-determinists of the Laclau and Mouffe stamp.

Classical Marxist hegemony, therefore, represents a concerted attempt to rewrite contingency as a mere aspect of historical necessity. Increasingly, this exercise takes on an authoritarian character, as the Communist Party comes to conceive of itself as the guardian of that necessity, with the duty of implementing it on behalf of the proletariat. The slide into authoritarianism soon becomes evident:

Once every political relation is conceived as a relation of representation, a progressive substitutionism moves from class to party (representation of the objective interests of the proletariat) and from party to Soviet state (representation of the world interests of the Communist movement). A martial conception of the class struggle thus concludes in an eschatological epic.¹⁶

From the perspective of representation, contingency can be rewritten as a state of incomplete understanding (or even false consciousness) of the operation of the laws of historical necessity. The party and the Soviet state, having attained the required condition of enlightenment, can thus act, with authority, for others. From the assumption of that authority to outright authoritarianism is a short step, and one that is soon taken. Western European communist parties come to perceive it as their major role to preserve the purity of revolutionary theory on behalf of the proletariat, against a real political world where social democratic parties are enthusiastically pursuing an integrationist policy.

Classical Marxism will trade on that notion of contingency as false consciousness, even through the much more sophisticated theories of hegemony put forward by Gramsci and Althusser. Critically enough, in each of the latter two cases it is again the purity of the theory that is sought by the further elaboration of the concept of hegemony. At all costs, it seems, this purity must be protected, and the spectre

of *real* contingency kept at bay. The bias is always towards the theory, with contingency treated as an unfortunate error to be cleared up by the application of yet more theoretical rigour: the new 'reading' methods of Althusser, for example, with their appropriation of structuralist methodology in the service of a supposedly more 'scientific' Marxism.

Gramsci does, however, represent a watershed in Marxist theory to Laclau and Mouffe, in the debate over the nature of hegemony: a move towards a 'principle of articulation' as opposed to the sterile 'principle of representation' applying in most Soviet (certainly Leninist) thought on the subject of class.¹⁷ Moving towards the principle of articulation means acknowledging the complex of shifting alliances and mass of contradictions in which social agents are caught up, and addressing these in one's analysis. What Gramsci offers, in his attempt to come to terms with these contradictions, is a concept of hegemony that transcends class alliance, and a concentration on the factor of ideology. Despite this ability to think beyond class alliances, and at least to explore the possibility of alternative articulations of interests, Gramsci ultimately is seen to be working with a fairly traditional Marxist notion of class. New articulations of interests may arise, but from Gramsci's standpoint 'there must always be a *single* unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Gramsci's work continues to hold a fascination for Laclau and Mouffe, on the grounds that, as the latter had stated a few years earlier in her introduction to a collection of essays on the theorist, the 'gramscian conception of hegemony is not only compatible with pluralism, it implies it'.¹⁹

For Laclau and Mouffe, the 'classist' mentality continues to reassert itself through the various social democratic parties of Western Europe, even in the aftermath of the First World War, and they regard this as yet another missed opportunity to construct a radical democratic politics out of a highly promising social situation. The narrow classist mentality in European social democracy comes to constitute a barrier to significant social change, and generally collapses into mere pressure-group tactics on behalf of the working class, with the trade union interest almost invariably dominant. In consequence, the status quo is hardly affected at all. We witness a failure of the socialist imaginary; its inability to move past a crude, and for Laclau and Mouffe self-defeating, class reductionism. This failure leaves us with an unfortunate choice between an authoritarian Marxism and a social democracy whose reformist sentiments merely serve to maintain capitalism in power. Laclau and Mouffe reject the choice altogether, and, with it, the notion of classism itself. Further, the category of historical necessity goes too, and we are projected into a world where struggles are not predetermined, and everything is still to play for – the world of the new social movements, which are to be harnessed for the construction of a radical democratic politics by means of a reformulated concept of hegemony. This is also the world of 'postmodern' science that we shall be exploring in chapter 9: an 'open' universe with almost infinite capacity for development.

The new concept of hegemony is founded on a belief in 'the openness of the social': an openness which in practice always resists the totalising imperative of Marxism, for all the various theoretical attempts made to overcome it.²⁰

Traditionally, Marxist theorists have attempted to tame this openness by the use of dialectics, which allows for the creation of new states of affairs, but only as stages on the way to the establishment of full socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The teleological context in which dialectics takes place means that any openness is to be treated as apparent only: we know in advance what the desired end is supposed to be. Contingency is brought under control, and totality still rules. Seen from Laclau and Mouffe's perspective, dialectics is a way of trying to deny diversity, since it channels everything that happens in the social domain into an overarching teleological scheme. True to their poststructuralist bias, they emphasise difference instead, which in this case means a commitment to 'the multiformity of the social'.²¹ The thesis is that most social orders try to suppress difference, whereas they want to use it as the *basis* for social relations in their proposed radical democratic social order. Difference is to shift from being a problem somewhere at the margins of socialist theory, to being the centre of one's social vision; from something unfortunate to be explained away, by hegemony or dialectical sleight of hand, to something avidly to be embraced. It is a shift from theoretical rigidity to theoretical fluidity, where abstraction is forced to recognise the reality of social existence (although Laclau and Mouffe's own argument is all too often pitched at a forbiddingly high level of abstraction, leading one commentator to describe it as 'challengingly inaccessible'²²). What examples they can find of Marxist theorists trying to take a similar road to theirs, will, they contend, end in failure, with the authors in question falling back on essentialism eventually. The goal is to radicalise certain aspects of such theories, Althusser's and Gramsci's in particular, in order to reformulate hegemony as a concept able to underpin a radical democratic politics.

Althusser is an intriguing case in that his project to recapture Marxism's theoretical authority ironically enough opens up some very promising lines of enquiry for the post-Marxist project in its turn. The emphasis on overdetermination, for example, has for Laclau and Mouffe the implication that, 'Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order.'²³ From a classical Marxist position this is a startling implication, and one that Althusser chooses not to pursue, retreating instead into the essentialist prescriptions of *Reading Capital*. Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, think overdetermination points forward to the world of deconstruction, prefiguring the notion of the 'surplus' that is held to be inescapably there in any state of affairs. The excess of meaning, for example, that prevents the sign from ever being graspable in its entirety, since it is always referring to other states of affairs – quite possibly a multitude of them – outside the present one. Thus, 'a system only exists as a partial limitation of a "surplus of meaning" which subverts it'.²⁴ For all social relations to be, as Althusser claims they are, overdetermined, is for them to be beyond the reach of totalising by means of the rigid theoretical schema that classical Marxism insists on imposing on all phenomena. Laclau and Mouffe also point out that overdetermination's psychoanalytical roots suggest that 'the social constitutes itself as a symbolic order': hardly the kind of conclusion that a theory such as Marxism, with its severely materialist bias, would normally care to draw.²⁵

Another major problem with overdetermination is that it conflicts with Althusser's commitment to the 'last instance' thesis; that the economy is 'in the last instance' the determinant for all social relations in every possible society: 'it is sufficient to retain from him [Engels] what should be called the *accumulation of effective determinations* (deriving from the superstructures and from special national and international circumstances) *on the determination in the last instance by the economic*.'²⁶ For Laclau and Mouffe this leads us into contradiction, with overdetermination signalling contingency, and the 'last instance' strict determination. Althusser is faced with the same problem that hegemony theorists in the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries had been: the need to confine contingency within an overall teleology. The fact that Althusser goes on to state that 'the lonely hour of the "last instance" never comes', merely deepens the problem.²⁷ If the last instance is to be no more than a metaphysical conjecture, then it can hardly claim to exert control over contingency. Such a formulation leaves the field open for contingency, offering yet more opportunities for the anti-determinist post-Marxist project to exploit. Bringing theory and reality into conjunction seems no nearer than ever after Althusser's exercise, and just as much in need of theoretical bridging devices that do not bear very close scrutiny.

As far as Laclau and Mouffe are concerned, the Althusserian attempt to bridge the gap is just the latest in a long line of failures that reinforces their reading of classical Marxist theory as an internally flawed system of thought, trying desperately to pretend that it is not. The disjunction of the ideal and the real remains the major stumbling-block to the realisation of classical Marxism's socio-political objectives, and, in prototypical deconstructive fashion, Laclau and Mouffe want to destabilise that binary relationship, with its assumption of a dominant position for the ideal. Theory always has come first in classical Marxism, with reality being forced to conform to its dictates, whereas Laclau and Mouffe are aiming at an interactive relationship, with each side informing the other reciprocally. Rather than the purity of theory, their interest lies in articulation, defined as 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice'.²⁸ Drawing on Foucault, they define the product of an articulatory practice as a *discourse*, and, as in Foucault, this is not characterised by unity but instead by 'regularity in dispersion', such that it becomes 'an ensemble of differential positions'.²⁹ Critically, however, those positions are *dependent* upon each other in the sense that they are only differential *in relation* to other positions within the discourse. Contingency is not 'random', and Laclau and Mouffe even can speak of there being a quality of *necessity* about such relationships – although that is not to be interpreted as being the same thing as determinism: 'Necessity derives', as they put it, 'not from an underlying intelligible principle but from the regularity of a system of structural positions'.³⁰ That system is never complete, however, so it is also quite logical to speak of it as featuring a large degree of contingency.

This condition of incompleteness leads Laclau and Mouffe to controversial conclusions about, first, identity, and then, society: that 'there is no identity which can be fully constituted', and that "'Society" is not a valid object of discourse'.³¹ The poststructuralist cast to their thought is much in evidence in the insistence that there

is no underlying principle of organisation, or 'deep structure', to the 'field of differences' that goes to make up what we call society. They describe that field of differences, where identities are both unfixed and, in any final sense, unfixable, as '*the field of overdetermination*'.³² Althusser is turned on his head; the last instance thesis sacrificed to overdetermination, and contingency and necessity brought into a new kind of relationship, where 'necessity only exists as a partial limitation of the field of contingency'.³³ Laclau and Mouffe's identification with a series of currents in twentieth-century thought challenging the concept of fixed meaning – Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida, etc. – is complete. 'Society never manages to be identical to itself', it is argued, being subject instead to 'an intertextuality that overflows it'.³⁴ The elements of a discourse are to be regarded as floating signifiers which can be connected up with each other in an inexhaustible variety of ways (the rhizomatic image suggests itself). Above all, there is the insistence on 'the openness of the social' that will justify the construction of a radical democratic politics. That openness guarantees there will always be the emergence of new differences, and given that state of affairs, the classical Marxist concept of hegemony is an essentially doomed enterprise. The controlled totality of Marxist legend is simply unrealisable.

If there is no identity to be fully constituted, there can be no classical 'subject' either. Subjects become "subject positions" within a discursive structure', on the model of the elements within the Saussurean linguistic system.³⁵ Those positions are relative to each other, but in no way fixed or determined. There is no essentialism about either the discourse or its elements, which removes most of the point of classical Marxist analyses of the social: 'If every subject position is a discursive position, the analysis cannot dispense with the forms of overdetermination of some positions by others – of the contingent character of all necessity, which . . . is inherent in any discursive difference.'³⁶ Adopting such a position enables Laclau and Mouffe not just to question the classical Marxist approach to the social, but certain trends of feminist thought as well. They deny that the oppression of women can be reduced to a single cause, since that is a position which all too easily reintroduces biological essentialism onto the cultural agenda. What is emphasised instead is the multiplicity of interrelated factors at work in the articulatory practice, such that 'overdetermination among the diverse sexual differences produces a systematic effect of sexual *division*'.³⁷ For Laclau and Mouffe this is a liberating move, which offers feminist analysis a way of moving beyond the standard antagonistic positions that block significant change. Given an open discourse whose elements are floating signifiers rather than predetermined positions, there is always the possibility of overcoming traditional conceptions of gender relations.

Traditional conceptions of the working class fare no better under this iconoclastically minded form of analysis, with Laclau and Mouffe, following on from Gorz in this respect, considering these to be based on a fallacy. There is neither a fixed subject position nor a unified social whole for the working class to belong to; nor, for that matter, any 'false consciousness' by which such subjects can fail to recognise their 'true' class interests. The notion of a future class unity, as yet unrealised by its subjects, but represented in the interim by a vanguard party acting on their behalf while the subjects in question work their way out of the condition of

false consciousness, falls apart if that unity is unrealisable under any real-world, as opposed to merely theoretical, circumstances.

The problematisation of hierarchy also applies to the categories of base and superstructure, with this becoming yet another binary relationship to be overturned in an act of deconstruction. Rather than the political realm being determined by the economic, those realms are in a state of tension, with neither being able to encompass the other fully: 'the economic *is* and *is not* present in the political, and vice versa; the relation is not one of literal differentiations but of unstable analogies between the two terms.'³⁸ It is the deconstructionist critique of the metaphysics of presence applied to the materialist categories of Marxist theory, and if identity is as problematical a phenomenon as deconstructionists are claiming, then little of the Marxist edifice will remain standing after their analysis is carried through; particularly when Laclau and Mouffe go on to argue that even *dialectical contradiction* requires a belief in fixed identity: 'it is because A *is fully* A that being not-A is a contradiction.'³⁹ Any theory at all that depends on fixed categories would fall foul of such an analysis, which can only succeed in creating a sense of turmoil amongst the left in general.

The thrust of Laclau and Mouffe's argument is against what they see as a simplification of social and political processes, such that their inherent complexity, or field of differences, is denied. Such reductionism is a condition of both totalitarianism and bourgeois democracy, with the erasure of difference that these socio-political systems feature (each in their own particular ways, and by their own particular methods) eventually leading to authoritarianism. Both systems oppress individuals by forcing them to conform to a fixed cultural model which allows little room for significant dissent. In each case, the individual is forcibly absorbed into a totality which regards difference as a threat to its power base. For Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, difference is the way forward in a postmodern world where traditional authority is increasingly being subjected to intense scrutiny:

We, thus, see that the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity. Taking a comparative example from linguistics, we could say that the logic of difference tends to expand the syntagmatic pole of language, the number of positions that can enter into a relation of combination and hence of continuity with one another; while the logic of equivalence expands the paradigmatic pole – that is, the elements that can be substituted for one another – thereby reducing the number of positions which can possibly be combined.⁴⁰

Applying the logic of equivalence is what gives us the notion of class unity, with the various members of the working class being treated as substitutable for each other on the grounds that they share the same 'class consciousness'. One worker equals any other worker, with individual differences being discounted (even across national boundaries). Laclau and Mouffe want to expand the network of the social, regarding this almost in the light of a moral imperative we are under as individuals: difference

is what leads to change, thus preventing cultural stagnation and the preservation of established elites. Lyotard's notion of the 'little narrative' has many similarities to this vision, as does his concept of 'philosophical politics' – a process whereby little narratives are helped to find their voice, and thus to resist their oppression by the totalisers.⁴¹

Throughout the work of Laclau and Mouffe, Deleuze and Guattari, and Lyotard, diversity is treated as one of the most desirable of human traits rather than a menace to the prevailing social order, although it is never exactly clear what we are to do when that diversity leads to conflicting demands between competing interest groups. Too often, the solutions offered to such states of affairs depend on a display of goodwill from everyone involved that is not always to be relied upon. The left has more than its share of factional infighting and sworn enmity amongst groups which, to the outside public, differ from each other only by the most minor of doctrinal points. Religious history offers a host of similar instances of diversity-as-problem rather than cure, as does recent political history with the break-up of such nation-states as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The pursuit of diversity in the latter cases led to fragmentation rather than any dialogue of equivalence. Perhaps a different kind of unity, unity of toleration of difference no matter what the outcome proves to be, is, somewhat ironically under the circumstances, being called into play by diversity theorists at such points.

Nevertheless, diversity does drive the struggle for emancipation from totalitarianism and authoritarianism for Laclau and Mouffe, and they are openly sceptical of all attempts to subsume the wide range of democratic struggles found in the later twentieth century under any overarching concern (the overthrow of capitalism, for example). These are the kind of arguments still being put forward by many minority left-wing political parties, who tend to regard protest movements as digressions from the real business, which is always taken to be the creation of an entirely new social order. The claim being made is that the demands of the protest movements cannot be met satisfactorily under the existing system, the motives of which cannot be trusted, and must wait their turn in the queue for social reform that will follow on from the overthrow of capitalism. Reforms in the meantime will merely serve to entrench the existing political system by defusing dissent in a piecemeal fashion; the assumption being that the protest movements cannot see the larger picture and will remain fixated with their own little agenda to the exclusion of all others. What we see in such cases is the reintroduction of the notion of hierarchy, with some socio-political objectives being privileged over others: but that is to remain stuck in the discourse of fixed identities, class positions, and class unity that has hindered the left's progress so many times before. In Laclau and Mouffe's reading of political life, this is the road to totalitarianism all over again. None of the current democratic struggles is reducible to a single clear enemy to be vanquished; what always needs to be taken into account is the sheer complexity of such struggles with their inevitably overlapping nature:

Take, for example, a discourse which presents men, qua biological reality, as the enemy. What will happen to a discourse of this kind when it is necessary to

develop antagonisms like the struggle for the freedom of expression or the struggle against the monopolization of economic power, both of which affect men and women?⁴²

No democratic struggle exists in isolation, therefore, and no individual within any of those struggles has a fixed, unified identity that would predetermine how he or she would act in any given situation where a conflict of interests occurred. Overlapping struggles militate against essentialism, and once that essentialism is undermined by conflicts of interests so is the certainty that attaches to Marxist social analysis. No outcome can be specified in advance, everything is still to play for, and the situation is very fluid, and often very local, in nature. Such a move from the macro to the micro perspective runs counter to the principles of classical Marxism, and is guaranteed to fan the flames of controversy even further. Classical Marxism can hardly conceive of itself as anything *other* than a popular movement expressing the will of the masses, and is unlikely to take kindly to any reduction in its universal scope.

Laclau and Mouffe's version of hegemony is designed for operation in this fragmented political scene, where articulatory practices vie with each other across unstable and constantly displaced 'frontiers' (frontiers which are *inside* the individual as well). The new hegemony requires there to be antagonistic forces, equivalence, and fluid frontiers; conditions which Laclau and Mouffe claim take them beyond Gramscian hegemony, with its residual commitment to unity. Gramsci posits a division of the socio-political space into two opposed factions, each struggling to push back the frontier that separates them; whereas it becomes part of the very definition of democratic struggle, for Laclau and Mouffe, that there is a *proliferation* of such spaces in advanced capitalist countries. If we accept that there *is*, then the last vestige of Gramsci's essentialism disappears. The move from unity to endlessly proliferating differences is textbook deconstruction, with hegemony shifting from being a 'centre of the social and hence its essence', to 'a political *type of relation, a form . . . of politics*' instead.⁴³ Hierarchy and loaded binary relationships have been abolished, and a series of what Laclau and Mouffe call 'hegemonic nodal points' becomes possible in the socio-political realm.⁴⁴ Pluralism asserts itself, and henceforth the task of the analyst is to determine the nature of the relation obtaining between the various nodal points (which are in a constant process of change and realignment), rather than to force them into a spurious unity in the service of a totalising political system. Displacement becomes the focus of attention: hegemony's 'effects always emerge from a surplus of meaning which results from an operation of displacement'.⁴⁵

Laclau and Mouffe want us to recognise how fluid such a pluralist situation is, but not to assume that we must accept whatever displacements just happen to occur. Power struggles continue and some power struggles, thus some displacements, are preferable to others. There are right-wing as well as left-wing pressure groups, after all. As long as we drop any pretence to be in possession of a foundational power we can align ourselves with particular causes – feminism, anti-racism, the gay movement, etc. – in the name of social progress. The critical point is to maintain a commitment to the openness of the social that does not preclude the possibility of a range of other displacements being fought for, since that would be to revert to the

totalitarian mind-set that has characterised so much Marxist thought. What is being argued for is a politics of displacement. The search for a 'scientific' socialism is therefore seen to be a misguided, hopelessly utopian, project. We have, instead, to face up to 'that continuous redefinition of the social and political spaces and those constant processes of displacement of the limits constructing social division, which are proper to contemporary societies'.⁴⁶ To most Marxist thinkers, however, that is to have abandoned dialectical materialism for something perilously close to anarchy. 'The indeterminacy of the social' is simply not a concept the latter can admit, whereas for Laclau and Mouffe it is the basis of their enquiry.

Indeterminacy leads us to a radical democratic politics. Laclau and Mouffe feel they have located a fault-line at the heart of Marx's own conception of the social, and that is 'the postulation of *one* foundational moment of rupture, and of a *unique* space in which the political is constituted'.⁴⁷ In this 'political imaginary' there are two opposed classes locked in a struggle to the finish. Marx's ambitions ran no farther than a victory for the oppressed class within the envisaged closed social space, even if this victory had to be projected into the future when the right conditions for it would materialise. Once the indeterminacy of the social is acknowledged, however, we are on our way to the construction of a far more radical kind of political imaginary than the Marxist variety. One of the first implications of such an objective is that we must step outside the 'political' in its more limited institutional sense. Laclau and Mouffe's analysis takes over the feminist principle of 'the personal is political' to concern itself with those processes 'whose objective is the transformation of a social relation which constructs a subject in a relationship of subordination'.⁴⁸ This need not always be done through standard political channels (as feminists are only too well aware), although that is yet again to pose a problem for classical Marxists, with their desire to exert control over absolutely *everything* that occurs within the socio-political space. The task that confronts Laclau and Mouffe is 'to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination'.⁴⁹ This is clearly a left-wing objective, but the authors' way of going about it is beginning to depart quite radically from standard Marxist principles.

Subordination in itself is not quite enough to generate a full-scale radical democratic politics: what is required is for 'relations of subordination' to be transformed into 'relations of oppression', and then subsequently 'relations of domination'.⁵⁰ It is a shift from a relationship of subjection to the dictates of another (employee towards employer, for example) to a relationship featuring antagonism, then to the latter relationship being perceived as illegitimate and unacceptable by outside agents. We can still deal in libertarian ideals, without needing to refer to any pre-existing class consciousness, or class unity, as a guarantor of our opposition to oppression. Neither do we need any totalising theory to prompt us into action. Such struggles against oppression can take place in a wide variety of ways, and settings, from a micro up to a macro level. Given a commitment to 'the personal is political', the campaign against oppression and domination can be waged in our daily lives. Differentiating between subordination and oppression becomes a key to how we construct a new form of political imaginary, and that is one of the enduring legacies

of the 'democratic revolution' we have experienced from the late eighteenth century onwards in Europe. Socialism is to thrive thanks to the spread of democratic discourse, with the struggle against political inequality being translated into one against economic inequality; but inasmuch as this can be considered a working-class movement, it has to be recognised how incohesive this presumed class is, how deficient in any general sense of class consciousness that binds its members together across different trades, skills and nationalities. The working class of the nineteenth century was riven by differences, and, in a large part of it, more 'reformist' than antagonistic in attitude towards the capitalist system. The success of the trade union movement in countries like Britain is predicated on just such a reformist character (which has continued on relatively unchecked to the present day), although this is something that most Marxists would rather ignore, or, if not ignore, dismiss as the product of false consciousness. Both reformism and Marxism become enemies to the democratic revolution, and if the latter is to continue, then a new perspective for articulating struggles and antagonisms is urgently required.

The way to expand the democratic revolution is to investigate the terrain that has given rise to the so-called 'new social movements', a term covering a wide diversity of groups: 'urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or sexual minorities'.⁵¹ What holds this disparate grouping loosely together is that none of its constituent elements are describable as a workers' struggle on the old-style 'class war' model, thereby rendering them very problematical to classical Marxism (feminism being an outstanding example of the uneasy relationships this can create, as we shall see in chapter 8). Laclau and Mouffe are drawn by the diffuse nature of such struggles, which cut across existing social and political boundaries by their sheer *novelty* (not a factor likely to appeal to classical Marxists). That novelty is seen in the way the new movements challenge those forms of subordination consequent on the extension of capitalist relations into virtually all areas of late twentieth-century life. The 'success' of capitalism is a measure of Marxism's 'failure' as a universal revolutionary movement, and it has meant that resistance has had to take new forms: environmental pollution, for example, giving rise to the ecology movement and the greens. There is a 'multiplicity of social relations from which antagonisms and struggles may originate: habitat, consumption, various services can all constitute terrains for the struggle against inequalities and the claiming of new rights'.⁵² This is 'brave new world' territory, to which classical Marxism can contribute little except its spirit of resistance to economic exploitation. That spirit is clearly hanging around in the background of Laclau and Mouffe's analysis, but the further we go in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* the less Marxism's *methods* are in evidence. When Norman Geras goes on to call the authors' Marxist credentials into question – 'the post-Marxist tag no doubt has a nicer ring to Laclau and Mouffe's ears than would the alternative, "ex-Marxist"'⁵³ – one can see his point, even if that alternative tag need not generate the negative connotations Geras attaches to it. Whether 'ex-' or 'post-', Marxism is still the point of departure for the exercise, and Geras glosses over the attempt to retain the spirit of the original enterprise rather too quickly.

Laclau and Mouffe are willing to grant that even liberal-democratic ideology has its good side (not a concession likely to commend them to the more fundamentalist Marxist temperament either), commenting that it has led to a welcome 'broadening of the sphere of rights' for its citizens.⁵⁴ Such 'broadening' clashes, however, with the intrusion of capitalist relations into every area of social life that is one of the defining features of post-war culture – a clash which provides fertile breeding ground for the development of a series of new struggles. Contradiction comes to the fore at such points, as in the case of the young:

In order to create new necessities, they are increasingly constructed as a specific category of consumer, which stimulates them to seek a financial autonomy that society is in no condition to give them. On the contrary, the economic crisis and unemployment make their situation difficult indeed.⁵⁵

Contradiction plays a critical role in classical Marxist thought, but its use in Laclau and Mouffe does not constitute a reversion to theoretical type, since it is not assumed that the product of contradiction is a deepening of class consciousness. The young are instead pictured as 'new subjects', whose rebellion takes a variety of forms that recall spontaneism more than they do the mass action predicted by classical Marxism. Marcuse had earlier argued for experimental artistic activity as a legitimate form of rebellion in a 'one-dimensional society' such as America had become by the 1950s and 60s, incurring the wrath of classical Marxists in the process. Laclau and Mouffe are suggesting something similar in the sympathy they extend towards the young, as well as in their refusal to insist that youth conforms to class-based stereotypes. Being young is not, in itself, a class position of course, and Laclau and Mouffe's willingness to look beyond standard Marxist categories for ways of effecting social change is much in evidence here; even if this obliges them to defend the distinctly non-Marxist trait of extreme individualism that youth culture so often thrives upon. What is important from their point of view is the act of rebellion itself, rather than the precise form it takes, and, picking up on Geras's jibe once again, that could well be described as an ex-Marxist attitude.

The new social movements are to be regarded, therefore, as the product of the profound social changes that characterised the post-war period, and the long-term success of the 'democratic revolution' in promoting campaigns for liberty and equality across a constantly widening range of social domains ('the egalitarian imaginary' in action⁵⁶). Which is not to say that all those calling themselves democrats necessarily agree this imaginary must be allowed to go on expanding indefinitely. Neoconservatives, for example, are prone to argue that the process already has gone too far, resulting in an obsession with equality in every possible area of social life that in actual fact *threatens* democratic ideals. 'Political correctness' has since become one of the areas where such battles are most keenly contested in the West, particularly in America. What such thinkers see, is a levelling down of society that destabilises hierarchies of power in which they have a vested interest. Postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers are themselves often accused of being neoconservative in outlook, or of unwittingly offering succour to the neoconservative cause (see the

critique offered by Habermas, for example⁵⁷), but there is no doubt which side of the right–left divide Laclau and Mouffe are on, given their trenchant criticism of the neoconservative ethos.

The success of the new social movements in challenging both classical Marxist and liberal-bourgeois political dogma announces the need for a pluralist-oriented radical democracy. In a neat piece of reading against the grain, the *failure* of previous generations of classical Marxist theorists to come up with a satisfactory conception of hegemony bridging the worlds of theory and empirical reality, provides the foundation for such an enterprise:

If we read *sous rature* the texts of Rosa Luxemburg, Labriola, and of Kautsky himself, we shall see that this unassimilable moment of plurality is in one way or another present in their discourse, undermining the coherence of their categories. It is clear that this multiformity was not necessarily a negative moment of fragmentation or the reflection of an artificial division resulting from the logic of capitalism, as the theorists of the Second International thought, but the very terrain which made *possible* a deepening of the democratic revolution.⁵⁸

Working on that terrain Laclau and Mouffe have deconstructed the notion of a unitary subject, opening up a new world of displacements and antagonisms which cut across traditional Marxist political schemas. With such schemas in disarray, but the spirit behind them still felt to be worthy of retention, the way is cleared to establish the conditions on which a radical and plural democracy can be made to work. 'Radical' here means irreducible to a unitary foundational principle (working-class consciousness in a class struggle, for example), and 'democracy' the ongoing 'displacements' generated by the expansion of the egalitarian imaginary. Working-class struggles can then be, as Laclau and Mouffe put it, 'redimensioned' as a plurality of often conflicting struggles, but, more importantly, shown to offer exciting opportunities for new alliances challenging the political establishment (as in the case of the *événements* where students and workers combined to confront the French state).

One of the most critical distinctions between Laclau and Mouffe's vision of cultural process and that of Marxism, is the former's rejection of predeterminism. As noted above, theirs is a world where everything is still to play for, and, as they point out, new struggles could as well take us in a rightward as a leftward direction politically. Nothing can be taken for granted in the ensuing struggles, which need close examination to clarify their libertarian potential. Each struggle must be taken on its merits. Feminism, for example, can take various forms, some more applicable to the radical democratic project than others (Laclau and Mouffe have already expressed their doubts regarding the value of separatist feminism). Some of the newer movements pose even more intractable problems than feminism, with its longer social history, does: ecology, as a case in point, can be placed at various points on the political spectrum, involving reactionary as well as radical political sentiments. We cannot automatically assume that all the new struggles will have a politically progressive character or that absolutely any form of 'rebellion' will

be acceptable to the left. Laclau and Mouffe are dismissive, too, of what they see as the fruitless search for a 'new privileged revolutionary subject' that movements such as feminism and ecology tend to generate, viewing this as yet another regrettable lapse into predeterminism – as if it were merely a case of shifting from the working class to another exploited and victimised sector of the population.⁵⁹ Their emphasis remains on the unfolding process, which requires constant analysis to reveal its progressive status ('progressive' meaning contributing to the success of the radical democratic political project). The openness and fluidity of that process is where hope lies for the left. Just as there is nothing which determines in advance how a radical democratic campaign will turn out, neither is there anything that guarantees the status of the established socio-political order for an indefinite period. If the left has lost its Marxist 'guarantee' of outcome, and the moral authority stemming from such an assumption, it has gained a new, and in many ways more promising, terrain on which to prosecute its efforts: one full of ruptures for the creative imagination to go to work on in its search for creative new alliances.

If we accept this line of reasoning, then ideas such as Fukuyama's 'end of history' can be dismissed as so much wishful thinking. Liberal-bourgeois democracy never finally triumphs, as Fukuyama claims it has in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet empire, it just gains a temporary ascendancy which invites challenge by new articulations of progressive intent. So, too, with the 'new right', whose success in the heyday of Thatcher and Reagan is based on a particular set of circumstances, the popular appeal of an individually 'liberating' free market economics, for example, which are not as permanent and politically binding as its supporters would like to believe. From a later vantage point, that looks to be a prescient view, although classical Marxism would no doubt beg to differ, seeing the new right as merely one expression of an overall political system it would wish to abolish in its entirety: for classical Marxism the meaning of each struggle *is* given from the start. It is the monolithic character of left-wing thought in general, and Marxist in particular, however, which has left the field open for the development of new right articulations, whose real objective is the entrenchment of elitism. There is still a clear target for the left to attack if it can only shed its traditional conceptual baggage and tendency towards dogmatism: then, with base/superstructure and privileged revolutionary agents out of the way, the spread of an anti-democratic new right ideology can be countered. The new right is engaged in a 'redimensioning' exercise of its own, whereby key political terms such as 'liberty', 'equality', 'justice', and 'democracy' are being redefined to its advantage: *that* is what a hegemonic left alternative ought to be trying to eclipse. If the new 'liberal-conservative' alliance can construct subjects to accept its hegemonic project of a free market economy blended with anti-egalitarianism, then so can the left construct them on behalf of its alternative. A right displacement can always be answered by a left displacement, although, somewhat depressingly for those seeking to entrench social justice permanently at the heart of political affairs, the reverse must also be the case: a movement away from teleology does run the risk of having to embrace a potentially dispiriting 'eternal recurrence'.

Laclau and Mouffe are aware of such problems, and their solution is to go into the enemy heartland with a mission to proselytise: '*The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy.*'⁶⁰ To the classical Marxist this will constitute an unsavoury blend of collusion and gradualism, neither very highly regarded political manoeuvres, and the argument is always likely to be that the collusion wipes out any chance of the gradualism being successful anyway, with trade union reformism constituting an instructive model in this respect. Laclau and Mouffe gloss over collusion on the grounds that, given their deconstruction of the concept of identity, neither liberalism nor conservatism is a fixed position, therefore open to subversion; but that line of argument can always be turned back on them, in that being on the left cannot be regarded as a fixed position either. Behind their 'progressive' politics lies a set of assumptions, which, if they are *not* fixed, are as open to subversion as those of their liberal-conservative counterparts. One set of loosely combined principles struggling against another similarly constructed set does not sound like the most promising of scenarios for the committed left-winger, to whom politics is more in the nature of a moral crusade than a rhetorical exercise. If, on the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe have a disguised agenda (a set of deeply held 'socialist' principles which take precedence over all others), then we are back with the problem of essentialism. The more open Laclau and Mouffe make the social sound, the less clear it is what gives their anti-capitalist stance any moral authority. Indeed, the more they appropriate the pragmatism of the right, the less the notion of moral authority seems to have any purchase. To extricate oneself from essentialism is not necessarily to solve all one's socio-political problems: local tactics divorced from any theoretical ground can become indistinguishable from mere opportunism, and left-wing politics traditionally has laid claim to being much more than that.

When they foreground their agenda, Laclau and Mouffe do seem to veer towards essentialism:

Of course, every project for radical democracy implies a socialist dimension, as it is necessary to put an end to capitalist relations of production, which are at the root of numerous relations of subordination; but socialism is *one* of the components of a project for radical democracy, not vice versa.⁶¹

One might wonder quite where the 'of course' and 'necessary' come from in this instance, and why reform of capitalism, by some as-yet unrealised articulation of the kind that Laclau and Mouffe hold is always possible in a 'floating signifier' world, is altogether ruled out of court. Even their apparently anti-essentialist belief that there is no '*one* politics of the Left whose *contents* can be determined in isolation from all contextual reference', does not entirely resolve the problem, since if there is no overlap (that is, some common set of principles, however minimal) then 'Left' ceases to mean anything much at all.⁶² If there *are* some common principles, then essentialism rears its head again. The most they can offer is that all versions of left politics have some Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance', but this is surely to fudge the issue

still further, since it is hard to see what the resemblance could consist of if not some common goal: and it seems unlikely this would not entail *some* principle or other, leading us back into the domain of essentialism. Laclau and Mouffe suggest one such principle themselves in their dislike of the public/private distinction, which enables neoconservatives to argue that economic activity is a private concern that should be kept free of any state control: thus they oppose the fact that, 'neo-conservative discourse today is exerting itself to restrict the domain of the political and to reaffirm the field of the private in the face of the reduction to which this has been submitted in recent decades under the impact of the different democratic struggles'.⁶³ It is hard to see how such sentiments *could not* feature on any socialist agenda. Laclau and Mouffe insist that there can no longer be 'a *general* theory of politics on the basis of topographic categories – that is to say, of categories which fix in a permanent manner the meaning of certain contents as differences which can be located within a relational complex'; but this does hold out the spectre of the term 'left' turning into, not so much a floating, as an *empty* signifier.⁶⁴

Radical democratic politics requires certain conditions to be met, that create further problems for the loose groupings of interests Laclau and Mouffe envisage as the way forward for politics in a post-Marxist world. In the first instance, such a politics has to assume goodwill across the disparate movements engaged in their own particular struggles, with Laclau and Mouffe speaking of 'a basic precondition for a radically libertarian conception of politics [being] the refusal to dominate – intellectually or politically – every presumed "ultimate foundation" of the social'.⁶⁵ The failure to respect this precondition will, ultimately, lead to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. This 'principle of democratic equivalence' calls in its turn for the development of 'a new "common sense" which changes the identity of the different groups, in such a way that the demands of each group are articulated equivalentially with those of the others'; that is, a recognition that one's own interests must not be pursued at the expense of other equally worthy interest groups (workers at the expense of women or immigrants, for example).⁶⁶ In order to guarantee that this state of affairs obtains, the forms of democracy will need to be plural and adaptable to circumstances. While this is all good libertarian rhetoric, it is also very utopian, predicating a world very different from the one that most of us feel we inhabit (there is also a slight problem in the well-established appropriation of the term 'common sense' by the right⁶⁷). Anyone who has ever tried to construct a broad front out of several left-wing groups – all but indistinguishable in doctrinal terms to outsiders – will evince a certain scepticism about the likelihood of such an outbreak of common sense. Desiring it is one thing, expecting it to happen quite another, but *depending* upon it for the success of one's enterprise is to raise serious doubts concerning the viability of the entire enterprise.

Laclau and Mouffe are more concerned with the current struggle against the encroachments of the new right, which they see as posing a serious threat to the expansion of the democratic revolution. They warn that the sheer openness of the late twentieth-century social world represents a golden opportunity for both the left *and* the right, in that the collapse of so many traditional structures has created a power vacuum that is at least as receptive to the reintroduction of totalitarianism

(on the basis of a nostalgic yearning for an 'ordered' society like those of the past), as it is to the dynamic articulations of the new social movements. Left-wing politics shifts from being a project with a clearly outlined objective, the overthrow of an exploitative socio-political system, to an eternal power struggle. There is never a final outcome, just a position of greater or lesser success at keeping 'unprogressive' articulations at bay at any one moment. For all that Laclau and Mouffe strive to put an optimistic gloss on things, there is more than a hint of the nihilistic implications of 'eternal recurrence' in their analysis. 'All to play for' can also mean 'no possibility of winning no matter how long you play'. While this may well be a more realistic assessment of the political world than the left has been prone to peddle in the past, there is no denying that it is not the most galvanising of messages to deliver to an already heavily demoralised left. A lack of centre may appeal greatly to deconstructionists, but many more will find it disorienting and productive of insecurity. The message is largely negative in tone: we know what we are up against, but also know that it is unlikely to go away and that it is at least as resourceful as we are. The calls for a new social order at the close of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* seem to clash with that omnipresent spectre of eternal recurrence.

Radical democratic politics becomes a balancing act, with a need to 'avoid the two extremes represented by the totalitarian myth of the Ideal City, and the positivist pragmatism of reformists without a project'; but it is a moot point whether Laclau and Mouffe have shown us how to achieve this by the end of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, laudable and politically mature though the objective undoubtedly is.⁶⁸ They still espouse a certain utopianism, arguing that 'without the possibility of negating an order beyond the point that we are able to threaten it, there is no possibility at all of the constitution of a radical imaginary', and they clearly have a project of resistance to the new right, international capitalism, etc.⁶⁹ Yet it does not quite add up to a structured programme of action, and remains curiously formless. Having jettisoned most of the theoretical baggage of the traditional left, Laclau and Mouffe are reduced to slogans, bandying around buzz-words such as 'radical', 'plurality', 'diversity', and 'openness'. It is the classic post-Marxist dilemma of spirit without substance, and if Laclau and Mouffe make a better fist of it than most, they leave us with a host of unresolved problems nevertheless – even if we prove to be deeply in sympathy with the spirit they wish to preserve for posterity. Their desire to prevent the creation of yet another dominant socio-political class is understandable, but perhaps this goes too far: to the point where, as critics often complain, authority is being confused with authoritarianism. The arguments for rejecting the universal can be very persuasive; the suggestions as to what we do after that point, less so. There is a worryingly abstract quality about much of the latter, and even the sympathetic reader might query what 'a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity' really *means* in hard political terms.⁷⁰ Having said that, Laclau and Mouffe do face a massive problem in trying to redimension socialism while the legacy of Marxism is still so visible, and if nothing else, they make it crystal clear what terrain that redimensioning exercise must take place on. One feels compelled to applaud, too, the sense of optimism they invariably bring to the venture.

Some of that optimism for the future of socialism also comes through in Slavoj Žižek, whose work Laclau appropriates for the radical democratic project. Žižek contends that the Lacanian subject as the subject-of-a-lack enables us to break through the essentialism that can still be identified in residual form in certain expressions of the post-Marxist temperament (the more fundamentalist versions of feminism, for example), thus projecting us onto that 'undecidable terrain' where radicalism can flourish:

Lacanian psychoanalysis goes a decisive step further than the usual 'post-Marxist' anti-essentialism affirming the irreducible plurality of particular struggles – in other words, demonstrating how their articulation into a series of equivalences depends always on the radical contingency of the social-historical process: it enables us to grasp this plurality itself as a multitude of responses to the same impossible-real kernel.⁷¹

This is to say that there will be no 'final solution' to the organisation of the political world; never a totality without some internal fissures – that is, in the political sense, without dissent and social antagonism. As long as this is so we have the possibility of change, of new articulations, and an escape route out of an agency-inhibiting determinism. Both Marx and Lacan want to go beyond mere appearances, or 'symptoms', to see what really drives individuals in their behaviour and social relations, but where the former sees the possibility of reconstituting the whole subject, the latter finds no whole subject to reconstitute. Žižek's reading of Laclau and Mouffe is that what they tell us is that 'we always live in hyperspace and in borrowed time; every solution is provisional and temporary, a kind of postponing of a fundamental impossibility . . . we can save democracy only by *taking into account its own radical impossibility*'.⁷² At the heart of all socio-political process lies a fundamental antagonism which will prevent all globally oriented theories from ever realising their totalising goals. This is the lesson we should learn from Hegelian dialectics, and Žižek promotes the cause of Hegel as 'the first post-Marxist' on the grounds that 'he opened up the field of a certain fissure subsequently "sutured" by Marxism'.⁷³ This is Hegel read through Lacan such that he becomes the champion of difference and contingency – an anti-evolutionist thinker rather than the arch-exponent of teleological systems as he is more commonly pictured. Lukács may have tried to save Hegel *for* Marxism (as in his study *The Young Hegel*); here we have Hegel saved *from* Marxism.⁷⁴

Žižek shows us how we can circumvent Marx, without falling into what he calls the 'postmodernist trap' that we have moved into a '“post-ideological” condition'.⁷⁵ As in Laclau and Mouffe, the emphasis is on how to maintain a political project, committed to difference and contingency, in an attitude of staunch resistance to the aims of totality. Žižek is particularly critical of the way in which communist states set about suppressing difference and contingency such that politics to all intents and purposes died:

The paradoxical functioning of the 'People' in the totalitarian universe can be most easily detected through analysis of phrases like 'the whole People supports

the Party'. This proposition cannot be falsified because behind the form of an observation of a fact, we have a circular definition of the People: in the Stalinist universe, 'supporting the rule of the Party' is 'rigidly designated' by the term 'People' – it is, in the last analysis, *the only feature which in all possible worlds defines the People* . . . the People always support the Party because any member of the People who opposes Party rule automatically excludes himself from the People.⁷⁶

People and Party are, in effect, 'sutured' together to prevent there being any space for difference, but such a process can only work for so long. The work of Zizek, the citizen of a state (Yugoslavia) structured on just such a principle over a period of several decades, is testament to the fact that difference cannot be suppressed indefinitely and will always find a way to reassert itself: as is, even more tellingly, the fate of what we are now calling the 'former Yugoslavia'.

3 ‘Without apologies’

The Laclau–Mouffe affair (II)

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy stimulated a wide range of responses, from the sympathetic to the openly hostile. No one was more hostile than Norman Geras, and we shall be looking at his substantial *New Left Review* essay on the topic shortly; first, a glimpse at some of the more sympathetic respondents. David Forgacs, for example, in the pages of the increasingly post-Marxist inclined journal *Marxism Today*, applauded the innovative quality of Laclau and Mouffe’s thought, drawing attention to its ‘provocative’ intervention into such critical areas of concern in contemporary cultural debate as the role of the working class and the relationship between socialism and democracy. The problematical status of the working class as the ‘privileged agent of revolutionary transformation’ is acknowledged, although Forgacs decides that ‘dethroning’ that class leaves a vacuum at the heart of socialism.¹ Pluralism, as so often is the case, proves to be the sticking point, with Forgacs commenting that, by replacing the working class with ‘a “polyphony of voices” of equal intensity the book leaves a big question mark over how *socialism*, as opposed to some form of mixed economy will actually be achieved’.² The way the point is phrased indicates that it has to be traditional socialism that prevails, and that anything that smacks of a mixed economy is automatically suspect; the anti-spontaneist reflex on the left dies hard. The residual commitment to the working class signals a similar traditionalism of outlook, and one can appreciate why a *post-Marxist* such as Lyotard could react as he did to this particular obsession: ‘And here is the question. Why, political intellectuals, do you *incline towards* the proletariat? In commiseration for what?’³ In cases such as the latter, the sheer impatience that lies at the heart of *post-Marxism* – an impatience with the dogmatic cast to classical Marxist thought, ‘privileged agents’ and all – is very much in evidence.

Forgacs’s is a ‘yes, but’ reading: broadly sympathetic to the project in question, but ultimately doubtful of its practicality and wary of its problematisation of traditional Marxist concepts. He cannot see what would hold the projected ‘polyphony of voices’ together, predicting either a drift towards centralisation or a collapse into opposed factions and anarchy, and concludes that it is an ‘attractive idea, but hard to see how it would work’.⁴ The fact that Forgacs finds the Laclau–Mouffe project ‘attractive’ is indicative of at least a degree of unease with the classical tradition and its track record, but Marxist principles are held onto, albeit with a certain reluctance. The need for control that is such a characteristic feature of the classical Marxist

temperament reasserts itself, refusing to make the leap of faith, or trust, Laclau and Mouffe are asking for in the new cultural climate of the late century. A loose polyphony of voices is not, after all, the disciplined cadre of Marxist legend. Those voices cannot be depended upon to follow the party line unquestioningly, and are too suggestive of Luxemburgian 'spontaneism' for comfort. When the opportunity presents itself, Forgacs cannot quite bring himself to venture into the unknown and take risks with untried, as well as ideologically suspect, allies. Without class leadership of the old-fashioned variety, 'what is one actually going to *do* about the private property of one's middle-class partners in a hegemonic alliance', he ponders.⁵ The point is a well-taken one: but only if one assumes certain constants – such as the overall superiority of one's own cultural theory, or fixed subject positions such as 'middle class'. Unfair though it might be to lay too much weight on Forgacs's brief intervention into the *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* debate, it does reveal a lot about the mind-set that Laclau and Mouffe are up against. To put it in colloquial terms: classical Marxism has a distinct tendency to produce 'control freaks'. Thus, in this particular case, it cannot be left to chance or gradualism: one must *do* something about one's middle-class partners to engineer an old-style socialist solution to cultural crisis. The possibility of new articulations that might cut across existing class lines is too disorienting to contemplate.

Stanley Aronowitz is another example of the 'yes, but' tendency. Laclau and Mouffe are praised for addressing precisely the kind of issues that Marxism must do if it is ever to renew itself, even if it is the case that they present us with 'a series of *hypotheses* rather than a real theory'.⁶ Nevertheless, those hypotheses are found to be compelling ones, well worth pursuing, especially when they involve the overt politicisation of poststructuralist philosophical critique. With Laclau and Mouffe, it is hinted, poststructuralism is at last beginning to infiltrate political discourse to some visible purpose. Yet again, however, pluralism becomes a sticking point, with Aronowitz arguing that to espouse this position is to risk destroying the moral authority of socialism. Significantly enough, Aronowitz points out that *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 'remains an engaged discourse, although not to any existing party or political ideology'.⁷ Clearly, this evasion of any specific affiliation is regarded as a problem, in that it implies the possibility of the construction of various positions outside the socialist camp, thus a 'lack' or deficiency somewhere in socialist theory: more importantly, a lack or deficiency in the *authority* of socialist theory. Laclau and Mouffe are taken to task for problematising this, for Aronowitz, necessary element of political discourse:

they share the confusion of authority with authoritarianism that sometimes afflicts many forms of libertarian thought. This confusion prevents them from engaging the issue of what happens when a social movement gains power, not only within a civil society or the state, but also how its moral authority may enable it to set the agenda for left politics.⁸

Postmodernist commentators are, as Aronowitz observes, prone to conflate authority and authoritarianism, and the criticism is one worth registering. The point could

also be made, however, that it is one of the great virtues of postmodern thought to demonstrate just how large an element of the latter there so often *is* in the former – or, for that matter, at least to raise the prospect that the former, however unwittingly, may in practice *entail* the latter (Stalinism, for example).

What proves most interesting about Aronowitz's comments are the assumptions encoded within them: that left politics is such an unproblematical entity; that *moral authority* is such an unproblematical entity; that it is relatively straightforward to set an agenda for left politics; that libertarianism is off the map as far as left politics is concerned. All of these assumptions suggest, as do Forgacs's, a nostalgia for simpler times, when the issues were more clear-cut, and the heroes and villains easier to recognise and classify.⁹ Neither is Aronowitz willing to give up on the privileged role of the working class quite yet, and he identifies several contemporary cases where it has been a positive force for social change – South Africa, Brazil, and Poland, for example. It is the absence of specific case studies of this nature in Laclau and Mouffe that renders their work less useful than it might have been, although Aronowitz concedes that 'their book offers an opportunity to lay aside the legacy of an all but discredited past and start over'.¹⁰ At least a gesture towards post-Marxism lies contained in such sentiments, even if it is felt that, as formulated by Laclau and Mouffe, that theory is still too abstract to make a truly significant impact on political practice.

Ellen Meiksins Wood adds a far more critical voice to the debate, contextualising Laclau and Mouffe's work within a wider trend that, going back to some critical remarks on socialism in *The Communist Manifesto*, she calls the 'new "true" socialism (NTS)'.¹¹ The NTS is taken to task for its 'autonomization of ideology and politics from any social basis, and more specifically, from any class foundation', and Wood argues forcefully for the continued relevance of class to the socialist project. As for Laclau and Mouffe, they are guilty, adapting the phrase of Perry Anderson, of a 'randomization of history and politics', with the 'beautifully paradigmatic' *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* revealing all that is wrong-headed in the logic of the NTS.¹² Their reading of Marx is heavily criticised for imputing a crude technological determinism that is not there in the original (another instance of the 'what Marx really said' tactic), and their emphasis on the factor of discourse as an organising principle for political theory is taken to downgrade the importance of historical process. In a well-taken point, Wood asserts that 'The silent question running throughout the Laclau–Mouffe argument is: who will be the bearer of discourse?'¹³ The question arises because of the poststructuralist concept of identity that Laclau and Mouffe are using. If identity does lack the unity those outside the poststructuralist camp generally assume it to have, then it is hard to see how any long-term interests can be formulated, never mind prosecuted. For Laclau and Mouffe that is a liberating prospect, which means the future is always 'open', but for someone like Wood it describes a situation more akin to anarchy, even if she is willing to admit that Laclau and Mouffe seem 'to have the best of democratic intentions'.¹⁴

Democratic intentions are not enough to recommend your work, however, especially when 'democracy' is made to cover such a multitude of positions and struggles from the French Revolution onwards. Laclau and Mouffe are taken to

espouse a 'truly bizarre account of modern history', which simply overrides all evidence to the contrary in its desire to impose 'an unbroken continuity between one form of democracy and another'.¹⁵ Against this notion of a transnational, and trans-class, democratic revolution dating from the French Revolution, Wood reaffirms her commitment to a classical Marxist model of history as the history of class struggle (going back well *before* the French Revolution), and recent history as an arena where, given the increasingly oppressive actions of capitalism, class consciousness cannot fail to be a critically significant factor in political life. She regards Laclau and Mouffe as little better than apologists for liberal democracy, internalising its ideals to the point where they are expressing a contemptuous attitude towards the working class. Adopting their interpretation of events such as the Russian Revolution, we would have to conclude that the working class was a mere 'mob' manipulated by the Bolsheviks; even worse, that 'there is no social basis for *any* kind of politics' at all.¹⁶ If Althusser gives us 'history without a subject', Laclau and Mouffe would seem to give us 'random events without a subject', which leave us unable to explain how a labour movement ever came about in the nineteenth century to combat the excesses of industrial capitalism. Their work, as well as that of similarly oriented theorists such as Hindess and Hirst, consists of nothing more than '*a priori* theoretical constructions' with no foundation in reality.¹⁷

Laclau and Mouffe are a significant part of the 'intellectual malady' that is NTS:

Both the historical record and the structural antagonism between capital and labour tell a story very different from the one we are offered by the NTS. One cannot, then, help wondering what exactly we are being told when the NTS deny the connection between the working class and socialism, or even between economic conditions and political forces in general.¹⁸

The answer is that they have profoundly misunderstood Marx, crediting him with a technological determinism that has no part in his theory. Marx is exonerated from all blame even if it is the case that some of his followers, entirely mistakenly too, of course, have recast him as a technological determinist. The theory is rescued from those who implement it in what we now know to be a characteristic move of classical Marxism when under attack. Class consciousness is reaffirmed, as is the notion of a unified socialist struggle, and with the 'retreat from class' stemmed, pluralism is held up for ridicule. The furthest Wood will go to meet Laclau and Mouffe, is to agree that the new social movements can be conscripted in the larger Marxist cause: but that is hardly pluralism as Laclau and Mouffe conceive of it, more like colonisation by a totalitarian power.

It is instructive to note that the general drift of Wood's argument is to manoeuvre Laclau and Mouffe into the anti-socialist camp: at which point all the usual Marxist censures against capitalists, and their assorted fellow-travellers, can be brought into play. The notion that one could dissent from the classical Marxist line *without* having crossed over to the enemy cannot seriously be countenanced. Wood pictures the world as composed of 'them' and 'us', and to deviate from Marxist purity is to become one of 'them': end of the argument. The principles of Marxism

are adhered to like holy writ, with no substantive questioning of doctrine allowed. To retreat from class is the equivalent of a lapse into apostasy, and thus not to be forgiven. This is not the response of a theory prepared to evolve, or to subject itself to shock tactics on occasion to test its principles, but of a theory turned into dogma. The recourse to the 'Marx didn't say that' argument merely confirms such an impression, that being one of the standard tactics of fundamentalist systems of thought by which the purity of the original theory is defended. None of this proves Laclau and Mouffe are *right*, but the retreat behind the barricades of Marxist theory does raise some doubts about the adaptability of that theory. Responses like Wood's reveal that Laclau and Mouffe have touched a nerve, and fundamentalist affirmations of faith do not really repulse the attack that is being made.

Not that everyone was so alienated by the idea of pluralism. Some years after the event Derrida approvingly cited the example set by Laclau and Mouffe in his plea for a pluralist Marxism in *Specters of Marx*. Much in the style of Laclau and Mouffe, Derrida makes a case for the development of a 'New International' (a 'radical democratic politics' by any other name), and is unequivocal in his rejection of the anti-Marxist sentiments of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*:

For it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity.¹⁹

For a theorist whose political pronouncements had previously tended towards the oblique, this is an explicit endorsement of the socialist cause, and Marx's relevance to a postmodern age is insisted upon with some conviction:

It will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx – which is to say also a few others – and to go beyond scholarly 'reading' or 'discussion'. It will be more and more a fault, a failing of theoretical, philosophical, political responsibility. When the dogma machine and the 'Marxist' ideological apparatuses (States, parties, cells, unions, and other places of doctrinal production) are in the process of disappearing, we no longer have any excuse, only alibis, for turning away from this responsibility. There will be no future without this. Not without Marx, no future without Marx, without the memory and the inheritance of Marx: in any case of a certain Marx, of his genius, of at least one of his spirits.²⁰

Specters will be treated in more detail in chapter 7; suffice it to say for the time being that something of the post-Marxist spirit of Laclau and Mouffe is informing the Derrida text, almost in an act of reverse homage for the influence of deconstruction on the earlier project.

When we turn to Geras, the sympathy, however qualified, dries up altogether, and we are plunged into an analysis of the 'intellectual malady' of which Laclau and

Mouffe's book is taken to be such a conspicuous symptom. We might define Geras's reply as 'beautifully paradigmatic' of the case for the defence. Geras can hardly bring himself to consider *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* as a socialist piece of enquiry at all. The realignment that Laclau and Mouffe seek is in his eyes a betrayal of socialist principle; not so much 'post-Marxist' as 'ex-Marxist' (and potentially even anti-Marxist). Where Laclau and Mouffe see a heritage of which their speculations are a justifiable and defensible part, Geras sees 'an intellectual vacuum', and battle-lines are quickly drawn.²¹ On the Laclau–Mouffe side is the desire to go beyond Marxism while retaining its original emancipatory spirit: from the Geras perspective, an 'impoverishing view of Marxism' that seriously misrepresents the theory, and the appeal of which lies only with the sceptics.²²

For Geras, the entire argument of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is based on a rigid and simplistic division between the 'closed' and the 'open'; with anyone on the former side being, by definition, against diversity and complexity, and by implication totalitarian and authoritarian in outlook. Marxism is thus consigned to outer darkness as the *enemy* of diversity and complexity, which almost take on a transcendental quality in Laclau and Mouffe's analysis – the reverse side to class consciousness in this respect. Any vestige of support for a 'closed' system of thought is evidence enough to damn anyone. The same goes for hegemony, support for which becomes 'the sign of an incoherence' in any theorist's thought, since hegemony is ruled to be 'incompatible with Marxist categories'.²³ Once the definitions are set in place classification becomes seductively easy, and one might note, ironically enough, a 'them and us' mentality at work that strongly recalls the practices of the classical Marxism from which Laclau and Mouffe are trying to distance themselves. Both Laclau–Mouffe and Geras seem to be employing similar tactics concerning 'them'; that is, accepting nothing less than total agreement with their system of thought, and judging people accordingly. Sartre's jibe at the practices of the French Communist Party of the late 1940s, 'the opponent is never answered; he is discredited', comes to mind, and a great deal of discrediting is going on in this debate.²⁴ What is being postulated, Geras contends, is an 'irreducible dualism' at the heart of Marxist theory; the collision between theory and reality which a series of theorists wrestle with, but can never satisfactorily resolve.²⁵ Thus Luxemburg cannot follow through with the 'logic of spontaneism' because her belief in the Marxist doctrine of 'objective laws of capitalist development' will not allow her to do so.²⁶ This gains her a place in the 'them' category, whose collective efforts have hindered the progress of the democratic revolution and made the development of a radical democratic politics a necessity. On that basis Laclau and Mouffe can work through the canon of Marxist theorists, awarding points to those who approximate to their objectives, but ultimately damning them when, as almost invariably happens, they revert to type, choosing the 'wrong' side of the dualism they have set up as an evaluative criterion. On that wrong side we find the cardinal sin of 'essentialism' at work, giving Laclau and Mouffe yet another handy calculus with which to conduct their classifying exercise.

Geras is contemptuous of the method employed to make the charge of essentialism stick, dismissing it as little more than an 'intellectual game', whereby you hunt

for departures from 'a rigidly, an absolutely, determinist economism' in a Marxist thinker, and then 'nail' that thinker for the sin of essentialism if you can 'catch them out in the use of a central Marxist concept'.²⁷ Since Marxist thinkers invariably use Marxist concepts this becomes a game you can hardly lose. Either the theorist does *not* depart from 'determinist economism', in which case they become the sworn enemy of the democratic revolution, or they do, in which case they are guilty of inconsistency, or 'incoherence'. There is no rigour involved in this process for Geras, who in an earlier study had defended Luxemburg against the charge of spontaneism, arguing that

her strategic conception of the mass strike embodied not some irrational faith in mass spontaneity, but the elements of a theory of the political preconditions for successful proletarian revolution, as well as a first adumbration of the difference between bourgeois democracy and socialist democracy.²⁸

The game soon deteriorates into mere nihilism for Geras, with the overall aim being to damn the whole Marxist project as deeply misguided.

All Geras can find in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is a simplistic narrative of the Marxist tradition, in which a succession of theorists are pictured vainly trying to transcend Marxist categories and reach the world of pluralism. Paradoxically, too, Marxism is charged with being simultaneously monist and dualist in character: monism being what Marxism is in a state of theoretical purity, dualism what it tends to become when it tries to overcome the discrepancy between that theoretical purity and the real world of politics. Since Marxist theorists all fall into one or the other category, neither of which is acceptable to Laclau and Mouffe, we have yet another calculus which cannot fail to yield the answers the authors want. Geras's not unjustifiable conclusion is that, 'In this place, truly, there can be no salvation, other than by taking leave of Marxism altogether.'²⁹ The argument of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is rigged so that Laclau and Mouffe cannot lose: monists are beyond the pale, dualists are engaged in an impossible task, pluralism would appear to be the only way out. While Geras wants to insist on the richness and variety of the Marxist tradition, he cannot find any contribution to this in the theories of Laclau and Mouffe, who end up being viewed as traitors to the socialist cause. Geras, for one, is not yet ready to take leave of Marxism, and seems to be standing by the pronouncement he made in the introduction to an edition of his collected essays published just prior to the *New Left Review* article, that

Marxism *is* full of problems and unresolved questions, gaps, weaknesses and areas inadequately researched. But somebody who gives this as the basis for abandoning or disembowelling it does not give a reason. They give an excuse. The choice they make thereby is an intellectual one, to be sure, but it is also, in the largest sense, a moral choice.³⁰

Laclau and Mouffe have made the wrong moral choice, and must expect harsh treatment at the hands of the Marxist establishment in consequence. As well as

being non-Marxist, they are to be dubbed anti-materialist and non-historical too; guilty of back-dating their own preoccupations onto intellectual history, and treating it as little better than a preparation for their arrival onto the scene.

Persuasive though Geras's criticisms often are, in a very real way they miss the point of Laclau and Mouffe's exercise. The latter are not setting out to bring about the 'salvation' of a theoretical tradition, nor even to judge its internal intellectual rigour, but rather to try to explain how a situation was reached by the end of the twentieth century when belief in Marxism and socialism was crumbling – and then to consider how we might move on from there without repeating the mistakes that landed us in that predicament. It is not a reformist exercise of the kind that Geras might just have accepted (reform from within, accepting the broad parameters of classical Marxist theory as sacrosanct), but a more radical, root-and-branch, effort born out of extreme disillusion and a litany of failure. As to the charge of back-dating, it is difficult to think of a major cultural theorist who does *not* do that – Marx included. How else can we interpret the notion that all history is the history of class struggle? Laclau and Mouffe make no claim to being historians, who might be expected to provide as balanced a picture of the past as possible, but present themselves unashamedly as polemicists concerned to change the way we think about political processes *now*. The goal is a more limited one than explaining the past: rather it is to consider how its theories have impacted on the present. If one accepts Geras's line of argument, on the other hand, it is difficult to see what to do next, other than to continue the same processes (theoretical and political) all over again in the hope that they work better the next time around than they have done so far. Not for the first time in the history of Marxism we are confronted by the attitude that the theory is unproblematical, it is just in its application that it has gone wrong. The effects of the theory are separated from the theory itself, as if there were no necessary connection between the two that might lead to the failures that are all too obvious a feature of Marxist history in general, and its later history in particular. From the perspective of post-Marxism, *individuals* are being made to carry the blame for the *theory's* failure. Thus it can be claimed that neither Stalin nor Mao tell us anything about Marxism, but only about their own characters and the cultural contexts within which those characters were operating.

Geras's criticisms stung, stimulating Laclau and Mouffe to reply in kind in the pages of *New Left Review*: a reply, as their title put it, totally 'without apologies'. The emphasis is on the *opportunity* that political dissent is opening up for the socialist project, an opportunity to which Geras, and those of like mind, simply seem oblivious:

We are living . . . one of the most exhilarating moments of the twentieth century: a moment in which new generations, without the prejudices of the past, without theories presenting themselves as 'absolute truths' of History, are constructing new emancipatory discourses, more human, diversified and democratic.³¹

This is to lump Geras in with the reactionaries: those defending the 'absolute truth' of Marxism in defiance of the demand for emancipatory, democratic, discourses to

fit new sets of cultural circumstances. It is also to suggest that classical Marxism can no longer consider itself to be emancipatory; that it belongs to those 'prejudices of the past' we should be striving to overcome. Geras is dismissed, in classic 'discrediting' fashion, as one of 'the fading epigones of Marxist orthodoxy', and Laclau and Mouffe make it plain that they regard such orthodoxy (characterised for them, as we have seen, by the radical disjunction of theory and reality) as the enemy of the democratic revolution.³² Classical Marxism has become a body of dogma, resistant to any idea of change or the possibility of any paradigm shift; whereas Laclau and Mouffe wish to press the case for evolution:

There is no room here for disappointment. The fact that any reformulation of socialism has to start today from a more diversified, complex and contradictory horizon of experiences than that of fifty years ago – not to mention 1914, 1871 or 1848 – is a challenge to the imagination and to political creativity.³³

It is precisely whether any 'reformulation of socialism' is necessary, of course, that is being contested. If it *is*, then words like 'imagination' and 'creativity' take on a different meaning – more like 'meddling', and even 'vandalism', one suspects, to a thinker such as Geras.

The impact of poststructuralist and postmodernist thought on Laclau and Mouffe can also be seen in their other works. As we noted in chapter 2, the notion of a fixed subject position is rejected by Laclau (writing in this instance with Lilian Zac) in favour of 'the subject of the lack', and this lack at the level of individual identity also applies at the level of political identity. Just as there never can be full personal identity (identity that is present to itself, thus confirming the metaphysics of presence), so there never can be full political identity either. Politics takes place in the gap between the assumption of the possibility of fullness and the reality of a lack of fullness. 'The subversion of an existing order is the search for a fullness that the latter is preventing', but that fullness can never be achieved: 'a series of signifiers of the lack, of the absent fullness, have to be constantly produced if politics – as different from sedimented social forms – is going to be possible.'³⁴ Totalitarian societies can be classified as 'sedimented social forms', in that they *claim* that fullness of reality and, in the process, eradicate politics. The more utopian the vision, the more circumscribed the political dimension becomes, and class reductionism certainly plays its part in such visions in the communist camp. Politics, for Laclau and Zac, is an expression of that lack of fullness of identity – a lack which can never be overcome. A commitment to the metaphysics of presence is tantamount to a commitment to totalitarianism, in which case deconstruction is turned into a radical politics. Totalitarian societies may repress awareness of the lack that lies at the heart of political identity, but, as the case of the new social movements amply proves, it always returns in some form or another: class reductionism only works for so long.

The use of class reductionism to preserve the totality of Marxist thought is also attacked by Laclau in his pre-*Hegemony* study *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. Class reductionism means that all contradictions in social relations are assumed

to be, at base, class contradictions, which, for Laclau, drastically oversimplifies an infinitely more complex social reality. Laclau's own approach is an iconoclastic one: abandon class reductionism altogether, on the grounds that it is preventing the rethinking of Marxist concepts that a changing geopolitical situation urgently necessitates. Neither class reductionism nor uncritical application of classical Marxist concepts is of much help in a Latin American context, for example, given a history which does not conform to European socio-political models. Arguments that Latin America has always been capitalist gloss over the very substantial differences that separate the economic experiences of 'the indigenous Peruvian peasantry, the Chilean *inquilinos*, the Ecuadorian *huasipungueros*, the slaves of the West Indian sugar plantations or textile workers in Manchester' from each other.³⁵ Class reductionism quite illicitly links these together, despite the fact that they are not all definable as capitalist in the Marxist sense of the term, since this requires there to be a free labour market in each case. Theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank are taken to task for postulating a class unity that Laclau cannot locate in practice, in order to explain the phenomenon of underdevelopment in Latin American societies.³⁶ Frank's conception of capitalism is significantly broader than Marx's, and is for Laclau part of an unfortunate trend in Marxist thought whereby reality is forced to conform to the theoretical model rather than the other way around.

Laclau invariably homes in on difference and variety of relation in his own social analyses, rather than succumbing to the attractions of a model of socio-economic development which sets out 'to show the continuity and identity of the process, from Hernan Cortes to General Motors'.³⁷ The various populist movements in twentieth-century Latin American history alone undercut this totalising imperative, and Laclau is willing to grant the 'popular-democratic' form of these movements a significant role in the political process, arguing that they cannot be reduced to mere expressions of class. It soon becomes apparent in any survey of Laclau's work that a search for difference rather than totality is what guides his thought, and in that respect he is post-Marxist from an early stage. One can sometimes wonder, however, whether the relentless search for difference turns into an end in itself, amounting, arguably, to a *refusal* to see patterns of development that may actually accelerate socio-political change. Constructing patterns can decline into a glib exercise (as it does with Lévi-Strauss on occasion); but patterns can also be extremely useful in building up a sense of historical context and common purpose. Like most post-structuralists and postmodernists, Laclau is prone to underestimate the psychological importance of tradition, as well as the potentially disorienting effect of being cast adrift in a world organised around difference. That world, however, is where the 'revolution of our time' is now being fought out, and difference takes on a moral dimension in his oeuvre.

The 'revolution of our time' had been Harold Laski's term, in a 1943 book, for the ideological shift towards socialism and the doctrine of central planning, as in the example of Soviet Russia, which had seemed to present the way forward for countries like England. The trick was to make central planning compatible with democracy, but as Laclau points out in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, this was to assume that only two models of society were available, which his

post-Marxist project is designed to dispute. Laclau is postulating a new direction for this revolution, given that the grounds of debate have altered so dramatically since the utopian vision of centrally planned societies that had come out of the experience of the Depression and the Second World War. Whether in its Soviet (communist) or Western (welfare state) form, centralised planning is held to have failed as a social experiment, and Laclau can cite the end of Eastern European communism and the rise of neo-conservatism in the Western democracies as conclusive evidence for his thesis. A line is drawn under Marxism and communism, and post-Marxism is presented as the only way the left can survive. 'Radical democracy' is once again the battle cry, with Laclau clearly considering himself to have been vindicated by recent political events.

Once again it is the reductive quality to Marxist thought that Laclau challenges; the tendency to see economic relations as based on internal contradictions which create class antagonisms and promote the growth of class consciousness. Issue is taken with Marx's conception of the relationship between wage-labour and capital, which Laclau regards as being based on questionable premises. It is worth quoting from the first essay of *New Reflections* at some length in order to register just how deep the division between Laclau and classical Marxism has become by 1990:

It is obviously not being denied that conflicts exist between workers and entrepreneurs, but merely that they spring from the logical analysis of the wage-labour/capital relationship. It should not be forgotten, however, that the theoretical foundations of this relationship had been based on the reduction of concrete social agents to the economic categories of buyer and seller of labour power. Once these categories are reintegrated into the social totalities forming the agents that are their bearers, we can easily imagine a multitude of antagonisms arising between those concrete social agents and the relations of production in which they participate. For example, a decent standard of living is impossible when wages fall below a certain level; and fluctuations in the labour market affect housing conditions or the worker's access to consumer goods. In this case, however, the conflict is not internal to capitalist relations of production (in which the worker counts merely as a seller of labour power), but takes place between the relations of production and the worker's identity outside of them.³⁸

The idea of anything being *outside* the relations of production in a capitalist society is anathema to classical Marxism, and represents a direct attack on its totalising ethos. If capitalist relations are *not* the sole determinant shaping the worker's identity, then capitalism can hardly be the threat that Marxism claims. Nor can we speak of class consciousness, or for that matter false consciousness, if other, non-economic, factors are involved in the construction of identity. For Laclau, without such an outside, and the gaps that it implies between theory and reality, there can be no resistance to the capitalist system or possibility of liberating change.

With this refusal to acknowledge any direct causal link between economic practice and consciousness, Laclau has rejected the very fundamentals of the Marxist world

vision. The one-to-one correspondences between economic cause and social effect on which so much of Marxist political theory is predicated, are dismissed as simplistic: life is much more complex than that, and individual experience far less schematic and predetermined. The 'revolution of our time' must take as its task the development of 'a pragmatism that leaves the perverse dialectics of "necessary embodiments" behind', in order to overturn the 'apocalyptic universalism' that, for Laclau, constitutes the disastrous legacy of classical Marxist thought and political practice to the cause of democracy.³⁹

The anti-essentialism that shines through *New Reflections* is also at work in Mouffe's *The Return of the Political*, with its call for the development of an 'agonistic pluralism' to replace both the certainties previously peddled by Marxism and the consensus-oriented tendencies of liberal democracy. Difference again is at the head of the agenda, with Mouffe insisting that the 'existence of every identity is the affirmation of a difference'.⁴⁰ 'Agonistic pluralism', the condition where 'the opponent should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated', becomes the objective for all those desirous of the success of the democratic revolution.⁴¹ Post-Marxism is put forward as the 'other' every democracy needs if it is to escape totalitarianism of the variety that had bedevilled communism: the 'agonism' within the pluralism. Without such an 'other' there is a very real danger of a political void for the right to exploit. Following on from the project set out in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Mouffe seeks to establish a 'new imaginary' for the left, that avoids Marxism or social democracy; with postmodernism again providing the theoretical basis, and the 'new social movements' a spur to action. Once we can achieve a 'common articulation . . . of antiracism, antisexism and anticapitalism', then the democratic revolution can be pushed on to a new level of success in its struggle against reactionary elements.⁴² The 'myth of the transparent society', as envisaged by both communism and liberal democracy, has to be countered by an insistence on the 'dimension of conflict and antagonism within the political' and the 'irreducible plurality of values' that all societies in reality contain.⁴³ Whatever the proponents of the 'transparent society' may believe, the political will always return: the rise of the 'new social movements' alone providing proof of such an optimistic assessment.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism have come under attack from various Marxist thinkers; perhaps most notably in the English-speaking world from Fredric Jameson. To Jameson, postmodernism is 'the cultural logic of late capitalism', and although he is relatively enthusiastic about the works of art that appear under the name of postmodernism, he is less convinced by its value as a general cultural theory: 'postmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order . . . but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself.'⁴⁴ Postmodernism is to be regarded more as a set of symptoms than a theory as such. Jameson sees us as being in a transitional state, culturally speaking, and postmodernism as part of our reaction to a condition for which he can muster little enthusiasm: 'we ourselves are still in the trough, however, and no one can say how long we still stay there.'⁴⁵

Laclau and Mouffe come in for scrutiny in connection with their championship of the new social movements – the latter being for Jameson a highly characteristic phenomenon of the postmodern age that repays investigation. Jameson differs from Laclau and Mouffe, however, in his reading of what the new social movements represent. The notion that they are the product of a 'void left by the disappearance of social classes', is rejected, with Jameson professing himself mystified as to how classes could ever just disappear within a capitalist system. Instead, he regards the movements as a consequence of the expansion of late capitalism, which has introduced new technologies that have destroyed traditional working-class industries around the globe. The working class has not disappeared, therefore, it has simply been displaced by one of capitalism's periodic 'systemic modifications', that it is our 'postmodern' misfortune to have to live through. To treat the movements as a substitute for an extinct working class is to have misread the cultural situation brought about by late capitalism. Given their diversity of objectives, the movements present less of a threat to the dominance of late capitalism than the working class does, and Jameson is innately suspicious of anyone who perceives them as an essentially optimistic cultural sign. His own verdict is considerably more downbeat:

That the 'new social movements' are postmodern, insofar as they are effects and consequences of 'late capitalism,' is however virtually a tautology which has no evaluative function. What is sometimes characterized as a nostalgia for class politics of some older type is generally more likely to be simply a 'nostalgia' for politics *tout court*: given the way in which periods of intense politization and subsequent periods of depolitization and withdrawal are modeled on the great economic rhythms of the boom and bust of the business cycle, to describe this feeling as 'nostalgia' is about as adequate as to characterize the body's hunger, before dinner, as a 'nostalgia for food'.⁴⁶

The contention is that, far from heralding a 'return of the political' as post-Marxists like Laclau and Mouffe would have it, the new social movements are symptomatic of the *marginalisation* of the political under a late capitalist regime.

Neither does Jameson hold out much hope for the political effectiveness of the 'ideology of difference' propounded by assorted postmodernists. It is an ideology with a hidden agenda, serving the cause of late capitalism far better than it does socialism:

Much of what passes for a spirited defense of difference is, of course, simply liberal tolerance, a position whose offensive complacencies are well known but which has at least the merit of raising the embarrassing historical question of whether the tolerance of difference, as a social fact, is not the result of social homogenization and standardization and the obliteration of genuine social difference in the first place.⁴⁷

This is to consign thinkers such as Laclau and Mouffe to the enemy camp. No matter how much they protest their own 'difference' from liberalism, their commitment to

'tolerance' – or 'agonistic pluralism' – as the basis for new cultural articulations leaves them under a cloud of suspicion as 'closet' capitalists. Difference offers no agenda for cultural transformation, its cultivation being merely another symptom of the cultural rut in which we are stuck. Postmodernism, and its subdivisions such as post-Marxism, do not point towards the future, rather they describe the transitional state between one form of capitalism and another. Jameson's hopes for the future are pinned, not on difference theorists, but on the rise of a 'new international proletariat' to engage with late capitalism.⁴⁸

Whether one dubs Jameson a classical Marxist or not, and his sympathy for postmodern art-forms tends to suggest he is somewhat less than orthodox, he retains a faith in the concept of class consciousness: at the last, the 'them and us' mentality we noticed in Geras and Wood, amongst others, reasserts itself. It is noticeable that even Jameson, however, postpones the collapse of capitalism into the indefinite future, where opposition will take 'forms we cannot yet imagine', as if in tacit acknowledgement of the limitations of the classical Marxist paradigm.⁴⁹

4 ‘Marxism is not a “Science of History”’

Testing the boundaries of Marxism

During the period when Laclau and Mouffe were urging us to go beyond Marxism in our politics, critical voices were also beginning to be heard from within the Marxist camp itself, and from the 1960s through to the 1980s we can observe the boundaries of Marxism being subjected to some rigorous testing. Hindess and Hirst, for example, although still proclaiming themselves Marxist, come very close to espousing a post-Marxist position in books such as *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, *Mode of Production and Social Formation*, and *Marx’s ‘Capital’ and Capitalism Today*, and their impact on the development of post-Marxism deserves consideration – particularly since their rejection of classical Marxism is nearly as vigorous as Laclau and Mouffe’s. Hindess and Hirst adopt a reformist stance, drawing our attention to Marxism’s theoretical inadequacies, as well as to a tradition of ‘vulgar’ Marxism based on what to the authors is a series of misinterpretations of the original material. While to some extent their project is a contribution to the ‘what Marx really said’ genre, eventually it goes well beyond this in its criticism not just of the history of Marxism but of Marx himself, suggesting that a large-scale revision of the theory is urgently called for if it is to continue to play any significant cultural role.

As well as Hindess and Hirst, we shall also be looking at the work of certain other figures of their generation who show a similar interest in testing Marxism’s boundaries. Nicos Poulantzas and Rudolf Bahro, for example, are just as willing to problematise concepts such as class, and to offer support for the burgeoning new social movements, even if at the last, like Hindess and Hirst, they still situate themselves somewhere within the boundaries of Marxism.

The degree of Hindess and Hirst’s iconoclasm can be gauged by the opening paragraphs of the conclusion to *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*:

We have no doubt that this book will appear to many people, historians and others, to be a contradictory exercise. How can a book about pre-capitalist modes of production be abstract and anti-historical? Surely, the sole value of the concepts of the pre-capitalist modes of production is to serve as tools or research devices for the investigation of concrete historical societies? What purpose do these concepts have if they are not used as guides to historical research? Our answer to these questions is simple. They are based on a

misrecognition, not only of the nature of our book, but of the nature of Marxist theory: a misrecognition which engenders a cosy conflation between Marxist theoretical work and the historian's practice, a misrecognition which reduces Marxist theory to historical method and to a philosophy of history. Marxism is not a 'science of history' and Marxist theoretical work has no necessary connection with the practice of the historian.¹

To deny that Marxism is a 'science of history' is high-level iconoclasm, especially in an era (the mid-1970s) dominated in Western Marxist circles by Althusser's structural revision of Marxism as just such a science. Despite the authors' earlier support for structural Marxism, Althusser and his followers come in for some harsh treatment at the hands of Hindess and Hirst. *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* is confrontational in attitude, calling into question some of the most deeply entrenched beliefs of the Marxist tradition of thought – to the point where it can seem as if *most* interpretations of Marxism are misinterpretations. Ironically enough for figures who see themselves in the vanguard of a Marxist revival ('Marxist economic theory has enjoyed a renaissance in the last decade. The extent and vigour of contemporary debates and discussions have not been equalled since the turn of the century'²), their analyses in hindsight provide evidence of a steep decline that Laclau and Mouffe will soon both confirm and take advantage of in their even more iconoclastically minded project. 'Mode of production' is argued to be an under-theorised concept that generally assumes an underlying teleology. So successful are Hindess and Hirst in locating a commitment, acknowledged or otherwise, to teleology in the work of the major Marxist theorists, that one begins to wonder if Marxism can survive *without* a teleological basis, so widespread does its assumption seem to be. The authors' insistence that we can dispense with that teleology comes perilously close to destroying Marxism as most of its adherents appear to have understood it over the years, and although they declare their allegiance to the cause, arguably they undermine much of what gives Marxism a popular appeal in the process. Marxism without teleology can come to look like Marxism without a sense of destiny – and that sense has inspired several generations of adherents. If Hindess and Hirst give us a much more realistic, far less idealised Marxism, they also give us a much less powerful and authoritative one.

The crux of their critique of teleological Marxism is that the latter demands that all modes of production contain the seeds of their own inevitable supersession, and, apart from the fact that this removes the human dimension from cultural process (a common criticism of structural Marxism), their enquiries into the workings of various modes of production provide no evidence that this is so. In this reading, modes of production could continue indefinitely, and we cannot as socialists depend on their ultimate implosion through internal contradiction. Capitalism will not collapse of its own accord, it must be induced to do so through political action. Just as nothing in capitalism ineluctably leads to the development of socialism, nothing in either feudal or pre-feudal modes necessarily dictates the appearance of capitalism. The traditional Marxist historical schema is problematised (including its theory of how transitional states between modes operate), taking with it, as observed above, most of Marxism's sense of cultural destiny.

Hindess and Hirst's conclusions are certainly controversial; their intention being to show 'that there is no "Asiatic" mode of production, that the feudal mode of production requires neither serfdom nor seigniorial power, and that the transition between one mode of production and another must be conceived in a non-evolutionary manner'.³ They are dismissive of the value of history as a discipline, describing it as essentially empiricist in character, and making it clear from the start of their study that empiricism is the great enemy for the cultural theorist.⁴ If Marxism really is a science of history, then that is to consign it to the scrapheap. Given that the authors also believe that a general theory of modes of production is impossible, and that the current Marxist theory of such is rooted in teleology and idealism, they give every indication of drifting towards the boundary between Marxism and post-Marxism. Any general theory, Hindess and Hirst contend, can only be, as Althusser's manifestly is, a structuralism, with all the problems inherent in the notion of structure – most notably that the structure must be considered to be programmed to work out in one way, and one way only. The human dimension is yet again eclipsed.

What lies behind the notion of a science of history is the work of Hegel, whose teleological idealism is thought to infect Marxism to a far greater extent than is generally realised, or admitted. Althusser is particularly guilty of operating in a pseudo-Hegelian manner, and of reducing science to mere essentialism. Lukács, too, comes in for criticism for his Hegelian-oriented theory of class consciousness. Against such essentialism, Hindess and Hirst 'insist that the social formation must be analysed in terms of a determinate material causality with real relations producing definite effects'.⁵ Marxism provides theoretical tools for analysis, rather than a theory of essences that renders analysis gratuitous since the outcome is specified beforehand. Teleology becomes the enemy of *real* Marxism, which, for Hindess and Hirst, centres on the notion of class struggle; but, crucially enough, on class struggle in the real world rather than abstract sense. Theoretical models must not be allowed to determine outcomes, as so often happens in the classical Marxist tradition where ad hoc formulations, such as the concept of hegemony, will be deployed if necessary to guarantee the right result.

Hindess and Hirst test various forms of mode of production against their definition of the concept to assess if they can fulfil the criteria: if they do not, then it is clear that Marxism – or at the very least some of its most common interpretations – is in need of radical revision. The concept is defined as follows:

A mode of production is an articulated combination of relations and forces structured by the dominance of the relations of production. The relations of production define a specific mode of appropriation of surplus-labour and the specific form of social distribution of the means of production corresponding to that mode of appropriation of surplus-labour. For example, capitalist relations of production define a mode of appropriation of surplus-labour which works by means of commodity exchange. . . . A particular mode of production exists if and only if its conditions of existence are present in the economic, political and ideological levels of a determinate social formation.⁶

The Asiatic mode of production is a prominent casualty of this definition, since Hindess and Hirst can identify no appropriate 'articulated combination of relations and forces' to constitute such a system, and dismiss it as a mere figment of the theoretical imagination.⁷ It is also argued that 'the presence of a particular mode of production is not sufficient to secure the reproduction of its conditions of existence', on the grounds that, if it were, that would prevent the transition from one mode to another.⁸ That such transitions do occur is the result, not of some metaphysical imperative unfolding through the medium of human history (Hegel's 'World Spirit', for example, or any of its vulgar Marxist variants), but because of the nature of the particular class struggle occurring within the mode in question. Teleology is rejected as an explanation of such transitions, which turn out to be far more problematical events in this reading of cultural process than is generally acknowledged to be the case in the Marxist theoretical canon. The latter involves a belief in predictability with regard to cultural change that Hindess and Hirst refuse to countenance: possible outcomes they will talk about, necessary outcomes never. In their view Marxism is not a determinist, and particularly not an *economic* determinist, theory. Neither is Marxism a philosophy of history, even if many of its supporters have been inclined to treat it as such over the years.

Hindess and Hirst systematically work their way from primitive communism through to feudalism to conclude that no general theory of modes of production is possible. Neither do they think that a universally applicable theory for transitional states can be formulated, and their opposition to the more mechanistic forms of Marxist theorising quickly becomes apparent. Although they are able to establish the existence of a primitive communist mode of production, Hindess and Hirst observe that there is no elaborated concept of this in Marxism, leading to some highly debatable findings within the field of Marxist anthropology. Neither can they find an elaborated concept of the ancient mode of production. The details of their analysis as to what constitutes the features of either mode are less important than the fact that it is shortcomings in Marxist theory, including the original Marxist classics, that lead other analysts astray. Marxism begins to seem very sketchy on such matters, an unreliable guide as to why one mode of production would ever be superseded by another. What is being denied is Marxism's predictive and prescriptive qualities: qualities which many would regard as absolutely integral to Marxism as a mode of cultural analysis. To Hindess and Hirst, these are merely the symptoms of an intellectual laziness that has left Marxism lagging badly behind in the contemporary political arena.

An intense dislike of teleology propels the authors' argument throughout *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*. To opt for teleological explanation is to introduce an unnecessary metaphysical element into one's analysis (a transhistorical cause of one kind or other), that effectively dispenses with human agency. When it comes to the work of Althusser structure fulfils that role of transhistorical cause, and Hindess and Hirst are scathing in their condemnation of such a practice, which to their mind runs counter to the real objectives of Marxism. Althusser gives us a theory of *éternités*, where structural causality operates, rather than a theory enabling us to analyse the present. Hindess and Hirst are adamant that 'Marxism has a non-teleological theory

of history; a theory in which history has no necessity other than that produced in the conjunctures of its actual and non-pre-given course'.⁹ Their anti-determinist sentiments would be shared by many Marxists; but what is being argued here is that there is a *disguised* determinism (of Hegelian origin) operative in Marxist theory in general, that has survived Marx's claim to have stood Hegelianism on its head. Implicit in the argument is what G. A. Cohen has called 'the consistency problem': 'why struggle to bring about socialism, if socialism is an inevitable consequence of historical process?'¹⁰

Further problems arise when we examine the feudal mode of production – also left inadequately theorised by Marx. Marxist commentators on this phenomenon are faced with a considerable dilemma at this point, in that Marx himself appears to lead them straight into error:

In particular, the 'direct relation of lordship and servitude' [Marx] entails a retreat from structures of *social* relations to *inter-subjective* relations, a retreat towards Hegel. *Marx* does not go in that direction, he uses the pre-capitalist forms as illustrations and proceeds with the exposition in *Capital*. *But to take Marx at his word*, to take these positions as given and to attempt to elaborate pre-capitalist modes of production from them, cannot but lead in this direction.¹¹

Marx is simultaneously exonerated and condemned; given the benefit of the doubt, but seen to be the source of much subsequent dubious analysis by his followers. It is a warning against allowing Marxism to turn into a dogmatism, but also a stinging indictment of Marxism's theoretical failings that paves the way for post-Marxism. This is Marx removed from his pedestal and located squarely back in his socio-historical context, with all the constraints this imposes on him. The warning that we cannot take Marx *at his word* is hardly likely to be met with much enthusiasm within the classical Marxist community, suggesting as it does a degree of pragmatism with regard to the Marxist corpus that has rarely been a feature of the classical position.

Marxist categories come to seem less and less useful given Hindess and Hirst's context-driven approach, with its refusal to back-date what we know about capitalism onto earlier social formations. In the process, much of the inner dynamic of the Marxist scheme (as it has traditionally been understood) is lost; although Hindess and Hirst perform a valuable service in demonstrating just how little sociological foundation there is for that dynamic. Whether Marxism gains from the exercise is another question. Marxism without its sense of inevitable progression does begin to look an impoverished theory: not a science of history; not a philosophy of history; not an unchallengeable guide as to why we have ended up where we are, culturally speaking. What it reduces to for Hindess and Hirst is a commitment to the class struggle, but significantly missing from this conception of Marxism is any sense of destiny (plus, as noted before, all the appeal this can generate), and it is questionable if the class struggle alone will give us that. We do seem to be poised on the verge of post-Marxism by the close of *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*: at the very least on the verge of a Marxism cut off from the bulk of its history and traditional conceptions.

When it comes to transitional states between modes of production, there is the same anti-teleological bias to note in the argument. Nothing in feudalism dictates that it must evolve into capitalism; equally, nothing in capitalism requires it to become socialism or communism. All such assumptions, held by many Marxist theorists over the years, are examples of idealist philosophy of history in operation, where outcomes are specified in advance. From the early days of Marxism through to the structural causality of Althusser, this is a strain of thought which has held back Marxism by giving its followers an inaccurate picture of reality. In many ways one could say that teleology is the false consciousness of Marxism, and unless it is overcome Marxist political action will never be truly effective. For one thing, teleology tends to minimise the importance of the class struggle – for Hindess and Hirst *the arena* in which Marxism ought to be engaged. To be added to this dislike of teleology is a dislike of economism, where a similar form of essentialism seems to prevail with regard to human agency. Hindess and Hirst deny that all politics and ideology can be reduced to the economic level, and given the primacy accorded the economic in Marxist thought, this raises their work to an appreciably higher level of scepticism. A Marxism which features neither a science of history, a sense of teleological destiny, *nor* an economic bias, has moved well beyond traditional conceptions.

The critique of the concept of mode of production is continued on in *Mode of Production and Social Formation*, with the authors calling for yet more 'radical change in concepts and problems . . . if we are to be able to deal with the social relations and current political problems that confront us', and then into *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today* (co-authored with Antony Cutler and Athar Hussain).¹² The latter takes, if anything, an even tougher line towards classical Marxism and its theoretical heritage. The focus is on Marxist economic theory, which is held to be woefully inadequate to deal with the current cultural situation, having hardly advanced at all since the time of Marx, and certainly not significantly since the work of such early Marxists as Hilferding, Rubín, Bukharin and Lenin. Much of the blame for this is to be placed at the door of the Marxist classics, which are considered to be particularly weak on such topics as 'value', 'mode of production', and 'economic agents'. Redefinition is essential if Marxist economists are to have any hope of countering modern capitalism.

There is no doubt that the redefinition is radical in intention, since it involves a rejection of the concept of value found in *Capital*, as well as a series of secondary concepts based on it such as 'surplus value' and 'exploitation'. What comes to be questioned is the assumption that labour is the basis of value and, therefore, profit. For there to be surplus value there must be a calculable difference between the value assigned the labour to create a product and the value of the product so created – a wages-profit differential. The authors sense some circular reasoning going on here, as well as the existence of hidden assumptions:

This analysis of the two quantities cannot work unless value-terms in labour-time are supposed and form the basis of calculation. In order for it to be shown that the two sums are not equal (value of wages – value created by labour) it is

necessary that comparable terms be present on both sides (wages and the product can be expressed as quanta of the same measure). *When the assumption that labour-time is the 'substance of value' is abandoned then the two sides of the equation become incommensurable. This is not a technical matter of calculation in price-terms versus value-terms, but a question of the theoretical conditions of existence of calculation. The linking of the two sides of the equation depends on the concept of the value-creating power of labour.*¹³

If we cannot do the calculation then we cannot assume labour is the source of value and profit. Marxist value analysis is criticised for assuming an absolute quality to value independent of the state of the market, as if the surplus value were encoded in the product itself (through the agency of the labour-time expended in its creation). If there are problems with Marxist value analysis then there are also problems with the concept of exploitation, since it is by means of value that exploitation is measured. Unless we are clear how exploitation actually occurs we can hardly address it as a social evil.

The root of the problem is the equation of value and labour-time, an equation rendered ever more problematical as industrial processes increase in technological sophistication to become less and less dependent on direct human labour. Marx himself thought that increased automation would work to the detriment of capitalism; that the more of an imbalance there was between direct labour and technological process the less the capitalist system would be able to reproduce itself, leading to its eventual dissolution. From their standpoint in an increasingly post-industrial world which has yet to experience the collapse of capitalism, despite regular 'crises', Hindess and Hirst et al. dispute this conclusion, arguing that we need to scrutinise the entire process of production rather than just its labour-time component. The obsession with labour-time has prevented such an analysis from being properly made: put simply, Marx's theory of value gets in the way. It is concluded that exploitation is an untenable term and that surplus-value could not, as such, ever be paid to the worker – even under a socialist economic system.¹⁴

Iconoclastic though such conclusions are, they are not felt to undermine the fundamentals of the Marxist conception of class relations under capitalism. These are seen to be a matter of whether one is a 'possessor' or 'non-possessor' of the means of production, rather than of what one actually produces. A working class certainly exists, although it is argued that capitalism need not entail a class of capitalists: '*Capitals* (not *capitalists*) are the agents of possession necessary to capitalist relations of production (depending on the economic and political/legal context, they make take the form of human or non-human economic subjects).¹⁵ The class struggle is less to do with exploitation of one class by another than the antagonism engendered by the enforced separation of labour from the means of production. To fixate on exploitation is to lapse into an essentialism which retards the successful prosecution of the class struggle. In reaching such conclusions, the authors freely admit they have 'passed a long way from *Capital*'.¹⁶

We might sum up the problem of value in Marxism, as it is identified here, as follows: it overestimates the role of labour-time in the creation of value, when several other factors – notably, the nature of the production process – need to be taken into

account; it assumes that an equivalence can be established between different kinds of labour-time; it assumes an equivalence between total profit and total surplus-value, even though we know that supply and demand can create an imbalance in the relationship. Overall, the criticism is that Marx's desire to totalise his theory leads him to over-simplify the nature of the capitalist mode of production. Attempts have been made to rescue Marx from the impasse he is left in by his theory of value (that of I. I. Rubin, for example¹⁷), by claiming that we need to consider the wider context of historical materialist theory within which his political economy functions. From this perspective, value

is part of the theory of historical materialism which, unlike 'economics', raises the conditions of existence of and the effects of social relations as a *problem*. . . . Historical materialism provides political economy with the basis for a *critical* analysis of commodity/capitalist social relations, unlike bourgeois political economy or 'economics' which takes these relations as an unreflected point of departure.¹⁸

Nevertheless, even Rubin runs into difficulties, with what to Hindess and Hirst et al. are some questionable assumptions about the distribution of labour and labour's role in changes in value. Yet again, it is the shortcomings in Marx's treatment of value that lead his disciples into error; in this particular case, the lack of a detailed formulation in any of Marx's works of the concept of 'use-value' or demand. The latter is left at the level of circular reasoning – whatever the market demands must have use-value, and use-value is whatever it is that the market demands.

Circular reasoning and disguised teleology continue to plague Marxist theory when it comes to 'laws of tendency'. No justification can be found for such laws, which are deeply entrenched within Marxist thought – as in the belief that the rate of profit will progressively decline under capitalism, or that capitalism will collapse under the weight of its internal contradictions. When such 'predictions' fail to be realised, anti-Marxists claim the invalidity of the theory, while fundamentalist Marxists resort to deferring their appearance. The stalemate that ensues can never really be resolved, since one could defer indefinitely. As far as Hindess and Hirst et al. are concerned, that stalemate deflects Marxism from its true course: the application of the theory to the specifics of the current class struggle. Teleology has reared its ugly head again. To rely on the unfolding of 'tendencies' is to marginalise human agency – a recurrent theme of this style of analysis, which regards a belief in laws of tendency as tantamount to an abdication of socio-political responsibility. Positing the economy as the locus of such tendencies merely compounds the problem:

This auto-effectivity of the economy in providing its own intersubjective conditions of existence may be called *economism*. The primacy of the economic generates a necessarily subordinate concept of human subject – a receptacle appropriate to the effects of this causality. It also constitutes a *general* concept of subject, one universally ready to receive these necessary effects.¹⁹

Both circularity and teleology conspire against the individual, reducing her to the status of a pawn in a metaphysical game: a trend exacerbated in the work of the Althusserian school.

The economist interpretation of Marxist theory is dismissed as a caricature, although in this case it is possible to rescue Marx from the excesses perpetrated by his followers; albeit in such a way as to reduce the authority of Marx's own work. What we ought to be doing is treating Marx as a *discourse*; that is, as an interdisciplinary enquiry containing the contradictions we would expect of someone pushing all the time into unknown intellectual territory. Marx turns into a figure seeking to make sense of an exceedingly complex cultural situation, and his responses do not add up to an ordered system capable of predicting future events as so many of his followers seem to believe. The tendency to treat Marx's work as a rational totality should be resisted. It is instead a discourse which can be raided for insights as to how we should confront capitalism *now*, bearing in mind that capitalism has changed and no longer conforms to Marx's analysis of it. Marx shifts from being holy writ to a point of departure for socialist thought. Neither should we feel under any obligation to reconcile the inconsistencies we find in Marx; that would be to adopt a quasi-theological attitude to his work. This is Marx humanised, a Marx who does not know all the answers, who sometimes follows up wrong leads, draws faulty conclusions, and does not always provide arguments to support his assertions. The semi-deified Marx of the Soviet and classical traditions vanishes.

We are consistently led away from the totalising, generalising side of Marxism, with its attendant teleology, and encouraged to scrutinise socio-political struggles in terms of their real, as opposed to theoretically assumed, characteristics. Hence classical Marxism can be told that its theoretical model has no basis in Marx's work. We are constantly encouraged, too, to think in terms of an open future that may develop in a variety of ways depending on the actions of the agents who inhabit it, rather than one whose outcome is predetermined by laws of tendency which dictate, through their immanent forms, the nature of both causality and human action at any one historical point. Neither is the advent of socialism a foregone conclusion of conflict within the capitalist system:

There is nothing in capitalist relations of production as such to ensure any of the forces engaged in those struggles will be or will tend to become socialist. . . . Forces will have to be won for socialism. There is nothing in capitalist production-relations as such which necessarily generates such forces let alone ensures that they will be successful.²⁰

Pluralist politics beckons, and with that the end of the Marxist totalising vision.

Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today concludes that Marxism offers no detailed analyses of modern capitalism, and is obsessed instead with the exegesis of *Capital*. This is Marxism as self-enclosed system; the clear message being that Marx himself is now a barrier to the progress of socialism. Far from being a sacred text, *Capital* is full of errors and misconceptions which have encouraged a host of misreadings from disciples convinced that it constitutes a unified discourse on which they can base

cultural analyses and political programmes. In a neatly turned phrase, Marx's disciples have bequeathed us an 'economic scholasticism' whose effects have been almost entirely negative.²¹ Economism is pictured as a lazy reflex providing no real threat to the capitalist order: an evasion of political reality rather than a means to effect its transformation. It becomes all too easy for socialists to take refuge in economism when faced with the apparent failings of Marxist theory: easier to defer the revolutionary moment, and construct ad hoc concepts like hegemony, than work out why historical process never quite conforms to the theoretical model. Once again, it would seem to be orthodox Marxists who are suffering from false consciousness rather than a bemused working class.²² Despite the fact that 'capitalism has never obliged by creating of itself the political unity of the masses and the political conditions for the construction of socialism', the economic scholastics go on believing that, eventually, and of necessity, it will.²³ On such dubious premises has the socialist cause foundered.

Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today preaches a reformist line, which involves working through, and within, existing political institutions in countries such as Britain. The totalising vision is simply set to one side, on the grounds that 'Capital is not a monolith', 'state power is not homogeneous', and the working class not a cohesive body just waiting to be mobilised by the right slogans drawn from Marxist theory by a progressive leadership.²⁴ One might suggest that another of the work's messages is that *Capital* is not a monolith either.

The work of Hindess and Hirst and their circle reveals deep disquiet about both Marxism and its history that bodes ill for the theory's future. We become very aware of the quandary that Marxist supporters find themselves in by our day, faced with a theory whose political track record inspires little confidence and whose sheer weight of history renders it highly resistant to change. Can one really detach Marx from classical Marxism? Between the excesses of the Soviet Empire and the rigidity of the classical Marxist establishment, East and West, there is little room for manoeuvre, and it is unsurprising that so much of the left has been reduced to 'gesture politics'.²⁵ Overall, the group displays a low opinion of the Marxist theoretical community, most of whom are held guilty of misinterpretation of the Marxist classics. Marxist history is more than somewhat damaged after such an exercise, and the future utility of the theory in some doubt after the thoroughgoing critique offered of its conceptual basis. For all their claims to the contrary, the logic of Hindess and Hirst's position points beyond Marxism, and their analyses suggest that Marxism should be treated as a historical phenomenon rather than a fail-safe blueprint for the construction of socialism. Whether perceived in that way or not by the authors, this is a step on the road to post-Marxism, where Marxism is perceived as little more than an aid to tactical thinking. Marx's reputation is shrinking before our very eyes.

There is a marked lack of reverence shown for that reputation in *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today*, with whole areas of Marx's own thought simply being written off. Once one dents that reverential attitude surrounding Marx himself it becomes all the easier to contemplate a post-Marxist future of the kind that Laclau and Mouffe are soon to map out for us. There has to be a question mark as to whether

Marxism can exist without its concepts of value, surplus-value, exploitation, mode of production, and economic agents, with nothing stronger to sustain it than a commitment to the class struggle (and a much looser form of that phenomenon than classical Marxism envisages²⁶); not to mention the problems attendant on the loss of its historical perspective and pretensions towards being a science. Stripped of its assumption of historical destiny, and the laws of tendency which maintain this, Marxism is just another theory – perhaps even, as postmodernism has been dubbed by some, more of an *attitude* or a *mood* than a theory? It is hard to argue that Hindess and Hirst and their followers do anything to prolong the Marxist moment: when Marxism begins to be seen as an outright hindrance to the success of the class struggle, its eclipse is surely close at hand. The 'intellectual malady' takes many forms.

One might find fault with the the militant anti-traditionalism coursing through the works discussed above, with its concentration on the immediate moment and refusal to be bogged down in the mistakes of history. While one can understand the appeal of such a position, it is hard to see it translating into mass political action (always Marxism's prime objective). Take away the commitment to the class struggle and there is something of a vacuum at the heart of this version of Marxism, with its rejection of any transhistorical perspective. One might conclude that the Marxism of the Hindess–Hirst circle is dangerously close to residual, especially given the largely negative reading offered of the movement's founding texts: 'we anticipate a scandal, the scandal of Marxists denying the general primacy of determination by the "economic"'.²⁷ In the light of such 'scandals' we might just wonder what a Marxist *is* by the end of these surveys.

Others have been similarly perplexed by the inherent contradictions of the Hindess–Hirst project, and Gregory Elliott's mid-1980s' article 'The Odyssey of Paul Hirst' sums up the confusion these can induce on the left. Elliott himself is no fundamentalist, but his Marxism is clearly less residual than that of Hirst in its insistence that 'as a research programme historical materialism will only be surpassed when it has been improved upon'.²⁸ Within such a demand lies a fair degree of commitment to the theory, which is still felt to be on essentially the right lines – even if its *eventual* supersession is not ruled out. Yet one might pick some holes in such a position. Marxism has traditionally laid claim to being much more than a 'research programme', and a certain academic Western Marxist bias can be detected here. One might also query the intellectual status of the argument that positions should be adhered to until such time as they are disproved. Aside from the fact that, given the multitude of variables involved, proof of the superiority of one's position one way or the other is notoriously difficult to establish in the realm of theory (let alone politics), such quasi-Popperianism has a conservative quality to it that sits oddly with a professedly revolutionary theory. The inability to construct a totally coherent alternative is not in itself proof of the validity of the position being dissented from: religion has traded on that notion over the centuries but that does not mean that religion per se constitutes a valid, or even a socially useful, system of belief. Question the validity of religion *itself* and the ground of argument can shift quite dramatically, and the same goes for socio-political theories. There is no

intellectual inconsistency involved in rejecting one system before having an alternative to move onto: one is under no obligation to have a complete system of belief – indeed, to insist this is necessary is to predetermine the ground of debate in authoritarian fashion. One totalising theory does not have to be replaced by another, any more than one religion does by another; the totalising imperative can be called into question instead. Grand narratives have no divine right to exist or command our allegiance.

Hirst's career becomes exemplary of the changing landscape of British left-wing politics since the early 1970s, with Elliott describing him as 'one of the unsung heroes of the de- and re-alignment of Communist, Labour and independent Marxist intellectuals' that the period features.²⁹ Collectively these various de- and re-alignments are considered to represent a regrettable move away from political radicalism. Elliott cannot accept Hirst's claim to remain a Marxist despite appearing to reject most of the tenets of historical materialism: a claim which is dismissed as no more than an unsuccessful attempt to disguise a move to the right. It is characteristic of the Marxist temperament, even a relatively open-minded one such as Elliott's, to conceive of challenges to the theoretical base of Marxism as necessarily right-wing in orientation; as if any criticism at all has to be regarded as suspect. Hirst is pictured as an intellectual dilettante: an exponent of Althusser, then later a critic of structural Marxism; a Marxist, then a poststructuralist; a socialist, then a social democrat. It is an odyssey which transcribes a move from Leninism to Labourism, and for Elliott it succeeds in demonstrating some of the grosser failings of the intellectual class – Hirst being guilty of 'an absolutism of the intellect' in his continual search for a perfect theory.³⁰ Against that, Elliott posits the need for a sense of 'sobriety about the present explanatory powers of historical materialism': although how this would manifest itself in the face of a continued commitment to Marxism as the best of all current theoretical options is never entirely made clear.³¹ Hirst stands condemned, paradoxically enough for someone who keeps changing his position, of being too rigid in what he expects from a theory; of lacking a sense of proportion as regards a theory's powers and scope. One senses that critics of Marxism are doomed to lose the argument no matter what they do. Criticise the theory from within and you cast doubt on your sincerity; move away from the theory and you provide conclusive proof of your *insincerity*. One might also wonder what it would mean to have a sense of proportion about a totalising theory: there is at least a hint of paradox in such a position.

It is not enough to claim Marxist credentials, therefore, these must also be backed up by hard proof of one's belief in the theory's fundamentals – which neither Hirst nor Hindess (attacked later in the article by Elliott for his collaborative efforts with Hirst) really provide. There is still an 'all or nothing' attitude in operation in Elliott's analysis of Hirst's odyssey. Degrees of belief of Marxism cannot be entertained, and de- and re-alignment can only be treated as hostile actions. Again, one can see why post-Marxism would come about if there is to be so little room for manoeuvre within Marxism itself. While criticism of the theory is apparently invited, it never seems to be framed in such a way as to satisfy the committed Marxist, whose concept of what constitutes acceptable criticism is exceedingly narrow.

One also comes away from the Elliott article with a distinct sense of the scholasticism that, as Hindess and Hirst complain, can be such an irritating and alienating feature of Marxist discourse, with, in this instance, Elliott picking apart Hirst's (and Hindess's) interpretation of Althusser's interpretation of Marx. It all comes to seem so very self-enclosed – and so far away from political action and the ostensible project of changing the world. At some point one is obliged to consider whether there is something in the theory that encourages such constant theoretical infighting, and the fragmentation of the left that follows on from this phenomenon. Elliott complains of the 'defiant theoreticism' of *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, but it could be argued that this is a characteristic of, not just Western Marxism, but *all* Marxist discourse.³² For a theory which is so committed to the totalisation of human experience, Marxism seems singularly unable to create a totality of interpretants to prosecute its cause.

Nicos Poulantzas had earlier voiced similar sentiments to those of Hindess and Hirst on the topics of class and mode of production – if not in as radical a form or reaching such iconoclastic conclusions. In *Political Power and Social Classes* (French edition, 1968), for example, Poulantzas identifies problems in Marxist theory in terms of its incompleteness on several key issues involved with the analysis of the modern capitalist state. Speaking of 'the non-systematic character' of the Marxist classics, he argues that we must 'use elaboration rather than simple extraction to replace the different concepts contained in these texts in the place which is validly theirs in the process of thought'.³³ When it comes to the concepts of class and mode of production, Marx is not to be regarded as the last word – there are many contradictions to be acknowledged in the pages of his classic works. Poulantzas sees himself as engaged in an exercise in filling in the gaps left by Marx, and most of his classical interpreters, in order to reach a fuller understanding of how the capitalist state operates. Along the way he borrows freely from the Althusserian structural Marxist approach, paying particularly close attention to the structures and 'practices' operative in a capitalist society.

Mode of production is felt to be a very sketchy concept in Marx, and this is particularly the case when it comes to pre-capitalist modes of production, which are defined in terms of the model constructed for the capitalist mode. At best we have a series of analogies here, and are warned not to take Marx too literally. This is to imply that history is being redesigned to fit the Marxist model: a complaint increasingly to be heard in Marxist and then post-Marxist circles. Given such analogical constructions, it is the theorist's task to elaborate on the insights Marx has left us rather than to take what he did say as gospel. Unfortunately, as we know, the latter tendency has predominated over the course of Marxist history. The question that always arises is how far one can go in identifying holes in the Marxist system of thought and still call oneself a Marxist. Internal critics such as Poulantzas open up a Pandora's box in this respect: the habit of criticism can become hard to break, and the theory's overall credibility suffers accordingly.

Marx also fails to be as explicit on class as he should, and Poulantzas feels compelled to come up with a more sophisticated theory of the nature of class struggle

in a capitalist society than Marx gives us. The class structure in a given society does not always conform to its abstract model: 'Imagine a social formation composed of a certain number of classes: that does not mean that these classes are going to be found as such in the historical individual model of that formation.'³⁴ (Neither is a mode of production pure either; it will include certain aspects of various other previous modes of production within it at any one time.) Poulantzas puts forward his theory of class 'fractions' to capture the complexity of social reality as opposed to its theoretical formulation. Apparent inconsistencies in class behaviour can be explained away by fraction theory. What might be postulated as a distinct class within the theoretical model of a mode of production often appears in a very different form in a concrete historical situation; sometimes '*dissolved and fused* with other classes, as groups (autonomous or not) of other classes, or even as specific social categories'.³⁵ A concrete example of such dissolution and fusion is given in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, when Poulantzas observes that

production technicians often have proletarian class positions, frequently taking the side of the working class in strikes, for example. But this does not mean that they have then become part of the working class, since their structural class determination is not reducible to their class position. Moreover, it is precisely by virtue of its class determination that this grouping sometimes takes the side of the working class, and sometimes the side of the bourgeoisie (bourgeois class positions). Technicians no more form part of the bourgeoisie each time that they take up bourgeois class positions, than they form part of the proletariat when they take up the positions of the latter.³⁶

Classes can be underdetermined or overdetermined in specific cultural instances, therefore, and fractions may exist as a social force in their own right even though they fail to fit the precise formulation of the abstract model of a class. Failure to recognise this state of affairs has led to many wrong conclusions in classical Marxist analysis, with its general tendency to privilege the theory over the concrete socio-political situation. The bourgeoisie, for example, is often divided into fractions (a fact of which Marx is held to be intuitively aware), and Marxist theorists miss such subtleties at their peril in terms of defining where political power lies in a given social formation. Class struggle never appears in the pure state: we face instead fractions and 'blocs' that deflect us and force us to adapt our theory – although not our overall socialist objectives. We need also to avoid the trap of assuming that class struggle is transparent in its workings. Ideologies, as Poulantzas points out in a memorable phrase, are not 'number-plates carried on the backs of class-subjects': if they were, then the class struggle would be a much easier prospect for Marxists, but the picture is more confusing than that.³⁷ There is the need, for example, '*to account for the permanent possibility of contamination of working class ideology by the dominant and petty-bourgeois ideologies*'.³⁸ Unless such possibilities, and the theory of fractions that underpins them, are taken into account we will continue to reach false conclusions in our political analyses.

Despite the complaints registered about the relative incompleteness of Marx's conceptual scheme, Poulantzas's project is still essentially Marxist in orientation (as

well as being too structuralist for the likes of Hindess, for whom that is a recipe for losing the human dimension to one's enquiry³⁹). The objective is not to go beyond Marx but to strengthen him theoretically such that he can be applied with greater precision to the task of fighting capitalism. The broad outlines of Marxist theory are still present, and the many references to Lenin's political and theoretical pragmatism – carefully differentiated from Luxemburg's spontaneism – indicate a desire to make Marxism functional at a grass-roots level. What counts is not the purity of the theory but its effectiveness in a concrete historical situation such as the one Lenin had to face: 'Against the deviations of the Second International, Lenin returned to the authentic thought of Marx in producing the concept of *conjuncture*, equivalent to that of the "present moment", which is the specific *object* of political practice.'⁴⁰ The reference to Marx's 'authentic thought' is revealing: Marx's concepts may need some help to make them effective in the 'present moments' of political struggle, but they retain a core of authenticity that Poulantzas considers himself bound by. Poulantzas is calling for a reform of Marxist thought within the parameters laid down by its founder and his major disciples, not for any radical reassessment of its structure or conceptual basis. The class struggle may present itself in a more confusing form than Marxist thought has often realised, but it is still the class struggle nevertheless and it must be prosecuted from a Marxist perspective using Marxist concepts – even if these latter do require a certain amount of judicious 'elaboration' to improve their performance. As he goes on to state in entirely orthodox manner in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 'given the present phase of imperialism and the current conjuncture, it is the struggle of the popular masses in Europe against their own bourgeoisies and their own state that is fundamental'.⁴¹

For all its criticisms of past Marxist practice, *Political Power and Social Classes* constitutes an exercise in recovery, with Marx being given several extra layers of theoretical sophistication to equip him for an increasingly complex class struggle against an increasingly resistant capitalism. Such criticisms of key concepts do give putative post-Marxists much to think about, however, and, as we can see from the work of Hindess and Hirst to come, represent the thin end of the wedge as far as Marxist belief is concerned. The theory can only absorb so much critique before it begins to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions – an ironic fate for a theory structured on the principle of bringing the contradictions of other grand narratives to light.

Rudolf Bahro's case is an intriguing one in that his critique of Marxism was begun from within the 'actually existing socialism' of the German Democratic Republic. Arrested as a dissident in the 1970s, Bahro was subsequently released to live in West Germany, where he became a champion of the cause of the new social movements, in particular the greens. The notion of a new articulation of interests finds expression in Bahro with the claim that 'red and green, green and red, go well together'.⁴² Bahro's best-known work is *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, published in 1977 while he was still a citizen of the GDR, and the immediate cause of his imprisonment there. The study reveals a deep sense of unease with the current state of communism in the Eastern bloc, and is a daring and admirable work considering the context in

which it was written. Yet Bahro makes it clear that he remains within the Marxist camp: 'Communism is not only necessary, it is also possible.'⁴³ Events in the Eastern bloc may have swiftly overtaken Bahro's judgement on this score, but the version of communism he is defending differs quite considerably from that being practised at the time, and the implicit criticism is that the latter is certainly *not* necessary; that if communism is the public face of Marxism then something has gone drastically wrong, and an alternative is urgently required to its rigidly bureaucratic approach.

Bahro pictures a world where the communist hierarchy has lost touch with the masses and has turned into a conservative force holding back human progress. On the theoretical front, too, there has been ossification, with nothing of note happening in revolutionary thought since the writings of Lenin. In what is becoming a familiar refrain from those testing the boundaries of Marxism, Bahro insists that the theory must adapt to the cultural change happening all around it or go under. As it stands, there is a clear discrepancy between theoretical principles and political practice in the Soviet Empire, leading to a state of 'ideological bankruptcy': a claim which most certainly tests the boundaries of acceptable critique within 'actually existing socialism'.⁴⁴ Various reasons are advanced for this state of affairs (self-interested party functionaries, the baleful influence of Stalin, the inapplicability of the Russian experience to more advanced industrial countries, gaps in Marx's own theories, etc., in effect, the usual litany), although in many ways these are less important than the conclusions Bahro draws as to what we must do to restore communism's tarnished reputation: a 'cultural revolution' by 'a new League of Communists' willing to distance themselves from the state machine.⁴⁵ What is being called for is no less than the voluntary relinquishment of power by the existing party apparatus, which is accused of operating a stranglehold on the states of the Eastern bloc.

Bahro's analysis of 'actually existing socialism' uncovers a whole series of myths propagated by the party, such as the idea that the states espousing this model are workers' states. This is dismissed as mere propaganda that serves only the interests of the party machine. The unequal relationship between party and people is for Bahro the single greatest obstacle to human emancipation, and as much as anything, his work announces the need for an emancipation *from the party*. The solution is seen to be the creation of a much wider social consensus that succeeds in marginalising the old party regime, with Bahro taking Eurocommunism – particularly the Italian version – as a model. We return to the earlier days of Marxism, when it operated at the level of persuasion rather than force, and Bahro is willing to envisage a gradualist approach to the reduction of capitalism's dominance in the name of social regeneration. That dominance can even be found in the practice of 'actually existing socialism', which is just as obsessed by the need for increased production and exploitation of the environment as is capitalism – indeed, it has simply taken over these aspects of the capitalist ethos in an uncritical manner. Marxism should mean more than beating capitalism at its own game; what is wanted is a radical reassessment of the role played by production in human affairs: '*The so-called scientific and technical revolution . . . must be reprogrammed by a new social revolution.*'⁴⁶ (As we shall see in chapter 7, Baudrillard is making very similar noises about the obsession with production in Marxist thought at around the same time.)

Communism has become materialist in the wrong sense, and the more it persists in imitation of the capitalist system the more its moral authority will drain away. The real battle is not on the economic front, but on that of social consciousness. Society will not really change, Bahro contends, until our minds change: increased production is irrelevant to the success of that most important of revolutions. What we ought to be investigating is our concept of need.

Other than Eurocommunism, Bahro takes the 'Prague Spring' experiment in Czechoslovakia as a model for the new political order he has in mind, arguing that this demonstrated the potential for a transformation of communism already existing within the Eastern bloc. Here was a case when the communist party really *did* seem to be speaking for the masses and not afraid to voice criticism of the system it ruled over. The defeat of the Dubcek government is regarded as a lost opportunity, but one that can inspire us to try again. Bahro particularly applauds the encouragement of 'self-management' during the experiment as a means of bringing about 'an end to the permanent tutelage of society by the state, the permanent treatment of people (individuals and collectives) as infantile objects of education'.⁴⁷ There is a 'surplus consciousness' within society that, while it can be suppressed by the authorities, remains ready to be tapped by anyone brave enough to challenge the 'polit-bureaucracy' that has grown up in the Eastern bloc countries.⁴⁸ With the notion of 'surplus consciousness', yet another synonym for 'difference' can be added to the list.

Bahro's diagnosis that things had to change in the Eastern bloc has been proved correct, but what has followed from that change has not been the 'new League of Communists' he called for, unless one wants to see in that phrase a shorthand for post-Marxism.⁴⁹ Certainly, Bahro has gone on to espouse the cause of the new social movements with all the enthusiasm of a post-Marxist, and it is there that he sees a public expression of the 'surplus consciousness' with the power to destabilise systems. Although the dream of a middle way between communism and capitalism, a critically-minded 'non-capitalism' able and willing to engage in debate in the struggle to reach a more responsible form of social consciousness, has faded in the interim, at least there is no longer the dreaded politbureaucracy to contend with. Nevertheless, Bahro still remains true to the communist heritage in his belief that there should only be one political party in the projected new social order, for all that it is to be a more flexible, less bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation than any operating under the heading of 'actually existing socialism'. Pluralism is not on the agenda in this instance, with faith being placed in the ability of consensus to deliver the right kind of one-party rule (although it is worth noting that Bahro modifies his opposition to pluralism when he moves to West Germany⁵⁰). Bahro is a reformer, whose attitude towards materialistic capitalism could even be defined as somewhat puritanical in character, but so radical is his testing of the boundaries of communism that eventually he offers much food for thought to post-Marxists.

Bahro is confident that a revived communism is possible, and that it can also escape the shackles of a party-controlled past that has alienated the mass of the population from Marxism, but one could query whether that past can be overcome so easily – or whether the totalising bias of Marxist thought (which is still evident in Bahro's own commitment to a one-party state) will always tend to gravitate towards

oligarchy of the Eastern bloc kind. He may claim that 'The ruling party apparatuses have as little in common with communism as the Grand Inquisitor with Jesus Christ', but both the apparatuses and the Inquisitor are typical products of the zeal that a totalising theory almost invariably generates; they cannot always just be written off as aberrations of the original theory, as if that theory's 'essence' could be isolated from the expressions of it.⁵¹ Neither is Bahro himself entirely free from zealous sentiments:

Some workers may grow up to exhibit undisciplined or parasitic inclinations. Workers who despite correct and comradely advice do not deploy the skills, for whatever reason, can either be given other activities more satisfying to them, or be deliberately withdrawn from the collective, without further discrimination.⁵²

If we were being sceptical, then for 'comradely advice' we could read 'psychological pressure'; and exactly where does a 'withdrawn' worker go in a one-party system where the same ethos applies everywhere? Bahro shares the belief in the force of the rational that the communist system inherits from Marxism and the Enlightenment project: the assumption that a rationally ordered society must appeal to everyone, and that whoever dissents from this notion must have some psychological defect. Rationalism brooks no opposition in this regard. 'Surplus consciousness' has a right and a wrong expression: an attitude which well might, in the fullness of time, lead to just as authoritarian a society as the one Bahro is rejecting in the 1970s. We could also object that Bahro's 'comradely advice' leaves little space for unpredictability: a planned society is still the ideal, and that assumes certain constants to human nature, and the constitution of the subject, that the postmodernist and post-Marxist camps will find unacceptable. Even so, his uncompromising rejection of communism and the vast bulk of its heritage provides little comfort for the classical Marxist tradition, which can also mull over remarks such as the following, made after Bahro's move to the West: 'Modern revolutionary theory will have to relate to classical Marxism in a similar way to the relationship of relativistic to classical physics.'⁵³ The boundaries are all but breached at this point.

The boundaries of Marxism are also tested to some extent by Jürgen Habermas, although his critique takes place within a wider concern to rescue modernity and enlightenment values from attacks by anti-modernists and anti-humanists. For Habermas, modernity is 'an unfinished project' worth extending.⁵⁴ It is still felt to be possible to 'free historical materialism from its philosophical ballast'.⁵⁵ As Thomas McCarthy has summed it up, Habermas is concerned to institute 'an enlightened suspicion of enlightenment, a reasoned critique of Western rationalism', and Marx and Marxism come in for scrutiny on that score.⁵⁶

Although he finds much worth retaining from the work of Marx (a combination of Marx on ideology and Weber on cultural modernity, for example, generating an explanation for the apparent decline in class conflict in welfare-state democracies), Habermas also identifies certain critical weaknesses in the way Marx conceives of

the relationship between 'system' (economy plus state) and 'lifeworld' (public and private spheres). The Marxist obsession with totality is the basis of the problem:

Marx did not withstand the temptations of Hegelian totality-thinking; he construed the unity of system and lifeworld dialectically as an 'untrue whole.' Otherwise he could not have failed to see that *every* modern society, whatever its class structure, has to exhibit a high degree of structural differentiation.⁵⁷

In Marx's analysis, lifeworld (the 'realm of freedom') is subjugated by system (the 'realm of necessity') such that reification results; but for Habermas this is to confuse reification and structural differentiation. Further, the latter can be seen as a positive aspect of social change, leading to *individuation* as much as *alienation*: 'In an extensively rationalized lifeworld, reification can be measured only against the conditions of communicative sociation, and not against the nostalgically loaded, frequently romanticized past of postmodern forms of life.'⁵⁸ Marx had certainly seen capitalism as a positive phenomenon in terms of what it revealed about our potential to control the environment, and, as many commentators have pointed out, he is a staunch advocate of a production-oriented society. Habermas is suggesting that the commitment to totality obscures this positive side, implying the possibility of a return to a mythical organic wholeness.

Marx is also guilty of overgeneralizing from the particular case of early industrial capitalism, thus locating class conflict in the contradictory relationship between wage labour and capital. The effect of this is to confine reification to the labour sphere, whereas for Habermas it is a consequence of a structurally differentiated society that it 'can manifest itself just as well in public as in private domains, and in the latter areas it can attach to consumer as well as to occupational roles'.⁵⁹ Restricting reification to the labour sphere leaves Marxism at a loss to explain a series of developments in advanced capitalism, such as government intervention in the economy, mass democracy, and the creation of the welfare state. A more sophisticated analytical model than Marx provides is required to deal with reformism in general, such that we can get to grips with late capitalism. The impact of reformism means that the 'structures of late capitalism take shapes that have to appear as paradoxical from the perspective of a marxian theory with a narrowly economic approach'.⁶⁰ Alienation, for example, is no longer confined to the workplace. It is also experienced by the individual in her role as consumer and 'client' of the welfare state, giving rise to non-class specific conflicts that pose a potential threat to late capitalist society. Marxism, however, with its 'narrowly economic approach', hardly knows how to process these. The successful combination of welfare-state democracy and capitalist growth defuses class antagonism, undermining the basis of Marxism's social vision. With class struggle largely pacified, 'the theory of class consciousness loses its empirical reference'.⁶¹ It is the fragmentation of such consciousness that must be explained by cultural theorists now, and Marxism's ideology critique goes only part of the way towards doing this.

For all the criticisms offered of the Marxist approach, what Habermas is querying is the fit between Marx's critique of capitalism and the developed model that

constitutes late capitalism, rather than the general drift of Marx's critique itself. There are weaknesses within Marx's theories of value, reification, etc., which prevent them from being as effective as they could be, and Habermas suggests some adjustments and theoretical realignments to improve matters. Empirical references may have been lost, therefore, but only because they have been displaced throughout a more complex differentiated social structure than Marx could envisage. The boundaries are stretched rather than breached.

The gauntlet thrown down by the boundary-testers is not always picked up, however, and the left can be very loath to give up their investment in Marx's conceptual scheme and allow themselves to experiment with notions such as class struggle, surplus-value, and exploitation. Ralph Miliband provides a case in point where the Marxist verities are restated despite the changing cultural climate. Writing in 1989 (*Divided Societies*), we find him adamant that class struggle, conceived in fairly conventional Marxist terms, is still the defining feature of the leading capitalist countries. Despite some modish acknowledgements of the claims of the new social movements, and the insistence that Marx should be regarded as a point of departure for late twentieth-century socialists, the study amounts to a restatement of the Marxist creed that refuses to take many liberties with Marx or his basic conceptual scheme. There is to be no paradigm shift of the type called for by Bahro. Marx's 'model' of class struggle may stand in need of some modification, but Miliband is not about to follow the radicals and discard it altogether: 'I think that Marx had the essence of the matter'.⁶² The choice of words is significant: 'essence' is just what a string of post-Marxist and radical Marxist thinkers are claiming that Marxist analysis falsely assumes. Miliband is unphased by such criticisms and makes yet another attempt to detach the theory from its vulgar interpretations:

even though class analysis does run the danger of a simplistic kind of economic reductionism, such a deformation is not inherent in the mode of analysis itself; and . . . handled with all due care, it does constitute a uniquely valuable approach to the interpretation of social reality.⁶³

'All due care': the theory must be protected at all costs. False consciousness, too, is called upon to explain the 'failure' of the working class at large to recognise where their best interests lie: 'it seems perfectly reasonable to say that the nature of the struggles in which people are engaged is not determined by the perception which they have of it.'⁶⁴ Marxism is taken to provide the missing link between perception and underlying reality; the basis for theorisation of a lived experience otherwise lacking critical insight.

The essentially conservative cast of Miliband's Marxism (Poulantzas and Hindess being amongst his critics on this score⁶⁵) is at its most revealing when it comes to his treatment of the new social movements. He is not blind to recent developments in this area, nor as prone to write off such cross-class movements as petit bourgeois in character, as so many of his Marxist colleagues are only too willing to do. The movements are taken to be a fact of contemporary life to which Marxists must adapt

themselves. Neither does Miliband see any contradiction in making connections between these movements and Marxism:

But it is in any case perfectly possible to believe that if advanced capitalist societies are to be fundamentally transformed . . . then labour movements and their agencies remain by far the most important factor in any such transformation; *and* to believe also that new social movements are themselves of great importance, and can make a real contribution to the achievement of fundamental change.⁶⁶

While this sounds superficially close to the position of Laclau and Mouffe, we note the hierarchy that is posited whereby the labour movement takes precedence overall: a case of 'in the last instance' labour (and thus the factor of class) determines the struggle, regardless of the contributions of the others. Class may be 'at best a rather uninformative allegory' for Hindess, but for Miliband it is the bottom line of all social conflict.⁶⁷

Marxism is expanded in Miliband's reading, but its fundamentals left relatively undisturbed. It is a plea for a more tactical Marxism, yet a Marxism still recognisable to the majority of its followers. Miliband sets up the kind of debate that would be only too familiar to earlier generations of Marxist agitators (Lenin, Lukács, the Eurocommunists), as to what alliances can be countenanced to bring about the ultimate victory of the working class without compromising Marxism's purity. Whereas in the past the debate was generally over the issue of cooperation (or not) with parliamentary institutions and their constituent parties, now it is one of whether to sanction extra-parliamentary activity with disparate socio-political groupings possessed of single-issue objectives. The underlying motivation, however, stays the same – to further the cause of the working class through tactical political manoeuvring. The cause of the labour movement itself is taken to be sacrosanct – and paramount. Such assessments depend on a network of assumptions which are becoming very questionable by the late 1980s in the aftermath of Reaganism and Thatcherism: that the labour movement has a recognisable homogeneity; that the labour movement has much the same character in an advanced technological society that it had in previous heavy industry-based ones, as well as a similar relationship to its employers; that there is a working-class consciousness waiting to be activated – even if it is often to be found in a latent form; that the class struggle has essentially the same parameters as in Marx's day.

For Miliband labour versus capital still defines our world, demanding that we take sides. Faith in the eventual arrival of a socialist democracy to end all exploitation remains undimmed:

the conditions do not at present exist – and will not exist for some time to come in any advanced capitalist country – for the coming to power of the kind of government that would seek to bring about a radical transformation of the existing social order. But as I have sought to argue, it is quite realistic to think that these conditions will come into being within the next ten, twenty, or thirty

years – a long time in the life of an individual, but a mere moment in historical time. In this perspective, class struggle for the creation of democratic, egalitarian, co-operative, and classless societies, far from coming to an end, has barely begun.⁶⁸

The argument is a well-worn one in Marxist circles: the dictatorship of the proletariat at some future point in history when conditions will be 'right'. Salvation is always just around the corner; perhaps not in your generation's lifetime, but in the next one's – or the one after that. It is an argument that can always be called upon, and over the course of Marxism's history has been repeatedly, but by 1989 it is looking more than a little threadbare. One comes to feel that if this is the best that late twentieth-century Marxism can do, then the rise of post-Marxism is unsurprising: the promise of 'jam tomorrow' can only work for so long before provoking an adverse reaction. Post-Marxism is that reaction, and although Miliband alludes to it briefly he is clearly unsympathetic to any line of thought challenging the validity of class analysis. Orthodoxy reasserts its hold, and we can understand why Hindess had been moved to claim that 'for all the striking differences between them . . . Poulantzas and Miliband clearly exhibit the characteristic promise of class analysis'.⁶⁹ For Hindess and Hirst, and even more so for Laclau and Mouffe, it is a promise which can no longer be kept.

5 Post-Marxism before post-Marxism

(I) Luxemburg to the Frankfurt School

Totality-conscious though it is, even classical Marxism is not a homogeneous body of thought, and there are many conflicting strains within it – although these are often subject to repression in the name of the theory’s overall solidarity. Perry Anderson speaks not just of Western Marxism, but also ‘post-classical Marxism’, in order to give some sense of the diversity within the Marxist tradition – even if it is a diversity which he feels is an unfortunate consequence of Marxism’s development.¹ In the next two chapters we shall be looking at some of these, at least implicitly, dissenting tendencies to be found in the work of such earlier theorists as Lukács, Luxemburg, and the Frankfurt School; as well as exploring the somewhat unexpected help given to the development of post-Marxism by structural Marxism, and even Eurocommunism and existentialism. The common feature in the last three cases is the attempt to cross-reference Marxism with another theory to form a ‘hybrid’ Marxism, and the encouragement this provides to experimentation by later generations. Despite the marked differences in approach between such thinkers and schools, collectively they constitute a source for unorthodox and disaffected Marxists in an increasingly sceptically oriented culture such as ours. The thinkers dealt with here are generally listed under the rubric of ‘Western Marxism’ (the exception being Luxemburg, the product of an earlier generation, although spiritually arguably closer to the Western tradition than to her Leninist peers), and, certainly since Anderson’s study *Considerations on Western Marxism*, this is a group that often attracts a bad press in Marxist circles. A more positive narrative can be constructed from their work, however, that sees them pave the way for post-Marxism by pointing up the limitations of Marxist thought through their various approaches to the subject.

Luxemburg’s commitment to ‘spontaneism’; Lukács’s insistence in *History and Class Consciousness* that Marxism was a method rather than a body of doctrinal principles (as well as his residual attraction to Hegel); Adorno and Horkheimer’s ‘negative dialectics’; Marcuse’s reformulation of the category of class to fit the American post-war sociological experience, all point to unease with the deterministic side of Marxist thought, suggesting a matrix for the development of post-Marxism. Althusser’s recasting of Marxist thought within structuralist methodology can also be considered to have created a climate receptive to experiment with hybrid forms of Marxism – Laclau and Mouffe certainly took encouragement from that quarter.

A similar observation might be made of Eurocommunism, as well as Sartre's attempt to create an existentialist Marxism in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. A history of both doctrinal dissent and interest in hybridisation can be noted, which suggests something like *post-Marxist* and *post-Marxist* undercurrents within the classical Marxist tradition, well before the institutionalisation of such distinctions in the work of Laclau and Mouffe and their followers.

We have already considered some of the implications of Rosa Luxemburg's work for the development of the post-Marxist sensibility, and she is certainly not afraid to question the decisions taken by the Marxist hierarchy of her day. In *The Russian Revolution*, we find her criticising Marxist orthodoxy as it is in the very process of being codified during that momentous event:

Clearly, not uncritical apologetics but penetrating and thoughtful criticism is alone capable of bringing out the treasures of experiences and teachings. . . . And surely nothing can be farther from their [Lenin and Trotsky's] thoughts than to believe that all the things they have done or left undone under the conditions of bitter compulsion and necessity in the midst of the roaring whirlpool of events, should be regarded by the International as a shining example of socialist policy toward which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order.²

This seems a reasonable enough point to make about a revolution in its early stages, but we know that, all too soon, 'uncritical admiration', 'zealous imitation' and 'uncritical apologetics' are *exactly* what will be required of the Marxist theoretical community when the Soviet Union begins to establish itself as a world power. The critical spirit that moves Luxemburg's analyses is one that Soviet Marxism turns its back upon – as Lukács is about to discover with the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*. It is not just Lenin and Trotsky who are held up for scrutiny, Luxemburg is also particularly critical of Kautsky's pedantic approach to Marxist theory. Luxemburg is a proponent of revolutionary zeal instead, arguing that theory should not dictate one's tactics to the detriment of that zeal. The stagist arguments of Kautsky are rejected, with Luxemburg displaying an almost post-Marxist impatience with the demand that reality be made to conform to theory:

The proletariat, when it seizes power, can never follow the good advice of Kautsky, given on the pretext of the 'unripeness of the country,' the advice being to renounce the socialist revolution and devote itself to democracy. It cannot follow this advice without betraying thereby itself, the International, and the revolution.³

To the orthodox this defence of zeal can seem like a recipe for spontaneism, with the revolution in danger of spiralling out of control. In Žižek's reading, however, a revolution is not a revolution *unless* it is in such danger, and Luxemburg is to be applauded for her recognition that 'opposition to the "premature" seizure of power

is thus revealed as opposition to the seizure of power *as such, in general*.⁴ Even more contentiously Luxemburg attacks the growing authoritarianism of the communist party, calling for ‘a dictatorship of the *class*, not of party or of a clique’.⁵ While there is a romantic note to her attachment to class, an assumption that this constitutes a badge of authenticity as to one’s actions, there is also a suspicion of the party’s motives that subsequent events in Russia prove to be very prescient.

Luxemburg’s fear that communism represents a threat to Marxism is being given voice even before the Russian Revolution, as in her provocatively titled pamphlet *Leninism or Marxism?* (1904). The problem that is so to tax Marxist theorists in the aftermath of 1917, the lack of a properly bourgeois phase to Russian socio-political development as Marxist theory seemed to require before revolution could be fully successful, is identified even at this stage by Luxemburg. Centralism is Russian Social Democracy’s chosen solution to this significant gap in Russian history, but one about which Luxemburg has deep reservations – particularly as regards its formulation in Lenin’s *One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward*. This work is a textbook example of the control ethic in Marxist politics, where Lenin envisages an all-powerful Central Committee, possessed of totalitarian control right down to the level of the most minor aspects of local party organisation: a dictatorship not just of the party, but of the party’s democratically unaccountable Central Committee. While conceding the need for a large measure of centralisation within the Marxist movement to combat a centralised capitalism, Luxemburg questions the Leninist solution to Russia’s admittedly unique situation, since it subordinates the working class to the will of the party.

Lenin stands accused of having the soul of a conspirator, propounding ideas that will only work if the centre is unquestioningly obeyed by all sections of the party. This is a particularly chilling prospect for a theory rooted, as Luxemburg repeatedly insists Marxist Social Democracy is, in the desire of the masses to take control of their own historical destiny. The discipline the Leninist-style party calls for is a perversion of socialism, which has no place for the centralising imperative except as a short-term expedient, or ‘tendency’. As far as the orthodox are concerned, anti-centralisation is another instance of the spontaneist heresy they are so determined to counter – and, indeed, Luxemburg praises the ‘spontaneous’ actions of the Russian proletariat over the previous decade, with several strikes and street demonstrations to its credit. This wins her more praise from Žižek: revolution should be a process of learning through doing, and that is likely to involve some failure. Centralism stands opposed to what Žižek calls the ‘logic of the error as an internal condition of truth’: the critical point being for Žižek that the presence of error can never be eradicated.⁶ (It could be argued that both classical Marxism and bourgeois thought are equally guilty of ignoring those failures/errors that spoil the logic of their historical narrative.⁷) What for Luxemburg is a mere tendency, and thus subject to change depending on political circumstances, is to become a point of principle for Leninism, and then Stalinism afterwards, with all the adverse implications this was to have for the development of Marxism as a revolutionary movement. Romantic though she can be in her defence of spontaneism, Luxemburg nevertheless homes in unerringly on what will become one of the most problematical

aspects of twentieth-century Marxism: the relationship between the party and the people. Luxemburg's verdict on the party is a harsh one, but one that post-1917 history bears out as broadly correct:

The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role. Experience shows that every time the labor movement wins new terrain those organs work it to the utmost. They transform it at the same time into a kind of bastion, which holds up advance on a wider scale.⁸

These are criticisms which prefigure those of Marcuse and then the post-Marxist movement in general, and Luxemburg's fear of the totalitarian tendencies within communism proves to be only too well founded.

Luxemburg reaches very different conclusions on how to resolve Russia's peculiar political situation than Lenin does. She calls for a widening of the party's proletarian base in order to reverse the elitism that Leninist centralisation almost inevitably will bring, rejecting any move to formalise Marxist theory such that it turns into a body of unopposable doctrine administered by the Central Committee. The working class must be allowed to learn by trial and error rather than be manipulated by control-obsessed party intellectuals. When it comes to a choice between the party and the working class, Luxemburg is in no doubt where her loyalties lie: 'Let's speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.'⁹ The sad part is that, after Luxemburg's death, the Central Committee mentality – cleverest or otherwise – will prevail.

False consciousness is also called into question by the demand that the working class should be free to learn from its mistakes. The underlying assumption is: trust the working class, its consciousness can only be wrong if it decides so itself. Consciousness is interpreted as a dynamic phenomenon, constantly in a process of change, rather than a condition to be ruled on by party functionaries. The orthodox conception of consciousness is far more rigid than that assumed by Luxemburg. For the orthodox there is a right state to be in and a wrong, and what each involves can be unambiguously specified. Ultimately, false consciousness constitutes any state of disagreement with the dictates of the Central Committee, a situation just ripe for the development of a stifling bureaucracy. To counter the impulse towards bureaucracy, Luxemburg recommends the encouragement of independent action on the part of the proletariat, but that is to assume such action can be trusted to bring about the right outcomes – and Central Committees are founded on the premise that this is highly doubtful without their interventionist guardianship. Luxemburg's faith in the proletariat amounts to a rejection of the concept of false consciousness, and we could even come to regard that concept as inimical to the general interests of the working class: a Central Committee tactic to keep that class in subjection to its will. Expressing faith in the working class is a standard communist line, repeated throughout the Soviet experience like a mantra, but few are as willing as Luxemburg to give that class its head and allow it to develop in its own way. It will not really be until we reach post-Marxism that we shall see such trust displayed again.

Luxemburg's dislike of centralism seems to point towards a post-Marxist solution to the clash between party and people. Certainly, there is no mistaking her deep distrust for the nascent Leninist party machine, and one is constantly struck by how prophetic so many of Luxemburg's assessments are.

Luxemburg's analysis of Lenin's proposals about party organisation is highly perceptive, although perhaps we should not overstate its post-Marxist potential. There is still a notion of purity underpinning her theoretical vision, a purity which demands, not the stages of Kautsky's vision, but the development of a particular *kind* of working-class consciousness. In her own way she can be as dogmatic as Kautsky. If Kautsky wants reality to conform to the theory of historical stages (feudal to bourgeois to socialist), then Luxemburg wants it to conform to the growth of class consciousness – mistakes and all. Whether Luxemburg's spontaneist methods would ever lead to a successful revolution is a moot point, and one could argue that Lenin's pragmatism is politically the more mature position given the extremely powerful forces ranged against Social Democracy in the early twentieth century. The faith that Luxemburg puts in the working class is not one that always will be repaid either, as both Laclau–Mouffe and Lyotard forcefully point out to us. It is precisely this unpredictable quality about working-class consciousness (the spur to all the various formulations of hegemony from the Second International onwards) that the Leninist party is designed to circumvent; although Luxemburg is right to draw our attention to the dangers inherent in the Leninist approach. Marxism would have developed in a different way if Luxemburg's methods had been widely adopted, but whether it would ever have become the political force that it did has to be very open to question. Nevertheless, within Luxemburg's prescriptions lie the seeds of a humanist Marxism that continues to be a source of inspiration and to make its case, albeit somewhat fitfully, across the twentieth century (as in the *événements*, for example, or in certain strands of Western Marxism), until it takes an entirely new direction with the rise of post-Marxism. When it comes to a choice between the party and the people, Laclau and Mouffe too will opt decisively for the latter over the former: for the human element over the abstractions of Central Committee theorising. The difference being that Laclau and Mouffe and their post-Marxist followers are no longer pretending to be defending Marxism from within – or insisting there is any purity at all to be defended. They offer us the flexibility of Luxemburg's spontaneism minus any of her belief in the possibility of a purist interpretation of Marxist theory. In their reading, Luxemburg correctly identifies the problem, but fails to draw the obvious inference – that Marxism is its own worst enemy and not worth saving in the long run.

Lukács is one of the major theorists of the dialectic, but in his early career he succeeds in opening up some lines of enquiry which, in their desire to push back the boundaries of what constitutes 'orthodox' Marxism, gesture towards post-Marxism. *History and Class Consciousness* created considerable controversy within the communist movement of the 1920s, as well as providing much of the impetus for the development of Western Marxism through its influence on the Frankfurt School. *History and Class Consciousness* tries to move away from the notion of Marxism as a body of doctrine to argue that what Marx bequeaths us is, first and foremost, a methodology:

Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx's individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious 'orthodox' Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx's theses *in toto* – without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the 'belief' in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a 'sacred' book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*.¹⁰

This may look like little more than a harmless 'thought experiment' now (and to such critics as Castoriadis a naive and 'untenable' separation of method and content¹¹), but it was considered all but an act of heresy at the time, and led to Lukács being forced to retract his ideas by order of the Comintern. The method is the dialectic, which is here severed from such theses as 'all history is the history of class struggle'. Marxism as a method rather than the exegesis of a sacred text, suggests post-Marxism in that it undercuts the authority of the official exegetes, which, as we saw, was a primary concern of the Laclau–Mouffe project. Lukács's is one of the first attempts to preserve the spirit of Marx at the expense of the doctrine, and he was ahead of his time in this respect. We have seen how difficult it can be, even for present-day Marxists such as Wood, to give up the 'theses', since to do so calls into question most of Marxism's history; but in the immediate aftermath of a revolution constructed on the authority of just those theses, Lukács's thought experiment was only too likely to lead him into trouble.

Lukács compounds the problem by suggesting that the dialectic itself is capable of modification over time:

It is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders. It is the conviction, moreover, that all attempts to surpass or 'improve' it have led and must lead to over-simplification, triviality and eclecticism.¹²

While there is the insistence that any changes must be consistent with the theory's original principles, the very fact that the theory is not to be regarded as in its final state could only provoke a negative response at a time when Marxism was actually being put into political practice. As Laclau and Mouffe are to discover in their turn, proposals to develop and expand Marxist concepts invariably rouse the Marxist establishment to anger. Any development or expansion of the theory threatens the authority of its guardians, after all, with their vested interest in defending the theory's 'purity'. The more one examines Lukács's thought experiment, the more contentious it becomes – especially in the context of communism's expansionist phase during the 1920s, when solidarity was at a premium.

The opening essay of *History and Class Consciousness*, 'What is Orthodox Marxism?', lays out the case for a relatively 'open' Marxism just at the time when it is being turned into a body of doctrine by Soviet theorists. Lukács displays an

anti-traditionalist, anti-bureaucratic streak to his thought that was to remain with him, in some form or other, for the bulk of his career, arguing that, ‘Marxist orthodoxy is no guardian of traditions, it is the eternally vigilant prophet proclaiming the relation between the tasks of the immediate present and the totality of historical process.’¹³ Orthodoxy to Lukács means a non-deterministic attitude towards historical process. Dialectical materialism is an essentially dynamic theory to be applied to events, the exact outcome of which cannot always be known beforehand. As well as being anti-traditionalist and anti-bureaucratic, Lukács is also anti-determinist, refusing to believe that the proletarian revolution will happen of its own accord. It has to be generated by the efforts of the working class, with the help of a communist party whose role is to respond creatively rather than dogmatically to events as they unfold: ‘A situation in which the “facts” speak out unmistakably for or against a definite course of action has never existed, and neither can nor will exist.’¹⁴ Although not quite spontaneism on the Luxemburg model, one can see how the increasingly control-conscious Soviet establishment might come to interpret Lukács’s version of the dialectic in that way.

Lukács’s iconoclastic approach to Marxist orthodoxy is also seen in his treatment of Engels. Daringly enough, Lukács severely criticises Engels for his philosophical failings, and somewhat presumptuously puts himself forward instead as the guardian of Marxism’s theoretical purity. Engels is taken to task for his misreading of Kant, in particular his failure to recognise the unknowable quality of the thing-in-itself (for Engels it was a hidden quality in nature which could be brought out by the application of science and technology). Unless the thing-in-itself is properly understood then the failings of idealist philosophy cannot really be addressed by Marxism, and Engels’s intervention simply proves to be philosophically embarrassing. The philosophical subtleties of the argument are less important (although Lukács is undoubtedly in the right on this issue) than the irreverence shown towards one of the founders of dialectical materialism. If such irreverence had been generally encouraged within Marxism, it would have turned out to be a far less dogmatic theory than it became, and certainly a less authoritarian one. Sadly, that spirit of disputation was soon suppressed within Soviet Marxism, and with it the possibility of creative development at the political level. If the criticisms of such a committed Marxist as Lukács could not be encompassed within orthodox Marxism, it is small wonder that the theory ossified into dogma.

One must not overstate the post-Marxist leanings of *History and Class Consciousness*: Lukács maintains an unshakeable belief in the historic role of the working class, as well as displaying a totalising world-view. The working class is regarded as a homogeneous entity uniquely placed to bring about the overthrow of capitalism, and class consciousness the key to bringing this about – under the guidance of the communist party. Lukács may not consider history a deterministic process, but he is in no doubt that it can be manipulated as a totality. Unorthodox Marxist though he may be for his time, he still displays the trademark Marxist desire to control social existence in its entirety; even if his vision of how to achieve that measure of control differs significantly from the Soviet model. What is crucial is that not even the smallest divergence from orthodoxy is permitted, and Lukács is faced with the stark choice

of recanting his beliefs or leaving the Marxist camp altogether. It is the dilemma that later faces Laclau and Mouffe, and it is characteristic of the rigidity of classical Marxism that no room for manoeuvre is allowed them either: one either swallows the theory whole, or one is dubbed a traitor to the cause, no middle position seems possible.

The academic bias of Western Marxism owes much to Lukács's emphasis on method in *History and Class Consciousness*. Western Marxism is often accused of being a primarily intellectual pursuit, more concerned with philosophical disputation than actual political struggle. One could say that, at its most abstract, it remains at the level of interpreting the world rather than changing it, thus falling short of Marx's vision for philosophy. Anderson traces this line of development back to the spread of fascism and Stalinism in the inter-war years, the combined effect of which was to cut the links between theory and practice in Western European Marxist movements. To Anderson, the move into a largely self-contained theoretical domain is a tragedy that has set back the cause of socialism in the West. Even more trenchantly, Anderson argues that the 'hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is a product of *defeat*'.¹⁵ We might conjecture that the pessimism that soon crept into Western Marxist discourse in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, and that for Anderson became such a pervasive feature of that tradition of thought, had its roots in such a realisation. Anderson's subsequent prognosis for a Western tradition blighted by its experience at the hands of fascism and then a resurgent post-war capitalism, is a bleak one:

When a truly revolutionary movement is born in a mature working class, the 'final shape' of theory will have no exact precedent. All that can be said is that when the masses themselves speak, theoreticians – of the sort the West has produced for fifty years – will necessarily be silent.¹⁶

On the plus side, Western Marxism has no legacy of political repression of its own to explain away (that remains the province of the Eastern bloc), and it has kept alive the spirit of debate within Marxism: a spirit that is largely missing in Soviet Marxism between the days of Stalin and perestroika. That commitment to debate, however, very often leads away from Marxism – as we shall soon discover with Adorno and Horkheimer, whose 'negative dialectics' (arguably the fullest expression of the pessimism that infects Western Marxist discourse) transcend orthodoxy in an even more radical manner than Lukács's early humanist-oriented Marxism does.

Lukács may have retracted the views put forward in *History and Class Consciousness*, but he continued to demonstrate a non-doctrinaire approach to Marxist theory. The 'Blum Theses' of 1928–9 (Blum being Lukács's party code-name at the time), went on to argue for a policy of cooperation with bourgeois political parties in Hungary, on the grounds that this offered the best hope for the Hungarian communist party in the political circumstances then prevailing.¹⁷ Lukács's prefiguration of Eurocommunism led to yet more condemnation by the Soviet establishment, and his subsequent withdrawal from official political life until a brief return during the Hungarian uprising of 1956. For the next few decades he concentrated on

literary and philosophical studies, although even here he managed to come into conflict with orthodox Marxism and its theory of socialist realism, with the latter's memorable injunction on the author to be an 'engineer of human souls'.¹⁸

Lukács's reading of literary history steered clear of the crudeness found in much Soviet aesthetics, where an artist's political affiliation tended to dictate the aesthetic value assigned to his or her work. Lukács was more than willing to praise bourgeois, and even reactionary, authors, as long as they communicated some sense of historical process in their writings. He could champion the work of Sir Walter Scott, since Scott's work, particularly his sequence of Scottish novels, demonstrated what was involved in the transition from feudalism to modern bourgeois culture despite the author's essentially romanticised view of the past. Scott's personally conservative politics did not prevent him from being a source of insight as to the workings of socio-historical process, and, as such, necessary reading for Marxist scholars. Lukács's ability to see beneath the surface of Scott's work, an early version of 'reading against the grain', marks off his work from the socialist realist school, who show nothing of the subtlety, and relative open-mindedness, that Lukács can bring to textual interpretation. A similar approach is adopted to the work of more modern bourgeois writers such as Thomas Mann. It is tempting to speculate on what Lukács might have achieved within a more flexible political system than the Soviet Empire turned out to be.

Lukács's championship of Hegel also landed him in trouble with the guardians of orthodoxy. *History and Class Consciousness* was felt to be too much under the influence of Hegel, who is certainly a dominant presence in Lukács's early thought. Works such as *The Theory of the Novel* bear the unmistakable mark of Hegel's ideas, and even after the furore caused by *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács continued to draw on Hegel for inspiration, although he felt compelled to 'Marxise' him in order to placate the Soviet authorities. *The Young Hegel* is a product of this double existence he was forced to lead. Lukács identifies an interest in English economic theory in Hegel's early work, and decides that element provides a basis for a materialist philosophy to build upon, even if Hegel does lapse back into idealism in later career. The concentration on Hegel's 'economic' interests proved to be thoroughly acceptable to the Soviet establishment, and led to a doctorate in philosophy from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, although the picture of Hegel as a proto-Marxist has since found little support outside the Marxist community. Whether Lukács's exercise in rehabilitation succeeds in exorcising Hegel's 'ghost' from Marxism is debatable, however, and the latter will continue to have a problematical relationship to the Marxist dialectic. Orthodox Marxists have remained very wary of Hegel, whereas the unorthodox tend to embrace his philosophy with enthusiasm.

Imbued with the spirit of the early Lukács, the Frankfurt School carried on the campaign for a self-critical Marxism right up to, and arguably well beyond, the boundary with post-Marxism. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, for example, is later to be described by its translator as 'an apologia for deviationism, a Marxist thinker's explication of his inability to toe the lines laid down for proper Marxist thinking'.¹⁹ The collaboration between Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

demonstrates a similar inability to follow the prescribed party line, in its Nietzschean sense of pessimism about the current state of the world and the prospects for its future. For the authors, it is a state that can be traced back directly to the ideals of the Enlightenment – particularly the obsession with rational solutions and desire to exert control over the environment (including, crucially enough, human nature). The self-critical spirit is imperative, yet that spirit is in short supply in a world in the aftermath of Auschwitz, and it seems unlikely that Marxism will provide it, given that, as a product of the Enlightenment tradition, it shares that obsession with control. The anti-productionist sentiments of Baudrillard and Bahro communicate a similar antipathy to the control ethic that motivates so much of classical Marxist thought, and which Adorno and Horkheimer identify as central to the Enlightenment approach.

The legacy of the Enlightenment desire to control is a series of heavily administered societies around the globe, where human nature is no less the subject of bureaucratic control than the natural world in general:

The ticket thinking which is a product of industrialization and its advertising machine, extends to international relations. The choice by an individual citizen of the Communist or Fascist ticket is determined by the influence which the Red Army or the laboratories of the West have on him. The objectification by which the power structure (which is made possible only by the passivity of the masses) appears as an iron reality, has become so dense that any spontaneity or even a mere intimation of the true state of affairs becomes an unacceptable utopia, or deviant sectarianism.²⁰

It is striking that, even by this relatively early stage in the development of communism, Adorno and Horkheimer can envisage so little help arriving from that quarter. Although opposition to totalitarianism can never be completely eradicated, for the authors it is at a singularly low ebb as the world emerges from the Second World War. With the enthusiastic support of the ‘culture industry’, the Enlightenment cult of reason has become a cult of conformity. While critical of Marxism himself, as well as sympathetic to the plight that Adorno and Horkheimer found themselves in at this point, Habermas regards their stance in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as consistent with the defeatist strain in Western Marxism that he himself is striving to overcome: ‘they surrendered themselves to an uninhibited scepticism regarding reason, instead of weighing the grounds that cast doubt on this scepticism itself.’²¹

In *Negative Dialectics* the critique of the notion of unity, on which so much of Marxist thought depends, is extended even further, with Adorno describing his objective as the construction of an ‘anti-system’, which ‘attempts by means of logical consistency to substitute for the unity principle, and for the paramountcy of the supra-ordinated concept, the idea of what would be outside the sway of such unity’.²² Difference puts in yet another appearance in a manner which will inspire Derrida and the deconstructionist movement. Dialectics will be ‘freed’ from its association with the achievement of ‘something positive by means of negation’: an association

that holds good over the history of philosophy from Plato onwards.²³ Instead, for Adorno, dialectics ushers us into the world of ‘nonidentity thinking’, with contradiction revealing ‘the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived’.²⁴ In attacking the dialectic Adorno strikes at the very heart of classical Marxism, where the dialectic is the motor of history that guarantees progress to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the establishment of the Marxist utopia – not a *partial* (or even worse, unreliable) guide only, as Adorno is suggesting. We do seem to be heading into *post*-Marxist territory at such points, especially when Adorno insists that dialectics ‘cannot be maintained as a structure that will stay basic no matter how it is modified’.²⁵ The dialectic loses its law-like nature in such a reading, which is bound to raise fears amongst classical Marxists dependent on that property of the dialectic for the authority of their pronouncements on cultural and historical process. For that latter group, modification introduces an unwelcome element of contingency into such processes; not to mention unknowability, as when Adorno remarks that, ‘the subject is never quite the subject, and the object never quite the object; and yet the two are not pieced out of any third that transcends them.’²⁶ Teleology is simply removed from the dialectical equation.

The concept of totality is another victim of Adorno’s critique: ‘Totality is to be opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself – of the nonidentity it denies, according to its own concept. Negative dialectics is thus tied to the supreme categories of identitarian philosophy as its point of departure.’²⁷ To deny the possibility of apprehending totality is to call into question Marxism’s pretensions to control. If what we call totality always has a missing element, then clearly complete control becomes an illusion. Other socio-political theories might be able to live with this state of affairs, but not Marxism, which has traditionally made a fetish of totality – as well as its ability to exert control over the destiny of the social totality by its understanding of the nature of the dialectic underpinning it. Nonidentity thinking becomes a critique of ideology, on the grounds that ‘Identity is the primal form of ideology’ – and from that point of view Marxism is an ideology too, since it sees in dialectics a process whereby contradictions are overcome.²⁸ In the way that identity thinking operates closure on nonidentity it can be considered authoritarian in nature, and it is here that Adorno’s thought begins to project well past Marxism into a much more radical form of philosophical, and by implication political, vision. Dialectics can no longer be regarded as the means of resolving contradiction, rather it signals the ineradicable presence of contradiction within systems.

Aiming at what is different is going against the grain of Marxism, which seeks to reduce reality to conformity, where the same kind of class consciousness applies across cultural boundaries, and the dialectical movement of history has a determinable course that leads to a specific objective. In its orthodox manifestation the Marxist dialectic does not involve surprise; the objective can be prepared for in advance. Adorno makes clear his opposition to such a procedure when he argues that

a contradiction like the one between the definition which an individual knows as his own and his ‘role,’ the definition forced upon him by society when he would make his living – such a contradiction cannot be brought under any

unity without manipulation, without the insertion of some wretched cover concepts that will make the crucial differences vanish.²⁹

Making differences vanish is what bureaucracies are designed to do, and that is a criticism applying to both Eastern and Western societies. Marxism certainly trades on a series of such 'cover concepts' to manipulate the individual into her historical role: class consciousness, hegemony, totality, and the one Adorno is most concerned with problematising in this instance, dialectical resolution. Nonidentity thinking undermines the authority felt to be invested in all such concepts, as well as the whole project of a totalising theory:

The thoughts of transcendental apperception or of Being could satisfy philosophers as long as they found those concepts identical with their own thoughts. Once we dismiss such identity in principle, the peace of the concept as an Ultimate will be engulfed in the fall of the identity. Since the basic character of every general concept dissolves in the face of distinct entity, a total philosophy is no longer to be hoped for.³⁰

If a total philosophy is no longer to be hoped for, one wonders what role, if any, Marxism can have in a post-Auschwitz society where Adorno queries whether philosophy itself can continue at all. At such points Adorno has thought himself through to the other side of Marxism (as well as the Enlightenment project), and has nothing more comforting to offer us than an 'anti-system', whose existence mocks all the efforts undertaken in the name of Marxism over the course of more than a century. Adorno continues to be critical of bourgeois society, but we emerge from *Negative Dialectics* with no sense that dialectical philosophy as we have known it provides us with the tools to overcome that form of society. In its official form as communism, it reaps only scorn from Adorno, who sees no salvation in the political practices of the Soviet empire, where the centralisation that Luxemburg warned against has come to pass.

In the sheer negativity of its 'apologia for deviationism', *Negative Dialectics* seems to herald the birth of *post-Marxism*. What else are we to make of such statements as, 'Brecht's line – that the party has a thousand eyes while the individual has but two – is as false as any bromide ever. A dissenter's exact imagination can see more than a thousand eyes peering through the same pink spectacles, confusing what they see with universal truth, and regressing'³¹ The emphasis on the experience of the 'dissenter' is revealing, because internal dissent has been frowned upon within Marxism in favour of the collectivist ethic. One either has class consciousness or false consciousness, and dissent belongs to the latter category. Adorno destroys most of the philosophical basis for Marxism, replacing it with a scepticism calculated to annoy political activists trained to think in terms of the good of the collective. *Negative Dialectics* is steeped in a disenchantment that holds out little immediate hope for human liberation.

Not every critic of identity thinking believes the critique need lead to such pessimistic conclusions, with Roy Bhaskar for one arguing that 'a rounded emphasis

on reality must make room for both structure and difference, contradiction and change, totality and reflexivity, desire and eudaimonia'.³² The dialectic is a much more positive phenomenon in Bhaskar (he is careful to discriminate between the several different kinds of dialectic, some good, some bad), describing 'the yearning for freedom and the transformative negation of constraints on it'.³³ Bhaskar's theories of the dialectic will be considered in more detail in chapter 9, but he provides an interesting corrective to the gloomy prognostications of Adorno (whose work he nevertheless admires). The more positive attitude to the dialectic that we find in Bhaskar perhaps reflects the more open context of discussion about such issues in the wake of post-Marxism and postmodernism. Whereas Adorno had cut a lonely figure in his day, Bhaskar can assume a more receptive audience after the various experiments in nonidentity thinking by poststructuralists such as Derrida. Bhaskar is conducting what we might call a 'campaign for "real negation"' (the latter his term, defined as 'the *presence . . . of an absence*'), where it is argued that '[n]egative is a condition for positive being'; which does suggest that nonidentity thinking can be pushed past the point of Adornian disenchantment to become the route to socio-political emancipation.³⁴

Marx's desire to change the world is interpreted by Adorno as a form of control comparable to the bourgeois desire to exert domination over nature. In any such programme contradiction must be brought under control as well, with closure being operated on whatever threatens that control. Freedom becomes a prime casualty of this programme, with Adorno referring to the revealing comment of Engels that, 'Freedom thus consists in our control, based upon our knowledge of the natural necessities, of ourselves and of external nature; it is thus necessarily a product of historic evolution.'³⁵ It is a comment which, in the light of communism's subsequent development, takes on a more disturbing character. If control is the goal of historical evolution then dissent can easily come to be regarded as unnatural, and conformity to authority as the only proper expression of freedom. It is a small step from that position to a repressive social totality of the kind that thrives in fascist and communist societies. In the case of the latter we have then the unhappy situation of 'the revolution's failure even where it succeeded', with universal history and economic determinism being deployed to subdue all dissent.³⁶ This is Engels's freedom-as-control with a vengeance, and it is what negative dialectics sets its face against.

Negative Dialectics is an intemperate work, highly critical of most of the major figures in Marxist thought at one point or other. Dialectical materialism is savaged as a concept, as is identity, totality and communism. Dialectics is treated as a confidence trick by which ideology maintains its hold over us: a process where contradiction is always resolved and positive outcomes achieved. Adorno is invariably opposed to such positivism, and negative dialectics resolutely refuses to play that game. Dissent becomes a matter of resistance to the ideological drive to totalise and universalise:

The reigning consensus puts the universal in the right because of the mere form of its universality. Universality, itself a concept, comes thus to be conceptless and inimical to reflection; for the mind to perceive and to name that side of it is the first condition of resistance and a modest beginning of practice.³⁷

From such 'modest beginnings' will post-Marxism emerge.

Adorno's aesthetic beliefs also bring him into collision with classical Marxism in that he espoused the cause of modernism, despite the fact that the Soviet authorities, from the days of Stalin onwards, were implacably opposed to this movement in all of the arts. *The Philosophy of Modern Music* offers a spirited defence of the work of Arnold Schoenberg, whose 'serial' music represented just about everything the Soviet authorities disliked about modernism, being almost militantly intellectual and inaccessible to the mass audience. Schoenberg's music, with its uncompromising rejection of past forms and methods, constitutes a break with an exhausted culture as far as Adorno is concerned, and he applauds its revolutionary zeal. From Adorno's perspective it is as necessary to reject previous artistic styles as it is previous political ones, and Schoenberg shows the way in his refusal to abide by convention. Those composers who continue to use tonality are, in effect, upholding bourgeois cultural values that are repressive to the bulk of Western society: 'It is not simply that these sounds are antiquated and untimely, but that they are false, They no longer fulfill their function.'³⁸ Considering that composers in the Soviet Union were at the time actively being prohibited from writing in any other way *but* the tonal, this is a brave position for a Marxist critic to adopt. Soviet aesthetic policy in general reveals itself to be obsessively control-minded, with a conception of the arts that reduces it to the level of propaganda on behalf of the state – artists as 'engineers of human souls' in the cause of socialism. To describe nineteenth-century tonality, as Adorno does, as having become a series of mere clichés, is to confront the Soviet aesthetic authorities head on. There is one irony to be noted in this championship of the cause of Schoenberg, however, and it is that serialism steadily developed into a very restrictive style, where the goal became total control by the composer over all the elements of musical composition such that they could be reduced to a small number of predictable patterns. Eventually, serial composition was to be criticised by new generations of composers for its highly regimented, in effect, totalitarian approach to composition that offered minimal scope for the creative imagination.

Marcuse, too, can be considered guilty of 'deviationism' in his later work ('petty-bourgeois anarchism' according to one critic³⁹), where traditional Marxist categories are challenged and altered, and artistic experimentation embraced with enthusiasm. Writing in an American context which fails to conform to the standard Marxist pattern, Marcuse maintains that Marxism has to be rethought if capitalism is ever successfully to be confronted. The notion of class consciousness, for example, needs to be reconsidered in this new habitat. For Marcuse, it is not just the working class which is exploited by capitalism, the middle class is also. In what is certainly a deviationist move, the anti-capitalist class now includes the bourgeoisie, as Marcuse consciously strives to widen the basis of opposition to a capitalism far more entrenched than it ever was in Marx's day.⁴⁰

One-Dimensional Man tackles various issues that have since become staples of the post-Marxist repertoire: the conflict between spontaneity and ultra-rationality in advanced Western societies; the lapsing of effective dissent against liberal capitalism; the decline of the working class as the principle agent of socio-political

transformation; the increasing inability of Marxist categories to reflect changing historical circumstances. Marcuse maintains that the 'containment of social change is perhaps the most singular achievement of advanced industrial society': an argument later picked up on by Bauman, when considering the implications of the collapse of communism for a *post*-industrial society in *Intimations of Postmodernity*.⁴¹ Essentially, Marcuse is grappling with the problem of hegemony, arguing that this is now as much an aspect of socialism as it traditionally was of capitalism. Given that professedly Marxist societies are becoming resistant to political change as well, we are forced to rethink our Marxist principles, although Marcuse affirms his ultimate commitment to these: 'the critical analysis continues to insist that the need for qualitative change is as pressing as ever before. . . . The distinction between true and false consciousness, real and immediate interest still is meaningful.'⁴² The continuing belief in the concept of false consciousness alone would indicate that we remain within broadly Marxist parameters, yet Marcuse is testing the boundaries of orthodox Marxism in advancing the notion that categories such as 'class' and the 'individual' are becoming increasingly problematical. We can no longer depend on such categories in our cultural analyses: they fail to map onto the actual state of affairs in a changing world. Despite the generally pessimistic picture that Marcuse paints of a society apparently able to contain and defuse dissent more or less at will, and with no obvious mass movement to offer resistance, he can still find some grounds for optimism in what one commentator has referred to as his otherwise 'bleak polemic', identifying counter-cultural trends under the surface of our society with the potential to destroy it in the longer term.⁴³ The goal is to bring about the appearance of 'an essentially new historical Subject', even if the institutions of a one-dimensional culture actively conspire against that.⁴⁴

Marcuse is concerned to unmask the 'new forms of control' that mark out mid-twentieth century societies, claiming that 'A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress'.⁴⁵ With the critical function largely eradicated, we have that nightmare of the left: a totalitarian society which commands the loyalty of its citizens with a minimum of force or overt persuasion. We are confronted by a hegemony which it seems to almost everyone's advantage to maintain in place. When communism collapses a couple of decades later, we find ourselves faced with an even more successful and entrenched version of that hegemony: what Bauman is to call 'living without an alternative'.⁴⁶ In Marcuse's reading, we are colluding in our own servitude by pursuing the satisfaction of the false needs that a one-dimensional society systematically, and cynically, promotes as part of its method of controlling individuals. Social controls have been internalised to the point where even protest against the system has been devalued, being reduced to the level of individual gesture. For all practical purposes, there appears to be no way to escape the system.

This condition extends even to the Western European communist parties, whose drift towards Eurocommunism is for Marcuse another symptom of the triumph of one-dimensionality. Marcuse is enough of a purist not to want to see Marxism cooperating with the enemy, but undogmatic enough to realise that Marxism is also in dire need of revitalisation to combat the unprecedented success of advanced

industrial capitalism as a cultural form. One could draw different conclusions than Marcuse does from the available evidence, of course; perhaps querying whether the unprecedented success enjoyed by the enemy is a comment on the weakness of one's own theory, or on the concept of human nature embedded in it (why is it that individuals are so easily bought off by 'false needs'?). For Marcuse, however, the triumph of capitalism is a signal to redouble his efforts on behalf of left-wing dissent, and he comes across as an interesting combination of fundamentalism and radicalism: someone who opens the door to post-Marxism, without ever quite going through it himself.

Post-1968, Marcuse, one of the champions of the 'Great Refusal' symbolised by the *événements*, can sound even less orthodox, arguing in *An Essay on Liberation* that the new militants have taken on the mantle of early communism, with their enemy becoming all those institutions, such as later communism, which seek to repress and control the individual in the name of the collective will. Repressive bureaucracies, it is clear, can lie on either side of the socialist divide. Marcuse is dismissive of the tradition of Marxist thought that has led to this pass, arguing that, in the struggle against capital, 'the critical theory which is to guide political practice still lags behind. Marx and Engels refrained from developing concrete concepts of the possible forms of freedom in a socialist society; today, such restraint no longer seems justified'.⁴⁷ The implication is clear, and profoundly critical of the orthodox tradition: freedom does not exist in communist societies, and Marxism equals authoritarianism by the later twentieth century. It is as if Marcuse has written off orthodox Marxism completely, as if 'liberation' has gone into hibernation between Marx and the 1960s, and we can note echoes of spontaneism yet again (although Marcuse can also warn against this phenomenon on occasion). 'The growth of the productive forces suggests possibilities of human liberty very different from, and beyond those envisaged at the earlier stage', and that demands unorthodox responses of the kind that classical Marxism can only regard as deeply suspect.⁴⁸ At least implicitly, Marcuse has edged into post-Marxist territory here, and there is a noticeable lack of sympathy with established methods and assumptions on his part that prefigures the iconoclasm of Laclau and Mouffe. We are now entering into an era featuring 'a new sensibility' that invites new forms of political expression.⁴⁹

Marcuse's utopian vision looks very dated now, and Western culture since the 1960s certainly has not moved in the direction that he thought most desirable. While it may have rejected authoritarian socialism of the kind that he disliked, it has not been in order to move on to a less capitalist, less exploitative, kind of society; quite the reverse, and if the intervening years of Thatcherism and Reaganism have demonstrated anything, it is just how exhausted traditional left-wing culture has become. Post-Marxism is a shock waiting to happen. Nevertheless, *An Essay in Liberation* registers an impatience with an outmoded tradition that we have come to recognise as characteristically post-Marxist, and Marcuse is in no doubt about the necessity for transcending orthodox Marxism in the search for liberation. Already 'Marxism' and 'liberation' are beginning to seem mutually exclusive terms, although even Marcuse sometimes feels the need to curb how liberation is expressed at the level of the individual. As he remarks slightly later in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*:

Spontaneity does not contradict authority: inasmuch as revolutionary practice is the explosion of *vital needs* . . . it is rooted in spontaneity – but this spontaneity can be *deceptive*: it can be the result of the introjection of social needs required by the established order but militating against the liberation of the human being. This is today the case to an unprecedented extent. The intensive indoctrination and management of the people call for an intensive counter-education and organization. And this very necessity is confronted with the antiauthoritarian tendencies among the New Left.⁵⁰

Perhaps we can detect a residual orthodox Marxist desire to exert control at such points that would mark Marcuse off from the more radical critics of orthodoxy in the post-Marxist camp. In his suspicion of such tendencies one senses a gap opening up between old and new left – no matter how unorthodox a member of the old left Marcuse himself may be. For all his radicalism Marcuse is still thinking within Marxist parameters, and cannot quite rid himself of the ‘control’ mind-set. There is a worry that individuals will deviate from the ‘correct’ collective consciousness felt to be necessary to bring about the downfall of capitalism: ‘the bourgeois individual is not overcome by simply refusing social performance, by dropping out and living one’s own style of life’, Marcuse warns in what must have sounded suspiciously like the voice of the authoritarian past to much of the new left.⁵¹ Spontaneism continues to have a problematical character for the Marxist theorist, who can appreciate its revolutionary implications while remaining very wary of its lack of theoretical grounding. The general fear is that spontaneism really equals chaos, and no supporter of Enlightenment-derived theory can be sanguine about the possibility of such a collapse into the irrational.

What the American Marcuse will not do is defend the record of Soviet Marxism. There will be no apology, of the kind that Western Marxists so often feel moved to provide with regard to the USSR, offered in his study *Soviet Marxism*. What Soviet Marxism, the first and most sustained attempt to turn Marxist philosophy into socio-political practice, reveals to us is the gap between theory and reality that is so to exercise post-Marxists like Laclau and Mouffe. Soviet Marxism is seen to depend on a Leninist interpretation, which diverges from the original theory in certain critical ways, particularly as regards the role of the communist party in the revolutionary state. Given the peculiarities of the Russian situation (relatively small proletariat, very uneven socio-economic development), the party comes to take on the authority of the masses in a way that for Marcuse sets the basis for the later Stalinist state, where we find those features that have since led communism into such disrepute: ‘the steady growth of totalitarianism and authoritarian centralization . . . the growth of the dictatorship not of but over the proletariat and the peasantry’.⁵² It is not Marxism that comes off badly from this analysis, but its Soviet variant; another instance of the fault being felt to lie with the interpretation rather than with the theory itself. When the original theory is compared to the Leninist–Stalinist interpretation it is always to the latter’s detriment. Marcuse shows himself acutely aware of just how much damage Soviet Marxism has done to the Marxist cause in general, but stops short of condemning the latter on the basis of the sins of the former. Rather, Lenin and Stalin are to be detached from Marx.

Marcuse's championship of artistic experiment also serves to distance him from the orthodox tradition, which in his lifetime was still officially committed to the principles of socialist realism.⁵³ Proponents of the latter regarded virtually all artistic experiment as elitist, and remained anti-modernist in outlook in defiance to what was happening in the Western artistic world as the twentieth century advanced. Even Lukács, no socialist realist in the orthodox sense (and in post-Stalinist times an outright critic of the aesthetic), was to be found on the side of the anti-modernists. Marcuse's aesthetic beliefs indicate a desire to go beyond Marxist orthodoxy in this realm as well: a desire to challenge received wisdom and traditional assumptions that in his opinion amount to a betrayal of Marxism's revolutionary ideals. He is in company with Adorno, Brecht and Benjamin, all of whom had taken the side of modernism in their aesthetic theories, challenging the received wisdom of the socialist realist aesthetic which regarded modernism as fundamentally elitist and anti-socialist.

Ernst Bloch's defence of expressionism also ran counter to the increasingly dominant realist tradition in Marxist aesthetics, bringing him into conflict with Lukács, for whom Bloch was guilty of exhibiting a form of false consciousness with regard to art. Expressionists and surrealists may well succeed in communicating the chaotic and alienating qualities of modern life in their work, but for a defender of realism like Lukács, to champion movements such as these is a case of confusing symptoms with real causes. Bloch had objected to Lukács's identification of expressionism with fascism, treating the former instead as counter-cultural in import and querying the obsession with realism amongst orthodox Marxists – and even somewhat unorthodox ones such as Lukács himself was in this period. Realism has been transformed into dogma in a way that threatens the integrity of the arts, as well as the freedom traditionally associated with artistic creation:

Given such an attitude, what recent artistic experiments can possibly avoid being censured? They must all be summarily condemned as aspects of the decay of capitalism – not just in part, which might not be unreasonable, but wholesale, one hundred per cent. The result is that there can be no such thing as an avant garde within late capitalist society: anticipatory movements in the superstructure are disqualified from possessing any truth. That is the logic of an approach which paints everything in black and white – one hardly likely to do justice to reality, indeed even to answer the needs of propaganda.⁵⁴

Although still defining himself as a Marxist, Bloch opens up some post-Marxist perspectives in this passage with its veiled attack on the inflexibility and narrowness of vision of orthodox Marxism. Reality is less straightforward to Bloch than it is to the orthodox, less of a graspable totality. Neither is the superstructure a mere reflection of the base as in the more mechanical forms of Marxist theory: it can be 'anticipatory' and possess its own inner integrity. The economic bias to Marxism that is so to alienate post-Marxists is coming under attack here. Bloch also displays an impatience with the reduction of art to politics, as well as the simplistic quality

of much of that politics. Expressionism becomes a way of exploring the ‘fissures’ and ‘crevices’ of reality that a totalising Marxism would rather pretend did not exist.⁵⁵

To focus on fissures and crevices is to register a protest against the totalising imperative, and, by extension, the control-oriented mind-set that underpins it. Lukács’s counter-attack becomes only too easy to understand: Bloch is calling into question arguably the most fundamental aspect of the Marxist world-vision. If the world is not the totality that orthodox Marxism pictures it, then it will fail to be as susceptible to socio-political manipulation as predicted – at which point the Marxist project as it is understood at the time begins to collapse. Marxism is not in the habit of regarding itself as a partial solution subject to the vagaries of an unpredictable reality: post-Marxism, on the other hand, proceeds from just that premise, with no commitment to forcing reality to conform to prearranged theses. The fact that we are still officially in ‘late capitalist society’ several decades after Bloch wrote the above in 1938 (with Jameson treating postmodernism as ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism’, for example), must give some pause for thought as to the nature of that totality and our ability to manipulate it in any crudely mechanical fashion. ‘Late’ gives the impression that capitalism’s demise is imminent, but after several generations of effort that can seem like wishful thinking – a false consciousness internal to classical Marxism. Post-Marxism is an acknowledgement that the wishful thinking has to stop, and that other more radical tactics, and ‘redimensionings’, have to be tried.

As Bloch’s example shows, the arts have a peculiar capacity to problematise Marxist theory, with fissures and crevices displaying an alarming propensity to crop up in aesthetic debate. It becomes easier for the Marxist establishment to insist that artists confine themselves to being ‘engineers of human souls’ than to contemplate the challenge that such fissures and crevices pose to the purity of their theory. An engineer of human souls steers well clear of such trouble spots, producing instead the theory-supporting propaganda that Bloch dismisses as both aesthetically and politically worthless. Socialist realism becomes a barrier between us and the real world, with Bloch railing against ‘abstract methods of thought which seek to skim over recent decades of our cultural history, ignoring everything which is not purely proletarian’.⁵⁶ This will become a well-worn refrain of post-Marxism – that the theory is out of synchrony with reality, that it is peddling a false image of that reality. When even some of its firmest supporters reach such a conclusion then a theory is heading for trouble, although, as we know, the official solution invariably seems to be not to reconsider the bases of the theory but to discredit the person making the observation. Lukács’s treatment of Bloch, with its suggestion that he has, even if only unwittingly, gone over to the enemy, is what we come to expect when the theory is called into question in any fundamental way. Reality can only be what the theory says it must be: the totality must be maintained, otherwise Marxism loses its power and authority. Fissures and crevices simply cannot be allowed into the orthodox picture.

The frustration with Marxist orthodoxy so evident in Bloch’s aesthetic writings is also present in those of Brecht, particularly when the subject of debate is Lukács, who comes to symbolise for Brecht the tyrannical side of Marxist aesthetics. Lukács’s prescriptions are condemned as reactionary; a case of applying old remedies to new problems:

Writers just have to keep to the Old Masters, produce a rich life of the spirit, hold back the pace of events by a slow narrative, bring the individual back to the centre of the stage, and so on. Here specific instructions dwindle into an indistinct murmur. That his proposals are impracticable is obvious.⁵⁷

Brecht points out that such prescriptions are of no aid to his own literary practice, that each work he writes requires a different formal approach according to its themes and objectives, and that in consequence he cannot rely on past models as Lukács is repeatedly urging all socialist writers to do. The case is put for experiment, with Brecht demanding 'revolution, not evolution' from writers, and denouncing those who advocate censorship (by now becoming a considerable problem for artists in the Soviet Union).⁵⁸ While allowing that not all experiment necessarily leads somewhere fruitful, Brecht is adamant that rules will be counter-productive in the arts, and that realism is not as straightforward an issue as most Marxist aesthetic theorists would like to believe:

In no circumstances can the necessary guide-lines for a practical definition of realism be derived from literary works alone. . . . Realism is an issue not only for literature: it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such – as a matter of general human interest.⁵⁹

Neither is it just realism that is not to be regarded as a settled issue. More contentiously, reality itself is possibly more complex, more in need of continuing interpretation, than orthodox Marxism implies. Marxism is for Brecht still an open project, rather than a set body of doctrine which infallibly yields the right answer on application to any and all socio-political problems. Artists above all must be left free to make new connections and articulations between theory and reality in order to further our understanding of the world around us.

To identify reactionary trends in Marxist aesthetics is to open up the possibility of finding the same in Marxist theory in general. When Brecht declares that, 'We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master', he raises yet again the spectre of spontaneism: of individuals acting outside the prescriptions, and thus the control, of the Marxist political elite.⁶⁰ We know how unacceptable to the elite this phenomenon is (even Brecht himself would condemn it during the 1953 workers' uprising in East Germany⁶¹), and Brecht comes close to open revolt against orthodoxy at this point. Certainly, he is in revolt against the concept of socialist realism: 'Realism is not a mere question of form. Were we to copy the style of these realists, we would no longer be realists.'⁶² Given the obsession with control in official Marxist circles this is a defiant assertion: little less than a clarion call for creative artists to disregard what their Soviet masters, such as Zhdanov, are telling them. It is also, by implication, an attack on the authority of Marxist theory in a more general sense, with Brecht refusing to accept uncritically the model of social reality, and thus the philosophy underpinning it, that orthodoxy is promulgating. Brecht's

stance is openly disrespectful to doctrinaire Marxism: 'New problems appear and demand new methods. Realism changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change.'⁶³ These may seem unexceptionable sentiments, but they cut right at the heart of Marxist orthodoxy. If realism is in a constant process of change, what price the theses of classical Marxism? Must these change also? If indeed they must, then their authority must be limited, which would not be good news for defenders of the faith. There are even certain parallels to be noted with Lukács here, who in *History and Class Consciousness* had earlier broached the possibility of a theses-free Marxism. Brecht, however, pushes his thought experiment much further to challenge not just the theses themselves but the methods for devising those theses. It is hardly surprising that this brings him into collision with a by-now repentant Lukács, concerned above all to stay within the Marxist fold in the fight against fascism.

What Brecht displays is the restlessness of the creative artist, the desire to break new ground and prevent oneself from becoming stale and predictable. He is the kind of figure that official Marxism is always likely to treat with suspicion (his later 'success' in communist East Germany notwithstanding); someone unwilling to submit to the control that the system is predicated upon. An entry from Benjamin's diary in 1938 brings this out even more clearly:

26 July. Brecht, last night: 'There can't be any doubt about it any longer: the struggle against ideology has become a new ideology.'⁶⁴

This is one of the great fears of left-wing intellectuals: that they have merely swapped one form of tyranny for another. To entertain such ideas is to open the door to post-Marxism, otherwise one becomes one of the despised intellectual caste that Lyotard argues is heavily responsible for maintaining most tyrannies in their place. The sheer fluidity of Brecht's thought in the 1930s, his ability to think the unthinkable and say the unsayable, poses a challenge to orthodox Marxism that calls forth stern resistance from the latter.

Bloch and Brecht, and the modernist trend within Marxist aesthetics and artistic practice in general, expose some deep fault lines within Marxist theory. What they reveal most starkly is orthodox Marxism's inability to cope with any significant change to its theoretical base – or even to countenance the possibility of *debate* about the constitution of that base. By Brecht and Bloch's time the theory is conceived of as a totality which is beyond need of interpretation, and a totality to be defended against any challenge to its assumed integrity. To take a more open-minded approach to the Marxist project, to treat it as a process in a continual state of becoming rather than a finished product, is to turn oneself into a maverick figure. Even the relatively mild challenge of a Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* must be met with severity; the control imperative swinging into action at the slightest provocation. Perhaps what the modernists most damningly reveal about classical Marxism is its lack of creativity. Already by the time Brecht comes onto the scene it has ossified; become the ideology that undermines its very reason for existence.

Adorno was later on in the 1950s to attack Lukács as a symbol of all that had gone wrong in Marxist aesthetics. Responding to Lukács's anti-modernist diatribe in *The*

Meaning of Contemporary Realism (1958), Adorno's assessment has a particularly vicious edge to it:

He acquiesced in the communist custom and disavowed his earlier writings. He took the crudest criticisms from the Party hierarchy to heart, twisting Hegelian motifs and turning them against himself; and for decades on end he laboured in a series of books and essays to adapt his obviously unimpaired talents to the unrelieved sterility of Soviet claptrap, which in the meantime had degraded the philosophy it proclaimed to the level of a mere instrument in the service of its rule.⁶⁵

Given Lukács's known opposition to official socialist realism (acknowledged grudgingly by Adorno as 'timid'⁶⁶), this is a less than fair interpretation of the former's career. It does communicate, however, the growing uneasiness about Soviet Marxism amongst the Western European left that will fuel the development of post-Marxism. In its Soviet guise, Marxism is seen to be authoritarian and totalitarian; an ossified doctrine that represses rather than liberates, and that is exercising a stranglehold on the artistic and intellectual imaginary. Lukács sums up the damage done by the system on creative thought, being for Adorno a critic who 'speaks with the voice of the dogmatic professor who knows he cannot be interrupted'.⁶⁷ Debate is at an end, and we are left with an unchallengeable theory. It is not such a large step from finding fatal flaws in the Soviet version of the theory to finding fatal flaws in Marxism in general: and Adorno is well on his way to that position by this stage of his life. Even if Lukács's relationship to Marxism is more complicated than Adorno allows, he does demonstrate the sacrifices that the theory can come to demand of even its most creative and committed exponents. As Adorno rightly points out, it is for his early, pre-self-censorship writings (such as *History and Class Consciousness*), that Lukács is respected in the West. There is a sad ring of truth to Adorno's final judgement on Lukács that

For all this, it is impossible to rid oneself of the feeling that here is a man who is desperately tugging at his chains, imagining all the while that their clanking heralds the onward march of the world-spirit. He remains dazzled by the power which would never take his insubordinate ideas to heart, even if it tolerated them.⁶⁸

Lukács is as much a victim of self-censorship as official censorship, and, in another twist to the concept, perhaps the victim of false consciousness as well: the false consciousness of refusing to acknowledge the theory's flaws to the extent of internalising them. Dogmatism replaces the confident iconoclasm of *History and Class Consciousness*, and Marxism becomes a case of protecting approved theses rather than liberating the exploited masses. From Luxemburg onwards, that party-inspired disposition towards closure will continue to be a major cause for concern for Marxism's internal dissenters.

6 Post-Marxism before post-Marxism

(II) Hybridising Marxism

Attempts to combine Marxism with other theories – Sartre with existentialism and Althusser with structuralism, to name two of the more notable cases – tend to suggest that Marxism requires periodic updating, and perhaps even that it is incomplete in some critical sense. Either way, such attempts encourage an attitude of experiment towards the Marxist corpus that is later to become the hallmark of post-Marxism. The existentialist-tinged Marxism of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, for example, while ostensibly designed to reconcile the theories, nevertheless succeeds in opening up some fissures within Marxist theory that can be exploited by later, more critically inclined thinkers. Castoriadis's work, as we shall see below, implies an existentialist dimension, and elements of existentialist thought can be found in many of the postmoderns (Lyotard being a particular case in point). Whether Sartre can be considered as a voice from *within* Marxism is a moot point, but in the revisions it undertakes of key principles, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* poses some interesting challenges to classical Marxist thought, while on the face of it trying to prove the author's Marxist credentials.

As we would expect from his earlier existentialist works, Sartre is very much concerned with the subject in the *Critique*, and here several problems immediately arise. The existentialist subject is much less culture-bound than her Marxist counterpart; more 'free' in her ability to make undetermined choices at any one point in her life. There is no sense of a class consciousness dictating certain actions at the expense of others in existentialism, nor of an inevitable progression to history. Contingency looms larger than it ever can in the classical Marxist world, and the subject of *Being and Nothingness* has, at least in theory, more control over the direction of her life than does the Marxist worker. If, as Sartre contends, 'We are not free to cease being free', then that would suggest we are in dialogue with historical process rather than a mere channel for it to work through.¹ To make such beliefs mesh with Marxism is no mean task; as Adorno points out, Sartre tends to see the subject existing in the abstract: 'Consequently, social conditions came in Sartre's plays to be topical adjuncts, at best; structurally, they do hardly more than provide an occasion for the action.'²

Sartre regards the *Critique* as an intervention into a crisis for Marxist thought, where dialectical reason, 'both a type of rationality and the transcendence of all

types of rationality', has declined into a dogmatism leaving mankind apparently at the mercy of a deterministic dialectic operating through history and nature.³ As so often in Marxist history, Hegel is to blame, with his assumption that his philosophy marked 'the beginning of the end of History'.⁴ Sartre strongly opposes this decline into determinism and its subordination of the individual to historical necessity, since this denies the value of human action or the possibility of choosing a particular course of action: 'the universe becomes a dream if the dialectic controls man from outside, as his unconditioned law'.⁵ Neither is Sartre happy at dealing with humanity in the abstract, arguing that

there is no such thing as man; there are people, wholly defined by their society and by the historical movement which carries them along; if we do not wish the dialectic to become a divine law again, a metaphysical fate, it must proceed *from individuals* and not from some kind of supra-individual ensemble.⁶

Even with the qualification about being 'defined by their society and historical movement', this opens up a significant gap between Sartre and orthodox Marxism, where class consciousness is just such a 'supra-individual ensemble'. The collective must always dominate in Marxism, which is supremely a theory of classes, and to emphasise the role of the individual is to raise, however obliquely, the spectre of spontaneism and the fear of loss of control at party level. For an existentialist, on the other hand, the dialectic must not predetermine what the individual does, and even where collective action occurs, it has to be rooted in individual choice:

in so far as the individuals in a given milieu are directly threatened, in practico-inert necessity, by the impossibility of life, their radical unity (in reappropriating this very impossibility for themselves as the possibility of dying humanly, or of the affirmation of man by his death) is the inflexible negation of this impossibility ('To live working or die fighting'); thus the group constitutes itself as the radical impossibility of living, which threatens serial multiplicity. But this new dialectic, in which freedom and necessity are now one, is not a new incarnation of the transcendental dialectic; it is a human construction whose sole agents are individual men as free activities.⁷

There is an arbitrary quality to such unity ('in so far as', 'a given milieu') that falls somewhat short of class-conscious revolutionary action, and a distinct lack of the sense of destiny that Marxism tends to imbue such action with in its historical context.

The insistence that individuals direct the course of the collective, rather than vice versa, relates back to Sartre's concept of commitment, where an individual freely commits herself to a larger cause such that it becomes her own. To engage in politics, or a revolution, is to commit oneself in this fashion, but the freedom to choose includes the freedom to choose *not* to commit oneself as well (even if this does run the risk of lapsing into bad faith). This is to introduce an element of uncertainty into the class struggle, which from an orthodox perspective would now become dependent on the whim of the individual. What for Sartre is an existential choice, is for

the orthodox a case of false consciousness. The class struggle is meant to have a necessary character that sweeps individuals along in its wake, rather than to be a series of individually made decisions which might not always be the right ones in the party's eyes. For individuals to be the source of group unity on the basis of existential choice, is for that group unity to be compromised as far as the central committee mentality is concerned. The Leninist vision of party unity could not operate on such principles; unquestioning loyalty is what is demanded instead, as Luxemburg complained, and individual agonising over choice would be perceived as weakness.

There is more than a hint of the 'little narrative' concept in Sartre's vision of 'radical unity', as well as a humanism that is out of synchrony with the way Marxist thought is developing in France, where Althusser's structural Marxism is bringing us 'history without a subject'. Sartre's existentialist Marxism arguably has more to recommend itself to a postmodernist, post-Marxist age than it did to the crisis of Marxism Sartre was addressing; although that age will want to take issue with his strong concept of the subject. Identity is a more problematical entity to the postmodernist than the existentialist, although both are rejecting the claims of determinism and neither is happy about the individual being reduced to the status of mere cipher in some transhistorical universal struggle. There is an implicit resistance to outside authority in Sartre that calls the Marxist project into question, no matter how hard he may strive to reconcile its objectives to those of existentialism. The hybrid ends up being far more existentialist than Marxist in character.

Althusser's development of a structural Marxism nevertheless played its part in encouraging the growth of post-Marxism – if against the grain of the author's intentions. We have already noted how, for Laclau and Mouffe, Althusser's emphasis on overdetermination implied a lack of essence on the part of both society and its agents, leaving him on the brink of poststructuralism. Structural Marxism is one of the more successful attempts to create a 'hybrid' Marxism that can take on board recent theoretical developments, and that suggests an unfinished character to Marxist theory. What differentiates it from Laclau and Mouffe's project is its continuing commitment to the basic principles of classical Marxism. Althusser is engaged in an exercise in clarification, whereby the underlying truth of Marx's texts is to be revealed by new 'reading' methods. It is a case of identifying where the line between scientific and non-scientific Marxism, the 'epistemological break', is to be drawn. Once we are in possession of this information we can see where the authority derives from in Marx's work. The epistemological break of the 1840s divides the Hegelian Marx from the scientific Marx, with Althusser being a staunch defender of Marxism's scientific character. Given that character, Marxism can be cleared of the charge of being an ideology, an entity which in Althusser's scheme of things is marked by blind-spots and internal contradictions hiding the real state of affairs from the citizens of a bourgeois state. Marxism, on the other hand, is the only true science of society, and as such becomes a source of authoritative pronouncements about how we should reorder ourselves politically to overcome economic exploitation by the capitalist class. Science still has that aura of objectivity for Althusser that removes it from the realm of mere interpretation.⁸

Somewhat ironically considering the fundamentalist cast of his project (Marx purified of errors of interpretation), Althusser's use of structuralist methodology creates various problems for Marxism, and could be said to open up some fissures within the theory that invite post-Marxist experiment. One of the most obvious dangers involved in the grafting of structuralism onto Marxism is that the former will make the latter an even more deterministic theory. Deep structures imply little scope for the exercise of free will, and can marginalise the human dimension to existence quite drastically – as critics of Althusser's structuralist Marxism were only too quick to point out, with their objection that it constituted 'history without a subject'.⁹ Althusser openly embraced the anti-humanism implied by the 'history without a subject' label, which serves to distance him from the predominantly humanist-oriented Enlightenment project, and in that sense might be said to be pointing past Marxism. The problem of determinism remains, however, and Althusser arguably takes modern Marxism to its limits in this respect, thus foregrounding an aspect of the theory with which many on the left are becoming increasingly discontented. Post-Marxists certainly want to reintroduce undetermined human action into politics, and 'history without a subject' is a dead end for such thinkers. Althusser's vision of 'Ideological State Apparatuses', backed up by a 'Repressive State Apparatus', working in concert to dictate how individuals behave in a capitalist society, leaves little space for the growth of dissent. It can always be objected, too, that scientific Marxism has made little headway against the development of such institutions, and that perhaps it has become predictable to the capitalist establishment, which has learned how to neutralise dissent by means of the various Ideological State Apparatuses. As with Marcuse, one can wonder whether the long-term success of capitalism is a comment on the theory set up to counter it; and as we noted above, calling it 'late' capitalism hardly resolves the problem either.

Althusser's theories were put to interesting use in the domain of literary aesthetics by his disciple Pierre Macherey. For Macherey, literary texts reveal the contradictions that an ideology manages to conceal from us in the 'spontaneousness' of everyday life. When read properly, that is 'against the grain', those contradictions become apparent on the page and we are able to recognise how our culture deceives us about the true nature of its power relations. In this case we can see how dissent *can* be constructed. Literature exposes the 'false resolution' ideology offers us to its hidden 'real debate'; although the problem always remains as to how ideologically brainwashed individuals would ever manage to develop the appropriate reading skills to promote the cause of dissent at all.¹⁰ The combination of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses would seem to be one with the power to defuse dissent at source, with individuals looking like mere pawns in the game. The theory depends very heavily on the notion of false consciousness; on individuals acting against their own best interests without knowing they are doing so. Ideological State Apparatuses are able to manipulate us pretty much at will, creating the kind of consciousness required to maintain the relevant ideology securely in power. Post-Marxism will register strong objections to this idea, with Laclau–Mouffe and Lyotard in particular challenging the vision of human nature that false consciousness promotes.

What needs to be confronted is the possibility, raised by Lyotard, that sometimes individuals choose, of their own free will, to go along with an ideology even if they can see that it has faults, and even involves dangers to their lives. A freely chosen capitalism ('late' or otherwise) poses more problems to Marxist theory than all the actions of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses.

Zizek provides a thought-provoking critique of Althusser's theory of ideology from his Lacanian-influenced perspective, in the course of which he provides a new twist to the problem of the subject who chooses the 'wrong' ideological option. For Zizek, there has to be some significant degree of collusion between the subject and the Ideological State Apparatus for the latter to have any purchase on his or her conduct:

Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machine of ideology is 'internalized' into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth; but we can learn from Pascal that this 'internalization', by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, that there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and that *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it*: it is precisely this non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism which confers on the Law its unconditional authority.¹¹

Ideology becomes a fantasy that we construct, rather than an imposition on us by various Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser's model is condemned as over-mechanistic; as not involving the subject in a meaningful way (a case not just of 'history without a subject' perhaps, but of 'ideology without a subject' as well). Ideology is to be regarded as 'a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our "reality" itself'.¹² Far from being interpellated by an ideology striving to disguise its inconsistencies from us, we ourselves are responsible for bridging the gaps in our system of belief. Zizek asks us to consider the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, where the real problem is not so much the discrepancy between appearance and reality, but our tendency to invest the Jews with the elements required to efface all such discrepancies:

The proper answer to anti-Semitism is therefore not 'Jews are really not like that' but 'the anti-Semitic idea of Jew has nothing to do with the Jews'; the ideological figure of a Jew is a way to stitch up the inconsistency of our own ideological system.¹³

The 'suturing' takes place at the level of the individual, therefore, rather than at that of the Ideological State Apparatuses, suggesting that we are more complicit with ideology than structural Marxism pictures us as being.

Zizek's model of ideology is both less and more worrying than that of Althusser. Less, in that it significantly scales down the power and influence thought to be wielded by the Ideological State Apparatuses, which look far less imposing from this

perspective than they do in structural Marxism; more, in that the enemy of socialism is now much more diffuse. It will no longer be enough to 'see through' the machinations of the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses (to read against their grain) in order to create the conditions for a successful social revolution: the problem lies elsewhere, within the human psyche and our desire to make ideology work despite its manifest failings. At this point the respective projects of Lacan and Marx diverge:

Herein lies the difference with Marxism: in the predominant Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is a *partial* gaze overlooking the *totality* of social relations, whereas in the Lacanian perspective ideology rather designates a *totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility*.¹⁴

What we continually come back to in Žižek is the notion of the subject as the subject-of-a-lack; hence the impossibility of the totalisation on which Marxism is structured. Hence also the scepticism with which the concept of false consciousness is regarded. In a Lacanian world something always escapes totalisation, and Marxism, in Žižek's reading, has a crucial blind-spot in this respect: it 'did not succeed in taking into account, coming to terms with, the surplus-object, the leftover of the Real . . . the leftover which embodies the fundamental, constitutive lack'.¹⁵ Because of this blind-spot, Marxism has failed to recognise the true nature of capitalism, which thrives on the very fact that it never constitutes a totality and need never acknowledge limits to its expansion. The presence of internal contradictions – for a classical Marxist a sign of the imminent collapse of the system – merely encourages capitalism to continue to develop. Since the "normal" state of capitalism is the permanent revolutionizing of its own conditions of existence', something more than the destabilisation of the Ideological State Apparatuses is required to bring down the system in the name of socialism.¹⁶ Althusser's failings on the topic of ideology invite a more sophisticated form of analysis that goes a long way to creating sympathetic conditions for post-Marxist reflection. One could even reach the disturbing conclusion from Žižek's analysis that capitalism is closer in spirit to our psyche than socialism is: less concerned to force us into a mould of total rationality. At the very least he is asking us to reconsider our relation to capital, and that does shift us into a post-Marxist framework.

Žižek is forced to conclude that Marx has failed too: failed 'to cope with the paradoxes of surplus-enjoyment'.¹⁷ Marxism, of course, can only see paradox in a negative light, as a threat to its belief in totality and therefore as a state to be overcome. Paradox, contradiction, lack, and excess, constitute a hostile landscape to a system as rooted in the ideals of the Enlightenment as Marxism is.

We have already considered how the 'last instance' thesis might also be pointing towards post-Marxism, in that it either hints at an internal contradiction within Marxist theory (a necessary condition which, by definition, can never occur), or some sleight-of-hand as to how one reaches one's theoretical objectives. The scientific side of Marxism is not much in evidence where this thesis is concerned, which has the effect of undermining the status of the base in the base/super-structure relationship. If the claim that the economic base really does determine

what goes on in the superstructure is merely an empty premise (Engels's use of it being summarily dismissed by Castoriadis, for example, as having 'scarcely any meaning' to talk of¹⁸), then that undermines the whole structure of Marxist theory – which plays right into the hands of post-Marxists such as Laclau and Mouffe. Given an undetermined superstructure there is everything to play for, and a host of possibilities as to how theory and events might be made to interact, and new theoretical articulations be constructed. There is much more room for theoretical manoeuvre in the superstructural domain, where areas such as the arts come into their own. The problem for classical Marxists is that without a determining economic base, they lose control of events by losing their predictive powers – and all the authority that traditionally accompanies these. Viewed from an orthodox position, a superstructure without a determining economic base (no matter how subtle and complex the determinations might prove to be in practice) is a free-for-all, in which Marxism can exert no special claim to authority. It is the postmodern world of competing little narratives where rhetoric becomes the currency, rather than theoretical rigour, and when that happens Marxism is no longer determining the ground of debate in the way that a control-minded theory desires.

Eurocommunism in retrospect can look like a dress rehearsal for post-Marxism, with the *rapprochement* between communist and bourgeois political parties a practical example of the new 'articulations' that Laclau and Mouffe will campaign for in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (as well as a latter-day version of the ill-fated 'Blum theses'). Italy proved to be the heartland of Eurocommunism, with the 'historic compromise' between the Italian Communist Party and the bourgeois political parties providing a model for Western European Marxism, as well as for the Eastern European alternative floated by Bahro. Communism thrived at local and regional level in Italy (as in the communist city council of Bologna, for example) within an overall context of bourgeois democracy, signalling a pragmatic side to the Eurocommunist initiative that prefigured the post-Marxist temperament.

Once again, we see a willingness to test the boundaries of Marxist thought, and, at least tacitly, to think the unthinkable about the theses of orthodoxy; although even Eurocommunism was not proof against the collapse of the Eastern bloc. Despite some limited success in Italy, one would have to say that it was an experiment that failed, creating almost as much dissension amongst Western European communist parties as did the machinations of the enemy bourgeois parties (the Italian Autonomy movement demonstrating just how deep the opposition to cooperation with the bourgeoisie could go in Italy itself). A similar initiative at a much earlier point might have yielded greater dividends, presenting Marxism as a pragmatic rather than control-minded theory, but by the time Eurocommunism was developed the damage was probably irreparable. The same point can be made about Bahro's attempt to introduce a Eurocommunist dimension to Eastern bloc thought: the right theory (possibly), but the wrong time. Reform from within remains the most elusive of ideals for Marxism.

While not exactly classical Marxists, *Socialisme ou barbarie* can nevertheless be described as an exercise in reform from within, and it is worth considering the role

played by the group in Marxism's decline as an intellectual force in Western Europe in the later twentieth century. The most important figures to emerge from the group were Cornelius Castoriadis, who will be considered below, and Jean-François Lyotard, whose tangled relationship with Marxism will be considered in more detail in chapter 7's survey of postmodern interventions into Marxist discourse; but the group's career as a whole provides an interesting case study of the dangers that internal dissent held for Marxism. The founding objective (undertaken as a reaction to the Fourth International's uncritical support of the Soviet Union) was to conduct a critique of Marxism from the inside, regardless of the consequences, and this was pursued with singular honesty to the point where the group itself broke up and its members went their separate ways – Lyotard to renounce Marxism for its failure to take libido into account, for example, and Castoriadis to announce, apparently without regret, that 'Marxism is dead as theory'.¹⁹

The critique of Marxism begun by Castoriadis within the *Socialisme ou barbarie* journal can be found fleshed out in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), a work published in French the year after Lyotard's anti-Marxist diatribe in *Libidinal Economy*, although parts of it were written in the early 1960s on the basis of debates begun in the 1950s. The emphasis is on the creative aspect of society, with Castoriadis pointing out that for him the imaginary refers to

the unceasing and essentially *undetermined* (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of 'something'. What we call 'reality' and 'rationality' are its works.²⁰

Marxism's totalising imperative is immediately put under stress by such a claim, which leaves considerable scope for personal initiative and interpretation. Castoriadis is adamant that each of us has to take personal responsibility for what we say, and that we cannot hide behind the authority of a theory (whether Marxism or otherwise). Whatever they may believe, political thinkers are speaking in their own name. In Castoriadis's assessment of Marxism, the theory is in some trouble: 'As for a rigorously rigorous theory, there is none in mathematics; how could there be one in politics? . . . the very idea of a complete and definitive theory is a pipe dream and a mystification.'²¹ Society should be the site of 'thoughtful doing', not the slavish performance of theoretical dictates drawn from a supposed master plan for socio-political development.²²

The Imaginary Institution of Society constitutes a chronicle of the author's alienation from Marxism. In Castoriadis's jaundiced view, Marxism has lost touch with its revolutionary roots, and in his writings from the 1950s onwards he prefigures many of the later complaints of the post-Marxist community. In a particularly damning criticism Marxism is accused of having declined into a mere ideology, with all the negative connotations such a status carries with it for the revolutionary-minded socialist:

for over 40 years Marxism has become an *ideology* in the very sense that Marx gave to this term: a set of ideas that relate to a reality not in order to shed light

on it and change it, but in order to veil it and to justify it in the imaginary, which permits people to say one thing and do another, to appear as other than they are.²³

The gist of Castoriadis's message is that society is a creative organism, theory an essentially oppressive one, and that our only long-term political hope lies in creativity. Marxism at its best escapes this stricture, in that, when it is at its best (as in the hands of Marx himself, 'a great economist even when he is wrong', in Castoriadis's back-handed compliment²⁴), it offers a devastating critique of ideology, and also demands an attitude of vigilant self-criticism in its followers that militates against the authoritarian impulse embedded in most theoretical programmes. But Marxism has not been at anything like its best for some time, and the stark choice facing us now is 'to choose between remaining Marxist and remaining revolutionaries'.²⁵ Marxist categories cannot aid us in our socio-political struggles, they have been bypassed by events and will fail us when used to explain historical process. That process is far too complex – that is, more creative, less determined (containing the 'non-causal' as well as the causal²⁶) – to be reduced to the schematics of Marxist theory, with its tendency to think in terms of large amorphous 'forces' overriding individual human action at any one point. No two societies are ever similar enough for such an analysis to be valid anyway. Culture is a creative rather than a mechanical process, in which values and objectives vary, often quite significantly, from one generation to another, and where there is always room for individual manoeuvre: 'man is not born', as Castoriadis asserts in resolutely anti-determinist fashion, 'with the sense of his life already laid out'.²⁷ There is an existentialist flavour to such an attitude, with its implication that there are always options of some description open to us as individuals.

Ultimately, the revolution is a matter of *autonomy* (the ability to engage in 'thoughtful doing' with one's fellow beings), and that demands a rejection of all models of an invariant human nature or cultural destiny. Revolutionary politics depends on autonomous action, and will not be successful if individuals are treated as mere passive counters to be manipulated by a self-serving priesthood of theorists. Castoriadis is adamant that Marxism is a determinist theory, both in the economic and more general philosophical sense, and that this curbs the autonomy required for human and societal creativity to flourish. We cannot even speak of class struggle in any meaningful sense, if both the fact and the eventual outcome of class struggle have been specified beforehand. Autonomy is needed for class struggle to be real, but autonomy is just what class struggle, as well as most other Marxist categories, denies. The masses can only do what their historical-cultural situation forces them to do, and if for some reason they fail to act as the theory prescribes, it can only be read as a case of false consciousness. Yet a revolution that did *not* involve autonomy could hardly be called a revolution at all, since it would be merely an effect of the underlying motor of history that is dialectical materialism – and in Castoriadis's withering aside, to analyse according to this motor of history is to 'give ourselves the solution before the problem'.²⁸ When that happens there can be neither autonomy nor creativity, and history is above all to Castoriadis 'the domain of *creation*' – where creation is to be read as 'non-causal'.²⁹ There is another

echo of existentialist choice to be noted: human action matters in this universe, and options do exist.

The non-causal becomes Castoriadis's version of difference: the aspect of human behaviour that lies beyond prediction, resisting all the efforts directed against it by the totalisers. Increasingly, we are to observe how critiques of Marxism from within – by both boundary-testers and putative post-Marxists – home in on the lack of a concept of difference as a major objection to the theory. It is a lack which will come to haunt Marxism, and one of the main reasons why Castoriadis concludes that Marxism is just another philosophy of history rather than the theory to supersede all other theories. In real terms it is little different from Hegel in this respect. Zizek may find an open-ended dialectic in Hegel, but for Castoriadis it is a classic instance of a closed one – and Marxism, whatever Marx himself may have claimed, never escapes from that closure.

Castoriadis's almost entirely negative 'provisional assessment' of Marxism does not diminish his revolutionary commitment or his opposition to capitalism. Revolutionary politics simply becomes more of a risk-taking activity, in which success cannot be guaranteed in advance, but enough dissatisfaction is felt with the current ideological system to make the effort of opposition worthwhile. Such dissatisfaction needs no fully worked-out philosophy of history behind it; it can start from the simple realisation that, 'I desire and I feel the need to live in a society *other* than the one surrounding me.'³⁰ A revolutionary politics discovers, not a closed system hemmed in by the 'laws' of a teleologically oriented history, but 'an *open-ended unity in the process of making itself*'.³¹ It does have to be said, however, that when one tries to extract a programme of action from this revolutionary politics, it tends to break down into a series of vague generalities such as the need to respect the autonomy of others, as well as the observation that it takes more than one autonomous individual to effect change in society at large. Castoriadis's opposition to capitalism is clearly principled, but *The Imaginary Institution of Society* graphically demonstrates the dilemma that faces all left radicals when they reject the schematics of Marxist thought: focus is lost (if there is one thing that Marxism is good at it is focus) and political dissent becomes a diffuse activity – possibly so diffuse that no one is quite sure what to do. One suspects that the injunction to 'be creative' will strike even sympathetic readers as worryingly inspecific: apart from anything else, one could argue that the right is just as capable of non-causal 'doing' as the left. Although he is well aware of the latter danger ('Creation does not necessarily – not even generally – signify "good" creation or the creation of "positive values"', as he admits elsewhere³²), Castoriadis is still more than willing to embrace the inspecific at the expense of a Marxist fundamentalism that believes it has all the answers.

Fundamentalism becomes the left's great enemy in this reading, since it precludes the non-causal. Post-Russian Revolution Marxism is treated as a large-scale exercise in closure, whereby the contingent, the unpredictable, the undetermined, and the creative, are excised from human affairs for the benefit of a political elite whose interest lies in power and control rather than in human liberation. Such an exercise can only ever be partially successful, and that partial success achieved only by means of severe political repression, since the unity of experience and universality of value

that the exercise is predicated upon is a fiction. Something always escapes the totalising imperative, whether or not we choose to acknowledge its existence. Lapsing into the metaphysical mode, Castoriadis sums up that something as follows:

What escapes it is the enigma of the world as such, which stands behind the common social world, as having-to-be, that is to say, an inexhaustible supply of otherness, and as an irreducible challenge to every established signification. What escapes it as well is the very being of society as instituting, that is to say, ultimately, society as the source and origin of otherness or perpetual self-alteration.³³

No matter what a totalising theory such as Marxism may do or say, therefore, it cannot eradicate the possibility of 'otherness' and 'self-alteration', and its attempts to do so reveal its lack of understanding of both history and human capability. In its mature form, Marxism is the sworn enemy of otherness and self-alteration, and thus, as far as Castoriadis is concerned, of the revolutionary impulse. It is as much Marxism as capitalism that we need to overcome.

It is clear that we *can* speak of a dissenting current within Marxism, both in its classical and Western forms. Although a range of viewpoints are expressed by the figures above, certain common themes and concerns emerge that will be developed even further by the post-Marxist movement. There is a worry about what the determinist implications of Marxist theory mean for human agency; a fear that individuals are being allotted an essentially passive role in historical development. The party machine and bureaucracy that grow up in the wake of a belief in that determinism is a continuing cause for concern, too. There are recurrent fears about whether Marxism's failure to make the final breakthrough against capitalism hints at shortcomings in the theory itself; that perhaps it is incomplete as it stands. Doubts also begin to surface as to whether Marxism's claims to comprehensiveness and universality are sustainable. The scope of theory, its moral right to direct human action, are themes which keep surfacing throughout Marxist history, no matter how united a front the Marxist establishment may try to present.

Not all of the dissenters are hostile towards Marxism. Some are trying to breathe new life into a theory they consider holds the best hope for mankind's future; others are more pessimistic (often deeply so, as in Adorno's case), although they still retain some commitment to the original spirit of Marxism. Castoriadis provides what is arguably the most interesting case study, however, in that he conducts such a rigorous critique of Marxism's pretensions, and can find almost no justification for the theory by the time he is through. By 1974 he is observing approvingly that,

For my part, I believe that in every domain of life, and in the 'developed' part of the world as well as in the 'undeveloped' part, human beings are presently engaged in the process of liquidating the old significations, and perhaps creating new ones. Our role is to demolish the ideological illusions hindering them in their efforts at creation.³⁴

Socialisme ou barbarie becomes something of a microcosm for the dissenting tendency within Marxism, and its fate is a warning for any reform of the theory from within. Harsh as Castoriadis is, his erstwhile colleague Lyotard will be harsher still. The assorted poststructuralists, postmodernists, and second-wave feminists who are emerging in numbers from the 1960s onwards, will find henceforth a cultural climate at least partially receptive to their declared project of ‘liquidating the old significations’ of all grand political narratives – Marxism notably included.

7 Constructing incredulity

(I) Postmodernism

Postmodernist theory, with its intense suspicion of grand narrative, or universal theory, has encouraged a *post*-Marxist outlook for some time now. The work of Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard, for example, has moved progressively further away from a Marxist orientation, resulting in such vicious anti-Marxist critiques as *Libidinal Economy*, 'A Memorial of Marxism', and *The Mirror of Production*. Postmodernism marks a paradigm shift where authority in general is rejected and scepticism becomes the defining cultural characteristic. Lyotard's notion of 'incredulity towards metanarratives' is a rallying cry to jettison theories such as Marxism, rather than engage in what to that author is a fruitless argument over the nature of the dialectic, and it has exerted a strong emotional appeal.¹ The collapse of Eastern bloc communism indicates that incredulity can emerge under even the most adverse of cultural circumstances, lending weight to Lyotard's contention that argument is not always necessary in the fight against authority. Tiananmen Square provides a salutary reminder, however, that sometimes incredulity is not enough on its own to bring totalitarian systems down.

This chapter investigates how incredulity is constructed by a range of postmodern thinkers such as Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Deleuze and Guattari, and why classical Marxism, with its totalising tendencies, found it so difficult to respond to rapidly changing cultural circumstances in the later twentieth century. It will also consider Derrida's highly ambiguous contribution to this debate in *Specters of Marx*, where the acknowledgement of Marx's massive cultural influence is undercut by the insistence that 'there must be more than one' Marx. Whether this latter line of argument furthers or retards the cause of incredulity is a very open question indeed.

Few thinkers of the later twentieth century have been as concerned with the ethics of control as Foucault, whose various archaeological and genealogical studies deal with the mechanisms of control that mark out modern Western society. Given such an agenda, it comes as no surprise to find Foucault distancing himself from classical Marxism: one of a whole generation of French intellectuals to turn their back on the Marxist tradition, expressing a sense of deep disillusionment with that tradition's authoritarian leanings and the strict parameters it imposes on intellectual enquiry. The disillusionment sets in at an early stage, even before the disappointments of the *événements*, with Foucault criticising Sartre's attempt to

construct an existentialist Marxism in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). Foucault sounds a distinctively *post-Marxist* note in his assessment of that work as ‘the magnificent and pathetic effort of a man of the nineteenth century to think the twentieth century. In this sense, Sartre is the last Hegelian and, I would say, the last Marxist’.² Clearly, Foucault feels the need for something far more drastic than mere revision of Marxism’s conceptual scheme.

The strength of Foucault’s Marxism is perhaps questionable (he is on record as claiming that ‘I have never been a Marxist’³), and there is never the sense of anger at the Marxist tradition that we find in a thinker like Lyotard, whose membership in *Socialisme ou barbarie* gave him a larger stake in that tradition than Foucault ever had, thus a greater depth of disenchantment at its perceived failings. Alan Sheridan sees Foucault as representative of a significant section of the French intelligentsia in his lukewarm support for the Marxist cause, suggesting that, in the aftermath of the Second World War,

it was not so much Marxist theory as the Party, an organization dedicated to action, that dominated the minds of French intellectuals . . . Many whose knowledge of Marxism was too sketchy to warrant acceptance or rejection found it quite natural to join the Party. Among them, for a time, was Foucault.⁴

Foucault went on to devise his own conception of historical process in works such as *Madness and Civilisation* and *The Order of Things*, the latter bringing him into open conflict with French Marxists, who objected, not just to his non-materialist vision of history, but also to his treatment of Marx as a historical figure first and foremost. Marx is consigned by Foucault to his historical milieu of the nineteenth century, and, like that milieu, regarded as having been superseded. Sheridan reads this as an implicitly post-Marxist gesture on Foucault’s part, and as such calculated to draw the ire of a still largely Stalinist French Marxist community:

The stock Marxist response to Foucault’s denial of Marx’s continuing relevance is to brand Foucault’s analysis as pre-Marxist. . . . Since no Marxist can contemplate the prospect of a post-Marxist, to say that someone is pre-Marxist is simply to say that he is non-Marxist – and no one would deny that Foucault was that. Yet nowhere, except in the minds of Marxists, is it inscribed that the ‘dialectic’ is an ineradicable law of nature. If, at the end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche set light to ‘the intermingled promises of the dialectic and anthropology’, then those who attempt to rethink history after Nietzsche must be post-Marxist.⁵

We have seen how that equation, post-Marxist really means non-Marxist, is later applied to Laclau and Mouffe by Norman Geras, backed up by a similar scepticism that there is such a thing as post-Marxism at all. Foucault can be dismissed as an idealist: a catch-all criticism that is as difficult to avoid within Marxism as it is without. (Although as regards that latter charge, some commentators have chosen to interpret Foucault’s later obsession with the body and sexuality as a form of materialism.⁶)

It is easy to understand why French Marxists would take issue with Foucault's remarks on Marx in *The Order of Things*. Marx is treated as a quintessentially nineteenth-century thinker responding to the problems of his time, and his economic theories compared, not necessarily very favourably, to those of Ricardo. Foucault sees little real difference between the two thinkers:

But the alternatives offered by Ricardo's 'pessimism' and Marx's revolutionary promise are probably of little importance. Such a system of options represents nothing more than the two possible ways of examining the relations of anthropology and History as they are established by economics through the notions of scarcity and labour.⁷

Ricardo saw resources as finite and posited an eventual end to economic growth; whereas Marx held there was a way to break out of the cycle of scarcity by a change in the ownership of the means of production that would lead, after a successful transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the establishment of a utopian society. In each case there is a model of cultural process in which a crisis point inevitably is reached. If we follow Ricardo's theories, then there will be an 'immobilization of History' where 'Man's *finitude* will have been *defined* – once and for all, that is, for an *indefinite* time'.⁸ Follow Marx, and there will have to be a 'suppression, or at least the reversal, of History as it has developed up to the present: then alone will a time begin which will have neither the same form, nor the same laws, nor the same mode of passing'.⁹ For Foucault, these are two sides to the same coin, and each depends on the particular relationship established between History, economics, and anthropology in the nineteenth-century *episteme*: a relationship which cannot be transplanted to another cultural context. 'Marxism exists in nineteenth-century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else': at a stroke Foucault denies the universality of Marxist thought, which can have no more bearing on the problems of our own time than does that of Ricardo.¹⁰ There will be no epistemological break out of ideology and into science in this instance: Marx remains locked in his historical period.

It is also easy to understand why Marxists would find Foucault's conception of historical process unacceptable, given that it largely abolishes the causal element. There is no dialectical motor of history in Foucault: change from one *episteme* to another is neither predictable nor schematic (therefore under no one class's control). Alan Sheridan has suggested that we might regard Foucault's procedure in *The Order of Things* as 'a sort of controlled experiment, in deliberately *excluding* the so-called "explanatory factors"', but that would be merely to compound the error in the eyes of the orthodox, for whom the search for 'explanatory factors' constitutes the whole point of their analysis.¹¹ Wilfully to avoid explanation is wilfully to avoid pinning the blame for exploitation where it belongs – all the more reprehensible when Foucault is writing about the period when the bourgeoisie became the dominant socio-political force in Western culture. Controlled experiments of the Foucault type could only be viewed as acts of bad faith designed to discredit the Marxist historical scheme, leaving us with a world whose arbitrariness

and lack of purpose mocks theory's claim to provide a moral ground for human action.

There is also Foucault's anti-humanism to take into account, with the vision of mankind presented at the end of *The Order of Things* communicating a sense of Nietzschean pessimism that Marxists, again, could only reject:

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And perhaps one nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.¹²

The Enlightenment project is effectively dismissed as a minor episode in cultural history, rather than the event of transcendent importance that its supporters claim, whereby mankind began finally to liberate itself from socio-political oppression and realise its potential for rational control of its own destiny. Foucault shares none of that optimism, and his estrangement from the Marxist world-view is very evident. J. G. Merquior speaks of a 'systematic disparagement of the Enlightenment' in Foucault's work, and a tendency to present an apocalyptic vision of recent history in consequence.¹³ *Epistemes* collapse without warning; the future is unpredictable; humanism little more than a passing fancy: from such a perspective, Marxism comes to seem an irrelevance.

Given that Foucault was never a major figure in French Marxist circles (he had broken away from the Party by 1951), his rejection of the Marxist historical scheme does not have quite the same resonance as that of, say, Lyotard or Castoriadis. Nevertheless, he is symbolic of a turn away from totalising explanation that becomes widespread in France from the 1960s onwards, and the popularity of his work strikes a blow at Marxism as an intellectual paradigm – even if Marxism is only obliquely a target of the author's enquiries. It is the lack of interest shown in explanatory factors that constitutes a significant part of the appeal of those enquiries, and that speaks to a generation growing increasingly disillusioned by grand narratives and their authoritarian ways. Foucault's concern is with what escapes the clutches of grand narrative: 'In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.'¹⁴ The clear suggestion is that mankind is only partially in control of its destiny, and that culture will always resist being controlled in the manner the grand narrative theorists like to believe is possible. Without a discernible pattern in history, we have no justification for proclaiming the truth of any grand narrative. From a Marxist standpoint this registers as a defeatist attitude; a recommendation to eschew political action on behalf of a universal cause, and as such, a gift to those exploiting the masses. Incredulity is well to the fore in Foucault, with Marxism being no more substantial a cultural presence for him than the face drawn in the sand.

The focus of Foucault's enquiries is rarely the mass of the population anyway, and his interest invariably lies with those who are marginalised by culture: the insane, the ill, prisoners, and homosexuals as particular cases in point. Categories such as these cut across class, rendering a class-based analysis largely irrelevant for Foucault's purposes. The postmodern fear of the authoritarian potential of the masses is never far from the surface in Foucault.

Lyotard's critique of Marxism, seen to best effect in *Libidinal Economy* and 'A Memorial of Marxism', has a long gestation period running back to his writings on the Algerian situation for the journal *Socialisme ou barbarie* in the 1950s. Even before he publicly rejects Marxism in the 1970s to become one of the foremost theorists of the postmodern, Lyotard is less than an orthodox Marxist – as his membership of the *Socialisme ou barbarie* group alone would attest. The Algerian writings reveal a figure often openly sceptical of classical Marxist doctrine, and more than willing to question the theory's assumed universality of application. In the case of Algeria, it is claimed that the classical Marxist schema does not apply: this is an underdeveloped economy lacking a mass industrial proletariat, and its cultural history dictates that such a schema should not be imposed on it. Official Marxism, in the guise of the French Communist Party (PCF) is, however, doing just that; imposing a European model of revolution on a Third World country, and in the process distorting the shape of the revolution.

The Algerian crisis resists a traditional Marxist solution, requiring, instead, something along the lines of what Laclau and Mouffe will later call a 'new articulation' of interests emerging from *within* Algerian society. What is important to note is the insistence that every political crisis does not conform to Marxist models, but should be approached with an open mind. Nationalism is clearly a more positive factor within Algerian society than classical Marxism, with its commitment to a class consciousness transcending national boundaries, can ever admit. Whatever the Algerian revolution may have been, it was not a standard Marxist 'class struggle', and for Lyotard 'the problem of helping Algerians to live is conceived and solved in terms of an individual or a small collectivity, a village, a family, a quarter'.¹⁵ The perspective switches from the macro to the micro in a manner that negates Marxism's universalism, and that negation becomes all the more pronounced when Lyotard declares that

No consciousness can span the whole of society so as to pose the question of what that society is for itself. The unemployed person wants work; the woman wants bread for her son; the combatant wants to be honored for having fought; the student wants books and professors; the worker wants a salary; the peasant wants seeds; the shopkeeper wants to restart business.¹⁶

This is to fragment the Algerian situation into a series of individual struggles, which undercuts Marxist theory and its commitment to class consciousness and social solidarity. Already by 1963, when the above sentiments are being expressed, Lyotard's position is recognisably post-Marxist in orientation.

Libidinal Economy's post-Marxist gesture is more extreme. A bitter and in many respects unfair piece of writing, *Libidinal Economy* at least has the virtue of showing just how alienating classical Marxism is becoming to many of its erstwhile supporters. Not all of them reacted with quite Lyotard's venom, but clearly classical Marxism can no longer depend on uncritical support from the left intelligentsia. There is no question that Lyotard is irrecoverably alienated:

We no longer want to correct Marx, to reread him or read him in the sense that the little Althusserians would like to 'read *Capital*': to interpret it according to 'its truth'. We have no plan to be true, to give the truth of Marx, we wonder what there is of the libido in Marx, and 'in Marx' means in his text or in his interpretations, mainly in practices. We will rather treat him as a 'work of art'.¹⁷

Marx is here stripped of his doctrinal status and opened up to plural interpretation, as if he were a creative writer rather than a cultural theorist. That is to be the drift of Lyotard's postmodernism, towards a world of competing narratives where Marx's would be merely one amongst many. As an icon, Marx's days are numbered: 'Let's repeat it over and again, we are not going to do a critique of Marx, we are not, that is to say, going to produce the theory of his theory: which is just to remain within the theoretical.'¹⁸ We have moved beyond theory, and those endless sterile debates about the nature of the dialectic, the base–superstructure relationship, etc., into a world where the unthinkable can be thought: that the theory is repressive, authoritarian, and, arguably, beyond revision.

Libidinal energy is pictured as a complex of forces that Marxism, given its ultra-rational nature, cannot cope with, and is forced in consequence to marginalise as much as it can. For Lyotard, libidinal energy is an excess that undermines Marxism's bid for total control, and as such it leaves Marxism's world-vision – class consciousness and all – in tatters:

look at the English proletariat . . . the English unemployed did not become workers to survive, they, hang on tight and spit on me – *enjoyed* the hysterical, masochistic, whatever exhaustion it was of *hanging on* in the mines, in the foundries, in the factories in hell, they enjoyed it, enjoyed the mass destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed upon them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity that the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolution of their families and villages, and enjoyed the new monstrous *anonymity* of the suburbs and the pubs in the morning and evening.¹⁹

Such views are heretical to the classical Marxist community, which is committed to the belief that capitalism is an exploitative system forced on societies to the detriment of the vast majority of the populace. The notion of collusion between classes can hardly be entertained (except in the sense of crossing over to the enemy, or exhibiting false consciousness), far less the idea that such an exploitative system

could actually *appeal* to those from whom it was extracting surplus labour-value. Unpleasant though Lyotard's diatribe is – if it were that simple there would have been no resistance to industrialisation at all, and there patently was – it does conjure up some spectres to disturb Marxism's version of modern world history. 'Enjoyment' may not be the most appropriate word, but it is at least arguable that industrialisation, particularly in its earlier stages, communicated a sense of *excitement* to English society that drew people in, even if it did involve a large amount of personal suffering. (Wars very often have the same effect of inducing excitement, whether we like to acknowledge it or not.) For Lyotard, industrialisation, and the demands it makes on workers, becomes an outlet for libidinal energies – almost an *excuse for* their expression. Behind such a view lies the idea that we are not simply rational beings awaiting the moment of enlightenment in order to throw off our socio-economic chains. We are much more complicated and unpredictable creatures than that: neither totally in control of our own nature, nor totally controllable by others – such as Marxist cultural theorists.

A slightly later take on much the same theme can be found in Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, where subjects conform to the dominant ideology in a cynical, knowing fashion, often mocking their rulers in the attitude dubbed 'kynicism' by Sloterdijk.²⁰ Here the notion is that the subject realises the high degree of cynicism involved in the workings of ideology as a system, but chooses to go along with it nevertheless. Žižek takes this reading a step further when he claims that ideology is based on a fantasy, such that we can say of subjects: 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it.'²¹ Again, it is a case of making a choice which can only appear counter-intuitive to a Marxist. Marxism is to be rejected for Lyotard because it fails to explain this counter-intuitive side of our natures, or the contingency of social existence in general. The libido cannot be contained by Marxism, it always escapes its authoritarian plans.

False consciousness is one of the prime victims of Lyotard's libidinally based model of human nature – as it will be later of Sloterdijk's cynically based one. Its role in Marxist history is to bridge yet another of those gaps that keep opening up between theory and social reality. Class consciousness is supposed to be an inescapable by-product of the application of capitalist principles to economic life. When such a consciousness, with its assumed disposition towards revolution in the name of social justice, is not declaring itself assertively, it must be because it is being blocked in some way. To be in a state of false consciousness is to be doubly a victim of the system: economically exploited, but also prevented from recognising the fact of one's exploitation. In coming to recognise that exploitation, and then to act decisively upon it, we come to achieve our full human identity. Lyotard has a simpler solution: sometimes we consciously choose capitalism under prompting from our unconscious. Workers accept capitalism because it harnesses their libidinal energy, and that libidinal energy dominates our rational side to the extent that we can no longer speak of achieving any complete identity. As Lyotard later puts it in 'A Memorial of Marxism', 'what if, after all, the philosopher asked himself, there wasn't any Self at all in experience to synthesize contradictorily the moments and thus to achieve knowledge and realization of itself?'²²

The libido is in evidence in Marx himself, identifiable in his own working methods:

its position is established first of all in something quite astonishing: the perpetual *postponement* of finishing work on *Capital*, a chapter becoming a book, a section a chapter, a paragraph a section, by a process of cancerization of theoretical discourse . . . Is the *non-finito* a characteristic of rational theory? We are able to support this, in these post-relative days; but for Marx (and therefore for Engels the impatient!), it must rather have been a bizarre, worrying fact.²³

This is a wounding analysis, suggesting that Marx, so often pictured as the arch-exponent of rational discourse, is just as captive to libidinal energy as anyone else. Marxist theory is not the complete system that its advocates like to claim, but something much more impressionistic, even digressive in form. The pattern that ‘Engels the impatient’ eventually manages to impose on the Marxist canon endows it with a sense of magisterial authority that is false to the original. The moral is that libidinal energy will undermine all attempts to totalise – and that desire to totalise is, as we have noted repeatedly, a desire to *control*. If *even* Marx cannot control his own analysis, what hope can there be for any of his mere followers? Marxism as a coherent system, it is implied, is based on a sham.²⁴

‘A Memorial of Marxism’ is a more measured piece, describing Lyotard’s break with the *Socialisme ou barbarie* group in general, and his closest friend within that group, the recently deceased historian Pierre Souyri, in particular. Even here, however, bitterness is never far from the surface, with Lyotard being particularly critical of ‘intellectuals who believed themselves to be Marxists because they read Marx and disliked bosses’.²⁵ ‘Intellectuals’ are to become particular hate figures in later Lyotard, and he is always ready to compare them unfavourably to philosophers: the latter being the ones open to new ideas and articulations, the former mere apparatchiks in the service of totalising systems such as Marxism.²⁶ Pierre Souyri, admittedly, had never sunk to that level, and Lyotard continues to respect his integrity even after his break with *Socialisme ou barbarie*; but there is no doubt in Lyotard’s mind that the break is an irrevocable one:

But now it was dialectical logic itself, with its still irrefutable operator, the anti-principle of contradiction, that was in the process of becoming a simple idiom. The machine for overcoming alterity by negating and conserving it, the machine for producing universality out of particularity, had for one of us – for me, as it happened, broken down.²⁷

Lyotard is increasingly a thinker for whom ‘particularity’ is the main area of interest, and the major motivating principle behind his thought – hence his concept of ‘little narrative’. Even in the Algerian writings he evinces a suspicion of Marxist universality, continually directing our attention to the local specifics of the Algerian situation, its points of difference from Marxist social models. The demand for universality that Marxism makes on its adherents is one that Lyotard cannot indefinitely

sustain: 'What if history and thought did not need this synthesis; what if the paradoxes had to remain paradoxes, and if the equivocacy of these universals, which are also particulars, must not be sublated?'²⁸ To argue the case for contingency is to move further into heresy. The contingent and the paradoxical cannot be allowed to remain unexplained in a totalising world-view: that would be significantly to reduce its claims to authority.

Lyotard also comes to recognise that Marxism's authority largely derives from its insistence on the doctrinal sanctity of the system of thought itself, which precludes any questioning of its assumed universality of application or the validity of its totalising imperative:

In what language would I have been able to dispute the legitimacy of the Marxist phrase and legitimize my suspicion? In Marxist language? That would have amounted to recognizing that that language was above suspicion and that the Marxist phrase was legitimate by its very position, even though I might contest or refute it.²⁹

To 'contest or refute' is precisely what a Marxist believer is not supposed to do: the authority of the theory is taken to be beyond all doubt or critique. Lyotard concludes that this is an illicit philosophical move which must be countered. For him it is a case of one genre of discourse (historical materialism) claiming to be able to speak for all others (such as historical reality), and he refuses to allow that this is acceptable. 'The roles of the protagonists of history are not played out in a single genre of discourse', as he puts it, opening up the spectre of pluralism yet again.³⁰ And not just the spectre of pluralism, but the spectre of the differend, and with it, incommensurability. There are, Lyotard insists, 'several incommensurable genres of discourse in play in society, none of which can transcribe all the others'.³¹ When such universal transcription is claimed by any genre of discourse, as it is by Marxism, it must be resisted – and the postmodern condition is where this resistance occurs as a matter of course.

Lyotard ceases to be a believer in the authoritarian grand narrative of dialectical materialism from this point in his career onwards: 'It was not a question, for me, of refuting theses, of rejecting a doctrine, of promoting another more plausible one, but rather of leaving free and floating the relation to Marxism.'³² A 'free and floating relation', with its clear echoes of spontaneism, is as good a way of describing the post-Marxist condition as any, although it has to be said that the relation becomes more and more tenuous as Lyotard's post-*Socialisme ou barbarie* career progresses.

Lyotard's work at the time of *Libidinal Economy* is close in spirit to that of Deleuze and Guattari's, particularly the latter's *Anti-Oedipus* (followed by its sequel *A Thousand Plateaus*), with its irreverent attitude to cultural heavyweights such as Freud and Marx, as well as grand narratives in general. If *Libidinal Economy*'s tone is vicious and nasty, that of *Anti-Oedipus* is mocking and playful, but just as concerned to establish a distance between the authors and the recent intellectual past. That past equals teleological thinking to Deleuze and Guattari, whereas their emphasis is resolutely anti-teleological: 'universal history is the history of contingencies, and not the history

of necessity. Ruptures and limits, and not continuity.³³ Orthodox Marxism's schematic model of historical process, with its clearly delineated stages based on modes of production, is denied by such a view, which sees history as driven by an unpredictable desire rather than a law-like dialectic.

With their 'nomad thought', Deleuze and Guattari represent a direct attack on the systematic, problem-solving ethos of the Enlightenment. Nomad thought seeks to keep systems open by making unexpected connections; the rhizomatic model favoured by the authors, which in the case of *Anti-Oedipus* means a 'confrontation, between Marx the revolutionary and Nietzsche the madman'.³⁴ Marxism and psychoanalysis are symbolic of a particular trend in our culture that results in authoritarianism, and Deleuze and Guattari set out to disrupt this, refusing to offer a system of thought as such. In the context of an intellectual milieu in which thinkers like Althusser are trying to isolate the scientific 'essence' of Marx's thought, there is a highly subversive quality to Deleuze and Guattari's anarchic approach to cultural analysis.

Anti-Oedipus constitutes an attack on 'fascism', the 'fascism in us all . . . that causes us to love power', as Foucault puts it in his preface to the work.³⁵ Fascism is symbolised for the authors by 'Oedipus', a collective figure representing all those forces that conspire to stem the flow of desire: 'Oedipus presupposes a fantastic repression of desiring-machines'.³⁶ Psychoanalysis is one of the primary means by which this repression is achieved, and the authors seek to replace it with schizoanalysis. The schizophrenic is taken to have the ability to resist psychoanalysis, and becomes a model for the revolutionary subject who will escape the grasp of Oedipus: 'The schizophrenic process (the schizoid pole) is revolutionary, in the very sense that the paranoiac method is reactionary and fascist'.³⁷ A new politics is at least implicit in such a theoretical project, even if Deleuze and Guattari insist that they have no wish to construct a new *system* of politics.

Most of the references to Marx in *Anti-Oedipus* are approving, and the authors are certainly critical enough of capitalism over the course of their argument: 'Capitalism is defined by a cruelty having no parallel in the primitive system of cruelty, and by a terror having no parallel in the despotic regime of terror'.³⁸ Yet the anti-system bias to the study renders it a post-Marxist document, especially given its commitment to desire in all its unpredictability, as well as its refusal to propose any specific political programme. Unpredictability is the enemy of control, and in its obsession with the latter, orthodox Marxism (as in the case of the Communist Party) becomes part of the Oedipal project where desire is curtailed: 'Subjugated groups are continually deriving from revolutionary subject-groups . . . they fall back on Oedipus, Marx-the-father, Lenin-the father, Brezhnev-the-father'.³⁹ Marx himself may escape censure, but it is clear that nearly everything done in his name does not. Desire has the ability to bring down capitalism ('one manifestation of desire . . . would be enough to make its fundamental structures explode'⁴⁰), yet desire is just what Marxism goes out of its way to subjugate when it achieves political power. Sadly, so effective is the Oedipal project, that the majority of us generally collude with it in helping it to attain its objectives, and it is this internalisation of authority above all that *Anti-Oedipus* is designed to break. Without such internalisation, grand narratives simply cannot work.

Baudrillard's *Mirror of Production* constitutes another frontal attack on Marxism's authority by a leading French intellectual writing in the aftermath of the *événements*. Once again the argument takes issue with Marxism's desire to exert control, in this case over 'Nature'. For Baudrillard, the Marxist conception of Nature as something to be tamed and harnessed to the forces of production represents the Enlightenment creed at its most questionable. There is an obsession with production in Marxist thought that distorts social relations, and that is no less market-oriented in its way than is capitalism. For that reason alone, Marxism cannot be considered a liberating social theory:

The concept of production is never questioned; it will never radically overcome the influence of political economy. Even Marxism's transcending perspective will always be burdened by counter-dependence on political economy. Against Necessity it will oppose the mastery of Nature; against Scarcity it will oppose Abundance . . . without ever resolving either the arbitrariness of these concepts or their idealist overdetermination by political economy. The political order is at stake here. Can the quantitative development of productive forces lead to a revolution of social relations? Revolutionary hope is based 'objectively' and hopelessly on this claim.⁴¹

Political economy dictates that both Nature and mankind must be dominated and exploited in the name of production; in fact, both Nature and mankind are, since the Enlightenment, *subordinated* to the process of production, as if this were an end in itself: 'A specter haunts the revolutionary imagination: the phantom of production.'⁴² Marxism does not contest this subordination, it merely concerns itself with who is directing the process and what use is made of the surplus, if any, of production. Five-Year plans loom on the horizon, offering no more liberation from the servitude of production than does capitalism.

Even worse, Marxism has read back this Enlightenment obsession with production to older societal forms, where it makes no sense at all: 'By pretending to illuminate earlier societies in the light of the present structure of the capitalist economy, it fails to see that, abolishing their difference, it projects onto them the spectral light of political economy.'⁴³ Baudrillard's refusal to backdate Marxism's concepts onto earlier cultural formations parallels that of Hindess and Hirst, with their general attitude of scepticism towards the Marxist conception of pre-capitalist modes of production. This refusal becomes a characteristic of post-Marxism, although it has to be said that there is a distinct tendency to backdate *postmodernist* concepts, such as 'difference' and 'pluralism', instead. The argument is that, not satisfied with wanting to control the present, classical Marxism also wants to control the past. Wood's reluctance to give up the idea that all history is the history of class struggle (and can be interpreted in no other way) is an all too typical response in this respect. Marxism becomes for Baudrillard a mirror image of capitalism, with both systems holding up the 'mirror of production' to us (although not, as Bauman goes on to point out, any 'mirror' of *consumption* in the case of communism⁴⁴). On this score, Marx is held to be stuck in a time-warp:

Analyzing one phase and only one phase of the general process, his critique goes only so far and can only be extrapolated regarding the remainder. Marxism is the projection of the class struggle and the mode of production onto all previous history; it is a vision of a future 'freedom' based on the conscious domination of nature. These are extrapolations of the economic. To the degree that it is not *radical*, Marxist critique is led despite itself to reproduce the roots of the system of political economy.⁴⁵

It is the familiar argument of difference's effacement in the name of totalitarian control, and it is the factor of control that is most responsible for generating a post-Marxist consciousness. Production is the key to that control, and its reign must be broken if we are ever to effect any significant change in human relations: 'The liberation of productive forces is confused with the liberation of man.'⁴⁶ Castoriadis makes a similar point when he notes that Marx's real concern is not with the ethics of production, but the question of ownership:

in his later years he really calls in question neither the objects nor the means of capitalist production, being concerned instead with the way in which both are appropriated, and with capitalism's diversion of the efficiency of technique (which is itself seen as irreproachable) to the profit of a particular class. Technique, here, has become not just 'neutral', but positive in all its aspects. It has become operative reason, and men need only, and must only, regain control of its operations.⁴⁷

It would almost seem as if, on the matter of production, Marx can be considered a fellow-traveller of capitalism.

Derrida's intervention into the debate over Marxism's future is characteristically iconoclastic. *Specters of Marx* may express a clear commitment to Marx's legacy ('no future without Marx'), but its manner of doing so is unmistakably post-Marxist. Marx is to be regarded as 'plural': 'there is more than one of them, there must be more than one of them.'⁴⁸ This is to argue that Marx is open to endless interpretation, and to distance oneself from the unity-minded theorists of the classical tradition – or the 'dogma machine' as Derrida slightly refers to them.⁴⁹ Marx's legacy is to be defended, therefore, but from a perspective that must be deemed post-Marxist. Certainly, a plural Marx offers little that is supportive to a classical Marxist world-view, no matter how much energy Derrida may expend in demolishing Fukuyama's neoconservative triumphalism over the death of communism as a global political force. Derrida's post-Marxism draws on previous crises in Marxist thought to make its point that Marxism should not be regarded as a static system of thought, incapable of adaptation to changing cultural circumstances – or even to the advent of pluralism as a cultural paradigm. He notes that Marxism already was considered to be in crisis in his youth, and that, as regards the question 'Whither Marxism?',

For many of us the question has the same age as we do. . . . For many of us, a certain (and I emphasize *certain*) end of communist Marxism did not await the recent collapse of the USSR and everything that depends on it throughout the world. All that started – all that was even *déjà vu*, indubitably – at the beginning of the 50s.⁵⁰

One might draw negative conclusions from this observation (that Marxism has been in progressive decline amongst Western intellectuals for some time now, for example), but Derrida refuses to do so, regarding it instead as proof of a well-entrenched desire for a pluralist Marxism as opposed to its totalitarian, communist, variant. He is quite clear that he does not support the latter, but also clear that there is still a critical role for Marx's spirit to play in today's political struggles. Derrida is insistent, however, that he has no intention of being conscripted under the classical Marxist banner: 'And if one interprets the gesture we are risking here as a belated rallying-to-Marxism, then one would have to have misunderstood quite badly. . . . What is certain is that I am not a Marxist.'⁵¹

Eccentric though his view of Marx might be, Derrida is still in dialogue with the older figure and all that he stands for, and adamant that Marx cannot simply be written out of cultural history – even if he remains there predominantly in what for Derrida is a spectral fashion. Derrida even suggests that he is unravelling the 'hauntology' of Marxism in *Specters*:⁵² the many traces that the theory and its practice have left within our culture – traces whose ghostly presence can never be eradicated from our discourse or our consciousness. Marx is an integral part of our cultural heritage, and his message, however distorted it may have become in the interim through the efforts of over-zealous dogmatists, still has significance today: 'Whether they wish it or know it or not, all men and women, all over the earth, are today to a certain extent the heirs of Marx and Marxism.'⁵³ We inhabit a world full of social injustice that calls out for the spirit of Marx if its abuses are to be addressed, and Derrida harks back to Marx's example in the call for the construction of a 'New International' to take on the forces of bourgeois liberal democracy. The need for a New International becomes evident when we consider Fukuyama's *End of History* and its claims that, with the demise of European communism, we have witnessed a decisive victory over ideology, and that Western democracy represents the endpoint of humankind's socio-political evolution: 'While some present-day countries might fail to achieve stable liberal democracy, and others might lapse back into other, more primitive forms of rule like theocracy or military dictatorship, the *ideal* of liberal democracy could not be improved on.'⁵⁴ Derrida may not be a Marxist, but neither is he an apologist for liberal democracy, and he is scathing of Fukuyama's claims, which involve simply ignoring the manifest failings of that form of government. Against Fukuyama's Panglossian vision, Derrida sees a world racked by socio-political problems, with unemployment and homelessness rife in most countries, and the military-industrial complex wielding enormous global power to humankind's detriment. Under those circumstances, Fukuyama's championship of liberal democracy, with its Christian fundamentalist undertones, comes to seem fairly grotesque to Derrida, who invokes the spirit of Marx in response to the idea that Western democracy is in any way post-ideological.

Derrida identifies an obsession with ghosts in Marx's work, such as the opening sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* with its famous image of communism as a 'spectre' haunting Europe. (Interestingly enough, Habermas had earlier referred to capitalism as 'nothing more than the ghostly form of class relations' in Marx.⁵⁵) In some sense that is still true, in that there is a history of communism to take into account nowadays that, even after events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, haunts our collective memory. The spirit of Marx will remain: it is just a matter of whether we deploy it to good or evil purpose. To participate in a 'New International' is to put Marx's spirit to good use: to insist on a totalitarian interpretation of the Marxist canon is to be part of the despised 'dogma machine'. True to his deconstructive roots, Derrida can find no central core to Marx's thought, regarding it instead as an area of discourse inviting multiple interpretations. The word 'spirit' retains its ambiguity in this respect. Marxism may both attract us (to work 'in the spirit of Marx's liberationist beliefs), and scare us (the catalogue of all the evil deeds that have been done in Marx's name over the course of the twentieth century). To indicate how open such interpretations of the Marxist corpus can be, Derrida elsewhere argues that there is 'a Marxism of the right and a Marxism of the left' (allowing the same to be said of the work of other such contentious figures as Nietzsche and Heidegger also).⁵⁶ In other words, Marx, like almost any other cultural theorist you care to name, can, with a little ingenuity, be adapted to fit various schemes; there is no essence there to prevent such appropriation from almost any point on the political spectrum. In the aftermath of theories such as the 'death of the author', we have become accustomed to the notion that the reader is at least as important in the creation of a 'text' as the original author. One might even cite Engels as an example of such textual 'creation' from the reader's end as regards Marx. A critical consequence of such a theory is that a text is always changing, depending on its current readers, which runs counter to the beliefs of the Marxist 'dogma machine'. The key issue, of course, is one of control. If the Marxist establishment cannot control the reception of Marx then it loses much of its power and authority over others as the guardian of Marx's legacy. When the death of the author is combined with a plural Marx, it can lead to an interpretive spontaneism no more acceptable to classical Marxists than the overtly political-activist kind. Control continues to exert its fascination on Marxists, to repel post-Marxists.

Derrida's deconstructive engagement with Marxism was to some extent anticipated back in the early 1980s by Michael Ryan in *Marxism and Deconstruction*. Ryan's objective was not so much to create a new hybrid form of Marxism as 'an alloy' of the two forms of thought.⁵⁷ Deconstruction is held to have significant philosophical and political implications for Marxism in 'providing a theoretical underpinning for the antimetaphysical and postleninist practical advances that are already under way within marxism'; although Ryan also shows himself alive to the differences between the two areas, pointing out that, for him, deconstruction is a philosophy and Marxism is not.⁵⁸ Deconstruction's interrogation of philosophical language reveals how unstable meaning is, and, in the case of Hobbes's defence of sovereign power, how unstable that concept is, too: 'The assertion of absolute sovereignty in meaning as in the state is always an economy of distrust, desire, and fear.'⁵⁹ Ryan

goes on to claim ‘a necessary relationship between conceptual apparatuses and political institutions’ that deconstruction enables us to subvert, at which point its value to Marxism becomes apparent; although there is always the problem that Marxism itself assumes the same necessary relationship when it comes to power.⁶⁰

A further problem is that the constituency most likely to be attracted by deconstructive-style interrogations are philosophers, rather than political-activist Marxists (accepting, for the time being, Ryan’s claim that Marxism is not a philosophy). There is a real danger that his articulation will prove to be very one-sided, and his belief that deconstruction will encourage further cultural revolutions is unlikely to recommend it to classical Marxists, given their obsessive desire to control the revolution’s character and direction. Already the pluralism that is to render Derrida’s encounter more post-Marxist than Marxist is making its appearance (a unity in plurality as Ryan describes it, trying to get the best of both worlds). Deconstruction continues to create more problems for Marxism than it ever resolves. For Ryan, deconstruction tells us that Marxism is both incomplete and full of ‘undecidables’ (the future outcome of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, for example); but again, these are deconstructive rather than Marxist points, which fail to suggest specifically why Marxism merits our support. Equally, the future outcome of capitalism is unknown: what deconstruction gives to Marxism with one hand, it takes away with the other. ‘The truth of history is that no truth about history is complete’ can offer encouragement across the political spectrum.⁶¹ Ryan is invariably critical of ‘right-wing’ deconstruction (the American school), but the very fact that there *is* such an entity points up the problem Marxism faces with deconstruction. Increasingly, Ryan is forced to fall back on the well-worn tactic of claiming extensive misreadings – of both Derrida and Marx – in order to make his articulation work, and that, as we have seen, is an open invitation to incredulity.

Another area of discourse where a campaign has been mounted against Marxist ‘orthodoxies’ is human geography, and a distinctively post-Marxist ‘postmodern geography’ has emerged in recent decades to contest the classical line. Edward W. Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* is one of the most important contributions to this debate, and the author’s goal of a ‘postmodern critical human geography’ represents an attempt to salvage the positive aspects of a Marxist political agenda (its call for an emancipation of the oppressed, for example), while rejecting its claims to possess absolute authority. Debates about ‘spatiality’ in late twentieth-century social theory are felt to have undermined key Marxist categories and made the development of a post-Marxist geography, drawing extensively on the insights of postmodern theory, imperative. Western Marxism ‘seems to have exploded into a heterogeneous constellation of often cross-purposeful perspectives’, and ‘Modern Geography has also started to come apart at its seams’.⁶² A clear opportunity opens up for a postmodern geography to fill the gap this leaves in contemporary social theory.

Soja identifies what he calls a ‘passage to postmodernity’ beginning in the late 1960s, and it is conceived of as a paradigm shift which has irreversibly altered our social existence: ‘another culture of time and space seems to be taking place in this

contemporary context and it is redefining the nature and experience of everyday life in the modern world – and along with it the whole fabric of social theory.⁶³ Modernity is being deconstructed in a process which involves the ‘convergence of three spatialisations’: ‘posthistoricism’, ‘postfordism’, and ‘postmodernism’.⁶⁴ The first is a shift away from the privileging of ‘being in time’; the second the decline of large-scale mass-production industrial systems of the kind that held sway in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century; the third, the cultural and ideological reaction against the ethos of modernity itself, with its authoritarian overtones and cult of ‘progress’. All of these constitute responses to the global economic crisis in the closing decades of the twentieth century, signalling the end of the post-war economic boom. In retrospect that post-war boom comes to seem like the swan-song of modernity.

Marxist geography is seen to have undergone a process of progressive postmodernisation since the post-war period, during which both Marxist and geographical categories have been subject to extensive reworking. The work of David Harvey highlights the problems facing Marxist geographers at the close of the century. In his study *The Limits to Capital*, Harvey, as Soja notes, ‘reached out from the heart of Marxist geography’ to present ‘a demonstrative argument for a spatialised Marxism and a spatialised critique of capitalist development’, only to run up against the limits of Marxism itself; with Harvey himself feeling compelled to wonder whether the book represented ‘a violation of the ideals of historical materialism’.⁶⁵ Harvey’s general objective, as he puts it elsewhere in his work, to ‘shift from thinking about history to historical geography’, runs into the difficulty that post-Marxists keep drawing to our attention: the gap between theory and the real world.⁶⁶ Harvey defends his own ‘violation’ on the grounds that, ‘no one else seems to have found a way to integrate theory and history, to preserve the integrity of both while transcending their separation’; but that is merely to provide grist for the post-Marxist mill.⁶⁷ Perhaps such repeated failure in a century and more of Marxism as both theory and political practice implies that theory and history are unintegratable? At the very least the burden of proof lies on the theory to resolve this separation – which is where post-Marxism, with its programme radically to amend the theory in the light of recent historical events, comes into the picture.

Harvey does not go so far as to embrace the post-Marxist cause, although he does concede the need for the theory to be judged in terms of its historical impact. Even so, he admits that *The Limits of Capital* largely avoids history to remain at the level of abstract theory. If not a classical case of ‘saving the phenomena’, it has some of the hallmarks of that procedure. Then at the end of the project there is a restatement of the Marxist creed of unity. Harvey insists that theory is under an obligation to help us understand history and political practice, and cites *Capital* as a textbook example of theorizing backed up by appropriate historical evidence. Any theory which fails to make such a connection with history is declared to be redundant, although Harvey can see a virtue in a certain amount of separation between theory and history, claiming that the tension this creates can lead to new ways of perceiving the world. The existence of the separation becomes a way of preventing us from jumping to hasty conclusions; from imposing a unity of theory

and practice on situations before we think them through exhaustively in terms of their specifics. Harvey is also at pains to deny that Marxism is a closed system of thought, finding no closure in Marx's own thought, or that dialectics provides final answers to socio-political problems: rather, 'Each ending should, in truth, be viewed as but a new beginning.'⁶⁸ We could treat such sentiments as a gesture towards difference, but it is one that is soon curtailed, with Harvey declaring in the end for unity. It is an ingenious attempt to have things both ways, with the separation being acknowledged, but then relegated to the status of a mere stage on the way to unity (Laclau and Mouffe's repeated criticisms of the 'stagist' bias to Marxist thought can be applied here), and even as *proof* of the necessity of that unity. In the binary relationship of unity and separation, the former is clearly the dominant partner, and, in consequence, ripe for deconstruction. Separation notwithstanding, it is capitalism which is considered to have reached its limits, not Marxism. Harvey remains within the Marxist fold: 'it is time for capitalism to be gone.'⁶⁹ Soja's intervention, however, suggests that, when it comes to dealing with the new spatialisations, Marxism is fighting yesterday's battles. Once again, testing the boundaries encourages transgression.

International relations is another disciplinary area where post-Marxism has made significant inroads. Marxism had always been a major player in the discipline, with its division into two main opposing factions, Realists and Idealists, leaving considerable scope for the application of Marxist theory. Realists adopt a generally empirical approach to global power politics, whereas Idealists (with Marxists and 'neo-Marxists' located in that camp) deploy some version or other of universal theory. The Marxist/neo-Marxist paradigm (the latter emphasising the conflicts occurring between international capital and the nation state) has, not surprisingly, come under strain with the decline of the Soviet state and world communism, and several writers have sought to develop a post-Marxist position out of the resulting situation. One such is R. B. J. Walker, whose *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* insists that it is time to break free of Cold War thinking patterns and reconstitute international relations as a discipline with a new set of methods and objectives. Walker takes a conscious stand against all attempts to minimise the significance of the collapse of communism, and to continue political analysis using the same philosophies of history as before. Those philosophies are outmoded; the remains of a world changed out of all recognition to that of the Enlightenment period, with its commitment to progress and rational procedures. International relations is no longer to be regarded as a source of ready-made solutions (Realist or Idealist) to geopolitical problems, but as a discourse whose theories are 'expressions of the limits of the contemporary political imagination when confronted with persistent claims about and evidence of fundamental historical and structural transformation'.⁷⁰ These limits are artificial to Walker, who wants to think about politics and relations between states in a more creative manner, free of the prejudices of the past. Postmodern theory gives him that basis to challenge the entrenched assumptions about geopolitical issues that mark out international relations as a discourse still largely tied to an Enlightenment world-view, where analysis is conducted, in the main, within a modernist framework.

Walker is particularly concerned with the concept of sovereignty, a concept much in need of rethinking in the aftermath of the Cold War when its 'categories of spatial extension' have been thrown into disarray in many areas of the world (one has only to think of the former Yugoslavia to realise how problematical this can become in political terms).⁷¹ In typically postmodernist fashion, Walker rejects the idea of there being any 'essence' to sovereignty holding over time. This is no more true of 'sovereign' identity than it is of personal identity. Walker's reading emphasises the contingent, historically specific nature of political sovereignty instead, in a bid to make us recognize the possibility of new articulations in this area. The problem with international relations in general is that it has very set ideas about geopolitics based on modernist perspectives:

As a theory, or complex of theories, constituted through claims about sovereign identity in space and time, international relations simply takes for granted that which seems to me to have become most problematic. I prefer to assume that any analysis of contemporary world politics that takes the principle of sovereign identity in space and time as an unquestioned assumption about the way the world is – as opposed to an often very tenuous claim made as part of the practices of modern subjects, including the legitimization practices of modern states – can only play with analogies and metaphors taken from discourses in which this assumption is also taken for granted.⁷²

It is another version of Lyotard's critique of 'grand narratives', and Walker's conclusion is much the same: that such narratives no longer have any purchase in a postmodern world. Sovereignty is a narrative whose time has passed, and we cannot continue to rely on modernist categories of spatial extension to resolve geopolitical problems – problems which largely arise from the *application* of those categories, with their assumption of clearly defined sovereign identities at the level of the nation state. Walker wants to replace the grand narrative of sovereignty with a combination of world and local politics, aware that such a possibility goes against the grain of our standard assumptions about sovereign identity.

Other postmodernist commentators have pointed out the imperialist assumptions that are so often embedded in modernist notions of political sovereignty. First nation inhabitants, for example, find that sovereignty does not seem to apply to them retrospectively, but only to those who have taken over their territory in an act of colonialist annexation. North America, Australia, and South Africa provide some outstanding cases in this respect, leaving residual socio-political problems behind that cannot be solved by existing methods (what Lyotard calls a 'differend').⁷³ Sovereignty here is a means of oppression, and only some radical adjustment to the way the concept works (dual sovereignty over a territory by both first and second nations, for example) can address that oppression. Walker's world/local model holds out the same kind of promise, although it is idealistic to expect ruling elites to accept the deconstruction of their own privileged position and embrace the principle of shared sovereignty. When it comes to such specifics, neither

postmodernism nor post-Marxism offers a very clear plan of action, and one suspects that the capitalist world order may prove to be an altogether tougher opponent to overcome than communism proved to be. What Walker *does* make clear, is that there will be ‘increasingly disconcerting incongruities’ between the old and new politics: between those operating from a modernist standpoint, and those seeking to create new (often very local) articulations to contest the authority of the modernists.⁷⁴ Like Laclau and Mouffe, Walker’s sympathies unmistakably lie with those new articulations, and he looks forward to the possibility of ‘other forms of political identity and community, other histories, other futures’.⁷⁵ Modernity is the enemy to be overcome if this goal is to be achieved, and again it is control – in this case over national boundaries and the citizens within them – that is the central concern.

Andrew Linklater also strikes a post-Marxist note in his attempt to construct ‘a critical theory of international relations . . . which follows the spirit if not the letter of Marx’s inquiry into capitalism’.⁷⁶ Linklater is just as critical of the restrictive nature of the current paradigm as Walker, arguing that ‘the classical distinction between realist and idealist approaches to international relations is a false dichotomy’ that must be transcended if we are to tackle such pressing problems as ‘geopolitical militarism’.⁷⁷ Marxism’s commitment to human emancipation means that it forms a reference point for the new critical theory, but the need to break free from the sterile debates of the past is clear.

Bauman puts a different spin on the post-Marxist debate by reflecting on the negative connotations of communism’s demise. The triumphalist tone that can mar some postmodernist treatments of this event (and bourgeois democratic ones as well, as in Fukuyama’s case) is singularly missing in Bauman. Here is an argument which looks back with a certain nostalgia – if a rather reluctant one – to communism’s role as a check on capitalism. What Bauman fears is a global order in which there is no ‘other’ to capitalism, and, indeed, in which the notion of an ideological other loses all moral legitimacy:

It is assumed that the practical discrediting of communism . . . pre-empted by proxy and disqualifies in advance any doubts about the unchallengeable superiority of the *really existing* regime of freedom and the consumer market: that it discredits, moreover, any suggestion that this regime, even if technically more viable, may be still neither entirely flawless, nor the most just of conceivable orders; that it may be instead in urgent need of an overhaul and improvement.⁷⁸

It is that latter proposition for which Bauman is arguing, that there is an urgent need for overhaul and improvement, and it is in that light that the history of communism is discussed in his ‘post-mortem’. Bauman is concerned to ensure that a left critique survives the fall of communism – an eminently post-Marxist position to adopt. Writing in the immediate aftermath of Fukuyama-style triumphalism in the West, one can appreciate the urgency of such a project, designed to keep a left

dissenting tradition alive. 'Living without an alternative' is no alternative at all for the left, and as Bauman points out, there are enough examples of totalitarian *non*-communist states in the world to justify the continued existence of left dissent for some considerable time to come.⁷⁹ Bauman is no uncritical apologist for communism, and freely concedes its failings; what he will not concede is that communism is the only possible form for anti-capitalist dissent to take.

Communism is treated as a product of modernity, sharing in both the vices and the virtues of that cultural phenomenon. The main vice, and by now we recognise this as a standard post-Marxist objection, is its obsession with order: 'The fall of communism', Bauman insists, 'was a resounding defeat for the project of a *total order*.'⁸⁰ Neither modernity in general, nor communism in particular, can cope with spontaneity, and its eradication in favour of a totally planned society becomes an overriding goal – what we have earlier seen applauded as the 'revolution of our time' by Laski. Communism might be considered the most virulent expression of modernity, and its urge for domination over Nature had some highly unfortunate side-effects which cast the entire project of 'total order' into question:

Deserts were irrigated (but they turned into salinated bogs); marshlands were dried (but they turned into deserts); massive gas-pipes criss-crossed the land to remedy nature's whims in distributing its resources (but they kept exploding with a force unequalled by the natural disasters of yore); millions were lifted from the 'idiocy of rural life' (but they got poisoned by the effluvia of rationally designed industry, if they did not perish first on the way).⁸¹

This is the Enlightenment project pushed to its absurd extreme, and just to prevent us from lapsing into self-satisfaction about communism's pretensions, Bauman insists we acknowledge that this is the *West's* past, too: modernity is above all a Western phenomenon. We are also asked to acknowledge a positive side to modernity that we are equally in danger of losing along with its legacy of Enlightenment-derived excesses of failed engineering projects in the Soviet Union: 'the urge to do something about those who suffer and clamour for something to be done'.⁸² For all its many failings, communism was, at least in the first instance, largely motivated by that urge, and its passing is to be regretted. Without a communist 'other', the individual is left completely exposed to the whims of the capitalist socio-economic system, which no longer has any effective check on its behaviour. Freedom is reduced to the freedom of the market and consumer choice, and this is not enough to enable individuals to realise their full humanity.⁸³

Concern for those exploited and oppressed by modernity remains a distinguishing feature of the post-Marxist cause. The elusive goal continues to be how the suffering and injustice can be alleviated without recourse to the methods of 'total order' that post-Marxists unanimously reject. Critical though he can be of postmodernity, with its tendency to accept the fragmentation and marginalisation of political dissent that characterises the society without an alternative, Bauman has no wish to see a return to the modernity of 'total order'.⁸⁴ 'The world without an alternative needs self-criticism as a condition of survival and decency', he argues, even if that

world 'does not make the life of criticism easy'.⁸⁵ Therein lies the post-Marxist predicament: an inability to rely on the authority of classical Marxism, but broad agreement as to what is wrong with the capitalist alternative. Between this rock and a hard place, the life of criticism is indeed not easy.

8 Constructing incredulity

(II) Feminism

Like postmodernism, feminist thought has posed some awkward, perhaps even unanswerable, questions for classical Marxism. A host of critics have pointed out how the objectives of Marxism are in several fundamental ways irreconcilable with the objectives of feminism, and even Marxist feminists have felt the need to think the unthinkable about their Marxism – such as the possibility of ‘divorce’, as raised in Heidi Hartmann’s memorable contribution to the influential collection of essays, *The Unhappy Marriage between Marxism and Feminism* (1981):

The marriage of marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism. Recent attempts to integrate marxism and feminism are unsatisfactory to us as feminists because they subsume the feminist struggle into the ‘larger’ struggle against capital. To continue our simile further, either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce.¹

Hartmann’s stark threat signals a post-Marxist trend in second-wave feminism, where classical Marxism is increasingly viewed as a hindrance to the realisation of feminism’s ideals. She polarises the debate very nicely, revealing the ferment under the surface of the Marxist feminist movement and the complex motivations leading it to the brink of incredulity. Through a study of the work of a selection of second-wave feminist theorists, we shall consider how feminism has gone about the task of constructing incredulity towards the Marxist tradition, and where this leaves it in terms of the development of a post-Marxist consciousness. We can note an interesting amalgam of *post-* and *post-* sympathies here, with the desire to transcend a perceived ‘masculinist’ Marxism coexisting in an uneasy state with a nostalgia for the certainties of classical Marxist thought – often in the work of the same writer. The theorists have been chosen because of their *direct* engagement with Marxist thought, although we conclude by considering the implications for Marxist feminism of the explorations into the relationship between identity and materialism in the work of Donna Haraway and Judith Butler.

Hartmann is worth dealing with in some detail first, in that she succeeds in crystallising the main issues of the debate in such an uncompromising fashion. To raise the spectre of divorce is to indicate how high the stakes are; to make it absolutely

clear that feminism is no longer prepared to go on subordinating itself to a masculinist Marxism. We are back with the issue of control. The pattern has tended to be that Marxism has sought to control Marxist/socialist feminism, to subsume it within the larger political cause dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism. Gender issues have been regarded as secondary concerns to be addressed when the revolution against capitalism has been secured, rather than matters of immediate urgency whose resolution might actually accelerate the revolutionary process (and conversely, whose *lack* of resolution might well retard it). The reality of women's oppression, often highly visible within the Marxist movement itself, almost invariably has been sacrificed to the assumed purity of the theory, in a manner that we have already seen occurring in terms of the working class. Classical Marxism's record on gender is not a particularly proud one, and while Hartmann wants to retain the link between feminism and Marxism, it is only if the terms of the alliance are revised to render each side equal partners. If equality cannot be achieved, then the 'marriage' has no future and must be terminated.²

Hartmann is in the first instance still concerned to reach an accommodation between Marxism and feminism, and that involves recognising the limitations of both theories:

We will argue here that while marxist analysis provides essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital in particular, the categories of marxism are sex-blind. Only a specifically feminist analysis reveals the systemic character of relations between men and women. Yet feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist.³

Marxism and feminism need each other, but whether classical Marxism is ready to accept this analysis is another question – hence the divorce threat. In Hartmann's view Marxism, because of its obsession with economic issues to the exclusion of almost all others, has never fully understood what the 'woman question' entails. It is the problem later expanded on by Laclau and Mouffe, whereby individuals are treated as mere units; the assumption being made that one's relationship to the economic system dictates the development of precisely the same kind of class consciousness in each and every individual in that same state. A worker is a worker whether that worker is male or female (any one worker being substitutable for any other), and Marxist analyses consistently reduce gender relations to labour relations. That latter relation remains the critical one, and is assumed to be the source of all the abuses found in a capitalist society.

Hartmann identifies three main strands of Marxist thought on the woman question: that of the early Marxists, such as Marx himself and Engels, who theorised that the absorption of women into the labour force under capitalism was destructive of the previously existing, gender-based, division of labour; that of contemporary Marxists of the 'everyday life' school, whose analyses treated women as an integral part of the capitalist system – workers in the same way as men (uniformly substitutable, etc.), and subject to the same cultural pressures; and third, that of Marxist

feminists, who concentrated on housework's relation to capital, often treating it as a 'hidden' form of work serving the interests of capital. In each case, the problem is that women are perceived solely in terms of their relation to capital, with their relation to men being a secondary issue. Hartmann notes that Engels traced the inferior social position of women back to the institution of private property, which meant he was able to argue that where private property did not exist, as in the case of the proletarian class, there could be no oppression. To be bourgeois was to be oppressed, but to be proletarian was to escape this fate. Proletarian women also had the benefit of being drawn into the wage labour force, which abolished gender difference and thus undermined the existing system of patriarchal relations. For Engels, proletarianism represented a potential passport to sexual emancipation, which would be completed after the successful revolution against capital. For Hartmann, on the other hand, this is to gloss over the differences in male and female experiences of capitalism in action. Patriarchal relations managed to survive capitalism (to be found in many later communist societies in a variety of forms), and we cannot regard capital and the institution of private property alone as responsible for women's oppression.

The 'everyday life' approach emphasises how capital has shaped sexism, of the kind we experience in the modern world, by excluding women from paid work. Eli Zaretsky, for example, held that housework was unpaid work on behalf of capitalism, which divided our public life from our private, such that we regarded each as spheres associated with a different gender.⁴ Once capitalism is overcome, so will that division be too. While agreeing with much of Zaretsky's analysis, Hartmann feels that he leaves many unanswered questions ('why did it happen that *women* work there [the home], and *men* in the labour force?', being one of her queries⁵), and fails to address the issue of inequality. Hartmann's point is that it is too easy to blame capitalism for sexual inequality, and that men have to face up to their self-interested role in the creation of such a system of relations. Capitalism may exacerbate sexism, but it is not the root cause of it, and Hartmann's verdict on the 'everyday life' school is that its analysis serves to deflect attention away from where the problem really lies: with men and their inherited system of privileges.

Hartmann is critical, too, of Marxist feminist versions of this line of argument, such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa's campaign for paid housework.⁶ Although approving the impact this campaign has had on raising consciousness within the women's movement, Hartmann still feels that it, too, deflects attention away from the issue of the relations between men and women. (Another critic of this campaign is André Gorz, for whom it is part of capitalism's fetishisation of the work ethic and reduction of all human activities to the cash nexus.⁷) Dalla Costa's perspective is for Hartmann insufficiently feminist in orientation, and, like the other approaches already considered to the woman question within the Marxist tradition, built on certain masculinist assumptions: that capital is the real enemy, and that all inequalities within modern society can be traced back to capitalism's baleful influence. Men, Hartmann insists, touching on the critical issue for post-Marxists, exert control over women's labour: and that is precisely what Marxists object to in terms of capitalism. Men are acting towards women, therefore, much in the way capital does towards

labour – and that goes for *Marxist* men, too, who benefit from patriarchy just as much as their bourgeois counterparts do. For Marxism to miss this point is for Marxism to be false to its liberationist ideals. Feminism here succeeds in bringing Marxism up against its shortcomings, and challenging some of its most deeply held beliefs in a provocative manner. The time has come to question the dominance that Marxism has traditionally exerted over feminism, and to find out why '*Marxist categories, like capital itself, are sex-blind*'.⁸ Until this has been achieved, Marxism is less than a truly revolutionary social theory. This is 'the personal is political' being stated with a vengeance, and we find it being stated even more forcefully by another contributor to the volume, Sandra Harding, for whom Marxist categories 'are fundamentally *sexist as well as sex-blind*'.⁹

Hartmann goes so far as to imply that Marxism might now be holding back the feminist cause, arguing that the 'liberal' wing of feminism, in the United States particularly, has become more effective than its 'left' counterpart in promoting social change and establishing its objectives in the public consciousness. Male Marxists generally have been quite content to see feminism held back, recognising that feminism represents a threat to their privileges, such as the control they exert over women's labour. Marxism is often part of the mechanism of oppression as far as women are concerned nowadays, and the insistence on class as the determining framework for debates about gender merely helps to institutionalise that oppression. Class solidarity masks gender inequality, to the benefit of men. The answer for women is to detach themselves from mainstream Marxism and construct their own organisations, since men cannot be depended upon voluntarily to give up their well-entrenched privileges. Without such separate development patriarchy will not be destabilised, and if patriarchy is not confronted no real revolution will have occurred if capitalism ever *is* overthrown. The post-Marxist implications of such separate development are obvious: at the very least, Hartmann's brand of left feminism leaves the category of solidarity under a considerable cloud, and we know how sacred that category is to classical Marxist thought.

The other contributors to *The Unhappy Marriage* share Hartmann's concerns, if not always her relative optimism about the possibility of reconciliation between Marxists and feminists. Iris Young argues that Hartmann is espousing a 'dual systems theory' that, in itself, will not be enough 'to patch up the unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism'.¹⁰ What Young proposes instead is the construction of a single theory combining Marxism and radical feminism, which will 'comprehend capitalist patriarchy as one system in which the oppression of women is a *core* attribute': this time, however, it will be feminism which is in the ascendancy in the relationship.¹¹ For Young, it is impossible to separate out capitalism from patriarchy, and dual-systems theorists present a false picture of women's place in contemporary society by attempting to do so. Marxism is culpable in this regard too, since it deflects attention away from the real state of affairs faced by women in our society by subordinating them to the demands of such mainstream Marxist concerns as the class struggle. Young wants to sidestep the category of class altogether, and replace it by 'division of labour'. Division of labour analysis 'assesses the effect of these divisions on the functioning of the economy, the relations of domination, political

and ideological structures', leading us inevitably on to the critical role played by gender division of labour in a capitalist society.¹²

The lack of a sustained gender division of labour analysis has, Young contends, held Marxism back as a cultural theory. Gender division is taken to be the most primitive form of the division of labour, and the basis for all others up to the present day. Any serious analysis of our culture and its particular mode of production must take this into account, yet Marxism, with its well-attested gender-blindness, remains crucially deficient in that area. It is even suggested that class society arises out of changes occurring in the gender division of labour. One of the great virtues of such a form of analysis is that it does not assume that all women are in an identical social situation: instead, it 'notices the broad axes of gender structuration of the relations of labor and distribution, and notices that certain tasks and functions in a particular society are always or usually performed by members of one sex'.¹³ Exceptions to the general principle involved do occur, thus enabling Young to steer feminism away from the pitfall of essentialism. What the analysis ultimately reveals, however, is that the '*marginalization of women and thereby our functioning as a secondary labor force is an essential and fundamental characteristic of capitalism*'.¹⁴ Capitalism thrives on the the division of labour, since this promotes an attitude of docility amongst the workforce (and along with that phenomenon, low wages), and therefore has a vested interest in maintaining the gender division of labour as long as it can.

In Young's interpretation, feminism becomes the missing ingredient to Marxism that would propel it into a new era of theoretical success; although whether classical Marxists can accept the subordination of the class struggle to the gender division of labour is another matter entirely. Despite all the common ground against capitalism as an exploitative system, one suspects that Young's categorial modifications verge on the heretical (even Hartmann expresses doubts in her closing summary of the tendency for such 'unifying' approaches to reduce the enemy to the relatively easy target of 'white male capitalists'¹⁵). Miliband's reassertion of the centrality of the class struggle indicates the powerful conservative forces that thinkers like Young still find themselves up against within the Marxist movement.

Marxism has many other blind spots which the Sargent collection strives to bring to recognition: lesbianism and racism being prime examples, with the latter generating the assertion that one should speak of 'The incompatible Menage a Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism'.¹⁶ Racism, as Gloria Joseph sees it, becomes 'the incestuous child of patriarchy and capitalism', whose existence demands 'an analysis of the Black woman and her role as a member of the wedding'.¹⁷ There is a general consensus throughout the collection that, as one contributor observes, 'marxist analysis can take us only so far and no farther'.¹⁸ Past that point, we are into some version or other of post-Marxism, where unhappiness is transformed into an attitude of rejection – 'beyond materialism', as Hartmann puts it, with or without a sense of nostalgia for the loss of past theoretical 'certainties' on the part of the post-Marxist theorist.¹⁹ While Hartmann suggests such a nostalgia, few others in the debate appear to be too worried about pressing on well beyond materialism.

Doubts about Marxism's value had surfaced earlier in the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement, in the work of such influential feminists as Kate Millett and Juliet Mitchell. Millett notes with approval how the Soviet Union initially passed laws granting women full equality with men, but that soon a reaction set in and Soviet society reverted to patriarchal type. She traces the reasons for this back to Marx and Engels themselves, arguing that

Marxist theory had failed to supply a sufficient ideological base for a sexual revolution, and was remarkably naive as to the historical and psychological strength of patriarchy. . . . Therefore, with the collapse of the old patriarchal order, there was no positive and coherent theory to greet the inevitable confusion.²⁰

Communist history turns into a litany of repressive measures heralding 'the counter-revolution triumphant', and Millett sees nothing more to hope for from that quarter.²¹ Mitchell's polemical study, *Woman's Estate*, voices anxieties about finding 'the attitude of the oppressor within the minds of the oppressed' in revolutionary circles.²² Going back to the source again, Mitchell, in an early version of Hartmann's 'sex-blindness', notes a distinct lack of interest in gender issues on the part of Marxism's founders: 'The position of women, then, in the work of Marx and Engels, remains dissociated from, or subsidiary to, a discussion of the family, which is in its turn subordinated as merely a precondition of private property.'²³ From that 'lack' stems the subsequent 'attitude of the oppressor' that feminists must take radical action to combat. It is a case of women being omitted from the socialist cause as it has developed up to the present, and of revolutionary socialism being on trial until it can rectify the situation.

One way of putting women back within socialism is for women to *take over* socialism, the solution offered by Shulamith Firestone:

we must enlarge historical materialism to *include* the strictly Marxian, in the same way that the physics of relativity did not invalidate Newtonian physics so much as it drew a circle around it, limiting its application – but only through comparison – to a smaller sphere. . . . We can attempt to develop a materialist view of history based on sex itself.²⁴

Mitchell finds this to be both unhistorical and undialectical, and she wishes to go on using the method of dialectical materialism, even if she concedes that it needs to be revised to take account of feminist demands. Nevertheless, from the call for a new materialism to the threat of divorce within a decade is evidence of Marxism failing the trial set it by Mitchell. Confidence in Marxism's ability to change is rapidly evaporating in radical feminist circles, and the reasons are seen to lie deep within the theory itself – not least in the attitudes of its founders. Mitchell admits that the division between radical feminists and socialist feminists may well come to dominate the feminist movement, but still feels that their objectives can be reconciled somehow

(Zillah R. Eisenstein will make similarly optimistic noises on this issue a few years later²⁵). Hartmann's divorce threat does tend to suggest, however, that time is running out. The spectre of incommensurability hovers around all such feminist revisionary attempts.

Rosalind Coward is equally unimpressed by the record of early Marxist thinkers on the issue of gender, and in *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* takes them to task for their refusal to confront sexual relations in any real detail. The failure to do so has left a gap in Marxist theory which has gone largely unaddressed right up to the later stages of the twentieth century. Once again, the fault lies in the tendency from the very earliest days of Marxism to regard the economic domain as paramount, with sexual relations being forced to concede priority. The result has been that Marxism's liberationist pretensions have gone largely unfulfilled as far as women are concerned, with Coward drawing our attention to the generally unimpressive record of communist countries in this respect. All this despite the fact that Marxism is feminism's 'natural ally' in the struggle for personal liberation, and that 'societies in whose development marxist theory has been crucial often afford women's formal equality a significant place in their constitutions'.²⁶ Formal equality is not the same thing as real equality, however, and we have another case of the ideal/real discrepancy that haunts Marxist political practice.

Coward, too, goes back to Engels (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) to discover where things first went wrong on the 'woman question', arguing that Engels's insistence that economic oppression must be overcome before moral and sexual relations can be transformed is the root of the problem. Engels's position is that, 'Once this element has been removed, sexual morality will pursue its "true" course, that of heterosexual, monogamous love', and it has largely dictated how the debate on the woman question has developed within the classical Marxism tradition.²⁷ Any theorist who tried to step outside the parameters established by Engels – Stella Browne and Alexandra Kollontai being cases in point – soon discovered how unsympathetic Marxism could be to contrary views on sexuality. Women's emancipation continued to be treated primarily as an economic matter in Marxist thought, which meant that the woman question was being defined in such a narrow way that real change was unlikely to occur. Yet again, the argument is put forward that in many respects it is liberal feminism which has succeeded in conducting the most radical critique of the family as an institution, despite what we might call that form of feminism's 'economic-blindness'. Coward concludes that the woman question remains undertheorised in Marxism, and that the latter's economic bias constitutes a real barrier to the cause of female emancipation. Full emancipation (that is, economic *plus* sexual) ideally would include an input from Marxism, but belief in Marxism's ability to deliver is beginning to waver in feminist circles, especially given Marxism's antipathy to pluralist politics. Incredulity beckons.²⁸

Given the problems identified by theorists such as Hartmann and Coward, Marxist feminism can come to seem an untenable position to occupy. Caroline Ramazanoglu for one is particularly exercised by the complexities involved in being a Marxist feminist, arguing that

Marxist feminists are . . . in the contradictory situation of having a commitment to struggle for the interests of women as women, regardless of our class, power or economic interests, while at the same time having a commitment to struggle for the interests of the exploited working class, which entails struggling with some men and against some women.²⁹

Pluralism suggests itself as the only answer to such a dilemma, but, as we are increasingly coming to realise, that only creates more problems for the ‘Marxist’ side of the Marxist feminist equation. Ramazanoglu is drawn towards pluralism, and her support for Marxism is very much a qualified one – a ‘bias’ as she describes it, rather than a deeply held belief – that is more than happy to embrace other, non-Marxist, viewpoints if they can help further the cause of women. The success of a radical feminism untrammelled by the theoretical rigidities of Marxist thought acts as a catalyst to Marxist feminists, such as Ramazanoglu, to investigate their own theory more closely to discover where it is failing them. For Ramazanoglu, the main problem lies with the concept of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is a contested term within feminism, and it can be interpreted in a diversity of ways depending upon the character of one’s feminism. Debates rage as to whether it is universal, or culture-bound in one way or another (the latter position leading to yet other debates in turn about the exact nature of such boundedness).³⁰ It is, however, a central feminist concept in that it enables feminists to address the sex-blindness of most existing social theories, based as these are on Enlightenment principles with a masculinist bias. Marxism, being a product of that ‘Enlightenment’ culture, shares its sex-blindness and easy assumption of male precedence. Patriarchy as a concept is an attempt to explain the whole range of practices, from the overt to the subtle and even hidden, by which men maintain their control over women. That takes it well beyond mere economic exploitation, and therefore beyond Marxism’s scope, although Marxist feminists can always insist on capitalism as an exacerbating factor in the growth of sexism. The bigger problem for Marxist feminism is that the radical feminist tendency to treat patriarchy as a universal phenomenon entails biological determinism, leaving us with men and women as universal categories transcending time and culture. From there, change seems impossible and separatism a logical solution – a solution that, given the historical bias of Marxist cultural analysis, Marxist feminists are going to find difficult to accept.

Ramazanoglu argues that the relation between patriarchy and capitalism is at best unclear, but that Marxist feminists need to keep exploring it, otherwise they will be forced to take the radical feminist line and opt for biological determinism as an explanation for the state of gender relations. The universalisation of patriarchy is identified as one of the weak points of radical feminist analysis, although it is worth pointing out that this is exactly what Marxism does with regard to class struggle. Any Marxist who chooses to challenge the practice of universalisation of concepts is going to be placed in a compromising position; unless of course they are deliberately floating the possibility of a post-Marxist solution to Marxism’s problems. A post-Marxist spirit certainly seems to inform Ramazanoglu’s conclusion that,

The relevant marxist question for feminists, then, is not 'are women oppressed?' but 'what are the sources of the contradictions which determine and limit the opportunities for women (or workers or ethnic minorities) to live as whole, free, human beings in control of their own lives?' If the question is put this way, then quite clearly there cannot be one standard answer that will apply to all women or in all circumstances.³¹

This is an open invitation to pluralism, since Marxism very much does believe in 'one standard answer' to the woman question. There is more than a suggestion of a post-Marxist consciousness here, and Ramazanoglu, for all her professed Marxist-feminist 'bias', offers yet more material for the construction of incredulity to the Marxist grand narrative. One comes away from a study such as *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* more aware of the contradictions inherent in being a Marxist feminist ('post-' and 'post-' in conflict), than in Marxism's continuing utility in the fight against gender oppression.

Sylvia Walby also wants to continue exploration into the link between capitalism and patriarchy, feeling that the problem lies in the imbalance between gender and economic factors in studies on both sides of the Marxist divide:

The strength of Marxist feminist analysis of gender and production in the household is its exploration of the link with capitalism. Its weakness is the overstating of this at the expense of gender inequality itself. Its strengths and weaknesses are thus the mirror image of those of radical feminism.³²

When it comes to the place of women's labour, both paid and unpaid ('household production') within a capitalist economy, Walby finds many gaps in the various Marxist accounts of the phenomenon. The 'Reserve Army Theory' views women as a pool of labour to be called on when needed – during an economic boom, for example, or in wartime conditions when the male labour force declines as men are conscripted into the armed forces. Women's employment is thus intermittent and relatively far less secure than men's. The Second World War provides a classic instance of the Reserve Army Theory in action, with women being drafted into industry to make up for shortfalls in male labour, and then in many instances being dismissed afterwards to provide employment for returning soldiers. Walby, however, finds a contradiction in the theory, in that it would have been to capitalism's advantage to continue with female labour, since this was, on the whole, cheaper than men's. Capitalism was going against its own best interests in re-engaging men – unless we regard what happened in countries like Britain and America in the post-war period as actions telling us more about patriarchy than capitalism. It would not have been in *patriarchy's* best interests to increase the permanent pool of female wage labour, as that would have severely undermined men's control over women. Walby does note, however, that female wage labour *has* been increasing towards the end of the century relative to male, indicating that capitalism sometimes can cut across the interests of patriarchy. Nevertheless, she finds the theory just too neat to deal with such a complex socio-political situation.

Arguments that women's ability to remain at home taking care of the family should be seen as positive – proof that capitalism is paying a large enough family wage to allow this – are dismissed as misguided attempts to justify higher wages for men, and thus maintain the existing system of patriarchal relations. Other suggestions that gender (and ethnic) inequalities in the wage market are part of capitalism's strategy to 'divide and rule' the working class, are similarly dismissed as special pleading on patriarchy's behalf; gender inequality manifestly pre-dating the advent of capitalism. What is happening persistently within Marxist thought is that capitalism is being used as a screen for patriarchy, which continues to exert control over women in a multitude of non-economic ways that Marxism simply avoids addressing: in Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison's well-chosen words, 'A wife inhabits her husband's class position, but not the equivalent relation to the means of production.'³³ Under the circumstances, one can understand why Hartmann would feel moved to threaten divorce.

A more personal memoir of the clash between Marxist and feminist ideals can be found earlier in Sheila Rowbotham's *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Rowbotham describes her early encounters with Marxism in the London Young Socialists movement, where 'innumerable species of "Trots" hurled incomprehensible initials at each other in exclusive intercommunication which completely whizzed past my ears'.³⁴ Despite the assumption by the various tendencies that each was in possession of the 'correct' reading of the point at issue, what Rowbotham took away from such experiences was a sense of Marxism as, in practice anyway, a plural theory with no central orthodoxy. This realisation enables her to hold onto her Marxism even when it clashes with her feminist beliefs, and to retain a feeling of optimism about feminism's ability to change Marxism:

In order for Marxism to prove useful as a revolutionary weapon for women, we have at once to encounter it in its existing form and fashion it to fit our particular oppression. This means extending it into areas in which men have been unable to take it by distilling it through the particularities of our own experience.³⁵

While these are radical sentiments by the standards of classical Marxism, they fall short of post-Marxism in assuming that Marxism is a broad enough church to incorporate such changes. The onus seems to be on women to make Marxism take notice of their situation: 'discouragement should not goad us into the trap of presenting our reality according to an already existing scheme of abstraction'; Marxism still remains the ultimate measure of all things socio-political and the overall, final, authority.³⁶

Sexism is treated almost as a form of false consciousness in Rowbotham, which somewhat undercuts her critique of patriarchy: 'male-dominated black and working-class movements can falsely define their "manhood" at the expense of women, just as some women define femaleness at the expense of men. They thus cheat themselves and lose the possibility of man-womanhood.'³⁷ Later, more overtly post-Marxist inclined feminists take a much harder line on patriarchy – as in the

case of Hartmann, where the privileges of patriarchy are held to be only too apparent to the male sex, hence their marked reluctance to give them up. Capitalism is still the main enemy as far as Rowbotham is concerned, and the source of unequal relations within society and the family unit. Women's indirect relation to the capitalist process of production (through housework, for example) can be turned to socialist advantage, in that it leaves them 'able to see through some of the "realities" men have come to regard as "normal"'.³⁸ On that basis, Rowbotham calls for greater female participation in such traditionally patriarchal institutions as trade unions, although the more radical anti-patriarchal theorists would most likely regard this as a lost cause. Rowbotham, on the other hand, still thinks in terms of standard Marxist categories where it is capitalism that is held responsible for the sin of sexism by creating divisions between men and women. In the collision between the hidden production taking place within the family unit and production in the public sphere, the possibility of a new feminist consciousness is created, but its main focus for Rowbotham remains capitalism rather than patriarchy as such. Nevertheless, Rowbotham does expose a masculinist bias in Marxist thought, and her feminist perspective makes demands of Marxism it is unlikely to be able to meet in full.

For all her commitment to Marxism, Rowbotham's study of the relation between feminism and Marxism raises more questions than it solves. One could say that what she succeeds in doing is further problematising an already problematical relationship (as she puts it in another work, 'feminism and Marxism . . . are at once incompatible and in real need of each other'³⁹). Not all feminists will find it necessary, or desirable, to accept Marxism as the ultimate theoretical authority, nor regard it as their duty to seek out ways to align feminism with Marxist categories. Michele Barrett for one adopts a far more sceptical attitude towards Marxism's authority vis-à-vis feminism, arguing that

I am rather suspicious of the view, which socialists are wont to assume as a fact of history, that feminism is naturally and inevitably associated with the left. . . . The ideas of radical feminism are for the most part incompatible with, when not explicitly hostile to, those of Marxism and indeed one of its political projects has been to show how women have been betrayed by socialists and socialism.⁴⁰

Barrett's clearly expressed bias is towards radical feminism, and we are in more obviously post-Marxist territory here, even if she is willing to admit, as are so many Marxist feminists, that radical feminism is deficient in terms of its sociological analysis. Marxism, on the other hand, is spectacularly successful at that kind of analysis, hence the value for a radical feminist of setting up a dialogue with it, and even appropriating some of its methods. Barrett is, however, adamant that 'the issues at stake cannot be resolved at the level of theory alone', and that accordingly she will adopt 'an empirical and historical point of view' in her study of women's oppression.⁴¹ The theory will not be given the opportunity to dictate to the feminist consciousness this time around.

Barrett takes on board Hartmann's principle of the 'sex-blindness' of Marxism, and the fact that this immediately sets up a tension with feminism since, whatever form the latter may take, it must be assumed to be centrally concerned with gender relations. The special brief of Marxist feminism is to identify where these relations are the product of capitalism and where they are distinct from that system. Barrett's analysis of the nature of gender relations within an advanced capitalist society has to be seen against a longer-term process of male oppression of women dating back to pre-capitalist times: a socially institutionalised oppression which we cannot depend on Marxism alone overcoming. With her radical feminist credentials well to the fore, Barrett warns us that it is unlikely that a socialist revolution would lead to the abolition of this entrenched form of patriarchy. It is the task of Marxist feminism to force Marxism to recognise this crucial point, and to insist on the need for autonomy from the mainstream in order to rectify the situation; although Barrett is not advocating separatism in its stricter form, conceding that at least some male socialists have offered support for the feminist cause.

Barrett concentrates on the concepts of patriarchy, reproduction and ideology, on the grounds that these are both central to Marxist feminist analysis and also succeed in foregrounding some of the more controversial aspects of the Marxist feminist project. As far as patriarchy goes she is critical of the radical feminist tendency towards biological reductionism, since this denies the possibility of change:

It is regressive in that one of the early triumphs of feminist cross-cultural work – the establishment of a distinction between sex as a biological category and gender as a social one – is itself threatened by an emphasis on the causal role of procreative biology in the construction of male domination.⁴²

This is the Marxist side of Marxist feminism speaking, the side that believes in cultural change, human agency, and human perfectibility. Patriarchy may pre-date capitalism, but *capitalist* patriarchy is the form that we live under now, and Marxists are united in their belief that it can be confronted and then defeated for the benefit of all humankind. Radical feminism sees patriarchy as transhistorical, Marxism sees class struggle as transhistorical: Marxist feminism is designed to be a bridge between these two positions, insisting on a historically grounded analysis in each case.

Another form of reductionism is at work on the issue of reproduction: the reduction of women's oppression to that of working-class oppression. Barrett's specific complaint is that women's biologically reproductive function is conflated with the role they are generally assigned in a capitalist society: 'ensuring the reproduction of male labour power and . . . maintaining the relations of dominance and subordination of capitalist production'.⁴³ No explanation is offered by Marxist theory as to why gender roles should be constructed in that particular way by capitalism, and it becomes clear that there are unexamined assumptions that need to be brought to the surface. The real problem is the Marxist requirement to analyse all relations in terms of class: in the process gender issues are simply elided.

New approaches to the concept of ideology offer a glimmer of hope to Barrett as to how Marxist feminism might break free of orthodox Marxism's reductionist tendencies. Althusser's claim that ideology is a 'practice', where subjects are

constructed through acts of interpellation, suggests that gender roles need not be seen as fixed (a point made earlier by Beauvoir in her famous observation that one 'becomes' a woman). 'Hence it has become possible', Barrett notes, 'to accommodate the oppression of women as a relatively autonomous element of the social formation.'⁴⁴ Useful though this notion of relative autonomy has proved to be to Marxist feminists, Barrett feels that in the hands of certain post-Althusserian thinkers it has been pushed too far: 'Whilst they appear to rescue sexual politics from their marginality to Marxist analysis, in fact they do so at the expense of any possibility of specifying determinate relations in a real world.'⁴⁵ Historical specificity disappears yet again, in what is effectively another form of universalism (gender as universally, transhistorically, indeterminate); although it will be that property of indeterminacy which will attract those post-Marxists – most notably Laclau and Mouffe – who are inspired by poststructuralist and postmodernist theory.⁴⁶

What shines out from Marxist feminism is a desire to retain the spirit of Marx's own social analyses, with their clear sense of commitment to improving the lot of the oppressed and irrevocably altering the balance of power in human relations. There is also a desire to access at least some of the authority that Marxism has accumulated as a social theory over the years. To be a Marxist is to plug into a long-running tradition of socio-political dissent whose original, anti-capitalist, objectives can still command respect even as the Soviet empire crumbles. The principle of Marxist solidarity continues to hold attractions even for the theory's critics, but feminists are beginning to question the cost of this solidarity in terms of their own particular cultural situation. While some are willing to accept the ultimate authority of the Marxist tradition, others are plainly not so disposed, and, following our earlier practice with post-Marxism, we might categorise those contrasting groups as *Marxist* feminists and Marxist *feminists*. When the accent shifts to the latter word we are moving into post-Marxist territory, because, eventually, Marxist feminism is an internally conflicted position. Marxism is only willing to revise its concepts within very narrow parameters – far narrower than the likes of Hartmann and Barrett are calling for.

In the ensuing struggle to 'redimension' Marxism, almost inevitably there comes a point when the theorist has to choose between the Marxism and the feminism. This is especially so when the theorist has a background in radical feminism: what Barrett has referred to as the 'irreducible core of truth and anger' lying at the heart of radical feminism eventually claims its allegiance.⁴⁷ Implicitly, Marxist feminism encourages the development of a pluralist outlook (even in the case of a *Marxist* feminist such as Rowbotham), and Marxism cannot really countenance that and still stay Marxism in its classical sense. Even to float the possibility of divorce is to have moved well down the road towards open incredulity. Increasingly, patriarchy is the real issue for Marxist feminists, and as Marxism's investment in this system of relations becomes ever more apparent, one can sense its authority steadily draining away. Solidarity can no longer be assumed, and the theory's unity has been gravely, perhaps even irreparably, damaged.

Second-wave feminism's critique of patriarchy reaches some kind of logical conclusion in Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto', where standard notions of gender identity are rejected altogether. Haraway sets out to construct 'an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism' around cyborgs, 'creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted'.⁴⁸ Central to this myth is Haraway's belief in the 'invention and reinvention of nature', where boundaries (between human and animal, human and machine, for example) are observed to be fluid rather than restrictive, a belief which situates her at the optimistic end of the postmodern spectrum.⁴⁹ Whereas Lyotard will become worried about the apparent autonomy of computerised technology, arguing that if we are not careful it will culminate in victory for the 'inhuman', Haraway embraces the phenomenon with enthusiasm:

Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile . . . People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque.⁵⁰

Women can go beyond this materiality and opacity by 'recrafting' their bodies in a context where 'science and technology provide fresh sources of power' for them to appropriate.⁵¹ To recraft is to escape the restrictions imposed by gender identity, since in the interaction between human and machine it becomes increasingly unclear where the boundaries of identity lie. As in science fiction, boundary transgression becomes the norm, and the organic (the realm where women are oppressed) is left behind: 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.'⁵²

All of this is rather utopian, although closer to Marxism than it might at first appear to be, in that, like Marxism, a cyborg manifesto assumes an ability to exert control over nature (to the extent of inventing and reinventing it). From the point of view of classical Marxism, however, Haraway's identity-blurring theories have disturbing implications for notions such as class consciousness. Haraway emphasises 'affinity' over identity, and this is best realised in coalitions which cut across class boundaries ('women of colour', for example); combine affinity with cyborg technology and Marxist categories begin to break down. So, too, for some of Haraway's critics, does feminism, with one complaining that cyborgs would create a situation of 'feminism without women'.⁵³ That is not something Haraway would shy away from, however, and as she remarks in another context,

Humanity is a modernist figure; and this humanity has a generic face, a universal shape. Humanity's face has been the face of man. Feminist humanity must have another shape, other gestures; but, I believe, we must have feminist figures of humanity. They cannot be man or woman; they cannot be the human as historical narrative has staged that generic universal.⁵⁴

Haraway's polemic is deliberately provocative, as well as playful and ironic, but she is in earnest about what she dislikes in socialist feminism and Marxism: 'the

production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now'.⁵⁵

In works such as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, Butler, too, sets out to problematise standard conceptions of identity and gender. The argument is that gender identity is a discourse based on the assumption of 'compulsory heterosexuality':

'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.⁵⁶

Butler identifies a state of 'heterosexual hegemony' in our culture, which she seeks to deconstruct, and, as in the work of Laclau and Mouffe, that hegemony never quite disguises the gap between theory and reality.⁵⁷ 'Forcible reiteration' of gender 'performance' merely constitutes

a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. . . . For the imperative to be or get 'sexed' requires a differentiated production and regulation of masculine and feminine identification that does not fully hold and cannot be fully exhaustive.⁵⁸

It is another argument against totalisation and the effacement of difference, with Butler exploring the various challenges that can be offered to that hegemony, as in the practices of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, and 'drag'. The anti-essentialist cast to her argument, taken together with Haraway's cyborgism (both exercises in 'recrafting'), indicates how postmodern feminism is beginning to outflank Marxist feminism, by finding ways round its problem with biological essentialism. And the farther away we move from that essentialism, concentrating on exposing 'the contingent acts that create the appearance of natural necessity', the more powerful the incredulity being amassed against the Marxist grand narrative.⁵⁹

9 An open universe?

Postmodern science and the Marxist dialectic

Marxist thought is heavily dependent on a notion of the dialectic, and the material realm itself, that harks back to a now largely discredited mechanistic model of the universe. Recent developments in ‘postmodern’ science – quantum mechanics, chaos theory, complexity theory, the anthropic principle – suggest that Marxism’s teleological bias is becoming ever harder to sustain, and that the universe may be far less deterministic in its unfolding than Marxism and nineteenth-century science assumed was the case. There has even been the suggestion that we are moving into a “‘post-mechanistic” paradigm’ featuring the ‘death of materialism’.¹ While many Marxist theorists have argued against the notion that Marxism is mechanistic or deterministic in character, there is still a strong belief in a knowable and exploitable nature, including human nature, in classical Marxism that assumes a predictable physical world. Given Marxism’s avowedly scientific orientation, any significant change in scientific paradigm calls for a reassessment of its theoretical principles and methodology: a ‘redimensioning’ of the dialectic.

Post-Marxism of the libertarian, Laclau–Mouffe variety would certainly benefit from such a reassessment, in that an ‘open’ universe may be more sensitive to the actions of consciousness than scientists have traditionally tended to believe. As Paul Davies has argued,

To borrow a phrase from Louise Young, the universe is as yet ‘unfinished’. We find ourselves living at an epoch only a few billion years after the creation. From what can be deduced about astronomical processes, the universe could remain fit for habitation for trillions of years, possibly for ever.²

This is the strong anthropic principle in action, and it is an argument against teleology with significant implications for cultural theory. There is no inevitability to the onward march of capitalism, as thinkers such as Fukuyama have implied, and it is possible that new, more liberating, forms of social organisation may result from the self-organising principle held to be active throughout the material realm. Exactly what we *mean* by the material realm needs to be reassessed: for Davies and Gribbin, for example, ‘the matter myth’ has been ‘put paid to’ by the new physics.³ The point of the argument is less to provide a new scientific model for Marxism (since as we know from scientific history, the current paradigm will be superseded in its turn),

than to explore the theory's capacity for reinventing itself in terms of changing paradigms. Having said that, the current paradigm is the one we know, and it becomes an interesting test case to see how Marxism fares when exposed to it.

The concern in this chapter will be to open up divisions between the *post-* and *post-* sides, in that the latter is suggesting a much deeper exploration of the theoretical implications of postmodern science – a term of convenience, as we shall see below – than, for example, Lyotard's superficial appropriation of it as a 'producer' of the 'unknown' rather than the 'known'.⁴ Arguably, such an exploration has more to offer the *post-Marxist* tendency, and the different degrees of scepticism implied by the term 'incredulity' need to be made clear.

It also needs to be made clear that not every Marxist is a reductive materialist, although that has been a powerful force within the movement itself. David-Hillel Ruben traces this particular 'distortion' back to the Second International, citing Bernstein's definition as typical of what the belief involved: 'To be a materialist means, first and foremost, to reduce every event to the necessary movements of matter . . . The movement of matter takes place, according to the materialist doctrine, in a necessary sequence like a mechanical process.'⁵ Bernstein was attacking what he saw as an unfortunate development arising from Marxism's deterministic conception of historical process, although Marx himself is exempted from the belief by Ruben.⁶ Not for the first time, however, we have then the problem of a considerable divergence between founder and followers to explain. Ruben insists that materialism is to be read as *philosophical* materialism; that is, the assertion that reality is independent of thought. The term then can be used interchangeably with 'realism'. What is incontestable, however, is that reductive materialism took hold of the imagination of many influential figures in the classical tradition, and that it seemed to answer a particular need – presumably the need for Marxism to be 'natural', in the sense of the natural order of things. For the dialectic to be working at the level of matter was for the dialectic to be irresistible: a force that would necessarily prevail over one's enemies. Given its insistence on being a science, it is not surprising if Marxism became entangled with the materialism current in nineteenth-century scientific circles, and, further, that some element of this has remained in the classical tradition. Sebastiano Timpanaro for one believes not just that this is so, but that it is a desirable trait, claiming in *On Materialism* that the opposition to so-called vulgar materialism has led to

denial of the conditioning which nature continues to exercise on man; relegation of the biological character of man to a kind of prehistoric prologue to humanity; refusal to acknowledge the relevance which certain biological data have in relation to the demand for *happiness* (a demand which remains fundamental to the struggle for communism).⁷

Timpanaro provides a corrective to what he argues is a generalised anti-materialism in Western Marxism, and we shall return to *On Materialism* later.

The appeal to science is certainly a common one in Marxism. At the very least there is that belief mentioned earlier in nature's malleability and receptivity to

control, to take into account. Such beliefs depend on theories of the nature of matter at *some* point, and that link deserves exploration in terms of the very different picture of the world that postmodern science provides. Thinkers like Ruben may be embarrassed by the belief, which they treat as part of a positivist heritage that Marxism should be rejecting; yet perhaps it is even more deeply engrained in the Marxist psyche than he would care to admit. Marxism has always aspired to being more than just another philosophical theory, and as Ruben himself admits, in arguing for it as primarily a realist theory, ‘there is a danger that it may begin to look wholly uncontentious’, given that realism is taken for granted in most philosophical circles by the time he is writing in the 1970s.⁸ (A similar problem arises with G. A. Cohen’s revision of the dialectic, where it is contended that there are no dialectical laws, and that it is enough for the stages of a process to *follow* one another (rather than be required to *generate* one another), to be described as dialectical. Coupled with the assertion that ‘I do not think that Marx himself used dialectic with explanatory pretension in his mature work’, one is left wondering what all the fuss has been about.⁹) The problem as Ruben sees it is that residual Hegelianism has distorted Marxism such that ‘many Marxists are, perhaps unconsciously, involved in a denial of materialism’.¹⁰ Hegel often gets the blame for what current-day Marxists regard as unfortunate developments in Marxist history, but there really does seem to be something larger at stake than whether the theory is realist or not. Marxism’s scientific pretensions were bound to bring it into contact with current views about the nature of matter, and its claims to be more than a philosophy mean that it is engaged in doing more than simply overcoming idealism. When Engels wanted an example of ‘the negation of the negation’ after all, he chose the germination of a seed, which indicates a desire for Marxist theoretical principles to be a feature of basic physical processes.

It is all too easy when reading a commentator such as Ruben to become bogged down in seemingly endless debates about what Marx *really* said, *really* believed, and *really* meant, as if we could recapture the essence of Marx and so put the unfortunate legacy of twentieth-century Marxism and communism behind us. A certain kind of Marxist thrives on this theological side to the subject, although in its concentration on supposed mistakes such exegesis tends to make Marxist history sound, ironically enough for a theory with such a strong sense of its own destiny as well as a belief in there being ‘laws’ of history, like one long chapter of accidents and missed chances. For the post-Marxist, however, what is most interesting is the gap that is opened up in such discussions between Marx and Marxism – and, in this particular instance, between Marxism and science. The existence of the gap might suggest that the search for that elusive essence of Marx’s ideas is pointless: that the entire *discourse* of Marxism must be confronted, including its relationship to science, positivist or otherwise. It might also be pointed out that materialism need not be reductive, and could have things to tell us about the scope of a theory – as well as, arguably even more importantly, its limitations. On that basis, we now plunge into the world of postmodern science.

Whether there is any such thing as ‘postmodern’ science has been the subject of much debate. Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont have, notoriously enough, rejected the

idea, arguing that what we are faced with instead is a systematic 'abuse' of scientific theory by an array of postmodern philosophers. Given the controversy surrounding their provocative claims, any attempt to postmodernise Marxism has to engage with Sokal and Bricmont's *Intellectual Impostures* to some degree. Sokal and Bricmont argue that the importation of scientific concepts into the humanities and social sciences calls for, although it rarely receives, some kind of justification; that the analogies assumed are frequently far too vague to be taken seriously intellectually, and betray, at best, only a superficial understanding of the scientific discourse in question. They wade into the work of such thinkers as Kristeva, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari with some gusto, claiming that it simply disregards facts and logic. Thus Kristeva's early work is taken to task for invoking 'technical notions concerning infinite sets, whose relevance to poetic language is difficult to fathom, especially since no argument is given'; while Baudrillard's extensive use of scientific terms is dismissed as 'manifestly irrelevant'.¹¹ Few postmodern philosophers emerge unscathed from the exercise (Derrida being a notable exception on the grounds that he largely avoids scientific discourse), whose knockabout quality, in an area of enquiry that can take itself too seriously, is often quite refreshing. Postmodernism is pictured as a gigantic conspiracy whose effect on the intellectual life of the late twentieth century is almost wholly malign.

While *Intellectual Impostures* is a useful corrective to some of the wilder flights of interdisciplinarity in postmodern thought, in many respects it misses the point of the use of scientific concepts in the humanities and social sciences – and perhaps also of interdisciplinarity itself. Scientific concepts often have metaphysical implications that invite leaps of imagination foreign to the more focused nature of the scientific project; or they have the effect of casting existing metaphysical problems in a new light that generates further debate. The intention is to create new perspectives of thought rather than, strictly speaking, to discover new facts. Interdisciplinarity is often a case of throwing disparate things together and discovering what happens when they collide, and if over-optimistic claims are sometimes made for what results from such intellectual experimentation, that does not devalue the exercise altogether. Science has for some time now been the major source of material for metaphysical speculation, and, again, one has to allow some room for experimentation here. Metaphysical speculation is, by its very nature, often wrong-headed and prone to go down blind alleys; but that does not detract from its important role in human affairs. It could be argued that if science is going to be anything other than an esoteric pursuit, it needs continually to be tested against our metaphysical beliefs: only then does it really come alive to the general population.

In a more general sense one would want to defend the use of science by philosophers and cultural theorists. Even if some individuals do abuse the privilege on occasion, the desire to find scientific reinforcement for one's theory is entirely understandable, and, in most cases, laudable. Whether in a modern or a postmodern society, science is still our best guide to an understanding of nature, including human nature. The degree of correspondence between nature and human nature remains a matter of considerable debate: we are material beings, are we therefore subject to quantum effects? or the mysterious operation of strange attractors? Are we as chaotic

at sub-atomic level as standard matter is theorised to be? And if we are, what effect does this have on us at the macro-level of self-consciousness? Might this explain some of the grey areas of human behaviour? Using science in the construction of cultural theory is one way of trying to bridge the gap between nature and human nature that generates such daunting questions: or at the very least of exploring just how much correspondence there is – or that we can experience. The most problematical aspect of the enterprise is the mind, which in some sense seems to be outside the process: an observer of nature rather than part of nature. Reading science back into the products of the mind – such as metaphysical or cultural theories – represents an attempt to demystify our mental processes; to render them more transparent, therefore more amenable to development. Science is not an ideologically neutral pursuit, nevertheless most of us will consider it to be less tainted by ideology than the bulk of our social activities, and thus a signal of one's good faith if used in the realm of theory.

Sokal and Bricmont conclude that postmodernism has exhausted its somewhat meagre stock of concerns, and is on its way out as a cultural paradigm. Postmodernism, in their interpretation, is a negatively oriented discourse with essentially nihilistic objectives. Its use, or 'abuse', of science has been designed in the main to mystify, and their greatest fear is that it might lead to an even more exaggerated form of irrationalism than it is currently espousing. One could argue that this is to underestimate the value of having challenged, and, arguably, having helped to bring about the downfall, of certain orthodoxies in both the intellectual and political realms: that if it had done nothing else than promote a more sceptical attitude towards entrenched authority, postmodernism would have justified its existence. It could be argued that *Intellectual Impostures* underestimates the value of scepticism in human affairs. Sokal and Bricmont miss, too, the fact that postmodernism has given rise to some positive currents of thought and political action, as in the case of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism with its search for new articulations to fight social and political abuses around the globe, and wary attitudes towards totalising theories of human behaviour that generally serve to repress us. Lyotard's concept of the little narrative might also be cited as a positive contribution to political thought, in encouraging action at local level against monolithic political systems and the multinationals. It is the seemingly open-ended bits of recent scientific theory that attract postmodern thinkers, since these provide reinforcement for the sceptical attitude adopted towards authority in postmodern theory. Part of the postmodern programme, paradoxically enough, is to cast doubt on the authority associated with science as well, by drawing on those aspects of recent scientific enquiry that lead us into paradox. The message being transmitted at such junctures is that even science, unquestionably one of the most revered of our cultural institutions in the West from the Enlightenment period onwards, cannot provide us with a totally consistent picture of the world. This need not be interpreted as an attack on science, more a recognition that it, too, has its limitations – a point we shall be discussing in more detail below when we look at the work of John D. Barrow.

Another point that ought to be made in their defence is that postmodern thinkers are operating in largely uncharted territory, focusing on those areas where there are

gaps in our knowledge, and inviting us to consider the implications of those gaps for our systems of belief and the social and political practices these entail. Both in science and in everyday human affairs inexplicable things do occur, and what postmodernists are trying to determine is whether there is some underlying lack of order that will frustrate our more ambitious attempts to totalise and exert control over natural phenomena (including human nature in there again). We treat the individual subject as a consistent entity responsible for its actions over time, although the extent of our control over our own identity, as well as the environment around us, is more and more open to question.¹² It is only to be expected that science would be turned to for help in trying to reconstruct our picture of our material selves such that disorder and lack of control are brought into the equation. Sokal and Bricmont argue that theories such as catastrophe or fractal geometry have not 'called into question traditional scientific epistemology', but in the way these particular theories point up human limitations (our inability, as Benoit Mandelbrot famously observed, to measure or map accurately a stretch of coastline, for example) they certainly seem to call into question our everyday epistemology with its assumption of a largely predictable physical universe obeying determinable laws.¹³ To expand the area of human lack of control is to create doubts concerning our Enlightenment-derived vision of ourselves and our intellectual capabilities. It is also worth pointing out that many writers on science feel that recent changes *do* call into question traditional scientific epistemology, and that we are experiencing a change of paradigm (to 'post-mechanistic', for example) along the lines of one of Thomas Kuhn's 'scientific revolutions'. Sokal and Bricmont's position on this is conspicuously conservative, and they take issue with the more radical side of Kuhn's project which they see as a major contributory factor in the growth of postmodern relativism – relativism being, in their view, one of the great evils of recent intellectual life.

Sokal and Bricmont are particularly keen to play down the supposedly radical implications of chaos theory, arguing that 'one should avoid jumping to hasty philosophical conclusions' about our inability to predict future states of a system.¹⁴ The extreme relativism that often results from the appropriation of chaos theory by the humanities and social sciences is utterly rejected, on the grounds that it is based on a gross misunderstanding of the science involved. Sokal and Bricmont cite a tendency to confuse the concepts of determinism and predictability amongst many commentators that, they insist, invariably leads them into error. It is perfectly possible for something to be both deterministic and unpredictable, so that *un*predictable need not necessarily be taken to mean chaotic. No doubt some philosophers have jumped to such a hasty conclusion, but that does not mean they are totally mistaken in the metaphysical implications drawn from it. What is critical from our point of view is that it lies beyond our power to alter the outcome whether the unpredictability is reached by a deterministic or an indeterministic route (even to state the problem in this way is to put our everyday epistemology under strain). A nature that is either deterministically or indeterministically unpredictable is hardly one we can exploit in the manner that the Enlightenment project demands of us. Extreme order and extreme disorder are equally threatening to our concept of free will – and neither is particularly welcome to the dialectic either. While conceding the need for

verbal precision (Sokal and Bricmont's discussion of the differences between linearity in the mathematical and intellectual sense is especially useful in this regard¹⁵), discriminating between determinism and predictability does not wholly eradicate the metaphysical dimension of chaos theory, nor its unsettling quality.

One might criticise Sokal and Bricmont for adversely judging postmodernism in general on the basis of its use, or abuse, of scientific theories, as if that aspect summed up what the movement was really about. Postmodernism comes across as an intellectual conspiracy to push the cause of epistemological relativism, rather than an attempt to theorise more general trends already present in everyday culture. Postmodern thinkers did not create scepticism about authority; their objective is rather to find theoretical justification – in science and elsewhere – for a scepticism that we can observe gradually permeating Western culture over the course of the twentieth century. This is a task requiring experimentation, particularly interdisciplinary experimentation, but postmodernism's experimental quality largely passes Sokal and Bricmont by. They see intellectual deceit, or at the very least a culpable lack of intellectual rigour, where we might posit instead intellectual risk-taking designed to unsettle entrenched orthodoxies of thought well able to defuse dissent presented in the standard mode. Even if postmodern thinkers do have an unfortunate tendency to confuse authority and authoritarianism, their challenge to orthodoxy has been both necessary and socially valuable – and it is no more than a concentrated version of what is taking place in the general cultural realm anyway. Institutional authority no longer has the status that it once did in the West, and there is little in current trends to suggest that it is on the brink of recovering it. *Absolute* authority certainly has few friends in Western society at the moment. Postmodernism did not manufacture such widespread scepticism, merely report it. At times it feels as if Sokal and Bricmont are shooting the messenger for bringing news they do not want to hear.

One of the more suggestive lines of enquiry in recent scientific thought, and one that does seem to call into question its traditional epistemological basis, has been that about the limitations of science. John D. Barrow's *Impossibility: The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits* is a case in point. It is part of Barrow's definition of science that it must have limits: 'Our knowledge of the Universe', as he puts it, 'has an edge.'¹⁶ If we are to take Marxism's claims to be a science at face value, then such ideas must be explored. Barrow freely admits that science is one of the great success stories of modern human endeavour, but wants us to recognise that we can overstate its power and scope, that even the most developed science will come up against some ultimate limits to its predictive abilities. Whereas our Enlightenment-derived notion of science is one of continual progress, of the inevitable rolling back of the frontiers of knowledge, Barrow's is less imperialistic. For him, 'the impossible is a powerful and persistent notion. Unnoticed, its influence upon our history has been deep and wide; its place in our picture of what the Universe is like at its deepest level is undeniable. But its positive role has escaped the critics' attention.'¹⁷ That positive role for the impossible turns many of our perceptions of science on their heads, such as the idea that science in the longer term will uncover all the secrets of the universe.

Science, in fact, will only *be* science where it is bounded by impossibility, and for Barrow it is a necessary condition of all scientific enquiry that it must fail to reveal all to us. Rather than a steady progress towards the discovery of ultimate truths (a scientific utopia to set beside a Marxist political utopia), we have something much more fragmented, and, one is tempted to say, something much more postmodern. It is not that Barrow is calling for a cessation of scientific enquiry, only for a greater modesty in formulating its claims: the kind of modesty that postmodernism, in its broadest sense (to include such phenomena as the ecology movement), tries to instil in us. A totalising science is no more consonant with the postmodern ethos than a totalising politics.¹⁸

Barrow speaks of a recurrent pattern to most scientific enquiry, where the progressive accumulation of knowledge from the application of a successful theory suggests that we are on the verge of total understanding in a given area. We are all familiar in our own day with the search for a 'Grand Unified Theory' in physics that will explain the workings of the universe to us, and the periodic claims that such a theory is near at hand. Barrow sounds a cautionary note on this kind of belief:

But then something unexpected happens. It's not that something is seen which takes the formulae by surprise. Something much more unusual happens. The formulae fall victim of a form of civil war: they predict that there are things which they cannot predict, observations which cannot be made, statements whose truth they can neither affirm nor deny. The theory proves to be limited, not merely in its sphere of applicability, but to be *self-limiting*. Without ever revealing an internal consistency, or failing to account for something we have seen in the world, the theory produces a 'no-go' statement. We shall see that only unrealistically simple scientific theories avoid this fate.¹⁹

The implication for Marxism is that either it *is* a fully fledged science, in which case eventually it will run up against limits to its predictiveness that will undermine its universalising claims; or that it is only a weak science, 'unrealistically simple' in its construction, in which case its authority largely collapses. Neither is a particularly satisfactory solution if one is an orthodox Marxist bent on changing the world, but it is worth following through Barrow's ideas in more detail before deciding which category to place Marxism in – and whether the dialectic can be rescued afterwards from such claims as 'Our knowledge about the Universe has an edge': especially since those claims include our knowledge of sub-sets of that universe, such as human nature. Add an 'edge' to human nature, and the dialectic would appear to be in some difficulty, its predictions randomised to some extent. Classical Marxism depends very heavily on its ability to manipulate human nature to bring about the end of class struggle and institute the Marxist utopia. Randomisation would be anathema to such a theory. Post-Marxism, however, can accommodate 'edges' quite comfortably, as can postmodernism in general. Postmodernism might even be called a theory of the edge. When Lyotard calls for 'incredulity towards metanarratives' he is doing so on the basis of those narratives' failure to recognise the edges of knowledge, to pretend instead to a universalism of application that recent history shows they will consistently fall short of in the real world.

Barrow proceeds on the basis of what sounds like a paradox: 'A world that was simple enough to be fully known would be too simple to contain conscious observers who might know it.'²⁰ In other words, it is a condition of our trying to understand the world that this only be possible up to a point: rather like the phenomenal/noumenal boundary in Kantian epistemology there is a line that we cannot cross in our enquiries. It is not just that there is an unknown still to be discovered, but an *unknowable* lying behind that. The totality will always elude us. This is not an argument against the pursuit of knowledge, or the improvability of human nature, but rather against the notion of total control: and, as we know, orthodox Marxism has always striven to achieve this state of affairs in the political realm, with no aspect of human affairs escaping the attention of the ruling elite. If Barrow is right, then this has been a project doomed to failure from the outset, and post-Marxism is no more than a belated recognition on the left of the need for a greater sense of modesty and proportion in conducting our political lives. Laclau and Mouffe's critique of the concept of hegemony becomes an object lesson in how to reveal the shortcomings of the totalisers, whose project is seen to be dependent on ad hoc prescriptions being smuggled in to shore up a theory faltering when confronted by the vagaries – or unknowabilities – of human nature. Totality is an illusion, the pursuit of which in the political domain generally causes distress to the bulk of humanity. The fetish over controlling events crumbles when faced by such a realisation.

Barrow pictures us as having a 'penchant for completeness', that only too easily leads us into error: 'our greatest blunders', he points out, 'often arise from the oversimplification of aspects of reality that subsequently prove to be far more complex than we realized'.²¹ Marxist totalisers stand guilty of such an oversimplification, of conceiving of social reality as a graspable entity capable of being understood in its completeness and thereby manipulated at will. It is when the completeness does not materialise as predicted that bridging concepts such as hegemony and false consciousness are brought into play in an effort to close the loop. As we have seen, however, the loop is not closed without some intellectual cost, and it is when that cost can no longer be borne meekly that post-Marxism begins in earnest. Barrow outlines a series of situations in which completeness cannot be achieved, pointing out that the corollary of this is that when completeness *is* achieved it is either fairly trivial in nature or incapable of yielding significant further knowledge: Euclidean geometry is complete but mathematics is not. Amongst the many things that can never be complete is our knowledge of the universe as a whole, since this is bound by the speed limit of light, and there exist cosmic areas simply too far away ever to permit light from there to reach us. Similarly, at the micro-level there are limits to what can be known because there are limits to what can be measured – as we are aware from Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. There are also limits set to our predictions when it comes to the operation of non-linear dynamic systems – the realm of chaos and complexity theory, where small changes in initial conditions can lead to large-scale unpredictabilities at later points. More crucially than any of these in many ways, is the fact that we cannot know with certainty whether we are in a universe that will expand continually or eventually collapse back into a 'Big Crunch' to complement the 'Big Bang'; in other words, whether we *are* in an open

universe or not, since that depends on the, unprovable, assumption that the unknowable universe beyond our horizon of experience is the same as the one within it. None of these cases means that we are unable to exert some control over our immediate environment, just that, at both micro- and macro-level, there are 'edges' that restrict what that amount of control can ever be – unless we are willing to settle for a trivial 'completeness' that is unlikely to satisfy the totality-minded social theorist.

Barrow puts forward some probing questions he claims we are faced with in each case when a scientific model is constructed to describe some aspect of physical reality:

- Is the gap between reality and the mathematical description of it a harmless one?
- Does the use of a mathematical model introduce any limitation upon what we can deduce from the model?
- How can we distinguish limits imposed by our choice of model from limits that would be imposed by any (or no) choice of model to codify our observations of Nature?²²

Leaving the mathematical aspect to one side for the moment, and substituting 'theoretical' where 'mathematical' appears, these are questions which also ought to be addressed when any social or political theory is applied to reality. The gap between reality and its theoretical description is certainly not harmless in the case of Marxism. It is a cause for concern to Marxist theorists, requiring the use of hegemony and false consciousness to render it harmless to the authority of the theory. A situation cannot be allowed to continue where theory and reality are failing to map onto each other; not if the theory is trying to win new adherents to its side. We also have to acknowledge that the theoretical model does introduce limitations to any model of, say, revolution or social development that is being applied to the world, in that the world is being made to conform to what the theoretical model says it should be. Indeed, if the world-picture does not conform to the theoretical model it will be discounted. All history is the history of class struggle – full stop. In the third case, no totalising theory such as Marxism can admit the validity of any other, or for that matter no, model, hence no effective comparison can be made – which is hardly very scientific (a point made earlier by Popper, in his observation that Marxism was unfalsifiable, thus in his understanding of the term, unscientific²³). Although it is keen to trade on the *mystique* of being a science, in most cases Marxism does not act very much *like* a science. There is a distinct lack of the doubt that Barrow insists should be there about the possibility of completeness, and we do have to consider whether the completeness that Marxists assume is either, (a) false, or (b) trivial. Either judgement would severely disorder Marxism's claim to be a world-altering, as opposed to mere world-interpreting, theory. Post-Marxism still has some claims to be the former, but in much more limited fashion that befits the new trends in science with their bias towards the notion of an open universe.

Barrow insists that we have to come to terms with the somewhat unpalatable fact that the limits to scientific enquiry and the extension of our knowledge are *absolute* limits:

the more we try to grasp what science is, and how it relates to the activity of human minds, the more we are drawn towards the possibility that limits might be deeply rooted in the nature of things. They might even *define* the nature of things.²⁴

This calls for a fundamental change to the Enlightenment mind-set, where we accept a necessary incompleteness to our knowledge and our abilities. Barrow also asks us to confront the possibility that our minds are less than totally logical processing organisms, which has some further unwelcome consequences for the Enlightenment outlook: 'The brain is a staging point in an ongoing evolutionary process. The mind was not evolved for the "purpose" of doing mathematics. Like most evolutionary products it does not need to be perfect, merely better than previous editions, and sufficiently good to endow a selective advantage.'²⁵ Human imperfections, in other words, cannot *completely* be overcome: which is bad news for any theory with utopian objectives (unless we are content to see socialism as a 'selective advantage' over other forms of socio-political organisation). False consciousness might have to be redefined as an inevitable part of the nature of things, an aspect of our fallibility, rather than a temporary blip in the development of class consciousness which only requires some concerted educational work by the party to be overcome for good. Again, this need not be seen as an argument against political action; more a warning about the dangers of overreaching where human nature is concerned (and if post-Marxism is anything it is a reaction against overreaching). Inconsistency might have to be accepted as an integral part of the human package that theorists ignore at their peril. We may not know precisely where the limits to our ability to organise human nature lie (never mind Nature in the larger sense), but we will keep encountering them no matter how much we may plan. More to the point, we will encounter them because we *do* plan.

Barrow leaves us with the paradox that the more powerful a scientific theory is, the more it will find itself having to acknowledge the existence of absolute limits. If we accept this as a model of science, and Barrow's arguments are seductive ones, then Marxism falls far short. Classical Marxists are not noted for admitting that their theory has limits. In cases where predictions fail to work out, the blame is generally put on reality not on the theory – and the outcome can always be deferred to some future point when reality will perform as expected. Post-Marxism involves a reversal of procedure, with reality being absolved for the theory's failures and Marxism's predictive claims largely abandoned in favour of a more open-ended approach to political action. Barrow's study suggests it would be hard to resurrect those predictive claims with any great sense of confidence:

Again, we see a threat to our confident extrapolations about the behaviour of complex collective intelligences in the far distant future. Our experience of complex systems is that they display a tendency to organize themselves into critical states that are optimally sensitive, so that small adjustments can produce compensating effects throughout the system. As a result, they are unpredictable in detail. Whether it is sand grains or thoughts that are being self-organized, their next move is always a surprise.²⁶

If even thought escapes Marxist predictions, then the theory is quite possibly in terminal trouble. The dialectic is not predicated on the basis of surprises, and self-organization throws the concept into disarray by replacing a predictable universe with a truly open one. The problem from a Marxist perspective is that an open universe is, by definition, not a totally controllable one, and unpredictable antitheses are a poor basis for a socio-political programme structured on the grand scale. Given their traditional commitment to social engineering, left-wing theories in general, not just Marxism, need to come to terms with that openness. We might see post-Marxism as a genuine, and welcome, attempt to do so.

A limitation-oriented, anti-completeness approach to science can also be found in the work of R. C. Lewontin, whose analysis of the Human Genome Project in *The Doctrine of DNA: Biology as Ideology* represents a blistering attack on the totalising imperative in the field of genetic enquiry. Lewontin identifies a tendency amongst genetic scientists to assume that DNA holds the secret to the whole of human behaviour:

I once heard one of the world's leaders in molecular biology say, in the opening address of a scientific congress, that if he had a large enough computer, he could compute any organism, by which he meant totally describe its anatomy, physiology, and behaviour. But that is wrong. Even the organism does not compute itself from its DNA. A living organism at any moment in its life is the unique consequence of a developmental history that results from the interaction of and determination by internal and external forces.²⁷

There are clear similarities here to the Marxist project, which felt that in the dialectic it had found the means to 'compute' humanity's essence and the workings of history. We note the same Enlightenment-derived boundless belief in progress and scientific method that Marxism displays: the sense that the totality of human experience, including its underlying motivation, can be grasped if we simply devote enough effort and resource to it. Modernity asserts itself in each case, with its refusal to acknowledge limits. Lewontin, like Barrow, is far more circumspect, pointing out that the processes in question are considerably more complex than control-minded geneticists would allow, and that both the limitations to human knowledge and the factor of difference must be given their due.

The Human Genome Project is for Lewontin reductionist in approach and determinist in ethos, and he senses political dangers in the direction it is taking. He discounts the claims of the movement to aid the cause of medical science by discovering the relevant genetic abnormalities involved in each human disease, arguing that this assumes a model of a 'normal' human being that could be misused by the authorities: 'A medical model of all human variation makes a medical model of normality, including social normality, and dictates that we pre-emptively or through subsequent corrective therapy bring into line anyone who deviates from that norm.'²⁸ The political implications of such 'corrective therapy' on 'deviants' are worrying enough, but even more worrying is the fact that the data being used is based on a series of false assumptions. Genetic development involves a huge amount

of 'noise', rendering the notion of normality a nonsense. There is not even perfect matching between the left and right sides of individual human beings (in fingerprints, for example), never mind between different members of the human race. Also, the interaction of internal and external forces, an essentially unpredictable process for which DNA provides no reliable guide, arguably has an even greater impact on individual development than the entire complex of genetic factors does.

Lewontin wants geneticists to tone down their claims and acknowledge that, no matter how much scientific data they may accrue, it will always fall short of providing a general programme for human behaviour or individual physical and psychological development. Genetic scientists must recognise the limits of their knowledge and methods, how large a part chance plays in the creation of the individual human character, and how indeterminable the causal patterns involved in the process actually are. The Human Genome Project is guilty of the overweening pride we associate with modernity as a social project, and, as in the case of Marxism, of similarly glossing over the fact of difference in order to make its theories work. The concept of class consciousness, for example, depends heavily on turning a blind eye to individual difference, as if knowledge of the economic structure of a society provided a complete blueprint for individual behaviour in much the same way that the Human Genome Project claims of gene patterns. We might well add 'difference-blindness' to 'sex-blindness' in our list of Marxism's faults, noting that it is all too representative of modernist science in this respect. That urge to totalise, and by totalising to control, lies buried deep inside the modernist psyche. In opposition to this, and in line with most postmodernist thinking on the issue, Lewontin wants to encourage an attitude of scepticism about all such totalising imperatives. Science-as-grand-narrative is unequivocally rejected.

We can now consider self-organisation and its role in recent scientific enquiry in more detail. The concept is integral to the generation of theories running from catastrophe through chaos to complexity, the 'post-mechanistic paradigm', as Davies and Gribbin refer to it, and its implications for dialectical materialism need to be assessed. Self-organisation occurs in each of these theories in ways which draw attention to the limits of human agency: what price free will in the domain of a strange attractor? Even if we take on board Sokal and Bricmont's criticisms, self-organisation, and allied notions such as the anthropic principle, still have the potential to unsettle our world-view.

Chaos theory was devised to explain the workings of non-linear dynamic systems, although it has caught the popular imagination, generating books on a wide variety of topics across the gamut of the human sciences. No doubt the word 'chaos' itself has been instrumental in this widespread appropriation, given its overtones of disorder and fragmentation (exactly what deconstructionists and postmodernists are looking for in their campaign against authority), and Sokal and Bricmont are right to point out that it does not necessarily carry the same metaphysical charge to scientists. What tends to attract philosophers and cultural theorists is the counter-intuitive mixture of determinism and randomness that lies at the heart of the workings of chaos, as well as such entities as strange attractors with their mysterious

power to control events. Strange attractors have been theorised to lie behind all systems, and have the effect of rendering them highly unpredictable, featuring, as they do, the 'deep order' of 'deterministic chaos'.²⁹ The weather is one of the mundane examples often chosen by chaos theorists, since its patterns persistently escape reliable prediction, not just in the macro sense but the micro also. There is assumed to be some controlling attractor behind the weather, but not one we can have access to, and although weather predictions can be correct, they can also be spectacularly incorrect on occasion. Black holes constitute a more dramatic example of the phenomenon, where matter is helpless before its attractive power. As in Barrow's enquiry, what we become aware of in such cases is the limitation of both human power and understanding, with the Enlightenment world-view again suffering in consequence.

Complexity theory becomes particularly interesting because it impinges on our conceptions of the mind and consciousness, the relationship of which to self-organisation continues to generate heated debate across the fields of both science and philosophy. When carried through into the anthropic principle, there are some startling, if still rather science-fictional in nature, implications created by the process of self-organisation. On the face of it complexity ought to be good news for free will, given the degree of openness it posits in physical processes: there is always the possibility of a new, and largely unpredictable, state of affairs developing, creating a range of options that could not have been envisaged beforehand. To some extent it is the world as pictured by existentialism, with a constant series of undetermined choices unfolding before us. The further we delve into complexity's processes, however, the more problematical the situation seems to become for human agency, with the issue of control moving firmly back on to the agenda. Self-organisation is an aspect of an advanced state of complexity ('the edge of chaos' as it is called), and it can occur in a wide range of phenomena, from those at the sub-atomic level through human civilisation to the universe itself.³⁰ Human consciousness can be regarded as a product of self-organisation, and it has even been theorised, through the agency of the strong anthropic principle, that the universe itself might be capable of conscious self-organisation – of which human consciousness would be a constituent part. As Davies puts it, 'there is still a sense in which human mind and society may represent only an intermediate stage on the ladder of organisational progress in the cosmos.'³¹ Davies and Gribbin, building on the ideas of the theoretical physicist John Wheeler, have even suggested that we ought

to think of the physical Universe as a gigantic information-processing system in which the output was as yet undetermined. . . . The human mind is a by-product of this vast informational process, a by-product with the curious capability of being able to *understand*, at least in part, the principles on which the process runs.³²

This may already be going too far for realists such as Sokal and Bricmont, who would no doubt trot out an explanation of the mathematics involved and then question the analogy being drawn from them. Nevertheless, even scientists are more

than willing to indulge in such metaphysical speculation, and, in the case of Davies, find hope for mankind in where, with the help of scientific concepts, such speculation can lead us. For Davies, the anthropic principle offers a possible way out of the apparently inevitable heat-death of our solar system, such that ‘the universe could remain fit for habitation for trillions of years, possibly for ever’. The suggestion is that the predictable might be circumvented by increasingly complex levels of self-organisation, and if that appears to be a science-fictional scenario as yet, then some interesting scientific data can be brought in as reinforcement for the speculations. Davies draws positive, even utopian, messages from the same bank of material that inspires nihilism in so many postmodern thinkers. In many ways, Davies gives us a massively expanded version of the Enlightenment project, where just about anything looks possible if enough effort is devoted to it and self-organisation continues to attain new levels of complexity over time. Neither is he willing to dwell on the limits of science in the manner of Barrow: the universe here looks well and truly open.

One would assume that leaves lots of scope for human agency and the exercise of individual free will, and that is the way chaos has been interpreted by some scientists: ‘chaos provides a mechanism that allows for free will within a world governed by deterministic laws.’³³ There is, however, a sting in the tail of the strong anthropic principle. It is the issue of control asserting itself yet again, and we find ourselves asking some awkward questions, such as: are we in control of the self-organisation?; or is it something that we are swept up in, something that cuts across individual wills? There is a world of difference between the two states: the difference between having some say in our fate and not; between control over and control by outside forces. If it is the latter that obtains then the universe is not quite as open as the anthropic principle initially made it appear, at least not for human beings, and we have discovered some new sets of limits. The question of the relationship between nature and human nature returns, with some scientists, as Davies notes, solving the problem simply by effacing the distinction altogether:

A physicist who has developed this theme in great detail, and drawn parallels with oriental philosophy, is David Bohm. Bohm sees quantum physics as the touchstone of a new conception of order and organization that extends beyond the limits of subatomic physics to include life and even consciousness. He stresses the existence of ‘implicate’ order, which exists ‘folded up’ in nature and gradually unfolds as the universe evolves, enabling organization to emerge.³⁴

Implicate order is more than slightly worrying from a human perspective, since it gestures towards determinism and the notion of a prearranged programme carrying human consciousness along in its wake. What we take to be instances of free will then turn into predetermined events in some unfolding cosmic pattern whose nature we can only guess at.

Sokal and Bricmont notwithstanding, quantum mechanics presents a series of challenges to our everyday epistemology, and this is nowhere more evident than in the case of the wave function. Davies brings out particularly well how the wave

function forces us to re-examine our picture of the material world by confronting us with apparent paradoxes:

Although the microworld is inherently nebulous, and only probabilities rather than certainties can be predicted from the wave function, nevertheless when an actual measurement of some dynamical variable is made a concrete result is obtained. The act of measurement thus transforms probability into certainty by *projecting out* or *selecting* a specific result from among a range of possibilities. Now this projection brings about an abrupt alteration in the form of the wave function, often referred to as its 'collapse', which drastically affects its subsequent evolution. The collapse of the wave function is the source of much puzzlement amongst physicists, for the following reason. So long as a quantum system is not observed, its wave function evolves deterministically. In fact, it obeys a differential equation known as the Schrodinger equation (or a generalization thereof). On the other hand, when the system is inspected by an external observer, the wave function suddenly jumps, in flagrant violation of Schrodinger's equation. The system is therefore capable of changing with time in two completely different ways: one when nobody is looking and one when it is being observed.³⁵

Viewed from this perspective, nature is a much more complicated phenomenon than it is pictured in Marxist theory, where thesis inexorably leads to antithesis and then on to synthesis (at best the passage from one to the other state may be delayed). We only have this kind of predictability with regard to the wave function as long as we leave it untouched – hardly much use to a theory concerned above all to exert domination over nature. The dialectic would lose much of its authority if it were a case of behaving one way when someone was looking at it and another way when no-one was (not to mention featuring an implicate order whose overall trajectory we can only guess at). The material realm begins to look rather odd when described from a quantum perspective, and if it is objected that it only provides a description of the behaviour of matter at sub-atomic level, then it also has to be said that we must assume *some* degree of interaction between the material realm at the micro- and macro-level: 'the macroworld needs the microworld to constitute it and the microworld needs the macroworld to define it.'³⁶

Chaos and complexity tantalise by dangling the possibility of an open universe before us, while simultaneously placing a question mark over the amount of control we might be able to exert in that universe. They also suggest that matter is even more mysterious than we might have thought, and that as material beings we are caught between the chaotic realm of the micro and the self-organising one of the macro. Our ability to direct the course of nature, and the dialectic assumed to be working through it, is thrown into some doubt by that model, unless consciousness can be detached from the material in some sense. This is not to suggest a return of mind-body dualism, rather to try and establish that consciousness is more than just a reflex or the working out of a series of algorithms. Roger Penrose has been in the forefront of this debate, in his desire to rescue the mind from the fate of being no

more than a super-computer, and through self-organisation, with its creative overtones, complexity theory seems to provide reinforcement for his position.³⁷ The problem for Marxism will always be whether that self-organisation can be harnessed to its socio-political project, and here the portents are unpromising; the strong anthropic principle giving us little to go on concerning human consciousness's relative importance in the larger creative pattern, or that pattern's objectives – other than adaptation to ensure basic survival.

Perhaps no philosopher of recent times has gone into the nature of the dialectic in quite such detail as Roy Bhaskar, who in works such as *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* strives to establish a positive role for the dialectic in what is fast becoming a post-Marxist society. Bhaskar's 'critical realist' dialectic has certain similarities, as already noted, to Adorno's negative dialectics: 'At the beginning, in this new dialectic, there is non-identity – at the end, open unfinished totality.'³⁸ Adorno argued strongly against the concept of totality because of its teleological connotations, but an 'open unfinished' one seems designed to keep teleology at bay, and Bhaskar is as sensitive as Adorno to the political implications of the concept of totality:

Reality is a potentially infinite totality, of which we know something but not how much. This is not the least of my differences with Hegel, who, although a more subtle exponent of cognitive triumphalism, Prometheanism or absolutism, nevertheless is a conduit directly connecting his older contemporary Pierre de Laplace to Lenin and thence diamat and the erstwhile command economies of the omniscient party states.³⁹

Totality is again identified with political repression and authoritarianism, and critical realism represents an argument for emancipation; although it is important to note that for Bhaskar there are both 'good' and 'bad' totalities, that is, open and closed ones (equally, there are also good and bad dialectics). It is against bad totalities that his argument is directed, and that encompasses most versions of totality since Hegel.

Bhaskar's is yet another argument against the notion of the dialectic as a closed system; a form that has been normative in philosophical discourse since Hegel. Once again we have a scepticism being expressed about claims to devise a theory capturing all of reality:

as the Hegelian totality is constellationally closed, all the contradictions, whether teleonomically or teleologically generated, are *internal ones* – and neglect of external contradictions, and more generally constraints, has been a damaging feature of Marxian social theory in the Hegelian mould.⁴⁰

If there must always be something external to the dialectic, then it can never constitute more than a partial explanation of reality. It becomes a bad totality, in which case it can only maintain its totalising pretensions by means of repression – in both its intellectual and political guises. Once we admit the existence of the external,

however, the authority of a theory like classical Marxism soon begins to dissipate, and concepts such as false consciousness stand revealed as crude acts of closure designed to protect the theory from close scrutiny. It is what the dialectic excludes that interests Bhaskar: but it is precisely the claim of the Hegelian (and classical Marxist) dialectic *not* to exclude anything. Within that latter claim lies the basis of the political repression that eventually leads to the command economy of communist societies. There has to be interaction between the internal and the external in any dialectic, therefore, if it is to have any purchase within a good totality. The dialectic must do more than simply describe the inevitable progression towards a preordained end of its own internal processes.

Bhaskar suggests we might gain some sense of how an open totality works, by observing how new perspectives can be opened up across a whole range of disciplinary areas by a new scientific paradigm. Presumably the shift from one scientific paradigm to another, no matter how contested by defenders of the old, could be read as another example of an open totality whose various internal dialectics interact in such a way as to create the conditions for the emergence of a new paradigm, but without there being the causal determinism implied by the Hegelian model. Unlike its Hegelian or Marxist counterparts, a critical realist dialectic makes no fetish of predictiveness: 'it remains the case that in an open world any particular prediction may be defeated.'⁴¹ The defeat of a prediction is also a defeat for the authority that made the prediction; and no theory with pretensions to omniscience is going to rest satisfied with that state of affairs without taking action to protect itself. Command economies, as a case in point, are not noted for admitting their mistakes – or even admitting that mistakes are objectively possible if its theories are followed faithfully. As we have seen with the various conceptions of hegemony investigated by Laclau and Mouffe, reality will be forced to conform to theory somehow or other, and closure brought to bear on rogue elements.

Bhaskar's argument for openness depends heavily on his notion of real negation, the 'presence of an absence', or 'non-being' as he also refers to it.⁴² Absence includes the past as well as the outside of the totality, and the presence of such absences means that totalities are always incomplete. The interaction of presence and absence also creates problems for our concept of identity:

At the boundary of the space–time region it may be difficult to say whether *x* is present or absent or neither or both (or both neither and/or both); and, if 'present' and 'absent' are treated as contraries, we are once more confronted with the spectre of rejecting the principle of non-contradiction or excluded middle or both.⁴³

Take away non-contradiction and the excluded middle and the concept of logical identity lapses, and various examples can be cited from recent science to buttress Bhaskar's argument. Schrodinger's cat is both present and absent, neither present nor absent, etc., in the famous thought experiment, and manifestly we do not have a closed totality in such a case, nor a workable concept of identity. If the concept of identity has to remain open in this way, then so must our notion of totality, rendering

invalid any philosophical–political theory based on invariant categories and assumed predictive power (the necessity of capitalism imploding under the weight of its contradictions, or of a revolution leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat). Real negation poses a real threat to orthodox dialectical materialism in this regard. For dialectics to be a ‘logic of *change*’ in this interpretation, it must be structured on ‘the process of *absenting absence*’, and as long these processes obtain there can be no universalisability of the Hegelian kind.⁴⁴ It is also a critical part of Bhaskar’s scheme that these processes can be activated at more or less any point: ‘that in any world in which human agency is to be possible, the human agent must be able to bring about a state of affairs which would not otherwise have prevailed (unless it was over-determined)’.⁴⁵ Even determinism has its limits.

Materialism survives in Bhaskar, but it never leads to precise prediction, since it is not a causally determined materialism:

To comprehend human agency as a causally and taxonomically irreducible mode of matter is not to posit a distinct substance ‘mind’ endowed with reasons for acting apart from the causal network, but to credit intentional embodied agency with distinct (emergent) causal powers from the biological matter out of which agents were formed, on which they are capable of reacting back (and must, precisely as materially embodied causally efficacious agents, do so, if they are to act at all), but from which, in an open-systemic totality in which events are not determined before they are caused, neither such beings nor the transformations and havoc they would wreak on the rest of nature could have been predicted *ex ante*. On such a *synchronic emergent causal powers materialism*, reasons (that are acted on) just are causes.⁴⁶

The argument is against reductive materialisms, which do appear to deny the concept of free agency, with all the problems that sets for any theory that really is asking for the world to be changed. As in Ruben’s attack on the reductive materialists of the Second International, Marxism is seen to be capable of coming into collision with itself.

The virtue of Bhaskar’s highly technical approach is that it makes us realise the sheer profusion of types of dialectic and contradiction with which we are confronted in discourse, and the problems that can arise from the failure to separate these out (even Marx is not proof against this failing). This is all grist to the post-Marxist mill, and Bhaskar is making a post-Marxist statement: arguing the case for pluralism, free agency, openness and contingency, and against determinism, closure, reductionism and teleology. The conclusions Bhaskar draws from his researches into the nature of the dialectic will be familiar ones to post-Marxist thinkers: namely, that we should be challenging the grand narrative of systems, and creating space for the individual narrative to thrive within a non-oppressive pluralist framework. Bhaskar opposes the coercion that has so often accompanied the dialectical project when it has been put into political practice. Dialectical critical realism is described as ‘the process of absenting constraints on absenting absences (ills, constraints, untruths, etc.). It is not in the business of telling people, in commandist (Stalinist) or elitist (Social

Democratic) fashion what to do'.⁴⁷ Both in physical and political terms, therefore, there is an open universe, or emergent totality (with the capacity for becoming 'greater'), for the dialectic to operate within.

In *Reclaiming Reality*, Bhaskar identifies a tendency within Marxism 'to fluctuate between a sophisticated idealism . . . and a crude materialism' that can be traced back to ambiguities and contradictions in the writings of both Marx and Engels.⁴⁸ Engels's conception of the dialectic, for example, is taken to be overly indebted to Hegel (that is, idealist), and thus responsible for such major problems of the later Marxist tradition as 'the absolutization or dogmatic closure of Marxist knowledge, the dissolution of science into philosophy, even the transfiguration of the status quo (in the reconciling *Ansicht* of Soviet Marxism)'.⁴⁹ Although these are largely problems experienced in the Soviet bloc, Western Marxism has not helped matters either, displaying a Hegelian bias derived from the work of Lukács in particular that has led into realms of philosophical abstraction. It is a common charge against Western Marxism that it has become a philosophically self-absorbed movement removed from the socio-political domain, although given the density of Bhaskar's own investigations into the nature of the dialectic it is hard to see how he can avoid being classed as Western Marxist himself – his reworking of the dialectic is nothing if not a philosophical enterprise. The argument is that Western Marxism loses sight of the scientific side of Marxism, whereas Bhaskar is keen to retain at least some of that scientific orientation, even if it does require extensive revision through his own critical realist position. A critical realist science is held to be a precondition for social and political emancipation, although true to his pluralist beliefs, Bhaskar insists that we recognise that Marxism's science of history operates within a much wider social context where there are other sciences. Science is to be regarded as another open totality, which Marxism may enrich and extend, but not, significantly enough, exhaust.

The problem does arise with Bhaskar's work, however, as it did earlier with Hindess and Hirst's, that it leaves us with the distinct impression that the Marxist community has a remarkable capacity for misinterpretation of the original theory. For there to be more than a century of fluctuation between sophisticated idealism and vulgar materialism is somewhat extraordinary, and it hardly promotes a sense of confidence about the theory's future emancipatory potential if it has been so persistently misread by its closest adherents. Marx himself, as the founder, can be exonerated from this charge to some extent, but even in his case we note just how difficult it can be to liberate oneself from Hegel's sphere of influence (Terrell Carver being one of the few to argue that Hegel means 'little in Marx'⁵⁰). Hegel comes to seem like an evil spirit within the Marxist corpus, always capable of subverting the work of even the most devout believer: a doppelganger that the Marxist theorist can never quite shake off, and who prevents the transition from philosophy to science on which the theory's political credibility depends. For Bhaskar, that transition is a matter of shedding our residual commitment to closed systems, and embracing the notion of an open totality. While this is entirely consonant with recent developments in science, it is worrying that there is so little precedent for it in the history of Marxism. We seem to be stuck even now in the cycle of interpretation

rather than change, as if we require constant philosophical judgement as to whether Marxism is lapsing into the false consciousnesses of sophisticated idealism or vulgar materialism. The Marxist theorist walks a tightrope in this respect, with the vast majority failing to make a successful traverse from philosophy to science.

Nevertheless, science is still held to provide the basis for our political salvation, being an open totality where change can occur and explanation has no need of recourse to determinism. Explanation becomes a mix of laws, emergent laws, and a complex of social factors (science being firmly in the category of social practice for Bhaskar), rather than reference to a totalising theory based on the untenable assumption of a closed system:

Emancipation depends upon the untruth of reductionist materialism and spiritualistic idealism alike. . . . Emancipation depends upon explanation depends upon emergence. Given the phenomenon of emergence, an emancipatory politics or therapy depends upon a realist science. But, if and only if emergence is real, the development of both are up to us.⁵¹

Emergence becomes the key to this argument, which brings Bhaskar into the frame of reference of complexity theory and the anthropic principle (Davies and Gribbin referring, in similar vein, to 'the emerging universe paradigm'⁵²); although given the doubts the latter discourse can raise regarding free agency, Bhaskar might not find this congenial territory for his researches. Particularly when we access the anthropic principle, control becomes an issue again (as does the materiality or otherwise of consciousness), and Bhaskar does require at least a degree of control to be exerted – or in theory to be exorable – over emergent phenomena in both the scientific and political arenas. A crucial aspect of Bhaskar's realism is that reasons are to count as causes, but that demands that reason be, broadly speaking, within our control – which some forms of self-organisation might give us serious grounds to doubt.

It should be noted as well that Bhaskar discourages close correlations being made between philosophy and physics: 'It seems to me to be always a mistake in philosophy to argue from the current state of a science (and especially physics).'⁵³ The danger of reading off philosophy from physics is that physics changes rather frequently these days; but we might wonder why Bhaskar, an enthusiastic proponent of change, would be so worried about this. Science is an open totality, and any use of it will have to take the inevitability of change on board: indeed, it will welcome it. The alternative, given that science and emancipation are so closely entwined in Bhaskar, is a conception of science so general as to have little real meaning. One can see why one critic has been moved to comment that 'Bhaskar's philosophy purports, rather, to tell the sciences the way the world *must* be.'⁵⁴ Bhaskar draws broadly socialist conclusions from the workings of open totalities, but as the above criticism suggests, it could be objected that all he is telling us is how the world would have to be for emancipation to be a consequence of scientific practice: there is no reason in itself why an open totality should lead to a socialist-libertarian society. It is one thing to demonstrate that totalities are open, another thing entirely to prove that a particular form of political practice necessarily follows from this realisation

– or that the population at large is open to persuasion on the matter. Emergence as such does not signal socialism. The development is ‘up to us’: but first of all there has to be agreement amongst ‘us’ as to what that development should be – its character cannot be taken for granted. While there *is* a significant redimensioning of the dialectic in Bhaskar, the openness that he finds in dialectical processes could provide encouragement for a wide range of political positions; although, to be fair, that is a criticism one can always make of post-Marxism in general once the virtue of pluralism is conceded.

One might also wonder about the continuing obsession with the dialectic (which can come to take on the status of a holy relic), and whether that merely connotes a mistaken investment in a largely discredited and outmoded world-view. There still seems to be this need to ground emancipation in something external, as if it would have little force otherwise. We could say that Bhaskar is engaged in an exercise of saving the phenomena, with science still constituting the model for dialectical thought, although it is manifestly a very different conception of what science (and materialism) is to that of the classical Marxist tradition; as well as arguably a much more general one (‘*any* investigatory activity in which experimentation is necessary’, as Ruben has put it, which is about as general as one can get⁵⁵). It is noticeable that it is not so much the overall system of thought that Bhaskar admires about Marx, but its specific applications to historical phenomena. We are left with a Marx for an anti-system-building age, rescued from a century and more of assumed misappropriation by the totalisers, and in that sense Bhaskar can be claimed for the post-Marxist cause. Being a penetrating critic of specific cultural abuses would be a more than satisfactory legacy for most thinkers to leave, and if he is to survive into the future as a cultural icon that is the most likely, and by no means ignoble, fate awaiting Marx. Whether we need to keep revising the dialectic and engaging in various other exercises to save the phenomena in order to achieve that outcome, is more questionable.

At this point we might usefully return to Timpanaro’s *On Materialism*, to consider the case for an unapologetically science-oriented materialism within Marxism. Timpanaro also recognises a constant fluctuation between ‘sophisticated idealism’ and ‘crude materialism’ in the history of Marxism, but rather than trying to reconcile these positions, or find some mid-way point minus the drawbacks of either, he comes down unequivocally on the side of materialism – which is rarely as crude or vulgar for him as it is for the anti-materialist brigade. There is a self-consciously iconoclastic air to the study, with Timpanaro deliberately taking an oppositional stance to mainstream Marxism over a whole series of issues, but most particularly over the relationship between dialectics and science. Castigating the Western Marxist tradition as intrinsically anti-materialist in approach, Timpanaro defiantly asserts ‘the work of the late Engels remains a brilliant attempt to fuse “historical materialism” with the materialism of the natural sciences – an attempt to which one must still always refer back.’⁵⁶ Resuscitating the reputation of Engels is one of the study’s main subtexts, since much of the ire of the anti-materialists is directed against Engels and his supposed distortion of key Marxist doctrines. What we must face up

to, according to Timpanaro, is the central place of a science-oriented materialism in the work of Marx himself (plus an acknowledgement that Engels must be assumed to have at least the tacit support of Marx in his researches⁵⁷). Neither is there any question in Timpanaro's mind that materialism means more than just 'realism':

But if materialism amounted merely to the recognition of a reality external to the subject, then Plato, Saint Thomas, and all their followers would also be materialists. Materialism is not just 'realism'; it is also recognition of the physical nature of the subject, and of the physical nature of his activities traditionally regarded as 'spiritual'.⁵⁸

There is strong emphasis on that physical nature by Timpanaro, who feels that the anti-materialists have slid back into idealism in their attempts to distance themselves from vulgar materialism, to the extent that they have almost lost sight of the fact that each of us is a biological being. Our relations with nature are at least as important to our development as our relations with our fellow human beings. Timpanaro also emphasises the fact that we are *acted upon*, and in many ways to be considered as *passive* beings. 'We cannot', he insists, 'deny or evade the element of passivity in experience: the external situation which we do not create but which imposes itself on us.'⁵⁹ It is also insisted, however, that we are not to regard this passivity as an argument for determinism, fatalism, or human powerlessness: we may be acted upon, but we also have the capacity to reflect on that experience and act back in a considered fashion. This human dimension has largely been elided by the anti-materialists in favour of philosophical or ideological abstractions, whereas Timpanaro wants to bring us back to the fact of the biological: 'because it is the brain that feels and thinks, acquires knowledge of the external world and reacts upon it, and not some mythical spirit or equally ill-defined "social being"'.⁶⁰ To acknowledge the primacy of the biological is to return to the world of science, where relations between man and nature constitute a critical area of study. 'Once the problem of knowledge is freed from its ideological extrapolations', Timpanaro notes, 'it becomes a scientific problem which concerns, in the first place, neurophysiology and the sciences connected with it, from biochemistry to cybernetics.'⁶¹ And once we make that transition, the nature and organisation of matter become an issue of overriding importance – hence our turn to postmodern science in this chapter.

We still remain firmly within a Marxist framework with Timpanaro, however, and it is clear he has no wish to move out of that. Marx has been systematically misread as far as he is concerned, as has Engels, and yet another set of reasons is being offered for Marxism's relative failure as a socio-political doctrine by the standards of its early promise. *On Materialism* is another exercise in saving the phenomena, although it does have the merit of keeping the lines open between Marxism and the physical sciences. Having said that, Timpanaro certainly does not envisage anything like the open season for experiment in that area being claimed by poststructuralism, which he dismisses as just another form of idealism. What Timpanaro's reading of Marx *does* entail, however, is that Marxism cannot ignore developments in the

physical sciences, which, contra-Ruben, invite us to keep at the very least an open mind about the possibility of fruitful interaction.

Surveying the world of postmodern science reveals a general suspicion of totalising theory, except in the postulation of open totalities, which, while they might become greater, can never be exhausted or known in their entirety. Limits come to be emphasised more than progress, and self-organisation more than human control of systems. Determinism seems less of a problem, although randomness, unpredictability and paradox make life no easier for the socio-political theorist trying to manipulate both nature and human nature. It is in this post-mechanistic context that the dialectic now has to operate, and there is no denying that its authority suffers. Science currently pictures for us a world governed more by rupture than teleology (although defenders of the anthropic principle tend to see an underlying holism nevertheless⁶²), and if it is ever to be anything other than a dogmatism Marxism must take this on board. At the very least a post-mechanistic paradigm asks us to re-examine our assumptions about causal sequences: the days of a largely predictable dialectic in nature are over. Presumably the dialectic, too, must learn how to exist at the edge of chaos, with all the opportunities, but also uncertainties, that condition involves.

10 ‘Not show biz’

Pluralist politics and the emancipation of critique

Whether it likes it or not, Marxism now exists within a world order of pluralist politics, and must adapt to this if it wants to survive in any meaningful form. The route to this renewal of purpose is through a detachment of the critique from the doctrinaire politics of classical Marxism. Marxism has been a conspicuous success in areas such as political economy, sociology and aesthetics, but that is no reason why it should be taken to entail an authoritarian political system – or any formal political system at all. Marxist critique is not dependent on the existence of Marxist-communist political states, and should be treated on its own merits within specific disciplinary areas. The critique needs to be emancipated from the dubious political heritage of classical Marxism (totalitarianism, authoritarianism, Stalinism), and set free to compete with other theories. Emancipation has its consequences, however, and Marxism will have to swallow its pride and accept that its status for the immediate future is likely to be that of a pressure group – and the possibility that, as with other pressure groups, individuals might move in and out of particular struggles rather than follow any kind of overall party-line as a disciplined cadre. One might be a Marxist on some issues, but not necessarily on all – the ‘free and floating’ relation recommended by Lyotard. From totalising theory to pressure group is a long fall, but Marxism can still have a role to play even if it is largely confined to curbing the excesses of those committed to a politics of difference. The latter does not hold the solution to absolutely every problem that socio-political life engenders either, and the totalising imperative sometimes has lessons to teach us about the interrelationships of human existence and the solidarity these can promote across national and gender divides. Difference can become a mantra repeated unthinkingly, and as open to abuse in its own way as the totalising imperative of Marxism was in its time.

There is, as we have seen, already a substantial body of work establishing a post-Marxist perspective in fields as diverse as political economy, sociology, aesthetics, political philosophy, human geography, and international relations, and we can now summarise what this has to contribute to the way politics is conducted now.

Zizek’s Lacanian-influenced political vision, briefly considered in chapter 2, deserves closer attention at this stage. For Zizek, there are real dangers to be noted in some forms of post-Marxist and postmodernist discourse, which assume a fundamentalism

that is anti-pluralist in its bias. Feminist fundamentalism, democratic fundamentalism, ecological fundamentalism and psychoanalytical fundamentalism, as cases in point, all run the risk of introducing new forms of essentialism into cultural debate, when we should be encouraging a recognition of the necessity of social antagonism. To believe otherwise, to assume that we can resolve social antagonism if only some particular objective can be achieved (a 'return to nature', for example), is to lapse back into the bad old ways of ideological repression that we identify with the modernist project:

It is not only that the aim is no longer to abolish this drive antagonism, but the aspiration to abolish it is precisely the source of totalitarian temptation: the greatest mass murders and holocausts have always been perpetrated in the name of man as harmonious being, of a New Man without antagonistic tension.¹

Any 'new articulation' with, say, the ecology movement, will need to take this factor into account; as will any with second-wave feminism: 'the only basis for a somewhat bearable relation between the sexes is an acknowledgement of this basic antagonism, this basic impossibility.'² It is not just pluralism we should seek, therefore, but an antagonistic pluralism, where, as with Lyotard's differends, all parties recognise there can be no acceptable 'final solution' to cultural division; that, instead, there will have to be a continuously unfolding process of negotiation aimed at 'a somewhat bearable relation' between the divided parties. It is the world of Lyotard's 'philosophical politics', where little narratives are actively encouraged, but carry with them an in-built resistance to any attempt to seek grand narrative status; the world where negative, rather than positive (that is, closure-oriented), dialectics rules.

Perhaps we need also to construct a 'somewhat bearable relation' with capital. This would involve moving away from the conspiracy theories so beloved of certain sections of the left – capitalism as an imposition by a self-interested, exploiting minority on an exploited, false-consciousness plagued majority – to a position where capitalism is regarded as the expression of certain drives in human nature, which might manifest themselves in a variety of ways, good and bad. Socialism and capitalism would then be antagonists, but neither would be seeking to abolish the other since that would be the road to some form or other of authoritarianism. One of the implications of Bauman's argument that capitalism needs an 'other' in the aftermath of communism's demise, is that socialism does too. Odd though it may seem to be arguing for the socially beneficial aspects of capitalism from a left perspective, capitalism – of some variety or other – *might* be necessary to curb the excesses of which socialism is only too capable when left to its own devices (see the history of the 'actually existing' model). Follow Žizek, and we have to ensure that no socio-political system is allowed to put together the means to eradicate dissent in the name of the 'harmonious' working of society: that can only ever have unfortunate consequences for individual freedom. What must always be resisted, according to this line of thought, is any campaign to abolish resistance, and thus the possibility of new articulations being constructed on into the future – even if such

pluralism is at least as high-risk a strategy for the left as for the right (fascism is an ever-present possibility, and has been reasserting itself in Europe of late³).

Culture becomes a process of negotiation with a range of contradictions, rather than a struggle to eradicate all that clashes with one's own ideological position: one's perspective switches from the global to the local, grand strategy gives way to short-term tactics. With its remorselessly rational, global-oriented, approach, Marxism has always treated contradiction as the enemy, and sought to overcome it whenever it revealed itself. While most of us can cope with contradictions in our own life (even within our own personalities), Marxism has traditionally regarded conflicting drives as a problem to be resolved. The purity of the theory demands there be no such loose ends; there must always be resolution according to the 'laws' of dialectics. The notion of the 'edge of chaos' can be brought back into the discussion at this point, because it does sound as if Žizek, speaking for many other post-Marxists and post-modernists in the process, is calling for a society consciously structured on such a principle; a society held together by tension between opposing viewpoints rather than one based on the notion of a fight to the finish between those viewpoints. Incommensurability ceases to be a problem when we move out of a classical Marxist framework, becoming instead for post-Marxists and postmodernists an index of the success of our anti-authoritarianism. As long as incommensurability exists, and more importantly is *seen* to exist, the less likely we are to relapse into the totalising impulse that has prevailed in Western society from the Enlightenment onwards. Incommensurability stands as proof that the 'suturing' process is no longer working.

We do need to ask what it could mean to call oneself a Marxist in the aftermath of postmodernism and the turn towards a pluralist society full of competing single-issue movements, each trying to ensure their place on the cultural agenda. One can, of course, go down the well-trodden fundamentalist route and write off such movements as further evidence of false consciousness in action, and pluralism as yet another one of the dominant ideology's masks to disguise its real motivations. Closure can simply be deferred, again, in the well-established manner of a long line of one's distinguished colleagues, and the essential truth of one's theory given more time to reveal itself. There are many splinter groups on the left who still espouse this line (perhaps with a few minor modifications); enough to prove that fundamentalism has a constituency – although it is manifestly a diminishing one. Ironically enough, Marxist fundamentalism already *is* a pressure group in all but name. It can no longer command any kind of mass support (and in the case of the English-speaking countries never did), although it refuses to accept that status and still operates on the assumption that such support can be found if it only keeps reiterating its message often enough. There is little evidence of an imminent breakthrough, however, and unless one remains a defiant believer in false consciousness this ought to throw some doubt on the nature of one's project. If more than a century of fundamentalism can offer no better prospect than the current one in the West, then the validity of the totalising imperative surely ought to be called into question. Deferral can only be accessed so often before it falls into disrepute.

One of the more radical ways of situating Marxism in a pluralist world has been offered to us by Žizek, who, following on from the work of Saul Kripke, raises what

will be to many the startling prospect of concepts with completely contingent properties. Arguably, the 'class struggle' could continue to function as a political concept while coming to have a very different significance for users in a post-Marxist than a classical Marxist framework. Žižek bases his argument on a radical reading of Kripke's antidescriptivism, which leads him to proclaim 'the radical contingency of naming'.⁴ Kripke had pointed out that if, for the sake of argument, gold was suddenly discovered not to have the properties, or 'descriptive features', ascribed to it over the years, we would be unlikely to stop referring to it as gold: rather,

in this case, the word 'gold' would continue to refer to the same object as before – *i.e.* we would say 'gold doesn't possess the properties ascribed to it until now', not 'the object that we have until now taken for gold is not really gold'.⁵

If we applied the same logic to 'class struggle', it could be claimed that in a post-modernist world, the concept no longer had the same meaning that it did for previous generations, on the grounds that 'class' had been deconstructed and so lost its traditional properties. Marcuse's revision of the concept of class to include the white-collar middle class in America would then become an example of an ascription of new properties to the concept, threatening its supposed stability. The various commitments to the cause of the new social movements (itself a shifting descriptor) that we find in Laclau and Mouffe, Hindess and Hirst, etc., push that process further in what is a large-scale act of de-ascription, where the notion of class consciousness has been written out of the script. A touch of postmodern irony perhaps creeps in at such points, with class struggle deliberately being distanced from its now discredited classical Marxist frame of reference in a very knowing manner that denies its traditional identity. Apart from anything else this is to adopt a very patronising attitude towards the past, assuming that it should be judged adversely on the basis of current theoretical preoccupations and cultural norms. An even more obvious objection would be that such a practice takes us perilously close to the 'Humpty Dumpty' conception of linguistic meaning where words mean what one wants them to mean (or what one finds it convenient for them to mean at any one point). Given the amount of times the word 'democracy' has been taken in vain over the last century or so, one has to admit there is a precedent for this procedure – if not a particularly happy one in the degree of cynicism it has fostered about the concept in question.

'Gold' becomes for Kripke a 'rigid designator' that applies in any possible world, although its list of properties could vary. Žižek, however, draws more radical conclusions from this line of thought, arguing that it is the act of naming that confers identity on an object: 'naming itself retroactively constitutes its reference'.⁶ Even a 'rigid designator' shorn of necessary properties is missing something – the surplus that can never be captured by any theory. It is impossible to specify any particular cluster of properties which would hold over all possible worlds, and any attempt to do so is based on an illusion:

In the last resort, the only way to define 'democracy' is to say that it contains all political movements and organizations which legitimize, designate

themselves as ‘democratic’: the only way to define ‘Marxism’ is to say that this term designates all movements and theories which legitimize themselves through reference to Marx, and so on.⁷

On this basis the rigid designator would be committing one to very little, since the phrase ‘through reference to Marx’ could be interpreted in a wide variety of ways, not all of them necessarily consistent with each other. Even if such consistency were reached through consensus, there is nothing to say that the present consensus need be consistent with any past one. Not surprisingly, Žižek concludes that the rigid designator is ‘nothing but a “pure” difference: its role is purely structural, its nature is purely performative’.⁸ Difference is yet again deployed to undermine totalising theoretical pretensions, in what is becoming a standard postmodern tactic.

To acknowledge this differential quality is to realise how empty the claims made on behalf of democracy, Marxism, etc., are: mere tautologies specifying no particular programme – and having no grounds for doing so either. The rigid designator merely marks the site of a series of floating signifiers, and the belief that it guarantees stability of meaning is dismissed as an unfortunate ‘error of perspective’.⁹ Grand narrative is reduced to the status of a collective delusion based on nothing stronger than a tautology; the class struggle, for example, being ‘present only in its effects’, with no objective cause lying behind these.¹⁰ In Žižek’s world, where contingency rules over discourse, grand narratives can never get off the ground, and both ideologues and their critics (such as the structural Marxists) are forced to recognise that there are always areas ‘beyond interpellation’ where we will find ‘desire, fantasy, lack in the Other and drive pulsating around some unbearable surplus-enjoyment’.¹¹

Marxism *could* be rewritten, therefore, as a theory which operates within a pluralist framework, since none of its traditional properties need be considered to constrain it, and its rigid designator does no more than signify that a Marxist is whatever Marxists collectively – and currently – believe in. After that point, the field of action appears to be wide open: Marxism can become what Marxists decide they want, or need, it to be. One could argue against Žižek that (as is so often the case in postmodern thought) he underestimates the power and the appeal of tradition, and the extent to which these factors can provide a counter to the force of contingency. The sheer weight of history attaching to terms cannot so easily be sloughed off in the name of contingency, nor the traditional cluster of properties discounted without arousing some fierce opposition. There is a strong emotional attachment to the traditional properties of ‘Marxism’, ‘class struggle’, etc., that will resist Žižek’s linguistic and metaphysical manoeuvres where contingency invariably seems to be the winner – a resistance that would be Marxism’s equivalent, perhaps, of the ‘surplus’ that Žižek claims always lies beyond mere argument? Turning that emotional attachment into a political programme that does not impose rigid historical, metaphysical, and behavioural models on us all, is the challenge that faces Marxism in a pluralist world fuelled by a desire for a politics of emancipation at the personal level. It becomes less a question of ‘what Marx really said’, than ‘what Marx might be made to lend his name to’ with a measure of creative input from non-doctrinaire adherents. Žižek’s critique of the totalising imperative offers us some of the tools to start that process.

Given the tendency amongst the Marxist community to continue to engage in ‘what Marx really said’ debates, however, it is highly unlikely that Žižek’s ideas will find much favour there. ‘Marxism’ as a ‘floating signifier’ signalling no more than the site where people ‘legitimize themselves through reference to Marx’ (implying that this could be done in almost any fashion at all), and the class struggle as a series of delusional effects, can only be anathema to the committed believer. Radical contingency leaves no room for a destiny-driven political programme whose law-like objectives are held to apply in any and every possible world, and whose overriding concern is with controlling events. The openness that Žižek pictures for us in the field of discourse cuts against the almost pathological need for predictability and determinability of outcomes that is such a hallmark of the classical Marxist character. Deferral and disappointment can be coped with, but not an open playing field where there are no fixed positions or necessary connections between social causes and effects. Control breaks down at that stage, and so to a large extent does the Marxist project. There is no denying, however, that such openness offers a wider range of options for an emancipatory politics than an exclusion-minded totalising theory does, and pluralism thrives on options.

We can ask whether *critique* can provide those options, even if Marxist politics seems constitutionally unable to; thereby providing a model for how Marxist theory can survive in a pluralist world. There is no reason why Marxism cannot continue to play a significant role in a pluralist society, nor that its critical edge should disappear from cultural debate – and here aesthetics could play a particularly important role, given a *relative* autonomy from the political domain that even Marxist theorists seem determined to claim. Even Perry Anderson, while in general deploring the concentration on aesthetics at the expense of politics in Western Marxism (part of its obsession with ‘superstructures’, in his opinion, and representing little more than a ‘consolation’ for disappointed theorists), feels compelled to pay tribute to what figures like Lukács and Adorno have achieved in this area:

The great wealth and variety of the corpus of writing produced in this domain, far richer and subtler than anything within the classical heritage of historical materialism, may in the end prove to be the most permanent gain of this tradition.¹²

If nothing else, therefore, Western Marxism will continue to offer an alternative perspective in aesthetic debate: to survive as an ‘other’ there. Bauman’s argument about the need for an ‘other’ to capitalism, which will otherwise become ever more oppressive at the level of the average individual, needs to be borne firmly in mind in this context as well, although clearly this ‘other’ does not necessarily have to possess the characteristics of Soviet communism. Marx becomes a point of reference for certain general ideas – opposition to economic exploitation, for example – which can be prosecuted through aesthetic critique; but one need not accept the superstructure that has been constructed on such ideas – nor believe that Marx is the only repository of them. The opposition can proceed from something as simple as Castoriadis’s sentiment that ‘I desire and I feel the need to live in a society *other*

than the one surrounding me': in this case, a society other than one featuring gross economic exploitation. Marxism becomes one, but only one, way of expressing that sentiment.

The aesthetic domain has always had the virtue of being very synthetic and debate-oriented, and, in the West anyway, Marxist ideas have long been accepted as part of that process rather than a threat to its existence. Aesthetic debate would be much poorer without that Marxist input, and, as long as ideas such as class struggle are kept fairly loose in form, that input can continue to be made. It can be seen as a measure of Marxism's success that so many of its techniques – 'reading against the grain', for example – have been adapted into general usage, such that it can be argued that Marxism has contributed to the development of a pluralist culture. We might speak of an 'aesthetic paradigm' which can be carried over into the political realm, with a similar latitude being allowed in debate (synthesising and resynthesising of ideas and techniques, etc.). The critical factor becomes the *effect* of one's ideas, rather than their relationship to an abstract theoretical model; whether or not they help in the struggle against cultural abuses such as economic exploitation, rather than feature an overall consistency of approach across areas of discourse. Feminism's synthetic approach provides another model in this respect, with the success of one's desire 'to live in a society *other* than the one surrounding me' being far more important than the particular techniques deployed to bring this about.

Suggestions have been made as to how Marxist ideas can continue to circulate and inform political and cultural debates (although they are unlikely to please the fundamentalists), but what of post-Marxism's future? As long as there *are* fundamentalists around, there will be a ready target for *post-Marxism*, but as the causes of the latter's disenchantment recede in time the position will no doubt lose its edge. *Post-Marxism*, however, is a more interesting proposition, and it is worth reflecting on whether it does constitute more than an attitude or mood as has been suggested in certain criticisms of postmodernism. As a movement defined by Marxism, it has to be asked whether *post-Marxism* will long outlive the Marxist moment that brought it into being. It is unlikely that it will ever exert the appeal of Marxism itself, with its well-attested ability to mobilise significant sections of the world's population over the course of the twentieth century, even if there was a considerable amount of bad faith involved in the act of mobilisation by various communist parties. Part of the problem lies in the nature of the beast: a reaction to a totalising theory, calling for compromise, scepticism towards authority, and an open mind about any ideological positions one holds. These are rarely the characteristics of populist parties, such as Marxism always aspired to be, and they hardly raise the adrenaline level of those who wish for radical change in the short rather than the long term. R. C. Lewontin has summed up the problems that a movement with this kind of brief faces quite neatly:

Anyone with academic authority, a halfway decent writing style, and a simple and powerful idea has easy entry to the public consciousness. On the other hand, if one's message is that things are complicated, uncertain, and messy, that

no simple rule or force will explain the past and predict the future of human existence, there are rather fewer ways to get the message across. Measured claims about the complexity of life and our ignorance of its determinants are not show biz.¹³

Post-*Marxism* is in just such a position as Lewontin sketches out for himself, since it simultaneously undermines a simple and powerful idea – even if one only intermittently expressed in ‘a halfway decent writing style’ – embedded deep within the left’s consciousness (and with an emotive history of struggle to back it up) and fails to offer any glamorous alternative. We are left instead at individual level to grapple with the complicated, the uncertain, and the messy. Definitely not ‘show biz’ in political terms of reference, as Lewontin sadly, but also shrewdly, notes.

But perhaps we have had too much show biz. Postmodernism certainly has made us wary of the ‘one big idea’ approach to anything. Incredulity is a positive cultural force in that respect, and it entails both pluralism and a critique cut free of ‘one big idea’ programmes. Post-*Marxism* performs that function with regard to a particular narrative, and in remaining in dialogue with that narrative keeps some of its principles alive (such as opposition to economic exploitation), while also acting as a check on the more anarchic versions of the postmodern narrative. Perhaps post-*Marxism* will be what keeps postmodernism honest? Disenchantment would not then be the end of a narrative, but the beginning of a new, if admittedly more diffuse, one. Diffuseness has its virtues, however, in that it invites constant rearticulation and negotiation of positions, and where those are present oppression is kept at bay. Post-*Marxism*’s value would then lie in its commitment to negotiation – even where that negotiation was with the more disenchanted *post-Marxist* community: negotiation *plus* persuasion of the general public of the virtues of the spirit of Marxism. Again, not show biz: but an acknowledgement of a messy, complex, on-the-edge-of-chaos, reality which resists ‘one big idea’ fixes. Seductive though the latter can be, they lead to cultural stasis in the longer term, and that is a worse fate to befall us than all the insecurity and uncertainty trailing in the wake of post-*Marxism* and postmodernism. Not only must pluralism be encouraged, therefore, but incredulity also.

Notes

Introduction: Marxism's 'disenchanted'

- 1 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 1985, p. 4.
- 2 Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint: Order and Complexity at the Edge of Chaos*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995, p. 196.
- 3 Stuart Sim, ed., *Post-Marxism: A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- 4 'Spectres and Nostalgia: Post-Marxism/Post-Marxism', *ibid.*, pp. 1–11.

1 Marxism in a 'post-' world

- 1 See, for example, Alex Callinicos, *The Revenge of History: Marxism and the East European Revolutions*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press and Blackwell, 1991, where it is argued that Stalinism was a counter-revolution that destroyed the ideals of 1917.
- 2 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: NLB, 1976, p. 96.
- 3 Alvin Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980; Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, p. 223.
- 4 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London and New York: Verso, 1989, pp. 197, 198.
- 5 André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, trans. Mike Sonenscher, London: Pluto Press, 1982, p. 3.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 69.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 12 Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward A. Shils, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 248.
- 13 Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, p. 75.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 For the Autonomy movement, see the work of Antonio Negri; for example, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, New York: Autonomedia, 1991.
- 18 Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, p. 218.
- 19 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London and New York: Verso, 1988, pp. 177, 178.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

- 21 Several other journals, with key figures like Laclau, Hindess and Hirst on their editorial boards, served to create a forum for post-Marxist theorising during this period, including *Economy and Society* and *Theoretical Practice*. On the latter, see John Taylor and David Macey, *The Theoreticism of 'Theoretical Practice'*, London: NLB, 1974.
- 22 Hall, *The Hard Road*, p. 183.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 218.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 28 'To deny that the consumers of popular culture are cultural dupes is not to deny that the culture industries seek to manipulate. But it *is* to deny that popular culture is little more than a degraded landscape of commercial and ideological manipulation imposed from above' (entry for 'Cultural Studies', in Stuart Sim, ed., *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, Cambridge: Icon Press, 1998, p. 218).

2 'An intellectual malady'?: The Laclau–Mouffe affair (I)

- 1 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism*, London: Verso, 1986, p. 47.
- 2 Frank Webster, review of Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 30 April 1999, p. 26.
- 3 Norman Geras, 'Post-Marxism?', *New Left Review*, 163 (1987), pp. 40–82, at pp. 42–3.
- 4 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 1.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 8 Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism – Fascism – Populism*, London: NLB, 1977; see particularly chapter 3.
- 9 See, for example, the furore over Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London: Merlin Press, 1971.
- 10 Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac, 'Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics', in Ernesto Laclau, ed., *The Making of Political Identities*, London: Verso, 1994, pp. 11–39, at p. 12. For Žižek's Lacanian conception of the subject see *The Sublime Object*.
- 11 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 47.
- 12 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 47.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 19 Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, Introduction, p. 15.
- 20 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 95.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 22 Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. vii.
- 23 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 98.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 97–8.
- 26 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: NLB, 1977, p. 113.
- 27 *Ibid.*

- 28 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 105.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 106. Laclau and Mouffe's model of discourse analysis is drawn on 'to provide a more adequate understanding of the interrelationship between the state, economy and society' in René B. Bertramsen, Jens Peter Frølund Thomsen, and Jacob Torfing, *State, Economy and Society*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1991.
- 30 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 106.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 41 The work of Emmanuel Levinas, a significant influence on the development of post-structuralism, constitutes another notable challenge to the project of the totalisers; see particularly his *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer, 1991, and *Totality and Infinity: An Essay in Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer, 1991.
- 42 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 132.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 154.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 53 Geras, 'Post-Marxism?', p. 43.
- 54 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 163.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 57 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press and Blackwell, 1987.
- 58 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 166.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 At the time of writing (autumn 1999), 'common sense' is a key slogan of the British Conservative Party, much deployed in speeches by its leader William Hague. To complicate matters further, it has been argued that, when it comes to the new physics, 'the chief casualty is common sense' (Paul Davies and John Gribbin, *The Matter Myth: Towards 21st-Century Science*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, p. 11).
- 68 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 190.
- 69 *Ibid.*

- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 191.
 71 Žizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 4.
 72 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
 73 *Ibid.*
 74 For an example of Marx being saved *from* Hegel, see Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, where the expressed objective is 'to "minimise" Hegel in looking at Marx' (p. 4).
 75 Žizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 7.
 76 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

3 'Without apologies': The Laclau–Mouffe affair (II)

- 1 David Forgacs, 'Dethroning the Working Class', *Marxism Today*, 29 (1985), p. 43.
 2 *Ibid.*
 3 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Athlone Press, 1993, p. 115.
 4 Forgacs, 'Dethroning the Working Class', p. 43.
 5 *Ibid.*
 6 Stanley Aronowitz, 'Theory and Socialist Strategy', *Social Text*, 16 (1986/7), pp. 1–16, at p. 3.
 7 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 8 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 9 Aronowitz has more recently put the case for a postmodern approach to political action in 'Against the Liberal State: ACT-UP and the Emergence of Postmodern Politics', in Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman, eds, *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 357–83: 'The wager of postmodern social movements is that they can maintain their strength by hewing the thin line between oppositional independence to and troubled participation in the institutions of state policy, if not the legislative and executive branches of government. . . . This wager is crucial for any possible postmodern politics' (p. 381).
 10 Aronowitz, 'Theory and Socialist Strategy', p. 16.
 11 Wood, *The Retreat from Class*, p. 1.
 12 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
 13 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 14 *Ibid.*, p. 64. As regards those intentions, Mouffe elsewhere defends certain aspects of Enlightenment, arguing that radical democracy 'does not imply . . . that we have to abandon its political project, which is its achievement of equality and freedom for all' (Chantal Mouffe, 'Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?', trans. Paul Holdengraber, in Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989, pp. 31–45, at p. 34).
 15 Wood, *The Retreat from Class*, pp. 66, 70.
 16 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
 17 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 18 *Ibid.*, p. 186.
 19 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 85.
 20 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 21 Geras, 'Post-Marxism?', p. 43.
 22 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 23 *Ibid.*
 24 Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman, London: Methuen, 1967, p. 190.
 25 Geras, 'Post-Marxism?', p. 52.
 26 *Ibid.*

- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 28 Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London: NLB, 1976, p. 9.
- 29 Geras, 'Post-Marxism?', p. 58.
- 30 Norman Geras, *Literature and Revolution: Essays on Marxism*, London: Verso, 1986, p. xvi.
- 31 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, 'Post-Marxism Without Apologies', *New Left Review*, 166 (1987), pp. 79–106, at p. 80.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 34 Laclau and Zac, 'Minding the Gap', pp. 36, 37.
- 35 Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, p. 23.
- 36 See for example, Andre Frank's studies, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1967, and *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution: Essays on the Development of Underdevelopment and the Immediate Enemy*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1969.
- 37 Laclau, *Politics and Ideology*, p. 41.
- 38 Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London and New York: Verso, 1990, p. 9.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 40 Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, London and New York: Verso, 1993, p. 2.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 4. There are affinities here with Levinas, particularly his theories of 'the face', as expounded in *Totality and Infinity*, and *Otherwise than Being*.
- 42 Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p. 18.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 152.
- 44 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1991, p. xii. For other Marxist critiques, see Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Perspective*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, and Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- 45 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic*, p. 417.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 330–1.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 341.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 417.
- 49 *Ibid.*

4 'Marxism is not a "Science of History"': Testing the boundaries of Marxism

- 1 Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 308.
- 2 Antony Cutler, Barry Hindess, Paul Q. Hirst and Athar Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today*, I–II, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977–8, I, p. 1.
- 3 Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, p. 1.
- 4 Hindess also argues an anti-empiricist case in *The Use of Official Statistics in Sociology: A Critique of Positivism and Ethnomethodology*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973. For a critique of the empiricist bias specifically in British history writing, see Gareth Stedman Jones, 'History, the Poverty of Empiricism', in Robin Blackburn, ed., *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory*, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1972, pp. 96–115.
- 5 Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, p. 9.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10, 14.
- 7 For more on the controversy over the Asiatic mode of production, see Anne M. Bailey and Josep R. Llobera, eds, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Science and Politics*, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. For a discussion of the mode's 'anomalous' status within the Marxist paradigm, see Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms*, pp. 325–8.

- 8 Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, p. 15.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 G. A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 51. Cohen's position is that Marxist political practice is 'compatible' with a belief in the inevitability of socialism, even though he does not subscribe to the belief himself (p. 52).
- 11 Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, p. 230.
- 12 Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Mode of Production and Social Formation*, London: Macmillan, 1977, p. 12.
- 13 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, I, pp. 34–5.
- 14 Contrast this with Cohen's view that the labour theory of value is indeed highly questionable and fails to explain exploitation, but that exploitation nevertheless exists (see *History, Labour, and Freedom*, chapter 11).
- 15 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, I, p. 46.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 17 I. I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, trans. Milos Samardzija and Fredy Perlman, Detroit: Black and Red Press, 1972.
- 18 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, I, p. 72.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- 21 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, II, p. 235.
- 22 In *The Decline of Working Class Politics*, London: Granada, 1971, Hindess contends that the socialist political system in Britain is functioning in such a way as to exclude that working class from active involvement.
- 23 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, II, p. 259.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 260, 267.
- 25 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, I, p. 316.
- 26 In *Politics and Class Analysis*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, Hindess argues, in even more iconoclastic fashion, that 'much of the appeal of class analysis rests on an explanatory promise that cannot be fulfilled. The analysis of politics in terms of classes as social forces is at best a kind of allegory, the treatment of a complex subject in the guise of something simple; at worst it is thoroughly misleading' (pp. 1–2).
- 27 Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital'*, I, p. 128.
- 28 Gregory Elliott, 'The Odyssey of Paul Hirst', *New Left Review*, 159 (1986), pp. 81–105, at p. 105.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 33 Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, trans. Timothy O'Hagan, David McLellan, Anna de Casparis, and Brian Grogan, London: NLB, 1973, pp. 19, 22.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 36 Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, trans. David Fernbach, London: NLB, 1975, pp. 15–16.
- 37 Poulantzas, *Political Power*, p. 205.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 See Hindess, *Politics and Class Analysis*. Poulantzas is also attacked by Hirst in 'Economic Classes and Politics', in Alan Hunt, ed., *Class and Class Structure*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, pp. 125–54.
- 40 Poulantzas, *Political Power*, p. 93.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 42 Rudolf Bahro, *Socialism and Survival: Articles, Essays and Talks 1979–1982*, trans. David Fernbach, London: Heretic Books, 1982, p. 18.

- 43 Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, trans. David Fernbach, London: NLB, 1978, p. 453.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 263.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 313.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 For an argument putting a positive spin on the collapse of the Soviet empire, as the death of Stalinism, see Callinicos, *The Revenge of History*.
- 50 As he remarks pragmatically in a speech delivered in Freiburg in 1979: 'I agree to a large extent with Herbert Gruhl's formulation: neither to the right nor to the left in the traditional sense (at least not far to the left), but ahead' (Bahro, *Socialism and Survival*, p. 35).
- 51 Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, p. 357.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 391.
- 53 Bahro, *Socialism and Survival*, p. 46. An essay entitled 'Why We Need to Re-examine Our Entire Theoretical Inheritance' leaves little doubt of the gulf opening up between Bahro and the classical tradition either (*ibid.*, pp. 47–50).
- 54 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. xix.
- 55 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, II, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987, p. 383.
- 56 Thomas McCarthy, 'Translator's Introduction', to Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984, pp. vii–viii.
- 57 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, II, p. 340.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 342.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 348.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 352.
- 62 Ralph Miliband, *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. vi.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 65 For an exchange of views between Poulantzas and Miliband, see Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', in Blackburn, ed., *Ideology in Social Science*, pp. 238–62.
- 66 Miliband, *Divided Societies*, p. 96.
- 67 Hindess, *Politics and Class Analysis*, p. 9.
- 68 Miliband, *Divided Societies*, p. 234.
- 69 Hindess, *Politics and Class Analysis*, p. 33.

5 Post-Marxism before post-Marxism: (I) Luxemburg to the Frankfurt School

- 1 Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, p. 112.
- 2 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution, and, Leninism or Marxism?*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961, pp. 28–9.
- 3 Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 76.
- 4 Žizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 59.
- 5 Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 76.
- 6 Žizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 59.
- 7 'By confining itself to "the way it really was"', by conceiving history as a closed, homogeneous, rectilinear, continuous course of events, the traditional historiographic gaze is a priori, formally, the gaze of "those who have won": it sees history as a closed continuity of "progression" leading to the reign of those who rule today. It leaves out of consideration what *failed* in history, what has to be denied so that the continuity of

- “what really happened” could establish itself’ (*ibid.*, p. 138). Even Luxemburg can be held guilty of such blinkered vision to some extent.
- 8 Luxemburg, *Leninism or Marxism?*, p. 93.
 - 9 *Ibid.*
 - 10 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London: Merlin Press, 1971, p. 1.
 - 11 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987, p. 12.
 - 12 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 1.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 - 15 Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, p. 42.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
 - 17 See Georg Lukács, *Political Writings 1919–1929: The Question of Parliamentarianism and Other Essays*, trans. Michael McCollgan, ed. Rodney Livingstone, London: NLB, 1972.
 - 18 A. A. Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature – The Richest in Ideas: The Most Advanced Literature’, in Maxim Gorky, et al., *The Soviet Writers’ Congress, 1934: The Debate between Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, p. 21.
 - 19 E. B. Ashton, ‘Translator’s Note’ to Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. xi.
 - 20 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London and New York: Verso, 1979, p. 205.
 - 21 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 129.
 - 22 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. xx.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. xix.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, p. 148. For all their differences of opinion, there are similarities to be noted between Adorno and Mannheim on the virtue of contradiction: ‘Whereas contradictions are a source of discomfiture to the systematizer, the experimental thinker often perceives in them points of departure from which the fundamentally discordant character of our present situation becomes for the first time really capable of diagnosis and investigation’ (Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 48).
 - 29 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 152.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
 - 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 46–7.
 - 32 Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, London and New York: Verso, 1993, p. 307.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, p. 378. Amongst the various kinds of dialectic identified by Bhaskar are: ontological, epistemological, relational and practical.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 38, 385.
 - 35 Quoted in Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 249, from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Berlin, 1962, vol. 20, p. 106.
 - 36 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 322.
 - 37 *Ibid.*, p. 344.
 - 38 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster, London: Sheed and Ward, 1973, p. 34.
 - 39 Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society*, trans. John Merrington and Judith White, London: NLB, 1972, p. 233.
 - 40 For a feminist reinterpretation of this position, see Jackie West, ‘Women, Sex, and Class’, in Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe, eds, *Feminism and Materialism: Women*

- and *Modes of Production*, London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 220–53. West’s argument is that, given women’s subordinate role in patriarchy, female ‘white collar’ workers ‘are – objectively speaking – part of the proletariat’ (p. 250). See also Margery Davies, ‘Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force’, in Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialism*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979, pp. 248–66.
- 41 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, p. xii.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
- 43 Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 91.
- 44 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 252.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 46 Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1992, chapter 8.
- 47 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p. 15.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 50 Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, London: Allen Lane, 1972, p. 47.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 52 Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, p. 74.
- 53 For a critical view of Marcuse’s aesthetics, see Robert Pippin, ‘Between Art and Utopia: Reconsidering the Aesthetic Theory of Herbert Marcuse’, in Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg and Charles P. Webel, eds, *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988, pp. 107–40.
- 54 Ernst Bloch, ‘Discussing Expressionism’, trans. Rodney Livingstone, in Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: NLB, 1977, pp. 16–27, at pp. 20–1.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 57 Bertolt Brecht, ‘Against Georg Lukács’, trans. Stuart Hood, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 68–85, at p. 69.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 61 Brecht’s *Diary* refers to the ‘aimlessness and miserable helplessness’ of the uprising, revealing a working class ‘once again the captive of the class enemy’ (quoted in *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 142).
- 62 Brecht, *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 Walter Benjamin, ‘Conversations with Brecht’, in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, London: NLB, 1973, pp. 105–21, at p. 119.
- 65 Theodor Adorno, ‘Reconciliation under Duress’, trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 151–76, at p. 151.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

6 Post-Marxism before post-Marxism: (II) Hybridising Marxism

- 1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, London: Methuen, 1958, p. 439.
- 2 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 50.

- 3 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, London and New York: Verso, 1991, p. 21.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 341–2.
- 8 For another strong defence of Marxism as a science by one of Althusser's contemporaries, see Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*.
- 9 Geras even accuses Althusser's theoretical project of destroying the notion of class consciousness: 'It has vanished literally without trace' (Norman Geras, 'Marx and the Critique of Political Economy', in Blackburn, ed., *Ideology in Social Science*, pp. 284–305, at p. 302).
- 10 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 131.
- 11 Žizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 43.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 53.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 18 Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution*, p. 22.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 32 Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, trans. David Ames Curtis, et al., New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 3.
- 33 Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution*, p. 371.
- 34 Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 205.

7 Constructing incredulity: (I) Postmodernism

- 1 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. xxiv.
- 2 Michel Foucault, quoted in Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism and Being*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 82.
- 3 Quoted in J. G. Merquior, *Foucault*, London: Fontana, 1985, p. 11.
- 4 Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, London and New York: Tavistock, 1980, p. 4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- 6 See Merquior, *Foucault*, p. 99.
- 7 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, London: Tavistock, 1970, p. 261.

- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- 11 Sheridan, *Michel Foucault*, p. 211.
- 12 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 387.
- 13 Merquior, *Foucault*, p. 145.
- 14 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xxiv.
- 15 Jean-François Lyotard, *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman, London: UCL Press, 1993, p. 302.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p. 96.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 20 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred, London: Verso, 1988.
- 21 Zizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 33.
- 22 'A Memorial of Marxism', Afterword to Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*, New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 45–75, at p. 50.
- 23 Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, pp. 96, 97.
- 24 For a more positive reading of this aspect of Marx's work, see David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, where it is argued this is a tribute to the acuteness of the analysis: 'At each step in the formulation of the theory, we encounter antagonisms that build into intriguing configurations of *internal* and *external* contradiction. The resolution of each merely provokes the formation of new contradictions or their translation on to some fresh terrain. The argument can spin onwards and outwards in this way to encompass every aspect of the capitalist mode of production' (p. xvi).
- 25 Lyotard, 'A Memorial of Marxism', p. 67.
- 26 For a discussion of this aspect of Lyotard's thought, see my *Modern Cultural Theorists: Jean-François Lyotard*, Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, 1996, chapter 9.
- 27 Lyotard, 'A Memorial of Marxism', p. 50.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 33 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London: Athlone Press, 1984, p. 140.
- 34 Mark Seem, Introduction to *ibid.*, p. xviii.
- 35 Foucault, Preface to *ibid.*, p. xiii.
- 36 Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, p. 3.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 379–80.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 373.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 375.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 379.
- 41 Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster, St Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1975, p. 59.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 44 See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988.
- 45 Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p. 67.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 47 Cornelius Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle, Brighton: Harvester, 1984, p. 237.

- 48 Derrida, *Specters*, p. 13. Carver takes issue with Derrida's reading of Marx, although he comes to the broadly similar conclusion that there are 'multiple Marxes, and each one is a product of a reading strategy' (*The Postmodern Marx*, p. 234). For more on reading strategies with regard to Marx, see Dominick La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- 49 Derrida, *Specters*, p. 13.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 88. Just to confuse the issue, Ryan points out that Derrida publicly declared himself a communist in 1976 (*Marxism and Deconstruction*, pp. xiv, 223).
- 52 Derrida, *Specters*, p. 10.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 54 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992, p. xi. For more on this debate, see my *Derrida and the End of History*, Cambridge: Icon Press, 1999.
- 55 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, II, p. 339.
- 56 Jacques Derrida, *Ear of the Other. Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, ed. Christie McDonald, Lincoln, NA and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988, p. 32.
- 57 Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, p. xiii. For another deconstructive approach to Marxism see Bertramsen, Thomsen and Torfing, *State, Economy and Society*, where such assumptions of classical Marxism as 'the unity of the economy' are questioned (p. 18).
- 58 Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, p. 1.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- 62 Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London: Verso, 1989, p. 60.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 65; Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, p. xiv.
- 66 David Harvey, *Consciousness and Urban Experience*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, p. xii.
- 67 Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, p. xii.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 446.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 445.
- 70 R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 5.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 73 See, for example, the arguments put forward by Bill Readings, in 'Pagans, Perverts or Primitives? Experimental Justice in the Empire of Capital', in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Judging Lyotard*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 168–91. For the different, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George Van Den Abbeele, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.
- 74 Walker, *Inside/Outside*, p. 14.
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990, pp. 4, 7.
- 77 *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.
- 78 Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 177.
- 79 *Ibid.*, chapter 8.
- 80 *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- 81 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

- 83 For more on the topic of 'consumer freedom', see Bauman's *Freedom*, where it is argued this may be the most we can hope for in the current state of Western society: 'our survey suggests that for most members of contemporary society individual freedom, if available, comes in the form of consumer freedom, with all its agreeable and not-salatable attributes' (p. 88).
- 84 See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993, and *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press and Blackwell, 1997.
- 85 Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, pp. 185–6.

8 Constructing incredulity: (II) Feminism

- 1 Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in Lydia Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy*, London: Pluto Press, 1981, pp. 1–41, at p. 2.
- 2 For a denial that the 'marriage' is an 'unhappy' one, see Rosalind Petchesky, 'Dissolving the Hyphen: A Report on Marxist-Feminist Groups 1–5', in Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy*, pp. 373–89.
- 3 Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage', p. 2.
- 4 See Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, New York: Harper and Row, 1976.
- 5 Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage', p. 7.
- 6 See Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1973.
- 7 See Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*.
- 8 Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage', pp. 10–11.
- 9 Sandra Harding, 'What is the Real Material Base of Patriarchy and Capital?', in Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage*, pp. 135–63, at p. 137.
- 10 Iris Young, 'Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory', in Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage*, pp. 43–69, at p. 44.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 15 Heidi Hartmann, 'Summary and Response: Continuing the Discussion', in Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage*, pp. 363–73, at p. 366.
- 16 Gloria Joseph, 'The Incompatible Menage a Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism', in Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage*, pp. 91–107.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 18 Carol Ehrlich, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Feminism and Marxism: Can It Be Saved?', in Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage*, pp. 109–33, at p. 131.
- 19 Hartmann, 'Summary and Response', p. 369.
- 20 Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, London: Sphere Books, 1972, pp. 169, 170.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 22 Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, p. 19.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 24 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1971, p. 6.
- 25 Zillah R. Eisenstein, 'Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism', in Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy*, pp. 5–40.
- 26 Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 164.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 28 Coward's later work suggests that patriarchy has been overcome, and she has become critical of 'womanist' feminism; see *Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium?*, London: HarperCollins, 1999.

- 29 Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 14.
- 30 See, for example, various contributions to Kuhn and Wolpe, eds, *Feminism and Materialism*, and Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy*.
- 31 Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions*, pp. 40–1.
- 32 Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p. 73.
- 33 Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison, 'Patriarchy and Relations of Production', in Kuhn and Wolpe, eds, *Feminism and Materialism*, pp. 11–41, at p. 36.
- 34 Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 18. The debates described by Rowbotham might be seen as examples of what has been dubbed the sin of 'theoreticism' (see Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe, 'Feminism and Materialism', in Kuhn and Wolpe, eds., *Feminism and Materialism*, pp. 1–10, at p. 6).
- 35 Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness*, p. 45.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 39 Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p. 246.
- 40 Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, London: Verso, 1980, pp. 3, 4.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 5. See also Michele Barrett, 'Marxist-Feminism and the Work of Karl Marx', in Betty Matthews, ed., *Marx: 100 Years On*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983, pp. 210–14.
- 42 Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, p. 13.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 46 Mouffe argues against the validity of a gender-essentialist politics in 'Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics', in Nicholson and Seidman, eds., *Social Postmodernism*, pp. 315–31: 'My main argument here has been that, for feminists who are committed to a political project whose aim is to struggle against the forms of subordination which exist in many social relations, and not only in those linked to gender, an approach that permits us to understand how the subject is constructed through different discourses and subject positions is certainly more adequate than one that reduces our identity to one single position – be it class, race, or gender' (p. 329).
- 47 Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, p. 4.
- 48 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 149.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 50 See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, p. 153.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 165. For a similarly optimistic vision of the new technology in terms of women, see the work of Sadie Plant; for example, *Zeroes + Ones: The Matrix of Women + Machines*, New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- 52 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, p. 181.
- 53 See Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age*, New York and London: Routledge, 1991.
- 54 Donna Haraway, 'Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds, *Feminists Theorize the Political*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 86–100, at p. 86.
- 55 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs*, p. 181.
- 56 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and

London: Routledge, 1990, p. viii; *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 1–2.

57 *Ibid.*, p. xii.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 187–8.

59 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33.

9 An open universe?: Postmodern science and the Marxist dialectic

1 Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, p. 2; chapter 1.

2 Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, p. 196.

3 Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, p. 229; 'scientists are increasingly thinking of the physical Universe less as a collection of cogs in a machine, more as an information-processing system. Gone are the clod-like clumps of matter, to be replaced instead by "bits" of information' (*ibid.*, p. 277).

4 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 60.

5 Cited in David-Hillel Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism: A Study in Marxist Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edn, Brighton: Harvester, 1979, p. 5.

6 For a rebuttal of Bernstein's reading of Marx on such issues, see Colletti, 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International', *From Rousseau to Lenin*, pp. 43–108.

7 Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, trans. Lawrence Garner, London: NLB, 1975, p. 10. For an argument from the Marxist side that Marx can be *too* materialist, see Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom*, chapter 8.

8 Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism*, p. 6.

9 Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom*, p. 185. Carver also plays down the importance of dialectics in Marx (see *The Postmodern Marx*, pp. 200–2).

10 Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism*, p. 6.

11 Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science*, London: Profile Books, 1998, pp. 37, 137.

12 For a more detailed discussion of the treatment of this issue in recent Continental philosophy, see my *Contemporary Continental Philosophy: The New Scepticism*, Aldershot: Avebury, 2000, chapter 5.

13 Sokal and Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures*, p. 127. For Mandelbrot, see the discussion in chapter 4 of James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science*, London: Sphere Books, 1988.

14 Sokal and Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures*, p. 30.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 133–5.

16 John D. Barrow, *Impossibility: The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits*, London: Vintage, 1999, p. 252.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

18 Mouffe makes the interesting observation that both postmodern and conservative politics are 'predicated upon human finitude, imperfection and limits', hence the tendency for commentators like Habermas to conflate their objectives ('Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?', p. 39).

19 Barrow, *Impossibility*, pp. 2–3.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

23 See, for example, the arguments in Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972

24 Barrow, *Impossibility*, p. 190.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

27 R. C. Lewontin, *The Doctrine of DNA: Biology as Ideology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993, p. 63.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

- 29 Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield, *Frontiers of Complexity: the Search for Order in a Chaotic World*, London: Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 174. ‘Deterministic chaos’, as the authors note, ‘blurs our intuitive ideas of order and disorder’ (p. 174).
- 30 See, for example, the discussion on the Anasazi civilisation of New Mexico in Roger Lewin, *Complexity: Life on the Edge of Chaos*, London: Phoenix, 1993. Lewin is prone to overstate the case with regard to complexity, as in a back-cover blurb claiming that a few ‘simple rules . . . can explain any kind of complex system – multinational corporations, or mass extinctions, or ecosystems such as rainforests, or human consciousness’. By Sokal and Bricmont’s standards this is no doubt ‘abuse’, but Lewin’s eclectic range of interdisciplinary case studies does offer a challenge to many of our assumptions about the nature of systems.
- 31 Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, p. 196.
- 32 Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, pp. 301, 302.
- 33 James P. Crutchfield, J. Doyne Farmer, Norman H. Packard and Robert Shaw, ‘Chaos’, *Scientific American*, December 1986 (p. 38).
- 34 Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, p. 176; see also David Bohm, *Wholeness and Implicate Order*, London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
- 35 Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, p. 168. For a narrative application of the wave function, with feminist objectives, see Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries*, London: Granta Books, 1997, p. 162.
- 36 Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, p. 168.
- 37 See Roger Penrose, *The Emperor’s New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics*, London: Vintage, 1990, and *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness*, London: Vintage, 1995.
- 38 Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse*, p. 3.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 43.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- 48 Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*, London and New York: Verso, 1989, p. 133.
- 49 Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, p. 277.
- 50 Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 123.
- 51 Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, p. 4.
- 52 Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, p. 114.
- 53 Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975, p. 109.
- 54 Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism*, p. 103.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 129. For Bhaskar’s reply to such arguments, see the ‘Postscript’ to the 2nd edn of *A Realist Theory of Science*, Brighton: Harvester, 1978, pp. 251–62.
- 56 Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, p. 69. Gouldner is similarly concerned to rescue Engels from his critics by emphasising the collaborative aspect (see *The Two Marxisms*, chapter 9).
- 57 Carver feels the relationship is much more complex, and confusing, than that (see *The Postmodern Marx*, particularly chapter 8).
- 58 Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, p. 80.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 62 ‘The paradigm shift that we are now living through is a shift away from reductionism and towards holism’ (Davies and Gribbin, *The Matter Myth*, pp. 22–3).

10 'Not show biz': Pluralist politics and the emancipation of critique

- 1 Zizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 5.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Elections in Austria and Switzerland (1999) have resulted in significant gains for the neo-fascist far right, and Germany, Italy, and France all have neo-fascist political movements with some degree of popular appeal.
- 4 Zizek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 92.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- 12 Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, pp. 75, 93, 78. For a survey of this tradition, see my 'Marxism and Aesthetics', in Oswald Hanfling, ed., *Philosophical Aesthetics: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 441–71.
- 13 Lewontin, *The Doctrine of DNA*, p. vii.

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