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**THE QUESTION OF CULTURE IN DERIVATIVES
OF MARXIST THEORY**

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*A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis delineates the context and history of the field of cultural studies, specifically tracing the construction of culture as a site of critical theory. Primarily, it explores the influence of Marxist philosophies in politicizing the culture concept, and subsequently surveys the set of internal debates in progressive theory. Comparing the various strengths and limitations of political economy, American cultural consumption discourse, and British cultural materialism, ultimately the thesis argues in favour of instating the third paradigm as the privileged analytical model of progressive scholarship. Cultural materialism is cited for its methodological excellence and political relevance in the contemporary world.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire de maîtrise décrit le contexte et l'histoire du champ des études culturelles, en retraçant spécifiquement la construction de la culture comme un lieu de la théorie critique. Il explore d'abord l'influence des philosophies marxistes sur la politisation du concept de culture, puis recense l'ensemble des débats internes de la théorie progressiste. Enfin, en comparant les qualités et les limites de l'économie politique, du discours américain de la consommation culturelle, ainsi que du matérialisme culturel britannique, ce mémoire plaide en faveur de l'établissement de ce dernier paradigme comme modèle analytique privilégié de la recherche académique progressiste. Le matérialisme culturel est cité comme un exemple d'excellence méthodologique et de pertinence politique dans le monde contemporain.

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PREFACE:
A Note on Definitions of Major Terms

Culture

Since there really is no transhistorical essence to the meaning of culture, any project of definition is bound to be nebulous. This underlines culture's intangible qualities. If this leaves the notion of culture unrefined, it is because I want to accent its conceptual weight and its ability to carry multiple (sometimes conflictual) claims. In my definition, culture refers to a conjunction of ideas based on Williams, Hall, and Gramsci. In the writings of all three, culture is inextricably linked to power. My working definition of culture is as follows:

Culture alludes to the whole way of life of a given group, generally self-identifying as ethnic, racial, and/or national in character, whose collective consciousness is produced and continually contested through hegemonic social relations.

First, following Williams, I mean culture as "a whole way of life," combining the more specialized compartments of meaning usually assigned to the idea - as in the combination of aesthetic forms; the tension of dominant and counter-hegemonic community values; and finally, diverse traditions and customs. In Sociology of Culture, Williams defines culture as "a signifying system through which necessarily...a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored." Culture encompasses the formations, institutions, and traditions of the social order - juridical, aesthetic, pedagogic, economic, the spheres of everyday communication and language. It espouses collective psychic, spiritual, and corporeal practices and values. Culture is a lived consciousness, bound by a social system of signs that shapes that consciousness.

Secondly, I invoke the Gramscian idea of culture as hegemony to underline the role of power relations. I prefer using hegemony as a correlate of domination, where social actors aspire to secure or sustain power. Hegemony includes ideology. As a term, hegemony best suggests the activity involved in *manufacturing consent* and translating dominant discourse into *common sense*.

Generally I employ culture to refer to the practices and values of national bodies, or racial and ethnic communities. The use will be apparent from the context. This definition is not intended to describe any essential properties of a group or constituency. What I do wish to underline is the every-changing nature of culture as a process of *becoming*, in Stuart Hall's terms, which suggests a cultural semiotics in perpetual contest.

When I discuss culture specifically as it is attached to classical Marxist theory, it is used interchangeably with ideology, as an element of the superstructure.

Social Totality

The social totality, or the social, is constituted of the aggregate of culture, politics, and economics. Social relations are constituted by the intersection of these three spheres, which usually operate in real terms in an interconnected way, but which can also be classified as specific categories of analysis and operation for conceptual purposes. Social ideologies are those ideational propositions which deal with the frontiers of culture, politics, and economics either together or separately.

Capitalism

Here I use Everling's (1997:9) definition: "Capital, as a social and historical particular form of economic development, is the accumulation of money capital through its system of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption." Capitalism entails a class system which separates the owners of the means of production and the labourers in the industrializing process. As a profit economy also, it generates profit for the owners by usurping the surplus value of commodities, i.e. the difference between labour value and (arbitrarily assigned) sale value. That is, profit is the difference between an object's real value in production and its symbolic value in consumption. Following many progressive thinkers, I cast capitalism as an oppressive structure, with radical socialism being the alternative.

I refer to Western and Eastern Marxism in the sense that Graham Murdock (1995) raises. In his explanation, East and West correspond to Cold War divisions. Eastern Marxism alludes to Soviet and Eastern European socialist theory, privileging an analysis of the modes of production (base), while Western Marxism designates those theories generated in Western Europe, subsequently leaking into North America, which have concentrated on the role of ideology (superstructure).

Cultural Studies and British Cultural Materialism

British cultural studies originated the idea of interdisciplinary and politicized knowledge, against the claims of the rationally objective academy. I refer to it as an interdiscipline, since it incorporates many knowledge-systems in its fold, blurring the borders between traditional scholarly domains.

As in interdiscipline, cultural studies consists of postmodern critical discourses. By postmodern critical discourses, briefly I mean a conglomeration of what have been termed identitarian theories (feminism, postcolonialism, self-reflexive ethnography), progressive anti-capitalist theory (including Marxist theory), post-structuralism, deconstruction, and contemporary psychoanalysis. This epistemological term is

distinguished from the other political phenomenon of post-modernity (see that definition under "Globalization").

Cultural studies shares a contested relationship with postmodern discourses. Although it uses postmodern insights, it also remains critical of (in Judith Butler's words) an apolitical nihilism espoused by deconstruction - which in turn has become the brand of thought mostly equated with postmodernism. I wish to clarify that in my definition, cultural studies includes, but is not confined to, deconstructive analysis.

Cultural studies also introduced cultural materialism, a significant advance in Marxist-based theory which collapsed the distance between base and superstructure as discrete, autonomous, separate categories, proposing a unification in terms of articulating the interdependence of the two spheres. The materiality of culture is taken into account, as well as the culture of production.

I pose British Cultural Materialism as the real version of cultural studies. In this text, the Birmingham School is linked to the practice of that version. Many of the thinkers I group under the umbrella term do not necessarily self-identify as cultural materialists. However, because their politics and analyses tend to share basic elements with the cultural materialist analysis (i.e. foregrounding class relations, and the material production of culture), I am giving them a common label for purposes of reference. As I define it, this group of scholars including the likes of Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Samir Amin, Arjun Appadurai, and Gayatri Spivak. These thinkers appear the most in my text, though they do not exclusively constitute the cultural studies camp.

(British) cultural studies, the British method, and (British) cultural materialism all are used interchangeably.

American Cultural Consumption Studies

Describes a subset of cultural studies which has significantly reduced the role of class in its analysis, and also reduces a critique of capitalism, attempting, instead, to overlay agency and resistance, with excessive focus on how signs and commodities are received and reinterpreted by social actors. More than British cultural studies, it highlights postmodern concerns with multiplicity in interpretation. American cultural consumption studies is a theoretical type, and I am labelling it as such for convenient referencing only, as with the other definitions; of course; its methods are not only limited to America, but it exists as a method, an identifiable bias in the literature. I use the term interchangeably with American cultural studies.

Political Economy

I use political economist, orthodox Marxist, orthodox economist, and economic determinist (and any of these preceded by *vulgar, fundamentalist, or crude*) to refer to a type of thinking which privileges material relations over ideological or cultural relations in Marxist analysis. Sol Yurick and Nicholas Garnham are primarily cited as adherents of this kind of thinking. In the apposite sense, cultural determinism alludes to the reverse position that accords primacy to cultural relations, excluding or marginalizing analysis of the economic means of production.

The three perspectives I discuss - political economy, cultural materialism, and cultural consumption studies - are, in my definition, offshoots of Marxist theory; therefore their points of convergence are manifold, yet the points of divergence define them as very distinct paradigms, and this has to be kept in mind. Here, I am only separating them conceptually for the convenience of referring to the set of beliefs encompassed by each body of thought at the basic level - certainly there are major internal contradictions within each paradigm, but those concerns are not mapped out here in detail, in the interest of keeping some analytical focus.

Globalization

I paraphrase the definition usefully provided by Pieterse in Featherstone et al (1995:5). Globalization names an epoch that commenced in the 1960's, coterminous with post-modernity, or late capitalist formations. Modernity is a historical epoch in which the idea of the nation-state reigned. Post-modernity, and globalization, mark the dethroning of the nation-state by transnational institutions. Globalization speaks to the rapid diffusion of populations, wealth, travel, and ideas in the contemporary world. Diaspora, as a feature of globalization, refers to the hybrid communities formed in post-modernity; geographical location is no longer definitive of a stable identity.¹

N.B. I abide by these general usages, unless otherwise specified - the meaning should be clear from the use of the term in a particular context. Further clarifications and elaborations will be provided in the body of the thesis.

¹ As an example, saying someone is Chinese does not necessarily indicate that s/he is from China; rather, it indicates that person's descent, but does not automatically convey their geopolitical identity in a definitive way. As a Chinese Canadian, or Chinese Malaysian, or Chinese American, s/he may be part of a diasporic population that can trace its roots to China. But s/he is not 'from there' in the literal sense. S/he has plural cultural contexts, allegiances, and influences, and the Chinese identity indexes a racial positioning more than anything else. Proponents of globalization theory argue that in earlier times, a singular all-defining identity was possible and indeed predominated; following the example cited, those who self-identified as Chinese probably tended to live and affiliate themselves within the geopolitical and 'racial' space of China. Now, in the era of twentieth century globalization and the proliferation of diasporas, place is not always coterminous with cultural identity. There is a greater co-mingling of race, culture, and space.

The radicalism of the issue of culture lies in the fact that culture affords us ways of seeing the world, and if the latter have any bearing on our efforts to change the world, then is its essential that we confront our ways of seeing...To avoid the question of culture is to avoid questions concerning the ways in which we see the world; it is to remain imprisoned, therefore, in a cultural unconscious, controlled by conditioned ways of seeing...without the self-consciousness that must be the point of departure for all critical understanding and, by implication, for all radical activity.

Arif Dirlik

INTRODUCTION

This thesis traces the peregrinations of culture in theories which can trace Marxism as a progenitor. The question of culture continues to haunt Marxism and its derivatives, political economy and cultural studies (inclusive of both American cultural studies and British cultural materialism). Here, I trace the role of radical theory in shaping the nucleus of these paradigms, and chart its contributions towards cultural scholarship.

The narrative of culture can be structured in the modalities of crisis and chaos. As culture moves in and out of various meanings, the nomenclature represents the kinetics of the concept, its collisions with a myriad of traits, compressed into a single ideational frame. In most conservative interpretations, culture has acted as a synonym for civilization, and under liberalism, it has become the site for examining multiculturalism; alongside postmodernism we speak of cultural difference, and paradoxically, in an age of globalization, we purportedly face the dissolution of cultural borders, as culture's affective affinities submit to an impersonal, homogeneous culture of imperialism, increasingly bearing the stamp of transnational capital.

The reason for choosing Marxism and cultural studies to be the overarching categories of analysis is my curiosity about paradigms of power. Beyond the notions of liberalism and conservatism which tend to dictate the central terms of debate, I am interested in unpacking the intricacies of culture as hegemony, as ethnic, racial, and/or national consciousness, within critical discourse. Beyond the relationship of culture to imperialism, there are several brands of study which seize on culture as their preferred

site of critique - we hear of popular culture, subculture, work culture, cultural pluralism, even cultures of narcissism and cultures of complaint.¹ While no one can question their validity and value, these studies are mostly devoted to uncovering the central metaphors governing our ways of life - often betraying a nostalgia for the way things were, in conservative renditions - without paying attention to the material dimensions of social experience. That is why, I believe, the unorthodox Marxist tradition and the theories it has inspired, most notably cultural materialism, is important for reinfusing the vibrant political edge lost to many other disciplines. I would hasten to add that my endorsement of unorthodox Marxism refers to relatively nuanced discourses which are not reducible to a crude economist position. Adherents of the latter are gathered under the umbrella of orthodox Marxism, a.k.a traditional political economy, which tends to rely on pure economic analysis virtually to the exclusion of other criteria informing the constitution of the social field.²

In contrast, I uphold cultural studies for its refusal to abandon identity politics even in a time when it is dangerous to do so, given the extreme anti-essentialism of the deconstructive method. Personally, I believe the British mode of cultural studies (cultural materialism) most gracefully orchestrates the symphony of Marxist, postcolonial, and

¹ A series of books that take on the last two themes in particular are authored by the likes of Christopher Lasch (The Culture of Narcissism, New York: Norton Books, 1991) Dinesh D'Souza (The End of Racism, New York: Free Press, 1995 and Illiberal Education, New York: Free Press, 1991), Neil Bissonndath (Selling Illusions, Toronto: Penguin, 1994) and by others seeking to theorize the contemporary state of Western culture.

From here onwards, whenever full information for a publication appears, it means that it does not appear in the bibliography of this thesis. It also means the reference is not deemed very central to the formation of the ideas contained herein. Full information about those marginal references only is provided in footnotes for the convenience of the reader. When complete citations do not appear in the footnotes, they can be found listed under the "References" section of the thesis.

² I will elaborate on the methodological debates mentioned here further on in the thesis. Also see the "Note on Definitions" to clarify my uses of terminology.

feminist philosophies, though admittedly the relationship between these quarters is alive with tension; and the reverberations of deconstruction, too, can be felt within its parameters, against modernity's metanarratives. After British cultural studies, and, of course, the conjunction of postmodern, postcolonial and feminist contributions (as separate fields in their own rights) it has become impossible to speak of knowledge construction apart from standpoint epistemology, or subject-object, subject-text positioning. The myth of positivism has been shattered.

The following endeavour is expository, descriptive, and exploratory. This is not to say that I am striving for pure objectivity. My intellectual positions, as it will become evident, are overwhelmingly informed by British cultural materialism, deeply invested in its aesthetics and ethics; I find its articulations, against other humanities disciplines - if we accept the facades of their arbitrary separations - politically convincing, academically rigorous, and methodologically supreme. From the cultural materialism group, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall can be isolated as my principal influences in terms of how I have crafted an approach to my subject.³ Proposed as a defense of the contemporary relevance of cultural materialism, then, my text is a short survey of the academy's role as a producer of knowledge on culture. As such, my evidence is solicited from the history of the main ideas covered, in primarily textual form; real-life examples are used infrequently, since the polemics I deal with are more intra-theoretical in nature.

In the process of collecting and assessing the thoughts of numerous thinkers, some limitations are unavoidable. Inevitably, this text is defined by the latitudes of

³ This is not to suggest that these theorists are identified only with cultural studies. Stuart Hall, for example, more of late identifies himself within the Third World and diasporic postcolonial intellectual niche. Thus, being a proponent of cultural studies is only one affiliation in his intellectual vocation.

absence as well as presence. I have deliberately excluded a number of themes in my presentation of culture, which I briefly rehearse here, knowing their evacuation is problematic; the limits of space and narrow focus dictated this decision. However, these polemics do leave invisible imprints, and occasionally lurk in the margins of the argument.

Most notably, I limit myself to First World thinkers. I am well aware of the dangers in perpetuating Eurocentrism. However, I wish to deliver an understanding of common problematics that have a relevance to theory in the West; indirectly, these issues also tend to inform the critical and political sensibilities of the decolonizing world. There is evidence of a mutual and shared history between Western and Third World thinkers. Marxism, for instance, has impressed itself in the revolutionary doctrines of many anti-imperialist movements in Third World nations, and so, as a resource, it has great relevance to these countries as well. The strange consequence of colonization is the creation of a common Western and Third World intellectual heritage of sorts - usually chosen in the case of the former, and usually imposed through violence in the case of the latter.

Nevertheless, many of the theories that provided an opening in the form of a liberatory ethic (such as Marxism) have been used by marginalized populations in the fulfillment of their own political goals and agendas. Yet, rather than being simply integrated into the social fabric, these philosophies have been reformulated in the Third World, and thus possess an inherent vitality and use value independent of their framing in the West.

Moreover, dealing with a cultural heritage - or burden - of the dual order, at the very least, means the Third World intellectual occupies an ambiguous and troubled location. Her bifocal vision, and access to rarefied language, present a dilemma not directly shared by self-identified First World clients of academe. The perspectives and agendas of Western theories cannot be transposed into the Third World arena without considerable recontextualization.

For these purposes, I situate Third World intellectuals outside European/North American bounds; the specific intricacies of their unique social positioning, and their versions of shared epistemologies, warrant a careful and separate study. *Third World* is not to be confused with *postcolonial*, which often implies a set of entirely different conditions related to diaspora and racial stratification *within* the West. To keep some analytical focus here, I have deliberately not included the contributions of 'hyphenated' Westerners of African, Native, Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian descent only because many deal with very specific postcolonial predicaments, and the issues they bring up deserve deep consideration within another context of study.⁴

It should, however, be noted that many such thinkers practiced cultural studies before it was named as such, and provided extremely provocative and interesting insights. Franz Fanon; Albert Memmi; the Swadeshi and Negritude movements; the Harlem Renaissance; the Subaltern Studies group; and the Black British thinkers Isaac Julien,

⁴ The predicaments that scholars of the postcolonial perspective deal with include notions of double consciousness and split identities, multiple national allegiances, and the construction of race in the media, to give only a few examples. However, because these are interests which look at social problems through the primary lens of race, I am not discussing them specifically in this paper. I do make mention of Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, and Samir Amin - all people of colour, all scholars of critical race/class theory - since their contributions are integral to the focus of this thesis, which is the discussion of cultural studies as a critical methodology.

Pratibha Parmar, and Paul Gilroy have shaped Postcolonial and Third World Cultural Studies a great deal.

Regrettably, this paper also appears to be a conversation between men, although women have contributed significantly to the debates. Michele Mattelart, Asoka Bandarage, and Chandra Mukherji are excellent examples.⁵ By no means do I intend to suggest that women are not involved in the dialogue on culture; rather, I think the implicit canon of socialist history reveals a masculine bias, and in my paper I deal with parts of that canon as my main focus, to understand the initial development of theory. It goes without saying that the academic stars who tend to get exposed are generally male academics, leaders, and thinkers - bringing the operations of patriarchy and masculine privilege into sharp relief.

I proceed with my discussion in six sections. The first part of the thesis describes the vicissitudes of culture in theory. The opening section, "Historicizing the Culture Concept," is a basic overview which offers a historical background for assessing some of the competing discourses that cumulatively produced the notion of culture, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, with special attention to the contributions of anthropology as the formal house of culture. Subsequently, "Marxist Interpretations of Culture: Marx, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School" traces the formation of ideology versus hegemony, as they have both been applied in the work of the aforementioned philosophers. Then, part III, "Cultural Studies," provides a sketch of

⁵ Again, because many of these thinkers deal with women and labour, or women and popular culture, I am not discussing the specifics of their arguments in this thesis. Wherever possible, I have used theories that have a general relevance to the formation of cultural studies. Rather than looking at the specific complexity of intersecting phenomena like gender and class, or race and class, I have narrowed my focus to the

the original contributions made by British academics/activists Thompson, Hall, and Williams, who were at the forefront of developing a politicized, interdisciplinary approach to knowledge and who oversaw the inception of cultural materialism.

In the principal focus of historicizing and contextualizing the study of culture in Western intellectual practice, the thesis comparatively delineates the recurring dialectic of the Marxist culture versus economy controversy: base and superstructure, material analysis and ideology, modes of production and patterns of consumption. This dialectic serves as the common thread binding together the project. The interface of these oppositions repeatedly appear, interspersed throughout my argument at relevant moments. And as it is not possible to surmise on all the past permutations of culture within the scope of this paper, only selected positions are accorded interest.

The second part describes debates within cultural studies and the splits that have solidified three camps within derivatives of Marxist theory: political economy, American cultural consumption studies, and British cultural materialism. "Splinters in Theory" and "Culture and Class" integrate aspects of this discussion. It should be noted that the differences between political economists and cultural studies in general constitute an internal fracture among intellectuals with socialist sympathies. In the literature which explores these differences, there often appears to be a stalemate between the so-called morally vague cultural studies practitioners, and the supposedly ethically superior Marxists.

Strictly speaking, this stalemate does not govern the larger relationship between cultural studies and political economy. As multivocal fields, they embrace divergent

negotiation of culture and class. Wherever appropriate, however, I will mention the ways in which race and

perspectives within their native folds. Rather, the supposed debate can be framed as a contest of single issue politics versus multi-issue commitments. In embryonic form, cultural studies method presented, in part, a reformulation of Marxist categories, and all of its forms rarely betray this ethical heritage in spirit - in contrast to what certain materialist purists say.⁶ Cultural studies merely points out that an axiomatic allegiance to orthodox Marxism tends to erase the importance of other fealties.

Orthodox political economy is appealing because it is clear and decisive in its theory. It lays out a program of revolution, produces clear value judgments, and outlines procedures for the abolition of capital interests as well as its troubled coefficient, consumer culture. However, it can be deceptively reductive and programmatic; it is striking, for instance, that the proverbial recitation of *race/class/gender* in cultural studies, much-maligned in class-oriented literature, is akin, however, to the equally formulaic invocation of *the workers struggle* documented in political economy.

As I will argue, there is, in actuality, no debate. Springing from a common source - Marxism - cultural studies and political economy are battling cousins in the same family of thought - the very family, in fact, which birthed the peacemaker of cultural materialism. I will lead up to the conclusion that cultural studies does provide a sophisticated method of social analysis in contrast to the monocular vision of political economy, but as a project of theoretical reform it must address and counteract the evacuation of class reflected by the recent postmodern turn in academic scholarship, an

gender inform the debates.

⁶ Usually, the argument from the point of view of orthodox Marxists is that cultural studies diminished the importance of class because of its interdisciplinary approach, its theoretical pastiche of race, gender, class, and sexuality concerns. This contention will be taken up throughout the paper. I will be demonstrating why

evacuation prompted by a focus on the emancipatory effects of consumer culture as the main concern in critical theory. Cultural studies can be saved from itself if the lessons of cultural materialism are substantively reintegrated into the discourse.

Consequent to the rehearsal of these originary conflicts, I briefly elaborate on a cultural materialist critique. Thus, throughout the body of the text, and especially in the conclusion "The Task of Theory in a Globalizing World," I reiterate some of the cultural materialist principles to reunite the alienated discourses of economic determinism and cultural consumption. Here, the privileged aim is consolidating cultural studies as an intellectual resource and affirming the inherent possibilities within it, via a charting of the most significant contributions it can make to continue traversing an ethical path in an age of globalization.

First and foremost, to dissect the essential matter at hand, I consider the matter of culture: its hereditary successions, the history of its study, and its ideological affiliations.

the orthodox Marxist view is false, by looking at some of the central tenets of cultural materialism as it developed in Britain in particular.

I. HISTORICIZING THE CULTURE CONCEPT

Speaking of racial politics, the great African American intellectual W.E. Dubois prophesied the twentieth century would be defined by the colour question.⁷ Strikingly portentous, his words foreshadowed the rise of an ensuing dilemma, as colour is not our lone obsession: We are equally haunted by the *culture* question.

In the contemporary social landscape, culture qualifies as a contested site and features heavily in discourses as diverse as the *culture wars* and *political correctness* to *tribalism* and *ethnic cleansing*. These keywords of our times illustrate that most facets of everyday social relations -- discussions of national policies, headlines in the media, academic discourse, the ideology of the global marketplace -- are all organized around the subject of culture, whether we imagine it as a demarcation of collective distinction, as a factor in the promulgation of unity, or as a fault line threatening social stability.

Usually, the cultural referent is invoked as sufficiently transparent, as a self-evident premise. But in spite of this assumption, it is clear that culture has such an embattled history, such a protean spirit, that it is difficult to articulate in very tangible terms. The concept's biography reveals a rich and textured lineage that further complicates the hermeneutical task.

Raymond Williams has charted a genealogy of culture in works such as Keywords, Culture and Society, and Marxism and Literature where he notes the term's

⁷Ronald Takaki, 1995:66

changing contours throughout the modern Western history of ideas.⁸ Culture has a rare, chameleon complexity stemming from its panoply of ideational identifications. Collapsing multiple meanings, it has variously served as a synonym for elite origins and comportment, aesthetic traditions, and generic ways of life. But its original connotations have never been completely shed -- rather, each new association is superimposed onto its antecedents to produce a curious melange.⁹ In its form as pastiche, culture comes to us with a confusing array of affiliations: metonymically aligned with *civilization*, analogous to *high art*, equally conditioning the definition of *society*, while embodying traits of foreign *exotica*.¹⁰

"The complexity of culture is then remarkable," Williams states, "It became a noun of inner process, specialized to its presumed agencies in intellectual life and the arts. It became also a noun of general process, specialized to its presumed configurations in whole ways of life."¹¹ Williams' brilliant archaeology of knowledge in Marxism and Literature shows how the contents of culture have always had a relational life, shifting with context, dispossessed of any fixed, intrinsic value of signification.

Its situation as discursive centre in the philosophical-academic matrix has highlighted culture as an archive of power relations. Undeniably, the exact trajectory of culture in Western intellectual history is difficult to map. Nevertheless it is generally

⁸ See Culture and Society, London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, London: Fontana, 1976; Marxism and Literature, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; and Culture, London: Fontana, 1981.

⁹ Williams, 1977:13-15.

¹⁰ Williams does not mention this last feature of culture (its management of *exotica*, and cultural difference in non-Western societies). I have inserted this observation because it has a relevance to the dominant notions of culture present in the nineteenth century, fundamentally tied also to the genesis of anthropology. Many scholars have focused on the nineteenth century to show how the discursive creation of the colonized Other depended on the argument that non-Westerners were in fact culturally inferior to white Westerners; see Said, 1993; Young, 1995; and Gilman, 1985.

agreed that German Romanticism, Italian irredentism, and the French Enlightenment pioneered the modern custom of meditating on sociocultural matters.¹² The British and Americans also joined in, especially in the 1800's as culture entered new sites, its nascent apprenticeship under philosophy carrying over into the related realms of literature and anthropology. It was the nineteenth century that seamlessly negotiated the conversion of culture into a formal object of disciplinary and scientist concern.¹³

To be precise, we might suggest that culture came of age under the auspices of European empire.¹⁴ As a consort of colonization, culture was pressed into service as the harbinger of difference *par excellence*. An assorted medley of communication artifacts - popular travel accounts, news reports, legal documents, official statements, curricular material, translation work, historical writing, novels, music, paintings, photographs, scientific studies, ethnographic chronicles - virtually all of these media confronted, at one point or another, the colonial encounter. Together they comprise an impressive collection of cultural thinking.

The Western diffusion of culture into several disciplinary portfolios merits special consideration. Literary studies, especially, relied on the cultural theme to a great extent.

¹¹ Raymond Williams, 1977:17

¹² Williams, 1977:17,20 shows how Hegel, Herder and de Vico had a great impact on developing ideas on culture. Also see Haberman 1987, sections on "The Enlightenment" and "Ideology, Culture and Society 1848-1880" for more details on the subject.

¹³ De Gobineau and other social Darwinists began their so-called scientific comparisons of cultural and racial development in this period, emphasizing the especially nefarious branches of eugenics and physiognomy. It is a well-documented fact that the medieval faith in religious doctrine in the West was replaced by the faith in science following the onset of the Age of Reason. Thus, scientific logic provided the rhetoric that underscored Europe's racial and cultural supremacy. For a detailed exploration, see Sander Gilman, 1985; Said, 1993; Rabinow, 1984. Also see Ann Laura Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

¹⁴ Said, 1993, first section "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories"; Young, 1995, Ch.2 "Culture and the History of Difference." Talal Asad explores this theme further in Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter, Ithaca: Humanities Press, 1973.

Predominating as a philosophical-political theme, the subject nevertheless appeared as a masquerade for expounding on *the human condition*. This impulse for lofty universalism was epitomized in conservative drones like Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy." Arnold and his inheritors promoted the dissemination of cultural knowledge through canonical European literature, thereby entrenching an elitism that is still pervasive in the political atmosphere of educational institutions today. As many scholars have pointed out, the great literature itself, of course, was infused with colonial symbology and held matters of culture in their orbit, to varying effect.¹⁵

But culture would reach its apotheosis as the *raison d'être* of another academic discourse. Without its exalted twin as rationale, the birth of anthropology could probably not have been imagined. In its more insidious forms, there was rarely a more dehumanizing and objectifying practice of "serious scholarship" than ethnography, yet bound to metropole convention, it quickly acquired respectability as professional study of the Other¹⁶. Devoted to the construction of the savage paradigm, early anthropology sought to seal its status as a legitimate scientific career by mimicking the study of natural flora and fauna. And it mirrored the impulses of scientific positivism meticulously, armed with a certain repertoire: there was a repertoire of fascination with species; of observing, collecting, dissecting; of taxonomy and classification; of discovering primordial law; of taming and conquering the feral. To complete the parallel between social science and natural science, ethnology experimented with an arsenal of Darwinist

¹⁵ Said, 1993: 45. Also see Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, who shows how the development of the British literary canon in India coincided with the needs of colonial administrations interested in producing a Westernized Indian subject.

¹⁶ Young, 1995:44-50, 134-40

scientist rhetoric, catapulted and inscribed into the scene of the human, as justification for its own ethnic schema.¹⁷

Culture, then, became the site of distinction, used to mark Otherness, to concretize a series of oppositions moored in the Manichean allegory.¹⁸ In this way, colonial systems licensed the rhetoric of domination using the conduit of culture. Enjoying a secure position as the reified object of ethnography in the nineteenth century, then, culture was formally housed in the domain of anthropology, where it remained comfortably ensconced for more than one hundred years until its final undoing by postmodern critical discourses.

There were subtler moments insinuating the postmodern event of rupture prior to its actual arrival. Culture's conceptual metamorphosis came about through the interception of several iconoclastic thinkers within anthropology itself. In this line the premonitory effects of concepts like cultural relativism and universal myth (authored by Franz Boas and Claude Levi-Strauss respectively) cannot be underestimated. Their accent on the plurality of cultures, and on the discovery of shared elements among diverse societies, were anticipated much earlier by Herder, de Vico, and Prichard -- though these

¹⁷ Haberman, 1987:227-230 excerpts Spencer's writings on progress as a natural social law, and the transposition of the study of natural science to the study of society. Spencer developed these ideas prior to Darwin - but retrospectively we can include him among the social Darwinists as a way of referencing the principles he espoused. Young, 1995:98 shows how the Other occupied a liminal space in this discourse, suspended in the interstices as not quite human but also not quite animal. Denied full subjectivity, the Other was sometimes cast as a lower species of 'human,' and sometimes as a lower animal species. White supremacist characterizations of the Other oscillated between ethnophobia and ethnophilia in anthropological literature. Also see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995; she situates the discursive framing of the Other in more detail.

¹⁸ In an essay on the "Savage Paradigm" contained in the volume *Recapturing Anthropology*, Michel Rolphe-Trouillot speaks of formal anthropology being preceded by the emergence of travel literature, which produced a structure of feeling that finally paved the way for the formal enshrinement of anthropology; thus there is a continuity in imagining the cultural and racial Other that transforms according to the context of study while retaining the elements of the symbol system and discourse.

visions ultimately defaulted to the more dominant presumptions circulating at the time.¹⁹

Departing from most of their nineteenth-century counterparts, these then-radical ideas of Boas and Levi-Strauss disturbed Western convention by reframing the Other to some degree, setting the stage for the emergence of other twentieth century thought aligned to similar perspectives. Boasian relativism, for instance, championed a non-hierarchical view of difference; Levi-Strauss founded the notion of a shared symbol system underlying all societies.²⁰ Although in hindsight we can perhaps suggest these insights were simplistic and flawed, despite being well-intentioned, for their own times Boas and Levi-Strauss's contributions furnished theory with indispensable tools, advancing alternative perspectives, allowing a new detour in the path of cultural history.

Innovations in perspectives on culture, however, did not flower exclusively in the rich terrain of anthropological thought. Apart from ethnography and philology, cultural questions were vigorously debated in the other Humanities - Sociology, Religious Studies, and History, to name just three. But culture was always appended to other more primary concerns - as the nomenclatures of the disciplines themselves would suggest - and since the addressal to culture was rather tangential, it continued to circulate as a translucent reference, its contents rarely unpacked.

Even within progressive ethnology the newer concepts were bound to the flaws of a particular telos inscribed in the limits imposed by modernity's macrological narratives.²¹ The subject-object relationship, for instance, retained its prominence. Levi

¹⁹ Williams, 1977:16 Young, 1995:10, 16, 36

²⁰ Young, 1995:45, 50.

²¹ Young, 1995:54 outlines the idea of modernity and post-modernity, and I invoke these meanings throughout this thesis when those terms come up: "A connection can be made here to that more general term that encompasses the project of the Enlightenment ideals of history, universality, and reason:

Strauss characterized the common metaphors underlying each society in binary terms, leaving intact the allegory of an essential dichotomy; Boasian theories heralded the proliferation of difference but failed to critique the construction of difference itself.

Thus, for the most part these disciplines shared the modernist itinerary of placing culture as an index of progress achieved by a social collective, the level of cultivation it represented in an arbitrary evolutionary scale²². If they happened to escape this bind, there was still the determinist bias to contend with, a position that reductively assumed all social meaning could be encapsulated within the shell of culture. Moreover, these epistemologies were self-consciously fashioned suprapolitical enterprises manifesting another legacy of modernity: their immediate concerns fulfilled by way of acquiring pure, objective knowledge, pristine and free of ideological motive. Even fairly liberal interpretations of culture were still, for the most part, rooted in this discourse of rational positivism.²³

Arguably, despite its purchase in each of these departments, the most compelling treatment of culture actually came from none of these quarters. The study - and story - of culture underwent a profound shift as a result of its encounters with Marxist social

Modernity. Post-modernity is increasingly seen not so much as a simple historical development that seeks to replace Modernity as the subversion of Modernity by itself...by the very drive of the principles of Modernity to their self-dissolving limits." When I use the term 'modernist,' I am using it as the adjective related to Modernity, *not* in reference to the artistic sense of 'modernism' or 'high modernism.'

²² Johannes Fabian has an excellent study on the use of arbitrary evolution models in anthropology - see Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. The anthropological idea of social development and progress is also adopted by Max Weber in his sociological delineation of political cultures. See Max Weber on Capitalism, Bureaucracy, and Religion: A Selection of Texts, London: Allen and Unwin, 1983. The same idea obviously influenced conservative theorists of modernization, like Samuel Huntington, who base their arguments on an essential division between what they call primitive and capitalist societies. See especially Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, which is a blatant argument supporting and perpetuating the artificial divide between the rational western Self and the backward Third World Other.

²³ Young, 1995:51-54; West, 1990:19; Haberman 1987.

critique. Indeed, culture has enjoyed a strangely robust history through its left-wing lineage. It is striking to note how culture surfaces in Marxist theory and its derivatives, how it functions as a signpost of ideology, how it occupies a politically charged space.

II. MARXIST INTERPRETATIONS OF CULTURE: *Marx, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School*

In their role as representatives of a counter-hegemonic ideal, socialist thinkers applied a limited critique of the Enlightenment and its accoutrements (i.e. a critique of reason). Marxism, of course, was aligned with modernity as well, and thus bears traces of the teleology attached to its contents. Consequently, the advances Marxism made were mitigated and “qualified by the persistence of an earlier kind of rationalism, related to the assumption of progressive unilinear development, as in one version of the discovery of the ‘scientific laws’ of society.”²⁴

Marx himself implicitly accepted a linear view of progress and the sequential ordering of evolutionary stages. The 1859 Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, for example, is replete with the lexicon of development at the political level, outlining the rites of passage Marx believes the worker must enter and exit before arriving at a profound understanding of injustice. Revolution is the sequel to conscientization in this social process²⁵. Ironically, even as he sought to undermine imperialist core-periphery relations, Marx did so using modernity’s linguistic trappings: “the bourgeoisie...has made *barbarian* and *semi-barbarian* countries dependent on the *civilizing* ones” he states in The Communist Manifesto²⁶. Thus, he himself could not evade the savage paradigm. Conveying the plight faced by satellites of the metropole, Marx nevertheless persisted in his assumption of a necessary telos as handed down from

²⁴ Williams, 1977:19; Hall 1992:279

²⁵ I take up a fuller exploration of the 1859 Preface later in this thesis

²⁶ Marx, The Communist Manifesto, p.53; italics mine.

the moderns; the difference lay in the master narrative, which presumed socialism would supplant capitalism in completing the civilizing process for the Other.

The primitive/civilized metaphor is more illustrative of the social Darwinist dogma enjoying widespread approval at the time, that Marx, for all his radicalism, chose not to question. But though he deferred to the limits of modernity in a serious sense, we can still insist the bulwark of Marxist critique rests on the cornerstone of confronting the “theoretical procedures of the Enlightenment” in important ways, as an insider’s critique. As Williams confirms:

The...decisive intervention of Marxism was the rejection of what Marx called idealist historiography...History was not seen (or not always or primarily seen) as the overcoming of ignorance and superstition by knowledge and reason. What that account and perspective excluded was material history, the history of labour, industry as the ‘open book of the human faculties.’...[Marxism] inaugurated the decisive inclusion of that material history which had been excluded from the ‘so-called history of civilization, which is all a history of religions and states.’²⁷

In essence, Marx identified a crucial absence in the theories propounded by his intellectual precursors and peers. This was the elision of social power relations. Marx answered this lack by politicizing culture as ideology.²⁸

Marxism was the first formidable opponent to dominant renditions of culture as either a neutral repository of aesthetic signs centering erudition (i.e. culture as the

²⁷ Williams, 1977:19

²⁸ Williams, 1981:26-27. Because Marx concentrates on deconstructing the bourgeois uses of ideology, the idea of a working class ideology is only latent, as the problem is framed as the need for the proletariat to acquire a ‘real’ consciousness in order to break the seductive power of dominative ideology. Later, in a Gramscian interpretation, ideology can be a productive force in securing hegemony, and does not automatically come with negative or positive connotations. Rather, it depends on what the ideology is attached to. Indeed, a working-class ideology is posited as the authentic alternative to the false consciousness promoted by the elite class fraction.

Williams, 1977:55 elaborates on the debates on ideology in Marxist writing. He conjures ideology as “a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group” and also as “the general process of production of meanings and ideas.” Whenever I speak of ideology in this thesis, I mean it as a combination of these two

measure of civilization and refinement), or as benign rationale manipulated by elites to achieve suspiciously self-serving ends (i.e. culture as the index of class and race differentials)²⁹. These idealist retrospectives neglected the materialist dimension of history, Marx pointed out, and tempered by this evacuation, such sanitized models of culture took on a deceptively affable appearance.

So Marx took a far less sanguine view of culture than his idealist detractors, and instead positioned it as a problematic, an explicitly political metaphor and societal organ. In contrast to his liberal and conservative colleagues, Marxists forwarded a rather sinister vision of cultural mediums as ideological conditioning agents in service to the bourgeoisie.³⁰

ideas - thus, ideology characterizes the modes of consciousness, or the set of beliefs of a given group, and the conditions of the production of those beliefs.

²⁹ In terms of his perspectives on culture and society, Marx opposed the views predominant at the time, authored by liberals like Mill and Arnold; anthropologists like Taylor, Maine, de Gobineau; and thinkers like Malthus and Spencer. While his own views were hardly ideal - recall his well-known claim that Asiatics cannot represent themselves, and must be represented - I would argue he still began a dialogue on culture in a different mode than these blatant cultural supremacists, even if he had a rather grim view of non-European self-determination. See On Colonialism: Articles from the New York Tribune and Other Writings by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, New York: International Publishers, 1972. Marx did not widely discuss the specific manifestations of racial oppression, except as they related to imperialism, and he did not explicitly discuss the broader meaning of culture in this light; however, he does have some notes which make mention of ethnicity as a social factor, as in his work A World Without Jews, translated by Dagobert D. Runes, New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.

I talk about racial differentials here because, again, the implications of his analysis of class supremacy could easily translate into a deeper analysis of race. Referring to some of the more conservative social Darwinists and ethnologists that Marx implicitly challenged, Young, 1995 extensively describes the vicissitudes of culture in a number of nineteenth-century texts, in Chapter 2 of Colonial Desire.

³⁰ Of course, there was a general awareness of the use of culture as ideology, but it was considered a benevolent process rather than malevolent. As one example, colonial administrators in India used the pretext of culture in the educational arena to promote European values. This process is described in Viswanathan's book, Masks of Conquest, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. As she explains, culture was considered a superb site for the transmission of ideology by colonial administrators, but of course it was not used for liberatory or progressive ends; rather, it served as a site for disseminating Eurocentric ideology.

Though it did not address these imperialist purposes of dominant culture per se, a critique of the functions of culture in the hands of dominant groups came about principally in Marxist theory, and thus the theory did provide a useful model that could be applied in the critical analysis of other oppressive formations.

Marx transformed civilization (standing in for culture) into a “specific historical form: bourgeois society as created by the capitalist mode of production.”³¹ Under capitalist trusteeship, civilization “had produced not only wealth, order, and refinement, but as part of the same process poverty, disorder, and degradation.”³² With this emphasis on entropy, Marxism presented the first evidence of an occidental theory illuminating the troubling effects of culture as a function of elite ideology.

Ideology in the Marxist sense is tied to the idea of the production of consciousness in class stratified societies, a set of values that are adopted by the bourgeoisie, and disseminated for the purposes of procuring and sustaining power.³³ In the writings of Marx, bourgeois ideology is described as false consciousness; generally, it appears as the justificatory rhetoric fabricated on behalf of the owners of the means of production, as he states “the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.”³⁴

Ideology, in the traditional Marxist model, is contained in the storehouse of the superstructure. The social totality consists of the combined pairing of base, which is the realm of material production, and the superstructure, which is the overarching category affiliated with institutions, forms of consciousness, and cultural practices.³⁵ However, the exact views of Marx on the nature of interlinkages between base and superstructure, and its economic and ideological corollaries, are not only difficult to discern, but are in

³¹ Williams, 1977:18

³² Ibid.

³³ Barret, 1993

³⁴ Quoted in Williams, 1977:58

³⁵ Williams, 1977:77

fact almost opaque. Marx articulates the relationship in his celebrated preface to the 1859

Critique of Political Economy, and it is worth quoting at length:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of productions constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general... With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic - in short, ideological - forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.³⁶

From this account, we can extrapolate the skeleton of a certain Marxist position on culture, here taken as a function of ideology's "legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic" expressions.³⁷ Fully cognizant of the impossibility of fixing culture into a single frame of meaning, Marxist theory confronted the noun's layered significations by cathecting them into the opposite of the social base; and so the superstructure came to manage ideology's heterogeneous allusions in the form of ritual practices, institutions, and consciousness.³⁸ Leaning on the social supports made available by the superstructure, the elite is able to acquire, maintain, and reproduce its power, Marx compellingly suggests.³⁹

³⁶ Quoted in Williams, 1977:75

³⁷ I should however point out that a decisive conclusion about the real meaning of this passage has not been reached even to this day; there is still a lively debate regarding its implications. See especially Williams 1977 on this.

³⁸ Williams, 1977:66

³⁹ Here, I use culture interchangeably with ideology, as an equivalent of the superstructural order, only in reference to classical Marxist theory. In all other cases, cultural relations are expressed through the term hegemony. Please refer to preface for a detailed explanation of my usage of the terms.

Interestingly enough, there is some other fallout from this historic passage. The schisms between political economy and cultural studies can in large part be attributed to the difficulty of pinning down exactly what Marx meant in this 1859 Preface. Under classic Marxist critique, culture in the ideological mode assumed the aura of mystifying fetish, the carrier of bourgeois values mitigating the revolutionary potential of an international labour alliance. Incidentally, it is worthwhile to note this strand of thinking was picked up by orthodox political economists who chose to cast culture as a cleavage in class movements, a perspective which very much holds sway to this day.⁴⁰ Moreover, these thinkers rigidly maintain the cultural process is affected primarily by transitions in the economic base. With its superstructural dwelling serving as the main reinforcement, culture is most simply regarded as an instrument of ideology in the simplest interpretations of Marxist scholarship.⁴¹

But there are other dimensions and layers to the pronouncements of Marx. Later modifications on the theme of ideology by Gramsci, the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies scholars left culture a much more ambivalent force than earlier imagined - an ambivalence embedded, as many discern, in the writings of Marx himself.

More than anyone else, perhaps, the Italian radical Antonio Gramsci has left his indelible impression on Marxist cultural theory.⁴² Gramsci challenged the peripheral role

⁴⁰ Thinkers such as Nicholas Garnham and Sol Yurick espouse this kind of thinking - I will take up a fuller discussion of the vulgar economist tendencies later on this text.

⁴¹ Murdock, 1978, gives a useful history of the Western Marxist tradition of cultural commentary regarding the role of ideology by summarizing the origins of the literature which concentrates on the operations of the superstructure. However, he doesn't dispute what Williams sees as a problem, namely the *separation* of base and superstructure - the spheres of economy and culture respectively - as discrete categories (Williams suggests they should be considered interpenetrating arenas). Thus, although Western Marxists move one step ahead of orthodox economists, by at least citing the importance of ideology, they don't make the next move of breaking down the rigid division. I will elaborate on this later.

⁴² Williams, 1977:108; Eagleton, 1994

assigned to culture in the writings of Marx, consciously fixated on cultural domination as a defining dilemma in his Prison Notebooks. He presents the first major departure from orthodox socialist thinking in this regard.

In several small notes from his prison writings, he locates the importance of treating culture as a formation equal to economics and politics.⁴³ In his meditations on cultural paraphernalia as the apparatus of state authority, Gramsci denotes media, educational and legal institutions, artistic production, and ideas of the intelligentsia -- the various layers of culture -- as reinforcements of dominative systems. He agreed with orthodox Marxists that "the dominant class reflects in its social life the relations that characterize its particular modes of existence."⁴⁴ But he departed from his predecessors hereafter. Well known as a proponent of working-class hegemony, Gramsci - unlike orthodox Marxists - did not characterize ideology (the space in which culture resides) as a negative expression of class interests.⁴⁵ "Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power," Gramsci writes in "Questions of Culture," "the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. Just as it has thought to organize itself politically and economically, it must also think about organizing itself culturally."⁴⁶

Gramsci's thoughts on revolution may have been inspired from a subtle set of insights encoded in the 1859 Preface. In this document, Marx had written: "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production...From forms of development of the productive forces

⁴³ See in specific "Ethico-Political History," Gramsci's rejoinder to Croce; and his early notes, "Culture and Class Struggle," and "Questions of Culture," all in Selections from Cultural Writings.

⁴⁴ Gramsci, 1985:42

⁴⁵ Eagleton, 1994:198

⁴⁶ Gramsci, 1985:41

these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.”⁴⁷ From this portion of the passage, it appears that an awareness of injustice is the crucial prerequisite for rebellion by the masses; in the absence of this awareness, there is no possibility for revolutionary action. In Gramsci’s scheme, conscientization on all fronts is necessary for the oppressed to recognize the ‘existing relations of production’ as barriers and ‘fetters’ to their self-actualization, and for persuading them to engage in conflict with authority, in order to productively alter the exploitative social order. The organic intellectual would spearhead this movement towards conscientization, as one who galvanizes opposition to the status quo in service of a liberatory ethic.⁴⁸

Cognizant of power’s charlatan character, Gramsci nevertheless acknowledged its strategic value and defended revolutionary uprisings from the standpoint of his abhorrence for fascism. In the spirit of attending to his duties as organic intellectual, Gramsci urged communist agitators to fulfill their quest of wresting power from the elite by inaugurating their own cultural forms, forms which would assist in preserving enlightened rule once the proletariat finally filled the ranks of the dominant class. To this end, he states:

⁴⁷ Quoted in Williams, 1977:75

⁴⁸ Eagleton, 1993:200 clarifies, “The function of the organic intellectuals...is to forge the links between ‘theory’ and ‘ideology,’ creating a two-way passage between political analysis and popular experience.” The organic intellectual continues to be popular in the work of a number of scholars. Hall, 1992:281 discusses the figure in depth. West, 1990:33 outlines the contemporary role of the organic intellectual, who he calls “critical organic analyst.” And Amin, speaking of late capitalism in tones reminiscent of Gramsci, convincingly delineates the role of the organic intellectual today (1997:152): “Clearly, the crisis [of late capitalism] will not be resolved until popular, democratic forces capable of dominating the society get together again. But all effective hegemony depends on the presence of ideological and strategic instruments. In the creation of these tools the intelligentsia has a huge responsibility. It is its mission to establish bonds between its own productive thinking and the aspirations and actions of the popular classes, making them social partners; without this each is doomed to endure social isolation.”

Although through such organizations it is not yet going to be possible...to obtain positive creative results before the system of bourgeois domination has been broken up, it should still be possible to pose the fundamental questions and outline the most characteristic features of the development of the new civilization...the mere fact that the workers raise these questions and attempt to answer them means that the elements of an original proletarian civilization already exist, that there are already proletarian forces of production of cultural values...⁴⁹

Apart from his special concentration on this aspect of civil society, Gramsci paid close attention to another notion which, inextricably linked to culture, would have lasting effects on theory. This is the notion of hegemony, which challenged the supremacy and success of ideology as the governing doctrine in Marxist cultural theory. Gramsci's inception of hegemony rightfully holds a premium position in cultural discourse, impressing upon us the need to address power's *failed* attempts to enshrine itself monolithically.

Gramsci's ingeniousness lies in his revelation of power as provisional, conditional, tentative. And so, against the grain of conventional understanding, he mounts a challenge to the idea of power as a secure and stable construct, against the grain of conventional understanding. Domination is never complete as a project, he claims; rather, it is an ongoing *process* of consolidation.⁵⁰ His writings lend insight into the anxious psychology of social authorities haunted by the fear of reprisal and defeat. For them, Gramsci argues, victory lies in suborning public consent. Ever-dependent on

⁴⁹ Gramsci, 1985:41. Of course, it must be noted that despite his own incarceration, Gramsci could still afford to be quite optimistic at the time of his writing, given the relatively recent victory of the Russian Revolution. In addition, this was well before Stalinism and Nazism had reached their heights. While this in no way discounts the value of Gramsci's work, it is useful to remember that the political environment was to change so radically in the years of the war, and the time directly preceding it, that the political valence of oppositional agency was seriously jeopardized for a while.

⁵⁰ Williams, 1977: 108

winning widespread favour, power must find new ways to repeat itself, and it is thus forced into perpetual engagement with counter-hegemony.⁵¹

Gramsci points out how power relies on convincing the populace to naturalize and internalize its truth claims, in order to reap the rewards of authority. Of course, this results in a tautology, where the reward of authority includes the privilege of (re)installing such truth claims, thus setting the stage for the future multiplication of power. The procedure of reification works, Gramsci notes, through the equivalence of dominative norms with 'common sense.'⁵²

In this way, hegemony travels at the very borders of vulnerability and conquer. Since absolute coercion would render authority too transparent to remain credible, the trappings of power are duly camouflaged -- with varying degrees of success.⁵³ If its strategies are revealed, a hegemonic force exposes its frailties, its regime of truth becoming prey to interrogation. Thus, in the effort to ensure that its potency is not unravelled or supplanted by another competing force, hegemony aspires to conceal its transactions, covertly handling its operations.⁵⁴

Without doubt, Gramsci delivered an incisively brilliant prognosis of domination and subordination. As Eagleton has suggested, Gramsci's crucial gesture was to maintain a distinction between a totalizing ideology and a precarious hegemony: "It is with Gramsci that the crucial transition is effected from ideology as 'systems of ideas' to ideology as lived, habitual social practice - which must then presumably encompass the unconscious, inarticulate dimensions of social experience as well as the workings of

⁵¹Eagleton, 1993:197; Barret, 1993:238

⁵² Eagleton, 1993:199

⁵³ Williams, 1977:110; Barret, 1993:237

formal institutions.”⁵⁵ The expression of ideology, conceived by Marx and clarified in the Lukascian treatment, was the prevailing tenet in progressive class theory of that time. Theoretically speaking, hegemony is the superlative concept since its parameters include ideology but it manages to escape the danger of being cast within it. In short, ideology is a feature of hegemony, but the same cannot necessarily be said of the reverse.⁵⁶

For Lukacs, ideology is an opaque and static concept which more or less relies on the trio of compulsion, force, and restraint. However, for Gramsci, the lenitive effects of hegemony are communicated through a range of circuitous channels. Based on persuasion rather than coercion, tinged with subliminal effects, hegemony is about coaxing, not demanding, societal props. Accordingly, the mode of cultural hegemony has an active, dynamic quality that is decidedly lacking in Lukascian ideology, the latter weighed down by a certain inertia. In contrast to Lukacs, who placed a stress on ideology that can be imposed by force, Gramsci insisted that authority is won through the manufacture of popular assent. Hegemony is a relational syndrome.

By theorizing hegemony, Gramsci delivered another critical opening - the potential for radical agency, an idea that is precluded in certain interpretations of ideology in the style of Lukacs.⁵⁷ With hegemony, ideology is stripped of its magical effects, replaced by the understanding that social mutiny is possible.⁵⁸ There is always the option of struggle. No longer sutured to ideology, the subject is released from the script of

⁵⁴ Eagleton, 1993:196

⁵⁵ Eagleton, 1993:197

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For instance, Althusser picks up from Lukacs, casting ideology as “largely unconscious and always institutional.” (Eagleton, 1993:197)

interpellation. Power is always negotiated, always susceptible, never invincible; Gramsci believes it cannot hold an entire constituency captive under its spell. Thus, conscientized members of a given group can challenge the hegemonic force and harness support to overturn the social order. The chasm between power's intentions and its ultimate failure to mesmerize represents an eternal opening for dissent, protest, opposition; power's effects are perpetually delayed and deferred in light of this resistance.⁵⁹

The theory of hegemony has transformed the direction of cultural studies. Its dual-edged effects translate into the simultaneous acknowledgement of the pressures exerted by social conditioning, while identifying cracks and fissures in the columns of power. In short, hegemony calls for an exercise in agency. If authority solicits support, there is also the opportunity for denying or refusing its gesture. The desire for reform, the potential for alternatives, and the possibility of escape are all written into the social topos; it is simply a matter of unearthing them.

The invitation to question the pervasive nature of ideology was a promising one offered by Gramsci. However, there would be reason for pause before it could be accepted. The events of wartime Europe – especially the rise of the Nazis -- prompted members of the progressive intelligentsia to reexamine the hypnotic intensity of ideology. Several of these intellectuals, many of them Jewish thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School, were made to suffer torture, exile, and murder, as their political beliefs and identities came under siege. Understandably, their concern in tracing the numbing effects of dominant ideology superseded celebrating the phantom victories of counter-

⁵⁸ Williams, 1977:113

⁵⁹ Ibid; Eagleton, 1993:198

hegemony; it would be difficult to do otherwise, given the tyrannies and horrors of fascism.

Nevertheless, Frankfurt School philosophers, most notably Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin, proved to be important benefactors to developments in cultural thought with their critique of the culture industry. This industry's prime role, as they saw it, was its participation in the capitalist conditioning apparatus.⁶⁰ Two esteemed thinkers from the School, Adorno and Horkheimer, issued a particularly strong warning against culture as ideology in their analysis of the culture industry, stating

Culture is a paradoxical commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can longer be used. Therefore it amalgamates with advertising. The more meaningless the latter seems to be under a monopoly, the more omnipotent it becomes. The motives are markedly economic.⁶¹

Vehemently opposing the commodification of cultural products, they cautioned against uniformity and routinization in mass society; loyal to Marxist principles, they adopted the critical posture that ideology is ineluctably bound to bourgeois strategies of repression:

The sociological theory that the loss of the support of objectively established religion, the dissolution of the last remnants of precapitalism, together with technological and sociological differentiation or specialization, have led to cultural chaos is disproved everyday: for culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system.⁶²

⁶⁰ Crook et al, 1992: 54; Benhabib, 1993:70,77

⁶¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944, from website http://hamp.hampshire.edu/~cmnF93/culture_ind.txt (page number not specified on screen).

⁶² Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944:1 from the text on website http://hamp.hampshire.edu/~cmnF93/culture_ind.txt

Cultural production is, then, ideological artillery deployed to protect the fortress of oppressive social authority. In championing this insight, Adorno and Horkheimer took their cues from Marx, who was rather equivocal about the relationship between elite control over the superstructure, the attendant process of indoctrination, and the distraction from more authentic class interests. Because “an insipid dehistoricization is the rule for products of mass culture,”⁶³ as another theorist reminds us, culture is deliberately depoliticized, its aura of authenticity smashed (and in his famous essay, “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin concurred). Cultural standardization, all three speculated, is a design to empty art of its subversive function. Adorno and Horkheimer indict the culture industry - as a branch of ideology - for their attempt to contain dissent. The interrogative potential of creativity, they maintained, can be resuscitated only outside the expressive limits of vernacular culture.⁶⁴

This mode of thinking has an arresting power. However, opponents point out that the entire culture industry model presupposes the subordination of personal agency and inserts a substitute discourse of structural conditioning and victimization. This, in turn, offends the exploited class as the existence of meaningful subjectivity is occluded and obscured.

A useful reminder. But the Frankfurt scholars have been accused, and unjustly so, I think, of diminishing the idea of resistance. It is true that their views allow only a marginal subjective agency, but they do not dispose with it altogether. Rather, they described the nuances and machinations of power as well as the appropriation of individual psyches into dominative schemes. In a sense they detailed the workings of

⁶³ Mattelart, 1983:75

economist hegemonies - albeit with less faith in counter-insurgency than, say, proponents of Gramsci.

The Frankfurt School theories should not be divorced from the context in which they appeared. After all, this is the generation who witnessed firsthand the inability of oppositional agency to fully answer the onslaught of mass violence. Starkly, in the face of regimes of fascist terror, freedom all but crumbled. In this light, Horkheimer's statement that the "value of a theory is decided by its relationship to the tasks, which are taken up at definite historical moments by the most progressive social forces" has a special resonance⁶⁵. In this case, the urgent task left to intellectuals was undoubtedly a diagnosis of the extreme right-wing dangers shadowing the Western ethos. Turning their gaze on the marauding force of ideology, they saw the social landscape paralyzed by the killing shocks of totalitarianism, Nazi tyranny, the traumas of the Holocaust.

The Frankfurt theorists were passionately tied to the experience of ideology and its spillover into the substance of their own lives. Stripped of the usual protective distance afforded to intellectuals, they lacked the luxury of simply speculating on the powers of the subject's will to resist and other abstractions. That these thinkers reminded us of the ideology's will to power and its pernicious effects is certainly natural and even desirable. We would do well to pay heed to the Frankfurt School's historical legacy by acknowledging the production of cultural-ideological conformity has led to the sanction of incredible acts of terror and violence. They remind us that the reception of ideology is often, unfortunately, congruent with the intentions of the sender, intentions that are

⁶⁴ Crook et al, 1992:53; Benhabib, 1993:77

⁶⁵ Quoted in Benhabib, 1993:69

sometimes malevolent⁶⁶. Otherwise, overestimating the resistance to dominant ideology has cataclysmic effects - something we need no reminder of in the aftermath of this century's wars and genocides, as well as the devastations of Japan, Vietnam, and the Middle East.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Admittedly, there is not a one-to-one relationship here, but I protest throwing out this possibility entirely. Often, indoctrination *does* work - and while it is important to consider instances where it doesn't, it is even more necessary to look at why it does. Otherwise, if, as some claim, resistance is always present, there would be no incentive to produce critiques of domination and violence against the disenfranchised. The presence of resistance in no way guarantees the success of resistant efforts against hegemonic structures.

⁶⁷ Noam Chomsky and others have written about how elites in the U.S. use the media to manufacture consent for their programs, policies, and ways of thinking, through various discursive means, like framing certain political events in a biased manner, encouraging exposure of certain stories that coincide with defined national interests, and instituting censorship when the angle threatens to reveal the violence of the state. Pertaining to this last point in particular, media censorship in the case of Vietnam and the Gulf War is well-documented in reports like Manufacturing Consent, New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL STUDIES: *Contributions of Williams, Thompson, and Hall*

It would be difficult to recapture a vibrant exuberant sense of culture after such sobering events caution against it. However, the kinetic sense embedded in culture, first introduced by Gramsci, was picked up in England by Raymond Williams, adherents of the Birmingham School, and radical historians. Cultural ideology came to them with a curvilinear history: its chronology traced through the political discourses of Marx, Lukacs and Gramsci, the Frankfurt School; its auxiliary status mapped in fields like sociology, philosophy, and literature. But the British New Left initiated the study of culture in a form altogether new.⁶⁸ At the periphery of academics and politics, the nascent endeavour of cultural studies began to exist in fuller form.

Except for its official appellation and formal induction into the rarefied halls of academe, perhaps there was nothing startlingly novel about centering the question of culture. As we have seen, prior to the explicit articulation of a new epistemological method in British educational institutions, there had been a long and varied narrative on cultural hegemony within Marxist theory and the disciplinary contours of academe. It may be said that cultural studies incorporated the techniques of its predecessors and built on the existing body of knowledge offered by its intellectual ancestors. In this sense, it simply distilled the best theories and amalgamated them into a sophisticated alloy. Refining Marxism, cleansing it of vulgar economic determinism, specifically referencing Gramsci, and assimilating the lessons of ideology taught by the Frankfurt School, the

⁶⁸ I use the Birmingham school or method, (British) cultural materialism, and British cultural studies, all interchangeably. They refer to my preferred brand of cultural studies.

most preeminent thinkers of cultural studies were able to advance a progressive analysis of social practice.⁶⁹

But there is more to cultural studies than the banality of fusion. Its symbolic value can be truly appreciated when traced in the proper spatial and temporal context. Cultural studies came into being in postwar Britain, when that country, among others, was undergoing a profound reconfiguration in its social, political, and economic terrain.⁷⁰ At this juncture, it is imperative to remember, the moral intuitions of academe were firmly in line with a certain edict under whose demand politics and knowledge led autonomous lives - mainly out of fear that *politics* (read: radicals) would infect the halls of learning and spell the ruin of *pure* (read: conservative or disinterested) scholarship.⁷¹ The development of cultural studies was variously hailed or decried, depending on the observer. Its key challenge to mainstream academe took the form of politicizing culture, bringing the concern of mass society into its fold, and blurring disciplinary distinctions in the humanities.⁷² It also seriously jeopardized the deterministic bias of both economics and anthropology, while usurping the idealist vision of the academy.

To put in another way, cultural studies imperiled the premises of a pedagogical system heavily invested in the Arnoldian Project. Superbly cast in the mould of modernity, Arnoldian scholarship is immersed in the rhetoric of distance, disengagement,

⁶⁹ There is more to cultural studies than Marxism, of course, but it must be noted that Marxist thought shapes the interdiscipline to a remarkable degree. Yet, it is equally vital to note, as Hall (1992:279) has, that there is never a moment where there is a "perfect fit" with Marxist theory and cultural studies. It is a hybrid discourse, which has successively incorporated elements of feminist, postcolonial, gender-based, and post-structuralist thinking into its pastiche.

⁷⁰ Hall, 1992:279; Grossberg, 1992:9 Interestingly, cultural studies came about mainly through the academic wing of adult education in Britain.

⁷¹ Cultural Studies appeared, and bravely I think, right in the face of the Cold War politics – given the notorious difficulty of justifying or redeeming any theory related to Marxism in an environment trumpeting the virtues of capitalism and Western-style democracy following WWII.

disinterest. Though it camouflages its interests through a universalist masquerade, essentially Arnold's project considers civilization to be the domain of a racially privileged, patriarchal elite who hold the definitive power of culture, as Cornel West elaborates:

For Arnold the best of the Age of Europe ...could be promoted only if there was an interlocking affiliation among the emerging middle classes, a homogenizing of cultural discourse in the educational and university networks, and a state advanced enough in its policing techniques to safeguard it...the candidates for participation and legitimation in this grand endeavor of cultural renewal and revision would be detached intellectuals...⁷³

This imagined community of the disengaged shoulders the moral imperative of shielding culture. Cloaked in idealist aura, the elite conceive of themselves as the proprietors of educational and cultural institutions, and so rationalize prohibiting the trespass of special interest groups into territory. Failing to recognize the politics of partisanship, they proscribed the entry of mass politics into citadels of privilege. The move of issuing an embargo was of course aimed at protecting customary strictures of class and tradition, or more succinctly, warding off their reformulation or disintegration.⁷⁴

Sustained by a host of elite intellectuals who have taken on the role of cultural guardian, the residue of Arnoldian precepts continues to serve as the grounds for reproducing a stable national culture in Britain and elsewhere.⁷⁵ That the claim is based on the mythology of class is quite evident. In line with this thinking, the elite presumably authorize their own ideological dominance in the name of the larger social

⁷² Grossberg, 1992:52; Hall, 1990:12; Hall, 1992:279

⁷³ West, 1990:22; Hall, 1990

⁷⁴ Young, 1995:59

⁷⁵ Hall, 1990:11; West, 1990:23

totality.⁷⁶ To apocryphal effect, the elite's subjective self-interest is confused and conflated with the welfare of the national-popular and consequently the elite's narcissistic acts on its own behalf is projected as an ameliorative measure to social chaos, a pre-emptive strike against the anarchy Arnold so feared.⁷⁷

Cultural studies violated the protocol of the prevailing idealist formula by embroidering politics into the very texture of knowledge. Through this interweaving, it represented more than a simple rupture of a didactic schema. A result of conjoining the previously estranged spheres of politics and knowledge, it was a seminal intellectual methodology and agenda perfectly tailored to the British social climate.

Cultural studies threatened to dismantle the authority of the Arnoldian syndrome, decentering the idea of a coherent collective identity fashioned by elites. As the Cimmerian antithesis to Arnoldian "sweetness and light," critical theory centered those extratextual and contextual interests previously deigned unbearably political or merely irrelevant to cultural thought. The force with which the Arnoldian impulse imposed itself, and the active burial of the political, seemed to augur the return of the repressed in the form of cultural studies. To borrow from Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the chronicle of the Arnoldian project is the chronicle of a death foretold.

In several of his articles, Stuart Hall speaks about the role of cultural studies inciting a kind of epistemological insurgence, or, at the very least, precipitating a crisis.⁷⁸ Its explicitly political impulse -- its insistence on exploring the relations between ideology, history, and social conflict -- symbolized the undoing of an apolitical stance

⁷⁶ Gramsci, 1985:206 astutely comments on this phenomenon.

⁷⁷ Young, 1985:82

⁷⁸ Hall, 1990 and 1992

carefully guarded by conservative elites. He summarizes the vicissitudes of the field in relation to conservative perspectives on academic knowledge, detailing the major contribution of cultural studies towards the politicization and historicization of culture, relating central questions of ideology, class, and social practice.⁷⁹ Moreover, cultural studies financed theory with the notion that knowledge is never innocent of power as it circulates discursively.

Hall delineates how cultural studies is not bounded within any particular discipline, but is rather a “conjunctural practice,” interrupting artificial constructions of boundary and limit between official academic classifications, and thus resides in the interstices of disciplinary knowledges. Hybrid child of a postmodern aura, it was greeted as a mongrel by the Arnoldians, who, with purist zeal, condemned cultural studies as the product of illicit relations between ideology and scholarship. To them, disciplinary miscegenation equalled miseducation.

Hall counters by stating the process of self-mystification in the academy obscures real contradictions and power relations embedded within it; it is the role of cultural studies to “undertake the task of unmasking what is considered to be the unstated presuppositions of the humanist tradition itself” and expose the operations of knowledge formation. Further clarifying this thought, he comments,

The vocation of cultural studies has been to enable people to understand what is going on, and especially to provide ways of thinking, strategies for survival, and resources for resistance to all those who are now - in economic, political, and cultural terms - excluded from anything that could be called access to the national culture of the national community.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Hall, 1992:282. Hall acknowledges that there are multiple praxes available as modes of intervention in cultural studies, that his perspective is by no means absolute.

⁸⁰ Hall, 1990:22

In essence, there were two key implications in the development of cultural studies, one pedagogical, one social; in these terms the approach proved itself to be indispensable in both the academic arena and political milieu. First, as an intellectual and theoretical project, cultural studies draws on various disciplines to disturb the artificially constructed boundaries separating systems of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. In doing so, it questioned the very security of those seemingly neutral categories. Moreover, since it resisted constitution as a specialized field and blurred together various disciplinary methods and insights, it also refused the classical notion of a foundational canon.⁸¹

Secondly, and more importantly, cultural studies was indebted to politics. It could not maintain itself in the academy only as a new philosophical strain; rather, it imagined itself to have real social consequences in effecting change. It inverted the relations between the social sphere and the educational one: now academe was a place from where to theorize actual experience, rather than limiting oneself to disembodied, disengaged intellectual production. According to Hall, cultural studies “insisted that intellectuals themselves take responsibility for how the knowledge they produce is then transmitted to society...[that they] attempt to put it at service of some other project.”⁸² Thus empowering politics and knowledge as imbricated relations, cultural studies is best cast as an

⁸¹ Grossberg, 1992:2; Hall, 1990:11. The lack of a real canon set off alarm bells among certain liberal humanists and conservatives alike, for whom a canon is usually an essential reference, if the heated debates around curriculum reform and multicultural representation in education are any indication. Hall further comments that established pedagogical power relationships were transformed by cultural studies practices, due to the lack of definitive texts, and because knowledge had to be shared between teachers and students.

⁸² Hall, 1990:17. So, cultural studies remembers Horkheimer and Gramsci’s call for an engaged intellectual practice, uniting politics and theory.

enterprise of “theoretical revision,” in Will Straw’s terms, where its conceptual use-value is calibrated according to its articulation of contemporary political exigencies.⁸³

The pantheon of scholars associated with the development of cultural studies include the likes of E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams. Among the heavily laurelled set of texts and studies bringing issues of class, history and ideology into sharp relief were Thompson’s The Making of the English Working Class and Williams’ Culture and Society, Marxism and Culture, and Stuart Hall’s work in Culture, Media and Language. Together, their work comprises a veritable body of knowledge now integral to our conceptual vocabulary: modern formations of class, cultural materialism, and culture as expressed by the diasporic populace.

Thompson’s tome, The Making of the English Working Class, debuted a critical methodology that explicitly opposed the limits of historical empiricism.⁸⁴ Moreover, he refused to fall prey to the kind of determinist thinking which sheltered cultural discourse from economics (or vice versa). Thompson patterned his analysis after Marx, borrowing and developing a dialectical view of history, but he used the methodology as a point of departure in shaping his narrative on the origins of English subalterity. Although the title of the book accentuates the working class as object to be made, Thompson’s document transforms the deceptively passive “making of” into a reflexive act of self-determination on part of the “English Working Class.”

In overview, Thompson’s volume charts the development, strategies, and effects of Jacobin agitation in the 1790’s, the notion of class as it is linked to dominant

⁸³ Straw in Blundell et al, 1993:90

theological strands, and finally analyzes the work ethic and its function in British life. Christening class as a “social and cultural formation,” Thompson locates its origins in the industrial age and the epoch of expansion, from the period between 1780-1830’s. He suggests that the proletariat presence was predominantly constitutive of the British political landscape at this time.

By historicizing class, the foundations of culture and society are denaturalized and put into an alternative political framework, a move that is elided by many theorists and historians who either fall into the bind of occulting class into a purely ideational construct (and subsequently negate the subjective experience) or those who hold an investment in certifying an interpretation of history favouring the upper class.

In so doing, Thompson challenges the dominant discourses which frame analyses of the period he has selected. The Fabian perspective, he points out, saw the working class as victims of capitalism in sheer terms. Empirical economic theory had a quantitative focus on dehumanized data, compiling statistics on labour, calculating numbers of workers and peasants with compulsive fervour. The Pilgrim’s Progress mentality, meanwhile, acknowledged dissent but used proletariat struggle as a precipitate of later social formations, ignoring the value of mass activity and resistance as fundamental to working class consciousness in that specific epoch. Thus, the oppressed classes were “always already” marginalized, invoked as mere social fact, or reduced to inhabiting a structure of feeling in preparation for later revolution.

²⁴ Although Thompson was not part of the Birmingham School, or what could formally be called the cultural studies movement, his critical methodology and political allegiances had enough in common with later cultural studies practitioners that he is claimed as a precursor to the movement.

The Making of the English Working Class eschews the static idea of class

approved by orthodox economic pundits. Energizing social theory, the book emphasizes the working class as a self-constituting collective, as much as it is created in the cradle of capital. Thompson elected to focus on the category of class with respect to its experiential dimensions. So in his delineation, class is a dynamic and fluid set of relations interacting with embodied subjects, who are entrenched in particular sociohistorical situations. Class is never stable and unitary in its meaning, for it constantly renews and reinvents itself in accordance with the geopolitical circumstance. The stratified groups themselves (e.g. the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) are not autonomously formed. Rather, class emerges through a certain nexus, through the interconnected spheres of culture and economy. Thus, it is not a universally stable or transcendent entity, but activates in specific contexts. Significantly, the scholar's analysis refutes the notion of universal law as transposed from scientific discourse – as if certain predictable outcomes could be quantified into a solid measure of class interaction.⁸⁵

For Thompson, class ceases to be an acontextually denotative term, an overarching structure, or abstracted category; rather, since “class is defined by men as they live in their own history,”⁸⁶ it becomes a specifically historical phenomenon organized around collective social relations.⁸⁷

Thompson made a crucial point. Here he patterned his thoughts after Marx, in whose work “the original notion of ‘man making his own history’ was given a new radical content by this emphasis on ‘man making himself’ through producing his own

⁸⁵ Thompson 1964, Introduction

⁸⁶ Thompson 1964:11

means of life.” The idea “offered the possibility of overcoming the dichotomy between ‘society’ and ‘nature’, and of discovering new constitutive relationships between ‘society’ and ‘economy’.”⁸⁸ Echoing Marx, Thompson saw that social boundaries and identities are not fabricated by external social forces alone, and so presumably working class dissent is not solely constructed through its relation with dominative authorities. Thompson worked against the erasure of the oppressed group’s own role in making history, emphasizing that proletariats are informed intrinsically by their own struggles in equal portion to the machinations of structural exploitation.

Thompson was able to breathe new life into an ancient concept, refurbishing notions of class for progressive intellectuals. Raymond Williams revived other sleeping rumours of theory. Revising notions such as hegemony, base and superstructure, and aesthetic expressions of ideology, Williams distinguished himself as an august figure in Western intellectual history, following in the footsteps of Gramsci.

Primarily focusing on culture as a site of intervention, Williams’ most enduring contribution to theory was his cancellation of the traditional link between base and superstructure sanctioned by most strands of Marxism (and also endorsed by political economists). He summarized the main principles of this discourse in Marxism and Literature, as culled from his set of previous volumes and studies. His chief aim is to prize open the procedures behind the bracketing of culture from economy. Williams opens with a disclaimer in appreciation of Marxist perspectives, calling the advent of dialectical historiography “the most important intellectual advance in all modern social

⁸⁷ Thompson thus kept alive the dynamism embedded in Marx’ writing, as opposed to economic determinists who insisted on viewing class in a more rigid manner

⁸⁸ Both quotes in Williams, 1977:19

thought;”⁸⁹ subsequent to this, however, he deals a blow to vulgar Marxism, citing how the materialist stance was hindered by its refusal to endorse the organic plenitude of culture:

Instead of making cultural history material...it was made dependent, secondary, ‘superstructural’: a realm of ‘mere’ ideas, arts, beliefs, customs, determined by the basic material history. What matters here is the element of reduction, in an altered form, of the separation of ‘culture’ from material social life, which had been the dominant tendency in idealist cultural thought. Thus the full possibilities of the concept of culture as a constitutive social process, creating specific and different ‘ways of life,’ which could have been remarkably deepened by the emphasis on a material social practice, were for a long time missed, and were often in practice superseded by an abstracting unilinear universalism.⁹⁰

Effectively critiquing the archaic presupposition of culture pinioned to monetary systems, he argued against its subordinate status to the economic base in orthodox Marxist theory, noting that despite being a regime of representation, culture has considerable material meaning-effects.⁹¹ Yet these effects are effaced precisely by the theoretical maneuver which privileges the base as the constitutive social element: “in specification, the base is given very general and apparently uniform properties. ‘The base’ is the real social existence of man [sic]. ‘The base’ is the real relations of production corresponding to a stage of development of material productive forces. ‘The base’ is a mode of production at a particular stage of its development.”⁹²

Although Williams doesn't oppose the separate assessment of a cultural economy from the financial one for conceptual purposes, admitting they yield different results and have their own boundaries of operation, what he does confront is the ancillary status

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Williams, 1977:81

⁹² Ibid.

imputed to culture, especially its intrinsic meaning resting on the cornerstone of the base. The general force of Marxist critique is therefore diminished, he says, since it doesn't thread culture as fully as it could have into the textures of its main premise, specifically, locating the cultural and economic as interconstitutive relations; and it is this sequester of superstructure and base that accounts for a "persistent dissatisfaction within Marxism."⁹³

Additionally, Williams makes it immediately evident that there has been a regrettable tendency in pre-cultural studies narratives – equally in their idealist and materialist avatars -- assuming that culture is, first, an *identifiable* entity; secondly, that it is a *knowable* entity, and thirdly, that it is a *finished* entity. Thus, Marxism didn't escape the trap of making culture into an inert object of analysis (here he absorbs the Gramscian view); in fact, it reified culture as pure ideology. Williams rightfully questions this Marxist fortification:

To say that all cultural practice is 'ideological' need mean no more than that...all practice is signifying...But it is very different from describing all cultural production as 'ideology,' or as 'directed by ideology,' because what is then omitted, as in the idealist uses of 'culture,' is the set of complex real processes by which a 'culture' or an 'ideology' is itself produced.⁹⁴

His remarks are profoundly instructive. The assumption that culture is a hermetically sealed thing, seamlessly delivered into the social sphere, effaces its very manufacture in the matrix of power relations. Williams brings the fiction of culture-as-closed-object to the fore for further analysis, suggesting the elision of the configuration process is a structured lack in progressive discourse.⁹⁵ Moreover he repeatedly admonishes Marxists for stifling the potential of radical methodology, and for their undisputed confluence of

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Williams, 1981:29

culture and ideology. The exclusion of material concerns from the realm of the superstructure limns a portrait of the social that is patently false, he exhorts.

In Williams' view, culture is tied to the social base, the superstructural coequal to the economic milieu, engendering the claim that "what is really required, beyond the limiting formulas, is restoration of the whole social material process, and specifically of cultural production as social and material."⁹⁶ These are the underpinnings of his cultural materialist stance. Issued as a corrective to the gaps he sights in Marxist theory, Williams offers a blueprint which has the makings of a "full sociology of culture," "necessarily concerned" with "productive processes."⁹⁷

In this perspective, culture is infinitely suspended in the process of production, as against existing in any form of finite certitude. This accent on continual metamorphosis is complemented by Williams importation of hegemony into his materialist analysis. As we have mentioned, Gramsci prescribed hegemony as the discursive antidote to ideology; Williams expands on this for the purpose of strengthening his technique of cultural study, perfectly in line with rejecting the limitations of ideology as a fixed ideation. He rehearses some of the salient features of hegemonic political technologies:

A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits...Moreover (and this is crucial, reminding us of the necessary thrust of the concept) it

⁹⁵ Curiously, though, Williams does not mention Thompson, who did in fact concentrate his study on the makings, or production, of class in a specific context.

⁹⁶ Williams, 1977:38 - he mentions, in specific, the example of book publishing in this section, pointing out that the mode of production through which a book comes into being must also be considered along with how it is received in the social field; there is no other way to account for the life cycle of things unless its full trajectory through all spaces of production - and reproduction - are carefully detailed.

⁹⁷ Williams, 1981:29 Thus, what Thompson did in looking at the production of class, Williams repeats and refines, by suggesting a frame for a full analysis of the production of culture and related ideology.

does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own.⁹⁸

As cited earlier, the quality of dynamism embedded in hegemony was clarified and restored by Williams, who also saw it as the object of various social forces locked into protracted battle. In his review, the experience of hegemony entails a battery of struggles occurring simultaneously as the reigning authority attempts to expand its range of control and undermines adversaries. It is wise, then, to picture the crowning of power as a temporal, ephemeral, and evanescent event, as its circuits perennially navigate the currents of collapse and consolidation.

For Williams, reigniting the Gramscian concept has an interesting impact on the vocation of culture as process, decentering its traditional distinction as product. The marriage of culture and hegemony elicits a productive outcome in two intelligible ways. In the first political reading, we can accept the cultural territory as the very grounds for hegemonic negotiation. Culture - taken in the Marxist sense as the repository of ideological claims annexed to a specific ruling force - shifts in valence, in direct proportion to a regime's falter or splinter.

On the other hand, we may claim that culture and hegemony are conceptually related by analogy. Culture has a subjective dimension as it involves a 'whole way of life,' encompassing lived experience, social interaction, and changes in consciousness; in this way, it mirrors hegemony inasmuch as it is an intersubjective, mediated activity,

⁹⁸ Williams, 1977:113

explicitly in contrast to the first characterization as a given object. Williams endorses culture also as a lived process, a site of contest in the social ascription of meaning.⁹⁹

Following his theory via Gramsci, cultural materialism emerges as neither as a procedure of extracting pure ideology (for this limits culture's reception as a complex and contradictory encounter) nor for the discovery of a set of absolute properties within a given boundary (for this eternalizes one interpretation over others). Rather, the method traces the immortal energies of a flow, with the substance of culture functionally proselytized from objective noun to polysemic process.

Hall plays on the distinctions between culture as product and culture as process in his landmark article, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Expanding on Williams' nuances of culture as a fluid set of social relations, meditating on its curves and tangents, he delineates two poles of thought preponderant in contemporary theories of identity.¹⁰⁰ As Hall sees it, culture is a deeply contested terrain, alternately conjured to serve as the space of conformity and regulation, a highly disciplining terrain demanding coherence, and paradoxically it is the site of identity in flux, refusing the imposition of monolithic meanings, breaking the seams of an imaginary unity:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position defines cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common... There is, however, a second related but different view of cultural identity. This second position also recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference... We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity,'... *Cultural identity, in this second sense,*

⁹⁹ Williams, 1981

¹⁰⁰ Hall is an extremely unique figure in cultural studies, the first who explicitly historicized interlocking economies of difference such as race and class in a number of his publications, most recently in the anthology Questions of Identity.

*is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being.'*¹⁰¹

Hall's perspicacious remarks invite speculations on culture as an abstract container of signs, subject to contest and fracture in the procedure of assigning, seizing, or upsetting authentic meaning. The idea of culture as a common denominator, occupying a secure ontological status, is caught in a tight embrace with notions of fissure and uncertainty, the liberation of meaning-effects; both senses are juxtaposed to create an ongoing collage of culture as a social process, in formation at the borders of mediation and negotiation. The allegory of rupture, then, is homologous to the metaphor of synthesis in culture's configurations.

Shorn of permanence, the ascription of meaning in the cultural field is arbitrary and tentative, and in the construction of identity politics in specific, it mandates the emergence of contingent coalitions -- or *strategic essentialisms*, in Spivak's words. Hall's contemplation rehearses Williams' perceptions of culture as an activity, inhabited by mysterious cadences and rhythms; culture is not an end in itself, but a point of departure in the rivers of collective and individual consciousness. He and Williams effectively consolidate the cultural materialist vision by according primacy to the production of culture, displacing culture as a crystallized product, and disturbing the substance of its presumed homogeneity.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Hall, 1994:393-394 (italics are mine). This notion of *becoming* is extremely useful for theorizing cultural factors today, as they become synonymous with the idea of globalization, fragmentation, and diaspora, - thus, culture is always traveling in a sense, as are our identities (especially if we are migrants); we really are constantly in the process of *becoming* and rarely exhibit the fixity of *being*.

¹⁰² Generally, orthodox culturalists and economic determinists tend to subscribe to this mistaken sort of thinking. Again, Hall and his compatriots (Williams and Thompson) look at the makings of a concept, without taking for granted what is already made; crucially, they are not supplanting, but supplementing Marxist theories of culture as power.

Related to the cultural materialist method is another inception of Williams which is worth considering in its implications for social theory. This conception fundamentally entails the unified analysis of the entire production-consumption cycle for a copious articulation of the social life of things. Elaborating how an extensive critique of the cultural economy repudiates isolated concentration on a single axis of the cultural process, in favour of examining the intersection of modes of production, reception, and reproduction¹⁰³, Williams describes what he calls a *full sociology of culture*:

A Marxist sociology of culture is then recognizable, in its simplest outlines, in studies of different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution, and in the linking of these within whole social material processes...the fundamental principle of a sociology of culture is the complex unity of the elements thus listed or separated. Indeed the most basic task of the sociology of culture is analysis of the interrelationships within this complex unity: a task distinct from the reduced sociology of institutions, formations, and communicative relationships and yet, as a sociology, radically distinct also from the analysis of isolated forms.¹⁰⁴

Existing divisions of intellectual labour impute specialized tasks of acquiring knowledge and establishing critique to separate disciplines, thereby precluding the fullest scope of understanding in relation to the sites, events, and objects of discourse, in a single methodology; if economics outlines the organization of production, aesthetics muses on the formal properties of objects, and sociology deals with the circulation of items and signs, then the revelatory task of theory is severely complicated unless one is familiar with the thrust of each narrow enterprise. Fortunately, cultural materialism represents the compression of these concerns into a single paradigm, and herein lies its remarkable use value.

¹⁰³ Here, Williams absorbs the lessons of what Marx suggested in the Introduction to the Grundrisse, where he advocated viewing the material life of things in cyclical, rather than linear, terms. (Marx, 1971).

¹⁰⁴ Williams, 1977:139-140

The cultural materialist method is a significant advance in progressive theory; in conjunction with the idea of a full sociology of culture, it brings into light the necessary interrelation between modes of production and ideology, cultural production and cultural reception, and the structural and experiential dimensions of the social.¹⁰⁵ Thus, in an elemental way, this inception of cultural studies promised to reconcile the internal split in Marxism regarding the real nature of the economy-ideology relationship.¹⁰⁶

Recent developments have, however, threatened to derail the prime efforts of the original cultural studies method; there are certain theoretical twists still to be understood, in terms of resolving contradictions of ideology versus modes of economic production in contemporary progressive theories.

There are two schisms to consider here. One is confined to the interior of cultural studies, between American consumption literature and British materialism. The other is the debate between cultural studies and political economy as differentiated bodies of discourse. A review of the standard claims involved on each side is still timely and beneficial for reflecting on the intellectual odyssey undertaken by Marxist scholarship on culture. In my opinion, a critical examination of the terms of antipathy would reveal the frailties and internal contradictions of each extreme and hopefully signal a denouement to the conflict. The deadlock can be ultimately resolved by rejuvenating the original British version of cultural studies, thus recentralizing cultural materialist practice. I now turn my attention to the details of these schisms.

¹⁰⁵ Previously, each of these three sets had been considered in mutually exclusive terms.

¹⁰⁶ Despite a chronology that points to the contrary, cultural studies is by no means a unified and coherent field, nor is it the last word on culture itself. Recent years have witnessed a florescence of discussions on this topic in disciplines like self-reflexive anthropology and critical literary theory. The advent of

IV. SPLINTERS IN THEORY: *Economic Determinism, American Cultural Consumption Studies and British Cultural Materialism*

In a recent colloquy focusing on the significance of theory, an ensemble of eminent scholars debated the relationship between cultural studies and political economy, a relationship that is particularly fraught with tension. Luminaries like Lawrence Grossberg, James Carey, Graham Murdock, and Nicholas Garnham evaluated the two fields as separate projects, arguing their merits and demerits, finally judging the possible successes and failures resulting from their tentative coupling.¹⁰⁷

This debate between cultural studies and political economy is a highly familiar one in social theory, especially in self-proclaimed progressive circles. In fact, the very construction of a theoretical dichotomy between the two illuminates the depth of internal fissures among Left intellectuals. Although it is nothing new, it continues to hold an undeniable power of provocation. The conflict has greater currency in an academy transformed by postmodernism, where the inclusion of contextual questions like subjectivity, methodological bias, and political positioning are now integral for establishing the legitimacy of scholarly inquiries.

Consequently, what is really remarkable about the argument is not its inherent value, its contribution to knowledge, or even the principles at stake, although these are also important considerations. The most interesting factor is the trope of repetition circumscribing it. Raised countless times, the issue of cultural theory versus economic

postmodernization and globalization seem to be the reason behind the explosion of new kinds of literature on culture.

¹⁰⁷ Colloquy, Critical Studies in Mass Communications (hereafter known as CSMC) March 1995.

analysis is a recurring theme in academic literature, perhaps reflecting the foundational value of this fracture. Yet in each case, the quality of argumentation involves a rehearsal of predictable positionings that uphold the purported split between cultural studies proponents and political economists, ultimately confirming the superiority of the former. The colloquy mentioned earlier is symptomatic of this general trend.¹⁰⁸

However, detailing the specific concerns embodied in that symposium is not my concern. They are important insofar as they are at root emblematic of two polarized patterns of thought. I use it as an instant to illustrate the foremost question here, which is not about the merits of one side against the other, but the underpinnings of the polarity itself. *Namely, is there actually a debate?*

To reiterate, I propose that there is no fundamental debate between cultural studies and political economy as methodological divides in social theory. This is primarily because one branch of cultural studies long ago negotiated the difference by amalgamating both. The reconciliation can be attributed to the concept of cultural materialism developed in postwar Britain by Raymond Williams and other activists linked to the Birmingham School. Presaging them were Gramsci and Frankfurt School thinkers, who -- in musings on *cultural hegemony* and *culture industry* respectively -- contributed to a structure of feeling tied to what would later become formalized as the British theory of cultural materialism.

In the past thirty years, a process of gradual reconstruction has occurred in Marxist-based theories, augured by a trio of events: the emergence of identity politics, the arrival of poststructuralist theory, and the export of continental cultural studies to the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. See Grossberg and Carey in particular.

American academy. In turn, these moments effected cleavages inside the boundaries of Marxist scholarship, with three distinguishable analytic modes generating their respective niches and responses to those changes: the modes of economic determinism, American cultural consumption, and British cultural materialism.

First, the 1960's saw the rise of liberation movements by collectives opposing the regimentation of white supremacy, patriarchy, and heterosexuality.¹⁰⁹ A number of issue-oriented grassroots politics surfaced in their wake, highlighting social justice concerns like the environment, housing and education, and equal civil rights. These revolutionary protests, retrospectively named identity politics, militated against racism, classism, and sexism as intersecting oppressions.¹¹⁰

Secondly, the unleashing of poststructuralist critique in the academy destabilized the architecture of modernist theory.¹¹¹ Challenging rationalism and positivism, poststructuralists devalued objectivity and universalism, blurring subject-object boundaries and endorsing dialogic relations instead of unilinear, monologic discourse. They refused to subscribe to single, overarching systems theories. Casting aside both inductive and deductive reasoning, they questioned the expression of universal law and

¹⁰⁹Hall, 1992:283 Again, the changes happening in the West take center-stage, as I am situating the changes in theory against the backdrop of grassroots politics in that geopolitical space.

¹¹⁰Grossberg, 1992:9; Grossberg, 1995:73; Hall, 1992:282. Ageism and ableism were not, in my opinion, sufficiently questioned in these movements. Since their positions were considered minor in comparison to gender and race, and thus do not appear widely in the theory, I am not addressing them in any sustained way here. This is not because I wish to ignore their effects, but because 'race, gender, class' has become the dominant triad in identity politics, and I want to assess the impact this has had rather than take up questions of excluding age and ability within the limits of this paper. I also want to point out that although cultural studies tends to collapse the postmodernist critique of truth an essentialism with feminist and critical race studies, there is a contested relationship between identity politics and postmodernism, revolving around the problems of the validity of the subject, the idea of truth, and producing and claiming history in light of its declared end. While it is outside the scope of this paper to deal with these divisions, I would like to raise them as they are of utmost importance. I suggest viewing deconstruction as a method of undoing modernity's metanarratives, and using feminism, and critical race and class politics as the productive grounds for creating alternatives to modernist hegemony.

truth as embodied in particular events. Proclaiming the end of history and the end of the subject, they interrogated the teleological bias of Western thinking, and the status of the purposive, propertied white male imagined at its core. Moreover, poststructuralists emphasized the role of hermeneutics and standpoint epistemology as against realist modes of knowledge production.¹¹²

Third, as cultural studies came to American intellectuals, its role substantively changed as it was transported into its new geopolitical context. As we have seen, British cultural materialism fully incorporated class and identity politics into its fold, while also assuming a poststructuralist posture for the purposes of critiquing the modernist impulse of the Arnoldian project. American cultural studies intellectuals, however, grappled with poststructuralism and identity politics practically to the exclusion of a materialist analysis, directing their attention to the patterns of cultural consumption and reception.¹¹³

Hence, American cultural consumption squared off against British cultural materialism. As Thompson, Williams, and Hall have convincingly demonstrated, the British cultural studies model involves a polycentric, interdisciplinary approach, one which significantly reduces, but doesn't eliminate, the privileging of class as the theoretical frame. Yet in its American avatar, cultural studies tends to obscure the role of class; although it does not entirely annihilate its value, it rarely expresses a total

¹¹¹ Rabinow, 1984:13; Spivak, 1994:67

¹¹² Featherstone et al, 1995:4. The authors outline the differences between "homogenizers" and "heterogenizers," the former term pertaining to orthodox Marxists and functionalists, the latter to poststructuralists. I have adapted their comments here to characterize divisions between political economists and cultural studies proponents.

¹¹³ Hall, 1992:185; Grossberg, 1992:10

commitment to unmasking its functions, making it difficult to ascertain the positioning of capitalism within American cultural studies discourse.¹¹⁴

And for those dedicated Marxists who continued to preach the prime significance of the economic base, identity politics and poststructuralism became ideological debacles.¹¹⁵ A confrontation with poststructuralism was inevitable, since early Marxism was conceptually informed by a modernist schema, its essential truth being the imperative of class struggle. For its proponents, preoccupations with race and gender identities only signalled a distraction from the most pressing problem of class. Although they did not advocate ignoring inflections of race and gender, in their view injustice was perpetrated by the preliminary orderings of class stratifications. Never convinced by the culture-economy nexus offered by Williams and the Birmingham School, and repudiating the denial of modes of production in American consumption studies, they remained fervent supporters of the primary value of the economic base. Thus, the renaissance of a narrow political economic stance found its rationale in opposition to the advent of poststructuralism and identity politics, in the form of orthodox Marxist determinists branching out against cultural studies practitioners who braided together analyses of multiple sources of oppression and resistance.

¹¹⁴ Garnham, 1995; Hall, 1992:285

¹¹⁵ Grossberg, 1995; Garnham, 1995. An additional note: Certainly, Foucauldian poststructuralism and Marxism have their points of convergence, but it is more significant to note that a Foucauldean analysis emphasizes the omnipresent exchanges of power at both the individual and structural levels, whereas Marx locates power and resistance as a class-based dynamic of systemic, collective expressions of domination and revolution. Furthermore, there is a judgement call in favour of working class hegemony and special program of revolution that Marx advances, while Foucault deliberately shies away from characterizing power as either a negative or positive exchange from any particular standpoint. His interest is in the discursive apparatus used to construct identities, rather than concentrating only on the component of material relations that shape them. After Foucault, it is difficult to imagine a subject existing outside the limits of discourse. Foucault argues that there are competing discourses that seek to shape subjectivity and

It may be argued that prior to the arrival of cultural materialism, there had been reason for a gulf between culturalists and economists; but considering this key development, which insists on treating culture and economics as interconstitutive rather than autonomous elements, the controversy ceases to exist. As a method, cultural materialism far surpasses the others as a sophisticated theoretical resource and is able to offer a more profound grasp of complex social phenomena.

Why, then, does the mutual antagonism relentlessly renew itself? As I elaborate, it is not much of a mystery. The cultural materialist position was relegated to the margins at a critical juncture, replaced in the past two decades by an American brand of study intent on exploring cultural consumption. The effect of this process has been detrimental to cultural studies as a whole and leads to the kind of theoretical impasse we now witness.

The British analysis, strongly anchored in Marxism, has been overshadowed by what I recognize as the American brand. The implications of this positional exchange are twofold. First, it constitutes a major difference within cultural studies, splitting it into two factions (namely, British cultural materialism and American cultural consumption).

¹¹⁶ The impeachment of cultural materialism, secondly, allowed cultural consumption to metonymically stand in for cultural studies as a whole. Its focus on audience-reception,

consciousness; while certain strictures of discourse can be interrupted by desire, it is still difficult to privilege the liberal notion of individual will in a Foucauldian analysis.

¹¹⁶ In asserting that the real cultural studies is the British version of cultural materialism, and accusing the American brand of being inauthentic, I am setting up a certain binary here. However, I am upholding this division, as problematic as it may be. I do not intend to suggest that all American cultural studies can be described in this fashion. The naming only designates a type of thinking, a theoretical bias that anyone American or non-American may put into practice. However, it receives its national affiliation mainly because most theorists agree that the overall pattern of cultural studies changed when it was transplanted into the American academy, and the deconstructive direction it followed could be differentiated noticeably from the directions of British cultural materialist practice.

resistance to dominant institutions, and expressions of personal desire and agency subsequently engenders a gulf with economic determinists, thus creating a schism between (an ersatz) cultural studies and political economy.

The bulk of responsibility for these polarized perceptions is arguably borne by the American side of cultural studies because of a principal contradiction haunting its practice. Symbolically, it usurped the British method, but in concrete terms, it became susceptible to depoliticization while practically neglecting a solid materialist analysis - all the time chanting the race-class-gender mantra in the background.¹¹⁷ This leaning, Gayatri Spivak notes,

ignores the international division of labour, a gesture that often marks poststructuralist political theory. The invocation of *the* worker's struggle is baleful in its very innocence; it is incapable of dealing with global capitalism: the subject-production of worker and unemployed within nation-state ideologies in its Center; the increasing subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from the realization of surplus value and thus from 'humanistic' training in consumerism...¹¹⁸

Rather than following through on the demands raised by class, as in producing thick descriptions of particular class formations in the global field, American-style intellectuals announced a symbolic solidarity with "the workers struggle" while actually relegating it to the background in their scholarship.¹¹⁹

Specifically following this impulse, I would suggest the American incarnation of cultural studies is decidedly less loyal to its Marxist roots (a development that is variously lauded or castigated, depending on the observer's political prejudices). Up until this

¹¹⁷ Hall, 1992:84

¹¹⁸ Spivak, 1994:67

¹¹⁹ Spivak is critiquing positions espoused by Derrida and Foucault, who are French, but again, I emphasize that the American style of cultural studies is intended to encompass anyone whose work can be said to conform to the contours of that way of thinking. These two qualify as American-type thinkers because, as

point, the centrality of class interlocking with culture as an expression of ideology had been integral to all forms of progressive cultural thought, arguably from the writings of Marx himself right through to the Birmingham School. Permutations of cultural studies coincided with the path of identity politics and the poststructural detour in theory, both signalling the decline of class as the prime axis of organization for the traditional left. However, cultural materialism did not encourage the *exclusion* of class relations, and certainly did not mandate the evacuation of economic *production*, a pair of structured absences in American cultural studies tendencies.¹²⁰ Speaking of these gaps in cultural studies paraphernalia, Arif Dirlik asserts,

Unlike in discussions of cultural production where it relates to literature, art and architecture, or even everyday forms of cultural life, there is little question in this literature on the existence of an intimate relationship between culture and political economy; not just with reference to consumption, which has received considerable attention in cultural studies, but more importantly with reference to production, which has suffered marginalization under the sign of the postmodern.¹²¹

Neglecting and occulting the economic base, the American wave nevertheless inaugurated a process of liberalization for this field, with liberalization doubly referencing the positive sense of an *opening* in addition to signalling the precarious ascendancy of *liberal* political values in cultural studies. The American turn is invested in recuperating two very definably American traits: individualism and consumer culture. Unsurprisingly, these dual properties epitomizing American values are the

Spivak (1994) points out, they tend to neglect class and focus on the circulation of signs and commodities, instead of outlining the conditions and process of their production.

¹²⁰ Here I repeat my earlier assertion: while all American cultural studies do not evacuate class, the integration of class into the analysis is not necessarily the dominant feature in theory, and thus the bias is towards an examination of identity in place of class, rather than in addition to it. The manufacture of the Other in representation is the first concern of American cultural studies, but the facets of economic production circumscribing representation are hardly mentioned.

¹²¹ Dirlik, 1997:186

most critically positioned in British cultural materialism. But in contrast to that method, the American version leans towards an inscription of popular consumption as a *choice* (so appears to sanction a strange compatibility with capitalist rhetoric), and further intimates a reification of the production-distribution-consumption chain as the ordering logic of the material line. Thus, it subscribes to a powerful mystification. Appadurai issues this reminder: "Consumption as a topic has always come equipped with an optical illusion," he states, "This illusion, especially fostered by the neoclassical economies of the past century or so, is that consumption is the end of the road for goods and services, a terminus for their social life."¹²²

In this way, the American paradigm ignores the British model, which, incorporating the lessons of Marx' introduction to the Grundrisse, emphasizes a material *cycle* for commodities, where consumption is also a *productive* act. Alluding to the Marxian text, Everling clarifies,

Marx demonstrated...that human production and consumption, and their attendant processes, are always subject and object for one another in some form. They mutually define one another as social relationships...Production is thus directly consumption, consumption is directly production.¹²³

And Williams reiterates this bent in describing the importance of this interlinkage:

Thus distribution, for example, is not limited to its technical definition and function within a capitalist market, but connected, specifically, to modes of production and then interpreted as the active formation of readerships and audiences, and of the characteristic social relations, including economic relations, within which particular forms of cultural activity are in practice carried out.¹²⁴

By selecting the social field of reception as a site of intervention, there is potential for American-style practitioners to describe it as an act of reproduction, as well as linking

¹²² Appadurai, 1996:66

¹²³ Everling, 1997:10; Marx, 1971.

production with consumption as an imbricating relation. Yet the opportunity is lost as consumption is primarily referenced as a liberating act of pleasure. The special crisis of American consumerism, then, lies in resolving the philosophical problem of agency.

The popularity of reception theory is exemplified by many textual studies. In this kind of literature, the aim is to illustrate the gulf between authorial intention and social reception, and thus disturb the assumption of a seamless message delivery from sender to receiver. Defenders of reception analysis accent how this imaginary chain is constantly broken, and how ascriptions of textual meanings, by consumers, that do not coincide with the producer's designs, form an instance of social production on the part of the receiving agents.¹²⁵ Thus, it may be argued American cultural studies does in fact use a model of cyclical rather than linear production process; it simply applies the model after isolating the sector dealing with the consumption of signs and commodities, and their circulation in the social field.¹²⁶

However, cultural studies conducted in the American vein tends to overplay the role of consumer¹²⁷ as renegade within the capitalist system - partly as a response to the structural determinism rampant in orthodox Marxism, and partly to undermine the totalizing claim that consciousness is a discursive production, the idea popularized in much of post-Foucauldian philosophy.¹²⁸ The standpoint of American cultural studies is especially popular, I think, because it resurrects that tarnished hallmark of Western liberal

¹²⁴ Williams, 1977:29

¹²⁵ In short, the consumer is not duped into supporting the hegemonic intentions of the producer. See especially Tiersten, 1993.

¹²⁶ Grossberg, 1995:74

¹²⁷ Whenever I use *consumer*, I do not mean it only in the sense of a buyer engaged in some sort of financial transaction. Rather, consumer simply means a human who consumes, or receives, or takes, or reads, or is engaged with (in the passive *and* active sense of that phrase) commodities; systems of signs; artifacts; events (i.e., any social object, whether materially tangible or discursively disseminated).

theory: the purposive individual. Admittedly, it *is* reductive to pose the subject as a repository for ideology, all choice paralyzed by structural influence; this amounts to viewing the subject as an empty container, her desire devoid of autonomy as she is interpellated into the monetary order of things and the constraints of dominant discourse. This is the bleak picture of subjectivity handed down in extreme renderings of political economy and social constructionist schemes.¹²⁹ In response, however, American cultural studies engenders its own prosaic spin-off: the narrative of subversive volition engendered in the matrix of pleasurable consumption.

Sweeping generalizations that equate consumption as a mode of capitalist imprisonment seem to have been supplanted by the reverse assumption of its freeing effects. The idea seems to restore the power of the individual, and his/her embodiment of superior will, the capacity for choice. It also suggests the power of desire supersedes structural conditioning. Thus, personal expression and pleasure are isolated as the main components of human experience, the corollary being the subordination of ethical concerns to the claims of self-interest, and the satiation of pleasure constituting an absurd symmetry with *resistance*.

Such an account would elicit greater support, were it not for the disjointed recitals of pleasure and resistance marking the American mentality (to say nothing of its elision of the other aspects of the production cycle). There is no denying the potency of personal

¹²⁸ Rabinow, 1984:25; Eagleton, 1993:195

¹²⁹ It is strange that American cultural studies would bypass Gramsci's contributions in this regard, for his notion of hegemony presents a way of both theorizing domination and maintaining the critical point of subjective agency. I would surmise that even the Gramscian position has not proved adequate for American-style intellectuals because it doesn't sufficiently place individual desire at the centre of history, and puts her/him in a position of at least partially reacting to dominant ideology as part of a collective. Also, Gramsci did not perhaps articulate the importance of desire or pleasure, all-important elements in the American cultural studies conception.

meaning-construction, or reading against the grain; indeed, the interpretive space is where the liberatory potential of the critical reader is released. Yet, conjuring the trope of resistance is an altogether different - and dangerous - matter.

Resistance minimally implies a level of conscientization - that is, acting consciously against dominant ideological configurations - and ideally, supporting an alternative (though by definition, this second part is neither a necessary nor sufficient component of dissent). The oppositional aura is clearly missing in much of American cultural studies, replaced by an analysis casting resistance in spurious and superficial terms.¹³⁰ For instance, under a capitalist scheme, does shopping for commodities ever amount to real subversion?¹³¹ Or does it justify the agenda of self-fulfillment? And is it actually congruent with the needs of capital? Is the purchasing decision initially motivated by subliminal or explicit conditioning (i.e. in the form of advertising, drawing on personal fears and insecurities, or the promise of upliftment)? Or is it an independent expression of will?¹³²

These questions are largely ignored in American cultural studies literature, which virtually ignores the cavalier characterization of resistance, plus the issue of how such "freeing" and "resisting" moves are available for co-optation and manipulation by dominant ambition. In this respect, "there is no freedom as long as everything has its price," as Adorno states, perhaps asking us to recall that capitalism only offers the

¹³⁰ Stromer-Galley and Schiapa, 1998, show how many of the audience research projects taken up actually are highly speculative, and do not produce reliable data; also, many theorists don't use the data even when it is available, or only adapt it to their own interests, ignoring evidence which may run contrary to their claims.

¹³¹ See the work of Janice Radway and Angela McRobbie, cited in Grossberg, 1995, who have undertaken major studies of the relationship of gender and consumption practices.

illusion of liberation in the form of saturating the market with products that in the end command us to choose and offer a limited potential for the exercise of agency¹³³.

Moreover, these accounts downplay the social production of conformity. If resistance rather than assimilation into the mainstream is the stronger trend, it begs the question of why there *is* collective acquiescence to the performance of normativity. To take a simple example - if corporate advertising does not inveigle consumers, why is there an entire industry devoted to the art of persuasion? Advertisers themselves know it is effective in shaping responses to products and services. All the accounts of resistance to mass culture veil the extent to which efforts at co-optation have, unfortunately, proved highly successful.

Meaghan Morris sardonically characterizes the popularizing of this thematic of resistance:

But sometimes, when distractedly reading magazines such as *New Socialist* or *Marxism Today* from the last couple of years, flipping through *Cultural Studies*, or scanning the pop-theory pile in the bookstore, I get the feeling that somewhere in some English publisher's vault there is a master disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations. American and Australians are recycling this...*with the perhaps major variation that English pop theory still derives at least nominally from a Left populism*...Once cut free from that context, as commodities always are, and recycled in quite different political cultures, the vestigial critical force of that populism tends to disappear or mutate.¹³⁴

¹³² The earlier comments by Adorno and Horkheimer are prescient; recall their characterization of the capitalist machine and advertising apparatus as one and the same thing, and their call to resist the seductions of commodification and consumption.

¹³³ Adorno, 1993:36

¹³⁴ Meaghan Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies," in *Logics of Television* edited by Patricia Mellencamp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. Italics are mine.

Morris points out that in these accounts of subversion through rituals of consumption, the analyst loses sight of the critical aspects of consumption - as an act of reproduction, for example, in all of its abundance, and its intrinsic place in the capital accumulation *process*. The chronicle of resistance fosters triplicate fantasies: that consumption, linked to desire, is in itself subversive, as the meaning assigned to the commodity by the receiver may collide rather than collude with the intentions of the producer or distributor; that consumption is extrinsic to the capitalist process and affirms individual will and pleasure; that resistance is implied in encoding alternative meanings in artifacts rather than critiquing the systemic constraints undergirding commodification in the first place. The end result is the notion that there is no need for other kinds of resistance - since resistance is already embedded into quotidian activity; since capitalism is, after all, essentially benign; or worse, since there is no alternative, what is there to question?¹³⁵

Garnham, succinctly addressing these very problems, is fully attuned to the implications of this line of thinking:

By focusing on consumption and reception and on the moment of interpretation, cultural studies has exaggerated the freedoms of consumption and daily life. Yes, people are not in any simple way manipulated...Yes, people can and often do reinterpret and use for their own purposes the cultural material, the texts, that the system of cultural production and distribution offers them. Yes, it is important to recognize the affective investment people make in such investments and the pleasures they derive from them. But does anyone who has produced a text or symbolic form believe that interpretation is entirely random or that pleasure cannot be used to manipulative ends?¹³⁶

It is perhaps necessary to remember the original Marxist (and social constructionist, Foucauldian) injunction, that the subject is also a historically and socially

¹³⁵ Jameson, 1993; Amin, 1997

¹³⁶ Garnham, 1995:65

constituted entity, for “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness,”; and Everling reiterates, “individuality is always created through the forms of social production and reproduction which make individuality possible”;¹³⁷ thus, we may inherit the notion of subjective consciousness created in the frictions of social force and individual volition.¹³⁸

By effacing capital’s role in the education of consumer desire, as American cultural studies does, an overdetermination of social subversion is the net result, even where it is obvious that the celebration of resistance by social marginals does not cancel out the inscription and co-optation of such resistance into dominant narratives. For example, the defiance of the labouring classes is still often affiliated with a desire for greater consumer spending power within capitalist structures - to say nothing of alignments with virulent nationalism, parochialism, and patriarchy.¹³⁹ Recall Garnham’s caution that “the tendency of [American] cultural studies to validate all and every popular cultural practice as resistance - in its desire to avoid being tarred with the elitist brush - is profoundly damaging...”¹⁴⁰ Unequivocally, agency does not automatically transfigure into *oppositional* agency; it does not always exemplify resistance, for many exercise agency in favour of conservative agendas.¹⁴¹

While the cliché “where there is power, there is resistance” may be self-evident in post-Foucauldian analysis, finding resistance in the rituals of marginalized communities - through virtue of social ontology, rather than ethico-political stance - is a

¹³⁷ Everling, 1997:6

¹³⁸ Quoted in Williams, 1977:75

¹³⁹ Mattelart, 1983:82, goes as far to say “the ideology of consumerism becomes for those sectors of the population that do not benefit from the economic model...a mechanism for political mind control.”

¹⁴⁰ Garnham, 1995:69

serious error. It lays claim to a flawed notion of inherent oppositionality, a kind of genetic predisposition towards struggle.¹⁴²

This is the Achilles heel of American cultural studies. On one hand, it is concerned with examining the debilitating patterns of race and gender ingrained into the collective unconscious; in these instances, it freely admits these hegemonic pressures are pervasive.¹⁴³ On the other hand, it tends to resist the consequences of economism and consumerism as ideologies, insisting on the recuperation of autonomous agency as paramount¹⁴⁴. In the first example, it is acknowledged we are partially products of our environment; however, somehow in the second instance of consumption, we are transformed into autonomous subjects affirming our innate powers of choice.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Eagleton and Bourdieu, 1993: 265

¹⁴² Curiously enough, American consumption studies shares its weakness regarding agency with political economy. This is the arena where political economy faces absolute limitations in its revolutionary capacities. While it provides a critical diagnosis of world-systems, and often creates a blueprint for struggle against capital, the problem of consciousness remains. Although political economy rarely considers agency in its formulations, focusing on the production of consciousness by ideological institutions, it does bring up agency occasionally to bolster a program of mass rebellion. The project of persuading 'the masses' that they are de facto oppressed, rests on the cornerstone assumption that a knowledge of systemic atrocities will provoke outrage and action against capital entities. Yet, publicizing catalogues of corporate injustice has not elicited this reaction; nor has it been enough to counteract the reality of political apathy. Even more, the assumption underestimates the individual desire for material security even where the trade-off is complicity with the establishment. More often than not, most individuals harbour an awareness of that complicity and yet manage to negotiate the complexities of the moral contradictions with which they are presented.

¹⁴³ The acknowledgement of race and gender in critical theory is hard won, mainly due to the feminist and postcolonial or critical race scholars who demonstrated the operations of racist and sexist mechanisms in the social structure. Nevertheless, the burgeoning number of texts which include 'race and gender' in their subtitles indicate the incorporation of these concerns, at least nominally, in social justice scholarship. Class is a more complicated issue because, as the argument goes, it is not predicated on the biological traits which define the other prejudices based on; race and gender are, according to this justification, written on the body. Although this may be true to a certain extent, it still does not explain the level of resistance to acknowledging the relevance of non-biologically based constructs like class, which have equally debilitating effects.

¹⁴⁴ In this instance, American reception theory and studies of consumption share an affinity with capital interests. See Jameson, 1993 on this point for further exploration.

¹⁴⁵ I am not suggesting that we are locked into racial and gender conditionings. Once we are aware of their damaging effects, it is possible to choose to unlearn them and try to break free. However, in the case of consumer ideology, the notion of resistance at times seems to deny the fact that we are socially conditioned beings in the first place, *as well as* conscious people capable of critical interrogation and oppositional

Dallas Smythe disagrees with these characterizations and explores another position on this matter as he critically reorders the terms of debate beyond questions of embodied will. Situating the material effects of consumption as commodified process, he reconceptualizes the consumer as a commodity appropriated into a capitalist system. The same system which needs labour to produce goods also requires a market; this entails the interpellation of the worker as consumer, permitting the illusion of a collapsing distance between labourers and the owner of means of production.¹⁴⁶ Appadurai, echoing Smythe's observation on the construction of the consumer-commodity as a feature of the capital accumulation procedure, forcefully points out that "consumption in the contemporary world is often a form of drudgery, part of the capitalist civilizing process. Nevertheless, where there is freedom there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency. *Freedom, on the other hand, is a rather more elusive commodity.*"¹⁴⁷

These analyses embody the spirit of a cultural materialism devoted to understanding the interlocking operations of ideological and economic modes of production; while acknowledging the potential for agency and resistance in consumptive acts, they also take into the account the very real pressures of structural conditioning. Importantly, they do not fall prey to the apolitical claims of self-interest often exhibited by American cultural consumption studies, nor to the virtual annihilation of agency tendered by absolutists like some political economists and certain Foucauldeans.

While it is important to uphold the aforementioned readings of resistance as an option, the usage of the term is meaningless if the context of consumption and reception

activity. Casting consumption wholly in terms of liberation, and denying the constraints of socialization, is a problematic venture indeed.

¹⁴⁶ Smythe, 1995

goes unreported. This is, I believe, what Williams meant by encouraging cultural materialism¹⁴⁸ - elaborating the entire process of constructing artifacts and discourse, rather than positing fragmentary narratives centering one field of operation, decontextualized from the larger historical and political climate.

The challenge then remains for the American praxis to successfully integrate the key ethical and methodological lessons of cultural materialism into its field if it is to remain self-sustaining as a critical enterprise. It needs to renew an ethical commitment to dismantling or at least more fully interrogating capitalism, rather than perpetuating it through narratives of resistance that implicitly valorize consumerism. It must also radically question the liberal, purposive individual imagined at the centre of discourse, and rethink the model of free will attached to the pursuit of pleasure (why not imagine resistance from the standpoint of ethics and politics instead?). And it must substantiate its rhetorical gestures against class structures by providing historically scrupulous accounts of, for instance, labour histories, policies and regulations, for instance, transgressing the purely discursive level.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, it must attend to the production process in addition to considering consumption.

Another set of conceptual changes have to be taken into account, namely towards recontextualizing the postmodern idea of the absence of singular truth. If cultural studies is to formulate any ethical position, it needs to take a stand by championing

¹⁴⁷ Appadurai, 1996:7; my emphasis.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, 1981

¹⁴⁹ Takaki, 1995:173, critiquing this very problem in postmodern theory, usefully points out: "Theory is crucial [as an abstract understanding of various processes of social formation] but the purpose of theory is to guide our reaching for an understanding of reality. Here we need not only theoretical discussion about the importance of dense description, but we also need to do it."

certain axioms (even if it is only on a temporary basis for strategic purposes).¹⁵⁰ This raises the dilemma of pondering postmodernism as a strategy of undoing dominative knowledges and practices moored in modernity, or as an intellectual end in itself, where the support of any truth is virtually impossible.¹⁵¹

I would argue towards the support of certain claims that represent a politically situated goal. While the problems do not have to be framed dichotomously, there are positions that we need as points of departure, if progressive social praxis is to establish itself proactively in favour of some ideal rather than relinquishing the goal in the name of deconstructivist postmodernism. This points to a further absence in American cultural studies: an inspirational vision.¹⁵²

In my own perspective, the British cultural materialist stance is clearly superior to the American one, and renders hollow the supposed debate between orthodox economic determinist and cultural consumption studies. As discussed, the British materialist analysis contains the seeds of an illuminating theory of cultural production germane to

¹⁵⁰ Spivak calls this procedure strategic essentialism, that is, repudiating the consolidation of essentialized identities as ends in themselves, but using identity as a means for achieving progressive political goals. Thus, identity is envisioned as an enabling point of departure for political organizing rather than viewed as an end in itself.

¹⁵¹ Spivak 1995:181 reiterates the predicaments of postmodern theory when applied to political coalition-building: "Difference cannot provide an adequate theory of practice...We must find some basis for unity. It is a travesty of philosophy, a turning of philosophy into a direct blueprint for policymaking, to suggest that the search for a situational unity [i.e. strategic essentialism] goes against the lesson of deconstruction. If we perceive our emergence into the dominant as a situation, we see the importance of inventing a unity that depends upon that situation."

¹⁵² The importance of a vision sustaining political and academic practice cannot be underestimated; and deconstruction in itself does not serve as an adequate method of acquiring a proactive vision. We can look to a number of practicing cultural studies intellectuals (at least, they qualify as such in my opinion, by bringing together excellent analyses of culture and materialism): the South Asian intellectuals Bina Agarwal, Medha Patkar, Partha Chatterjee, and the Subaltern Studies group all outline a vision that their theory supports, in the form of achieving an ideally egalitarian civil society. For instance, the last of these - the Subaltern studies group - have at least paved the way for some kind of alternative praxis, by refusing both the gestures of imperialism and national elitism, favouring a subaltern-based democratic politics in South Asia.

any serious version of cultural studies, but one which has been sidelined by disciples of social consumption. Next, I will assess the value of the British articulation of cultural studies, against the tenets of political economy.

V. CULTURE AND CLASS

The main problem between political economy and cultural studies can be investigated by revisiting base and superstructure, two fundamental Marxist concepts which logically determine the objects of intellectual inquiry.¹⁵³ From the outset, there have been two poles of thought in Marxist theory. The roots of disagreement can be found in radically different interpretations of the classic 1859 Preface to a Critique of the Political Economy, a document focusing on historical materialist methodology. To review briefly, Marx opens his monograph by describing the determining *base* of society as economic in nature, centering modes of production, whereas the apposite term, the determined *superstructure*, is concerned with cultural apparatus, subjectivity and consciousness, and political institutions.¹⁵⁴

According to the classical political economic interpretation of the Marxist model, capitalist modes of production organize social totalities into the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, underscoring the power relations between elite dominative groups who own the means of production whereas the workers constitute the disenfranchised, superexploited majority. This conceptual understanding of class governs political-economic critiques of a variety of formations, such as imperialism, multinational corporations, and globalization.

Yet according to the Western Marxist tradition, the ideological wing demands urgent scrutiny, as its effects are particularly insidious. Thus juxtaposed with the political

¹⁵³ Murdock, 1978; Williams, 1977:81

economic bias, many theories have erroneously situated the object of critique as *capitalism* or *culture*. Since there is little agreement on class being the prime category of theory, it serves as a major point of divergence between the two methodologies. Consequently, proposing a real solution to oppression is virtually impossible thanks to the lack of consensus about the nature of the conundrum in the first place.

The orthodox economists have upheld the conventional base and superstructure distinction, choosing to focus on material inequalities as structured by economic formations, while the precursors of cultural studies theorists have sought to theorize the superstructure in more complicated relation to the base, "precisely because no specific fit or pre-given compatibility can be discerned between the base and the superstructure."¹⁵⁵ The choice of focus immediately delimited sites of investigation. Whereas political economists concentrated on the modes of production ordering the base, others elected to focus on questions of consciousness, institutions, the media, and art.¹⁵⁶

The two strands existed as polar tendencies until the formal advent of cultural studies presented a brief interruption of the Marxist binary, allowing a productive intersection. But even here, though cultural materialism moved in the direction of mending the gap, it never wholly convinced die-hard Marxists, who continued to privilege the base and thereby kept class as *the* measure of analysis.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the separation of cultural and economic analysis was residually reestablished following the

¹⁵⁴ Murdock, 1995; Grossberg, 1995; Williams 1977, 1981. As mentioned earlier, the meaning of what Marx states is notoriously difficult to translate into theory, because there are multiple and conflictual invocations of the dualism.

¹⁵⁵ Grossberg, 1995:79

¹⁵⁶ Garnham, 1995; Murdock, 1995; Yurick, 1995; Hall, 1992

¹⁵⁷ Carey, 1995

rise of American consumption literature, the study of culture duly secluded from the study of capital.

This leaning is problematic indeed. Vulgar Marxists hold onto the view of class as the organizing axis of society, with culture and ideology as offshoots of the economic system. In the crude economist vision linking base and superstructure unidirectionally, culture is ideology's progeny, which in turn stems substantively from the economic terrain. Reiterating a literal interpretation of Marx, this view preaches monetary forces as being at the root of the social base, with the concomitant ideology mirroring elite interests in the superstructural sphere. Thus, in a sequential ordering representing cultural process as the predicate of modes of production, the economic base retains its autonomy while rendering culture transparently dependent upon it.¹⁵⁸

The analysis of hegemony resting in the hands of those who control the means of economic production has a certain allure. However, the following examples concretely interrupt this model, highlighting the need for a paradigmatic shift in traditional Marxist interpretations of base and superstructure in favour of a cultural materialist theory. Contesting the oversimplified notion of base and superstructure (as it appears in Garnham et al, points I take up soon), cultural materialists stress an inherent dynamism and variation in both categories, repudiating their reductive characterizations as frozen entities.

They point out the division between the economic base and ideological superstructure in orthodox Marxist theory is problematic precisely because of the complex interactions between both arenas. Even importing Althusser's idea of a relative

¹⁵⁸ Williams, 1977: 77

autonomy between the two spheres is deficient in accounting for the fact of a basic cultural economy which operates through the traffic of ideas, and substantially influences the financial realm. Appadurai asserts,

But the relationship between the cultural and economic levels...is not a simple one-way street in which the terms of global cultural politics are set wholly by, or confined wholly within, the vicissitudes of international flows of technology, labour, and finance, demanding only a modification of existing neo-Marxist models of uneven development and state-formation.¹⁵⁹

The simple truth endures. The portrait of culture as subsidiary to a material base is impugned by many instances where its condition is not determined solely by economic production; there is also a reverse relationship, of culture conditioning the process of capital accumulation and distribution, sometimes even existing outside the direct purview of a structural economic process.

The first example illustrating this reality is the composite figure of the Third World woman as signifier in modernization discourse.¹⁶⁰ As Chandra Talpade Mohanty has shown, the Third World Woman travels in the Western cultural economy as the ultimate embodiment of female suppression and backwardness, a casualty of poverty, tradition, and indigenous male domination. In short, the Third World Woman is oppression made flesh.

This 'average third world woman' leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions... These distinctions are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Appadurai, 1994:333

¹⁶⁰ Mohanty, 1990

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.56

This influential typology has, in turn, engendered an entire subfield of Gender and Development in schemes of international aid. The image is crucial, Mohanty insists, in the language justifying modernization initiatives in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East.¹⁶² Typically these projects are bound to a dominant discourse surrounding an idealized narrative of feminist progress in the West, thus encouraging women's entry into the formal economic sector as a spurious technique of liberation from the yokes of native male control. Ostensibly fulfilling the mission of rescue from hypersavage patriarchies and ensuring women's upliftment, development programs provide a benign alibi for continual intervention in the Third World:

[I]n the context of the hegemony of the Western scholarly establishment in the production and dissemination of texts, and in the context of the legitimating imperative of humanistic and scientific discourse, the definition of the 'third world woman' as a monolith might well tie into the larger economic and ideological praxis of 'disinterested' scientific inquiry and pluralism which are the surface manifestations of a latent economic and cultural colonization of the non-Western world.¹⁶³

Mohanty carefully details how the discursive move of deploying the sketch of an imaginary Third World Woman actually attenuates imperialist practice.¹⁶⁴ The failures, successes, or moral prerogatives of development schemes are not the core issue; the more important point is to note how instating a representative regime that trafficks in Third-World-Woman-as-Motif functions as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the imperialist economic project. Mohanty outlines and indicts the ideology that does not merely accompany, but actively *shapes* economic policy.

¹⁶² Mohanty, 1990:54

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.74

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.63

In contrast, the failure of cultural hegemony by groups who have procured state and capital power is the second reality which renders orthodox economic determinism inadequate. In this instance, the ruling group has the means to impose their ideologies, but is rendered impotent by a powerful counter-hegemony, illustrating the sharp experiential division between cultural and economic subjugation. Colonial structures tend to elicit the force of this stark disjunction. South Africa's systemic apartheid and doctrine of white supremacy reigned institutionally at one time, but rarely achieved ideological omnipotence or credibility among the Black and Coloured masses. These communities of resistance never consented to living under the brutalizing apparatus of a state built on racial doctrines. Since the colonized constituencies had very little access to political and economic enfranchisement, the unravelling of social segregation in South Africa rested primarily on the cornerstone of cultural rights, anti-racist ethics, and liberationist ideology.

What is notable again is that culture cleared the space for subsequent participation in economic and political arenas, not vice versa; here, existing material domination did not foreclose the potential for discursive dissent by political agitators.¹⁶⁵ As with many anti-colonial struggles, the cultural factor was not a mystifying *fetish* in the sense of what Marx had articulated - that is, it did not dissolve class consciousness. Rather, culture was the site of entry for equalizing power relations, strategically harnessed to create the grounds for enabling agencies and coalitions.

¹⁶⁵ This is not to say that the state did not repress dissent - rather, political organizers used their limited resources to creatively subvert the repressive laws and regulations designed to maintain the racial hierarchy. The organizers themselves created the space to engage in oppositional activity, in spite of difficult material circumstances.

The South African case is illuminating as it underscores the key problem with articulating class as the singular fetish of theory. Orthodox economic determinism proposes a unidimensional identity, reducible to class, that rarely is in operation in embodied subjects.¹⁶⁶ Race and gender tend to become abstracted relations in such theory, rather than visceral realities. Thus, where social class structures are based on race, as with colonial regimes, it is imperative to imagine culture and economy as interconstitutive elements.¹⁶⁷

There is a third instance where culture is not ideologically bound to the support of official state practices. The phenomena of *nationalism without nation* exhibits how deterritorialized constituencies use culture as the organizing theme of their connections. Without a tangible geographical base, then, and even less a trove of financial or legal power, the desire for cultural-national sovereignty is perhaps the sole adhesive for agents involved in struggles as diverse as Kurdistan, Tibet, and Palestine. These spatially dispersed groups are sustained almost entirely by the sheer force of imagination and ideology, linked by diasporic affect, memory, and hope. Their countries are places that no longer formally exist on maps, places that are forcibly annexed and occupied, places imagined only in tenses of the future.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Mohanty, 1990; Hall, 1992; Grossberg, 1995

¹⁶⁷ For example, Saudi Arabia and Singapore have strict policies governing the social positions of various groups residing in their states. Not coincidentally, class and race intersect to produce a vertical mosaic of certain populations filling predetermined labour slots. This also happened with the targetting of people of African descent in the American slaveocracy. In such cases, a purely economic analysis is not sufficient to account for the racial ideology subtending the labour scheme. There must be a focus also on non-economic social factors in order to fully grasp the ways in which oppression is constructed, maintained, and reproduced.

¹⁶⁸ Appadurai, 1994, and 1996: Chapter 3, "Global Ethnoscapes." He mentions the aspects of a newly deterritorialized postmodern world, and the fact of dispersed populations which must be taken into account in reformulated studies of culture.

In other situations, culture has served as pretext for chauvinism with regard to labour and migration issues in the interest of protecting nativist claims. This is evinced in the US with regard to sensationalized media reports concerned with so-called *invasions* of Mexican workers, and in Europe with the *tides* and *hordes* of migrant guestworkers. Moreover, the kinds of virulent nationalisms expressed through the use of culture as a support for belonging or unbelonging in nation-states signal the potentially dangerous uses of this ideology, the economic benefits of multiracialism notwithstanding. Anti-Jewish fascism in Nazi Germany is an especially devastating exhortation of this fact. The boundaries demarcating Us versus Them creates a politically expedient discourse of purity, where the group excluded from national membership is alienated as a potential contaminant due to their alleged cultural incompatibility with the society in question.

This points to a fourth illustration of the centrality of culture to nationalism, with a slight variation. In three major revolutions of our time – China, Cuba, and Iran – the insurgents positioned themselves against (Western) cultural intrusion and vowed to exorcise the specter of imperialism.¹⁶⁹ The partitions of India, Pakistan, the former USSR and Yugoslavia are further proof that culture's oppositional power cannot be underestimated.¹⁷⁰ Without doubt, culture has animated the critical energies of the colonized and oppressed (or those who perceive of themselves as such, which produces the same net result), directing collective action pressed into service towards liberation.

¹⁶⁹ Although imperialism is largely connected to the West's history of domination, it should also be mentioned that imperialist designs have been set, for instance, on Korea and China by Japan in the past; and on Tibet by China more recently. However, there is still a quantitative distinction that can be made regarding the annexing projects undertaken by Western and non-Western nations, based on the scale, scope, and duration of domination.

Indeed, in many of these cases the protection of culture appears to be at odds with economic prudence, and the second tends to be sacrificed, usually temporarily, on the altar of the first and greater demand.¹⁷¹ Such is the power of culture that self-identifying members are often prepared to literally pay the price, willing to shoulder the burden of economic hardship in exchange for transcendental self-determination.

Discourses of the Other, nationalisms with or without nation, the demarcation of psychic and geographical cultural boundaries, in the name of self-protection or revolution - every one of these parables exemplifies the increasing relevance of *primordia* in organizing social relations worldwide. Appadurai's elucidation is a perfect frame for situating these phenomena:

[P]rimordia (whether of language or skin colour or neighbourhood or kinship) have become globalized. That is, sentiments whose greatest force is in their ability to ignite intimacy into a political sentiment and turn locality into a staging ground for identity, have become spread over vast and irregular spaces as groups move, yet stay linked to one another through sophisticated media capabilities. This is not to deny that such primordia are often the product of invented traditions or retrospective affiliations, but to emphasize that because of the disjunctive and unstable interplay of commerce, media, national policies and consumer fantasies, ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality..., has now become a global force...¹⁷²

Culture, then, has a dynamic, energizing force of its own that cannot be designated the ideological byproduct of macroeconomic process. Often preceding the acquisition of

¹⁷⁰ In each of these cases, a certain cultural factor - religion in the Indian case, ethnicity primarily in the others - precipitated the desire for severance from the previous motherland.

¹⁷¹ The protective measures undertaken by China under Mao, and by Iran under the Ayatollah, are good examples of this; they chose to shut down to any Western influence for a long time, despite the fact that they would have prospered, in average economic terms, if linked into a world economy with the G7 nations. However, the idea of cultural integrity proved more enticing than the idea of greater standards of living (which, in any case, mean "Western" in Eurocentric parlance). Still, we should remember that Mao and the Ayatollah both engaged in repressive and brutal nationalisms. Cuba might qualify as a case here, but its situation is less a matter of choice than imposition; embargos dictated by some countries in the West have hurt Cuba's ability to choose this route. The punitive attitude of the U.S. in particular has forced Cuba into self-sufficiency, if it can actually be called that.

economic power, a cultural *imaginaire* has the capacity to mount an oppositional critique against hegemonic maneuvers (e.g. dissent in the South African case), or provide certification for dominant praxis (e.g. the Third World Woman as sign), thus complicating traditionally received notions about the relationship between culture and economy. I am not suggesting that economic imperatives do not have an effect on culture, or that the two are autonomous milieux. Rather, these examples demonstrate the failings of monocausal explanations. As we have seen, it is crucial to allow that the interrelationship is much more symbiotic and complex than reductive economic and cultural determinisms would both suggest.

Here, a materialist cultural studies is crucial for resolving the deadlock. While political economy's exclusive focus is provoking disapprobation towards one specifically material manifestation of domination (capitalist systems) cultural studies is linked to the analysis and explication of multiple subjugative structures such as nation, race and gender.

As we have seen, the orthodox Marxist stronghold is a domination-subordination model detailing the structural oppression of class and the delineation of a political program devoted to the critical undoing of capitalist relations, an undoing which would ideally produce egalitarian societies. Even while conceding that other systems of domination may be important, orthodox economists espouse two general claims: one, that other issues are not as significant as class; and two, class is the underlying structural

¹⁷² Appadurai, 1994:332

model of those other economies of difference - leading us back neatly to the first premise.¹⁷³

The work of Nicholas Garnham is just one example of a reductive economism which flattens out all difference in an effort to rescue the pristine value of class. In the colloquy mentioned earlier, he derogatively asks,

While not wishing to be economist, would cultural studies practitioners actually deny that the major political/ideological struggles of the last decade...have been around, for better or worse, narrowly economic issues -- taxation, welfare, employment, and unemployment? Would they deny that much so-called identity politics, and the cultural politics of lifestyle associated with it, has its roots in the restructuring of the labour market -- the decline of white manual labour, increased female participation, the failure to incorporate blacks into the wage labour force, the growth of service employment, and so on?¹⁷⁴

Garnham's words are almost shockingly naïve. In the worst tradition of a class fundamentalist, he harbours outright ignorance and unusual condescension towards the serious effects of race and gender. As he bemoans the alleged "decline" of white men's labour prospects, would he deny the fact that "housewife ideology" (as explained by Mohanty) is responsible for the ghettoization of women and people of colour into the lower basins of the production process? Would he pay lip service to the fact that women routinely face lower wages for similar job performance as men? How would he have explained slavery outside of racial ideology?

Sol Yurick goes even further. In a stunningly myopic essay on postmodern politics, he ridicules culture, here standing in for ethnicity, as an incendiary and irrational dogma:

Each fanatical subunit promotes the bloody primacy of its cultural 'selfhood'

¹⁷³ Dirlik, 1997:27; Gonzalo Arroyo (quoted in Mattelart) 1983:17; Hall, 1992:279

¹⁷⁴ Garnham, 1995:65

and 'self' determination...What is this new desire for national 'selfhood'? Why have these primitive, infantile emotions continued to persist? What powerful gravitational magic is there in nationalist, ethnic, religious, frequently racist, cultural 'identities'...that makes certain populations take leave of their senses and desire to return to a hypothetical 'past' state of cultural, if not material, plenty?...The movements towards decolonization that followed the Second World War, so-called nationalist-cultural passions, in India and Africa for example, preceded the latest break-ups into ethnocentric warlordism, tribalism, religious fundamentalism, and horrendous corruption.¹⁷⁵

Yurick's dismissals are indeed simple-minded and would qualify as outrageous, were it not for the widespread popularity of the vocabulary he uses, a lexicon parroted daily in the mainstream media. Indeed, he recites the familiar phrases deriding Third World culture as it becomes hypervisible to the etic gaze of the West, predictably rehearsing the tenets of liberal humanist oppositions to the uses of culture, which, resonating as ethnicity in the morphology of globalization, is cast in blanket terms as the engineer of social chaos and upheaval¹⁷⁶.

In authoring his scornful remarks, Yurick lays bare the fact he lacks the sort of imagination and sympathy necessary for contributing to an original discourse on culture - an intelligent compassion that is found in, say, Appadurai's graceful characterizations of primordia, which essentially deals with the same processes that Yurick addresses.

Yurick's mistake is in characterizing identity as a state of injury, to use Wendy Brown's phrase¹⁷⁷; thus, he is able to scorn its validity since ethnic subjectivity is supposedly based on negation and narcissism. Hence he is able to make the claim that

¹⁷⁵ Yurick, 1995:207

¹⁷⁶ Much more might be said of Yurick's characterizations, especially that his remarks exonerate the West for its responsibility for fueling ethnic antagonisms. The partition of India might be taken as an example. The British exploited preexisting tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent, leaving India only after partitioning it into Pakistan and into what is now Bangladesh; but in any mainstream discussion of Indian politics, the British role in heightening and accentuating social difference is hardly if ever mentioned. These social identities that Yurick derides did not, after all, assert themselves in a vacuum. For more on this, see Said, 1993.

self-determination and *selfhood* metaphorically slide into *selfishness*. However, as evinced in the earlier examples citing the success of the anti-apartheid movement and the moral aura enjoyed by anti-colonial agitators, it appears that there is no great difficulty in judging culture as a productive location for ethical organizing and action.

The evisceration of culture performed by Yurick and Garnham, typifying a set of misprisions located in orthodox economist thought, more than anything betray a paranoia around the need to protect class from its immanent disappearance from the nucleus of social theory. In addition, pejoratively conjuring the identity politics of race and gender only discredits their value even as political economists. For, to be exact, in Marxist terms race and gender would qualify less as identities than ideologies, and thus they rightfully belong as objects of critique in any socialist analysis, alongside of class. Crucially, identity is reducible to the personal level, while the production of ideology involves an entire network of structures, implicated in social construction of consciousness. This second sense is integral. Identity is an individual matter, but ideology has collective consequences, as it formally designates the ideal beneficiaries of privilege, while classifying the intended targets and victims of institutionalized violence.¹⁷⁸

In a strange way, if we read between the lines of Garnham's and Yurick's texts, a reverse understanding of their words promise to solve the underlying mystery of culture's primordial pull. The reification of culture cannot be denied. However, culture dramatizes the resilience of community in a postmodern world, the desire to belong, to

¹⁷⁷ From Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

¹⁷⁸ Bourdieu, 1994

be anchored historically even if the choice is to be a geographic philanderer. If culture has a special claim, it is a claim on affect.

The strength of this desire, which cannot be replicated within the strictures of class, lies beyond the imagination of the vulgar Marxist. Arguably, in itself class has no provisions for organizing affect in an affirmative way, after the project of addressing injustice and exploitation is completed; it is hardly invigorating to adopt an identity based on oppression as the primary incentive for coming together. In any case, presumably the class grouping will dissolve once it achieves victory (since in the most utopian scene, class would cease to exist), and some other reason for coalition would need to materialize for accomplishing group cohesion.

Cultural difference implies the distinct, the unique, the exceptional; and we need to acknowledge the extraordinary power of these mystical qualities, the power also of myth - if only because culture is sometimes a vessel of affect lying somewhere beyond the horizons of direct commodification, beyond biologism and beyond the politics of cohesion within a spatial territory.

So it is to their credit that cultural studies proponents distance themselves wholeheartedly from the economist pattern of thought and dive into the predicament of culture. But despite the repetitions of leading scholars confirming their basic commitment to socialist principles, many political economists consistently express skepticism about the legitimacy of cultural studies methods. This tendency expresses itself most clearly in their failure to take seriously issues other than class conflict.

“The analysis of a historic process above all social movements at the base; the way in which they constitute, structure and express themselves; their ideological, cultural

and religious dimension have generally been left aside by economists, sociologists, and other intellectuals identifying with the [political economy] current," Arroyo states¹⁷⁹. In lieu of a few commentators, self-defined political economists admit the field's intellectual alienation from the question of culture.¹⁸⁰ This preoccupation in political economy then leads to the serious allegation against cultural studies: seemingly it betrays progressive values (read: the workers' struggle) in favour of supporting special identity interests, however obliquely.¹⁸¹

Somewhere along the line, vulgar Marxists have forgotten that the disciplinary task, as outlined by Marx himself, "was to understand all of the presuppositions within productive and social relations which made social life in a given form and content possible at a particular time."¹⁸² Cultural materialism seems to better reflect Marx' injunction, in that it addresses itself (at least ideally) to those presuppositions in the fullest sense, while political economy is arrested from doing so, hindered by its fundamental bias against identity.

The cultural materialist move insists on equalizing the importance of auxiliary interests as parallel constellations of power. It takes on the more serviceable Marxist

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Mattelart, 1983:17. It is worth mentioning Dirlik, 1997:27, who repeats the same point: "World system analysis, which could with only slight unfairness be described as economism on a global scale, is inspired to a greater or lesser extent by Marxism and represents an essentially structuralist view of the world that in most uses bypasses the question of culture altogether. These approaches, however admirable their intention and significant their undertaking, do not resolve the question of hegemony but bypass its most fundamental aspects..."

¹⁸⁰ The theorists who do view culture and class in conjunction are well-respected but regrettably are not considered pure economists, according to the mainstream of political economy. They do, however, provide an excellent analysis of class and culture as interpenetrating concerns. The works of Samir Amin, Amartya Sen, and Angela Davis typify such a theoretical enterprise. See also Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, London: Bogle l'Ouverture Publications; Manning Marable, Speaking Truth to Power, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996; and Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society, edited by Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.

¹⁸¹ Grossberg, 1995: 82

¹⁸² Everling, 1997:8

contribution to social theory -- the *general* framework and critique of power relations it offers. Most cultural studies scholarship pays homage to the teachings of Marx in the form of adopting a structural analysis of dominance and exploitation, while integrating the methods of other critical theories. Unlike their counterparts, cultural studies thinkers like Williams and Hall concentrate on structural interlinkages, departing from an exclusively materialist focus.

They do this out of a realization that asymmetrical social formations are not only built through mechanisms of monetary exploitation and oppression, but through complex systems of signification that considerably influence the allocation of social power.

"Hegemony always presents multiple faces and operates at diverse and complementary levels," states Samir Amin, "Hegemony is not reducible to economic efficiency...and monetary dominance is not the only instrument by which it is asserted."¹⁸³ Amin's observations indicate that imagining a horizontal model of power is necessary for the undoing of the underlying assumption in political economy - that class is the singular, monolithic paradigm in analysis and actuality.

Sacrificing complexity and succumbing to the seductive power of partial ideology is a move that is neither intellectually or politically redemptive; but the gesture is initially appealing as it volunteers simple explanations that purportedly lend themselves to equally simple redressal and resolution. This is true of any single-issue polemic. Thus, in a critical political economy scheme, if class is defined as the primary oppression, then the assumption is that its removal will result in egalitarian human

¹⁸³ Amin, 1997:48

relations. In this depiction, the valorization of working-class struggle becomes the prerequisite for a utopian social condition of equivalence.

The rhetorical response to single-issue truisms is, ostensibly, will widespread social justice actually emerge with the dissolution of capitalism? That this is a highly unlikely development is a banal observation at best, but one which seems to escape economic determinists of both radical and conservative breeds. Naturally, the pure concentration on class effaces the consideration of power expressed through gender and cultural difference as elemental features of human existence; and the freedom won is artificial and partial at best.

A more productive deliberation for political economists may be the examination of class in relation to interrogating other structural inequities. Racism and patriarchy, in terms of doling out privilege and punishment, are systems similar in function to class, and characterized by parallel effects; however, they are not to be vertically ordered as less or more significant. An analysis which foregrounds the intersection of plural social forces in a horizontal arrangement most convincingly illuminates the functions of plural centers of power defining the postmodern condition and its beleaguered heir, globalization, now synonymous with the process of cultural dispersion and disorganized capital.

The nature of late modernity, or post-modernity, demands new analysis and reconceptualizations of traditional academic and political categories. Proletarianization is one, but not the *only* site of conflict; there are multiple axes of subjugation, such as race and gender, which cannot be held hostage to class.¹⁸⁴ The misguided subsumption of these factors to a monocausal politic is a dangerous maneuver, for it ignores the manifold

¹⁸⁴ Appadurai, 1997; Amin, 1997; Dirlik, 1997; Featherstone et al, 1995; Spivak, 1995; Mattelart, 1983

ways power attempts to repeat and renew itself. Beginning from this basic recognition -- namely that oppression and liberation cannot be theorized through unidimensional experiences or formations -- cultural materialism is able to deliver a much more sophisticated, nuanced, and elaborate understanding of the social scene than the parochial claims of orthodox political economy.

VI. THE TASK OF THEORY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

Cultural materialist methodology is an indispensable analytical tool if we take into account the interlocking operations of culture and class in a concrete manner. The task of theory is infinitely complicated in today's world. The appearance of scattered hegemonies¹⁸⁵, augured by the advent of transnational politics, translates into the fact that power is pervasive throughout all social relations, making it difficult to isolate one identifiable entity as *the* solitary dominating force. For instance, power is no longer polarized or centered around class segregation alone (if it ever really was, historically speaking); late twentieth-century globalization starkly underlines the interconnections of financial, racial and gender flows in landscapes of contemporary societies in unprecedented ways.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Grewal and Kaplan, 1997 and Gayatri Spivak, 1995

¹⁸⁶ Many thinkers have pointed out that globalization is not a new phenomena, for people, money, goods, and ideas have always travelled throughout history. However, here globalization is the specific name given to a late-twentieth century phenomena, in recognition of the fact that the nature of interconnection has changed because of the post-modern compression of space and time enabled by technology. Second, the interrogation of patriarchy, race and normative sexuality within and outside Eurocentred space is another feature of late modernity - although these interrogations have not yet succeeded in large-scale transformation, or enabled the installation of new hegemonies. Lastly, the interaction between the world's nation-states, outside of direct colonial relations, is another novelty as far as the relatively young history of nation-states is concerned. By this I mean that the installation of nation-states is a modern phenomena, which has been in existence globally for perhaps 200 years, as an adopted or imposed formation in the majority of the world. Relations between formal states (as opposed to pre-modern structures of government) were originally conceived as core-periphery links, as per a colonial scheme. The current era represents a rupture of those explicit metropole-satellite formations. However, colonial relations continue to operate in circumspect ways - the language has changed, but the practices have not. The only discernible difference between colonialism and postcolonialism is the removal of direct foreign political rule in the colonies. Sometimes even the removal of that rule is not complete (i.e. Martinique is still a French protectorate, as Northern Ireland is of the British). More accurately it may be said that in the majority of cases, direct rule has been withdrawn, but there are still a handful of cases where even this minimal condition of postcoloniality - political decolonization - remains to be fulfilled. And in those colonies where political decolonization is a reality, economic and cultural colonization, still continue to exert considerable force. For a detailed discussion pertaining to this, see Amin, Capitalism in the Age of Globalization, and Eurocentrism.

Globalization has had two major consequences. Samir Amin cites the “erosion of the autocentred nation-state” and the dissolution of clearly demarcated center-periphery relations as two elements of the present world system¹⁸⁷. As Luke opines, citing Appadurai, “the internationalized neo-world orders consist of the replacement of national organizations by global flows in the familiar set of media, techno, info, and finanscapes”¹⁸⁸. The multinational firm increasingly manages these flows, thereby relegating the nation-state to the periphery. Amin clarifies further:

A new contradiction now characterizes world capitalism: on the one hand, the centres of gravity of the economic forces commanding accumulation have shifted outside the frontiers of individual states; on the other hand, there is no political, social, ideological and cultural framework at world level that can give coherence to the overall management of the system. In its political dimension, then, management of the crisis consists in trying to suppress the second term of the contradiction - the state - in such a way as to impose management of society by ‘the market’ as the only rule.¹⁸⁹

Amin succinctly underlines the premise behind the expansion of capital. The proliferation of extra-national forces supervising sociopolitical transactions means a reduction of the state’s significance as custodian and manager of national culture, and thus signals a realignment of allegiance from nations to a ‘metastate’ responsible for “the untrammelled financialization of the globe.”¹⁹⁰ The multinational firm, of course, epitomizes the promotion of these denationalized values.

¹⁸⁷ Amin, 1997:3

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Featherstone et al, 1995:8; Appadurai, 1994:328-329

¹⁸⁹ Amin, 1997:xi. Jameson, 1993 and Mattelart, 1983 also agree with these comments.

¹⁹⁰ Quote from Spivak, 1995:177; ‘metastate’ is from Sol Yurick, 1995; Mattelart, 1983 and Amin 1997 agree with this comment. According to them, capitalism is in crisis and thus extends its tentacles globally, in order to ensure greater and greater profits, by setting up subsidiaries in places where cheap raw materials and cheap labour are available. Also, through mergers and big business initiatives, Western companies aim to seal their dominance in the global market. However, these are all signs of how desperate capitalism is, that it must engage in a constant struggle to maintain its hegemony, which has been weakened in any case by large-scale social movements. This view is actually endorsed in the book *Postimperialism*, which is a treatise highly biased in favour of capitalism - but it also admits that winning over a global market is an

According to the logic of the transnational economic order, then, ideally the national-popular identity is to be renounced in favour of a supranational corporate identity masquerading as humane agent of global unity. Sol Yurick ruminates on the question of membership in the metastate:

What are the characteristic features of the population that inhabits the Metastate as against those who inhabit a nation-state? This (these) population(s) come from many nations...joined together for certain periods of time for certain purposes. They seem to have an international discourse...devoted to accumulation and the conquest of nature. One could say that this international population constitutes a ruling class in classic, Marxist terms. If, in fact, it engages in class and intra-class struggles...it is not so much over shared interests as over unshared access to markets, profits, and power: a way of doing things.¹⁹¹

The benign rhetoric of economic institutions attempts to conceal the malign design of a "distorting culturalism," representing a liberal multicultural posture -- no more than "an important public relations move in the apparent winning of consent from developing countries in the dominant project of the financialization of the globe" for Spivak.¹⁹²

Speaking of the consequences of this type of financialization, Mattelart expands on the nature of late modern capital's flirtation with ideology, in Transnationals and the Third World.¹⁹³ Citing a study which concluded "the specific characteristic of the hypermodern corporation and of neo-capitalist society is the spectacular extension of the power of the economic sphere into the political, ideological, and psychological spheres," he notes the multinational unit is not only a disseminator of (usually Western) goods and values in the financial economy, but is concurrently "*a producer of culture*, that is, a as a

inordinately difficult task. To keep the machinery of capitalism in process, the essays blatantly set out ways in which marketers can strategically urge various populations of the South to enter as citizens of the global economic order. The book triumphantly documents capitalist hegemony in motion and unabashedly encourages the discourse of free market values.

¹⁹¹ Yurick, 1995:213

producer of models of social relations between individuals, representations, attitudes, and behaviour"¹⁹⁴ - that is, it enshrines the "way of doing things" to which Yurick alludes.

As cultural producer, then, capital creates an idealized image of itself as a messiah of freedom.

Discursively, this has been made possible as capitalism increasingly enters a global system of economic signification under the protective pseudonym of *democracy*. The complex chain of signifiers collapses free markets, economic growth, political progress, and individual agency into a specialized lexicon attached exclusively to the liberatory force of capitalism and its accoutrements. Certainly, the use of the term *liberalization* in the structural adjustment discourse of the IMF and World Bank tantalizingly suggests the arrival of an emancipatory force capable of injecting new life into the nation-state.¹⁹⁵ However, it tellingly indicates the need for Third World countries to 'open up' to foreign investment - even as the Eurocentred nations who engage in most of the investing rarely open up their own borders to foreign investors.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Spivak, 1995:183

¹⁹³ Mattelart, 1983:71

¹⁹⁴ Mattelart, 1983: 68, my emphasis.

¹⁹⁵ As a condition of receiving loans for projects, or funds to meet the balance of payments, global lending institutions often impose a set of conditions in the forms of structural adjustment plans (SAPs). Inevitably, SAPs recommend opening countries to foreign investment as a way of attracting foreign currency and thus restoring an acceptable balance of credit. However, SAPs tend to attack social security networks, oppose nationalized corporations, and discourage any tendencies of protectionism or import-substitution policies that may endanger the profit prospects for foreign corporations.

¹⁹⁶ Amin, 1997, explains more on this, describing the double standard applied to First World and Third World countries in trade regulations. While Western countries, and Japan, are allowed to maintain a protectionist economic policy, the South is regularly pressured into so-called liberalization, that allows foreign companies to benefit from the South's inexpensive raw materials, relatively lower cost of production, deregulated labour rights, lesser wages, and minimal environmental protection standards. To circumvent preexisting national statutes that guarantee labour, wage and environmental rights, many countries set up free trade zones or export-oriented zones to attract investors. Those aforementioned rights are not enforceable in these zones, thereby removing the major obstacles to profit for multinational companies. The South also provides new and populous markets for foreign companies (China and India alone have a sizeable middle class that are now successfully tapped as consumers of Western goods and services).

The diminishing of the state, especially in the Third World, is heralded as victory for the capital accumulation process - euphemistically called the free market - while identitarians have resorted to nationalism and fundamentalism to bolster their cultural interests.¹⁹⁷ This accounts for the second manifestation of globalization in terms of the radical reshaping of cultural notions.

A quantitative rise in ethnoscares - collectives comprised of immigrants, refugees, tourists, and temporary labourers - is one feature of the remaking. The rise of orthodox nationalist doctrines - whether residual, emergent or intensified status quo - is another.¹⁹⁸ Conceived partly as a response to the onslaught of consumer cultures and their homogenizing tendencies, partly as a result of post-colonial negotiations of identity, fundamentalist dogmas have made a comeback in late modernity - not only confined to indigenous geopolitical boundaries, but evermore in diasporas¹⁹⁹. Thus, diasporic nostalgia for a secure place on the map, for the possession of territory, sustains freedom-fighters and justifies the actions of national governments alike.

As a result of these two factors, the notion of culture is more polysemic than ever, fluid, shifting, and decentralized (always already *becoming*, to resurrect Hall). By this I mean the dislocation of cultures is occurring at a rapid speed; culture is not specifiably contained within a geographical border; and the topographies of identity are increasingly

¹⁹⁷ Amin, 1997:55

¹⁹⁸ Appadurai, 1997: "Global Ethnoscares" and "Consumption, Duration, and History" vividly illustrate the impact of asserting ethnic identity today.

¹⁹⁹ At least, the anti-imperialist, anti-foreign argument has been embraced by ideologues to bolster their claims of authentically representing the national polity, even as it conceals the very problematic construction of new ideological binaries, and even more, used as justification for internal colonialisms, the suppression of dissidents, and those who disagree with the terms of the dominant social contract.

dispersed, newly baptized as *hybrid*.²⁰⁰ Although none of this is necessarily a novelty in content, the changes in form are emblematic of late modernity; the velocity of change, and the multiplicity of dominative forces, determine the difference between the present moment and history.

It is this contested terrain of power named globalization -- marked by converging political, economic, and cultural dilemmas -- that requires sustained theoretical analysis and intervention; the matter of prime importance is to produce a counter-discourse that is sophisticated and complex enough to address the multiple narratives promulgated in the speed and force of globalizing regimes.

As the role of critical discourse is an exigent matter in light of contemporary world situations, the predictable assignments -- orthodox economists speaking on world-systems theories, ethnographers fixating on cultural difference -- no longer hold. Political economy is not sufficient as an answer to the complexities of the international order of things, for in the era of disorganized capital, there isn't a centralized structure of oppression which can be effectively critiqued, reformed, or dismantled. All the evidence shows class oppression is not the sole system driving planetary hegemony.

Additionally, classical studies of culture are equally inadequate for fully considering the rise of dispersed communities and fragmented identities. Mainstream anthropology - which traditionally seized on culture as its existential alibi - has come under assault following the postmodern turn in social studies. Its prime failing, as a

²⁰⁰ The hybrid identity is an ambivalent one, as it is accused of inauthenticity, and identified as a valuable resource in terms of its ability to absorb the privileges of the new world. This is especially true for migrants from the Third World into the West, who are perceived in paradoxical ways: as morally compromised and culturally alienated, but materially affluent, and privileged by their acquisition of Western status which facilitates their social mobility. The contest between cultural authenticity and economic privilege entails

number of critics have already pointed out, is its exoticization of an objectified Other somewhere *over there*. As a result, it is barely equipped to theorize the connection of the Other as the mirror of a splintered self grounded *here*. Even the most self-reflexive anthropology is received with great skepticism because of its politically suspect ancestry as colonial handmaiden.

However, much of critical discourse has, prematurely I think, signalled the demise of specific subjectivities in the name of an apolitically hybrid cosmopolitanism. There is only quiet mention of imperialism, appropriation and commodification, as these concepts appear to be remnants of a rather arcane and outdated political language in the newer days of the global village. And so we have the backlash of liberalism with a vengeance. Its proponents, armed with the fiction of a post-identity, indeed post-oppressive world, argue technology and capitalism have equalized the cultural field, and suggest all players have the same access to all kinds of privilege. The anonymous populace of Technocapital has shed all other allegiance.

Implicitly, there is a crumbling security that domination over others once provided, especially in the West, and the deliberate minimizing of that domination's effects. To have the new hybridity available without guilt, apologists of the global village thesis must distance themselves from the reality and history of oppression by calling out a new universal of Technocapital Hybridity. Under the masquerade of locating the universal, they instate a position reminiscent of Arnold, invoking free market values, demanding the automatic exit of politics - unnecessary, after all, in a world where justice has already prevailed. The fictions of justice, and the rhetoric of the universal, hold off

the constant negotiation of a trade-off - an appeal can be made to the superlative value of one of these items,

radical changes which allegedly signal the minoritization of those currently in power - to speak to the fears of believers in reverse discrimination. These fictions need to be put into a context of power relations that a cultural materialist thesis can provide.

The remarkable transitions culture has gone through in its history - from *culture* to *multiculture*, perhaps even *post-culture*, with the impending dissolution in the shadow of late modern capital regimes - index its contradictory invocations in the singular, as the modernist idea of culture as civilization, as well as in the plural, as the postmodern notion of cultures embodying the politics of difference.²⁰¹ The urgency of forming a viable response to the new social formations of postmodern transnationalism is particularly evident at this juncture, and the praxis of a materialist cultural studies is our best hope for a sophisticated counter-narrative enabling critical examination of the conceptual and procedural supports of globalization and its cultural discontents, its ever-shifting contours and grounds.

depending on the imperatives of the moment.

²⁰¹ And now, perhaps, we can conjure culture in a state of subtraction, as it appears to be replaced (in the eyes of some) by a homogenized capitalist global village. I do not believe this will actually come to pass, because culture will always carry the power of affect and an imaginary kinship for constituencies of a given political, or geographic, or identity-based space.

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