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# NST

**Nature, Society, and Thought**  

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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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**NST**

University of Minnesota  
116 Church Street S.E.  
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Nature, Society, and Thought

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# Franz Neumann's Theory of Modern Dictatorship

Roger Boesche

Franz Neumann is perhaps the most overlooked member of the Frankfurt School. While one searches almost in vain for scholarly articles on Neumann's thought, even good books on the Frankfurt School pay his analyses comparatively scant attention. Such neglect has stemmed in part from the relatively small quantity of Neumann's scholarly publications and in part from the fact that he influenced subsequent scholars by being a dynamic teacher of brilliant students (Peter Gay, Fritz Stern, and many others). In addition, a large number of commentators apparently embraced the facile assumption that *Behemoth*, a 1942 analysis of Nazi Germany, must have been superseded by works with later dates of publications; too many scholars gave too much weight to the factual inaccuracies of *Behemoth* and thereby failed to appreciate the superbly intricate theoretical analysis; and finally Neumann became a victim of Cold War scholarship that assumed his "Marxist" analysis of both Nazi Germany and also liberal democracies must be dogmatic propaganda. As H. Stuart Hughes put it, "hasty or hostile readers frequently dismissed Neumann's interpretation as Marxist and simplistic" (1975, 100–119, esp. 107; MacMahon 1954).<sup>1</sup> Certainly, some historians of modern Europe have recognized Neumann's importance. Hughes called *Behemoth* "the classic examination of [German] fascism in power" and a work with the "ring of profound intellectual responsibility." The French

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historian Pierre Aycoberry described Neumann's great work as "the first of the classics," and suggested that "in nearly every one of its chapters [one discovers] the seeds of the investigations of later historians" (Hughes 1975, 82, 117, 100–119; Aycoberry 1981, 97).<sup>2</sup>

But while Neumann's *Behemoth* is certainly a seminal analysis of Nazi Germany, it is also, woven amidst his empirical investigation, a great work of political theory, perhaps the best theoretical analysis of tyranny in this century, an analysis quite obviously leaning upon previous theoretical work of Montesquieu, Marx, Freud, and Weber. Like others in the Frankfurt School, Neumann sought to use a modified Marxist analysis to understand the origins and functioning of Nazi tyranny, and especially why "the underprivileged masses" came to support National Socialism (Marcuse 1957, ix).<sup>3</sup> In a later essay entitled "Notes on the Theory of Dictatorship," Neumann groped toward a more comprehensive theory of tyranny, or what he preferred to call "dictatorship." Showing how well he knew both Aristotle and Montesquieu, he rejected both the words *tyranny* and *despotism*, charging that the former word involved a somewhat arbitrary rejection of governments one believes to be unrestrained and unconstitutional, whereas the latter word is emotionally laden with prejudicial rejections of so-called "Oriental" forms of government. "Tyranny and despotism," wrote Neumann, "have no precise meaning." What he wished to undertake, but could not because of an early and accidental death, was a "systematic study of dictatorship," looking at and comparing the workings of not only twentieth-century dictatorships but also those from the distant past. At most Neumann could begin the process of outlining "the theoretical problems encountered in the analysis of dictatorship" (1957f, 233–35).

His definition of dictatorship was straightforward. "By dictatorship we understand the rule of a person or a group of persons who arrogate to themselves and monopolize power in the state, exercising it without constraint." (Ironically, and confusingly, the Roman dictatorship—with authority and power clearly circumscribed—does not fit Neumann's definition.) Neumann outlined three types of dictatorship. First, in a *simple*



*dictatorship* the dictator maintains power almost completely through the predictable means of coercion, including the army, the secret police, and a dependent judiciary. Second, in a *Caesaristic dictatorship* the dictator builds up “popular support” and “[secures] a mass base” personally loyal to him or her. Third, in a *totalitarian dictatorship* those with power seek “to control education, the means of communication and economic institutions and thus to gear the whole of society and the private life of the citizen to the system of political domination.” Totalitarian dictatorships may or may not be Caesaristic (1957f, 233–36).

Analyzing dictatorships, Neumann suggested, is more difficult than ever before, because, unlike in the time of Tiberius and unlike in the era of Louis XIV, even the cruelest dictatorships dominate and tyrannize while proclaiming themselves defenders of freedom and democracy. Neumann quoted Guizot's famous remark that “no government or party . . . believes it can exist without inscribing [the word *democracy*] upon its banner.” Even the worst dictators such as Hitler seek, at some level, “to play the democratic game” and “practice the ritual of democracy.” Thus, the most effective dictatorships tyrannize their populations while both mobilizing popular support and also convincing citizens that their oppression is a higher and nobler form of democratic freedom. Opposing modern dictatorships—that is, convincing individuals that their perceived freedom is only disguised servitude—is, argued Neumann, no easy task. Finally, in arguing that liberal democracy and dictatorship were not polar opposites, Neumann sought to show, as we will see later, that modern dictatorships such as those in Italy and Germany often arose from and flourished upon the political and economic preconditions fostered so routinely, almost automatically, by liberal democracy (1957f, 236–37, 248–49).

In reading Neumann's discussion of the Nazi dictatorship, one finds not only an analytical framework, but also a political philosophy answering questions about human freedom and human needs. Both a legal scholar and a political philosopher, Neumann defined freedom as (1) the absence of restraints, or to put it another way, the guarantee of civil rights as a protection

from both private economic power and public political power, and (2) in an Aristotelian and Marxian sense, with a nod toward Freud late in his life as he reworked the theories of alienation by Hegel and Marx, the development of human potential, and the meeting of genuine human needs. “Freedom is more than the defense of rights against power; it involves as well the possibility of developing man’s potentialities to the fullest.” Every significant scholar, thought Neumann, must bring a philosophy of freedom to bear on his or her work, and every philosophy must be critical, because nowhere have men and women attained human liberation. “Since no political system can realize political freedom fully, political theory must by necessity be critical.” Critical thinking reveals how far short of authentic freedom any society has fallen. Neumann himself hoped for a democratic socialism that would meet the “universal interests” (in a Hegelian and Marxian sense) of humanity, that would bring a “humanization of politics” in which “the words of idealism become history” (1957d, 173, 162; 1957b, 18; 1957h, 294–95).

As an emigré from Hitler’s Germany, Neumann was pessimistic about the possibility of immediate and dramatic steps toward human liberation, and, consequently, he sought instead to analyze rigorously the oppression of the present. The analytical framework he used to examine any society originated from a conviction found in Hegel, Marx, and most especially Montesquieu—the conviction that each society is an interrelated whole in which each individual component from classes to political institutions, from economic production to personality structure, from laws to ideas, reinforces every other. “Each society has, according to [Montesquieu], a specific structure and follows its own inner logic. . . . Each nation being thus an essential unit, it is folly to isolate phenomena and to attempt to understand them if they are not seen in their interdependence.” To suggest that society is a “structure” or a “unity,” argued Neumann, does not lead one to embrace a static or ahistorical analysis, because change generated by one part of the structure—for example, a new need developed by the military or the industrial sector—reverberates and alters the entire structure. In fact, and this is Neumann’s Marxian conviction, the class

structure and the demands of economic development will be the key determining factors—not the sole determining factor—in determining the precise outlines of this social structure and how it forces change over time. Finally, enlivening any interrelated social structure is what Montesquieu called the “spirit” of the society, a complex term embracing morals, customs, behavior, motivations, ideas, indeed the very “character” of a society (1957c, 119–20, 128; 1957f, 250).

***Isolation, loneliness, and powerlessness***

Neumann found some truth in the retort by Nazi propagandists that liberal democratic societies become no more than “an aggregate of Robinson Crusoes,” not pluralistic societies composed of influential groups and associations, but rather atomized scatterings of isolated and powerless individuals. Such atomization formed the foundation, not the cause, of all modern dictatorships. Just as Montesquieu and Tocqueville had argued that despotism must destroy intermediate institutions between the individual and the state, so Neumann suggested that National Socialism, while carefully defending the class structure of society, consciously sought to atomize individuals “through the destruction of every autonomous group mediating between them and the state.” The conservative critics De Maistre and Bonald were right, according to Neumann, in suggesting that liberal democracy and capitalism would create lonely “mass men,” dissociated from one another, unattached and homeless, easily manipulated. While National Socialism and other modern dictatorships did not create this trend toward atomization, they all succeeded in accentuating and exploiting it. “Such groups as the family and the church, the solidarity arising from common work in plants, shops, and offices are deliberately broken down.” How do dictatorships accentuate the modern tendency toward atomization and isolation? First, by destroying or outlawing traditional groups such as political parties, trade unions, and associations of any kind. (In Myanmar—formerly Burma—it has been illegal for five persons to gather together.) And second, by using fear to create an intense psychological isolation, “making it

impossible for anyone to rely on anyone else" (1944, 42, 366–67, 400, 524; also 1957c, 106–9).

Isolated and lonely, detached from previous ties to families and communities, to groups and associations, the individual still seeks to belong to some large and meaningful entity, usually a political movement and frequently one that is ethnically or racially based. Examples in 1992 might include the various movements all over the world for an ethnically based territory or nation, or the Pan-Arabism of the Ba‘thist movement in Iraq. In Nazi Germany, according to Neumann, German citizens were denied a genuine political community and thereby an arena for political participation, so they embraced the illusory, and ultimately unsatisfying, “people’s community” or *Volks-gemeinschaft*, allegedly a broader community of the nation, transcending class, region, associations, and even families. “The natural structure of society is dissolved and replaced by an abstract ‘people’s community,’ which hides the complete depersonalization of human relations and the isolation of man from man.” National Socialism thus actively sought to create a new “type of man determined by his isolation and insignificance, who is driven by this very fact into a collective body where he shares in the power and glory of the medium of which he has become a part” (1944, 402; 1957d, 185–86; al-Khalil 1990, chaps. 3 and 7).

Of course the “people’s community” or *Volks-gemeinschaft* was a propagandistic sham that hardly erased feelings of loneliness. Two companions of such isolation are powerlessness and anxiety. Having experienced defeat in war, devastating inflation and depression, and the disruptions of the Weimar political system, Germans in the early 1930s already experienced “moral, social, and political homelessness.” The Nazis quite consciously attempted to accentuate this feeling of homelessness “to foster helplessness and hopelessness among the people” and thereby to create “an individual who feels overwhelmed by his own inefficacy,” an individual thus readied to do or to believe almost anything. Powerless individuals are easy to control, even more so if they are captivated by anxiety. Here Neumann used Freud to modify Montesquieu. Whereas Montesquieu was correct in

noting that all despotisms rely on fear, he might well have added, according to Neumann, that despotism must inculcate and even institutionalize a “depressive and persecutory anxiety.” “The caesaristic movement,” wrote Neumann, “is compelled not only to activate but to institutionalize anxiety” (1957h, 287; 1944, 96; 1957h, 291).

Such anxiety leads easily to obedience to a leader and to a false sense of unity based on a fomented hatred for a fabricated enemy. Without acknowledging Freud in his earlier work, Neumann maintained that anxious and powerless individuals look to obey powerful leaders (father figures?) who will supposedly save them from their helplessness. “It is not only anxiety that drives men to embrace superstition, but inability to understand the reasons for their helplessness, misery, and degradation. . . . Like primitive men, they look for a savior to fend off their misery and deliver them from destitution.” After admittedly borrowing from both Freud and Erich Fromm in his later work, Neumann suggested that isolated men and women seek to overcome anxiety through “ego surrender” to a powerful leader (1944, 96; 1957h, 288). “But how was the people to be integrated, despite all cleavages of class, party, religion? Only through hatred of an enemy.” With the Bolsheviks too strong and the Catholic church too entrenched, hatred for Jews provided essential psychological leverage for uniting anxious individuals. Like Fromm, Neumann focused on status anxiety, the anxiety of the middle-classes—which he likened to the anxiety in the United States felt by poor whites in their hostility toward Blacks—“doomed” by inflation, depression, and rapid economic and technological change. National Socialism easily channeled this middle-class anxiety into anti-Semitism. “The Nazi-Fascist movement activated the anxieties of the middle classes and turned them into channels of destruction which were made legitimate by means of the masses’ identification with a leader, the hero” (1957h, 287, 284–85; 1957f, 251–53). Neumann would argue, I think, that racial hatred substitutes itself for class tensions and genuine democratic reform in liberal democracies such as the United States and Germany in 1992, as well as the many ethnically based states in what was formerly the Soviet

Union. Similarly, Saddam Hussein uses racist appeals against Jews, Kurds, and so-called Persians to unite Iraqis in a movement of Pan-Arabism (al-Khalil 1990, 24, 262–64).

In seeking total control over even the individual's private life and thoughts, totalitarian dictatorship sought to top Pisistratus who had boasted that he "told the puppets how to dance." Education became propaganda and labor became regimentation, as National Socialism sought total control over the individual "from the earliest childhood to the oldest man." Neumann most chillingly described this attempt at total control in the manipulation of leisure, which, far from spontaneous enjoyment, became no more than relaxation so one could collect one's strength for work (1957f, 238; 1944, 429–30). Such control of leisure only symbolized for Neumann the Nazi attempt to control the most minute details of one's life and thought.

There must be no social intercourse outside the prescribed totalitarian organizations. Workers must not talk to each other. They march together under military discipline. Fathers, mothers, and children shall not discuss those things that concern them most, their work. A civil servant must not talk about his job, a worker must not even tell his family what he produces. . . . Even leisure time is completely organized, down to such minute details as the means of transportation provided by the authoritarian Strength through Joy organization. (1944, 401)

Like Marcuse, Neumann saw similar, if far less conscious and structured, attempts to control leisure in liberal democracies as well.

How could a modern dictatorship hope to bring about such control? Once more, as Montesquieu and Tocqueville had maintained, isolation, powerlessness, and anxiety were the key factors, because these made individuals subject to manipulation by mass organization, propaganda, and terror. First, "the atomization and isolation of the individual" rendered the individual lost and lonely in "huge and undifferentiated mass organizations" and therefore "more easily manipulable." Indeed the National Socialist principle of social organization involved

driving “workers into huge organizations where they are submerged; they lose their individuality, march, sing, and hike together but never think together” (1957f, 245; 1944, 430). Second, saturated with propaganda, such individuals cannot think critically. “Propaganda creates the conditions of spiritual exhaustion which makes critical thinking impossible, not through its completely insignificant content, but through endless repetition.” National Socialism transformed culture and education into propaganda, borrowed from the science of psychology that had experimented with the “management of men” in order to perfect the manipulation of individuals, and consciously played upon the status anxiety of the middle classes by giving them a theory of Jewish conspiracy and thereby a concrete enemy for their anger. As early as his writing of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler noted the power of propaganda on isolated individuals (1957g, 267; 1957e, 205; 1957f, 245; 1957h, 287, 293).

The mass meeting is necessary if only for the reason that in it the individual . . . feels lonely and is easily seized with the fear of being alone, receives for the first time the picture of a greater community, something that has a strengthening and an encouraging effect on most people. . . . If he steps for the first time out of his small workshop or out of the big enterprise, in which he feels very small, into the mass meeting and is now surrounded by thousands and thousands of people with the same conviction, . . . he himself succumbs to the magic influence of what we call mass suggestion. (1944, 439)

Finally, individuals who feel alone and powerless, separated from any group that might offer protection, are overwhelmed by the terror used by totalitarian dictatorship, and indeed the Nazis engaged in a process of “isolating the worker and terrorizing him.” Terror or “non-calculable violence” hovering as a “permanent threat” against each individual is essential to such a tyranny. By using terror and genocide mainly but not exclusively against Jews, the Nazis set about “to make the whole people into accomplices,” unsuccessfully according to Neumann. Anxiety and collective guilt did play an important role, however, because

in committing crimes, even those ordered by the authority of the Leader and the Party, the Nazis transformed the normal anxiety present in any political order into repressed guilt and “a nearly panicky” anxiety that could “be overcome only through unconditional surrender to the leader [which thus compelled] the commission of new crimes” (1944, 424; 1957f, 245; 1954g, 300, 293).

### *The leadership principle*

Despite criticisms of liberal democracy—for being weak, for its supposed inability to act, for its lack of unity because liberal democracies are composed of millions of Robinson Crusoes—Nazi theorists still waved the banner of democracy, proclaiming loudly that National Socialism was a higher form of democracy. Genuine democracy, according to Nazi ideology, embraces equality and “the principle that there is an identity between the rulers and the ruled,” and in providing this identity, it creates a unified government, a government that transcends and overcomes the divisions of provinces, classes, parliaments, state institutions, interest groups, and corporations. By this logic only a strong government unified by a leader constitutes genuine democracy. Possessing both legislative and executive powers, the leader could stand “above the petty quarrels of the numerous interests, public agencies, and states.” As a principle that allegedly facilitates democracy, Leadership was not, according to Nazi theorists, a form of domination, because it unified the nation, brought about the identification of the people with the government, and was based on “voluntary consent.” Although the people do not, of course, authorize the power of the Leader, because that would imply the authority to revoke it, they do “recognize” this power. Such unity brought about by surrendering all power to the Leader also solved the problems of inaction and political paralysis, leading directly to what Nazi theorist Carl Schmitt called “decisionism,” or “action instead of deliberation, . . . decision instead of evaluation” (Neumann 1944, 42–45, 136, 47–49, 66, 83–84).

In Nazi ideology, Hitler as supreme Leader “combines the



functions of supreme legislator, supreme administrator, and supreme judge; he is the leader of the party, the army, and the people. In his person, the power of the state, the people, and the movement are unified." At first Hitler was merely Chancellor, then effectively Chancellor and President, then Leader for life ("although no one knows whence his constitutional rights are derived"), and finally, "his power is legally and constitutionally unlimited; it is futile to attempt to describe it. A concept that is boundless cannot be rationally defined." Relying on Weber, Neumann noted that Hitler's authority was based on charisma, the belief that "the Leader is endowed with qualities lacking in ordinary mortals. Superhuman qualities emanate from him and pervade the state, party, and people" (Neumann 1944, 83–85).

In offering a political theory of modern dictatorship, Neumann argued that such powerful, charismatic dictators emerge, not simply because of some innate human urge to accumulate power, but rather when a conjunction of many events creates the preconditions for totalitarian dictatorship. Lord Acton's famous dictum that "absolute power corrupts absolutely" is no more than a "facile half-true generalization." Indeed, the charismatic rule of the totalitarian dictator only "becomes a powerful stimulus once the proper psychological and social conditions are set." By producing atomized societies composed of isolated, powerless, depoliticized, and anxious individuals, liberal democracy and developing capitalism have made the modern world ripe for such dictators. Neumann agreed with conservative nineteenth-century thinkers, one of whom, appalled at the fragmentation of society, predicted "the most gigantic and the most destructive [despotism] that men have ever seen," and Neumann thought Spengler was right in predicting that Caesarism was a predictable outcome of liberal democracy (1957b, 4; 1944, 85, 195–96; also 1957h, 276, 279, 288, 293; 1957f, 253).

### ***Modern dictatorship and a qualitatively new kind of terror***

Although violence and fear mark every tyranny, Neumann claimed as early as 1941, in writing the first edition of

*Behemoth*, that the terror of National Socialism was historically unique. “National Socialism,” wrote Neumann, “is the first Anti-Semitic movement to advocate the complete destruction of the Jews.” Although Jews were suffering the brunt of the terror, Neumann also noted that Nazi violence, following a racial ideology we have yet to examine, was directed toward Jews first, but also toward all allegedly inferior persons, for example, Poles and Slavs, the physically disabled, and the mentally ill. Nazi population policy, for instance, gave two commands—“to the German women, whether married or not, the commandment to produce children; to the SS, the commandment to kill those who are not fit to live.” It is this violence, falling almost exclusively on the innocent and harmless, that set National Socialism apart from previous dictatorships. Neumann made this point by contrasting Nazism to Stalinism, although we know now he was too generous to the latter. “In this respect, National Socialism and Bolshevism are utterly divergent. Not the persecution of political opponents—which is practiced in both countries—but the extermination of helpless individuals is the prerogative of National Socialism.” As he put it in a speech in 1951, we must distinguish between the violence of past tyrannies and that of twentieth-century dictatorships. In the past, violence was a somewhat selective “retributive justice” against identifiable and genuine opponents, whereas in our century it has become “irrational terror” against the innocent. “Between a penal justice, no matter how brutal, and terror there exists not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference” (1944, 111–13; 1957g, 266–67).

In the second edition of *Behemoth*, published in 1944, Neumann began to offer some tentative answers as to why Nazi anti-Semitism was uniquely murderous. First, the Nazis needed an enemy. Not only did they need to direct the hostility of anxious individuals toward an alleged conspiracy, but having supposedly abolished the class struggle, the Nazis needed an enemy against whom the key groups and classes could unite. Such an enemy could be neither too weak nor too strong, and Jews fit this prescription perfectly. Second, Neumann concluded that the Jews were not a scapegoat, because a scapegoat implied that there could be some final, expiating sacrifice, whereas terror

against Jews only brought more terror against both Jews and many other groups. Instead, concluded Neumann, Nazi anti-Semitism was “the spearhead of terror,” the prototype of terror to be used against other peoples in both imperial expansion and the destruction of free institutions everywhere.

An understanding of Anti-Semitism is impaired by the widely accepted scapegoat theory, according to which the Jews are used as scapegoats for all evils of society. The slaughter or the expulsion of the scapegoat, however, marks in mythology the end of a process, while the persecution of the Jews, as practiced by National Socialists, is only the prologue of more horrible things to come. The expropriation of the Jews, for instance, is followed by that of the Poles, Czechs, Dutch, French, anti-Nazi Germans, and middle classes. Not only Jews are put in concentration camps, but pacifists, conservatives, socialists, Catholics, Protestants, Free Thinkers, and members of the occupied peoples. Not only Jews fall under the executioner's ax but so do countless others of many races, nationalities, beliefs, and religions. Anti-Semitism is thus the spearhead of terror. The Jews are used as guinea pigs in testing the method of repression . . . It follows that in this Anti-Semitic ideology and practice the extermination of the Jews is only the means to the attainment of the ultimate objective, namely the destruction of free institutions, beliefs, and groups. This may be called the spearhead theory of Anti-Semitism. (1944, 550–51; also 125–27)

Neumann contended, therefore, that anti-Semitism in Germany was useful to the Nazis and largely contrived, not some indigenous characteristic of the German people. Anti-Semitic legislation proceeded relentlessly but gradually from 1933 on when needed by the Nazis either to motivate the population or to distract them from larger problems. “Spontaneous, popular Anti-Semitism is still weak in Germany. . . . The writer's personal conviction, paradoxical as it may seem, is that the German people are the least Anti-Semitic of all” (1944, 121; also 1957h, 286). In a saddening thought for the late twentieth century, when

ethnic nationalism and ethnic conflict are flooding over borders around the globe, Neumann noted how easily a dictatorship can mobilize subjects with racist and ethnic appeals, thereby obscuring the real problems of class conflict and genuine democratic change. "Racism and Anti-Semitism are substitutes for class struggle" (1944, 125).

### *Of political parties and bureaucracies*

In totalitarian dictatorship a "monopolistic" political party plays the pre-eminent role. First, the existence of a party allows the ruling elite to claim to be part of a democratic movement, one that practices the "rituals" of democracy and thus supposedly answers to the people. Second, the party is the weapon of attack against any possible opposition. Because the state bureaucracy, the army, the trade unions, the judiciary, and so forth are threateningly unreliable, the party can both attack and control these potential sources of opposition. "The monopolistic party is a flexible instrument which provides the force to control the state machine and society and to perform the gigantic task of cementing the authoritarian elements within society together." Before 1934, Neumann claimed, it was not clear whether the Nazi party was able to dominate the army, business, the state bureaucracy, and so on, but after the liquidation of the Rohm group in the summer of 1934, it became "abundantly clear that the party had succeeded in monopolizing political power" (1957f, 244; 1957b, 17; 1944, 80).<sup>4</sup> Writing the second edition of *Behemoth* in 1944, Neumann noted:

The N.S.D.A.P. is today the organization that maintains German society. Without the party, Germany would collapse. Party, State, and Society are, under war conditions, identical. The party provides the ideological leadership; it supplies the huge system of terror; it runs the occupied territories; it provides bread, shelter, clothing, and medical services for air-raid victims; it controls the administration; it administers labor and housing supply; it supervises millions of foreign laborers. In short, it controls all but two fields: the fighting fronts and the economy. (1944, 530)

Neither Machiavelli, nor Tocqueville, nor Weber—all of whom discussed political parties that mobilize popular energy for war and expansion—could imagine a political party undertaking so much.

In its third role, the party is the agency that attempts the total control of society. “The pluralistic principle is replaced by a monistic, total, authoritarian organization.” Not only is the party responsible for disseminating propaganda, but it must try to break up traditional organizations, invade the life of the family, and control the most minute aspects of behavior. The best means of achieving this is by replacing genuine organizations that might pose an oppositional threat with spurious, front organizations, created and controlled by the party, that seek to isolate and control the individual. The Nazis replaced all genuine youth groups with the party-controlled Hitler Youth, independent schools and universities with party-controlled administration and faculty organizations, and similarly specially created organizations for lawyers, doctors, teachers, small businesspeople, and so on. Most telling of all, the Nazis abolished all trade unions, and workers—isolated, unorganized, powerless, and anxious—became meaningless units in the twenty-five million member Labor Front. In this the Nazis attempted to “drive the workers into huge organizations where they are submerged.” With these artificial organizations, modern dictatorships seek total control of society, all while keeping intact the illusory facade of pluralism (1944, 400, 430; 1957f, 245; 1944, 398–400, 413–18).

Neumann argued that the National Socialist party was simultaneously charismatic and bureaucratic, charismatic in providing a Leader to mobilize isolated individuals and bureaucratic in seeking total control over them. Despite noisy ideological denunciations of bureaucracy, National Socialism increased bureaucratization in every sector of society. Just as Weber suggested, the demands of organizing the economy and society increased bureaucratic domination. “We must not be deceived into assuming, however, that centralization of bureaucratic machinery has in any way lessened in Germany, that the party’s existence has in any way restricted bureaucratic powers. On the contrary, preparedness and war have noticeably strengthened

authoritarian control in the federal, state, and municipal bureaucracies.” Neumann has given us Weber’s analysis. Despite repeated attempts by the party either to dispense with or to control state bureaucracy, in the end it could do neither entirely, because such bureaucracy is indispensable to a modern economy (Neumann 1944, 80–81, 77–79).<sup>5</sup>

“National Socialism must necessarily carry to an extreme the one process that characterizes the structure of modern society, bureaucratization” (1944, 367–69). While Neumann took the power that bureaucratic techniques gave to the state and the party to be somewhat obvious, he sought to show what the bureaucratization of life did to ordinary men and women. He took labor as his chief example. By abolishing trade unions that gave individual laborers considerable power and by enrolling millions of workers in the Labor Front, National Socialism sought to bring individuals under the control of distant and impersonal bureaucracies.

The Labor Front has driven the process of bureaucratization to its maximum. Not only the relations between the enterprise and the worker but even the relations among the workers themselves are now mediated by an autocratic bureaucracy. . . . The Labor Front has about twenty-five million members. Of what account can the individual be? The bureaucracy is everything. (1944, 418–19, 402)

Neumann was exploring and elaborating upon the nightmares of Tocqueville and Weber. Modern dictatorships have “imprisoned man in a network of semi-authoritarian organizations controlling his life from birth to death,” and like Tocqueville, Neumann recognized that modern forms of tyranny would attempt to do this by exacerbating and exploiting the isolation and powerlessness of individuals. “The isolation of the individual characteristic of modern society is intensified to the utmost limit with the help of an immense network of bureaucratic organizations” (1944, 367, 467). Neumann’s nightmare, however, combined two elements of Weber’s analysis of the twentieth century that Weber had not seen as entirely compatible—a fully charismatic and mobilizing

political party coexisting with a society suffocating under bureaucratic domination.

### ***The less-than-totalitarian society***

Although Neumann seemed ambivalent about whether the Leader, the party, or the state had the most power, he set out to examine the political dynamics behind the “all-embracing totalitarian state,” and in the process, he demonstrated that totalitarian dictatorship was neither total nor monolithic. Leader, party, state bureaucracy, army, and police all shared power, not to mention key classes with often-decisive influence. It is one of Neumann's lasting and original contributions to modern theories of tyranny to recognize that so-called totalitarian dictatorships offer a precarious politics among key groups and classes. He chose the title *Behemoth*—the land monster of Jewish eschatology and the chaos of civil war as depicted by Hobbes—precisely to show that National Socialism was not the static, monolithic rule of a leviathan, but rather a dynamic system forced constantly into political and economic change, indeed, “a non-state, a chaos, a situation of lawlessness, disorder, and anarchy” (Neumann 1944, 221, vii; Aycoberry 1981, 92–93). Far from being as instrumentally rational as Weber predicted, modern dictatorships are rife with politics and subject to enormous change.

The key to Neumann's analysis is his argument that behind modern dictatorships one finds both a functioning system of modern capitalism and thus a definite class structure. In fact, Neumann suggested, European Fascism grew out of both liberalism and capitalism. Much is made, for example, of the negative state or the night-watchman state in Locke's political theory, certainly the prevailing theory in British politics until the early twentieth century. But was it really so powerless to act? Indeed not. This negative state “proved itself capable of preserving the internal security of England, of dealing with the Chartists and the labor movement, and of establishing an immense colonial empire. Surely a strange theory for a so-called negative state which succeeds in maintaining an imperialist policy!” (1957g, 259). A better interpretation of Locke's theory suggests that the

state, which in fact more or less left alone both the economy and the class structure within England, was politically aggressive and even authoritarian in defending the interests of the economy and its ruling classes both at home and abroad. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the liberal state had to do more. With the advent of a more aggressive imperialism and capitalism, the state had to use force abroad, leave the economy alone at home, and defend forcefully challenges to the dominant classes from various democratic movements. Out of these actions—that is, out of imperialism, capitalism, and the liberal state—Fascism arose.

Here are the germs of Fascism. Since the economy needs the state, it wants a state that will not touch economic power relations. Thus one may say that Fascism emerged from the need of the holders of economic power for a strong state which, however, must not be subjected to the control of the people. Fascism did not originate as a reaction to the communist danger, but for the purpose of suppressing the democratic movement which wanted to give rational and democratic shape to the economy. (Neumann 1957g, 265)

At the time Neumann was writing *Behemoth*, it was fashionable among such writers as Peter Drucker, James Burnham, and Dwight Macdonald to suggest that National Socialism had eliminated capitalism in favor of some sort of state-run economy or a bureaucratic collectivism. Neumann rejected these conclusions. He noted that from the early 1930s Nazi theorists had boasted that National Socialism left the economy alone, and he argued that, despite or because of heavy state interference, the basic structure of capitalism persisted and flourished under Nazi Germany. Fascism in Germany, in short, was used to preserve the class domination of capitalism. “The German economy of today has two broad and striking characteristics. It is a monopolistic economy—and a command economy. It is a private capitalistic economy, regimented by the totalitarian state. We suggest as a name best to describe it, ‘Totalitarian Monopoly Capitalism’”<sup>6</sup> (1944, 261, 49, 222).



Borrowing from Marx and Weber, Neumann maintained that behind the Nazi state, one found a class structure intact, and thus, the very description “totalitarian” is an ideological veil hiding powerful classes. The key elites, of course, lie within the classes and institutions that served National Socialism well and profited from it—big industry, the party, the bureaucracy, and the armed forces.

National Socialism could, of course, have nationalized private industry. That, it did not do and did not want to do. Why should it? With regard to imperialist expansion, National Socialism and big business have identical interests. National Socialism pursues glory and the stabilization of its rule, and industry, the full utilization of its capacity and the conquest of foreign markets. German industry was willing to co-operate to the fullest. It had never liked democracy, civil rights, trade unions, and public discussion. National Socialism utilized the daring, the knowledge, the aggressiveness of the industrial leadership, while the industrial leadership utilized the anti-democracy, anti-liberalism and anti-unionism of the National Socialist party, which had fully developed the techniques by which masses can be controlled and dominated. The bureaucracy marched as always with the victorious forces, and for the first time in the history of Germany the army got everything it wanted.<sup>7</sup> (1944, 361; see also 365–99)

Four distinct groups are thus represented in the German ruling class: big industry, the party, the bureaucracy, and the armed forces. To these four, Neumann cautiously added the landed Junker class, which both helped the National Socialists attain power and profited from the new regime. “The political influence of the Junkers is still strong, though not decisive” (1944, 392–96). By the second edition of *Behemoth* (1944), Neumann still recognized the power of the party, the army, and big business, but thought that the power of the state bureaucracy had “steadily declined.” Because Neumann recognized the immense power of what he called “terrorists,” he thought that the

SS and the Gestapo could not be subsumed under, or declared dependent upon, either the army or the party (1944, 632–34). In seeking to demonstrate the politics of totalitarian dictatorship, Neumann probably underestimated the power of the Leader himself.

Nonetheless, Neumann demonstrated convincingly that behind claims of total control by the Leader, uniformity imposed by the party, and the monolithic nature of the state, genuine political conflict existed. While industrialists were happy to eliminate trade unions, they did not like restrictions imposed upon them by the state bureaucracy, and while the army eagerly embraced imperial expansion, it detested meddling by the party. Thus, the ruling class was neither homogeneous nor held together by stated ideals or common loyalty, unless it was loyalty to self-interested profit and power.

Nothing remains but profits, power, prestige, and above all, fear. Devoid of any common loyalty and concerned solely with the preservation of their own interests, the ruling groups will break apart as soon as the miracle-producing Leader meets a worthy opponent. At present, each section needs the others. The army needs the party because the war is totalitarian. The army cannot organize society “totally”; that is left to the party. The party, on the other hand, needs the army to win the war and thus to stabilize and even aggrandize its own power. Both need monopolistic industry to guarantee continuous expansion. And all three need the bureaucracy to achieve the technical rationality [note again the reliance on Weber] without which the system could not operate. (1944, 397–98)

By outlining in some detail these “deep antagonisms within the ruling classes,” Neumann sought to prove the existence of political conflict behind the decisions of the Nazi tyranny. “It is thus impossible to detect in the framework of the National Socialist political system any one organ which monopolizes political power” (1944, 469–70). Long before writers from the 1950s through the 1980s argued for the unchangeability of modern totalitarian dictatorships, Neumann described a politics inside

totalitarian dictatorships, and he predicted convulsive change.

Not only did Neumann seek to show that the state was less than monolithic, he went on to suggest that perhaps we could not call the system of National Socialism a state. Perhaps it is only a bargain, a perverse social contract, among these four ruling groups. Uncomfortable with the political categories of Marx and Weber as they might apply to National Socialism, Neumann suggested that perhaps Nazi Germany was becoming merely class rule directly through the means of the party, the army, and the terror apparatus.

### *Tyranny and empire*

National Socialism sought to disguise class antagonism with an overload of specious ideology. To take but a few examples, the notion of a people's community or *Volksgemeinschaft* pretended that the German Reich was attaining a genuine community transcending classes and groups; racial theories attempted to hide class conflict, because so-called inferior races—not classes—became the enemies against whom Germany supposedly had to struggle; anti-Semitism, more specifically, became a substitute for class struggle, because “by heaping all hatred, all resentment, all misery upon one enemy who can easily be exterminated and who cannot resist, Aryan society can be integrated into a whole”; and finally, the National Socialists put forth the fantastically fictional doctrine of “racial proletarian imperialism,” a doctrine depicting “Germany and Italy [as] proletarian races, surrounded by a world of hostile plutocratic-capitalistic-Jewish democracies”—that is, Britain and the United States—against whom the nation as a whole must struggle (1944, 227, 103, 125, 186–87, 130).

While false promises and spurious ideology were the keys to making imperial expansion acceptable to the German people, Neumann concluded that, opposition or not, a Nazi push for empire was inevitable. Much like Machiavelli's princely tyrants forced into expansive adventures to pacify military and financial interests, so “imperialistic war is the outcome of the internal antagonisms of the German economy.” Neumann even took a

“certain satisfaction” in noting that he predicted this in 1935, when this conclusion was not yet obvious to the rest of the world. Successful imperialist war would bring cheap labor and raw materials for industry, power to the party, grandiosity to the state, and glory to the army—and of course profits for all. The key, of course, was that German industry and the National Socialist party needed each other (1944, 202, 37, 360–61).

The imperialistic sections of German society found in the National Socialist party the ally needed to provide the mass basis for imperialism. This does not mean that National Socialism is merely a subservient tool of German industry, but it does mean that with regard to imperialistic expansion, industry and party have identical aims. . . . The National Socialist party is solely concerned with establishing the thousand-year rule, but to achieve this goal, they cannot but protect the monopolistic system, which provides them with the economic basis for political expansion. (1944, 185, 354)

Just as Germany achieved national unification late in European history, so did Germany come late to its imperialistic ambitions, and thus found the world already divided up among European powers. “When Germany came forward as an active imperialistic force, it found the earth divided among the various military machines. Redistribution . . . required the force of arms and an enormous outlay in blood and money.” It also required ideological justification. First, just as the National Socialist German Workers’ Party was neither a workers’ party nor socialistic, it was also not nationalistic. “A biological theory replaced the political theory of nationality.” If a racial theory supplants nationalism, then neither national sovereignty nor national boundaries need be accepted. Instead, “the sovereignty of the Germanic race exists wherever there are racial Germans,” an idea supposedly justifying “liberating” Germans living in Austria, the Sudetenland, and the Polish corridor. This idea was buttressed by the claim that the German Reich was heir to some idealized past moment of the Holy Roman Empire. Second, the doctrine of “living space” or *Lebensraum*—roughly the idea that

nations ought to share the earth in proportion to their populations, and thus, a great nation like Germany has a right to colonies in the East—sought to justify expansion into countries of Eastern Europe with little or no German populations. And finally, the claims of racial superiority purportedly gave a right to the so-called Aryan races to dominate and even exterminate not only Jews, but also Poles, Slavs, and so forth. Under these claims of racial superiority, the Germans have a right, indeed an obligation, to rule over allegedly inferior races. “The theory of German racial superiority and Jewish racial inferiority permits the complete enslavement of the eastern Jews . . . It actually establishes a hierarchy of races—giving no rights to the Jews, a few to the Poles, a few more to the Ukrainians, . . . and full rights to Germans” (1944, 103–4, 168, 130, 131–36, 147–50, 125–26, 183). Imperialism and military aggression are pushed by economic interests that make use of an ideology based on racism and racial hatred.

### ***Conclusion***

Neumann’s contributions to theories of tyranny or dictatorship are immense, although many of them come from his creative use of the categories set forth by Montesquieu, Marx, Freud, and Weber. First, like Marx, as well as thinkers such as Tocqueville, Neumann noted that modern dictatorships rule under the proclaimed banner of freedom, the spurious claim accepted by so many that National Socialism was a higher and nobler form of democratic freedom. Second, like Montesquieu, Neumann noted that all tyrannies must subvert the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. Third, Neumann was most brilliant in applying the idea he found in both Montesquieu and Marx that all societies, and hence all dictatorships, have a structure with “its own inner logic.” Looking behind the ideological veil that claimed National Socialism to be working on behalf of the middle and working classes, Neumann outlined a structure of rule in which the state bureaucracy, the party, big industry, the military, and the Junker landed class all had interests that benefited from the expansionary rule of National Socialism. Fourth, in an implicit critique of Weber, he noted that most

modern dictatorships, in a frighteningly clever way, combine an all-encompassing and oppressive bureaucracy with an almost uniquely powerful charisma. Whereas Weber thought these two could coexist, he did not allow for each being so dominant simultaneously. Fifth, borrowing directly from Weber, Neumann noted how skilled National Socialism was in applying science, and especially the science of organizing men and women, to their rule. Bureaucracy was everywhere, so that Nazi tyranny “imprisoned man in a network of semi-authoritarian organizations controlling his life from birth to death.”

Sixth, like Montesquieu and Tocqueville, Neumann saw modern dictatorships as consciously eliminating intermediate institutions between the individual and the ruling structure. Associations, unions, and clubs were all eliminated by the party, leaving the individual alone, lonely, powerless, and anxious. Seventh, as Freud suggested, individuals who are alone are readily susceptible to the claims of propaganda—that all citizens were part of a greater community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), that a nation finds unity in submitting to the Leader as father figure, and so on. Eighth, as Montesquieu had suggested, fear and violence are at the heart of any tyranny, and how much better they work when each individual is required to resist violence alone. What Montesquieu could not predict, however, Neumann observed as early as 1942, was that the violence of Nazi Germany—which Neumann called terror—was rare if not unique in that it was directed at those who were wholly innocent. Ninth, racial theories assist isolated individuals to unite by providing a false enemy, that to be German one defined oneself as superior to Jews, but also to Poles, Slavs, or, in Germany of 1992, Vietnamese immigrants. Sadly, racial struggles can obscure class struggles. Tenth, racial theories also directly supported the material interests of the ruling classes that sought profit and advantage from empire, and because Germany came late to European imperialism it was compelled by economic necessity to go to war to redivide the world. And eleventh, and most brilliantly, Neumann noticed that no government is entirely totalitarian, that there is a politics—even a chaotic politics—that still remains as the bureaucracy,

powerful industrialists, the party, the terror apparatus, and the army quarrel for power and policies with the Leader as umpire. Long after Neumann had written, political scientists wrote foolishly that totalitarian governments were entirely without politics, without turmoil, and without change.

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## NOTES

1. For the few secondary sources, see Tribe 1981 Miliband 1958, Jay 1973, Held 1980, and Kellner 1989.

2. Karl Dietrich Bracher calls Neumann's work "a pioneering study" and "the most important attempt at a socio-economic interpretation" of National Socialism, although he disagrees with some of Neumann's conclusions (see Bracher 1970, 7).

3. For parallels and contrasts of Neumann's analysis with those of other members of the Frankfurt School, see Jay 1973, 143–72.

4. Neumann clearly changed his mind from when he wrote, in the first edition of *Behemoth* [1942], that the state bureaucracy and the army were the dominant forces (1944, 221). Indeed, his claims of an all-powerful party frankly contradict his other analyses in which he located power in the party, the army, the state bureaucracy, and the industrial classes.

5. The Nazis finally did succeed in replacing the traditional Prussian civil servant—"a nihilistic technocrat . . . willing to serve any government"—with officials even more willing to dispense with rules and procedures (Neumann 1944, 629–30).

6. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., has refuted the thesis that big business was disproportionately responsible for the *rise* of Hitler, but, to my knowledge, no one has successfully challenged Neumann's overall thesis that big business supported and profited from the Nazi regime once it was in power (see Turner 1985).

7. Bracher is probably correct in claiming that Neumann's interpretation "runs the risk of misjudging the revolutionary component of National Socialism" by underestimating the transformations in the economy and the society that National Socialism brought about (see Bracher 1970, 7).

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- . "Approaches to the Study of Political Power," In *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 3–21. 1957b. See Neumann 1957a.
- . "Montesquieu." In *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 96–148. 1957c. See Neumann 1957a.
- . "The Concept of Political Freedom." In *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 160–200. 1957d. See Neumann 1957a.
- . "Intellectual and Political Freedom." In *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 210–15. 1957e. See Neumann 1957a.
- . "Notes on the Theory of Dictatorship." In *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 233–56. 1957f. See Neumann 1957a.
- . "Economics and Politics in the Twentieth Century." In *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 257–69. 1957g. See Neumann 1957a.
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# Truth versus Received Wisdom: In Praise of Nakedness

Emilio Ichikawa Morin

## I

Umberto Eco has suggested in a novel that a pioneering edition of *Don Quixote* with marginal corrections by Shakespeare was found in England and therefore Shakespeare could very well have been the author of this paradigmatic work and Cervantes its translator into Spanish.

Let us accept for a moment this hypothesis and let us concede the possibility of its being proven true. What could our culture then do with such a grave truth? *Don Quixote* is the novel par excellence, more than that, it is a symbol, the reality of which goes beyond the frontiers of literature and puts its stamp on all areas, from the more universal strata of our culture down to our daily life. Cervantes, for his part, is the father apostle of Spanish letters and of its American outcroppings. For that reason the most important prize a writer of our language could receive has been named after Cervantes.

Much has been erected on the foundation of this work and its author. What would happen if we were to discover all of a sudden that we have built all this on air, on nothing, that the author and his work are no more than a false twosome that has twisted our course with its siren song? We must agree that there would be at least a shudder greater than the one provoked by what Borges brought out laboriously about Pierre Menard and his (re)writing of *Don Quixote*.

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Another one of our more entrenched traditions is the rejection of those obscure medieval functionaries known as "Inquisitors." They have been handed down to us as assassins of virgins, as brutal pyromaniacs of the fine arts and as unmerciful inflictors of punishment. If, among all the papal tribunals, there is one that we hold to be cruel, it is the Spanish Inquisition; and if, among all the Spanish Inquisitors, there is one that is cursed, it is Tomás de Torquemada.

Tomás de Torquemada represents in our cultural code the symbol of fanaticism of faith. It is against him that humanism—the aristocracy of thought, the curiosity and freedom of research that the ideals of the Enlightenment turned into habits of the brighter side of our modern society—has shaped its dignity. In short, we have also built on the foundation of Torquemada.

And yet, a significant direction in Spanish historiography seems to have a different perception of this character. César Silió y Cortés, in support of his extremely vilifying biography of Isabel the Catholic, justifies the actions of the Spanish inquisitorial tribunal as a means of obtaining "unity of beliefs, harmony and tranquillity of the spirit, perturbed by the diversity of religions" (1943). He furthermore adds a historical reference made by Menéndez Pelayo concerning the activities of the Inquisition in Spain. It happens that in its most difficult epoch the Index of the Spanish branch "never proscribed a single line" of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Authors of such auspicious lineage as Maimonides and Averroes do not appear in it, nor do Giordano Bruno, Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza.

Facts like these, which can be directly or indirectly associated with Torquemada's life, provide the historian with enough testimony to join in the conclusion reached by William Thomas Wals about the Inquisitor: "Few men in history have been more cruelly caricatured out of ignorance or malice as this pious man so little given to ostentation, who saw, against his liking, such awesome powers fall upon him. An investigation into contemporary sources does not uncover any facts on which to base the monstrous legend which sectarian and rationalist prejudices have spun about his memory. . . . But if one retraces step by step the legend down to the sixteenth century, one sees this web

gradually dissolve, leaving but the portrait of a pleasant, amiable, hard-working, capable, and modest man whose principal ambition was to imitate Jesus Christ" (Silió y Cortés 1943, 227–28).

Very noble ideals have been acted out in the critical passion against those guardians of souls whose patron we took to be Torquemada. Since we have defended the high values of the most sincere humanism through a critique of him, I suspect that we cannot keep from damaging our narrative if we damage the base on which this narrative was built.

As stated, "something" was built upon Torquemada. According to Silió y Cortés, this something is a legend, a legend that is not merely monstrous but doubly monstrous, first because of what it tells of Torquemada and second, because what it tells is not true. Certainly, a tradition, called "rationalist" by Silió y Cortés, has worked up a "legend" about Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition, but this critical legend was put forward as a fact that for its authors held the title of a *historical truth*. Truth is the idol of modern science, and upon this truth the legend extolled human freedom; but it is also in the name of truth that Silió y Cortés aimed at destroying the dark legend about Torquemada. Yet, if there occurs a shift in the truth, a brusque change in the heart of the legend—something that in spite of everything has not yet happened—what will happen then to the legend as a whole? What will happen to the epic veneration of liberty as represented by those persons who, in spite of the Inquisition and in spite of Torquemada, defended humanism, truth, freedom? What will happen with the martyrs of modern art and thought? Will we continue loving them once they are deprived of their aura as sufferers of persecution and as transgressors that makes them so fascinating?

Thus, the problem of *truth* is shifted to the problem of *belief*, and the dilemma of the *individual* to that of *culture*. Conversely, we could also imagine the origin of the problem of culture and belief being located in the origin of the problem of truth. If truth is, by definition, perfectible and even refutable, in brief, if it is a result of history, what margins of certainty do the values possess that are built on it?<sup>1</sup>

Much bad and much good has been said about Torquemada,

but those who uphold him as a tolerant and pious martyr, as well as those who see him as a by no means pious and tolerant anti-hero, coincide in one point: tolerance and piety are human values. In this there is no discrepancy; perhaps, then, the problem stated here is really not that acute at all. In any event, it appears extremely doubtful that the traditional narrative “*adversus* Torquemada” could now be told about him without considerable posturing.

We can, of course, be confident that our values would find new foundations upon which to rise; moreover, one could even proclaim with pride that such a rectification is precisely an expression of the strength of these values, but let us not commit the sin of being simple-minded: although the rectifiers of the traditional narrative could recover from such a counterattack, there will be a precedent, a suspicion. The defensive capacity of culture has intuited that much, and it is for that reason that, in spite of all the proofs Menéndez y Pelayo, César Silió y Cortés, and the other historians have brought forth against it, we continue and probably will always continue to believe in a despicable Torquemada. If the sanctity of Torquemada were to constitute the truth, it still would represent a too drastic and aggressive stripping of the cultural foundations and it would, then, be rejected in any event.

The problem could be formulated as follows: our culture rests upon traditions and beliefs that, in turn, draw their prestige and their support from truths. But truth changes and can turn into error. We cannot correct the truth-as-foundation without, at the same time, affecting the stability of the edifice erected on it, without affecting, that is, its credibility. What alternatives do we have? What are the options, or, even better, what is the ultimate criterion for us to adopt?

Logically, several solutions could be designed; the variants of the solution that occur to me and that are not necessarily practices neatly and solidly verifiable in the cultural history of the West are as follows:

- (a) Maintain the narrative and somehow conceal the result of the investigation that could even become a

historically possible, although socially inconvenient, truth. (A variant of this solution is the *confinement of the truth* or the *management of knowledge*. It is not rejected, but it is confined to specialized communities or to circles of concrete power. Modern society *institutionalizes* the degree of availability of knowledge as part and parcel of the exercise of social control.)

(b) Maintain the narrative, but now based on a new truth.

(c) Change the narrative and accept the new truth. This last solution, which we might call the “catastrophic option,” would imply that science is the central giver of value.

These solutions can be recorded at different levels of execution along the history of Western culture. However, I believe that the movement of history has followed the first solution, while the occurrence of the third one is almost unverifiable; maybe this third holds true at intense historical crucibles as in the case of revolutions.

The constancy with which the first alternative appears in the panorama of the West introduces a new metamorphosis, namely the one of *error by deceit*. This conversion happens when, for whatever reason or under whatever pretext, the body of the cultural tradition is maintained past the point at which its truth has been refuted. In this case, then, a notable element of *intentionality* is present on the part of the “distributing agencies of verifiability,” whether these be a scientific community with the power to exert cultural pressure or a political group with a controlling influence on knowledge as part of its power.

It must be stated here that from the viewpoint of the “polis,” this intentionality or manipulation of knowledge does not necessarily have a negative meaning. It is possible that from a historical viewpoint such a practice is necessary and even inevitable.

In a famous lecture given at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882, Ernest Renan pronounced a thesis that, because of its frankness, could appear to be aggressive: “Forgetting and, I would say, historical errors are essential factors in the creation of a nation. It is

for this reason that progress in the study of history is often dangerous for a national entity" (1882).

Although "forgetting" and "error" are terms that are related to the involuntary rather than to intentionality, they still do suggest something *desirable*. It is for this reason that the aspect of manipulation is, if not openly stated, still noticeably implied in Renan's statement. The question turns alarmingly about the fact that the justification for the "error" or the "forgetting" in the process of founding a nation does not come from a military person, a functionary, nor a politician, but precisely from someone who is committed to the truth, namely from a historian.

The more we dwell on considerations of this kind, the more we sense that the concept of truth retreats, becomes diluted, and escapes us. We can say that, from the point of view of logical precision, it degenerates into something weaker and turns into a kind of *notion* of truth. But also this notion loses its contours when we examine it critically.

The permeability of truth, its accessibility, revitalizes constantly the classical discussion about the "objective" and the "subjective" elements in it. Radical disbelief in its objectivity is the extreme into which one may fall in discovering the social, subjective contaminations of the truth? Is it worthwhile to call this truth?

Even if truth were possibly no more than an ideal, this ideal still demands that it aspire to an effective relation to being. For Parmenides, being was at the same time truth; the other, the nontruth, was at the same time nonbeing. In other words, if we are to preserve *truth* as a signifier of a quality that is to be attributed to or denied to knowledge, this truth must possess, in any of its possible historical gradations, a relation to being. In this sense, then, an agreement, no matter for what end, even if it concerns the unity of a nation, is but a consensus. This consensus may certainly be *functional*, but in keeping with the most genuine philosophical tradition, it has no right to being called *truth*. On the other hand, this consensus may aspire to occupy a place of a different type of no less hierarchic dignity, even to enjoying the prestige that comes with what is true, for *credibility* is not the property of a group of thinkers but of a system of

power networks—today, in fact, of the owners of the mass media. Continuing with our Eleatic reference, a consensus is an opinion, a *doxa*, which is an aberration rather than knowledge.

My only intention here is to unname as true any attempt to manipulate knowledge in the service of “extrascientific,” or more exactly (or perhaps less inexactly), “extragnoseological” interests. Moreover, I am aware that the margins of objectivity and subjectivity (consensus included) of what is established as true change, that the context within which truth is generated and fixed is historical and relative, a fact that I acknowledge.

Contemporary theory has pointed out the difference that exists between the problem of constructing and apprehending an object and the problem of validity. The context within which a statement can be authenticated as true is very complex. This context grows even wider when one includes all the levels, from the epistemological, the propositional, to the those of a sociological and political nature. This, however, is a separate problem: investigations in this regard abound, and the complexity of the matter forces one to look at it in detail and not just on the run, as it were. I only want to discuss here the problem of the option that a scientist, and especially a social scientist, has as an ethical subject and at the same time as a *philo-veritas*, a lover of truth [a term the author coins here as a more scientific version of “philosophos,” the lover of wisdom of the Greek—TRANSLATOR] in a world that seems to have transplanted itself back to the ancient “*kynismos*” [cynical philosophy] of the Greek. In any case, I want to make clear that I join in the questioning of the direct implication between truth and objectivity in which the classical tradition so naively believed.<sup>2</sup>

## II

The studies about science have shown that the vision we possessed of it was certainly very heroic although equally candid. This disenchantment is, above all, the result of what has been called the “social focus of science.” If science is the “real avenue of the truths” and the scientist a detached but curious wanderer on it, then science has also died: the social studies have killed it. The attack on the romantic version of science has not only

brought with it a change of focus; the questioning, in fact, extends so far beyond a mere change of vision that we find ourselves now with a conceptual confusion and a growing suspicion of science. The enhancement and the institutionalization of science in the modern world are enabling factors for this doubt.

The history of science for its part has corroborated the permeability of its object and has seen itself forced to undertake radical conceptual reformulations like the ones performed by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) that attain the same integrity as the “truth of science.”<sup>3</sup>

The examples with which we have illustrated the present reflections are tied to social thought, to discursive knowledge that oscillates between history and critique; we specifically referred to the spectacular revisions to which the legends about *Don Quixote* and Torquemada have been subjected. Any readjustment of this kind would bring about a trauma in our culture. In this case we are dealing with what we could call “crucial truths.” The reaction against this type of exposure is always very strong; the critique of a *crucial truth* always meets with great social resistance, and the thinker must be aware what it is that his or her exposure brings to light. These reactions are justified defensive gestures of a culture, of a social order that, like any organism, tends to protect itself. We have quoted two extreme examples, one of them possibly fictitious, but there are many others that, at micro- and macrocultural levels, push diastolically toward the surface. Some have sufficient strength to demolish accepted positions and the prejudices built upon these. It would be interesting to ask what their probabilities are of acquiring the title of “truths”; this, of course, would tend to vary from case to case.

As is known, science is one of the substantive spheres of modern culture and truth is its pervasive nucleus. Truth is the absolute *telos* of science, no matter in what direction science moves. Its primary subjects are the scientist (as individual) and the scientific collectivity (as a group); its destiny is to establish knowledge as demonstrated truths, a destiny that finds its resolution in a double context of research and the rooting in society of the truths discovered.

To firmly anchor the truth in the body of a cultural tradition is



an intensive and, at the same time, extensive battle because it must fight obstacles that arise in succession from the most general levels of society down to the cultural disposition of the individual itself.

When the truth is shown as such to the individual who searches for it, (when the truth demonstrates itself to the individual), it is inserted in a predefined system of intellectual positions. This insertion provokes a series of displacements that is all the more drastic the more spectacular the discoveries. It is possible that the spectacular character of these displacements is no more than the collision between truth and belief—between belief and belief in the truth. When we react to erotic jokes about convents, we hardly manage a smile in honor of their naiveté: these jokes may be about what in our scheme of things is habitual but what within the limits of celibacy and asceticism is erotic and even pornographic. The equation is, then, simple: the intensity of the catastrophe is directly proportional to the intensity of the collision between the nascent position to be adopted and the existing prejudgments.

The cultural scheme of the thinker himself or herself is the first to defend itself against the gnoseological invasion that may occur at different levels of questioning. The crucial truth is an extreme mercenary. There is more than one historical example that illustrates how an individual belief system protects itself when confronted with the gnoseological threat stemming from a new truth. Einstein's resistance to the evidence of the uncertainty of the quantum has become proverbial: "God does not play dice!"

The belief systems of communities, nations, civilizations, and of all the other cultural entities associated with them protect themselves in an analogous form. For this reason the cultural rooting of a truth is a process of high complexity that never happens de facto. In his well-known text *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard cites as an outstanding example the process by which the theory of relativity became enrooted (1984). For the paradigm prevailing in physics at the beginning of this century, Einstein's theory represented too strong a move, that is, a "bad move," a blunder. Yet, its birth occurred at a lucky

moment because it was hatched within a “sympathetic” and “favorable” circle of newcomers to physics, namely, engineers and amateur philosophers rather than physicists. The theory of relativity would have been demolished in a scientific institution or in an established community of physicists with preconceived paradigms, or at least banished, and Einstein himself would have been seen as an “intellectual terrorist” and, as such, removed from the “game”—he had committed a foul.

It will be said that the success of the theory of relativity was in any case sooner or later assured because it was “true” and that the historical conditions were there for it to succeed (remember Poincaré). One should not say that this is a polemical assertion and only valid in a historicist and rationalist interpretation of science. Nevertheless, even if one accepts it, the important question is whether the theory struggled heroically toward the surface of an established context that it was able to penetrate or, to the contrary, did a change occur in the context itself that made the theory noteworthy. One might also think that the context itself brought it forth, which happened because the context was able to assimilate the theory, that a culture only engenders the truth it can assimilate. This assertion resembles very much the one made by Wittgenstein that says that the only questions or problems that have no answer or solution are those that are badly formulated. In either case there is a historical misconception: yes, culture has engendered truths that it has later rejected as bastard children, and yes, correct questions have been formulated that have no answer, and many problems (also correct ones) remain deprived of solutions.

As we asserted earlier, the vision we used to have of science and the truth has been losing its heroic semblance in the light of the new scientific and historical investigations, but it has gained in realism. It is today almost commonplace to say that the establishment of truth occurs within wide social contexts that transcend the scientist and the scientific community. The puritanical conception of science has given way to the contaminated conception.

The thinker is unmercifully confronted by the question about what to do with a crucial truth when it is discovered. What must

the individual do who dedicated his or her energies to the discovery that Cervantes was no more than a translator or that Torquemada was a saint? It is in this "limit situation" that one begins to experience the need for an ethics.

### III

Before tackling this question, we must reflect on the participation of science in the elaboration of the values and traditions that support a culture. The authority and the prestige that science has gained in modern times as an agent of progress allow for the fact that the most diverse values become accredited in its name; in the same manner, where value lacks a scientific foundation, it is deprived of prestige, no matter how constructive the value might be. Little can be done at the margin of science; it is impossible to propose knowledge unless it is for science or against science (that is, always in connection with science).

Science and truth exist in an astonishingly fertile crossbreeding, in a promiscuous weld that makes them both impure. As Weber would say, when we handle concepts such as science, truth, error, politics, or morals, it appears that we can only deal with them as "ideal types," and not as distinguishable and provable historical phenomena.

Society has crept into science, but science, in turn, has reacted by occupying the center from which it now irradiates authority and prestige. Science is, in modernity, more than a "form of consciousness" or an "occupation." It is a state of our culture, shaping its functioning and governing as the new faith. To demonstrate in order to believe and to know in order to be empowered are already the ingredients of the modern ideal. The solidity of a society that knows itself to be the result of history depends on the rational foundations of the bonds that hold it together, of its tradition: in other words, modernity is planted on top of something that has been called "historical truth."

As we have already asserted, the displacements that occur when a truth upon which a culture was founded has been disqualified are traumatic. Society guards itself against such a threat.

M. Berman defined modernity as a telluric state of occidental

society where “everything that is solid dissolves itself in air.”

This phrase, snatched from the *Communist Manifesto*, expresses in an exemplary manner the constant displacements and dislocations to which “modern rational society” is subject. Modern Western civilization is a culture with a historical consciousness that knows that it is a child of time and believes in progress. The ties that give it firmness are based on the favorite child of the favorite child of modernity: truth, which in turn is the child of science.

Consequently let us say, then, in the image and likeness of the society that it engenders, that truth is temporal, historical, changing. What happens in science, this utopian kingdom of truth, is the same as what continually occurs in modern society: All that is solid dissolves in air. And what is built on it, too, dissolves or incurs the danger of dissolving. It is for this reason that society protects itself by resisting when a type of “crucial truth” appears that could provoke serious convulsions.

Once rooted, traditions and beliefs are maintained and, in an extreme case, invented. The “invented tradition” is a rope that stretches between the present and the past, but with the peculiarity that this connection is artificial (Hobsbawn 1992, 63). A specific variant of this artificiality is present when a belief (perhaps as routine) in a thesis is maintained after its truth has already been contradicted. The cultural tradition built upon this thesis survives along with the disproved thesis.

Modernity is, then, based upon an equivocation: science and its truth. Yet, the share truth has in occidental culture is not as extensive as one might suppose. Its participation in science, its kingdom, is not extensive either, just as the presence of what is good in the morality of the West, or of what is just in its law, or of what is beautiful in its art, is not extensive.

Western culture has grown upon many misrepresentations. It has a very fragile foundation. Philosophy, the alma mater of the West, flourished on commentaries and rumors rather than on sure sources.

Medieval thought found in Plato, and mainly in Aristotle, a sort of *auctoritas magna* [great authority]. But what the medieval thinkers took for Aristotelianism had little to do with the original

doctrine; they made the Stagirite believe in the All Powerful, the creator of everything including the “substance.” They had Plato talk of the Mediator, and they had Democritus himself write that God had created the atoms.

The misrepresentation, the masquerade, occupies the place of foundation in Western culture, in this very culture that gave birth to a modernity said to be based on lights, on a maturity filled with knowledge, science, and truth. The two-faced mask has penetrated so deep that Ortega and Borges reiterated in a moment of remorse that “person,” a term that designates the inhabitant of the cities of the West, meant originally mask, actor. To lose one’s personality is to lose the mask, is to bare oneself, in short, it is to break the rule (the “regula,” the norm).

The modern human is the “person,” the actor that puts a face on top of the truth. The curious thing is that it is not this mask that is the enemy of modern society. Many times, as in the case of the “invented traditions,” these masks are a function of the system and contribute to the social equilibrium. It is because of this that the unveiling of a crucial truth that could attack the established order constitutes a supra-individual problem. Modernity, then, turns against itself, science and truth turn against the social ties, against the traditions, against Western civilization. The need to believe exceeds or is equated to the need to know; premodernity superimposes itself on modernity; it is the onset of an epoch of total coexistence: modernity begins to smell of the end.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Western culture is the defense, almost maniacal, of liberty and of truth. This defense accuses itself: if freedom is defended, it is because it is offended; if it is exalted, it is because it is actually debased. If we look directly at this struggle, we will discover that it is from the very outset condemned to failure, or in the best of cases, its victory can never be total: what it wants to exterminate is not an aberration but a bastion of the social order.

Modern society pretends to destroy the mask without taking into account that this disguise is indispensable to a society that functions as a farce. The definitive triumph of truth is possible only outside modernity, or, at most, in a modernity that carries

its project further and that does not remain, as Habermas believes, unfinished in its essential aspects.

Modernity is rebellion, but also deceit; it is telluric change, but also routine: the routine of change.

Habermas says the following about modernity: "The project of modernity that the philosophers of the Enlightenment formulated in the eighteenth century consisted in their efforts to develop an objective science, a universal morality and universal laws and an autonomous art in accordance with its internal logic" (1986, 28); this labor is still pending. More than a limit, modernity has been an "intention," a weary but certainly unfinished project. If this project is not a mistake, if it is worth the trouble, then our future is, indeed, a modern future.

#### IV

In our times science has turned into a gigantic industry where the individualities dissolve into groups and the groups into institutions. Genius becomes function in those gigantic centers, and the scientists perform like research technicians, like technologists that are so specialized and rewarded that the drama of the truth begins to become alien to them. In the *Encyclopedia* of Diderot physicians are treated as artisans and not as scientists; and this is precisely the case: scientific thought has turned to a considerable degree into skill, into an occupation, and into a pretext for technology. The problem of truth, so acute all along the history of science, has today become the privileged terrain of social thought. There are some areas of scientific thought, for example, genetics and cosmology, that remain involved in weaving the cloth of truth because they intermix beliefs and strongly rooted articles of faith, but it is largely in discursive knowledge that the thread of truth issues forth. It is discursive knowledge that injures more frequently the sensibilities, the beliefs, the values, and the ideologies of the prevailing social orders.

If postmodernity were more than just an entrapped reflection of a prostrated intellectuality, if it were at least a *conditio*, science would, strictly speaking, become impossible within its confines. Science supposes progress, conquest, establishment of foundations, truth, and gnoseological optimism; this is why

science is a modern phenomenon and why there is, in a strict sense, no pre- or postmodern science.

The scientists exist within the confines of modernity as individuals who struggle against the condition of being “persons,” as destroyers of masks, that is, as seekers of truth. This condition incites the scientist to become a transgressor. What must the scientists do when they recognize that truth can be antisocial even in modernity? This is the moment, when, as has already been said, it begins to be clear that there is a necessity for an ethics, an ethics of truth, an ethics of science, an ethics of modernity. I believe that it is logical to infer that an ethics that traces the contours of an ethics of modernity cannot but come from science, its favorite creature.

The sociological study of the professions shows that there exist rules of behavior established for the various professional activities. In his postwar lectures on science and politics as vocations, lectures that still retain their relevance today, Max Weber defines some basic elements for an ethics of these professions. Referring to the polemical relation between politics and morals, Weber distinguishes an “ethics of conviction” from an “ethics of responsibility.” In accordance with what Machiavelli had already discovered (something that certainly Plato did not know), politics is the art of uniting, and the politician is the one who pursues the unity and “happiness” of the “polis”; the politician must use toward that end a variety of means, some of which could appear scandalous to the mind of the noninitiated. The politician must have “responsibility,” and part of this responsibility involves regulating the doses of knowledge to be administered, lest knowledge become detrimental to the proposed end, to the unity and happiness of the community. But from the point of view of an “unworldly ethics” to the contrary, the only valid precept is “always to tell the truth.” The Christian West has reified this norm: thou shalt not bear false witness.

For Weber, the scientists are heroes who labor over an idea and who say to themselves: “I was born to demonstrate this.” The scientists must then be ready to demonstrate and to make believe what they have seen and what the rest have not. The politician can retreat, conceal, and even deny under the pretext of

tactical necessity; the scientists must defend truth at all cost, whether it be something as apparently cold as a geometric theorem or a hypothesis of astronomy. The fate of social thinkers is more uncertain because of the ties their knowledge has to the existing interests, but even so, they must be ready to confront this fate.

The norm, then, is clear: to fight for the truth, even if Cervantes ceases to be the author of *Don Quixote* and the Inquisitor Torquemada turns out to be a saint. This is, in effect, the *norm*; and the norm must be clear and neat and resolute so that it can resist the relativizations that life will impose on it along the way.

On the other hand, we must also ask ourselves if this ethics of conviction should not also contain an element of responsibility; in other words, should or should not the scientists always concern themselves with the social consequences of the truth, their truth?

It can be said that the scientists have already more than enough work on their hands than to occupy themselves with this question as well. In an almost humble tone they can say that they only know how to do research and that it is the task of the politician to handle those questions; but in practice they definitely show that they are involved with their surroundings, when, for example, they express an interest in getting paid and in having their discoveries recognized. This means that the scientists, who somehow have fought to be individuals before being persons, are also citizens. To fight against the masquerade is part of their drama, but they coexist irremediably with it.

More than against the unknown, the scientists fight against what is false, against the imperfect, because it might be a possible half-truth: in this sense they are revolutionaries, transgressors who dissent from established knowledge. They are people who *are not in agreement with* the way things are. Scientists, artists, and lovers are the archetypical dissenters of the modern West; herein lies the epic character of their existence.

Peter Sloterdijk, in the prologue of his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, recalls that Professor Adorno, months before his death, passed through a shocking trance: a group of women students



approached him with bared breasts (1988). This man, who had successfully critiqued and sorted out the enigmas of modern society, this most cultured and intelligent man, was stunned by such a simple spectacle. What had overcome Adorno? Was it the mammary glands that he probably knew in their very anatomical details? Of course not. What the professor was not able to bear was the *nakedness*, the transgression that he thought was in the fact that this erotic (and not even pornographic) truth made its appearance in the academy, a place where previously the West had agreed to use decorum, ritual formalism, in other words, another form of masquerade.

Western culture is obstinately adverse to nakedness: to bare oneself is to unmask oneself, and we already know what this implies. Truth is the counterweight of the mask, and such must be its role in the moral redefinition of the West. Yet science is not a producer of values but of truths. The production of values, including the conversion of the truth itself into value, is a matter that is beyond its patrimony. Sure enough, there remains for the scientists a very precise definition: it is their task to assume truth as value.

I think that the scientists must be conscious of the wide range of areas in which their knowledge participates, and that this knowledge can, for good or evil, turn back on them as citizens. I do not postulate that they look over their shoulder at every step to see whether they offended or pleased someone; I only say that they must be clear in their minds about the fact that they will, without doubt, gladden or disturb someone. This is the challenge: to know that the responsibility exists and to assume this responsibility. If Cervantes is not the author of the *Don Quixote* and Torquemada was one who imitated Christ, well, then, full steam ahead. If this hurts the tradition, if this causes a cultural trauma, well, again I say, full steam ahead, without forgetting, though, that the discoverers of the new truth will have to pay for this carnage.

Whether Cervantes was or was not the author of *Don Quixote* may seem irrelevant and it may be that a society (community, institution, a group in power) can well do without this authorship; the fact is, society possesses *Don Quixote* and who cares

who wrote it? But for the scientists, for the critics, for the historians, there will be nothing more important than this discovery. They have lived a vocation, a passion; they put their lives in it, and life is not that easily abandoned. They will have a utopian dream of surprising everyone with their discovery, and they will imagine, mistakenly for sure, that they alone will be able to carry out a “mental coup d’état” that overthrows the intellectual powers and the existing limits of consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

I believe that this is an area where an ethics of science may be valid: there may be variations, but the theme of every variation must be the same, namely, the defense of truth, of the freedom of research. If, however, there are to be limits, the lines of discussion are already drawn: Who establishes those limits? What principle does the one who implements the limits follow? Is it moral, religious, political?

We are in the presence of an old problem: the relations human beings have with their knowledge. The Pythagoreans believed that knowledge was very important and for this reason, it had to be well guarded. This was the reason for the hermetic structure of their league. We, however, have thought with a different logic: precisely because knowledge is valuable, it must be shouted into the four directions of the wind. We have loved knowledge, but it seems that this feeling is about to reach its end. As Sloterdijk notes, the *philo-sophia*, this erotic relation of the human to knowledge as a lover has expired. Knowledge can be and in fact is power; more than a friend, knowledge is an instrument, a pretext for a goal of a different order, for a different complicity and fidelity.

Under these conditions scientists cannot act without responsibility. Their defense of the truth must be conscious of the traumas that they can cause in a social order, and if they decide to go ahead (a decision to be hoped for), they have the opportunity to follow through with their drama: unmaskers in a world that needs masks. The scientists, the social thinkers, are crusaders, soldiers at the luminous flank of modernity, prophets of nakedness.

Someone might dispel the charm by saying that they do nothing with their critiques but to balance a game that also needs the

other side. It could be, in effect, that all this is nothing but a game where one party puts on the mask and the other tries to remove it, where some conceal by dressing up, and others reveal by baring themselves; all this could be the case, and yet, the consolation remains that the rebels, those who always defiantly attack, are the same who have joined the party of the ones who take off their clothes

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#### NOTES

1. As is readily seen, we are dealing with a series of terms with problematic definitions. *Truth, error, belief, history, value, individual, and culture* are terms that have generated much literature. To detain oneself with these terms may well mean to “detain oneself permanently,” that is, to do nothing but define and constantly redefine. Nevertheless, I believe that there is in this matter a kind of clandestine consensus that makes communication possible on the basis of common sense beyond the specifications.

2. The distinction between “objectivity” and “truth” is discussed by Habermas (1987). See also Léon Olivé 1985, chap. 4, who discusses the position of the German thinker in this regard.

3. A study regarding this theme served as a graduation thesis of Lourdes Alonso (Department of Philosophy and History, University of Havana, n.d.).

4. The term “mental coup d’état” was used by Alberto Arvelo Ramos in his book *En defensa de los insurrectos* (1992), an analysis of the attempted coup d’état against President Carlos Andrés Pérez. The central thesis of his work is that without democratic minds there can be no democracy. The author called for a “mental coup d’état” that would make democracy possible.

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# Feminism in the “New World Order”

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## I

What sorts of dilemmas arise when “Third World” women in the post–Cold War era first become aware of subordination based on gender? In Manila, in September 1992, I facilitated a women’s studies course with women from different countries in the Asian/Pacific region as participants. Most of the women were community activists of one sort or another; an admission requirement called for involvement in work with women. Because my assignment was to handle the module on “feminist analyses of the women’s movement in Asia/Pacific,” I selected readings broaching various formulations that have attempted to explain women’s subordination. I encouraged the women at every turn to use their lives and those of other women in their respective countries in considering the applicability or relevance of the theories presented.

As one might expect, the most significant realization for the women was that male domination permeated every facet of their lives. This process of coming to a feminist consciousness was speeded up, no doubt, by the accumulated experience and composition of this group of seventeen, with ages ranging from the early twenties to forty-six. The floodgates opened, the flow of exchange detailing specific cultural practices severely circumscribing women’s behavior proceeded as in a deluge. Yet the ultimate response this aroused was by no means unidimensional. For example, Rebecca, secure in the knowledge that hers was a healthy marriage affording a mutuality of affection, thought out

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loud as she sat across from me at lunch: "I've been married twenty-four years. Now I know that I am oppressed and that women in my country are oppressed. But what am I to do?"

It is tempting to interpret such a statement in the usual manner—that is, as an expression of powerlessness in the midst of large, incomprehensible controlling forces. But this is to take a one-sided view, for these women were acutely aware of the ambiguous character of the institutions that govern their lives, simultaneously restricting their activities as females and affirming their status as members of the community. Thus, despite her new apprehension of gender asymmetry, a twenty-five-year-old unmarried lawyer from Nepal continued to emphasize her personal preference for an arranged marriage, even though her parents had made available to her the option of choosing for herself. Her deference to what she perceived as her parents' wisdom based on age and experience suggests a boundedness to traditional ways of thinking that remained firm in the majority of these women, notwithstanding some of their nontraditional occupations. For her, as for the other women, any attempt to revise existing gender relations had to be weighed carefully against the conceivable breakdown of reciprocity and interdependence within the family and clan network, the ground upon which self-affirmation lies anchored.

That the awakening to individual and personal forms of oppression did not elicit the proposal of individualized solutions, therefore, came as no surprise. The women came from eleven Asian/Pacific countries—including Nepal, India, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea; three participants were non-Asian/Pacific—Rebecca from Zambia, and two college-age Euro-American women from the United States. All the women clearly comprehended the evolving, transitional character of their nations, and what that meant in terms of customs threatening and degrading to females—bride-burning, female infanticide, and the taking of temple prostitutes, to mention a few. At the same time, however, native cultures were viewed as a major means through which domination and decadence as symbolized by the West can be resisted.

Figuring prominently in these discussions was the way in

which most of the women saw the Philippines as separate from the rest of the Asian countries. To be sure, the presence of the two women from the United States, whose participation in the program was questioned from the very beginning (except for these two, who paid for tuition and living arrangements, everyone else was on scholarship), exacerbated these tensions. Filipinos suffer from "a lack of their own culture," according to the half dozen or so voices raised. For them the symptoms of this deprivation are evidenced as much in the way Filipinas dress and comport themselves (there was a citation of the "domineering" manner of Filipino women, but curiously enough, susceptibility to "Western" feminism was not openly impugned) as in the worldview inscribed in ubiquitous media images projecting the good life. Esther from Pakistan made no effort to conceal her disdain: "We are proud of our culture. We do not look up to America as our model."

Now none of what I have recounted thus far is new or particularly invested with novel insights. I want to stress that there is little to romanticize in the misogynistic religious rituals and cultural practices most of these women described. The majority of the women reside in the city or suburb where the veneer of an emergent industrialization is manifest, but underneath which lies a thickly encrusted foundation housing the old system of feudal relations. While these women may rebel against antiquated traditions that they have come to recognize as oppressive to their gender, they also approach with great trepidation the collapse of communal values to which they tacitly trace the social decay of the West. I think it is safe to assume that while these women are neither poor peasants nor urban slum dwellers, their habits of mind and living conditions are more representative of the larger portion of the world's population than, say, my students in Ohio. It is for this reason that I am using my experience with them as a backdrop for discussing the main tendencies in feminist theory and practice in the industrial West (like it or not, the West exerts hegemony in knowledge production as in other, more material ways), since my purpose is to explore some of their implications for women in developing countries in the context of a global women's movement.

Focusing on the feminist movement in the Philippines—a nation with long-standing historical ties to the United States—I will underscore the beneficial as well as adverse effects of a North/South feminist encounter, given current theoretical trends. Precisely because of its unique connection to the United States, the Philippine case might serve to clarify the issues involved in the articulation of feminisms in the “Third World,” particularly in light of the changing alignment of industrial powers in the “new world order.”

## II

In response to the question “What does feminism mean to you and what do you think it should do?” Judy Taguiwalo, executive director of the Manila-based Center for Women’s Resources, stated the following:

As a Filipina whose activism began . . . with the student movement in the late 60s, I originally understood feminism as a . . . white, middle-class women’s movement which . . . equated women’s subordinate status to male domination and emphasized confrontation with and separation from men. I felt it had no relevance . . . to the struggle for national democracy. . . .

That was over 20 years ago. I still hold . . . that women’s emancipation is inextricably linked to national and class liberation. But my own personal development . . . in our national movement, the development of our women’s movement, my present knowledge of the achievements and limitations in the handling of the woman question in countries which have won their liberation, and my exposure to feminist analyses and groups outside the Philippines have made me realize that feminism . . . has much to offer in . . . clarifying the particular roots and manifestations of women’s oppression. (Taguiwalo 1992, 36–37)

I reproduce the above quotation at length for two reasons. It is women like Judy Taguiwalo, a political prisoner and torture victim of the Marcos dictatorship, who have formed the backbone



of the feminist movement in the Philippines, at this point regarded as one of the most vigorous in the developing world (Mitter 1986, 153; Mirkinson 1992, 11). More importantly, the contours of the women's movement bear the imprint of these activists' thinking as it evolved from an outrightly productivist framework to one that, in embracing feminist analyses, assumes the calculated risk of reproducing neocolonial relations.

Colonized for nearly four hundred years by Spain and then taken over by the United States, the Philippines is still faced with the formidable problem of giving substance to what for the most part is little more than nominal independence.<sup>1</sup> The struggle of the sixties and beyond in which Taguiwalo and hundreds of thousands of other Filipinos were engaged was aimed at the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos, whose administrative policies confirmed continuing military and economic control by the United States. Consequently, protest against a modernization model relying on the production of consumer goods for export and its corollary, military repression—hallmarks of the Marcos regime eventually to be replicated by the government of Corazon Aquino—was also intended as a direct condemnation of U.S. imperialism. These represent, in broad outline, the national predicament which Filipina feminists must grapple with to resolve at the very moment that they strive to counter gender-linked instances of exploitation and oppression.

The origins of the contemporary women's movement can be traced back to the establishment of MAKIBAKA in 1970 as a revolutionary women's organization that affiliated with the NDF (National Democratic Front), a coalition of different anti-Marcos organizations spearheaded by the Communist Party of the Philippines. MALIBAKA's legal tenure was short-lived as it was soon forced underground by the imposition of martial rule in 1972. It was not until 1986 that it was reorganized for a brief public appearance during the cease-fire negotiations called by Cory Aquino. "Feminism" as a slogan did not find a friendly home in MAKIBAKA, tied as it was to the orthodox Marxism guiding party praxis. But the massive cross-class anti-Marcos groundswell that followed the murder of former senator Benigno Aquino in 1983 became the foundation for the emergence of

GABRIELA in 1984. As a federation currently composed of one hundred and twenty women's groups nationwide, GABRIELA has led the way in meeting head-on the inherently tense relations between women's distinct concerns and pressing national interests.

Today the women's movement has continued to participate in mass actions of a general nature: for the oil price rollback, part of the protest against conditions attached to loans from the IMF/WB (International Monetary Fund and World Bank); for the removal of the U.S. bases; against the legalization of arrests without warrants and unimpeded militarization; against degradation of the environment, principally by transnational corporations. An achievement of more recent vintage is its capacity to launch nationally coordinated campaigns and to wage effective pressure politics (de Vera 1992). But the most noteworthy change has been a qualitative one. The proliferation of women's organizations in the last few years (including the establishment of Women's Studies programs) has brought to the public consciousness a variety of issues heretofore unacknowledged, a primary one being domestic violence against women. It can no longer be said that the women's movement simply toes the progressive line, privileging the economic over the cultural or ideological. In fact it is in the realm of cultural production in which women have been most energetic and most passionate. The publication of books, staging of plays, music composition, the visual arts, performances and programs on radio and TV—in these the utilization of women's talent, imagination, creativity, and resources has been both remarkable and inspiring.

Several factors can be seen to account for the flourishing of feminism immediately following the Marcos era and thereafter: the "democratic space" opened up by Aquino's restoration of civil liberties and reestablishment of Congress; the weakening of the left due to both tactical and strategic mistakes; changes in the global arena, particularly the collapse of the Soviet Union. All of these helped legitimate the hard, patient, day-to-day work that feminists undertook to build an autonomous women's movement. Two years ago debates about the place of feminism in the revolutionary agenda as formulated by the Communist Party

were still taking place (Lansang 1991). But today with serious divisions wracking the left, there exists the possibility that, released completely from an economist paradigm on the one hand and drawn to the perquisites extended by international feminist networks and foreign funding sources on the other,<sup>2</sup> feminism could make a shift in another direction.

In the meantime, the urgency as well as the types of problems facing the majority of Filipino women militate against such a move taking place so quickly. Yet arriving at solutions to women's dilemmas that do not in some way incorporate retrograde properties has never been easy. The matter of contraceptives and population control is a good case in point. Here feminists must reckon with uneasy alliances—with the Catholic church, proliferators, and nationalists, for example, who all employ anticolonial rhetoric against World Bank sponsored population programs while leaving women's reproductive health needs unattended (Estrada-Claudio 1989).

Other situations are more clear-cut. The business of prostitution on the U.S. bases has pretty much been settled by the eruptions of Mt. Pinatubo. Prior to the bases' pull-out as precipitated by Mother Nature, it was the women's movement that stood in the forefront of the anti-U.S. bases campaign, serving Clark Air Field and Subic Naval Base their first notice of termination in March 1990 (de Vera 1992, 9). Now feminists are looking into the implementation of the government's conversion plans that are vital to the survival of fifty to fifty-five thousand registered and unregistered "entertainers" who have been displaced (Umali 1992). The interplay of gender, race, and class is so unmistakably stamped on the "entertainment industry" that it has not been difficult for feminists and nationalists to find common cause there.

The deployment of women workers abroad—comprehensible only as a phenomenon integral to the export-orientation policy and structural adjustments required by loans from IMF/WB—has been a subject of great concern to the progressive movement since the martial-law period. With poverty engulfing seventy percent of the population of sixty-five million, Filipinos who can scrape up the money from family and relatives turn to recruiters

who locate jobs for them overseas. In 1991 the National Statistics Office placed the number of overseas contract workers at 720,000, four out of ten of whom were women. who went abroad as domestic workers totalled 95,352 compared to 81,000 in 1987 (Palma-Beltran 1992, 3). Among registered nurses who numbered 173,340 in 1990, 25,940 joined the exodus for employment that year (Dionisio 1992, 59). When such tremendous numbers forsake the safety and familiarity of home for the means to support their families, it is time to question the social order that underwrites their dislocation. This is putting the matter in absurdly neutral terms, for reports of degradation, harassment, and violence are rife, especially among domestic workers and "entertainers." A Senate Committee Report confirms the prevalence of such incidents even as the actual number of cases filed officially is small (Beltran Palma and Javate de Dios 1992, 113–38).

The continuing commerce in mail-order brides persists in spite of a ban by Cory Aquino that resulted from lobbying by women's organizations. This, too, can be explained as an outcome of a deteriorating foreign debt-ridden economy that simply cannot provide for its citizens. A GABRIELA representative from the province of Negros with whom I spoke last summer described how bungalows sprouted overnight in a barrio in her region as a result of marriages to German "pen pals." The dutiful daughters, now stationed in Germany, had not ignored the childhood lesson of filial piety and sent money home to their parents. But the desire for a modicum of economic security, similarly harbored by "prostituted"<sup>3</sup> women on the U.S. bases, cannot be extricated from the yearning for association with a racial superior, a vestige of the colonial past. One woman I came across whose husband was British spoke of the good looks of her two sons, not because of any special features, but because the racial mix had diminished their dark complexion as Filipinos and, as an added bonus, they did not have flat noses.

Insofar as the women's movement retains its charge of advocacy for grass-roots women (peasants in the countryside and workers in urban areas) and for those suffering adversity indubitably shaped by a neocolonial state of affairs, feminism in the

Philippines will maintain its "Third World" character. There is little indication that the disintegration of the "Second World," its absorption into a global capitalist system, and the present reshuffling among industrial powers will mean anything other than an intensification of the economic woes of developing countries. How these economic tribulations are handled depends on the initiative of liberation movements whose alternatives have been limited by this historical conjuncture of international events (Petras and Fischer 1990).

In the post-Marcos years in the Philippines, the declining influence of the left as well as the macho stance of the revolutionary movement at its height have ironically functioned to invigorate the feminist enterprise. Up to this point feminist analysis wholly subscribes to the use of grand narratives indispensable to understanding sociopolitical and economic arrangements in developing nations, but which in the past decade has become anathema to *de rigueur* intellectuals in the West. The construction of theory, unlike in the West, has depended on the efforts of political organizers and the findings of university researchers who are also activists. Such a marriage of theory and practice, although not always in perfect harmony, still informs the work of Filipino feminists (Medel-Anonuevo 1990–91). At the very least, it is the vision of that union that spurs feminist activity.

But these conditions, as I have described them, are far from stable or fixed. That feminism stands at the crossroads seems apparent. So what is in store? In any projections of what could transpire, changes in the world picture have to be factored in, the status of "peripheral" countries being what it is. The weakening of the progressive movement as a whole, too, must be taken into account, since it can not but have an impact on the women's movement in the long term, if not in the near future. What the exact nature of that impact might be is, of course, difficult to predict with any accuracy. At worse, it could spell the erosion of feminist militancy, a watering down of leftist explications of women's socioeconomic troubles, or the ultimate abandonment of a revolutionary platform and a flight into the less hazardous terrain of cultural struggle and liberal reform. The virtual

mushrooming of women's offices, desks, and committees during the past two years, while boding well, can also take an inauspicious turn—the creation of a feminist bureaucracy dependent on dole-outs from foreign sources, for one. Already, a few women speak of a growing gap between feminists (who are generally from the middle class) and the grass roots, and an imminent “femocracy” in programs erected on development assistance from foreign governments (de Vera 1992, 16).

If these changes in fact take place—or even if only a fraction of them do—feminism in the Philippines will become that much more vulnerable to the authority of its U.S. counterpart and its theoretical leanings. (At this juncture it might be useful to recall the less-than-subtle chastisement we received from our Asian/Pacific colleagues.) Will the influence prove salubrious or inimical to the women's movement in the Philippines? It is to the exploration of this subject that I will now turn.

### III

These days one is unlikely to pick up a feminist book or journal without coming across an allusion to either essentialism (bad) or social constructionism (good)<sup>4</sup> as informing this or that piece of writing. Essentialism among feminists is defined as the belief that there is an immutable essence or unchanging humanity that all women share. Social constructionism, on the other hand, argues that “woman” is never a pregiven entity but is created in the social process. What I will attempt to do is ferret out some of the salient characteristics of both theoretical perspectives and examine their possible consequences for a “Third World”/“First World” interface, with the Philippine women's movement as my point of departure.

What is wrong with essentialism? The celebration of womanhood that in the United States finds expression in cultural feminism has inspired women to exalt supposedly female attributes, standing conventional misogyny on its head. At the onset of the feminist movement in the Philippines, too, it was this discovery of difference from men that exhilarated feminists and fired them up for action.<sup>5</sup> Women turned attention to their

work style and saw it as inherently less hierarchical, more cooperative and caring, and on the whole more humane than that of men. Some women even proposed the encoding of a "feminist ethic" which would infuse women's political work and set up a model for the society of the future. This initial euphoria has inevitably been tempered by other realizations. In any event, essentialism has not inflicted any appreciable harm within the domestic milieu, mainly because of the mitigation of class (and its articulation in the resistance movement) as a countervailing force.

Where essentialism becomes worrisome is in international encounters. The "universal female" that African-Americans, Latinas, and other women of color in the United States have fought so tenaciously to unmask and displace is alive and well in international feminist circles. I was told by a friend in Manila a few months ago that feminists are still called upon by foreign visitors to explain how it is that poverty is a feminist concern, and is GABRIELA really an organization of feminists or of nationalist women (read, dupes of men)? The wondrous ease with which "First World" feminists take it upon themselves to dispense advice on any number of things (giving "coming out" workshops for Filipino lesbians, for instance, or lectures derogating the ascription of women's subordination to Spanish and U.S. colonization as simplistic and reductive) is quite amazing.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Spelman is indeed correct in stating that it is in the very notion "as a woman" that the "Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism" is lodged (1988, x).

Maria Lugones contends that while in the United States racism is the major source of tension for women of color, internationally it is cultural imperialism (1991, 39). According to her, both are interactive phenomena, but the latter is not as perceptible because it entails no person-to-person mistreatment. This can explain the inability of Filipinas (unless residence in the United States has educated them) to discern racism in the conduct of those whose mission is to uplift and enlighten them. But blindness to racism on the part of the victim does not constitute the whole picture. I wish to emphasize the point that the ramifications of essentialism vary substantially, depending on where it

resides.<sup>7</sup> For the colonizer (following Spelman's pattern of argumentation), the most magnanimous impulses might be encapsulated in "As a woman, you are just like me." For the woman whose very psyche has been damaged by a deeply etched colonial mentality, such a declarative is construed as an invitation, an irresistible one, to a universal sisterhood.

Let us see how this operates. During the first stirrings of feminism in the Philippines, a keynote speaker at a conference (a Filipina) echoed the "We have gone too far" warning issued by Betty Friedan in the *Second Stage*. Now feminists at that time had barely begun investigation of gender relations within the family! No one came forth with the "Whatchou mean 'we'?" retort, a reflex reaction in racially sensitized U.S. people of color. This is not an isolated or uncommon occurrence, nor is the propensity to identify with the colonizer peculiarly female. In a neocolony, aping the master (or mistress) is a way of life. Consequently, the seductiveness of a call for unity based on a shared oppression cannot be downplayed when the exhortation comes from a perceived superior. In the case of Filipinas, knowledge of two cultures (and here the urgent task is one of recouping a decimated culture and a submerged collective identity) has led to neither an "epistemic advantage," nor the "borderlands consciousness" (Anzaldúa 1990, 377–89), or alienation that can result from straddling two contexts (Narayan 1989, 256–69). Instead, the pull has been toward an unconscious self-obliteration.

Essentialism as a trend in feminism has been harshly criticized by U.S. "Third World" women as well as by other writers, but I do not think that an iteration of all except the most pertinent (for women in the "Third World") of their objections is necessary here. Chandra Talpade Mohanty examines the variegated ways in which a singular focus on gender homogenizes "Third World" women, projecting them as passive victims (Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991, 51–80). Linda Alcoff points to cultural feminism's inability to forge long-range strategies for change (1988, 405–36). Lynne Segal uncovers what lies beneath the ahistorical glorification of women's "special nature"—an abandonment of hope, given a neoconservative political climate, in the tenability of social change (1987).



The ruling paradigms being what they are, Segal's lament that the ascendancy of essentialism in the 80s signalled the withdrawal from a social transformative project has found few reverberations since the 1987 publication of her book. Harking back to the activism of the 70s, she recalls the questions then crucial to feminists: the nature of human needs, of work, of politics, how we organize toward a new society (1978, 217–18). Segal was obviously writing as a socialist feminist. With socialism losing purchase among Western intellectuals at the onset of the Reagan-Bush (Thatcher in Great Britain) era of reaction, and receiving its final rites with the fall of the Eastern bloc and the ushering in of the "new world order," feminist thinkers have increasingly dissociated themselves from ethical questions that once served as the rallying cry for feminist activism. In itself a manifestation of how intellectual and philosophical currents are never removed from the *Zeitgeist*, this detachment and what it suggests of our inability to evade the molding power of the society we live in should give us pause. I need not repeat how paralyzing, how terribly destructive, the escapism that Segal writes about would be for women in the Philippines and the developing world.

In the past several years essentialism has been subjected to close scrutiny,<sup>8</sup> if not diabolization, the solipsism of white academic feminists having been decisively imputed to its lingering presence. Perhaps "Third World" women worry needlessly about their continued marginalization or exclusion. Chilla Bulbeck writes: "Western feminism has become less Eurocentric and, indeed, now discusses the differences among women with a vengeance" (1991, 77–78). It is unquestionably true that elaborations of "difference," with their theoretical underpinnings derived from postmodernist constructivism, have come to frame feminist discussions where the goal is to eradicate essentialist residues. Whether this new approach can act to alleviate exclusionary tendencies and whether it is conducive to the creation of a healthier climate in which "First World" and "Third World" feminist connections can be made, warrants some looking into.

With the aid of postmodernist devices, the concept of a

“universal woman” has been deconstructed and denaturalized (Riley 1988; de Lauretis 1986, 1–19). In its place subjectivities have emerged that are fragmentary, multiple, contradictory, and in constant flux. To the exclusive focus on gender has been appended a list of other forms of oppression—racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, etcetera—all of which are mutually determining and none of which supersedes the other in importance. The meaning of “woman,” then, is now constantly deferred and never fully established since this depends on how gender intersects with multiple other axes at any given moment. It would follow from this premise that, given the widely differing experiences of women, the common ground for feminism will have been swept away. On this score, Donna Haraway assures us that the resulting “permanent partiality of feminist points of view” ought not deter feminists from working well. Furthermore, she allows that “intensifications of hardship experienced worldwide in connection with the social relations of science and technology are severe,” then throws a caveat: “But what people are experiencing is not transparently clear, and we lack sufficiently subtle connections for collectively building effective theories of experience” (1989, 196–97).

Whatever else might be deduced from Haraway’s statements (a warm bond of international solidarity perhaps not among them), it seems evident that the construction of theory based on experience is the first order of business that supplants all other claims for the moment. Feminism has now situated “epistemological priority . . . in the personal, the subjective, the body, the symptomatic, the quotidian, as the very site of material inscription of the ideological” (de Lauretis 1986, 11). One might conclude that, at last, the challenge of the sixties to politicize the personal has been met and consummated. Maybe so, but L.A. Kauffman contends that the present vision informing identity politics radically deviates from that of the sixties. Whereas consciousness-raising then emphasized the social nature of individual experience and was viewed as a prelude to political change, today self-transformation is itself political change (1990, 74, 77). It cannot be otherwise since the earmark of current feminist approaches is the rejection of a cosmic view adopted from

postmodernism. Without such a synthesizing perspective, how can one begin to grasp the shape of capitalism or any other social formation? Besides, it is even doubtful that what is under discussion is self-transformation; it may only be a mode of "self-consciousness" (de Lauretis 1986, 8) exemplified by "the eccentric subject" whose "position is attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries, between sociosexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses" (de Lauretis 1990, 145).

What might this approach imply for Filipino and other "Third World" women? On the one hand, the emphasis on heterogeneity and pluralism connotes a refreshing acceptance of experiences that were once denigrated or ignored by posing women as a unitary category. Nevertheless, it is also the case that relations of power are elided by the stringing together of a series of oppressions, mutually defining though these may be (Gordon 1991, 106–07; Carby 1990, 84–85), in the end insuring the preservation of things as they are. The notion of multiple, unstable, self-contradictory subjectivities is extremely fascinating, to say the least, and may be helpful as foil and contrast to reductionist doctrines that typically guide "Third World" revolutionary struggles.

Still, I think of Victoria Justiniani, MAKIBAKA spokesperson during the peace talks of 1986–87, who was in the group of Asian/Pacific women that I taught. For twenty years she was able to elude capture—she "surfaced" briefly for the two months of ceasefire negotiations—until June 1992 when a military man got the prize of P500,000 (about \$20,000) that had been placed on her head. "Vicvic," now thirty-seven, came from a landlord family. How could this kind of feminism have instructed her? That it was foolish of her to join the revolution because she had no personal stake in it? When the military came to arrest her and asked if she was Victoria Justiniani, could she have summoned the heterogeneous, fluctuating, heteronomous, conflicting character of her identity and countered with "Am I that name?" If not Victoria, how about the women from the other Asian/Pacific countries? Despite their initial naiveté about feminism, they were

quick to recognize women's oppression once it was pointed out, but not as facile in devising solutions. I doubt that this was due to feelings of helplessness, because they simply did not evince that. Rather, it was a cognition of the limits imposed by the material world on what is possible, as well as a keen awareness of their profound integration into a family, a clan, a circle of friends, acquaintances, and workmates, and a social system operating in determinate ways that prevented any quick answers. In short, they did not think purely in the individual/personal terms that are a prerequisite, it seems to me, for these sorts of formulations.

If the exaltation of the essential female induced a retreat from politics, it can be said that the celebration of "difference" has resulted in the relabeling of what is considered political, restricting it to the personal, the local, and the discursive. As Jenny Bourne explains, once the exploration of experience itself becomes a form of resistance, and oppression, not exploitation, is the focus of attention, then "the distinction between idea and act, between individual and structure, between the real world and its representation is completely lost" (1987, 3). Bourne holds that this conflation of the objective and the subjective, the material and the metaphysical, results in the practice of challenging power in discourse rather than in challenging power directly. The concept that power lies everywhere, useful in granting the oppressed subject the self-determination and agency for the enactment of resistance in the mundane practices of everyday life, at the same time effectively dissolves the broader political project and justifies its substitution by an individualist one that is confined to the discursive.

If, as I mentioned earlier, women in developing countries like the ones I have cited are alert to the material conditions of their lives and not as inclined toward individualism, what is there to be concerned about? As I have also mentioned, things are in a state of flux. In the past several years, research employing precisely these approaches has encroached on the study of women in the Philippines. The problematization of language and science (in cultures where science has yet to gain a firm foothold!) and the replacement of universal values with a view of society in

which different discourses compete to create subjectivities are recommended as means of illuminating the complexities of development for "Third World" women (Gedalof, 1992, 3). While these new ways of looking at women's condition could have served as an antidote to the class reductionism reigning during an earlier period, the situation is different today. With the declining influence of the left, there will be fewer counterforces to offset the impact of these new ideologies.

What do these studies look like? I had occasion to read an otherwise interesting dissertation on gender, the military, and violence in the Philippines that I believe will soon see publication. The author had many unusual opportunities, one being to closely observe the workings of both the government military and the NPA (New People's Army, the guerrilla arm of the Communist Party). Using the Foucauldian conception of power as capillary, relational, contradictory, and heterogeneous, she wound up claiming parallel power for the NPA and revolutionary forces, discursively diffusing the violence of the Philippine armed forces, the vigilantes, and other state-backed agencies. She discovered on arrival in the Philippines that all actors were ultimately aligned either for or against the state. Her theoretical perspective, however, compelled her to realign them to fit a pre-determined pattern; namely, to flatten out and reduce all contending forces to the same level. What would Victoria Justiniani and the impoverished peasants alongside whom she fought and struggled for twenty years of her life have to say to this? And yet the author prefaces her work with the declaration that her objective is to produce emancipatory knowledge! One needs to ask, for whom? Needless to say, Nancy Hartsock's criticism of the homogenizing effect of the Foucauldian notion of capillary power is perfectly illustrated by this example (1990, 170).

Employing Foucault's *dispositif*, Collete St. Hilaire (1992) examines the impact of development programs designed to integrate women in the development process in the Philippines. With the spate of foreign funding pouring into the country in the past two years, her interrogation of one specific project (Canadian-funded) is very timely and essential. St. Hilaire investigates a health and livelihood project and finds that "the project includes

a whole series of control mechanisms, a complex system used to measure, if not the integration of women in development, at least the management of their underdevelopment" (1992, 8). Moving on to the newer gender and development programs in which feminists have recently deployed their activist energies, she appropriately warns of their potential cooptation under agency pressure.

To the extent that St. Hilaire's focus on the mechanisms women use to resist or make accommodations with development plans exposes hidden agendas, the study is extremely useful. But one can also discern in her framework an anti-totalization that inhibits her from ever naming the development or modernization model that is being upheld in these programs. What does this omission imply? She disparages as totalizing and symptomatic of a vanguardist mentality the feminist agenda valorizing the poorest and the most oppressed women as the main recipients of social change, a strategy which she perceives as simply promoting a new "historical Subject" to replace the working class (1992, 13). What does she suggest as an alternative? Surely not a move outside the *dispositif*, she admits, because such a site does not exist. In lieu of a target group, she endorses alliances based on common interests, but alliances that "like our identities . . . remain precarious, unstable, in constant flux, displacing and being displaced as they come into contact with other differences, whether of class, race, sexual preference, age, nationality." (1992, 13). Without a doubt, a fundamental respect for differences is indispensable for insuring that organizations we set up remain democratic and humane. But in the absence of a target population, political workers can easily slide into a self-serving and opportunist activism. Finally, an activist who is able to successfully organize with such a nebulous platform as a guiding light most assuredly deserves the heartiest congratulations.

Current discussions in the West are debating precisely these merits and pitfalls involved in the amalgamation of feminism and postmodernism. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, for example, look forward to the prospect of a postmodern feminism that would combine "feminism's robust conceptions of social criticism" with postmodernist antifoundationalism (1990). They

contend that feminism need not abandon large historical narratives nor analyses of societal macrostructures. Yet the feminist political practice they project, "a patchwork of overlapping alliances" (1990, 35), hardly suggests strategic action based on a subscription to an overarching, coherent narrative, but rather bears a strong resemblance to a postmodern pastiche. Sonia Kruks holds that even as feminists have benefited from the postmodern disavowal of the Enlightenment's autonomous subject, we should remain able to grant a role to individual consciousness and agency (1992, 91). In her review of Foucault's conceptualization of power, Nancy Hartsock explains that Foucault's emphasis on the heterogeneity and specificity of each situation causes him to occlude macrostructures, centering instead on how individuals experience and exercise power (1990, 168). Linda Hutcheon values postmodernism because of its ability to deconstruct and make ideology explicit, but she also sees it as politically ambivalent; in contrast, "feminisms have distinct unambiguous political agendas of resistance" (1989, 142).

The problem, it seems to me, is that even when feminists these days insist on holding on to a political agenda, their formulations are so abstract, so detached from actual struggle, that their implementation in the concrete is very difficult to imagine. I am unable to picture, for example, exactly how Chela Sandoval's notion of "oppositional consciousness" which she defines as "a kinetic and self-conscious mobility of consciousness . . . utilized by U.S. Third World feminists as they identify oppositional subject positions and enact them differentially" (1991, 11), might operate as a collective political strategy. Donna Haraway lauds Sandoval's argument as "one potent formulation for feminists out of the worldwide development of anticolonialist discourse" (1989, 180). What does Sandoval advance that Filipina migrant workers or mail-order brides (or "prostituted" women, poverty-stricken urban slum dwellers, landless tenants, or the lumpen, etc.) do not already employ as an everyday survival skill? Perhaps I am reading into Sandoval's new theory what she never intended in the first place, a prescription for group action. But for political schemes to have meaning,

they need to be given some historically concrete content so we can test their operability.

Another version of a politics built on heterogeneous identities and localized narratives can be found in the “crossover politics” put forth by Nancie Carraway that conceives of multicultural feminist coalitions as the locus for the formation of a reconstituted community (1991).

In this regard, Christine di Stefano appropriately questions the viability of solidarity that is no more than local and negative, offering only resistance and unable to project substantive alternatives (1990, 76). Furthermore, she fears that “the permanent partiality of the feminist point of view” can only serve to make feminism vulnerable to modern state and disciplinary power. To be sure, state power is anything but fractured, particularly when it is challenged. Ordinary people in too many “Third World” countries with their military might buttressed by “First World” powers can attest to this from experience. A more ambitious project is one proposed by Rosemary Hennessy that incorporates a global social analytic and materialist feminism into postmodernism’s critique of the subject and of epistemology (1993). Such a framework holds the most promise for creating collaborative linkages with women in developing countries, but unfortunately, like most treatises currently being developed in the West, this one provides little concrete evidence of its workability or efficacy.

As we have seen, while there is a great deal of debate and no clear consensus on future directions for feminism at this time, there are, nevertheless, fairly conspicuous tendencies that do not augur well for the interface between “Third World”/“First World” feminisms. Discussing postmodernism’s withdrawal from ethics and refuge in aesthetics, Laura Kipnis voices some self-evident “truths”:

It indicates the resistance of first-world feminists to the dangerous knowledge that in a *world* system of patriarchy, upheld by an international division of labor, unequal exchange and the International Monetary Fund, we first-world feminists are also the beneficiaries. (1988, 165)



As Susan Bordo argues, feminists may have to give up fantasies of epistemological conquest, explaining that the Cartesian God's eye view or view from nowhere has simply been dislodged by the "dream of everywhere," which is deceptively plural but just as personally invested (1990).

What is puzzling in most of these feminist appropriations of postmodernism is that they fail to question the assumption of the existence of a postmodern condition to begin with. Postmodernism is understood to differ from modernism in its concentration on the production of signs and in the production of debt and fictitious capital instead of the mass production of goods (Harvey, 1989). On the ideological level, as we have seen, these material changes are reflected in the reproduction of the social and symbolic order through the exploration of difference, the rejection of grand narratives, and a delimitation of political struggles to the local and specific. But does the postmodern condition represent a historical break from the modern period? Alex Callinicos (1989) thinks not, agreeing with David M. Gordon that what we are witnessing is the decay of the postwar global economy rather than the establishment of a new system of production and exchange. He also agrees with Gordon that the nation-state has by no means declined in economic importance with the globalization of capital. He debunks what he considers the myth of postindustrialism, arguing that on a global scale the industrial working class has witnessed considerable growth, not a diminution, the emergence of newly industrializing countries testifying to this fact. (We might be reminded here of Haraway's cyborg, a postmodern fantasy of the Southeast Asian electronics worker on the global assembly line.) Lastly, he asserts that, contrary to postmodernist accounts, wage labor has come to characterize social experience even more than in the past with the entry of women into the labor force and the decline of peasant agriculture. In sum, it appears that the system of production we are looking at is depressingly similar to the one it is presumed to have replaced, only it has extended its tentacles worldwide, and its most exploitative features vastly exaggerated and intensified. What I have written about women in the Philippines should corroborate this.

Callinicos rejects a simple equation of postmodernist culture with the rise of the new middle class, as some analysts have done, despite his recognition that the period has indeed spelled “good times” for this segment, if not “new times.” His most disturbing argument, and one that Western feminists might do well to think about, however, is the assertion that postmodernism as an intellectual trend is an expression of a specific group’s disenchantment with the promise of revolutionary change during the period of the sixties. Thus for him postmodernism “turns out to be less about the world than the expression of a particular generation’s sense of ending” (171).

Whether or not we accept wholly or in part (or not at all) Callinicos’ arguments, I think we would have to agree that the situation in developing countries is far different from that of the industrial West. As Nelly Richard remarks, Latin Americans “need not feel the weariness of belonging to a sated, over-consuming society, since their connection to that culture has invariably been one of dispossession” (1987/88, 11). But feminists from the West who do their research in “Third World” countries seem superbly capable of ignoring this simple fact and somehow presume people there to also suffer anxiety about the unsettling effects of having been catapulted into a postmodern era. It is true that the outcome of colonization is precisely a superimposition that creates a collage of cultures prefiguring, on the surface, the condition of postmodernity. But surely the shanties that ever-increasing numbers of urban poor inhabit, and the absence of sanitary facilities, indoor plumbing, electricity, etc., should make apparent the actuality that modernism has not quite arrived. So what makes it so easy for a feminist from the West to comfortably recommend the setting up of alliances where a women’s movement with a fully functioning, well-coordinated network already exists, and to write with equanimity about precarious “Third World” identities? What makes it so easy to directly apply a philosophical drift which, given its birth in the conjuncture of events that has spawned the “new world order,” has little relevance in a “peripheral” social formation?

I just heard from one of the two U.S. women who attended

the Asian/Pacific intercultural course. This was her first visit to a developing country. Some of her experiences were delightful, others difficult to handle. In my module I tried to place my discussion of women's condition in the context of a global economic system, delineating "center"/"periphery" relations. In part this was what encouraged some women to raise questions about the status of the Philippines and its continuing struggle for self-determination and a sense of national pride. My U.S. student, therefore, was not unaware of these issues. In her paper she describes in some detail her various encounters and her reactions to them. The last event she writes about is a visit to an area where people are subjected to government military operations. In giving her reaction to this, she also makes her concluding comments: "It was at this point, for the first time in my life, that I treasured the fact that I was able to live in such a free country." After all is said and done, I suspect that it is variations of this sentiment—and here, drawing on postmodernist jargon, I would stress its protean quality—that subtend whatever theoretical constructs "First World" women come up with, however nuanced, sophisticated, and elegant they may appear to be. I have much hope in this student, but I am only too aware that sometimes we are impervious to the most elementary ideas because we are loath to surrender those very precious guarantees of importance that we presume to constitute our birthright.

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#### **NOTES**

1. For Samir Amin, the option for countries that have been "maldeveloped" is either transnationalization or autonomous development, and not immediately socialism or capitalism (Resnick and Wolff 1985, 1–8).

2. In recent years, money previously given to the government has been channelled to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), a significant number of which have a women-in-development focus or a mandate toward "gender sensitivity" (de Vera 1992, 16; St. Hilaire 1992). For the implications of this trend, see Constantino-David 1990 and Council for People's Development 1991.

3. This is the term preferred by Filipino feminists, presumably to emphasize the involuntary character of the occupation.

4. Diana Fuss (1989) questions the assumption that the two are binary opposites, suggesting instead that they are merely two sides of the same coin. But her argument appears to rest less on substance than on a rhetorical maneuver. In any case, most feminists accept the opposition.

5. Unlike in the United States and Great Britain, where two tendencies—the push for equality with men and the celebration of difference—co-existed to impel both the early women’s movement and the second wave (Cott 1986, 49–62), in the Philippines the claim that women are just as capable as men has not gained currency, perhaps because individualist competition is not a core value.

6. Susan Bassnett writes about the lack of reciprocity that shapes relations between U.S. women and those in Eastern Europe, the former always presuming the latter to be recipients of their help (1992, 12). If this situation obtains among Caucasians, what hopes can one reasonably entertain for women of color living in the periphery?

7. Lugones complains that white feminist academicians have responded to charges of ethnocentrism by revising their theories, a convenient divagation (1991, 41). Susan Bordo, too, believes that these charges did not require a theoretical shift but, rather, careful attention to one’s prejudices (1990, 138).

8. In an otherwise perceptive essay Aihwa Ong, for example, criticizes Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen, and June Nash and Patricia Fernandez Kelly for being more occupied with the operations of capital and the consequent exploitation of women than with the details of “Third World” women’s experience (1988, 84–85).

How about reserving a place for studies like these whose aim is to demonstrate the exploitative nature of capitalism or of development programs? Should we now turn our backs on such realities? Can studies concentrating on the intricacies of women’s responses, useful and fascinating as they are, substitute for such works?

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### Communists and Right Revisionism in Australia

Peter Symon

*Peter Symon has been general secretary of the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) from the time of its formation in 1971. The founding members of the SPA were all former members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) who for a number of years had been opposing what they viewed as a steady movement of the CPA leadership away from the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism.*

*Peter Symon participated in the International Seminar of Communist Parties in Calcutta in May 1993 (see “Nature, Society and Thought,” vol. 6, no. 1 [1993]: 57–90). At the request of the Marxist Forum, he prepared this account of the demise of the Communist Party of Australia.*

“It was believed that the militant proletariat had been finally buried with the [defeat] of the Paris Commune. But, completely to the contrary, it dates its most powerful advance from the Commune and the Franco-German war.” So wrote Engels in his introduction to *Class Struggles in France* by Karl Marx.

Engels wrote this introduction in 1895, twenty-five years after the Paris Commune, but sufficient time had passed to gauge the

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direction being taken by events. Engels was right, and since that time the proletariat continued to grow throughout Europe and the world. Many struggles and revolutions followed the Paris Commune, culminating in the victory of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The first worker's state was established. Communist parties committed to socialist revolution were formed in many countries. Inexorably, capitalism produced more and more of its own gravediggers—the working class.

Revolutions in Europe and Asia followed. Then Cuba broke the capitalist wall in the Western Hemisphere. We can see in all these a historic progression of the international working-class and revolutionary movements.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist states of Eastern Europe has once again led to euphoria on the part of international reaction. "Communism is dead and buried," they cry. It is asserted that the collapse marks the end of history, meaning that capitalism is humankind's highest level of development and is not to be replaced by any other social system.

But, we can précis Engels today and comment: It was believed that the militant proletariat had been finally buried with the defeat of the Russian Revolution, but, contrary to those who declared its death, the revolutionary working-class movement dates its most powerful maturing and inevitable resurgence from that time.

Now, less than five years after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the demise of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), it is already possible not only to write of an inevitable resurgence by using our knowledge of historical materialism but to see its early manifestations in the struggles of the people and the work of the communist parties on all the continents.

Marx and Engels learned much from the lessons of the Paris Commune. Our task is to learn from the breakup of the Soviet Union as well as from the Commune and many other experiences.

Many Marxist parties have already turned their attention to this task. They are learning from the complex processes that undermined socialism and the communist parties of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and are reviewing their own work and improving their theory and practice.

Our basis is the working class of our countries and,

collectively, the international working class. It cannot be replaced or done away with. It is an essential and indispensable part of modern productive processes. And just as long as there is an exploited working class, there will be a working-class movement demanding an end to exploitation and its consequences. Hence the need for political parties committed to that purpose.

In response to the events, some who do not accept this estimation have, in one way or another, abandoned their revolutionary position and put aside the socialist objective. To the extent that they still wish to be regarded as being on the side of socialism and progress, they are searching for a “new” course.

It is this supposed “new” course that I wish to write about in this short article and to draw on the specific experience of the Australian movement, believing it to be one of the lessons to be learned from this historical period.

This “new” course became identified with claims of “socialist renewal,” a nonclass “democracy,” criticism and rejection of democratic centralism and the concept of the “leading role” of the working class and the party, abandonment of the party as an activist organisation, rejection of class struggle, and “pluralism” in ideology.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was founded in 1920. Militant and revolutionary-minded workers were given great encouragement and inspiration by the success of the Russian Revolution. There were also several generations of Australian working-class politics to draw upon. The party did much highly creditable work. It won considerable influence among the working class, particularly in the trade-union movement.

The struggle against the poverty and unemployment of the Depression in the 1930s, against war and fascism and then the heroic resistance of the Soviet Union against the Nazi invasion proved for many the validity and achievements of socialism and the leadership role of communist parties.

World War II was followed by a long period of economic boom conditions for capitalism, coinciding with the Cold War in the international arena. It was a period of intense anti-Communism. The influence of the Communist Party, compared with the days of the Depression and World War II, declined.

Capitalist leaders, including the social democratic leaders of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), declared the postwar boom years to be a “golden age” for capitalism. And so it seemed for many. There was very low unemployment, low inflation, and considerable industrial growth. The working-class movement was able to make considerable economic and social gains. Reforms were easy to achieve. With such advances, revolution hardly seemed to be necessary.

The Communist Party was faced with a declining membership and a contraction of influence in the trade-union movement as right-wing social democrats challenged the influence of the Communists. Electoral votes went down compared to those won in the war period. An attempt was made to outlaw the Communist Party, and although this failed, the intense anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism at home and internationally had its effect. But it was not just the internal pressures.

This was also the period of the Cold War launched by Churchill’s speech in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946. Khrushchev’s Twentieth Congress speech shocked many. Then came the counterrevolutionary attempts in the GDR, Hungary and, later, Czechoslovakia. The rupture in the international communist movement, which mirrored the split between the parties of the Soviet Union and China, led still others to look for another way.

However, the CPA (and one suspects, many other parties) failed to deal adequately with these problems. Two extremes emerged—one which excused all and the other which condemned all. A thoroughly objective analysis was required, one which separated socialist principles and Marxist theory from distortions, crimes, and misuse. This is a task that in many respects is only now being made in the international communist movement.

At this time other phenomena arose. The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of the women’s liberation and gay liberation movements; student struggles and workers’ control movements were prominent. Toward the end of the 60s the struggle against the dirty war in Vietnam brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets. Then came the environmental movement.

The CPA saw in these movements new contingents in the struggle for socialism. This evaluation was an overestimation of

the revolutionary potential of such movements. The CPA leaders saw in them something that was not there. At the same time they asserted that the working class had been absorbed into the bourgeois system. The elevation of the mass movements and the downgrading of the working class when put together led to a downgrading of the class struggle and of Marxism. They were seen as having been superseded by middle-class social forces, by nonclass “human values” and “pluralism.”

Yet another factor that influenced events in the 1980s was the shift to the right by the leaders of social democracy. The developing crisis of capitalism was also a crisis for social democracy. Its leaders readily took economic rationalist theories on board. This right swing by the social democratic leaders created the illusion that there was space for a left social democratic party that would be more popular than the Communist Party.

All these factors operated over a considerable period of time, but combined, they provided a breeding ground for the right revisionism which grew apace in the Communist Party of Australia. While the process began in the early 1960s, the truth was obscured by claims that changes were needed for the “renewal” of the party and the socialist objective. The new ideological concepts claimed to speak for “social progress,” for “liberation,” and “human values.” They were said to be a “development” of Marxism. It took some time for most members of the party to understand the real essence of the direction being advocated by the leadership.

While it is always necessary to review the objective realities and to take account of the economic, political, and social changes taking place in society, this must be done by the application of Marxism. The fact was, however, that Marxism was abandoned bit by bit. A foot was placed on the path of liquidation of the revolutionary party and the abandonment of the socialist objective.

“Renewal” did not follow the adoption of the “new” ideas and organisational principles. Instead, there was a slow process along the long road to liquidation that was finally reached by the CPA in 1990. The party was not destroyed directly by the ruling class but from within.

In preparation for the organisational liquidation of the CPA, its leadership proclaimed the objective of forming a New Left Party (NLP)—a so-called “broad” party. The CPA leaders thought they could create a party which would attract many of the activists from the various mass movements. Despite the very positive role and courageous activity of forces from these movements, many did not and do not want to be organised into a political party. They did not have a developed political strategy in mind nor had they moved towards accepting a revolutionary theory.

Those advocating the formation of the NLP assumed that the new party would also attract left social democrats. This assumption did not turn out to be valid either. Left-wing social democrats continued to find a home in the ALP and went along with right-wing policies for the sake of party unity and with the purpose of retaining hold of government. Opportunism, combined with an absence of theory and class commitment, turned out to be stronger than the proclaimed commitment of some left social democrats to socialism and social justice.

This new and allegedly “broad” party did not advance a socialist objective. It did not base itself on Marxist ideology but was pluralist and eclectic. It did not have any organisational cohesion. It had a “do what you please” approach and abhorred any suggestion of discipline. It did not base itself on the working class. In ideological and organisational orientation, the New Left Party was a left-leaning social democratic type party in a country where a strong and well-entrenched social democratic party already existed. The ALP continues to command the political allegiance of most of the working class and many intellectuals and is able to include left-wing activists in its ranks. There was no place for a second social democratic party.

The New Left Party had a short life of about two years. In 1992 it, too, disbanded.

The tragedy is that many excellent and committed activists who hold to a socialist objective have been run into a dead-end, and the CPA, to which they had adhered, was destroyed.

When right revisionism takes hold of a party leading a socialist state it results in the abandonment of the leadership role of the

communist party and to the liquidation of both the party and socialism.

The adoption of right revisionist ideas and practices by Gorbachev and other leaders of the CPSU has had that consequence in the former USSR—a catastrophe for the people of the Soviet Union and the CPSU, not to mention the revolutionary and liberation movements of many countries.

The Soviet Union had many problems that needed to be solved and many were under the illusion that they could be overcome by the adoption of a right revisionist course. As in Australia this course was dressed up as “socialist renewal.” The abandonment of Marxism, the adoption of unprincipled compromises in the class struggle, and eventually the abandonment of the class struggle itself lead inexorably to liquidation of the revolutionary party of the working class. It means the restoration of bourgeois, idealist philosophy. It leads, in the case of a socialist country, to the restoration of capitalist class rule. It represents a repudiation of socialism.

This is the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the experience of the CPA and international experience in recent times.

It is necessary to say more about some of the ideological positions taken up by the liquidationists.

“Human values”; attitudes to democracy; the class struggle; changes in the working class; pluralism; questions of unity, “broadness” and “narrowness”; the understanding of democratic centralism; the question of the leading role of communist parties and what this means; nationalism and internationalism; dogmatism and right opportunism are all familiar to readers.

As far back as 1972, Australian Communists were presented with arguments to the effect that a struggle for “human values” was superseding the class struggle. But, first of all, the relationship of being to consciousness was turned on its head: “In present conditions a transformation of consciousness is essential before objective conditions can be suitably transformed, not the other way round,” wrote Eric Aarons, a leading figure in the CPA in 1972 (*Philosophy for an Exploding World: Today’s Values Revolution*, Sidney: Brolga Books, 1972, 126–27). He claimed that

“because values deal with the most generalised attitudes which people have and act upon, they may be regarded as the ‘social cement’ . . . holding a social system together.”

Aarons asserted that “as it developed, marxism took on a rather equivocal or even disdainful view of ethical, moral, value considerations.” On the class structure of society: “Many attempts have been made to find some basis for analysis which would provide an objective starting point for delineating in classical marxist fashion the class forces of modern society.” He went on, “Among the eighty percent of people owning no means of production there are various and divergent strata—they can be called classes and sub-classes if so wished—[but] to look for a ‘leading class’ among these strata in the classical way that the bourgeois class held leadership in the capitalist revolutions . . . is to try to apply a model which does not fit.”

And again, “It now seems to me that these attempts [at political analysis] fail because they keep within the framework of the primacy of ownership over all other social relations and the determination of consciousness by these ownership relations, while other vital aspects are ignored or minimised.”

These viewpoints are presented to show the ideological positions used to underpin the political course which was taken by the leadership of the CPA. As already said, they were at that time put forward as the way to achieve a “renewal” of the party. Pluralism was an essential basis of attempts by the CPA to form a “coalition of the left” and after the party’s liquidation, the New Left Party was a continuation of the search for pluralism.

“Pluralism,” wrote Aarons, “has come to stay in political commitment, in life style and in philosophy and theoretical approach in general. . . . Such an apparently amorphous arrangement might well prove more enduring . . . compared with the integral social structures and systems of thought which tend to become brittle and moribund through being militantly defended against dissenting views and ultimately against innovation and change” (152–53).

Eric Aarons took the undoubted ideological pluralism in society and attempted to introduce it into Marxism and into a



party basing itself on Marxism. The inevitability of differing ideological and political views on a multitude of issues in society is one thing. Ideological pluralism within a party is quite a different matter.

Marxism is essentially critical, recognising change as “the way of life” of all things. But this dialectic of a changing world is different from an eclectic of the differing philosophical theories to be found in society. For example, it is not possible to synthesise opposing views concerning the basic question of philosophy, that matter is primary and thought is secondary and a derivative of matter. Both idealist and materialist philosophies will continue to exist and contend into the foreseeable future. But it is not possible to contemplate a philosophical “marriage” between them.

The advocacy of pluralism by Eric Aarons was an attempt (successful, as it turned out) to introduce ideological pluralism into the Communist Party, which, until then had been based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, meaning by that dialectical and historical materialism. The 1958 constitution of the CPA said: “The program, policies and organisational principles of the Party are based upon Marxism-Leninism, applied to the conditions of Australia.”

In the 1970 constitution, however, this formulation was changed to read: “The program, policies and attitudes of the party are determined by a scientific socialist analysis of the contemporary world and Australian reality.” It goes on: “Scientific socialism, founded by Marx, is *a* rational method of studying and changing society” (emphasis added).

This opened the door to pluralism within the party and it was not long after this that Trotskyism was proclaimed as a “legitimate revolutionary trend.” Marxism became just one among a number. Later, all references to Marxism were dropped and bourgeois philosophy took over.

Another concept assiduously pushed by the CPA leadership was that of “broadness.” This term is usually posed against an alleged “narrowness” of a Marxist party. But how can a party, guided by the comprehensiveness of Marxism, which takes into

account the many-sidedness of phenomena, which studies and comes to decisions on the basis of the objective realities of society, be “narrow”?

It is suggested that other community organisations are “broad,” hence the idea (since “broadness” is preferable to “narrowness”) that a communist party should mirror itself on the various community organisations. To achieve this, the party must adopt pluralism in ideology, abandon its partisanship in the class struggle, and adopt liberal bourgeois concepts of organisation rather than democratic centralism.

The CPA leaders attempted to implement their ideas on “broadness” when they launched the New Left Party. It incorporated all their principles in ideology, politics, and organisational principles. Experience has shown that it was a dismal failure.

It can be argued that communist parties are part of society and are, hence, part of the “broadness” of society. In practice, however, those who preach “broadness” attempt to exclude and isolate communist parties from any participation in social and political life. In the case of the CPA leaders they achieved that result by liquidating the party altogether!

There is a direct connection between this ideological base and the gradual transformation of the CPA, its abandonment of class positions and the socialist objective, of democratic centralism as the party’s organisational principle, of its working-class base, and its revolutionary role in society. Its final liquidation as an organisation was merely the logical outcome of the so-called “new” course begun in the 1960s.

It was necessary to vigorously oppose the right-revisionist trend in the CPA and although this took some time to develop, this was the fundamental reason for the formation of the Socialist Party of Australia in 1971.

The experience of right revisionism in the present period shows conclusively that it is a departure from Marxism. It is anticommunist and antisocialist in essence. When followed, it transforms a communist party into, at best, a social democratic or radical type party. If it takes root in a socialist state it will lead to the destruction of socialism and the re-establishment of bourgeois rule, bourgeois ideology, and capitalist economic relations.

Space does not allow for discussion of other issues listed earlier but those few discussed are sufficient to identify right revisionism.

Revisionism is always present in society and it infiltrates the communist movement. It finds a particular base among the middle class in society and reflects their equivocal position between the working class and the capitalist class. Within the working-class and communist movements it is a reflection of bourgeois ideology and attracts those whose Marxist-Leninist theory and working-class commitment are limited or undeveloped. It is a variant of bourgeois ideology and is not a variant of Marxism. It is an opponent and bitter enemy of Marxism. Its slogans of renewal are not to be believed.

The current horrific consequences of right revisionism, the unparalleled tragedy that it has wrought on the citizens of the former socialist countries, and its destruction of the revolutionary parties in a number of countries should lead all to be on their guard to recognise and work to defeat its influence wherever it appears.

It can be overcome by a correct application of Marxism-Leninism in all its scientific richness and revolutionary creativity.

Marxism-Leninism is equally opposed to dogmatism and left-sectarianism, which is the other side of the right-revisionist coin. But that is another story which could also be told about the Australian movement.

*Surry Hills, Australia*

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## Book Reviews

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### Tragedy and Class Society: A Review Essay

*Shakespeare*. By Kiernan Ryan. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1989, 128 pages, paper \$15.00.

*Monsters of the Deep: Social Dissolution in Shakespeare's Tragedies*. By David Margolies. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, cloth \$59.95.

In recent years Marxists such as Paul Siegel and Robert Weimann have approached the problem of Shakespearean tragedy afresh, continuing the earlier studies of George Thomson on Greek tragedy. The two books reviewed here work in this tradition.

Marxists generally seek the sources of tragedy not in some essentialist conception of humankind or a value system not generated in a lived reality, but in the social relations of production and their political, theoretical, and cultural superstructures, the contradictions of which generate a felt need for the creation and watching of plays of this type. Both books employ this approach, but come to differing conclusions about Elizabethan tragedy.

#### 1

It is Kiernan Ryan's intention to present revolutionary readings of representative comedies and tragedies of Shakespeare, "to contest and displace the established interpretation

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of canonical literary works” (1), and in this intention he succeeds wonderfully. Through a vigorous, left-oriented attack on representative establishment critics, and incisive analyses of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*, he provides a new understanding of Elizabethan tragedy. Taking his point of departure from recent critical trends represented in Marxism, feminism, and poststructuralism, Ryan argues that “the effective function of most orthodox criticism has been to turn literature into a means of reinforcing the ideological framework upon whose strength the persistence of our patriarchal, class-divided society depends” (2). More specifically:

The image of Shakespeare has been endlessly refashioned and his works tirelessly construed anew in order to ensure that they reflect the illusory beliefs underpinning the presiding structures of social and sexual power. The dramatist has been pressed into service as the supreme literary witness to the notion that the essential characters and fates of individuals are formed independently of their social circumstances and historical conditions, whose seeming mutability masks a fundamentally unchanging order of things. (2–3)

And here he points to academics like E. M. W. Tillyard and Jan Kott, as well as directors of the Royal Shakespeare Company who reflect their views like Peter Hall, Peter Brook, and Trevor Nunn. Ryan also attacks poststructuralist and new historicist criticism, critical trends presenting alternative views, like that of Stephen Greenblatt or of the feminist Kathleen McLuskie, that seem to argue that any resistance to established power is contained by the ruling ideology (6–7). Nor do the semioticists or deconstructionists like Terry Eagleton or Malcom Evans fare much better (8–10).

Ryan also attacks that kind of historicism which imprisons “a literary work within its moment of genesis, [for] whatever the political credentials of the critic, [such a view] is a ruse of conservative cultural ideology which should be resisted” (13). While his attempt to establish theoretically the past significance and present relevance of the texts he discusses does not succeed as

well as it might, the establishment of the present relevance of the plays he discusses in some detail succeeds admirably.

Rejecting certain Marxist and bourgeois analyses of the play that are historicist and antisentimental in condemning Shylock for his cruelty, Ryan insists that through Shylock's rebuking of Jew-baiting and insistence on the humanity the Jew shares with the Christian (III,i,59–73), Shakespeare subverts the Christian-mercantile world as devoid of the humanity its humanism claims it has. Ryan writes that with this speech "there erupts into the play the full protesting force of an irresistible egalitarian vision, whose basis in the shared faculties and needs of our common physical nature implicitly indicts all forms of inhuman discrimination" (17). Ryan passionately argues:

*The Merchant* engineers a dramatic situation in which an apparently civilized form of society is unmasked as in fact premised on barbarity, on the ruthless priority of money-values over human values, of the rights of property over the most fundamental rights of men and women. The point lies not in the justification of the Jew at the expense of the Christians, or of the Christians at the expense of the Jew, but in the explanation and the critique of the structural social forces which have made them both become what they are, for better or for worse. (19–20)

What has come under critical attack is the inhumanity of capitalist property relations and the anti-Semitism they engender here as well as the racism in *Othello*. Ryan writes that Antonio as merchant is an "absent centre around which the play revolves"; his significance is "the embodiment of the void at the heart of Venice."

For it is the text's rebellion against the expectations of its own title, in its conspicuously advertised refusal to project the merchant capitalist as hero, that the play's anguished rejection of the values increasingly prevailing over Shakespeare's world finds its distorted expression. (21)

An analysis follows, clearly demonstrating the patriarchalism of Portia's position, with its subordination of the woman, the

concern for a lucrative match, and, with the giving of the rings and the playful-serious banter following the disclosure, an indication of the almost inevitable consequences of patriarchal marriage: adultery and jealousy (22).

In short, what makes *The Merchant* as well as *Othello* relevant today is their critique of racism and patriarchalism, which still exist as constitutive parts of capitalism. How the past relates to the present is not made clear, however, although it is indicated in Ryan's historical analysis. But it is Ryan's history that is problematic.

Ryan invokes history in order to explain the source of "the production of potentially dissident plays" (27), of which *The Merchant* and *Othello* are typical, but in his haste to arrive at his literary analysis, he permits the historical analysis to become somewhat imprecise, with the result that the analysis goes awry. Instead of the concept of class that one might expect a Marxist to use, we get instead "social strata" (32). The distinction here is no cavil. Much of Ryan's analysis depends on a sense of equality that develops in the Renaissance. Ryan writes:

For complex reasons rooted in the levelling, democratising logic of the market economy, the Renaissance engenders an altogether new dimension of human experience and awareness. On the foundations of the nascent exchange-value system, defined by Marx as "a system of general social metabolism, of universal social relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities," there begins to arise an egalitarian consciousness of the *virtual* common humanity uniting people across divisions which can now be seen to be socially constructed and arbitrary rather than God-given or natural. (29)

What Ryan has in mind here is Marx's derivation of the concept of political equality out of the exchange relation. Marx writes in the *Grundrisse* that in the exchange relation, "each of the subjects is an exchanger, i.e., each has the same social relationship to the other as the other has to him. As subjects of exchange, their relation is therefore that of *equality*." Marx says that three moments emerge in the economic aspect of the relationship:



the subjects of the relationship, *the exchangers* . . . ; the objects of their exchange, values, *equivalents*, . . . which not only are equal but are explicitly supposed to be equal, and are posited as equal; finally, the act of exchange itself, the mediation by which the subjects are posited as exchangers, equals, and their objects as equivalents, as equal. The equivalents are the objectification of the one subject for the others, i.e. they themselves are of equal worth and prove themselves in the act of exchange as of equal value.<sup>1</sup>

Marx goes on to write that

if the economic form, exchange, in every respect posits the equality of the subjects, the content, the material, both individual and objective, which impels them to exchange, posits *freedom*. Hence equality and freedom are not only respected in exchange which is based on exchange values, but the exchange of exchange values is the real productive basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas, equality and freedom are not merely idealised expressions of this exchange; developed in juridical, political and social relations, they are merely this basis at a higher level. (1986, 28, 176)

Marx argues that commodities do not go to the market by themselves; they have to be brought there by their owners. The owners have to relate to each other just as the commodities relate to each other, as equivalents, or to express it in political terms, as equals. It is thus out of the exchange relation that the political-juridical-ethical concept of equality arises, the first carriers of which in modern times are the ideologues of the revolutionary manufacturing bourgeoisie as against the mercantile, the Puritans.<sup>2</sup> In short, the concept of political equality, which finds its first expression in Puritan congregationalism, is a bourgeois concept. It was at that time and indeed still is a powerful progressive political force, as Ryan argues. At the same time, it is deeply contradictory because it is not extended to those people who produce the surplus value on which the capitalist class lives, nor to women, even those of the bourgeoisie.

This exclusion of the women from the equality generated by their own class created a dissatisfaction if not a general dissidence. They can and did resist, as the Puritan minister William Gouge found out from his indignant female parishioners when he preached the usual Puritan patriarchalism. Artists like Shakespeare also objected. The bourgeois claim to equality was and is seriously compromised by the fact that the class is an exploiting class. The implications of this for a theory of tragedy we shall explore later on. Here it need only be emphasized that women indeed chafed under patriarchal exploitation, but the resistance was modified for bourgeois women by the fact that they enjoyed with their husbands the surplus value extracted from a growing class of wage laborers. Consistent dissidence could only come from the exploited, the working classes, however one defines them at this time.

We have seen, however, that Ryan has generalized this bourgeois consciousness, positing a virtual common humanity shared by all classes. He goes on to note the resulting “perception of the potential human equality and community of interests underlying the actual economic, cultural, racial and sexual barriers which divorce people from one another and prevent the full and equal realisation of their possibilities. In this respect the Renaissance signals nothing less than the modern materialist discovery of the human species, of the secularised concept of ‘humanity’ as such” (29). The crux here is that the sense of a common humanity derives from the class that exploits and, when the exploited rise in opposition, is prepared to slaughter them to achieve law and order, i.e., that state of obedience in which the exploitation can proceed without let or hinderance.

It is on the basis of this common humanity, the popular apprehension of that common humanity, and the awareness that it can somehow be achieved that Ryan’s theory of tragedy rests.

Ryan argues that as the Elizabethan audience was made up of different classes, the plays offered a “polyphonic perspective” (34). He writes that “it is the multi-vocal and reflexive form and language of Shakespeare’s plays that provide the means of their emancipation from the ideologies competing for dominance in his time, and that organize their prefigurative levelling of the

hierarchies governing his world and our own” (34). The polyphonic perspective forces the plays “into mutually unmasking contradiction, or confronts them with rival versions of life, with those alternative appraisals of social and sexual experience which they have suppressed in the effort to command the status quo on their terms alone” (35–36). Such a view “not only questions but also supersedes the ruling norms of division and domination.” Moreover, a “synoptic awareness of the developing human potential to live more fully and freely than the prevailing organization of life allows is reinforced by a complex of devices designed to reveal that the limited modes of experience and forms of consciousness imposed by the current social order are not unalterably fixed, but conditional and subject to change” (38).

Drawing on some of the concepts of the Russian formalists and on Brecht, Ryan maintains that “by objectifying and estranging his drama, Shakespeare defamiliarises and problematises the reality it refracts, revealing the contingency and optionality of both. The audience is persistently discouraged from surrendering unconditionally to the representation of life before them. For to do so would be to become the prisoner of the play rather than its creative accomplice in submitting the world and the text, and the relationship between them, to an unending process of vigilant questioning” (41). It leads the audience to conceive a future different and better than the one they are in, “to comprehend the impermanence of our own, and look to the future with the hope which is inseparable from pleasure” (42). Shakespeare’s plays use their language and formal techniques “not only to contest the destructive terms of a divisive, hierarchical world, but to educate our understanding and desire in the persistent need for liberating social transformation” (43).

It is from this point of view that Ryan approaches the tragedies. He rejects conservative interpretations of *Hamlet* and writes that to contain the play in the revenge-tragedy genre and to see the hero as psychologically and morally flawed “is to miss the point of Shakespearean tragedy, which is to dramatize a predicament which cannot be accounted for, let alone resolved, in terms of the moral responsibility of the protagonist alone.

Shakespeare's greatest tragedies compel us to probe beyond moralism, to analyse the premises of the society which could entrap such an individual in such a predicament in the first place" (47–48). If one rejects moralizing criticism about *Hamlet*, one comes to different conclusions about the play: "the tragedy of having to live and die on the degrading terms of such a world at all, despite the awareness that life could and should be otherwise, that human beings are not inherently and forever doomed to become scoundrels, dupes and time-servers that this kind of society moulds most of them into" (48). Conservative interpretations deny the "depiction of reality as a changing social process made and hence transformable by men and women" (48–49). This dynamic reading makes it "impossible to continue claiming that their aim is to reconcile us to the ultimately purposeful pain and necessary defeat of the heroic figures they portray" (49). Ryan argues that the tragedies do not make us acquiesce, as, for example, Willard Farnham claims. Indeed, the reverse is the case. Ryan argues that "the present meaning and value of the tragedies stem rather from their refusal to resolve the intolerable contradiction between justified human desires and their unjustifiable suppression: the heartbreaking contradiction between what men and women want to be and could be, and what the particular social scenario into which they have been scripted by history cruelly condemns them to be, in spite of the superior selves and more satisfying lives struggling within them for realisation" (49–50). Tragedy, in short, presents the contradiction between desire and its suppression, the desire for freedom and a better life and a surrounding world that suppresses it. The lack of catharsis should come as no surprise.

Shakespeare's tragic vision affords no therapeutic catharsis, no soothing consolation or compensation for the inhuman suffering it dramatises. It furnishes every reason for resisting the complacent conclusion that this is how life has to be after all, its agonies and devastations to be borne patiently as the insuperable will of spiritual forces beyond our ken, or as root for some hidden by enriching reason in the very nature of mankind. (49)

Ryan, then, finds the source of tragedy in the contradictions between human aspirations toward freedom and the social relations which prevent their realization. The venue of tragedy is thus shifted from the metaphysical to the social. In comparison to bourgeois interpretations of tragedy, against which, as we have seen, Ryan himself polemicizes, this is of enormous importance, for some of the reviews of his book indicate a level of sophomoric religiosity one would have not thought possible among highly paid academics.<sup>3</sup> But if in Ryan's view the contradiction is between the people and the surrounding social relations that prevent the realization of their full humanity, we have not so much tragedy as class struggle. In its modern form this struggle is between the capitalist and the proletariat. The struggle may be violent and sometimes bloody, but it is not tragic since it has a resolution either in the achievement of socialism or in counterrevolution. The tragic, on the other hand, requires a contradiction that is not resolvable. Ryan at times seems to approach this understanding but veers away from it because he lacks a consistently employed concept of class. His analysis thus fails in important ways to satisfy. Rather than embark here on a detailed analysis of what Ryan's theory lacks, I shall present a variant interpretation, similar but I hope more satisfactory, and return later to particular points.

2

Writing on tragedy, Marxists have seen the expression of a sense of contradiction. In his discussion of the tragic nature of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, Arnold Kettle defines tragedy as follows:

Tragedy occurs when a situation arises which men, at the particular point in the development they have reached, are unable to solve. Such a situation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries . . . was the growing consciousness of women of the necessity of their emancipation (by which is not meant mere formal emancipation, parliamentary votes, etc.) and the inability of class society to admit such freedom without destroying something essential to

itself. Clarissa *has* to fight her family and Lovelace; they for their part *cannot* let her win without undermining all that is to them necessary and even sacred. (1951, 70–71)

In this view tragedy depends on fundamental social contradictions that the people experiencing them cannot, at the stage in historical development their society has reached, resolve.

It is this sense of (social) contradiction that George Thomson finds fundamental to Greek tragedy. Thomson shows how this sense of contradiction is expressed in *Oedipus Rex*. Here the protagonist is in a situation in which all his well-intentioned actions turn into their opposites and lead to disaster. Thomson writes:

The *Oedipus* of Sophocles is a symbol of the deep-seated perplexity engendered in men's minds by the unforeseen and incomprehensible transformation of a social order designed to establish liberty and equality into an instrument for the destruction of liberty and equality. . . . Of all Greek tragedies it presents that sense of contradiction which is the essence of mature tragedy, in its sharpest and most inescapable form. (1950, 359, 363)

All cultures do not produce tragedy, and since tragedy appeared only at a particular point in the development of Greek culture, we may conclude that this sense of contradiction and deep-seated perplexity is historical in origin. Just as Thomson has found its source in Greek society, so we shall have to find a source of Elizabethan tragedy in the development of early capitalist society if we are to understand the emergence of the genre in the midsixteenth century. In other words, we shall have to find a type of experienced social contradiction so fundamental and so inescapable and so intractable to solution that it generated that sense of contradiction and deep-seated perplexity whose main expression was a type of play we call tragedy.

Let me offer a brief characterization of this emerging society.

### 3

The development of capitalist production relations creates a new type of economic and social individual, and a corresponding

new conception of this individual and its condition of existence. The bourgeois individual as it develops from the twelfth century on is one who seeks individual profit and power in trade and artisan manufacture and to a small extent from divided-labor with simple but heavy machines.<sup>4</sup> As merchant or manufacturer the individual is guided by his or her own will, which in turn is guided by rational calculation. If the economic individual is to make profits, what goods, in what quantities, at what prices, and to which countries must he or she go to realize the highest profits? Such decisions cannot depend on received doctrine. The entrepreneur can depend only upon him- or herself, upon individual will and initiative, to gain what is desired. The ability to do so defines freedom and the kind of man or woman he or she is to be. The bourgeois individual becomes conscious of the fact that to achieve freedom, he or she must act rationally and with decision and energy.

This conception of freedom is given expression by the fifteenth-century Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486). His central idea is that free, self-determining individuals, by the exercise of reason, will, and initiative, can fashion themselves into whatever they wish, angels or beasts, and are not confined to fixed positions within the hierarchic structure ordained by Providence. Through the exercise of *virtu* people can rise in the hierarchy, or by a refusal to use reason and *virtu* can fall to the level of beasts. Exerting reason, will, and initiative, humans create wonders, not the least of which are the results of newly realized creativity: great buildings, wondrous works of art, literature, music and science, and the production of goods the likes of which no one before had imagined. This marvel is given full expression also by Shakespeare in Hamlet's encomium, "What a piece of work is man!" (II,ii,307–12).

Yet these lines of praise are followed by lines expressing Hamlet's profound disgust with humanity and the world it has created. The historical basis of this negation of human achievements is that while on the whole the brave new world Miranda marvels at is positive, the cost of it all—its great new buildings; its art, music, literature, technology, and science; its splendid

court with its pomp, ceremony, progresses, and tournaments—was paid for by the grinding human labor, impoverishment, and degradation of masses. Some of these people were pushed off the land through enclosures, not yet absorbed into the new commodity production, and left to their own devices as houseless vagabonds.

This process was complicated in the sixteenth century by the fact that since the capitalism then developing was largely driven by trade, artisan, and loan capital, a new form of production perforce arose, manufacturing as against artisan. Artisan production was monopolized by the guilds, with restriction of the number able to join the guilds and the governing patriciates. This capital was then invested in manufacturing, and from about 1540 onwards relatively large-scale manufacturing developed in such areas as mining, iron production, glass, soap, and weaving of cheaper cloths. The basis here was wage labor. This branch of industry developed rapidly, but was excluded from the monopolies and from government. Thus a struggle began by the 1570s for this bourgeoisie to share power, and in Parliament it first took the form of demands to democratize the Church and for increasing control over taxation. We have, in short, a revolutionary bourgeoisie led by the Puritans as ideological and political vanguard. They were tough and uncompromising, and although the butt of some writers, they had their sympathizers at court and elsewhere. The emergence of a revolutionary bourgeoisie put an end to the compromise between the Tudors and the artisan and trading bourgeoisie. The ensuing struggle was to end only with Civil War and the victory of Parliament.

The brave new world brought with it the shrewd and brutal Stephanos and Trinculos, Shakespeare's sour comment on the new colonializers, no less than the sophisticated Edmunds, Iagos, and their like. The protest against this new society was expressed not only in a trenchant satire on the business morality of the Puritans, but also, in Shakespeare at any rate, against a racism that had a Caliban or a Shylock or an Othello as its butts, but also the *crie de coeur* for the poor and helpless that we find in *King Lear* and the utopian vision we find in Gonzalo's lines in *The Tempest*, a revision of the contempt for such utopias in the



Jack Cade scenes of *Henry VI, Part II*. Historically the contrast is between the tremendous growth of wealth and the freeing of the personality to enjoy that wealth by those who had it and the relatively extensive poverty such freeing produced. Added to this was the cynical use of religion to control the masses, and the use of naked power to crush the resistance of the poverty-stricken to the new forms of property then developing and against those who sought social change. In short, bourgeois man and woman became free at the cost of those who produced the wealth which the ruling classes enjoyed.

Let me now put this historical development in more abstract terms.

4

The bourgeois is conscious of the fact that emancipated people can act to secure their freedom, but is simultaneously aware that something in themselves, not any supernatural power—for example, God, fate, or the stars (as Edmund in *Lear* [I,ii,128] and Cassius in *Julius Caesar* [I,ii, 137–39] put it)—keeps them from achieving this freedom. Tragedy emerges as a genre when a contradiction is apprehended that cannot be resolved and thus induces a deep sense of perplexity. It is a contradiction within the nature of the new Renaissance capitalist, and is of such a kind that the more the individual struggles to achieve his or her freedom the more it is challenged and the more problematic it becomes.

The question is now what in the new system of production relations tended to negate the achievements it made possible. If we look at the structure of emerging capitalist society the only possible negating force is the new type of exploitation, the extraction of surplus value from wage labor. What keeps people from achieving and establishing meaningful human relations is their *bourgeois* nature. The fundamental contradiction of bourgeois society lies in this: while the bourgeoisie emancipate themselves from feudal relations, they achieve at the very best *bourgeois* freedom, that is, a type of freedom which is partial because it is based on the exploitation, the unfreedom, of others. The more the bourgeoisie achieve their freedom, the more the

exploited lose theirs; the more they strive to achieve bourgeois freedom, the less they achieve universal freedom.

Elizabethan tragedy, then, is the artistic presentation of the intuitive apprehension of the basic contradiction in bourgeois society, namely, that the bourgeoisie is an exploiting class and cannot achieve universal freedom. People are seen as the energetic creator of their own condition, freedom in unfreedom, and are alone responsible for this condition. People create themselves; yet, though they strive for freedom, they cannot achieve it for reasons they cannot yet know, namely, that as property owners, their struggle spells the unfreedom of the exploited and, in the end, their own. At the same time that they cannot know that the terms in which they strive for freedom preclude the achievement of that goal, they remain hopeful that they will achieve that goal though unaware how or when they will achieve it, and, indeed, that they will do so at the expense of their bourgeois essence as property owners, as exploiter.

Tragedy is a kind of play that is neither pessimistic nor optimistic; it is, indeed, both. Without the hope of an eventual solution to the experienced contradiction, the social source of which is already contained in the production relations and to which we will return, people's perception of their incapacity to solve their problem is not tragedy: it is merely a pessimistic statement. Without an awareness of their incapacity to solve the problem, the hope that people have that they will solve their problem is merely optimistic. If a play intended as tragedy becomes either pessimistic or optimistic, it ceases to be tragedy. To be tragic, a play must maintain a balance or tension between the two, between the sense of the inability to solve the contradiction of freedom in unfreedom and the hope amounting to deep conviction that there is contained in them the ability to achieve freedom, a balance between despair and consolation.

A few years ago V. Y. Katak argued against the tendency in Shakespearean criticism to find a moral order, Christian or other, in Shakespearean tragedy. When, for example, Irving Ribner writes that "Bradley could lead his readers only to a Shakespeare without positive belief, to a conception of tragedy merely as a posing of unanswerable questions, and to a moral system which

upon close analysis is not moral at all" (1960, 3), Katak replies that "such an approach . . . seems to ignore the fact that 'the posing of unanswerable questions' is, in the end, the very foundation of tragedy. The peculiar tension in a tragedy arises from our difficulty in accepting, not from our reluctance to accept the moral order. The moral order is there, but something has run counter to it to produce that tension" (1963, 44). Katak is not clear on the source of the tension that produces the new genre. What Shakespeare or Elizabethan and Jacobean writers of tragedy cannot explain is that, as a later age was to put it, man is free but everywhere in chains. This is, as A. C. Bradley has it, a "mystery" (1952, 23), and this surely has the sense of it if we mean by "mystery" the deep-seated perplexity that arises in the course of the sixteenth century that people are capable of being free but because of something about themselves, something within their own nature for which they alone are responsible, they are not free, though at the same time they have the hope that they eventually will be free, and here again achieve that freedom by their own efforts.

What I am arguing is that the Elizabethan writers of tragedy intuitively felt that something was profoundly wrong with the new world then developing: they understood intuitively that communal values were giving way to individualistic values that were at one and the same time enormously emancipating and brutally destructive. They understood, moreover, that these changes were permanent and accelerating in their developmental rate and that they were producing a world about which they had deeply ambivalent feelings: they hated the growing dominance of commercial values and at the same time admired the new freedom the new social relations offered. What the tragedies do is provide the form, the vehicle for the expression of the contradiction and the perplexity that arises out of the felt, lived experience of that contradiction.

Historically, tragedy as a dramatic form is invented at that point when the sense of the contradictory nature of emerging capitalism has reached the level of intuitive awareness, roughly in the 1560s. The felt need for such a form was expressed in the changes in the morality play into homiletic tragedy, an

intermediary stage in the development of mature tragedy in Kyd and Marlow. Here the *psychomachia* of the popular morality plays becomes interiorized as spiritual (ethical, moral, religious) conflict with the hero going down to defeat (rather than as in the earlier moralities to victory in the struggle of forces of good and evil for the soul of man) in retributive justice resulting from the protagonist's human imperfections.<sup>5</sup> There is no space here to develop in any detail the possible relation between tragedy and early Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> The bourgeois character of Protestantism has long ago been demonstrated by Max Weber (1952) and R. H. Tawney (1937), both of whom emphasize the subjectivism of Lutheranism and Calvinism.<sup>7</sup> It does not take much imagination to see that a character like Hamlet is analogous to the Protestant in his subjective individualism, his profound spiritual sensibility, his soul-searching and sickness at heart, and his separateness and isolation. One could thus argue that a character like Hamlet is inconceivable without the Reformation, and that both have their roots in the individualism of developing capitalism, an individualism that by the middle of the sixteenth century had become sufficiently integrated to reveal its destructive tendencies.

Let me return to Ryan's view of tragedy, which is, to state it briefly, that Shakespearean tragedy is a drama of protest. This view rests on an analysis of a cultural revolution attendant upon the development of capitalism. People began to question and look beyond the constraints imposed by society. Also, the "democratizing logic of the market economy" generated:

an egalitarian consciousness of the *virtual* common humanity uniting people across divisions which can now be seen to be socially constructed and arbitrary rather than God-given or natural.

This recognition fosters a perception of the potential human equality and community of interest underlying the actual economic, cultural, racial and sexual barriers which divorce people from one another and prevent the full and equal realisation of their possibilities. In this respect the Renaissance signals nothing less than the modern materialist discovery of the human species, of the secularised concept of "humanity" as such. (29)

My essential disagreement with Ryan's understanding of tragedy is that while he sees tragedy as a perception and "refusal to resolve the intolerable contradiction between justified human desires and their unjustifiable suppression" (49–50), I am inclined to see the contradiction *within* the emerging bourgeoisie, that is, to see the bourgeoisie so structured as a class that it cannot achieve the freedom it talks so much about without itself ceasing to be bourgeois, an exploiting class. There is no way around such a contradiction: no class ever commits social suicide. In Ryan's view, on the other hand, class has given way to a concept of "'humanity' as such," a view that is made clearer in his analysis of Shakespeare's audience, for such an audience, composed as it was of differing classes, had a "polyphonic perspective" (34), so that a play perforce has to respond to all classes, so that we have a "structural identification of Shakespeare's greatest plays with the common interests of humanity as whole rather than with the interests of one section of society at the expense of the rest" (38). The result of this critical procedure is that neither the source of the suppression nor the agent of change can be precisely located. Historically, however, both were locatable, for a revolutionary challenge came from the lower classes, for example, from the peasants in repeated uprisings, the most serious of which was The Peasants' War, and later the Digger and Leveller resistance to the grandees of the Civil War period.<sup>8</sup> And both knew that the source of their misery was property. In other words, as long as the lower-class outlook is oppositional, it can and will struggle actively against the exploiter. It would not normally regard its situation as tragic. The institution most readily available to ruling classes to dampen lower-class resistance to exploitation has generally been religion, not tragedy. Tragedy, in my understanding, would seem to be exclusively the outlook of the bourgeoisie, or, more precisely, the bourgeois intellectual. It is the intellectuals as artists who apprehend the contradiction within their own class in its depth and express it as tragedy. One would want to know more about a mentality that sees fundamental problems in a developing social structure such as capitalism was in the Elizabethan period, but rather than actively oppose it, regards it as semipermanent, is in

constant opposition to it but is half reconciled to it. Be that as it may, the point is that the bourgeoisie in its struggle to be free (from feudal restraints to the development of its form of property) creates in wage labor the condition of unfreedom for others, so that from *within* the bourgeoisie the struggle for freedom cannot be carried beyond the establishment of capitalist exploitation. This has never prevented it from striving towards that freedom, creating appalling unfreedom as it does so, and calling that unfreedom freedom.

A further point about the difference of outlook between the artisans and the bourgeoisie is that as the Diggers knew that the source of their misery was property, they called not so much for equality as for the abolition of property. I have already argued that the concept of equality emerges out of the market relation in the exchange of equivalents, and that it is a bourgeois idea, and produces the concept of political equality. What Ryan does not see is that in the exchange of equivalents, labor for a wage, capitalist exploitation takes place. As Marx shows in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), equal right is bourgeois right. The “democratizing of the market” leads only to wage slavery, which the political equality of Parliament does nothing at all to alter; indeed, it constitutes the fig leaf hiding exploitation. What the industrial workers in their turn called for—with whatever utopian dream they had or with whatever socialist program they fought for—was not equality (as Marx also showed in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*) but the abolition of property, that is, the elimination of exploitation. In the higher phase of communist society, differing needs will be recognized, not merely the bourgeois right of universal equivalents that produces inequality. Then “and only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!” (1989, 86–87).

Since he sees tragedy as a protest against those forces that suppress legitimate human desires, Ryan rejects Aristotelian catharsis. Catharsis represents, as Ryan sees it, reconciliation with the status quo, so that in rejecting it, he has a strong oppositional play—a comedy in Dante’s sense of the word. His

interpretation of *Hamlet* leads to a similar conclusion. He writes that if one rejects the notion that Hamlet's tragedy is in procrastinating the assumption of the role of avenger, "the tragedy turns out to be something quite different: the tragedy of having to live and die on the degrading terms of such a world at all, despite the awareness that life could and should be otherwise, that human beings are not inherently and forever doomed to become the scoundrels, dupes and time-servers that this kind of society moulds most of them into." Ryan maintains that the rejection of the revenge-tragedy formula has social implications, for Hamlet's assuming of the antic disposition "functions as a sustained estrangement-effect, a calculated sabotaging of the revenge-play formula and thus of the established order whose validity that formula presupposes, and whose conservative assumptions it would otherwise smuggle through unchallenged" (48). If *Hamlet*, or tragedy in general, is oppositional or subversive of the existing social order, the question remains: against what social force producing the "unjustified suppression" of "justified human desires" is which opposition to fight? As long as the concept of class has given way to universal human goals, only a confused conception of tragedy can emerge. We have already argued that tragedy must maintain the tension between opposition and reconciliation if a play is to be tragic. Ryan is certainly right in seeing that tragedy does show the terrible social state in which people are forced to live, and that people must and indeed do oppose it. But the point of tragedy—and not of practical politics then or now—is that it expresses the felt contradiction of facing a problem that one feels certain one can solve but because of one's own nature cannot solve except at devastating cost.

This balance is, in my view, fundamental for an understanding of the genesis and general character of art, and I should like to explore some of its implications.

We have already seen that George Thomson has argued that tragedy expresses deep-seated perplexity arising from the contradiction between the people's aspiration towards freedom but their inability to achieve it because of something in their (social) nature that denies it to them, struggle heroically as they may.

Thomson also argues that tragedy has a contradictory function: it includes the ideological function of inducing people to accommodate themselves to exploitation and all the suffering that goes with it and the (utopian) hope of the end of that exploitation sometime in the future. He argues (383) that Aristotle's understanding of the function of tragedy to be conservative of the social structure that was clearly exploitative and oppressive, and against which, accordingly, the people revolted more often than was helpful. The principle of *catharsis* "provides relief by giving free outlet to repressed emotions through such channels as the practice of confession or participation in public festivals. The citizen who has purged himself in this way becomes thereby a more contented citizen. The emotional stresses set up by the class struggle are relieved by a spectacle in which they are sublimated as a conflict between man and a God, or Fate or Necessity." Aristotle replied to Plato's banning of tragedy as subversive of the established order, that tragedy was conservative of that order. Through it the individual becomes adapted to society. Tragedy has thus clearly a politically conservative function. But not only. Thomson argues further that it is the function of the artist to present the contradictions: "The artist may endeavour to reform the world, like Shelley, or escape it, like Keats, or to justify it, like Milton, or simply describe it, like Shakespeare, but it is the discord between the individual and his environment, which, as an artist, he feels with particular force, that impels him to create in fantasy the harmony denied him in a world out of joint. . . . Therefore, the arts are conservative of the social order, in that they relieve the pressure on its members, but at the same time, they are subversive, because they promote a recurrence of the stresses which they stimulate in order to relieve. . . . The artist leads his fellow men into a world of fantasy where they find release, thus asserting the refusal of the human consciousness to acquiesce in its environment, and by this means there is collected a store of energy which flows back into the real world and transforms the fantasy into fact" (384).

The implications of this argument are interesting. If, as Thomson argues, tragedy expresses a tension between reconciliation and subversion, it must be a product of real social conflict,



in which reconciliation is the answer to the resistance of those who are exploited. More generally, tragedy is the product of an emergent class society expressing the tension resulting from the repression of one class by another in a way that hopes to reconcile the exploited to their condition. To put it a little differently: Tragedy presupposes real exploitation (of which both Plato and Aristotle were aware) to which it is the reconciling agency. Tragedy is the product of artists who are aware of the exploitation to which their plays are a reconciling agency. Tragedy thus always includes the absent opponent. The oppressed are not thus led to appreciate and love tragedy. For the most part they ignore it, sensing its ambiguous character: its implicit protest against human misery and simultaneous appeal to the exploited to reconcile themselves to their condition. In short, once people have rationally understood the source of their misery in the exploitation to which they are forcibly subject, they would have no need to watch a play which offers them reconciliation to what they no longer believe to be permanent and which they can change by the analysis of the social situation and the working out of a rational and effective politics.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of this enterprise, to which the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe offers testimony. Still, once the working class and its allies realize that they can create a world in accordance with their rational understanding, we can then speak of the death of tragedy, though perhaps not in the sense that George Steiner understands the genre. If the working class never had much of a taste for tragedy (whatever it had for melodrama), I suspect that the middle class will never lose it. But that is not the point. The point is that instead of claiming Shakespearean or any other tragedy as the heritage of the people, Ryan might reject the form as a whole, as an instrument, to be sure, one of enormous sophistication, of their oppression. In effect, when he rejects the cathartic function of tragedy, this is what he does. And if he has in fact done so, wherein consists in his view the tragic?

Without a clear concept of class I do not see that we have a clear understanding of what tragedy is, what its beginning was, or what its end might be. If Ryan argues that there was a

“structural identification of Shakespeare’s [and in fact every other dramatist’s] greatest plays with the common interests of humanity as a whole rather than with the interests of one section of society at the expense of the rest,” he has lost his sense of the history of the period. The propertyless protested in terms of their own class interests, and in aiming to abolish property, spoke for the greater part of the population. When the Diggers, in representing their own interests, called for the abolition of exploitation, they spoke for the majority. When Ryan urges his modern audience to reject conservative interpretations of Shakespearean tragedy, against what are they to struggle if not against that externalization of their misery which is constitutive of tragedy in the conservative interpretation of it as an expression of their class interest? Ryan, however, rejects class interests and instead speaks vaguely of the need to struggle for conditions in which human potential can be realized:

These plays’ built-in, synoptic awareness of the developing human potential to live more fully and freely than the prevailing organisation of life allows is reinforced by a complex of devices designed to reveal that the limited modes of experience and forms of consciousness imposed by the current social order are not unalterably fixed, but conditional and subject to change. (38)

The discrepancy between the need “to live more fully and freely than the prevailing organization of life allows” and the specific Digger demand to abolish property is clear enough, and the former demand sounds more like anarchism than anything of political use in the struggle for socialism. In terms of a politics of critical theory what Ryan has achieved is a literary critical version of what Ellen Meiksins Wood has called “A New ‘True’ Socialism” (1986).

Ryan is right in his left attack on the conservative use of Shakespeare to legitimize a bourgeois world of oppression, unemployment, war, EEC entrenchment against those in the Third World who wish to escape from imperialist exploitation and nationalist wars, neofascism, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, currency speculation, financial corruption, and

elections in which candidates achieve ballot status with no qualification other than millions of dollars. In this attack on the ideological use of literature he is not alone.<sup>9</sup> He is wrong, in my view, to argue that tragedy belongs not to the conservatives, but to the people. Be that as it may, Ryan's book is important because it brings the analysis of tragedy out of the realm of reactionary metaphysics into the realm of social analysis.

5

Margolies' book is designed not only for intelligent students who are ready to be convinced that Shakespeare is more than something to be studied because it is good for them, but also for the theater-goer and general reader. Among the book's virtues is that its discussion of the texts in their dramatic and theatrical settings as well as possible human responses to the plays then and now. The texts, Margolies writes, were designed as responses to "immediate life" not as abstract patterns remotely related to that immediate life. He goes on to write that "drama's attraction for the Elizabethans, as probably for people in all ages, was neither life itself, nor patterns divorced from life, but a transformation of life." At the same time that the plays are historically situated, they are not naive reflections of their own historical actuality; "We learn nothing about Hamlet from a study of Elsinore; historical Venice offers no clues to Shylock's behaviour" (1). It is, rather, the metaphors of plot and characters in their relations that carry an emotional-intellectual freight to which the audience is powerfully drawn and to which it responds. This attempt to relate the tragedies to a lived reality is followed consistently throughout the book in insightful examinations of *Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*. *Othello* is treated in an appendix in a surprising and refreshing way, but for all that not convincingly. *Titus* and *Romeo and Juliet* are left out, probably for reasons of space.

The central theme of the book is that the tragedies are responses to, as well as a negative commentary on, the development of an individualism so strong that it destroys the social fabric. Each of the tragic figures represents a stage in the development of this individualism, a stage that embodied in

Timon is so disintegrative of the social fabric that no positive values can generate out of it. Shakespeare then gives up tragedy and turns to the romances, which have little relevance to the real world.

In order to clear the ground for the social analyses of the tragedies, Margolies devotes the first chapter to a discussion of a number of critical problems. Because Margolies has his younger audience in mind and wishes to talk about the plays and their relevance then and now, the critical issues are dealt with in a way that is not entirely satisfactory. For one thing, Margolies seems to think that the student today avoids theoretical discussion for the same reason that British and American empiricists of his generation avoided "generalizations" as pure metaphysics. For another, where the theoretical issues are tackled, the students are given no hint where they might pursue these critical matters if they so desire, for there are no footnotes and no bibliography. There may be something to be said for this pedagogical strategy, but even if one is indirectly protesting against abstract academic criticism, I suspect the loss is greater than the gain. Intelligent students will feel that they are contending with an undesignated opponent, and might well prefer to have the critical opponent named and the issues fought out, even if briefly. In any case, the answer to inadequate abstract criticism is adequate abstract criticism, not a wholesale condemnation of abstraction.

To leave the point here would be to distort Margolies' argument. Margolies is concerned to show that the play cannot be grasped discursively. It has to be apprehended as metaphor which communicates in plot, character, and idea the emotions and meanings the author wishes to communicate. In contrasting *Lear* with *Gorboduc* Margolies points out that while the latter tends to be formal and argumentative and its imagery decorative, the former presents its meaning powerfully through the action as if it were a real-life experience. He writes that "the play organizes experience to show through the action what the behaviour it embodies means" (6). The argument is a strong one, but not without its problems. A bit later on, Margolies argues:

The problem of abstraction occurs not only in relation to philosophy or morality or questions of state. Treating the

plays as mirrors of history can also be a form of abstraction. If readers are asked by the critic to make a rational comparison of the history presented in the play with their understanding of the actual history, and in that difference to read a commentary, then they must receive the play not as a hypothetical actuality, as experience, but as coded meanings from which they can reason out the significance. Thus in *Richard II* . . . the energies of the metaphor derive from the social transformations taking place in Shakespeare's own day. It can be interpreted in relation to the actual reign of the real King Richard II, but such historical specificity, rather than make it seem more real, distances it. If its metaphorical character is not acknowledged, the transferability of attitude that gives the play the possibility of significance disappears. Asking the audience to filter the action through a screen of historical understanding instead of experiencing it is asking them to regard plays as documentaries and ignore the fact that it is drama they are watching. Similarly, when Shakespeare rewrites *The Iliad* in *Troilus and Cressida*, even though a learned audience can gain something from recognising the changes, the meaning comes primarily from the nature of the action portrayed; historical reflection only *modifies* that understanding. (8–9)

Margolies surely overstates his case here. Without some knowledge of the political issues in both the play and the context within which the play was written and performed a play like *Richard II* as the political play it is will not have much meaning. *Richard II* is, to be sure, a tragedy, and Richard's tragedy like that of Marlowe's Edward II occurred in and was occasioned by a political situation in which the characters of these kings were not adequate. To reduce the play to the fall of a sensitive man of high degree is simply to distort the play. To put it differently: the history play was a comment on a political comment on a political situation. As a genre the history play was the response to a felt need for discussion, comment, analysis, and interpretation on political issues of the 1590s which were of vital importance to

the Elizabethan audience. That the political issues involved no longer interest us results in shift of emphasis in modern productions from the political to the presentation of the ignominy and misery of a king who is deposed by cruel and grasping opponents because of his political incompetence. The result is a considerable loss of meaning of the play.

Margolies' argument seems to be that you go to see a play intellectually blank, so to speak: watch the play and all will be clear. But to understand the products of a culture presupposes that you have that culture as part of your mentality. You have to acquire the symbolic code system in order to receive what is communicated in it. A teenager can hardly make much of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* or Wagner's *Ring*, though his or her response to jazz may be immediate and apparently intuitive. Yet "gut" response to jazz is itself complex, involving a rejection of classical in favor of jazz musical forms. I have known people who go and listen to Wagner's *Ring* and refuse to read Wagner's text. I have a nephew who has gone to great pains to paint exactly like Monet, buying contemporary colors and brushes where he can get them, imitating the brush strokes, and choosing landscape such as Monet would have painted, and produces breath-taking imitations that are not forgeries. When I say to him that such a style is a solution to a problem which cannot endlessly be repeated and still have meaning and that it can only be understood through a historical understanding, his reply is that the paintings are beautiful, indicating a mind totally inaccessible to history. My point is that one's response to any cultural form is more complex than Margolies will allow. The further point might be made that some Elizabethans saw the absolute monarch one way and others another way: the Puritan revolutionary had a different view of Elizabeth or James than had a parasitic courtier, both of whom might have seen the play. Whether they liked or did not like the play would thus not depend solely on aesthetic considerations. Shakespeare in his histories is making a political plea for the unity of England in a period when this unity was being torn apart by a revolutionary bourgeoisie. Without understanding that, I cannot make much sense out of the history plays, not understand, for example, that here Shakespeare's politics are

conservative. On the other hand, I do not find Richard III's cynical clowning amusing, and to argue that this clowning is an implied criticism of monarchy or more generally political power, and thus subversive of authority, making Shakespeare into something of a political iconoclast, is jejune because it obscures the relation between political power and those who mainly benefit from it.

And the character of this bourgeoisie brings me to Margolies' main thesis: "the plays are all metaphors of social disintegration. Each succeeding tragedy, in a different playworld, shows a world at a further stage of decline" (11). In *Lear* the two groups of characters, though differing in their personal characteristics, still differ with respect to the value system they adhere to: Gloucester, Kent, Edgar, Albany, and Lear himself "adhere to tradition, are attentive to form and symbol and accept conventions, and they understand relationships to be personal and qualities to be inherent in the person. On the other hand, Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and, above all, Edmund are inner-directed, rational and empirical in their understanding of the world, and relationships for them are more subject to calculation of personal advantage than sentiment in regard to the person, and for them attributes are separable" (16). This differentiation is surely correct, and the idea has had some sort of consensus since John Danby pointed it out many years ago. What is not clear to me is just what in Margolies' view tragedy consists in. The type of individualism represented by Edmund is, as Margolies rightly argues, destructive, but it is part and parcel of the outlook of the bourgeoisie which as a revolutionary class was destroying a historically outmoded class and its values, some of which did in fact express the organic relations of feudal society, those indeed represented by Lear and his supporters. This outlook was not totally destructive, however, as Margolies seems to argue. The revolutionary bourgeoisie called forth enormous creative energies not required by feudal production relations, and these not be rehearsed here. The essential point is that the bourgeoisie sought freedom but could not achieve it because the new production relations were based on the exploitation of wage labor. And this wage labor, constituted as a class, is the source of the surplus

value that the bourgeoisie appropriates. The more the bourgeoisie realized its form of freedom, the more the exploited lost theirs, and there was and there is no way of getting rid of this contradiction except by revolution. And this resistance to exploitation develops first in religious-utopian forms about which Shakespeare wrote in his caricature of the views of the utopians in the Jack Cade scenes in *Henry VI, Part II* and later develops into a secular rational socialism. Against this growing resistance the ruling class develops policing and ideological instruments of control. At the same time the working class produces its own value system at the center of which is the aim to abolish exploitation and establish the communal relations that capitalist individualism tends to destroy.

Margolies seeks the source of the tragic in social relations, but what he finds is at best the destructive side of the bourgeoisie that is historically simply a half of what the bourgeoisie was. It leads him to a sentimentalization of feudal organic values, but not to an understanding of tragedy. Tragedy is the expression of the contradictory nature of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, a contradiction that the bourgeoisie (because of its fundamentally exploitative nature) could not and cannot get rid of and remain bourgeois. All its claims as defender of universal human rights are negated by the poverty, racism, patriarchalism, nationalism, fascism, war its market relations produce.<sup>10</sup> When Margolies writes that “the decline of society has gone too far to generate any positive attitude” (151), he may truly report what Shakespeare says in his tragedies, but such a view was only the view of a part of the bourgeois intellectuals, who, unlike the bourgeois ideologue, intuitively apprehended the flawed character of the developing bourgeoisie which they otherwise supported. An option is to turn to the lower strata, whose values represent the alternative to the hegemonic values. Turning away, like most intellectuals, from this option, Shakespeare wrote the romances, which Margolies describes as “brilliant exercises of technique, but which avoid structures that can have more than a passing reference to the real world” (151). Margolies only hints at a path not taken, and does not pursue the implications of this choice.

Margolies shows that although the personalities of the



characters in the plays are differentiated, they are types, and represent values of the group to which they belong. His method shifts attention away from the purely subjective aspects of the tragedies (a method inevitably leading to essentialist analysis) toward an understanding of the social nature of the tragedies. It is from this point of view that Margolies rejects the notion of the “tragic flaw.”

The traditional view, deriving from distortions of Aristotle, makes the process of tragedy an individual experience. The hero falls as a result of a ‘tragic flaw’ and the tragedy is seen to reside in that individual destruction. Almost all of Shakespeare’s tragedies can be pressed into this mould, but results in simplistic renderings, such as “Macbeth falls because he is ambitious,” “Othello falls because he is jealous,” etc. Hamlet is subject to a larger range of possibilities, but the result is still that effect and cause are located in the hero. (77)

Margolies’ view is connected with the nature of the cause/effect relation, and I will come to that in a moment. That the tragedy is not the result of the nature of the individual personality, as Bradley and his followers might have it, is an important insight, and Margolies might have drawn the conclusion that if the tragedy is the result of the types the tragic figures are, he might have gone on to conclude that the types they are is what leads to tragedy; that is, the various forms of the destructive individualism which produce the tragedies are constitutive of the types represented. In other words, the “tragic flaw” is a fault not of the individual personality but of the type, or, to put it in my terms, of the class. There is something in the class that prevents the realization of freedom or causes destruction. To say that Macbeth falls because he is ambitious, is not so simple minded as Margolis would have it. Ambition was a fundamental value of the enterprising bourgeoisie, and to reveal its destructive tendencies is the essence of Elizabethan tragedy. For he puts his finger on exactly what it was that was driving the revolutionary bourgeoisie forward and showing how destructive it was of basic human values. It might be added here that a ruling class will

always try to lay the blame for social injustice upon those who feel it most. The concept of original sin emerged when private property arose among the Hebrews, represented in the conflict between Cain and Abel, which in the mythology comes after the Fall. The Fall explains human misery as a result of human error. True as this explanation is, it leaves out the fact that the misery is the result of the emergence of class.

Margolies raises an interesting point in his criticism of a simplistic causal explanation:

This model of tragedy does not work for *King Lear*. Whereas Macbeth, the witches notwithstanding, might be said himself to generate the conditions that bring about his downfall, as well as himself committing the fatal act, for Lear the conditions are shown to be something over which he has no control. He does no more than precipitate a catastrophe where things were already about to fall. (77)

The cause/effect view of tragedy is simplistic because it ignores the unstable context in which the momentous actions occur. "Lear's world is shown by the play *not* to have been well-ordered—if it had been his abdication would have been inconvenient rather than disastrous. The tragedies show that the conditions of chaos—presented concretely in the experience in the plays—are as important as the single great tragic actions that only precipitate (rather than cause) the disaster" (9).

I am not sure that I follow the logic here. If Margolies' argument is that individualism is destroying a world that has humane values, how are we to understand this idea when the society being destroyed by this individualism is already unstable? Made unstable by what? The argument seems to forget that the context is just as much a Shakespearean invention as the characters in it, so that to suggest that if Lear's world had been well-ordered "his abdication would have been inconvenient rather than disastrous," is to suggest that the context had an objective existence separate from the characters. At the beginning, however, Lear's individualism is no different from that of Edmund, Goneril, Regan or Cornwall. There is no world apart from what is presented. In *Hamlet* a world beyond the will of Claudius is suggested in the

fact that the court had elected Claudius and had agreed to his marriage. Its corruption is implied; hence, its instability. But this court and its actions are just as much inventions as are those of Hamlet and Claudius. In *Lear* there is no such court apart from the characters presented. Lear's actions as those of Cordelia, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Edgar, Kent, and Gloucester combine and interact to cause the tragedy.

In his anxiety to demonstrate a social origin of tragedy, Margolies partially shifts away the responsibility from individuals and postulates an unstable social context which is of such a character that it is impossible to find the source of tragedy in it, quite apart from implying that society itself is tragic. His effort is to show that the source of the tragic is social not personal nor essentialist. Having got rid of the "tragic flaw," he leads us away from seeing just how the individualism of capitalist private property is, as he otherwise rightly argues, the basis of Elizabethan tragedy.

It also takes courage to say that the tragedy in *Othello* is "stupid" (159) because the murder of Desdemona is not, as in all the other tragedies discussed, necessary. That this is a variant on Thomas Rymer's judgement on *Othello*, and T. S. Eliot's concurrence, should have warned Margolies that in spite of the fact that neither Othello, nor Desdemona, nor Emilia pursues information that would have sorted the matter out, the play is, as Margolies himself admits, "serious and moving." Rymer's logic is right but irrelevant when one understands that a society so constituted as capitalism is, is racist, irrational and violent, and that Shakespeare condemns it. I find the play unbearable because of what happens to a black and what happens to a woman in a racist and patriarchal society. Unlike Margolies, who sees the play as a Problem Play (155–59), I do not feel "slightly foolish for admiring something so unsubstantial and so easily destroyed" (159). I feel outrage, and if there is any disappointment with the play, it is that it is a tragedy, a type of play which presents the contradiction without indicating a resolution, which is not acceptable at the present stage of the Black liberation struggle. For various reasons it was important in the past to perform the play: it gave Paul Robeson the opportunity to play the part and show what an African American could do with a great Shake-

spearean role. It seems unlikely that the play is politically useful. In any case, I think Ryan has more of the heart of the matter than Margolies.

Serious as my criticisms are, Margolies' book yet remains important not only because the analyses of the plays are full of insights, but also because most of what has been written about tragedy in the past decade or so has been with some exceptions idealistic in one way or another. Margolies, on the other hand, keeps the texts and his concept of tragedy firmly within social parameters. Apart from his blindness with respect to *Othello*, his demonstrations of the continuing relevance of the plays are very attractive.

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#### NOTES

1. For an interesting exegesis of the social derivation of the concept of political equality, see Pashukanis 1951, 111–280.

2. For the history of the idea of the value and the equivalency of human personality which goes back to the Roman Stoics, as well as the glaring contradiction between the de facto inequality of sex, class and the idea of equality, see Pashukanis 1951, 195–96. The contradiction is expressed in Rousseau's paradox that humans are free but everywhere in chains.

3. One has only to read Arthur Kirsch's brief comments on Ryan's study to realize how desperately needed Ryan's book is. Kirsh writes that "Ryan's argument is exasperating in many ways, but I will mention only two. First, the 'metaphysical statute' that governs Shakespearean tragedy and all other great tragedy is not social iniquity but human frailty and mortality, and not just the fact of death but its immanence in human life. Ryan, like many Marxist critics, cannot accept this reality, and thus cannot really respond to tragedies except as documents of social or political reform" (1990, 342). Surely even a late Arnoldian developer might attempt to understand what Marxists are trying to say instead of repeating religious banalities as surrogates for critical thought.

4. I have tried to deal with this difficult problem in my book on linear perspective (Goldstein 1988, chap. 3). The problem of how social relations are given conceptual form applies as well to ideas of tragedy as to scientific theories.

5. For the development of the *psychomachia* in the morality play, see David

Bevington 1962, chaps. 10 and 11. See also Willard Farnham 1956, chaps. 5 and 6. Valuable as these studies are, it is surprising that Farnham and to a lesser extent Bevington describe developments in the drama with hardly any reference to the historical developments in England at that time. For both the drama evolves out of itself, carrying with it traces of its medieval and earlier Tudor past.

6. A good start has been made by Alan Sinfield 1983.

7. What is highly problematic in denominating Protestantism as quintessentially bourgeois is the fact that the early notion of justification by faith seems to deprive the entrepreneurial individual much scope in determining the nature of his or her life. Catholic Christianity gives the individual a great deal more room in that the Christian's behavior on earth will determine his or her fate in the afterlife. The Italian notions of *virtu* and *fortune* expressed the understood reciprocal relation between individual entrepreneurial activity and market forces. The Calvinist notion of justification by faith seems to deprive the revolutionary bourgeois of the capacity to change anything though in fact that is exactly what the bourgeoisie as a class is doing.

I have no solution to this problem. It is a fact that the Protestants eventually modified if not entirely abandoned the notion of strict justification by faith, as one can see in a writer like Milton. It may be that the emergence of the manufacturing bourgeoisie to which I have referred forced a modification of the stronger Calvinist view.

8. Brailsford (1961) shows that in the Putney debates the contradiction between property and democracy came to be clearly understood.

9. See, for example, Bristol 1990.

10. A brief critique of capitalist democracy can be found in Ralph Miliband 1990.

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## ABSTRACTS OF ARTICLES

**Roger Boesche, “Franz Neumann’s Theory of Modern Dictatorship”**—Franz Neumann is perhaps the most overlooked member of the Frankfurt School, and yet his writings have given us not only an enduring and provocative analysis of Nazi Germany, but also perhaps this century’s finest analysis of how tyrannies can grow naturally out of the soil of liberal democracy. In this, he focused on the isolation, the loneliness, and the powerlessness that seem to be the inevitable companions of liberal democracy and capitalism; on how the dictatorial political party tries to use this helplessness to manipulate individuals’ lives from birth to death; on how modern dictatorships try to mask the class character of their regimes by exacerbating racial and ethnic tensions; on the manner in which dictatorships use racist ideologies to support imperial expansion profitable to the ruling classes at home; on why terror against those wholly innocent is a development of the twentieth century; and finally on why so-called totalitarian regimes are neither totalitarian nor unchangeable, but instead boast a divisive politics and are subject to convulsive change.

**Emilio Ichikawa Morin, “Truth versus Received Wisdom: In Praise of Nakedness”**—The belief systems of communities, nations, civilizations, and of all the other cultural entities associated with them protect themselves from gnoseological threats stemming from the discovery of new truths. Scientific ethics, however, demands that the scientists defend truth at all cost, but their defense of the truth must be conscious of the traumas that it can cause in a social order. The ethics of scientific conviction should therefore also contain an element of responsibility for scientists to deal with the social consequences of their discoveries, for scientists are also citizens of the society in which they function.

**Delia D. Aguilar, “Feminism in the ‘New World Order’”**—This essay discusses key tendencies in United States feminist theory and practice and explores some of their implications for women in developing countries in the context of a global women’s movement. Focusing on feminism in the Philippines—a nation with historic ties to the United States—the author underscores the beneficial as well as adverse effects of a North/South feminist encounter, given current theoretical trends.

Precisely because of its unique connection to the United States, the Philippine case might serve to clarify the issues involved in the articulation of feminisms in the "Third World," particularly in light of the changing alignment of industrial powers in the "new world order."

**(MARXIST FORUM) Peter Symon, "Communists and Right Revisionism in Australia"**—The author, general-secretary of the Socialist Party of Australia, attributes the formation of his party in 1971 by former members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) to dissatisfaction with the gradual shift of the leadership of the CPA away from Marxist-Leninist principles. The article discusses the ideological basis of the transformation of the CPA into the pluralistic New Left Party in 1990 in an attempt to broaden its base of support by abandoning its class-based orientation. The left social democrats, who this party had hoped to attract, remained, however, with the Labor Party of Australia, even though it was led by right-wing social democrats. The failure of the New Left Party to extend its base while at the same time losing its influence among militant trade unionists finally led to the dissolution of the New Left Party in 1992.

**Leonard Goldstein, "Tragedy and Class Society: A Review Essay"**—*Shakespeare* by Kiernan Ryan and *Monsters of the Deep: Social Dissolution in Shakespeare's Tragedies* by David Margolies are reviewed and a Marxist theory of tragedy is presented. The reviewer finds that Ryan succeeds in his attempt "to contest and displace" established readings of Shakespeare's plays, and that Margolies argues effectively for Shakespearean tragedies as "metaphors of social disintegration." Nonetheless, Ryan lacks a consistently employed concept of class, and Margolies fails to make his theory of tragedy clear. The reviewer examines sixteenth-century production relations and offers an interpretation of tragedy as the artistic representation of a basic contradiction, "that the bourgeoisie is an exploiting class and cannot achieve universal freedom."

### ABREGES D'ARTICLES

**Roger Boesche, «Franz Neumann et la théorie de la dictature moderne»**—Franz Neumann est peut-être le membre le plus négligé de l'école Frankfurt, et cependant ses écrits nous présentent une analyse de l'Allemagne Nazi qui dure et provoque aussi bien que la meilleure analyse de ce siècle de la façon selon laquelle les tyrannies peuvent croître naturellement du sol de la démocratie libérale. En ceci, il étudia



surtout l'isolement, la solitude, et l'impuissance qui semblent être les compagnons inévitables de la démocratie libérale et du capitalisme; comment le parti politique de la dictature essaie d'utiliser cette impuissance à manipuler les vies des individus de la naissance à la mort; comment les dictatures modernes essaient de déguiser leur alliance à la classe dirigeante en aggravant les tensions raciales et ethniques; la manière par laquelle les dictatures modernes se servent des idéologies racistes pour soutenir l'expansion impérialiste profitable à la classe dirigeante; comment la terreur contre ceux qui sont entièrement innocents se développa au vingtième siècle; et pourquoi les régimes soi-disant totalitaires ne sont ni totalitaires ni inaltérables, mais se vantent plutôt d'une politique qui divise et se rendent sujet à un changement convulsif.

**Emilio Ichikawa Morin, «La Vérité contre la sagesse reçue: faire l'éloge de la nudité»**—Les systèmes de croyance des communautés, des nations, des civilisations, et de toute entité culturelle qui s'y associe se protègent des menaces gnoséologiques survenant de la découverte des nouvelles vérités. L'éthique scientifique, cependant, exige que les scientifiques défendent la vérité à tout prix, mais leur défense de la vérité doit être consciente des traumatismes qu'elle peut engendrer dans l'ordre social. L'éthique de la persuasion scientifique devrait donc comprendre aussi un élément de responsabilité des scientifiques pour s'occuper des conséquences sociales de leurs découvertes, car les scientifiques sont aussi citoyens de la société dans laquelle ils fonctionnent.

**Delia D. Aquilar, «Le Féminisme dans le «nouvel ordre mondial»**—Cet essai discute les tendances de base de la théorie et la pratique féministe aux États-Unis et explore quelques unes de leurs implications pour les femmes aux pays en voie de développement au contexte d'un mouvement global des femmes. En étudiant surtout le féminisme aux Philippines—un pays avec des liens historiques aux États-Unis—l'auteur souligne les effets salutaires aussi bien qu'adverses d'une rencontre féministe nord/sud, étant donné les tendances théoriques actuelles. Précisément à cause de leur rapport unique aux États-Unis, le cas des Philippines pourrait servir à clarifier les questions qui s'impliquent dans l'articulation des féminismes au «tiers monde» surtout à la lumière de l'alignement changeant des pouvoirs industriels dans le «nouvel ordre mondial.»

**(LE FORUM MARXISTE) Peter Symon, «Les Communistes et le révisionnisme de droite en Australie»**—L'auteur, secrétaire-général

du Parti socialiste de l'Australie, attribue la formation de son parti en 1971 par les anciens membres du Parti communiste de l'Australie au mécontentement devant le changement graduel de la direction du PCA qui l'éloigne des principes marxistes-léninistes. L'article discute la base idéologique de la transformation du PCA à un parti de la nouvelle gauche pluralistique en 1990 comme tentative à élargir sa base de soutien tout en abandonnant son orientation vers la classe ouvrière. Les démocrates sociaux de la gauche, que ce parti avait espéré attirer, restèrent, cependant, dans le Parti travailliste de l'Australie, quand même celui-ci se dirigerait des démocrates sociaux de la droite. L'échec du parti de la nouvelle gauche à élargir sa base tout en perdant son influence parmi les syndicalistes militants finit par mener à la dissolution du parti de la nouvelle gauche en 1992.

**Leonard Goldstein, «Tragédie et la société de classe: un essai critique»**—On fait la critique de *Shakespeare* de Kiernan Ryan et *Les Monstres des grandes profondeurs: la dissolution sociale dans les tragédies de Shakespeare* de David Margolies et on présente une théorie marxiste de la tragédie. Le critique trouve que Ryan réussit à sa tentative de contester et déplacer les lectures établies du théâtre de Shakespeare, et que Margolies témoigne avec beaucoup d'effet en faveur d'une interprétation des tragédies shakespeariennes comme métaphores de la désintégration sociale. Néanmoins ce qui manque à Ryan c'est un emploi consistant du concept de classe, et Margolies échoue à bien préciser sa théorie de la tragédie. Le critique examine les rapports de production au seizième siècle et offre une interprétation de la tragédie comme la représentation artistique d'une contradiction de base, «que la bourgeoisie est une classe qui exploite et qui ne peut pas atteindre la liberté universelle.»