For Indu Gandhi and Julia Briggs

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Acknowledgments

Preface

In the last decade postcolonialism has taken its place with theories such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism as a major critical discourse in the humanities. As a consequence of its diverse and interdisciplinary usage, this body of thought has generated an enormous corpus of specialised academic writing. Nevertheless, although much has been written under its rubric, 'postcolonialism' itself remains a diffuse and nebulous term. Unlike Marxism or deconstruction, for instance, it seems to lack an 'originary moment' or a coherent methodology. This book is an attempt to 'name' postcolonialism—to delineate the academic and cultural conditions under which it first emerged and thereby to point to its major preoccupations and areas of concern.

There are correspondingly two parts to the book—the first offers an account of postcolonialism's academic and intellectual background, and the second elaborates the themes and issues which have most engaged the attention of postcolonial critics. In the main, the intellectual history of postcolonial theory is marked by a dialectic between Marxism, on the one hand, and poststructuralism/postmodernism, on the other. So,

too, this theoretical contestation informs the academic content of postcolonial analysis, manifesting itself in an ongoing debate between the competing claims of nationalism and internationalism, strategic essentialism and hybridity, solidarity and dispersal, the politics of structure/totality and the politics of the fragment.

Critics on both sides of this divide are persuasive in their claims, and compelling in their critique of theoretical opponents. Neither the assertions of Marxism nor those of poststructuralism, however, can exhaustively account for the meanings and consequences of the colonial encounter. While the poststructuralist critique of Western epistemology and theorisation of cultural alterity/difference is indispensable to postcolonial *theory*, materialist philosophies, such as Marxism, seem to supply the most compelling basis for postcolonial *politics*. Thus, the postcolonial critic has to work toward a synthesis of, or negotiation between, both modes of thought. In a sense, it is on account of its commitment to this project of theoretical and political integration that postcolonialism deserves academic attention.

Finally, there is the question of postcolonialism's constituency—the cultural audience for whom its theoretical disquisitions are most meaningful. In my reading of this field, there is little doubt that in its current mood postcolonial theory principally addresses the needs of the Western academy. It attempts to reform the intellectual and epistemological exclusions of this academy, and enables non-Western critics located in the West to present their cultural inheritance as knowledge. This is, of course, a worthwhile project and, to an extent, its efforts have been rewarded. The Anglo-American humanities academy has gradually stretched its disciplinary boundaries to include hitherto submerged and occluded voices from the non-Western world. But, of course, what postcolonialism fails to recognise is that what counts as 'marginal' in relation to the West has often been central and foundational in the non-West. Thus, while it may be revolutionary to teach Gandhi as political theory in the Anglo-American academy, he is, and has always been, canonical in India. Despite its good inten-

tions, then, postcolonialism continues to render non-Western knowledge and culture as 'other' in relation to the normative 'self' of Western epistemology and rationality. Rarely does it engage with the theoretical self-sufficiency of African, Indian, Korean, Chinese knowledge systems, or foreground those cultural and historical conversations which circumvent the Western world.

Nowhere is this book motivated by a desire for postcolonial revenge. It does not seek finally to marginalise the West—to render it an excluded and uneasy eavesdropper to cryptic exchanges between, for instance, Africa and India. Its manifesto, if any, is this: that postcolonialism diversify its mode of address and learn to speak more adequately to the world which it speaks for. And, in turn, that it acquire the capacity to facilitate a democratic colloquium between the antagonistic inheritors of the colonial aftermath.

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After colonialism

In 1985 Gayatri Spivak threw a challenge to the race and class blindness of the Western academy, asking 'Can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1985). By 'subaltern' Spivak meant the oppressed subject, the members of Antonio Gramsci's 'subaltern classes' (see Gramsci 1978), or more generally those 'of inferior rank', and her question followed on the work begun in the early 1980s by a collective of intellectuals now known as the Subaltern Studies group. The stated objective of this group was 'to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies' (Guha 1982, p. vii). Further, they described their project as an attempt to study 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way' (Guha 1982, p. vii). Fully alert to the complex ramifications arising from the composition of subordination, the Subaltern Studies group sketched out its wide-ranging concern both with the visible 'history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity' and with the occluded 'attitudes, ideologies and belief systems—in short, the culture informing that condition' (Guha 1982, p. vii). In other words,

'subaltern studies' defined itself as an attempt to allow the 'people' finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and, in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, the truly oppressed.

Spivak's famous interrogation of the risks and rewards which haunt any academic pursuit of subalternity drew attention to the complicated relationship between the knowing investigator and the (un)knowing subject of subaltern histories. For how, as she queried, 'can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1988 [1985], p. 285). Through these questions Spivak places us squarely within the familiar and troublesome field of 'representation' and 'representability'. How can the historian/investigator avoid the inevitable risk of presenting herself as an authoritative representative of subaltern consciousness? Should the intellectual 'abstain from representation?' (Spivak 1988 [1985], p. 285) Which intellectual is equipped to represent which subaltern class? Is there an 'unrepresentable subaltern class that can know and speak itself?' (Spivak 1988 [1985] p. 285) And finally, who—if any—are the 'true' or 'representative' subalterns of history, especially within the frame of reference provided by the imperialist project?

The complex notion of subalternity is pertinent to any academic enterprise which concerns itself with historically determined relationships of dominance and subordination. Yet it is postcolonial studies which has reponded with the greatest enthusiasm to Spivak's 'Can the subaltern speak?'. Utterly unanswerable, half-serious and half-parodic, this question circulates around the self-conscious scene of postcolonial texts, theory, conferences and conversations. While some postcolonial critics use it to circumscribe their field of enquiry, others use it to license their investigations. And, above all, the ambivalent terrain of subaltern-speak has given rise to a host of competing and quarrelsome anti- and postcolonial subalternities. There is little agreement within postcolonial studies about the worst victims of colonial oppression, or about the

most significant anti-colonial insurgencies. Metropolitan South Asian, African and West Indian poststructuralists battle Marxists at home; mainstream intellectuals within 'settler' colonies struggle against the claims of indigenous intellectuals and representatives; and feminist critics contest the masculinist evasions of nationalist historiography. Thus, while Spivak concluded her provocative essay by categorically insisting that 'the subaltern cannot speak' (Spivak 1988 [1985], p. 308), postcolonial studies has come to represent a confusing and often unpleasant babel of subaltern voices. How then, can we begin to make sense of—or, indeed, take sense from—this field?

Over the last decade, postcolonial studies has emerged both as a meeting point and battleground for a variety of disciplines and theories. While it has enabled a complex interdisciplinary dialogue within the humanities, its uneasy incorporation of mutually antagonistic theories—such as Marxism and poststructuralism—confounds any uniformity of approach. As a consequence, there is little consensus regarding the proper content, scope and relevance of postcolonial studies. Disagreements arising from usage and methodology are reflected in the semantic quibbling which haunts attempts to name postcolonial terminology. Whereas some critics invoke the hyphenated form 'post-colonialism' as a decisive temporal marker of the decolonising process, others fiercely query the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath—on the grounds that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. Accordingly, it is argued that the unbroken term 'postcolonialism' is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences.

On a different though related note, some theorists have announced a preference for the existential resonance of 'the postcolonial' or of 'postcoloniality' over the suggestion of academic dogma which attaches to the notion of postcolonialism. In the main, the controversy surrounding postcolonial vocabulary underscores an urgent need to distinguish and clarify the relationship between the material and analytic cognates of postcolonial studies. In its more self-reflexive

moments, postcolonial studies responds to this need by postulating itself as a theoretical attempt to engage with a particular historical condition. The theory may be named 'postcolonialism', and the condition it addresses is best conveyed through the notion of 'postcoloniality'. And, whatever the controversy surrounding the theory, its value must be judged in terms of its adequacy to conceptualise the complex condition which attends the aftermath of colonial occupation.

In this chapter I will examine some dimensions of, and possibilities for, the relationship between postcoloniality and postcolonialism in terms of the decolonising process. The emergence of anti-colonial and 'independent' nation-States after colonialism is frequently accompanied by a desire to forget the colonial past. This 'will-to-forget' takes a number of historical forms, and is impelled by a variety of cultural and political motivations. Principally, postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start—to erase painful memories of colonial subordination. As it happens, histories, much as families, cannot be freely chosen by a simple act of will, and newly emergent postcolonial nation-States are often deluded and unsuccessful in their attempts to disown the burdens of their colonial inheritance. The mere repression of colonial memories is never, in itself, tantamount to a surpassing of or emancipation from the uncomfortable realities of the colonial encounter.

In response, postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past. The process of returning to the colonial scene discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between coloniser and colonised. And it is in the unfolding of this troubled and troubling relationship that we might start to discern the ambivalent prehistory of the postcolonial condition. If postcoloniality is to be reminded of its origins in colonial oppression, it must also be theoretically urged to recollect the compelling seductions of colonial power. The forgotten archive

of the colonial encounter narrates multiple stories of contestation and its discomfiting other, complicity.

In addition, the colonial archive preserves those versions of knowledge and agency produced in response to the particular pressures of the colonial encounter. The colonial past is not simply a reservoir of 'raw' political experiences and practices to be theorised from the detached and enlightened perspective of the present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity, characterised by a profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonised subjects. Thus, in its therapeutic retrieval of the colonial past, postcolonialism needs to define itself as an area of study which is willing not only to make, but also to gain, theoretical sense out of that past.

The colonial aftermath

The colonial aftermath is marked by the range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation. It is, in the first place, a celebrated moment of arrival—charged with the rhetoric of independence and the creative euphoria of self-invention. This is the spirit with which Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, initially describes the almost mythical sense of incarnation which attaches to the coincidence of his birth and that of the new Indian nation on the momentous stroke of the midnight hour on 15 August 1947: 'For the next three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicos ratified my authenticity' (Rushdie 1982, p. 9). Predictably, and as Rushdie's Indian Everyman, Saleem Sinai, ultimately recognises, the colonial aftermath is also fraught by the anxieties and fears of failure which attend the need to satisfy the historical burden of expectation. In Sinai's words, 'I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning—yes, meaning—something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity' (Rushdie 1982, p. 9). To a large extent, Saleem Sinai's

obsessive 'creativity' and semantic profusion is fuelled by his apprehension that the inheritors of the colonial aftermath must in some sense instantiate a totally new world. Saleem Sinai's tumble into independent India is, after all, framed by the crippling optimism of Nehru's legendary narration of postcoloniality: 'A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance . . .' (Rushdie 1982, p. 116).

To quote Jameson's observations on postmodernism out of context, we might say that the celebratory cyborg of postcoloniality is also plagued by 'something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps impossible, dimensions' (Jameson 1991, p. 39). In pursuing this imperative, however, postcoloniality is painfully compelled to negotiate the contradictions arising from its indisputable historical belatedness, its *post*-coloniality, or political and chronological derivation from colonialism, on the one hand, and its cultural obligation to be meaningfully inaugural and inventive on the other. Thus, its actual moment of arrival—into independence—is predicated upon its ability to successfully imagine and execute a decisive departure from the colonial past.

Albert Memmi, the Tunisian anti-colonial revolutionary and intellectual, has argued that the colonial aftermath is fundamentally deluded in its hope that the architecture of a new world will magically emerge from the physical ruins of colonialism. Memmi maintains that the triumphant subjects of this aftermath inevitably underestimate the psychologically tenacious hold of the colonial past on the postcolonial present. In his words: 'And the day oppression ceases, the new man is supposed to emerge before our eyes immediately. Now, I do not like to say so, but I must, since decolonisation has demonstrated it: this is not the way it happens. The colonised lives for a long time before we see that really new man' (Memmi 1968, p. 88).

Memmi's political pessimism delivers an account of postcoloniality as a historical condition marked by the visible apparatus of freedom and the concealed persistence of unfreedom. He suggests that the pathology of this postcolonial limbo between arrival and departure, independence and dependence, has its source in the residual traces and memories of subordination. The perverse longevity of the colonised is nourished, in part, by persisting colonial hierarchies of knowledge and value which reinforce what Edward Said calls the 'dreadful secondariness' (Said 1989, p. 207) of some peoples and cultures. So also the cosmetic veneer of national independence barely disguises the foundational economic, cultural and political damage inflicted by colonial occupation. Colonisation, as Said argues, is a 'fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results' (1989, p. 207).

In their response to the ambiguities of national independence, writers like Memmi and Said insist that the colonial aftermath does not yield the end of colonialism. Despite its discouraging tone, this verdict is really framed by the quite benign desire to mitigate the disappointments and failures which accrue from the postcolonial myth of radical separation from Europe. The prefix 'post', as Lyotard has written, elaborates the conviction 'that it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking' (Lyotard 1992, p. 90). Almost invariably, this sort of triumphant utopianism shapes its vision of the future out of the silences and ellipses of historical amnesia. It is informed by a mistaken belief in the immateriality and dispensability of the past. In Lyotard's judgment, 'this rupture is in fact a way of forgetting or repressing the past, that is to say, repeating it and not surpassing it' (Lyotard 1992, p. 90). Thus, we might conclude that the postcolonial dream of discontinuity is ultimately vulnerable to the infectious residue of its own unconsidered and unresolved past. Its convalescence is unnecessarily prolonged on account of its refusal to remember and recognise its continuity with the pernicious malaise of colonisation.

If *postcoloniality* can be described as a condition troubled by the consequences of a self-willed historical amnesia, then the theoretical value of *postcolonialism* inheres, in part, in its

ability to elaborate the forgotten memories of this condition. In other words, the colonial aftermath calls for an ameliorative and therapeutic theory which is responsive to the task of remembering and recalling the colonial past. The work of this theory may be compared with what Lyotard describes as the psychoanalytic procedure of *anamnesis*, or analysis—which urges patients 'to elaborate their current problems by freely associating apparently inconsequential details with past situations—allowing them to uncover hidden meanings in their lives and their behaviour' (Lyotard 1992, p. 93). In adopting this procedure, postcolonial theory inevitably commits itself to a complex project of historical and psychological 'recovery'. If its scholarly task inheres in the carefully researched retrieval of historical detail, it has an equally compelling political obligation to assist the subjects of postcoloniality to live with the gaps and fissures of their condition, and thereby learn to proceed with self-understanding.

Salman Rushdie sheds light on this necessity in a wonderful moment of betrayal and reconciliation in *Midnight's Children*, when the anti-hero and narrator, Saleem Sinai, reveals the cultural miscegenation and comic misrecognition of his celebrated birth. Early in the novel, and at the same time as Amina Sinai struggles to produce her child in Dr Narlinkar's Nursing Home, a poor woman called Vanita suffers a neglected labour in the 'charity ward'. The child she is about to bear is the unexpected consequence of an affair with an Englishman, William Methwold, who boasts direct descent from a particularly imperialistic East India Company officer. When these children are finally delivered, a somewhat crazed midwife called Mary Pereira switches Amina's and Vanita's babies around. Thus, Saleem Sinai, hailed by Nehru himself as the child of independent India, is really the son of a reluctantly departing coloniser. But this accident, as the adult Saleem insists, is the allegorical condition of all those who inherit the colonial aftermath: 'In fact, all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents' (Rushdie 1982, p. 118). In his digressive self-narration, Saleem Sinai simultaneously

refuses the guilt of unauthenticity and the desire to withhold the knowledge of his flawed genealogy. The Sinais, we are told, eventually reconcile themselves to the fact of Methwold's bloodline, namely, to the hybrid inadequacies of their own postcoloniality. As Saleem explains: 'when we eventually discovered the crime of Mary Pereira, we all found that it *made no difference*! I was still their son: they remained my parents. In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts . . .' (Rushdie 1982, p. 118). We might modify this narrative wisdom slightly to say that, perhaps, the only way out is by thinking, rigorously, *about* our pasts.

Postcolonial re-membering

In his comments on Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha, announces that memory is the necessary and sometimes hazardous bridge between colonialism and the question of cultural identity. Remembering, he writes, 'is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present' (Bhabha 1994, p. 63). Bhabha's account of the therapeutic agency of remembering is built upon the maxim that memory is the submerged and constitutive bedrock of conscious existence. While some memories are accessible to consciousness, others, which are blocked and banned—sometimes with good reason—perambulate the unconscious in dangerous ways, causing seemingly inexplicable symptoms in everyday life. Such symptoms, as we have seen, can best be relieved when the analyst—or, in Bhabha's case the theorist—releases offending memories from their captivity. The procedure of analysis–theory, recommended here, is guided by Lacan's ironic reversal of the Cartesian *cogito*, whereby the rationalistic truth of 'I think therefore I am' is rephrased in the proposition: 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think' (Lacan 1977, p. 166).

In the process of forging the reparative continuity between cultural identity and the historical past, the theorist/analyst is also required to recognise the qualitative difference between two types of amnesia. The mind, as both Freud and Lacan maintain, engages in either the better known neurotic 'repression'—*Verdrängung*—of memory; or, and more devastatingly in its psychotic 'repudiation'—*Verwerfung* (see Bowie 1991, pp. 107–9). If the activity of *Verdrängung* censors and thereby disguises a vast reservoir of painful memories, the deceptions of *Verwerfung* tend to transform the troublesome past into a hostile delirium. The memories and images expelled through the violence of repudiation enter into what Lacan describes as a reciprocal and 'symbolic opposition to the subject' (Lacan 1977, p. 217). These phantasmic memories thus become simultaneously alien, antagonistic and unfathomable to the suffering self.

To a large extent, the colonial aftermath combines the obfuscations of both *Verdrängung* and *Verwerfung*. Its unwillingness to remember what Bhabha describes as the painful and humiliating 'memory of the history of race and racism' (Bhabha 1994, p. 63) is matched by its terrified repudiation and utopian expulsion of this past. In response, the theoretical re-membering of the colonial condition is called upon to fulfil two corresponding functions. The first, which Bhabha foregrounds as the simpler disinterment of unpalatable memories, seeks to uncover the overwhelming and lasting violence of colonisation. The second is ultimately reconciliatory in its attempt to make the hostile and antagonistic past more familiar and therefore more approachable. The fulfilment of this latter project requires that the images expelled by the violence of the postcolonial *Verwerfung* be reclaimed and owned again. This is, of course, another way of saying that postcoloniality has to be made to concede its part or complicity in the terrors—and errors—of its own past. In Sara Suleri's words: 'To tell the history of another is to be pressed against the limits of one's own—thus culture learns that terror has a local habitation and a name' (Suleri 1992, p. 2).

Thus, we might conclude that the forgotten content of postcoloniality effectively reveals the story of an ambivalent and symbiotic *relationship* between coloniser and colonised. Accordingly, the reparative proddings of postcolonial theory/analysis are most successful when they are able to illuminate the contiguities and intimacies which underscore the stark violence and counter-violence of the colonial condition. Albert Memmi has argued that the lingering residue of colonisation will only decompose if, and when, we are willing to acknowledge the reciprocal behaviour of the two colonial partners. The colonial condition, he writes, 'chained the coloniser and the colonised into an implacable dependence, moulded their respective characters and dictated their conduct' (Memmi 1968, p. 45). Memmi's predication of this perverse mutuality between oppressor and oppressed is really an attempt to understand the puzzling circulation of desire around the traumatic scene of oppression. The desire of the coloniser for the colony is transparent enough, but how much more difficult it is to account for the inverse longing of the colonised. How, as Memmi queries, 'could the colonised deny himself so cruelly . . . How could he hate the colonisers and yet admire them so passionately?' (1968, p. 45)

This situation of hate and desire described by Memmi poses a problem for 'oppositional' postcolonial theory, which scavenges the colonial past for what Benita Parry describes as an 'implacable enmity between native and invader' (Parry 1987, p. 32). The aim of this combative project is to promote, in Parry's words, 'the construction of a politically conscious, unified revolutionary Self, standing in unmitigated opposition to the oppressor' (p. 30). In fact, the colonial archive mitigates these simple dichotomies through its disclosure of the complicating logic and reciprocity of desire. It shows that the colonised's predicament is, at least partly, shaped and troubled by the compulsion to return a voyeuristic gaze upon Europe. How should we as theorists respond to this gaze? How does it fit into the theoretical economy of combat and enmity? We might gesture toward some answers by saying that the battle lines *between* native and invader are also replicated *within*

native and invader. And—as Memmi might say—the crisis produced by this self-division is at least as psychologically significant as those which attend the more visible contestations of coloniser and colonised.

There is a savage account of such postcolonial schizophrenia in Vikram Seth's epic novel, *A Suitable Boy* (1993). The impossibly home-grown, or *desi*, shoemaker hero, Haresh, is attempting to impress his suitability upon the heroine's obnoxious Anglophile brother, Arun Mehra, who has just been holding forth about the singular joys of Hamely's toy shop. Mehra claims to know the exact location of Hamley's, 'on Regent Street, not far from Jaeger's'. And yet, when Haresh—of the brown-and-white co-respondent shoes—politely inquires when the Mehras were last in the imperial capital, we discover that they have never been to London. There is an awful pause, long enough for our readerly sympathies to attach themselves firmly on the side of the shoemaker, before Arun splutters, 'but of course we're going in a few months time'. Seth's harsh satire on the Arun Mehras exploits the stigma of unauthenticity which haunts the 'Orient's' longing for its conquering other. And yet, there is a pathos even in the Mehras' excessive Anglophilia. Homi Bhabha might say that they are ideologically interpellated by the restrictive confinement of knowledge and value to the sovereign map of Europe. The Europe they know and value so intimately is always elsewhere. Its reality is infinitely deferred, always withheld from them. Worse still, their questing pursuit of European plenitude, their desire to own the coloniser's world, requires a simultaneous disowning of the world which has been colonised. Arun Mehra can only sustain his apprentice brown-sahibship by speaking in the language of his conquerors. A hard day in the office produces the following ruminations: 'The British knew how to run things . . . they worked hard and they played hard. They believed in command, and so did he . . . What was wrong with this country was a lack of initiative. All the Indians wanted was a safe job. Bloody pen pushers, the whole lot of them' (Seth 1993, p. 422). And so Arun Mehra loses the respect of his author and his readers.

A more sympathetic gloss on the Mehras might suggest that their postcolonial investment in Europe is also accompanied by a progressive, and ultimately crippling, loss of 'home'. In an early poem called 'Diwali', Seth offers a literary preamble to the Mehras through a considerably more sympathetic self-portrait (Seth 1994). This poem too considers the deleterious effects of a colonial education—but with a greater sense of the irresistible literary and cultural temptations of Europe. Its ambivalent apotheosis to 'Englishness' enacts what Ashis Nandy has eloquently described as the 'intimate enmity' of the colonial condition (Nandy, 1983). Seth's poem is spoken from a cultural crossing where the privileges and passions attached to the magic of 'English' literature are constantly undone and unworked by an underlying sense of cultural transgression. Traversing the genealogy of a Punjabi family from rural self-sufficiency to colonised civility, 'Diwali' chronicles the effort it takes for six generations of Punjabi peasants to finally gain 'the conqueror's authoritarian seal', by sending 'a son to school' (Seth 1994 [1981], p. 64). Suddenly, family history is rewritten as a faltering generational progress into coloniality. The crisis turns on the paradox that what is eminently desirable through Englishness—'a job . . . power'—is also, and at the same time, rendered utterly undesirable, once again, through the taint of 'snobbery, the good life' (1994 [1981], p. 65) Likewise, and perhaps more painfully, the etymology of the language that is loved so intimately by the poet belongs elsewhere and at a distance, to another—sometimes hostile and abusive—'tongue'. This younger Seth ponders the impossibility of crawling, willingly, beside the 'meridian names' of the English poets 'Jonson, Wordsworth', in the face of Macaulay's prophesy: 'one taste / Of Western wisdom "surpasses / All the books of the East"'(1994 [1981], p. 65). Herein lies the faultline of what Seth describes as the 'separateness' and 'fear' (1994 [1981], p. 65) attached to the self-conscious acquisition of English. To speak in the desired way is, from now on, to also learn how to speak against oneself. It is to concede, as Seth does toward the end of this poem, that his 'tongue is warped' (1994 [1981], p. 68).

To make theoretical sense of Seth's literary illustration of the colonised's complicity in the colonial condition, we need to allow for a more complex understanding of the mechanisms of power. While the logic of power, as critics like Benita Parry insist, is fundamentally coercive, its campaign is frequently seductive. We could say that power traverses the imponderable chasm between coercion and seduction through a variety of baffling self-representations. While it may manifest itself in a show and application of force, it is equally likely to appear as the disinterested purveyor of cultural enlightenment and reform. Through this double representation, power offers itself both as a political limit and as a cultural possibility. If power is at once the qualitative difference or gap between those who have it and those who must suffer it, it also designates an imaginative space that can be occupied, a cultural model that might be imitated and replicated. The apparent political exclusivity of power is thus matched, as Foucault argues, by its web-like inclusiveness:

> Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are like vehicles of power, not its points of application (Foucault 1980a, p. 98).

At an obvious level, Foucault's analysis seems to convey the quite basic idea that power is best able to disseminate itself through the collaboration of its subjects. But Foucault's more subtle point is that such apparent 'collaboration' is really symptomatic of the pervasive and claustrophobic omnipresence of power. It is the unavoidable response to a condition where power begins to insinuate itself both inside and outside the world of its victims. Thus, if power is available as a form of 'subjection', it is also a procedure which is 'subjectivised' through, and within, particular individuals. According to Foucault, there is no 'outside' to power—it is always, already, everywhere.

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In his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), Ashis Nandy adapts Foucault's analysis of power to account for the particularly deleterious consequences of the colonial encounter. For Nandy, however, modern colonialism is not just a historical illustration of Foucault's paradigmatic analysis. It is, more significantly, a sort of crucial historical juncture at which power changes its style and first begins to elaborate the strategies of profusion which Foucault theorises so persuasively.

Nandy's book builds on an interesting, if somewhat contentious, distinction between two chronologically distinct types or genres of colonialism. The first, he argues, was relatively simple-minded in its focus on the physical conquest of territories, whereas the second was more insidious in its commitment to the conquest and occupation of minds, selves, cultures. If the first bandit-mode of colonialism was more violent, it was also, as Nandy insists, transparent in its self-interest, greed and rapacity. By contrast, and somewhat more confusingly, the second was pioneered by rationalists, modernists and liberals who argued that imperialism was really the messianic harbinger of civilisation to the uncivilised world.

Despite Nandy's compartmentalisation of militaristic and civilisational imperialism, modern colonialism did, of course, rely on the institutional uses of force and coercion. In addition, it enacted another kind of violence by instituting 'enduring hierarchies of subjects and knowledges—the coloniser and the colonised, the Occidental and the Oriental, the civilised and the primitive, the scientific and the superstitious, the developed and the developing' (Prakash 1995, p. 3). The effect of this schematic reinscription of the colonial relationship is now well acknowledged. The colonised was henceforth to be postulated as the inverse or negative image of the coloniser. In order for Europe to emerge as the site of civilisational plenitude, the colonised world had to be emptied of meaning. Thus, as Nandy writes:

> This colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonised societies to alter their cultural

priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalise the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds (Nandy 1983, p. xi).

Colonialism, then, to put it simply, marks the historical process whereby the 'West' attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West'.

Nandy's psychoanalytic reading of the colonial encounter evokes Hegel's paradigm of the master–slave relationship, and he is not alone in this implicit theoretical debt to Hegel. In fact, whenever postcolonial theory queries what Irene Gendzier describes as 'the Other—directed nature of the reactions of the colonised and his need to struggle to free himself of this externally determined definition of Self' (Gendzier 1973, p. 23), it evokes categories which are reminiscent of Hegel's paradigms.

Hegel's brief but influential notes on 'Lordship and Bondage' are framed by the theorem that human beings acquire identity or self-consciousness only through the recognition of others (see Hegel 1910, vol. 1, pp. 175–88). Each Self has before it another Self in and through which it secures its identity. Initially, there is an antagonism and enmity between these two confronting selves; each aims at the cancellation or death and destruction of the Other. Hence, and temporarily, a situation arises where one is merely recognised while the other recognises. However, the proper end of history—viz. the complete and final revelation of historical truth—requires that the principle of recognition be both mutual and universal. Charles Taylor captures Hegel's conclusions in the following aphorism: 'for what I am, is recognition of man as such and therefore something that in principle should be extended to all' (Taylor 1975, p. 153). As harsh realities would have it, though, it doesn't quite work out this way. The peculiarly human history of servitude, or the historical subordination of one self to another, belies the Hegelian expectation of mutuality.

In his philosophical elaboration of the 'master–slave relationship', Hegel maintains that the master and slave are,

initially, locked in a compulsive struggle-unto-death. This goes on until the weak-willed slave, preferring life to liberty, accepts his subjection to the victorious master. When these two antagonists finally face each other after battle, only the master is recognisable. The slave, on the other hand, is now a dependent 'thing' whose existence is shaped by, and as, the conquering Other. Or, as Sartre writes of the slave in his monumental reworking of Hegel's summary text: 'I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculptures it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am' (Sartre 1969; cited in Gendzier 1973, p. 31).

The postcolonial recovery of the colonial condition, which we have been discussing, is, in the first place, an attempt to reveal the coloniser and the colonised as a historical incarnation of Hegel's master and slave. But the task of postcolonial theoretical retrieval cannot stop there. For if history is the record of failure, it also bears testimony to the slave's refusal to concede the master's existential priority. As Nandy tells us, it is crucial for postcolonial theory to take seriously the idea of a psychological resistance to colonialism's civilising mission. To this end, it needs historically to exhume those defences of mind which helped to turn the West 'into a reasonably manageable vector' (Nandy 1983, p. xiii). In this regard it is worth recalling that the slave figure in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* also makes the following revolutionary pronouncement: 'I lay claim to this being which I am; that is, I wish to recover it, or, more exactly, I am the project of the recovery of my being' (cited in Gendzier 1973, p. 31).

Gandhi and Fanon: the slave's recovery

Colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation. However, the psychological resistance to colonialism begins with the onset of colonialism. Thus, the very notion of a 'colonial aftermath' acquires a doubleness, inclusive of both the historical scene of the colonial encounter and its dispersal,

in David Lloyd's words, 'among the episodes and fragments of a history still in process' (Lloyd 1993b, p. 11). We have already considered the implications of a theoretical alignment between the adverse symptoms of the 'colonial past' and the 'postcolonial present'. It is also necessary, as Gyan Prakash writes, 'to fully recognise another history of agency and knowledge alive in the dead weight of the colonial past' (Prakash 1995, p. 5). The task of this 'full recognition' requires that acts of anti-colonial resistance be treated not only as theorisable but, as Prakash would have it, as fully comprehensive, fully conceptualised 'theoretical events' in their own right. Thus, Prakash insists, we might start to ascertain the first elaborations of a postcolonial theory itself in historical figures like Gandhi and Frantz Fanon, the anti-colonial Algerian revolutionary. In so doing, we might be guided by Benita Parry's warning against 'the tendency to disown work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciated heterodoxies, as necessarily less subversive of the established order' (Parry 1987, p. 27).

Prakash's brilliant juxtaposition of Gandhi and Fanon invites further attention, for in these two figures we find two radically different and yet closely aligned elaborations of postcolonial self-recovery. The differences between Gandhi and Fanon are stark and self-evident. If Gandhi speaks in an anachronistic religio-political vocabulary, Fanon's idiom is shot through with Sartre's existential humanism. If Gandhi's encounter with British imperialism generates a theology of non-violence, Fanon's experience of French colonialism produces a doctrinaire commitment to the redemptive value of collective violence. And if Gandhi enters Indian national politics in middle age, the more impetuous Fanon is dead, after a career of anti-colonial resistance, at the age of 36.

Yet, there are significant similarities between these two revolutionary thinkers. Both of them complete their education in the colonising country—Gandhi to become a reluctant lawyer and Fanon a despairing psychiatrist—and both prepare the theoretical underpinnings of their anti-colonialism in a third country, Gandhi in South Africa and Fanon, despite his

Martiniquian roots, in Algeria. It is probably for this reason that neither Fanon's nor Gandhi's resistance to colonialism is matched by a corresponding nationalism. Both remain wary of the national elite and eventually seek, although equally unsuccessfully, the disbanding of nationalist parties in favour of a more decentralised polity closer to the needs and aspirations of the vast and unacknowledged mass of the Indian and Algerian peasantry. In addition to these theoretical contiguities, Gandhi and Fanon are united in their proposal of a radical style of total resistance to the totalising political and cultural offensive of the colonial civilising mission. To this end, both men carefully elaborate Nandy's notion of a psychological resistance to colonialism. As Fanon wrote toward the end of his revolutionary manifesto in *The Wretched of the Earth*: 'Total liberation is that which concerns all sectors of the personality' (Fanon 1990, p. 250).

The principle underlying Fanon's project of 'total liberation' requires the enslaved figure of the colonised to refuse the privilege of recognition to the colonial 'master'. In Fanon's words: 'Colonialism wants everything to come from it. But the dominant psychological feature of the colonised is to withdraw before any invitation of the conqueror's' (Fanon 1965, p. 63). Fanon's image of a resolute colonised subject politely declining the primacy of Europe appears as the figurative masthead to Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*—a polemical critique of Western civilisation written in 1909. Whereas Fanon is optimistic and confident about the colonised's ability to valiantly resist the cultural viscosity of Europe, Gandhi's prickly text laments the Indian *moha*, or desire for the superficial glitter of 'modern' civilisation. In his words: 'We brought the English, and we keep them. Why do you forget that our adoption of their civilisation makes their presence in India at all possible? Your hatred against them ought to be transferred to their civilisation' (Gandhi 1938, p. 66).

In their categorical disavowal of cultural colonialism, both thinkers attempt, albeit through very different strategies, to transform anti-colonial dissent into a struggle for creative autonomy from Europe. And it is this quite specific emphasis

on creativity rather than authenticity which ultimately prevents both from espousing a nostalgic and uncritical return to the 'pre-colonial' past. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* resounds with an unequivocal 'no' to the 'question of a return to nature' (Fanon 1990, p. 253). So also Gandhi's interrogation of the West is matched by a series of quite heterodox—even heretical—revisions of religious and social tradition. Both thinkers are shaped by an obsession with the rhetoric of futurity. Fanon's revolutionary narrative moves with a compelling urgency toward the recognition that 'the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence' (Fanon 1967, p. 229). We might also recall that Gandhi treats his anti-colonial interventions as scientific 'experiments', geared toward the discovery of a hitherto unprecedented political style. While fully acknowledging the complicity or infection of the colonised subject, both men treat the project of national liberation as an imaginative pretext for cultural self-differentiation from Europe and, thereby, as an attempt to exceed, surpass—even improve upon—the claims of Western civilisation. As Fanon writes in his address to the colonised world: 'Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth' (Fanon 1990, p. 252). This defiant invitation to alterity or 'civilisational difference' carries within it an accompanying refusal to admit the deficiency or lack which is, as we have seen, the historical predicament of those who have been rendered into slaves.

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* invokes both Hegel and Sartre to diagnose the condition of the colonised slave as a symptom of 'imitativeness'. In Hegel's paradigm, the slave must ultimately turn away from the master to forge the meaning of his existence in labour. He can only regain his integrity by working over the density of matter to which he is henceforth confined. However, as Fanon argues, the racialisation of the master–slave relationship breeds a new and disabling discontent. For whenever the black slave faces the white master, s/he now experiences the disruptive charge of envy and desire. The Negro, Fanon writes, 'wants to be like the master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. In Hegel the

slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object' (Fanon 1967, p. 221 note). As both Fanon and Gandhi were to recognise, the slave's hypnotised gaze upon the master condemned this figure to a derivative existence. Herein lay the creative failure of a less than total liberation. In Gandhi's extravagant prose, the problem was this: 'that we want the English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature but not the tiger . . .' (Gandhi 1938, p. 30). The only way forward, accordingly, was to render the tiger undesirable.

Gandhi's and Fanon's powerful attempt to demystify the claims of Western civic society forces the allegorical figure of the slave to consider its own history as the terrible consequence of the master's privileges. Rather than see itself *as*, or in the image of, the master, the slave is now urged to see itself *beside* the master. It is compelled, to borrow Homi Bhabha's words, to envision 'the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonised man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries . . . disturbs and distorts the very time of his being' (Bhabha 1994, p. 44). It is with this agenda in mind, that Gandhi and Fanon rewrite the narrative of Western modernity to include the repressed and marginalised figures of its victims. In this revised version, industrialisation tells the story of economic exploitation, democracy is splintered by the protesting voices of the suffragettes, technology combines with warfare, and the history of medicine is attached relentlessly by Fanon to the techniques of torture. If Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* everywhere discerns the structural violence of Western 'modernity', Fanon is equally unsparing in his denunciation of the European myths of progress and humanism: 'When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders' (Fanon 1990, p. 252). Read together, the Gandhian and Fanonian critiques of Western civilisation sketch the ethical inadequacy and undesirability of the colonial 'master' whose cognition, as Nandy writes, 'has to exclude the slave except as a "thing"' (Nandy 1983, p. xvi). There is no space for

desire, as Fanon and Gandhi struggle to convey, in the existential limitations of a condition whose 'humanity' is founded on the inhumane pathology of racism and violence.

We know, of course, that the operations of desire are rarely informed by the reflections of judgment; Seth's poet-narrator in 'Diwali' desires Western knowledge despite his knowledge of Western imperialism. In a sense, it is irrelevant to ask whether Gandhi and Fanon successfully cured the colonised world of its perverse and self-defeating longing for the conqueror. Nor must we feel compelled to condone their fierce and uncompromising rejection of all things European. Nevertheless, the careful retrieval of figures like Gandhi and Fanon is instructive to postcolonial theory. For when this theory returns to the colonial scene, it finds two stories: the seductive narrative of power, and alongside that the counter-narrative of the colonised—politely, but firmly, declining the come-on of colonialism. It is important to re-member both—to remember, in other words, that postcoloniality derives its genealogy from both narratives. We might conclude this introduction by remembering a possibly apocryphal story about Gandhi. Journalistic legend has it that once, when in England, Gandhi was asked the following question by an earnest young reporter: 'Mr Gandhi, what do you think of modern civilisation?'. In some versions of the story Gandhi laughed heartily, in others, became very serious, before replying: 'I think it would be a very good idea'.

2

Thinking otherwise: a brief intellectual history

Having sketched out the overarching preoccupations and obligations of postcolonial studies, we might now turn our attention to the intellectual history of this new discipline. Although postcolonial theory has been instrumental, over the last fifteen years or so, in bringing a new prominence to matters of colony and empire, it is by no means unique or inaugural in its academic concern with the subject of imperialism. So too it is methodologically and conceptually indebted to a variety of both earlier and more recent 'Western' theories. The purpose of this chapter is to situate postcolonialism within a contemporary and metropolitan theoretical landscape, and to indicate some of its theoretical influences and points of departure.

Marxism, poststructuralism and the problem of humanism

In the excitement over what appears to be a 'new' focus on colonial issues, students of postcolonialism tend to ignore (or forget) the long history of specifically Marxist anti-imperialist thought. Ever since the first decade of this century, Marxist thinkers—such as Lenin, Bukharin and Hilferding, to name a

few—have been urging the Western world to concede that the story of colonialism is a necessary sub-plot to the emergence of market society in Europe, and to the concomitant globalisation of capital (see Brewer 1980; Hobsbawm 1987; Warren 1980). And yet, despite the rigorous and wide-ranging work conducted under its aegis, the Marxist engagement with imperialism has secured only a very limited constituency. Few critics have continued an exclusively Marxist interrogation of empire, and those who have, are vehemently opposed to the prevailing postcolonialist orthodoxy. Aijaz Ahmad, for example, has been especially vociferous in his insistence upon the theoretical and political incompatibility between Marxist and postcolonialist positions. As he writes: 'we should speak not so much of colonialism or postcolonialism but of capitalist modernity, which takes the colonial form in particular places and at particular times' (Ahmad 1995, p. 7). Postcolonial analysis, in turn, rarely acknowledges a genealogical debt to its Marxist predecessors—in fact, its engagement with Marxist theory is often explicitly antagonistic. In this it is guided, albeit mistakenly, by the assumption that Marxism has failed to direct a comprehensive critique against colonial history and ideology.

Jameson is instructive in his account of the postcolonialist bias against Marxism:

> The very widely held contemporary belief—that, following the title of Walter Rodney's influential book, capitalism leads . . . to 'the development of underdevelopment', and that imperialism systematically cripples the growth of its colonies and its dependent areas—this belief is utterly absent from the first moment of Marxist theories of imperialism and is indeed everywhere contradicted by them, where they raise the matter at all (Jameson 1990, p. 47).

For reasons of its own very specific reading of the developments of capitalism in the late nineteenth century, Marxism has been unable to theorise colonialism as an exploitative relationship between the West and its Others. Accordingly—as Jameson concedes—it has also neglected to address sympathetically the historical, cultural and political alterity, or difference,

of the colonised world and, in so doing, it has relinquished its potential appeal to postcolonialist thought. Where, then, does postcolonialism begin? Where, in other words, does it seek its appropriate intellectual inheritance?

While the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 is commonly regarded as the principal catalyst and reference point for postcolonial theory, insufficient attention is given to the fact that this ur-text (and its followers) evolved within a distinctly poststructuralist climate, dominated in the Anglo-American academy by the figures of Foucault and Derrida. Indeed, Said's own work draws upon a variety of Foucauldian paradigms. In particular, Foucault's notion of a discourse, as elaborated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, informs Said's attempt to isolate the principle and workings of Orientalism. In addition, Gayatri Spivak first gained admission to the literary-critical pantheon through her celebrated translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in 1977. And much of her subsequent work has been preoccupied with the task of dialogue and negotiation with and between Derrida and Foucault. Arguably, then, it is through poststucturalism and postmodernism—and their deeply fraught and ambivalent relationship with Marxism—that postcolonialism starts to distil its particular provenance.

Some hostile critics have been quick to attribute the links between postcolonialism and poststructuralism to temporal contingency and, therefore, to academic fashion alone. And in truth the alliance with poststructuralism has indeed enabled postcolonialism to gain a privileged foothold within the metropolitan academic mainstream. Poststructuralist thought has, for example, provided a somewhat more substantial impetus to the postcolonial studies project through its clear and confidently theorised proposal for a Western critique of Western civilisation. In pursuing the terms of this critique, postcolonialism has also inherited a very specific understanding of Western domination as the symptom of an unwholesome alliance between power and knowledge. Thus, in a shift from the predominantly economic paradigms of Marxist thought, postcolonialism has learnt—through its poststructuralist par-

entage—to diagnose the material effects and implications of colonialism as an epistemological malaise at the heart of Western rationality. It has also learnt to be suspicious of 'the problem of universalism/Eurocentrism that was inherent in Marxist (or for that matter liberal) thought itself' (Chakrabarty 1993, p. 422). According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, it was the recognition of this problem which led the postcolonialist historians engaged in the Subaltern Studies collective to be 'receptive to the critiques of marxist historicism—in particular to the "incredulity toward grand narratives"—that French post-structuralist thinkers popularised in the English-language world in the 1980s' (1993, p. 422).

For all its pondering on questions of 'difference', however, Derrida's and Foucault's work does not really address the problem of colonialism directly. It is only in an early essay, 'George Canguilhem: philosopher of error', that Foucault explicitly equates European knowledges and the mirage of Western rationality with the 'economic domination and political hegemony' of colonialism (Foucault 1980b, p. 54). Similarly, Derrida's 'White mythology: metaphor in the text of philosophy', (Derrida 1974) stands out for its suggestion that the very structure of Western rationality is racist and imperialist. Both essays are, however, typical of Derrida's and Foucault's oeuvre in their unhesitating challenge to the universal validity of Western culture and epistemology, and it is in this challenge, as Spivak tells us, that postcolonialist thought secures its desired intellectual moorings:

> Where I was first brought up—when I first read Derrida I didn't know who he was, I was very interested to see that he was actually dismantling the philosophical tradition from *inside* rather than from *outside*, because of course we were brought up in an education system in India where the name of the hero of that philosophical system was the universal human being, and we were taught that if we could begin to approach an internationalisation of that human being, then we could be human. When I saw in France someone was actually trying to dismantle the tradition which told us what

would make us human, that seemed rather interesting too (Spivak 1990, p. 7).

What is the tradition that Spivak is speaking of here? How is it dismantled through the poststructuralist intervention? And how does the liberated understanding of what it means to be a human being reflect upon the postcolonial studies project? We might begin to address some of these questions by stopping to examine the shibboleth of Western 'humanism'—which is also the name that Derrida and Foucault give to the tradition they seek to dismantle.

'Humanism' is a highly contentious term. As Bernauer and Mahon point out, for example, 'Christianity, the critique of Christianity, science, anti-science, Marxism, existentialism, personalism, National Socialism, and Stalinism have each won the label "humanism" for a time' (Bernauer & Mahon 1994, pp. 141–2). These various humanisms are, however, unified in their belief that underlying the diversity of human experience it is possible, first, to discern a universal and given human nature, and secondly to find it revealed in the common language of rationality. In defence of this belief, Marxist exponents of humanistic principles, such as Noam Chomsky, Fredric Jameson and Jurgen Habermas have argued that humanism holds out the possibility of a rational and universal consensus between responsible individuals with regard to the conceptualisation of a humane, progressive and just social order. In contrast, poststructuralist and postmodernist anti-humanists maintain that any universal or normative postulation of rational unanimity is totalitarian and hostile to the challenges of otherness and difference.

For these critics, the very ideas of 'rationality' and 'human nature' are historical constructions and therefore subject to historical investments and limitations. This view is self-evidently appealing to the postcolonial concern with cultural diversity. At the same time, and somewhat painfully for postcolonial studies, the debate between Marxist humanists and poststructuralist anti-humanists remains unresolved on the subject of ethics and politics. Political mobilisation and ethical

principles, as Marxist critics forcefully argue, necessarily require some sort of cross-cultural consensus. For a postmodern thinker like Lyotard, however, the very process of reaching consensus is vitiated by a 'conversational imperialism'. According to Lyotard, the participants in an ethico-political dialogue are rarely equal, and almost never equally represented in the final consensus. Insofar as this dialogue is already projected towards some predetermined end—such as justice or rationality—it is always conducted, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, 'within a field of possibilities that is already structured from the very beginning in favour of certain outcomes' (Chakrabarty 1995, p. 757). One of the participants invariably 'knows better' than the other, whose world view, in turn, must be modified or 'improved' in the reaching of consensus. The heterogeneity of thought, Lyotard would argue, can only ever be preserved through the refusal of unanimity and the search for a radical 'discensus'. Thus, and we will return to this problem in subsequent chapters, postcolonial studies critics are left to ponder the apparent chasm between the poststructuralist insistence on the impossibility of a universal human nature and the opposing Marxist verdict on the impossibility of a politics which lacks the principle of 'solidarity'.

In understanding postcolonialism's vexed relationship with humanism, it is important to recognise that postcolonial studies inherits two chronologically distinct, if ideologically overlapping, approaches to the history and consequences of humanism. The first is concerned with humanism as a cultural and educational program which began in Renaissance Italy in about the mid-sixteenth century and evolved progressively into the area of studies we now practise and preach as the humanities. The second distinctly poststructuralist approach brings a more precise meaning and imprecise chronology to bear upon the notion of humanism. It identifies humanism with the theory of subjectivity and knowledge philosophically inaugurated by Bacon, Descartes and Locke, and scientifically substantiated by Galileo and Newton. This philosophical and scientific revolution is said to find its proper fulfilment in the

eighteenth century, where it comes to be embraced as the Enlightenment or *Aufklärung*.

There are vast differences between the literary humanism of sixteenth-century Florence and the scientific humanism of eighteenth-century Europe. Nevertheless, both types of humanism are unanimous in their anthropocentricism or categorical valorisation of the human subject. Man, as Diderot observes in the mood of his Renaissance predecessor Petrarch, 'is the single place from which we must begin and to which we must refer everything . . . It is the presence of man which makes the existence of beings meaningful' (cited in Gay 1977, p. 162). Correspondingly, the status of human-ness is intimately bound up with questions of knowledge. Both thinkers presuppose a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between what man is (and I use 'man' advisedly) and what man knows—with one crucial difference of emphasis. Renaissance humanism and its inheritors insist that man is made human by the things he knows, that is, by the curricular *content* of his knowledge and education. Accordingly, it is predominantly concerned with the role and function of pedagogy. In contrast, Enlightenment humanism and its legatees take 'humanity' to be a function of the *way* in which man knows things. Its concern, accordingly, is with the structure of epistemology or the basis and validity of knowledge. The Enlightenment, as Charles Taylor writes, generates 'an epistemological revolution with anthropological consequences' (Taylor 1975, p. 5). It changes the way in which we have come to know the notion of Self. It furnishes, in other words, the modern understanding of subjectivity.

While both of the humanisms we have been discussing assert that all human beings are, as it were, the measure of all things, they simultaneously smuggle a disclaimer into their celebratory outlook. The humanist valorisation of man is almost always accompanied by a barely discernible corollary which suggests that some human beings are more human than others—either on account of their access to superior learning, or on account of their cognitive faculties. The historical logic of these humanist subclauses is illustrated in Thomas

Babington Macaulay's infamous minute of 1835 regarding the introduction of English education in colonial India:

> The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education . . . It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England (cited in Said 1983, p. 12).

Writing in a similar vein, the Reverend J. Tucker attributes India's civilisational inferiority to the pathological deficiency of the native mind, namely, to the 'dulness [sic] of their comprehension' (cited in Viswanathan 1989, p. 6). Reading backward from this nineteenth-century debate on colonial education, we might say that the underside of Western humanism produces the dictum that since some human beings are more human than others, they are more substantially the measure of all things. With this in mind, we can begin to direct a poststructuralist gaze upon Diderot's contemporaries and forefathers.

What is Enlightenment?

In November 1784, the liberal German periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift* published a response to the question 'Was ist Aufklärung', that is, 'What is Enlightenment?'. The respondent was none other than the philosopher Immanuel Kant, considered by many to represent the high point of Enlightenment rationality. In this brief and occasional essay—by no means a major piece of work—Kant argues that the Enlightenment offers mankind a way out of, or exit from, immaturity into the improved condition of maturity. The Enlightenment, he maintains, is the possibility whereby man philosophically acquires the status and capacities of a rational and adult being.

Some two centuries after the publication of Kant's confident response, Foucault revisits the scene of the 1784 *Berlinische Monatschrift* to reiterate the question: 'What is Enlighten-

ment?'. By resuscitating this question, Foucault strategically suggests that Kant's initial response and, indeed, the very project of Enlightenment rationality, is far from conclusive. The historical event of the Enlightenment, he argues, 'did not make us mature adults . . . we have not reached that stage yet' (Foucault 1984a, p. 49). In making this statement, Foucault is not so much mourning our collective failure to become adults, as gesturing toward our philosophical and ethical obligation to exceed the limits of Kantian maturity, or what he calls the 'blackmail' of the Enlightenment. If Kantian philosophy instructs us to be, know, do, and hope in universal ways, Foucault's response is to interrogate and historicise 'the contingency that has made us what we are'. It is only through this process that we might liberate the alterity and diversity of human existence or, in his words, discover 'the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think' (Foucault 1984a, p. 46). To this end, Foucault asks many questions of Kant and the history of Enlightenment rationality. One such question, especially meaningful for postcolonial purposes, focuses on Kant's suggestion that the Enlightenment holds out the possibility of 'maturity' for all humanity, for 'mankind' at large:

> A . . . difficulty appears here in Kant's text, in his use of the word 'mankind', *Menschheit*. The importance of this word in the Kantian conception of history is well known. Are we to understand that the entire human race is caught up in the process of Enlightenment? In that case, we must imagine Enlightenment as a historical change that affects the political and social existence of all people on the face of the earth. *Or are we to understand that it involves a change affecting what constitutes the humanity of human beings?* (my emphasis; Foucault 1984a, p. 35)

Through his seemingly open-ended interrogation, Foucault establishes that the Kantian conception of 'mankind' is prescriptive rather than descriptive. Instead of reflecting the radical heterogeneity of human nature, it restricts the ostensibly universal structures of human existence to the normative

condition of adult rationality—itself a value arising from the specific historicity of European societies. It follows that this account of 'humanity' precludes the possibility of dialogue with other ways of being human and, in fact, brings into existence and circulation the notion of the 'non-adult' as 'inhuman'. Needless to say, this move also instantiates and sets into motion a characteristically pedagogic and imperialist hierarchy between European adulthood and its childish, colonised Other.

Postcolonial theory recognises that colonial discourse typically rationalises itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilisation/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive. Critics like Ashis Nandy have especially drawn attention to the colonial use of the homology between childhood and the state of being colonised. In this regard, V. G. Kiernan's observations about the African experience of colonialism are generally revealing:

> The notion of the African as minor . . . took very strong hold. Spaniards and Boers had questioned whether natives had souls: modern Europeans cared less about that but doubted whether they had minds, or minds capable of adult growth. A theory came to be fashionable that mental growth in the African ceased early, that childhood was never left behind (cited in Nandy 1983, p. 15 note).

This perception of the colonised culture as fundamentally childlike or childish feeds into the logic of the colonial 'civilising mission' which is fashioned, quite self-consciously, as a form of tutelage or a disinterested project concerned with bringing the colonised to maturity. Macaulay's interventions into the proper education of colonised Indians, for instance, are informed by the sense that colonialism is really a 'developmental' project. The coloniser, in his understanding, is principally, if not exclusively, an educator:

> What is power worth if it is founded on vice, on ignorance, and on misery; if we can hold it only by violating the most sacred duties which as governors we owe to the governed and which, as a people blessed with far more than ordinary

measure of political liberty and of intellectual light, we owe to a race debased by three thousand years of despotism and priestcraft. We are free, we are civilised to little purpose, if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilisation (cited in Viswanathan 1989, pp. 16–17).

Macaulay's defence of the pedagogical motivations of colonialism betrays its Enlightenment legacy, namely, the sense that European rationality holds out the possibility of improvement for all of humanity. Accordingly, those who are already in possession of the gospel of rationality are seen to have an ethical obligation or 'calling' to spread the word and proselytise on behalf of their emancipatory creed. Civilised minds, as Christoph Martin Wieland wrote, are bound to 'do the great work to which we have been called: to cultivate, enlighten and ennoble the human race' (cited in Gay 1977, p. 13).

The Enlightenment expositions of Kant, Wieland and Macaulay have gained several followers and sustained many revisionary accounts of colonialism. For Marx, somewhat notoriously, the benefits of British colonialism more than compensated for its violence and injustices. 'Whatever may have been the crimes of England', he argues, 'she was the unconscious tool of history', which raised India—in this instance—from its semi-barbaric state into the improved condition of modernity (cited in Said 1991, p. 153). Against the coercive logic of these arguments, we may recall that for Lyotard, 'immaturity' is not so much the failure of modernity as the possibility of a truly humane philosophy. If the Enlightenment seeks its humanism in the decisive and aggressive rationality of adulthood, the task of postmodernity, as Lyotard sees it, is to salvage the tentative philosophical indeterminacy of childhood:

> Shorn of speech, incapable of standing upright, hesitating over the objects of its interest, not able to calculate its advantages, not sensitive to common reason, the child is eminently the human because its distress heralds and promises things possible. Its initial delay in humanity, which makes it the hostage of the adult community, is also what manifests to this

community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls on it to become more human (Lyotard 1991, pp. 3–4).

Rather than dismissing Lyotard's account of childhood as foolishly romantic or essentialising, it is crucial to recognise it as a rhetorical response to the Kantian policing of human nature. Seen from a postcolonial studies perspective, his disruption of the boundaries between the human and the inhuman helps to undo the logic of the colonial civilising mission—as Spivak would have it—*from inside* the Western philosophical tradition.

Descartes' error

The journey between Kantian adulthood and postmodern childhood, that is, between the Enlightenment and its critics, has its basis in an earlier history which officially begins in late November 1619. This is the birth date of Cartesian philosophy, recorded by Descartes himself at the beginning of his *Olympica*: 'On the tenth of November 1619 . . . I was full of enthusiasm and finding the foundations of a marvelous science . . .' (cited in Gilson 1963, p. 57). Descartes' discovery arguably spawns the Enlightenment philosophy, which Kant confidently defends in the *Berlinische Monatschrift*. So also the poststructuralist/postmodern critique of Western civilisation properly begins with a counter-assessment of Cartesianism.

The date 10 November 1619 marks the decisive and systematic advent of anti-agnostic secularism in Western philosophy. It marks Descartes' attempt to enthrone man at the centre of epistemology and, simultaneously, to make knowledge impregnable to doubt. We might say that this date confirms humanism as the basis for certain knowledge, or conversely, as Sartre puts it, 'the Cartesian *cogito* becomes the only possible *point de départ* for existentialism and the only possible basis for humanism' (Sartre 1946, p. 191). Generally speaking, Cartesian philosophy produces three revolutionary variants on the notion of the Self and its relationship to

knowledge and thereby to the external world. These are the notions of the self-defining subject of consciousness; the all-knowing subject of consciousness; and, finally, the formally empowered subject of consciousness. To clarify our understanding of this self-centred philosophy, we might look at the methodical process through which each of these notions is delivered.

Descartes introduces the self-defining subject of consciousness or the self-affirming ego through a simple inquiry into the things we know for certain. His meditations on this subject eventually lead to the troubling conclusion that there is nothing we know that is entirely beyond doubt—with one notable exception. Even though we may doubt the existence of the world and of external reality, we know, Descartes argues, that we exist. We know this even in the painful acuity of doubt as the very capacity to doubt gestures toward the activity of thought which, in turn, presupposes the fact of existence or self-consciousness. If I think, therefore, I am. Paradoxically, the certainty of my existence is established in the very uncertainty of my doubt. Seen in this way, the Cartesian *cogito*, or the 'I think' of his famous conclusion, makes, as Bertrand Russell puts it, 'mind more certain than matter, and my mind more certain than the minds of others' (Russell 1961, p. 548). In all philosophy which descends from Descartes it follows that matter is only knowable 'by inference of what is known of mind' (Russell 1961, p. 548). The crux of this philosophy is, in other words, the all-knowing subject of consciousness—an entity which insists that our knowledge of the world is nothing other than the narcissism of self-consciousness. At this turn in Cartesian philosophy, when the world is rendered into a giant mirror, man enters the scene of Western knowledge as, in Foucault's words, 'an emperico-transcendental doublet'. He is postulated as 'a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible' (Foucault 1970, p. 318).

The Cartesian celebration of the human subject's epistemological possibilities is inevitably accompanied by an assertion of its power over, and freedom from, the external world of objects.

This power—founded in knowledge—recognises that nature is threatening only, and insofar as, it is mysterious and incalculable. In response to this threat, the elaborations of *cogito* reduce the unintelligible diversity and material alterity of the world to the familiar contents of our minds. This opens up the possibility of ordering or taming the wild profusion of things formally, according to the structure of the subject's emancipatory rationality, and similarly to the terms of a mathematical demonstration. We need to remember here that Descartes privileges mathematics as the cognitive method most favourable to the function of rationality or *ratio*. But, as Weber argued, a mathematical perception of the world is ultimately a 'theft' of its inherent—uncontainable and unquantifiable—value or meaning. The offending thief, in this instance, is the formally empowered subject of consciousness: 'there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted' (Weber 1930, p. 139).

To think of the world mathematically, that is, as *mathesis*, thus requires a reductive application of a few abstract and generalising principles to the multiplicity of particular things. It requires a progression from *theoria*, or theory, to *praxis*, or practice, rather than the other way around. Seen in this way, Cartesian *mathesis* is clearly the basis of the Enlightenment universalism that we earlier encountered in Kant. It is, as Foucault writes, 'an exhaustive ordering of the world as though methods, concepts, types of analysis, and finally men themselves, had all been displaced at the behest of a fundamental network defining the implicit and inevitable unity of knowledge' (Foucault 1970, pp. 75–6). That is to say, it proposes a global and unitary view of thought which maintains that if all things are knowable in the same way, they must be virtually identical. This is the logic which later leads Foucault to claim that 'the history of the order imposed on things would be . . . a history of the Same' (1970, p. xxiv). These 'histories' of universal knowledge and self-identical subjectivity which Foucault speaks of are in turn engineered by the humanist impulse to, as Descartes wrote 'make ourselves masters and

possessors of nature' (cited in Gilson 1963, p. 74). They chronicle an equation of power with knowledge which Bacon, much before Foucault, announced with the tag: 'the sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge'.

Whose sovereignty? Which men? What history? These are some of the questions that postcolonial studies, along with its poststructuralist allies, asks of Descartes and the Enlightenment. Let us end this section with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which proudly informed its readers in the 1770s that the discoveries and improvements of eighteenth-century inventors 'diffuse a glory over this country unattainable by conquest or domination' (cited in Gay 1977, p. 9). In issuing this statement, the editors of the *Encyclopaedia* do not dissociate knowledge from the violence of 'conquest or domination' so much as announce its even greater capacity for enslavement. Reason is the weapon of Enlightenment philosophy and, accordingly, the problem for anti-Enlightenment thought. Is it possible, after 10 November 1619, to imagine non-coercive knowledges? Is it possible, as Gandhi would have asked, to think non-violently?

Nietzsche's genealogy

The anti-Cartesian turn in Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, which we have been following, develops out of a long line of thinkers stretching from Max Weber to Martin Heidegger, through to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Each of these thinkers is concerned with the destructive powers of Western rationality, and all of them invoke the nihilistic figure of Nietzsche to bolster their onslaught on the epistemological narcissism of Western culture—that is to say, the narcissism released into the world through Descartes' self-defining, all-knowing and formally empowered subject of consciousness.

Nietzsche's paradigmatic critique, as Foucault points out in a significant essay entitled 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', is directed at two foundational humanist myths: the myth of pure origins and the emancipatory myth of progress and teleology.

Foucault postulates Nietzsche's anti-humanism as an excavation at the archaeological site of origins, where it works relentlessly and systematically to reveal a formative deficiency in the historical beginnings of all humanist institutions, ideas and concepts. The Western humanist thinks of the 'origin' as the place of plenitude, presence and truth. The Nietzschian archaeologist, on the other hand, can only find the residual traces of malice, theft, greed and disparity at the start of human history. In other words, s/he discovers that a Fall prefigures and disfigures the purity of Genesis. Seen as such, the very idea of Genesis—of unadulterated origins—is shown as a supplement, or as a mythical compensation for an originary lack. 'We wished', Nietzsche writes, 'to awaken to the feeling of man's sovereignty by showing his divine birth: this faith is now forbidden, since a monkey stands at the entrance' (cited in Foucault 1984b, p. 79).

Nietzsche's 'destructive' endeavour directly foreshadows the method and intent of contemporary deconstructive philosophy which, likewise, scavenges in the forgotten archives of Western humanism to reveal its suppressed inadequacies, ruptures and paradoxes. Thus, for Derrida, as for Nietzsche, the outset of all emancipatory social discourse betrays the shared origins of morality and immorality; it is marked by the 'non-ethical opening of ethics' (cited in Norris 1982, p. 39). So also it is possible to discern an inevitable lack and the persistent naggings of doubt in the confident self-presence and aggressive certitude of Descartes' *cogito*. While the subject who 'thinks', Derrida and Foucault would argue, may not 'know' his own limitations, the uneven history of rationality testifies to the civilisational failure of the Cartesian project—which begins as it ends in violence: reason, as Foucault writes in his gloss on Nietzsche, 'was born . . . from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition—their personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason' (Foucault 1984b, p. 78). Accordingly, the vitiated beginnings of rationality fulfil their logic in the progressive deterioration,

rather than emancipation, of humanity. The atavistic flaw of *cogito* is re-enacted in a perverse evolution from error to cumulative error, from petty to genocidal violence: 'Humanity', in Foucault's somewhat apocalyptic words, 'does not gradually proceed from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination' (p. 85).

By the time Nietzsche's diatribe on the flawed origins and teleology of Western humanism is fully absorbed into the poststructuralist and postmodernist thematic, it acquires two specific and more clearly articulated objections to the Cartesian theory of epistemological subjectivity—first, to its philosophy of identity, and second to its account of knowledge as a power over objective reality. Both of these objections are especially resonant for postcolonial studies, as they hold out the possibility of theorising a non-coercive relationship or dialogue with the excluded 'Other' of Western humanism.

The first objection is developed through Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, each of whom maintains that the Cartesian philosophy of identity is premised upon an ethically unsustainable omission of the Other. For Heidegger— seen by many to be the 'archetype and trend-setter of postmodernism' (Bauman 1992, p. ix)—the all-knowing and self-sufficient Cartesian subject violently negates material and historical alterity/Otherness in its narcissistic desire to always see the world in its own self-image. This anthropocentric world view is ultimately deficient on account of its indifference to difference, and consequent refusal to accommodate that which is not human. Thus, as far as Heidegger is concerned, the Cartesian *cogito* fails adequately to think out the 'Being of a stone or even life as the Being of plants and animals' (Heidegger 1977, p. 206). For Foucault, similarly, that which is 'unthought' in *cogito* becomes a synonym for the Other of Western rationality: 'the unthought . . . is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other' (Foucault 1970, p. 326). While Heidegger seeks the quality of alterity in the natural and

non-human world, Foucault substantially extends the notion of Otherness to cover criminality, madness, disease, foreigners, homosexuals, strangers, women. Derrida's name for these excluded Others is the 'remainder', and Lyotard seeks their irreducible presence in the singularity and plurality of what he calls the 'event'.

The poststructuralist/postmodern postulation of the 'unthought', the 'remainder' and the 'event' is crucial for its illustration of the unsustainable discrepancy between the finitude of the thinking rational subject and the infinite variety of the world—which is simply in excess of what 'Western man' can, or does, think. Examined in this way, the presence of the Cartesian subject is simultaneously revealed as the locus of absence, omission, exclusion and silence. This subject is—to come full circle—diagnosed as the source of the epistemological poverty which informs Western humanism. Far from being the reservoir of certain and complete knowledge, Cartesian 'man', as Foucault writes, 'is also the source of misunderstanding—of misunderstanding that constantly exposes his thought to the risk of being swamped by his own being, and also enables him to recover his integrity on the basis of what eludes him' (1970, p. 323).

It is not enough, however, to leave Cartesian man in this state of benign misunderstanding and forgetfulness. In addition to simply omitting the Other, Descartes' philosophy of identity is also sustained through a violent and coercive relationship with its omitted Other. As Zygmunt Bauman writes: 'Since the sovereignty of the modern intellect is the power to define and make definitions stick—everything that eludes unequivocal allocation is an anomaly and a challenge' (Bauman 1991, p. 9). Accordingly, just as modern rationality has often attributed a dangerous Otherness to the figure(s) of the deviant, it has also endeavoured violently to repress all symptoms of cultural alterity. In a contentious move, writers like Adorno, Horkheimer and Bauman have identified fascism as one product of the Enlightenment's fear of alterity. The procedures of the colonial civilising mission are, arguably, motivated by similar anxieties.

Lyotard's observations on the levelling action of Western humanism are instructive here:

> the grand narratives of legitimation which characterise modernity in the West . . . are cosmopolitical, as Kant would say. They involve precisely an 'overcoming' (*dépassement*) of the particular cultural identity in favour of a universal civic identity. But how such an overcoming can take place is not apparent (Lyotard 1992, pp. 44–5).

Postcolonial studies, we might say, joins postmodernism in an attempt to analyse and to resist this *dépassement*.

Before concluding this poststructuralist account of Enlightenment humanism, I would like to briefly return to Kant's essay in the *Berlinische Monatschrift*. In the course of this essay, Kant tells his readers that the Enlightenment has a motto: *Aude sapere*, or 'Dare to know'. Herein lies the history of Western humanism and Cartesian rationality. To know with daring is henceforth to be bold, impudent, defiant, audacious in the exercise of knowledge. It is, in other words, to concede mastery as the single motivation for knowing the world. The poststructuralist and postmodern intervention into this field delivers the *possibility* of knowing differently—of knowing difference in and for itself. In sharp contrast with the Enlightenment, its motto could well be 'Care to know'. Let us end with Levinas: 'It is in the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its "hateful" modality) that we find ethics . . .' (Levinas 1994, p. 85).

3

Postcolonialism and the new humanities

In the previous chapter a distinction was made between Western *humanism* and the Western *humanities* on the grounds that while the former is concerned with ways of knowing, or acquiring knowledge, the latter proposes that man is made human by the things he knows. We have already examined the principal features of postcolonialism's inherited deconstructive bias against Enlightenment humanism. This chapter will supply a context for its oppositional stance against the traditional humanities.

Provincialising Europe

Ever since its development in the 1980s, postcolonialism has found itself in the company of disciplines such as women's studies, cultural studies and gay/lesbian studies. These new fields of knowledge—often classified under the rubric of the 'new humanities'—have endeavoured first, to foreground the exclusions and elisions which confirm the privileges and authority of canonical knowledge systems, and second to recover those marginalised knowledges which have been occluded and silenced by the entrenched humanist curriculum.

Each of these disciplinary areas has attempted to represent the interests of a particular set of 'subjugated knowledges', which is Foucault's term for 'knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scienticity' (Foucault 1980a, p. 82). These 'minor' knowledges, as Deleuze and Guattari write, embody forms of thought and culture which have been been violently 'deterritorialised' by major or dominant knowledge systems (Deleuze & Guattari 1986). Foucault's and Deleuze's terminology deliberately invests the struggle over the subject of knowledge with the language of political insurrection. For Foucault, the proposal for a radical reclamation of subjugated/minor knowledges helps to expose the hidden contiguity between knowledge and power, 'through which a society conveys its knowledge and ensures its survival under the mask of knowledge' (Foucault 1977, p. 225). Deleuze, likewise, postulates the 'reterritorialisation' of minor literatures as 'the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come' (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, p. 18).

A characteristic example of this type of project may be found within feminist/women's studies, which recognises that the disempowerment of women has been facilitated, in part, through their exclusion from the space where knowledge proper is constituted and disseminated. The acquisition of knowledge, as Susan Sheridan points out, has been an integral and established feature of feminist activism since at least the nineteenth century (see Sheridan 1990, p. 40). The feminist movement has consistently demanded equal access to the *means* of knowledge and also equal participation in the *making* of knowledge on the grounds that inherited knowledges are hopelessly constrained by the preoccupations of the predominantly male institutions within which they have been developed and validated. The feminist intervention into the humanities academy has thus posed a challenge to the normative and universalist assumptions of gender-biased or 'phallogocentric' knowledge systems, and attempted, in turn, to make both the ways of knowing and the things known more representative.

Its aim has been to enable women to become the active participating subjects rather than the passive and reified objects of knowledge.

Postcolonial studies follows feminism in its critique of seemingly foundational discourses. Unlike feminism, however, it directs its critique against the cultural hegemony of European knowledges in an attempt to reassert the epistemological value and agency of the non-European world. The postcolonial reclamation of non-European knowledges is, in effect, a refutation of Macaulay's infamous privileging of a single shelf of a 'good' European library over the entire corpus of 'Oriental' literary production. Macaulay's 1835 minute typifies the historical colonisation of scholarship and pedagogy whereby, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, non-Western thought is consistently precluded from the constitution of knowledge proper. Third-world historians, as he writes:

> feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate . . . We cannot even afford an equality or symmetry of ignorance at this level without taking the risk of appearing 'old fashioned' or 'outdated' (Chakrabarty 1992, p. 2).

This absence of reciprocity is compounded when we consider that European philosophy has never allowed its cultural ignorance to qualify its claims of universality:

> For generations now, philosophers and thinkers shaping the nature of social science have produced theories embracing the entirety of humanity; as we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind i.e., those living in non-Western cultures' (Chakrabarty 1992, p. 3).

Chakrabarty's arguments touch upon the heart of postcolonialism's quarrel with the orthodox humanities. However, while he restricts his focus to the problem of historical knowledge, postcolonial studies claims that the entire field of the humanities is vitiated by a compulsion to claim a spurious universality and also to disguise its political investment in the production of 'major' or 'dominant' knowledges. The episte-

mological and pedagogic reterritorialisation of the non-Western world thus involves a two-fold task: first, to expose the humanist pretence of political disinterestedness, and, second, to 'provincialise'—in Chakrabarty's terms—the knowledge claims of 'the "Europe" that modern imperialism and nationalism have, by their collaborative venture and violence, made universal' (Chakrabarty 1992, p. 20).

In order to assess the validity of this invective against the humanities we need now to cast a critical postcolonial eye upon the genealogy and formation of humanist knowledge—to return, as it were, to the first elaboration of the humanities as a privileged branch of study in sixteenth-century Florence.

Power, knowledge and the humanities

The term 'humanism' owes its origins to a secular and anthropocentric cultural and educational program concerned with the celebration and cultivation of 'human' achievements. The history of this pedagogic program is connected, in a circuitous way, to the emergence of an apparently new Italian word in the mid-sixteenth century, *umanista*, which comes to refer to the teacher, scholar or student engaged in that branch of studies known as the *studia humanitatis*, or generally speaking the liberal arts (see Campana 1946). The emergence of this word gestures toward the establishment of the liberal arts as a discipline within the academy—it marks the historical moment when the humanities became a special teaching subject at Italian universities, and relatedly, the monopoly of a certain group of specialists or academics. An academic discipline, as Paul Bove argues, is 'an accumulative, cooperative project for the production of knowledge, the exercise of power, and the creation of careers' (Bove 1985; cited in Spanos 1986, p. 52)—and the rise of the *umanista* in mid-sixteenth century Italy marks the process whereby a set of vested interests starts to attach itself to the promotion of the liberal arts.

Notably, while the term *umanista* can be traced to Renaissance Italy, the phrase *studia humanitatis* has a much earlier

Ciceronian etymology, and it carries within itself the notion of literary study as the only form of knowledge befitting a human being. As Cicero puts it, 'to live with the Muses means to live humanistically' (*Tusculan Disputations*, 5, 23, 66; cited in Curtius 1953, p. 228). Cicero's epistemological bias, in turn, evolves out of an even earlier consensus which, in Ernst Curtius' words, 'placed all higher intellectual pursuits under the sign of the Muses' (Curtius 1953, p. 230). Thus, Homer's *Iliad* praises the Muses for their knowledge of all things, and Virgil's Muses are consistently celebrated as the custodians of philosophy. Renaissance apologists for the *studia humanitatis* enthusiastically draw upon these multiple historical accretions, whereby poetry or literature are claimed as the foundation of all human knowledge. The Renaissance humanist Leonardo Bruni, for instance, defends the natural ascendancy of this new knowledge on the grounds that it is universal in its reach and, therefore, uniquely positioned to provide a complete education. In his words: 'the *litterae* are about to return with all their fertility, to form whole men, not just scholars. They call themselves *studia humanitatis* because they shape the perfect man' (see Garin 1965, p. 38).

Bruni's lavish praise of the humanities is significant for three reasons. First, like Cicero, he upholds the study of 'letters' for its capacity to produce 'whole' or representative human beings; second, his appeal to the ideas of 'forming' and 'shaping' delivers a specific understanding of pedagogic practice and thereby of the *umanista*'s professional role and function; and finally, by emphasising the relevance of the *studia humanitatis* to those who are 'not just scholars', he extends the function of humanistic education outside the academy. Each of these features in Bruni's plaudit points to limitations within humanism which constitute the target of what we have been calling anti-humanist or oppositional criticism. In order to clarify these limitations we need to explore the field and consequences of Renaissance humanism more thoroughly.

To begin with, it is important to remember that the educational program of the *studia humanitatis* was built upon a series of curricular exclusions, especially of those branches of

study associated with medieval scholasticism. Accordingly, and despite its claims to representativeness, this program excluded—from the moment of its inception—a range of other academic fields such as logic, mathematics, the natural sciences, astronomy, medicine, law and theology. Broadly speaking, and as a variety of commentators have argued, the quarrel between humanism and scholasticism was essentially one between the so-called 'sciences of man' and the 'sciences of nature' (see Garin 1965, pp. 24–9). In the course of the ensuing debate, the humanists relentlessly claimed the moral high ground against the allegedly 'base' concerns of non-literary disciplines. Petrarch is characteristically and tellingly vitriolic on the subject:

> Carry out your trade, mechanic, if you can. Heal bodies, if you can. If you can't, murder; and take the salary for your crimes . . . But how can you dare, with unprecedented impertinence, to relegate rhetoric to a place inferior to medicine? How can you make a mistress inferior to the servant, a liberal art to a mechanical one? (See Garin 1965, p. 24.)

The hierarchy of knowledges proposed by Petrarch self-evidently draws upon corresponding markers of social hierarchy—the relationship of the liberal arts to the natural sciences is, accordingly, like that of the mistress to the servant. Thus, Petrarch complicates the humanist claim to representativeness both by excluding certain types of knowledge from the curricular boundaries of the *studia humanitatis* and also by hinting at categories of people (i.e. servants and mechanics) who might not be considered adequately or representatively human. Similar clues regarding the insidious exclusions of humanist knowledge inhere in his distinction between the 'liberal' and 'mechanical' arts and in the disparaging comment he addresses to murderous doctors—'take the salary for your crimes', which reinforces the social differentiation between the pure activity of 'artists' and the manual labour of 'artisans'.

It is also worth noting that Petrarch's separation of the liberal and mechanical domains is built upon a politically charged discrimination—especially resonant for postcolonial

scholars—between civilised and barbaric cultural activity. The project of the *studia humanitatis*, as Heidegger points out in his 'Letter on humanism', has always relied on an opposition between the normative idea of humanistic man or *Homo humanus*, on the one hand, and the aberrant idea of barbaric man or *Homo barbarus*, on the other. In his words:

> *Humanitatis*, explicitly so called, was first considered and striven for in the age of the Roman Republic. *Homo humanus* was opposed to *Homo barbarus*. *Homo humanus* here means the Romans . . . whose culture was acquired in the schools of philosophy. It was concerned with . . . scholarship and training in good conduct (Heidegger 1977, p. 200).

Renaissance humanism takes over these discriminations from its Roman predecessors, and in so doing, it starts to reveal a fundamental contradiction at the heart of its project. While claiming the capacity to produce representative human beings, it imposes a series of cultural, social and economic constraints on the very quality of human-ness.

Seen in these terms, and once again through Foucault's hypothesis about dominant knowledge systems, the cultural and educational project of the *studia humanitatis*, can be seen to function, 'as a double repression: in terms of those whom it excludes from the process and in terms of the model and the standard (the bars) it imposes on those receiving this knowledge' (Foucault 1977, p. 219). Foucault's observation about the regulatory mechanisms of major knowledges brings us back to Bruni, whose praise of the humanities, it will be remembered, celebrated the *umanista*'s capacity to 'shape' and 'form' his students in a particular way. What exactly were these students being shaped into? And what does this concern with the formation of pedagogic subjects tell us about the humanistic claims to disinterestedness? Both of these questions have a direct bearing on the role of the humanities outside the academy—they point to what we might call the political motivations of the *studia humanitatis*.

In his recent book, *The Western Canon*, the critic Harold Bloom argues that the traditional humanities are politically

unmotivated. The activity of reading, he insists, is solitary rather than social, and literature is, therefore, unlikely to provide a sound basis for social change: 'real reading is a lonely activity and does not teach anyone to become a better citizen' (Bloom 1994, p. 526). Although his arguments are often quite compelling, Bloom neglects to observe that humanism proper has consistently regarded literary education as a necessary apparatus for the proper functioning of the State. In other words, humanism has always functioned as an 'aesthetico-moral ideology' which is concerned with, and directed toward, the moulding of ideal citizen-subjects (see Cantimori 1934, p. 86). So, for example, the Florentine humanist Brucioli praises the liberal arts on the grounds that, 'only those disciplines are worthy of being called the best for the training of youth which are needed for the government of the Republic' (cited in Cantimori 1934, p. 97).

Furthermore, humanism, as we have seen, regarded itself as an academic and pedagogic pursuit of perfected human nature or *humanitas*. Accordingly, while proponents of humanism argued that this ideal human nature was embodied in, and expressed through, various forms of human activity and organisation—such as language and literature, the family and civic life—most humanists were of the opinion that the State was the archetypal and representative form of *humanitas*. Hence it followed, for writers like Brucioli, that the State should also be posed as the logical and proper end of all *studia humanitatis*. It is in this spirit that Bruni prefaces his translation of Aristotle's *Politics* with the assertion that:

> among the moral doctrines through which human life is shaped, those which refer to states and their governments occupy the highest position. For it is the purpose of those doctrines to make possible a happy life for all men . . . The more universal the well-being, the more divine it must be considered to be (see Garin 1965, p. 41).

Brucioli, likewise, sees the best examples of human nature embodied in those who have the capacity to command rather than obey. In his words, 'not all parts of the soul are of the

same value, but some command while others obey, and those which command are best, so the Prince is the summit of the people . . .' (cited in Cantimori 1934, p. 93).

The Renaissance humanist valorisation of the State as the proper end of knowledge recurs in all subsequent manifestations of humanism. It is certainly a powerful component of the nineteenth-century humanist revival which occurs under the aegis of German idealism. Schiller's paradigmatic text, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, for instance, recalls the Florentine reasoning we have been discussing, in its insistence that the primary objective of aesthetic education is the realisation of the rational State:

> Each individual human being, one might say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal. This archetype, which is to be discerned more or less clearly in every individual, is represented by the State, the objective and, as it were, the canonical form in which the diversity of individual subjects strive to unite (Schiller 1966, p. 17; cited in Lloyd 1985, p. 165).

For Schiller, as for his Renaissance predecessors, the State's canonicity derives from its capacity to embody the best and, therefore, the most representative qualities of human nature. The same idea is, of course, more famously reiterated in Matthew Arnold's 'Culture and Anarchy'. In Arnold's words, 'culture suggests the idea of the State. We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our best selves' (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 5, p. 135).

In all its historical manifestations, humanist thought is clearly unified in its aspiration to establish a symbiotic relationship between culture—or knowledge—and the State. Nevertheless, the humanist attempt to make knowledge eternally amenable to power is almost always accompanied, as I have been suggesting, by corresponding protestations about

the disinterestedness of humanist pedagogy. As Arnold insists in his 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time':

> the rule may be summed up in one word—disinterestedness. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things' . . . By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas . . . (*Complete Prose Works*, vol. 3, pp. 269–70).

There are two observations to make in response to Arnold's rule of disinterestedness. First—like Seneca and Petrarch—Arnold uses the norm of disinterested inquiry to discredit all those allegedly 'ulterior', 'political' and 'practical' interests which, for one reason or another, pull away from, and are therefore unassimilable within, the dominant consensus represented in the State. The character and name of these disqualified interests have, of course, varied historically. Arnold identifies them within the uncultured and 'jealous' working classes—recognisably the descendants of Renaissance *meccanicos*. At other times, these discordant interests have been identified with numerous 'minority' groups, or with the ungovernable and uncivilised subjects of empire. Second, the Arnoldian appeal to disinterestedness effectively works to conceal the fact of the State's investment in the production of knowledge and culture—it serves to disguise the collaboration between knowledge and dominant interests. As a strategy, disinterestedness helps to bolster the State's fallacious claim to universality. In summary, as Marx and Engels argue, the ruling class is compelled 'to present its interest as the common interest of all members of society, that is, expressed in an ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, to present them as the only rational, universally valid ones' (Marx & Engels 1975, vol. 5, p. 60; cited in Guha 1992, p. 70).

In a final note on the collusion between humanism and the, albeit concealed, interests of the State, it is important to recognise that humanism has flourished whenever these established interests have been under threat or in need of reaffirmation. While we do not have the space here to detail

the historical contiguity between various humanist and nationalist revivals, it is worth mentioning that humanism has almost always accompanied and supported the emergence of unified and centralised nation-States. Thus, Italian humanism carries within it an appeal for some sort of unification among the Italian States, and the nineteenth-century German idealist version of humanism, likewise, communicates a call for the unification of Germany. So, also, Arnold's totalitarian humanism expresses an anxiety about the potential anarchism of the wilful and uncontainable 'populace' at home, and abroad in the colonies. Arnold's humanism, in particular, asserts the need to maintain the integrity and sovereignty of Europe in the face of its multitudinous and barbaric Others.

Oppositional criticism and the new humanities

In view of the preceding discussion, we can now begin to summarise the motivations of the 'new humanities', or oppositional and anti-humanist criticism. Edward Said echoes Foucault in his claim that such criticism must ideally, perhaps even impossibly, 'think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom' (Said 1983, p. 29). We might argue more specifically that an oppositional critical discourse like postcolonialism counters the exclusions of humanist thought through an attempt to make the field of knowledge more representative. This project relies upon two types of critical revelation or 'showing'. First, it takes upon itself the sometimes self-important function of revealing the interests which inhabit the production of knowledge. As Stuart Hall writes of the cultural studies project:

> . . . when cultural studies began its work . . . it had . . . to undertake the task of unmasking what it considered to be the unstated presuppositions of the humanist tradition itself. It had to bring to light the ideological assumptions underpinning the practice, to expose the educational program . . . and to

try and conduct an ideological critique of the way the humanities and the arts presented themselves as parts of disinterested knowledge (Hall 1990b, p. 15).

Second, the investigative function of oppositional criticism also draws attention to, and thereby attempts to retrieve, the wide range of illegitimate, disqualified or subjugated knowledges mentioned earlier in this discussion. Habermas describes this function as an 'emancipatory knowledge interest' which 'takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed' (Habermas 1972, p. 315). While Foucault also refers to this project in similar terms as an attempt to achieve an insurrection of subjugated knowledges, he is sensitive to the dangers of a utopian desire simply to invert the existing hierarchy of knowledges. A simple inversion, he maintains, will merely duplicate the institutions being attacked and thereby constitute another orthodoxy—in this case, the orthodoxy of heterodoxy: 'is it not perhaps the case that these fragments of genealogies are no sooner brought to light, that the particular elements of the knowledge that one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, of re-colonization' (Foucault 1980a, p. 86). Foucault's intervention compels oppositional criticism to contemplate the difficulties of dissociating the recovery of subjugated knowledges from the will to power.

In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari suggest—somewhat elusively—that subjugated knowledges and literatures must resolutely replace the desire to become 'major' or canonical, with an opposite dream: 'a becoming-minor' (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, p. 27). Although the precise implications of this project remain unclear, we might say that all 'minor' knowledges need to retain the memory of their subjugation and deterritorialisation and, therefore, of their creative affinity with other fields of 'non-culture'. A more philosophically complex version of this suggestion may be found in the procedures of what Heidegger calls *Lichtung*. The word carries within itself the double sense of 'light' and 'clearing'—it

designates a bringing to light which is also a clearing of space: 'In the midst of beings as a whole, there an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting' (Halliburton, 1981, p. 43). Such is the illumination and expansiveness of Heideggarian *Lichtung* that it enables the most restrictive human consciousness to experience the simultaneity of the familiar and the uncanny, the established and the emergent, home and not-home, the humane and, equally, the barbaric. Seen in these terms, *Lichtung* is the reminder that identity is always underpinned by the presence of its Other, or that every major knowledge carries within itself the possibility of a countervailing minor-ness.

In its utopian mode, oppositional criticism aspires to the condition of Heidegger's *Lichtung*. Whether its aspirations are successful is, of course, another matter. But we can end this section with Kwame Anthony Appiah's suggestive claim that 'the post in postcolonial, like the post in postmodern is the post of a space clearing gesture . . .' (Appiah 1992, p. 240). In this postcolonial 'clearing'/*Lichtung* it might finally be possible to recognise the epistemological valency of non-European thought. Or, as Chakrabarty writes, in the newly liberated space of postcolonial pedagogy we might start to imagine '(infra)structural sites' where the dreams of provincialising Europe 'could lodge themselves' (Chakrabarty 1992, p. 23).

The world and the book

Postcolonialism, then, derives from the anti-humanism of poststructuralism and the 'new humanities' a view of Western power as a symptom of Western epistemology and pedagogy. And insofar as the postcolonial critique of colonial modernity is mapped out principally as an intervention into the realm of Western knowledge-production, it paves the way for a privileged focus on the revolutionary credentials of the postcolonial intellectual. Postcolonialism is not alone or eccentric in its bias toward academic activism—thinkers from within leftist tradi-

tions have always defended the public responsibilities of the intellectual figure. Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist Italian political philosopher, famously upheld the everyday social influence of the 'organic intellectual'. Althusser, the French pioneer of structural Marxism, likewise praised teachers for their resistance to the State ideology embedded within educational institutions. Similarly, Foucault's equation of knowledge and power confers a unique radicalism upon the dissident or oppositional thinker. Yet, notwithstanding these precedents, postcolonialism's investment in its intellectuals has been bitterly contested by its antagonists. While postcolonial theorists have attempted variously to defend the politics of their academic practice, recent critics of postcolonial theorising have asserted the unsustainable distance between the self-reflexive preoccupations of the postcolonial academy, on the one hand, and the concerns arising from, and relevant to, postcolonial realities, on the other.

Some vigilant and self-critical postcolonial theorists agree that the academic labour of postcolonialism is often blind to its own socially deleterious effect. Among this group, Gayatri Spivak is salutary in her warning that recent concessions to marginality studies within the first-world metropolitan academy inadvertently serve to identify, confirm, and thereby exclude certain cultural formations as chronically marginal (Spivak 1993, p. 55). The celebratory 'third worldism' of postcolonial studies, Spivak cautions, may well perpetuate real social and political oppressions which rely upon rigid distinctions between the 'centre' and the 'margin' (see 1993, p. 55). Spivak's warnings accrue, in part, from Foucault's paradigmatic resistance to the intellectual valorisation of marginality. As he argues:

> One must not suppose that there exists a certain sphere of 'marginality' that would be the legitimate concern of a free and disinterested scientific inquiry were it not the object of mechanisms of exclusion brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power. If 'marginality' is being constituted as an area of investigation, this is only because relations of power have established it as a possible object . . .

(Foucault 1978, p. 98; cited with contextual modifications in Spivak 1993, p. 59).

Although both Foucault and Spivak contest the academic institutionalisation of 'marginality discourse', neither is willing to concede an absolute schism between intellectual activity and political realities. In sharp contrast, anti-postcolonial criticism repeatedly foregrounds the irresolvable dichotomy between the woolly deconstructive predicament of postcolonial intellectuals and the social and economic predicament of those whose lives are literally or physically on the margins of the metropolis. Critics like Arif Dirlik and Aijaz Ahmad, in particular, are unrelenting in their exclusion of all theoretical/intellectual activity which lacks adequate referents to 'everyday' sociality. Thus, Ahmad's recent article, 'The politics of literary postcoloniality', announces an ethical distinction between the tiresome domain of postcolonial literary theory and the considerably more 'fulsome debate on . . . the type of postcolonial states which arose in Asia and Africa after postwar decolonisations' (Ahmad 1995, p. 1).

This distinction is self-evidently premised upon the assumption that structural shifts in forms of governance affect more people more directly than imaginative shifts in critical methodologies. While Ahmad's claim is incontestable in itself, his objections take a disablingly prejudicial turn when he begins to treat all postcolonial theoretical practice as purely recreational. In his reasoning, postcolonial theorising—indeed, all theorising outside the social sciences—is a luxury based upon the availability of 'mobility and surplus pleasure' to a privileged few, while the vast majority of others are condemned to labour 'below the living standards of the colonial period' (1995, pp. 16, 12). In other words, while postcolonial subjects must work to stay alive, postcolonial intellectuals are free to partake 'of a carnivalesque collapse and play of identities' (1995, p. 13). Ahmad's polemic—here, as elsewhere—is specifically targeted against the postcolonial preoccupation with questions regarding the formation of subjectivities. As far as he is concerned, these self-indulgent and solipsistic questions

abjure the 'real' politics of the collectivity. A similar bias appears in Arif Dirlik's article, 'The postcolonial aura: third world criticism in the age of global capitalism', which argues that the predominantly 'epistemological and psychic orientations of postcolonial intellectuals' are ethically incompatible with and irrelevant to the 'problems of social, political and cultural domination' (Dirlik 1994, p. 331).

Ahmad's and Dirlik's objections accrue from the recognition of a radical split between the 'private' and the 'public' realm of human/social experience. Fredric Jameson has accounted for this split in terms of a dichotomy 'between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power' (Jameson 1986, p. 69). Jameson's analysis points to a contestation which is fundamentally marked, as he acknowledges, by the theoretical distinctions between Freud and Marx. While this contestation has assumed a number of forms in a number of divergent contexts, it has been most clearly articulated in the theoretical differences between psychoanalytic and socialist feminists. Whereas psychoanalytic feminists have been primarily concerned with the formation and deformation of female subjectivity, their socialist adversaries have emphasised the singular importance of class identity, and concomitantly stigmatised the realm of 'feeling' as non-political and regressive (see Kaplan 1985). This prejudice against feeling is sustained partly by the assumption that the condition of 'interiority'—required by feeling —presupposes a receding away from the social into the narcissistic pleasures of fantasy and the imagination. Seen as such, the cult of feeling privileges individual desire over collective necessity, and the fulfilment of personal longings at the cost of social agency. Thus, female subjectivity comes to represent, in Kaplan's words, 'the site where the opposing forces of femininity and feminism clash by night' (Kaplan 1985, p. 154).

Dirlik and Ahmad, to turn the discussion once again to postcolonialism, rehearse this bias against 'inwardness' with one crucial difference. In their analysis it is the *intellectual*

work and content of postcolonialism which comes to occupy the space, and thereby earn the stigma conventionally reserved for the luxury of 'feeling'. For both critics, postcolonial theorising is—like bourgeois interiority—a matter of class or, in this case, institutional privilege. According to Dirlik, for instance, postcolonialism happens 'when Third world intellectuals have arrived in the First world' (Dirlik 1994, p. 329).

Dirlik's metaphor of arrival—of 'having arrived'—is resonant with the charge of opportunism or 'having made it' in the first world; it implicitly predicates the professional success of postcolonial intellectuals upon a contingent and constitutive departure from the 'third world'. Seen in these terms, the postcolonial intellectual's journey becomes a flight from collective socialities—from the materiality of the beleaguered 'third world'—into the abstraction of metropolitan theory. For Dirlik, therefore, postcolonialism is not so much a description of a global condition, as a narrowly conceived 'label to describe academic intellectuals of Third world origin' (1994 p. 330). On a similar note, Ahmad's book-length polemic on postcolonial theory insists that postcolonial intellectuals are merely 'radicalised immigrants located in the metropolitan university', who are uniformly marked by a 'combination of class origin, professional ambition and a lack of prior political grounding in socialist praxis' (Ahmad 1992, p. 86). Seen through this glass, and darkly, the postcolonial intellectual emerges as a travelling theorist who has, in the manner of Rushdie's buoyant migrant 'floated upward from history'.

The postcolonial intellectual

While there is much to learn from Ahmad's and Dirlik's vigil against 'an opportunistic kind of Third-Worldism' (Ahmad 1992, p. 86), we need to guard against their generalising assumption that any attempt to think the 'third world' from the 'first' is bound to maintain, in Ahmad's words, 'only an ironic relation with the world and its intelligibility' (1992, 36). From another perspective, their objections can be invoked—

more usefully—to interrogate the incommensurability between the oppositional stance of postcolonial intellectuals and their co-option within the very institutions they allegedly critique. As Cornel West argues, all cultural critics who attempt to contest the operations of power within their own institutional contexts find themselves in a disabling double bind: 'while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them . . . For these critics of culture, theirs is a gesture that is simultaneously progressive and coopted' (West 1990, p. 94).

The problem of 'positionality' accordingly devolves upon the progressive intellectual the task of continually resisting the institutional procedures of co-option—such an intellectual must relentlessly negotiate the possibility of being, in Spivak's elusive terminology, 'outside in the teaching machine'. The task becomes more urgent when we reconsider Foucault's and Spivak's warnings about the centre's parasitic relationship to the margin. Neocolonialism, as Spivak reminds us, 'is fabricating its allies by proposing a share of the centre in a seemingly new way (not a rupture but a displacement): disciplinary support for the conviction of authentic marginality by the (aspiring) elite' (Spivak 1993, p. 57). Spivak's statement indirectly raises a number of open-ended questions: can postcolonialism be ethically professed only from within allegedly 'postcolonial' locations? Should third-world intellectuals in the first-world academy restrict their study to mainstream culture? Is it possible to disseminate marginalised knowledges without monumentalising the condition(s) of marginality? And finally, if facetiously, do intellectuals count anyway?

It is appropriate, in the context of these queries, to consider that, subsequent to the 'explosion' of marginality studies, the first-world academy is now involved, as Spivak puts it, 'in the construction of a new object of investigation—"the third world", "the marginal"—for institutional validation and certification' (1993, p. 56). Far from being disinterested, this investigation testifies, in many ways, to the persisting Western interest in the classification, analysis and production of what

we might call 'exotic culture'. And to this end, it relies upon the dubious good offices of the native (intellectual) informant.

In recent years, the problem of the native intellectual as a native informant has been forcefully posed within the United States academy through the intervention of a wide variety of 'internally colonised' or 'minority' communities. Among these, Chicana/o communities have been prominent in their conflictual engagement with the role and function of 'ethnic' intellectual/academic representatives. The work of a writer like Angie Chabran, for instance, is informed by the anxiety that the Chicana/o intellectual—indeed, the whole enterprise of Chicana/o studies—uncritically assists in the anthropologisation of the Chicana/o people (Chabran 1990). Rosaura Sanchez elaborates this anxiety by pointing to the insidious relationship between the apparently neutral field of 'area studies' and the considerably more biased field of 'public policy'. 'The state interest in gathering information', Sanchez contends, 'calls for the establishment of academic programs that can oversee a systematic and complex collection of data as well as interpret it for decision makers in this society' (Sanchez 1990, p. 299).

While these critics are necessarily alert to the covert operations of governmentality within the academy, their misgivings—much as those of Dirlik and Ahmad—often result in a categorical mistrust of intellectual activity in and of itself. In an argument which questions the fetishisation of intellectual authority, Chabran, for instance, reasserts the primacy of experience over theory. She appeals to the instructive status of the intellectuals' pre-institutional history in the fields, the family and the factory, on the grounds that we have to consider 'the shaping way in which experience directs us to ask certain questions of [a] particular theory which theory alone does not lead us to ask' (Chabran 1990, p. 242). Despite its irrefutable good sense, Chabran's claim leaves two questions unanswered. First, is experience the only valid precondition for theory? If so, and second, can one then speak about anything which is outside one's realm of experience? In other words, can a white intellectual profess a valid interest in non-white communities, or a heterosexual intellectual in gay communities, or, for that

matter, a contemporary intellectual in medieval communities? Taken to an extreme, the unilateral privileging of experience over theory—or activism over the academy—works to disqualify or debar the social validity of almost all intellectual activity.

Thus, while a critic like Mike Featherstone proscribes the activities of literary intellectuals on the grounds that 'we have to raise the sociological objection against the literary intellectual's license in interpreting the everyday, or in providing evidence about everyday lives of ordinary people' (Featherstone 1988, pp. 199–200), Iain Chambers celebrates the experiential complexity of the contemporary world for its total dissolution of the vainglorious intellect. 'A certain intellectual formation', in his words, 'is discovering that it is losing its grip on the world' (Chambers 1987, p. 20).

This resurgence of anti-intellectualism within leftist thinking is distressing when we consider that right-wing governments and lobbies are also engaged in the ruthless excision of intellectual work from national and budgetary agendas. Painfully, we seem to have inherited a world where, as John Frow argues, both the left and the right seem to collude in their objections to non-utilitarian activity. In his words:

> The problem is most deeply that of the possible place of critical thought in a capitalist society—that is, in a society that seeks to harness knowledge more or less directly to the generation of profit. Whereas once we could envisage spaces of exception to the logic of capital accumulation, these ethical and aesthetic spaces are disappearing in the face of a more totalizing rationality. One indication of this is the way in which, in the discourses both of the New Right and of their near cousins the technocratic left, an economic vocabulary is used to discredit the study of the humanities (Frow 1990, p. 357).

Utilitarianism, as Frow points out, has a variety of liberal and illiberal manifestations. At either extreme, however, it is marked by a reverence for the notion of quantifiable or visible effects. For left-thinking utilitarian critics, furthermore, visibility is seen to be the exclusive preserve of experience or praxis, and theory suffers by contrast as its effects are neither imme-

diately apparent nor quantifiable. Ironically, the current anti-intellectual bias within the left is entirely out of step with Marxism's long-standing insistence on the necessary coalition between thought and everyday life.

It is instructive here to recall Raymond Williams' understanding of culture as 'whole way of life' within which artistic and intellectual labour coexist through necessary linkages with other social activities (Williams 1981, p. 10–14). Williams' concession to the thought content of any given social order also appears—although from often entirely divergent positions—within the work of Habermas and Foucault. Habermas, for instance, argues that the schism between the contrary realms of purely empirical and purely transcendental knowledges is invariably mediated by those forms of knowing which are essential to the cultural reproduction of social life. These mediating knowledges, which he calls 'cognitive interests', refer to the complex processes of learning and mutual understanding which always accompany the activities of work and interaction. Knowledge, he argues, does not have to be either 'a mere instrument of an organism's adaptation to a changing environment nor the act of a pure rational being removed from the context of life in contemplation' (Habermas 1972, p. 197). Habermas undoes the demarcation between knowledge and human interest by postulating cognition as a necessary effect of social life. Foucault takes this proposition a step further by shifting the focus from knowledge to the question of thought itself, so as to argue that all forms of activity—of doing—are always informed, if not produced, by forms of thinking. Foucault's interest in making this claim is motivated by a definitive resistance to the idea that social life is necessarily more real and therefore more relevant than the activity of thought:

> We must free ourselves from the sacrilization of the social as the only reality and stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life as thought. Thought exists independently of systems and structures of discourse. It is something that is often hidden, but which always animates

everyday behaviour. There is always a little thought even in the most stupid institutions (Foucault 1989, p. 155).

There are serious limitations, as Foucault tells us, to a critique of academic activism which insists upon the fundamental irrelevance of all knowledge production. The intellectual's armchair is, indeed, a considerably less hazardous—and possibly less effective—political location than the revolutionary battleground. Even so, it remains a crucial sphere of influence—a place from which it is possible both to agitate thought within 'stupid institutions' and also, as Foucault maintains, to propose 'an insurrection of knowledges that are opposed . . . to the effects of the centralising powers that are linked to the institution' (Foucault 1980a, p. 84). If the postcolonial intellectual has a political vocation, then it inheres, as we have been arguing, in a commitment to facilitate a democratic dialogue between the Western and non-Western academies, and in so doing, to think a way out of the epistemological violence of the colonial encounter. But equally, this commitment comes with an infrequently heeded obligation of humility. Despite the protestations of some postcolonial critics, postcolonial theory speaks to a very limited constituency and, as Dirlik and Ahmad insist, there is always more to politics than theory.

4

Edward Said and his critics

The principal features of postcolonialism's intellectual inheritance—which we covered in the preceding two chapters—are realised and elaborated in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1991, first published in 1978). Here, as elsewhere in his extensive oeuvre, Said betrays an uneasy relationship with Marxism, a specifically poststructuralist and anti-humanist understanding of the contiguity between colonial power and Western knowledge, and a profound belief in the political and worldly obligations of the postcolonial intellectual. This chapter will provide some contexts for understanding the canonisation of this book as a postcolonial classic through a consideration of its academic influence and theoretical limitations.

Enter Orientalism

Commonly regarded as the catalyst and reference point for postcolonialism, *Orientalism* represents the first phase of postcolonial theory. Rather than engaging with the ambivalent condition of the colonial aftermath—or indeed, with the history and motivations of anti-colonial resistance—it directs

attention to the discursive and textual production of colonial meanings and, concomitantly, to the consolidation of colonial hegemony. While 'colonial discourse analysis' is now only one aspect of postcolonialism, few postcolonial critics dispute its enabling effect upon subsequent theoretical improvisations.

Gayatri Spivak, for example, has recently celebrated Said's book as the founding text or 'source book' through which 'marginality' itself has acquired the status of a discipline in the Anglo-American academy. In her words, 'the study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said's, has . . . blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important part of the discipline now' (Spivak 1993, p. 56). The editors of the influential Essex symposia series on the sociology of literature also invoke the spirit of Spivak's extravagant metaphor to argue that Said's pioneering efforts have single-handedly moved matters of colony and empire 'centre stage in Anglo-American literary and cultural theory . . .' (Barker et al. 1994, p. 1).

While these accounts testify to the valency of Said's dense text in the metropolitan Western academy, others eagerly confirm his influence on the 'third world' academy. Zakia Pathak, Saswati Sengupta and Sharmila Purkayasta have written passionately about the long awaited and messianic arrival of *Orientalism* into the alienated and alienating English Studies classroom in Delhi University. Said's *Orientalism*, they claim, finally taught them how to teach a literature which was not their own:

> To deconstruct the text, to examine the process of its production, to identify the myths of imperialism structuring it, to show how the oppositions on which it rests are generated by political needs at given moments in history, quickened the text to life in our world (Pathak et al. 1991, p. 195).

A similar mood informs Partha Chatterjee's assessment of Said's book in terms of its impact on his own intellectual formation as a 'postcolonial' historian. His essay nostalgically recalls a revelatory first reading of *Orientalism* through an uncertain season in Calcutta:
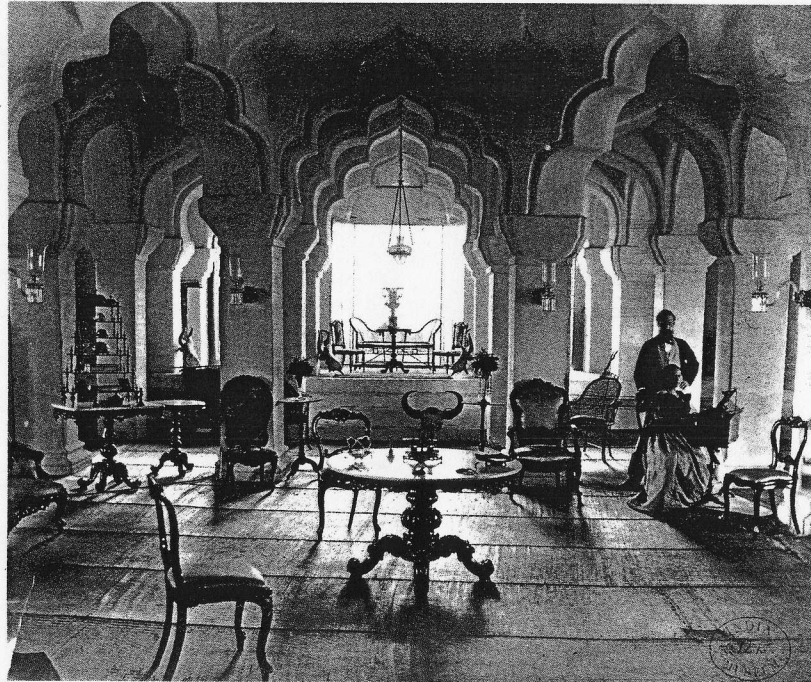
Interior of Tuncum, Madurai by Edmund David Lyon, Prints and Drawings Section of the Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library (OIOC photo 1001 [2975])

Postcolonial Theory

A Critical Introduction

Leela Gandhi