

THIEVES OF KNOWLEDGE: philosophy, politics, academe

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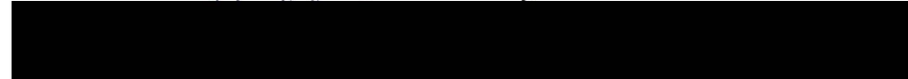
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### ABSTRACT


"Critical theory" has become an object of disrepute. The ambiguity of the relationship between such theories and the political demands that critical theory engage in a continual process of self-doubt. Beginning with the separation of academe and the everyday, and the ensuing theoretical anxieties, this thesis considers the efforts of three thinkers to resolve these doubts: Hannah Arendt, Karl Mannheim, and Louis Althusser. By reconsidering the relationship of knowledge and politics, each figure formulates a distinct basis for critical theory. Arendt attempts to exclude philosophy from the political, in order to preserve the possibility of action in the latter; Mannheim subordinates all social life to the rigours of intellectual planning; Althusser posits distinct realms of irreconcilable practices. By tracing the breakdown of each of these projects, this work concludes that the significance of critical theory lies in its inevitable indeterminacy, wherein its political contribution can be found at its margins.

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*for  
Poog & Beaner,  
and  
Angela*

## Preface

The actions of academics have been suspect ever since the emergence of the European university. Originally branded as "thieves of knowledge", pilfering knowledge from the divine, the act of theft has been transformed in recent times. The knowledge which is stolen no longer is the property of a deity: now it is the property of an everyday world from which the academic as such is excluded. The activities of academe remain suspect.

This suspicion is particularly evident when the academic discourse under consideration is political theory. Such theory is castigated as remote, detached, and utterly irrelevant to the actual substance of politics. The academic is represented as the trivial, the pedantic; the theory of politics and the practice of politics do not coincide.

My thesis is an attempt to consider this questionable process of thinking the political, as I have frequently shared these suspicions of theory. Yet in the same breath, I also maintain a belief that theory is indispensable to political action, despite the ambiguity of the relation. 'Progressive' politics, the politics in which I am interested, cannot safely reject the practices of theory. This thesis is both the process and a result of my attempt to think my way through the contradictions implicit in the theory and practice of politics.

In meandering through the maze of philosophy and politics, I have positioned my project beneath the rubric of 'critical theory'. Claiming this label may appear odd, as each chapter of my thesis focuses on the work of an individual -- Hannah Arendt, Karl Mannheim and Louis Althusser respectively -- who is not commonly credited with being part of such a tradition, at least as it derives from the pronouncements of Max Horkheimer and the initial participants in the Frankfurt School. Other theorists more commonly associated with critical theory do put in appearances: Horkheimer and Adorno from the first generation, Habermas, Gramsci, and particularly Alfred Sohn-Rethel, all too often ignored in discussions of critical theorists. My choice of Arendt, Mannheim and Althusser is intentionally idiosyncratic: it is part of an effort to find inspirations for a critical theory of politics beyond the boundaries of a single tradition.

In the same vein, it should be clear that the argument which I make for the tenuous relation between the political and philosophy need not be derived from these sources: it is not a new argument, nor are its contemporary manifestations primarily associated with the figures upon whom I concentrate. By exploring the relationship of academe, theory and politics through selected works of three figures who are rarely associated with each other, I hope in part to suggest the diverse routes which exist towards a theory of politically engaged philosophy, one which does not seek the subordination of all other realms.<sup>1</sup>

At this early stage in my thesis, the role of Arendt within my thesis deserves special

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<sup>1</sup> Many other figures who might be expected to put in an appearance are absent from my thesis, part of my suggestion that these routes should not be casually dismissed as an intellectually fashionable aberration. I am not trying to trivialize the significance of such theorists, many of whom are collapsed into a nebulous post-modernism/structuralism. Rather, I wish merely to emphasize that many of the arguments extolled or dismissed as emerging from such a camp can be traced through different lineages.

mention. While her work on the *vita contemplativa* serves as the starting point for one of the following chapters, Arendt's work has informed this entire project. Underlying this entire exercise is the conviction, borrowed from Arendt, that politics is necessarily a participatory enterprise, and any meaningful discussion of the political must return to everyday life, stressing its collective quality and necessary linkages to other aspects of activity. My anarchic reading of Arendt may be submerged in the subsequent investigations into the social imaginary of academe, yet it remains the motivation for the entire affair.

In an essay on Walter Benjamin, Arendt likens his work to that of the pearl diver, descending into the wreckage of the past and returning with fragments, which may help illuminate the world of the living.<sup>2</sup> The project is not one of historical reconstruction -- whether in the name of historicism, or the unfolding of reason, or romantic nostalgia -- but of salvaging; it is an attempt to rescue words and images of the past as the concern of the present. With this in mind, I now embark upon my own salvage operation, delving into the wreckage of critical theory within an equally dilapidated modernity.

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<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Introduction" to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, ed. & intro. Hannah Arendt; trans. Harry Zohn [New York: Schocken Books, 1968], especially pp.38-51.

## Introduction

# Politics and Conscience Intellectuals within critical theory

Political theory is plagued by a chronic bad conscience. Or at least this is the case for those forms of theorizing which seek to be socially engaged. The relationship between such philosophies and the worlds of which they speak frequently appears tenuous. Such tenuousness can appear particularly unsettling to those forms of thought which find their legitimacy in the demand for social change. The advocacy of such change is based in a critique of the existing social order, and in this oppositional stance, such thought is rarely satisfied to remain no more than critique.

But when it comes to moving from critique to transformation, political philosophy's record is less than scintillating. It has proven far easier to quote Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach than it has been to realize it.<sup>1</sup> This failure lies at the heart of modern political theory's troubled conscience: the world has obstinately refused to unfold according to the will of the philosophers, and when it has paid attention to such work, the results have rarely been those intended. There is a definite tendency towards apostasy among theorists of the political.

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<sup>1</sup> Or at least to realize it in any intended fashion.

Such apostasy may take the form of embracing the politics formerly rebuked, or it may take the form of a retreat from politics.

Yet one can not withdraw from the world and remain a political theorist. The political, of necessity, is a collective endeavour. It is the creation of people living together, and inseparable from such a communicative context. To attempt to contemplate politics, without living in the political, is impossible.<sup>2</sup> At best, such an attempt is a retreat to the most simplistic positivism, wherein the political is simply another agglomeration of raw material to be rendered factual through a rigorous scientific method; in a more insidious manner, contemplative claims threaten the very possibility of the political, freezing politics by denying the political significance of the act of theorizing. But how does one theorize the political within modernity, when the role of the philosopher has become a profession? The division of labour does not negate the dilemma of the philosopher; as Agnes Heller observed:

It is the *duty* of philosophers -- today no less than other periods of history -- to live according to their philosophy; they must face the risk of conflict with the "job" and with the division of labour itself, for these rob philosophy of its effectiveness, of its real function, of its democratic character. To doubt in the validity of the philosophical division of labour is an integral part of the dissolution of prejudices and hence an integral part of philosophy. Anyone who will not face this conflict should be a cobbler, and not a philosopher.<sup>3</sup>

To accept the strictly contemplative role of philosophy within modernity is to renounce any political relevance for philosophy, while denying the consequences of theory.

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps such a statement is self-evident, but it is worth keeping in mind that such a notion of 'theory' represents modernity's radical shift, hurling the philosopher into the world. See chapter one for elaborations on this shift.

<sup>3</sup> Agnes Heller, *A Radical Philosophy*, trans. James Wickham [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984], pp.21-22.

To live according to one's philosophy, however, is not an easy task in the modern world, within which 'politics' (as well as philosophy) has atrophied into yet another vocation within the division of labour.<sup>4</sup> The tension between the *polis* and living as a philosopher within and of the *polis* has not abated since the death of Socrates: visions of the good life and daily life remain discordant.

This tension has been exacerbated as the number of those choosing to study politics has increased. Universities in the Europeanized world have experienced an explosion in both students and faculty; in the past fifty years, the numbers able to claim the title of philosopher have reached unprecedented levels.<sup>5</sup> Yet this increase in numbers has not mitigated the alienation of political theory from politics.

This separation is the subject of the work at hand. Faith in the correspondence of 'theory' and 'practice' may have waned amongst the descendants of continental thought in the post-marxist world, but the notion of some affinity between the two remains compelling. The regime of capitalism, seeking to capture all aspects of life within the totality of the market, has successfully infiltrated the theoretical realms of its staunchest opponents within academe. Knowledge -- within capitalism, the only comprehensible rationale for theoretical activity --

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<sup>4</sup> Seyla Benhabib presents this version of Hannah Arendt's conception of modernity, wherein society is divided into "the narrowly political realm on one hand and the economic market and family on the other." From "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas", in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992], p.74.

<sup>5</sup> Russell Jacoby and Jürgen Habermas discuss the expansion of the universities since the Second World War, and an accompanying lack of political transformation, in the U.S.A. and the (former) Federal German Republic respectively. See Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* [New York: The Noonday Press, 1987], esp. pp.13-16; Habermas, "The Idea of the University -- Learning Processes", *New German Critique* [no.41, spring/summer 1987], pp.5-6.

must demonstrate its utility and value through 'applicability': theory must be able to quantify its validity. While philosophical regimes ponder the significance (if any) of *praxis*, bureaucratic regimes are accelerating the correspondence schema. One blatant expression of the attempt to enclose theory within the market can be seen in the current tendency of governments to relocate post-secondary education from the realm of education proper to, in the case of British Columbia, that of 'skills, training and labour'. All academic activity, and particularly the dubious areas of 'theory', must abet the productive process. Such tendencies emphasize the lack of conviction beyond (and within) academe in theory's attempts to reconfigure itself.<sup>6</sup>

Two starkly contrasting positions confront each other: the submission of theory to the market, and the desire to retreat from the world into the arena of pure contemplation. Both demand the abandonment of any political role for theory. The former claims to offer knowledge to the world, while the latter hoards it; both deny that theory as such might have a place within the political. My thesis explores the removal of political theory from everyday life, a removal which resurfaces repeatedly in the following chapters as tensions amongst claims to epistemological privilege.

These tensions become audible in the attempts to extricate theory from the polarity of application and contemplation, and in doing so, finding a place for theoretical endeavours

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<sup>6</sup> For two similar recountings of this theme, see Wlad Godzich's "Introduction: Literacy and the Struggle for Theory" in his *The Culture of Literacy*, [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994]; David Carroll's "Introduction: The States of 'Theory' and the Future of History and Art" in *The States of 'Theory': History, Art and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll, [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994]. Sande Cohen suggests a subtler collaboration amongst academic theory and capitalism in his *Academia and the Luster of Capital* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993]. According to Cohen, theoretical work is already embedded within an apocalyptic exchange mechanism, extending far beyond questions of utility, assisting in capital's imprisonment of time (p.xviii).

within political life. The works of Hannah Arendt, Karl Mannheim, and Louis Althusser suggest three distinct efforts to resituate theory in relation to the everyday. In the case of each writer, the relationship between the theorist and the wider political world is perilous. The theorist, in the guise of theorist, cannot participate in the political in the same manner as other political actors; at the same time, withdrawal is an unacceptable alternative. These three thinkers develop articulations of the position of the theorist which provide access to the paradox of political theory and its mutually inclusive and exclusive relation to everyday life.

## **The Palace and the Public Square**

While the focus of this thesis may be on theoretical discourses within academe, the concept of politics as a discursive practice cannot be restricted to the academy. My starting point in this thesis, the politics of academe contrasted with the everyday, is a transliteration of a much older theme in political thought: the politics of the masses versus that of the elites. Such a claim does not necessarily demand an identity between intellectual elites and other social elites; as Mannheim argued in *Ideology and Utopia*, in reference to the ascendant bourgeoisie, "It was common therefore to speak of the propertied and educated class, the educated element being, however, by no means ideologically in agreement with the property-owning element."<sup>7</sup> Rather than arguing for identity of membership between these strata, I wish

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* expanded English edition; trans. Louis Wirth & Edward Shils [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936], p.156.

to suggest a relational similarity: the differing social tactics identified by Mannheim in borrowing the categories of "palace and public square"<sup>8</sup> have their own epistemological incarnation, demarcating the knowledge of the theorist from that of the everyday. I begin with this political legacy.

The tradition of distinguishing between the political understandings and aspirations of the masses and those of elites runs throughout Western political thought; the tradition devotes much of its time to attempting to discern a form in which these clashing interests can be reconciled (or at least stabilized).<sup>9</sup> Aristotelian 'prudence' was a virtue which could only be understood and experienced by those who ruled.<sup>10</sup> Machiavelli's two most famous works deal separately with the appropriate political conduct within principalities and republics.<sup>11</sup> James Madison fretted about the menace of unrestrained democracy, fearing that impoverished masses might try to strip the wealthy of their privileges.<sup>12</sup> The distinctiveness of forms of political activity among different social groups is prominent in western political thought. The gap between the distinct visions and voices of the palace and the public square is paralleled by a gap between epistemologies, not necessarily between the powerful and the

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<sup>8</sup> The title of this section is drawn from Karl Mannheim's formulation of Machiavelli's main theme: "the thought of the palace is one thing, and that of the public square another." Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.62.

<sup>9</sup> But it is not merely an effort at mediating divergent interests; it is an effort to mediate divergent means of practice within the political.

<sup>10</sup> Leah Bradshaw, "Political Rule, Prudence and the 'Woman Question' in Aristotle", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, [vol.XXIV, no.3; Sept.1991], pp.557-563.

<sup>11</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961], and *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick; trans. Leslie J. Walker with Brian Richardson [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970].

<sup>12</sup> James Madison, Madison *et al*, *The Federalist Papers*, [New York: Mentor Books, 1961], no.10, p.78.

dispossessed, but between the practioners of intellectual and manual labour. The knowledge of the public square carries no meaning within the palace; the philosopher cannot know everyday life as part of that everyday.<sup>13</sup> Political theory is distinct from political practices.

Acknowledging this distinction is not synonymous with valorizing it: as Agnes Heller noted, to accept this division of labour would be to forsake the political potential of philosophical activity. Neither does this distinction suggest that the everyday is mute.<sup>14</sup> The philosophical entity recognized within academe as 'theory' may not be at home within the everyday, yet the everyday does produce its own self-understandings and linguistic forms. The political discourses of everyday life, however, cannot be transplanted into the discourses of academe: the separation, a construct of the separation of knowledge from experience, is marked by an epistemological rift which defies such transplantings. My thesis addresses the attempts by three very different thinkers to come to terms with this division.

Such attention to the discursive character of politics inevitably provokes accusations of a renewal of idealist delusions. The 'descent into discourse'<sup>15</sup> is not, however, simply a fashion amongst jaded mandarins who have turned their backs on materialities -- a new diversion for intellectuals disillusioned with millennial visions who seek to escape their guilty consciences. To the contrary, the struggle over the terms of the political has been a prominent

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<sup>13</sup> See my discussion of Lefebvre later in this introduction.

<sup>14</sup> Nor illiterate, depending upon one's hierarchy of linguistic forms. See chapter three for a discussion of writing and orality within the everyday.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase is from Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: the reification of language and the writing of social history* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990]. Palmer does not reject linguistic or textual theories, only particular uses and abuses. He is by no means alone in such an interpretation of discourse; Russell A. Berman's assault on the practioners of deconstruction is in a similar vein. See his "Troping to Pretoria: The Rise and Fall of Deconstruction, *TELOS* [no.85; fall 1990].

part of the upheavals of modernity. Some of these struggles have sought to expand the reach of politics; others have sought to redefine the language of politics entirely.<sup>16</sup> In either form, such struggles have been an attempt to recast our political vocabulary.

A peculiar twist arises. Political struggles can be understood as struggles over discourse, yet such understandings emerge from within a particular set of discourses: those of academe. It is within academe that thoughtful reflection on political turbulence can occur. The act of thinking the political has taken shelter within the academy; it has not abandoned politics, but its position in relation to a broader politics changes with this move.

The role of the academic takes on particular importance in relation to questions of political discourse, because within academe these discourses acquire different meanings than they carry in the broader public realm. Academic thought is by no means homogeneous, nor is academe a space of tranquil coexistence for conflicting theories. Yet political thought which may appear as counter-hegemonic beyond the university can thrive within the confines of academe. The discourses of socialism, feminism and marxism may not dominate academe, yet the position which they enjoy within it is certainly more comfortable than it is in the outside world.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Moira Gatens discusses these two trends in regards to philosophy within feminist thought. See her *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* [Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991], pp.89-92. Comparable tendencies can be found within other challenges to canonical thought.

<sup>17</sup> Such oppositional forms of thought are rarely comfortable with their existence as 'serious' modes of thinking, a status which is often difficult to reconcile with the grassroots movements from which these theories drew inspiration. Attempts to come to terms with this divide date at least back to the marxist/anarchist split within the First International; in this century, one well-known attempt to resolve this dilemma is Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. Fred Halliday [London: NLB, 1970].

This tension between formalized theory and popular practice remained a conundrum for the left in the Western world, running through the New Left in Europe and North America. In

The relation between the political theory of academe and political participation is problematic. 'Living one's philosophy' within academe is not a simple task, as Heller noted: life within the palace demands a different language from life within the public square. Attempts, not at obliterating this distinction but at identifying it, have fallen under the rubric 'critical theory' -- theories which seek to engage the everyday while recognizing the theorist's exclusion from this everyday.<sup>18</sup> The subject of this introduction is precisely the manner in which critical theory seeks to mediate the everyday and academe. The subject of my thesis as a whole is the manner in which the critical theories -- in the broadest sense -- of Arendt, Mannheim and Althusser provide the bases for very different versions of this mediation. Through rejections of the philosophical division of labour,<sup>19</sup> each of these theorists provides

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contemporary feminist debates, responses have sometimes advocated the whole-hearted rejection of theory as a patriarchal morass in favour of 'ad-hoc solutions' (Lynne Farrow, "Feminism as anarchism", originally published in 1974, reprinted in *Quiet Rumours: an Anarcha-Feminist anthology* [London: Rebel Press/Dark Star, no date].), but more frequently have attempted to seek some resolution through which institutionalized theory remains rooted in the popular movement. See, for example, Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, "On Writing Feminist Academic Prose", *SIGNS* [Summer 1992]; Susan Sheridan, "From Margin to Mainstream: Situating women's studies", *A reader in feminist knowledge*, ed. Sneja Gunew [London: Routledge, 1991].

<sup>18</sup> The contours of critical theory are notoriously volatile, to the extent that David Carroll, at the time director of the Critical Theory Institute at the University of California, Irvine, is reduced to describing it "as the hybrid and open field in which the possibilities of the various disciplines... are pursued and experimented with, where alternate critical practices are developed and tried out." Attempts at identifying the distinctive 'critical' elements become inescapably self-referential. Critical theory is simply an area "in which certain kinds of questions are raised that are not raised elsewhere..." Both quotes are from Carroll's "Introduction..." to *The States of 'Theory'*, pp.2-3.

Having said this, I embark upon my own quixotic attempt at explaining my usage of the term toward the end of this introduction.

<sup>19</sup> My assertion that these writers *reject* the philosophical division of labour will seem odd: Arendt denies the compatibility of the philosopher and the *polis*; Mannheim envisions intellectuals as planners; Althusser invokes distinct fields of practices specific to philosophy and everyday life. For a brief explanation of my assertion, see the conclusion to this introduction; for detailed accounts, see the respective chapters.

me with a starting point from which to consider the very different attempts to comprehend academe and the everyday.

## "Everyday Life"

The 'everyday' has had a comparatively brief existence within the political and philosophical traditions which underlay the thought of the major figures in my thesis, only emerging within modernity as the core of philosophical speculation. Despite this brevity, the everyday has become crucial to political thought: the products of theory must no longer strive for the eternity of pure idea, but instead are expected to speak directly to and of the world. In the course of this process, the everyday all too often is exempt from critical analysis. Such a version of the everyday is reminiscent of nineteenth century European intellectuals' romanticization of the working class and peasantry: a way of living which preserves the wisdom, tradition and edifying practicality of generations. In this guise (which still retains popularity), everyday life is an antidote to the mystifications, ideologies and decadence which have been superimposed upon it, by the urban, the intellectual or the politician. If the latter were simply swept away, the common-sense of 'the people' would eliminate contradictions and realize a world of material and spiritual harmony.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This romanticized everyday has been effectively critiqued within western marxism, most notably by Lukács, as false consciousness ("Class Consciousness", in his *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone [Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1971], and by Horkheimer and Adorno as mass society ("The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming [New York: Continuum, 1972]). Such critiques have in turn been subject to critique, and often dismissed

If the everyday is not to be privileged in this fashion, it still must be elaborated. Presuming the concept to be self-evident is liable to render a muddled, homogenizing 'everyday', a synonym for minutia or banality. My own use of the everyday is primarily inspired by the French Situationists and Henri Lefebvre, but I make no claim to piety with these traditions. While Lefebvre (by his own admission) contributed "the everyday" (as "*la quotidienne*") to the marxist lexicon,<sup>21</sup> neither my usage nor the concept itself are restricted to this variety of French marxism and its successors. Agnes Heller notes that, as a philosophical problem, everyday life appears in various guises across what she terms "philosophical paradigms".<sup>22</sup> Heller notes in her major work on everyday life that her own use of the concept is inspired by Edmund Husserl and Georg Lukács.<sup>23</sup> Fred Dallmayr traces the course of Husserl's 'life-world' from German phenomenology into both the work of Jürgen

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out of hand. None the less, they remain relevant when contrasted with a simplistic 'everyday' which has regained theoretical credibility, beyond the republican populism which never abandoned it. With recent explorations of identity and diversity, there is the potential to revamp 'the everyday' as 'the everydays', in which a plethora of existences are uncritically privileged.

<sup>21</sup> This is Lefebvre's own claim. It is also worth pointing out that the English term, 'everyday', does not do justice to Lefebvre's concept: "Of course, the word 'everyday' in English is not a perfect translation of *la quotidienne*, which really refers to repetition in everyday life, to that which repeats itself constantly." See Henri Lefebvre, "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death", trans. David Reifman; *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. & intro. Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg [Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988], p.78.

<sup>22</sup> Agnes Heller, "Can Everyday Life be Endangered?", in her *Can Modernity Survive?*, [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990], p.43.

<sup>23</sup> Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life*, trans. G.L. Campbell [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984], pp.xi-xii.

Habermas and French post-structuralists.<sup>24</sup> These 'variations on a theme' all reflect different philosophical attempts to bring the everyday within the philosophical gaze.

This fascination with the everyday marks a fundamental shift in how the world is conceived within these varied philosophical traditions. Prior to this moment, the everyday was simply the "prose of the world",<sup>25</sup> and not worthy of the philosophers' gaze. A properly philosophical life could only begin where the everyday ended.<sup>26</sup> Heller identifies this everyday as "the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu*, make social reproduction possible."<sup>27</sup> For Heller, it is Marx who ushers this everyday into the realm of philosophy, in the form of labour.<sup>28</sup>

Henri Lefebvre notes that Marx's concept of labour, while part of the everyday, is insufficient to explain the whole of human activity. Lefebvre sought to continue this reorientation of philosophy:

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<sup>24</sup> Fred R. Dallmayr, "Life-World: Variations on a Theme", in *Life-World and Politics: between modernity and postmodernity -- Essays in Honor of Fred R. Dallmayr*, ed. Stephen K. White, [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989]. In an earlier essay Dallmayr explores the affinities between phenomenology and various forms of western marxism, notably that of Lukács. See his "Phenomenology and Marxism in historical perspective" in *Phenomenology and Marxism*, eds. Bernhard Waldenfels *et al*; trans. J. Claude Evans, Jr. [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984].

<sup>25</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, cited from Lefebvre, "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics" *Marxism & the Interpretation of Culture*, p.79.

<sup>26</sup> This rendition of the difference between modern and pre-modern philosophy is presented by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958]. For Arendt, classical philosophy maintains the distinction between the private and public realms. Modernity is marked by the ascendancy of the social realm, wherein formerly private concerns become public ones. While this theme runs throughout the work, for an extended discussion of classical philosophy's contempt for labour (and its modern inversion), see chapter one.

<sup>27</sup> Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life*, p.3.

<sup>28</sup> Arendt and Lefebvre share this observation, although with very different perceptions of its impact. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.87; Lefebvre, "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics" *Marxism & the Interpretation of Culture*, p.78.

But workers do not only have a life in the workplace, they have a social life, family life, political life; they have experiences outside the domain of labor. So my project was to continue correcting the work of classical philosophy, much as Marx did, but to reach dimensions of *la quotidien* that he did not.<sup>29</sup>

For both Lefebvre and Heller, the everyday constitutes the matrix of relations experienced on a daily basis which together reproduce social and productive relations. The notion of 'labour' of itself fails to capture the multifaceted existence of such relations; while those activities deemed labour are a part of the everyday, they exist alongside an unending chain of relations and actions which reoccur in daily lives:

Everyday Life is made of reoccurrences: gestures of labour and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic, hours, days, weeks, months, years, linear and cyclical repetitions, natural and rational time, etc.; the study of creative activity (of production, in its widest sense) leads to the study of the re-production or the conditions in which actions producing objects or labour are re-produced, re-commenced, and re-assume their component proportions or, on the contrary, undergo gradual or sudden modifications.<sup>30</sup>

Everyday life comprises the actions and concepts which make such actions possible, both in repetition and alteration.

The marxist recognition and later expansion of the importance of the everyday has been further elaborated by feminist theorists. Lefebvre understood the relevant 'reproduction' within everyday life to refer to social, collective relations. Mary O'Brien insisted that the actual biological reproductive labour of women must be accorded political significance; Nancy Hartsock turned to the sexual division of labour. Both of these theorists reconstituted the

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<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre, "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics" *Marxism & the Interpretation of Culture*, p.78

<sup>30</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans.Sacha Rabinovitch [New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984], p.18.

everyday by introducing elements of women's experience which do not easily reduce to a marxist notion of productive labour.<sup>31</sup>

Dorothy Smith completes this process by reintegrating this expanded everyday within the broader relations which shape it. The everyday world is "the place from which the consciousness of the world begins,"<sup>32</sup> but this is not a sufficient basis by which to understand it: "The everyday world is not fully understandable within its own scope. It is organized by social relations not fully apparent in it nor contained in it."<sup>33</sup> The everyday may be the point at which the world is formed, but cannot be understood simply by recognizing its existence.

With Smith's understanding of the everyday world as problematic, the discussion has come full circle. The everyday world is neither to be despised nor romanticized. It is subject to the various hegemonies, ideological obfuscations and culture industries which have structured western marxist analyses;<sup>34</sup> simultaneously it is a site of resistance, through which such totalizing processes are diverted and refabricated, undermining their purported

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<sup>31</sup> Mary O'Brien summarizes this thesis from *The Politics of Reproduction* in the title essay of *Reproducing the World: Essays in Feminist Theory* [Boulder: Westview Press, 1989], pp.14-17; Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism", in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Sandra Harding & Merrill B. Hintikka [Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1983].

<sup>32</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987], p.89.

<sup>33</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic*, p.92.

<sup>34</sup> Among the many reviews of western marxism, Stephen Eric Bronner provides an excellent synopsis of this diverse field in his *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* [Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1994]. Martin Jay's *Marxism & the Concept of Totality: the adventures of a concept from Lukács to Habermas* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984] is also noteworthy, addressing the attempts at theorizing the totality of social relations, and the retreat from such efforts.

intentions.<sup>35</sup> The everyday is suspended between the processes of recuperation and subversion. Recuperation and subversion are intertwined within the everyday; neither has an exclusive claim on the everyday, and neither can be discounted.

The everyday which emerges from these positions is resolutely heterogenous. It defies attempts at reduction to a single discourse, genesis or agency. The everyday is a collection of diverse practices, interrelated but indeterminate. To foreshadow my discussion of Althusser, "there is no practice in general, but only *distinct practices*..."<sup>36</sup> As a realm of distinct practices, the everyday does not provide a point at which such practices converge; the everyday speaks of itself constantly in fragments, but cannot speak of itself as the everyday. The concept of 'everyday life' as deployed here is not part of the everyday:

The Quotidian is a philosophical concept that cannot be understood outside philosophy; it designates for and by philosophy the non-philosophical and is unthinkable in another context; it is a concept that neither belongs to nor reflects everyday life, but rather expresses its possible transfiguration in philosophical terms.<sup>37</sup>

The recognition of the everyday does not mark the merger of theory with the everyday, but its continued estrangement.

The philosophical recognition of the everyday provokes repercussions within the theoretical realm. Such repercussions are particularly troublesome among projects which seek

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<sup>35</sup> In his analysis of everyday practices, Michel de Certeau suggests that such subversions are the centrepiece of the everyday, and in particular the practice of *la perruque*: "*La perruque* is the worker's own work disguised as work for his[sic] employer." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], p.25. De Certeau suggests that this practice is the crux of popular culture in "the heart of strongholds of the contemporary economy." *La perruque* is a 'tactic' of everyday life, by which the order of things is diverted within everyday life.

<sup>36</sup> Louis Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy", in Althusser & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster [London: Verso, 1979], p.58.

<sup>37</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p.13.

to maintain their critical stance. While there are undeniably politics within the sites of theory, these sites themselves are not easily integrated with the aspiration for a participatory politics, which of necessity must have its bases in the everyday.<sup>38</sup> Once again, critical theory is forced to seek validation in some other form than instrumentality or withdrawal. As part of this search, the categories of philosophy, politics, theory, and theorist are all opened to questioning. If theory is to engage the everyday, it must re-think itself in the process.

The object of the critical theorist is the everyday. But this everyday, along with the theorist, is positioned outside its object. Those who philosophize undeniably have a place in the everyday, but not as philosophers. Expelled from the everyday, the theorist is forced to seek a vantage point from which to contemplate the everyday. Late modernity and capitalist logic have little sympathy for autonomous attempts at establishing such vantage points. Instead, today such a locale is frequently found within academe.

## Academe

In his 1987 book, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, Russell Jacoby declares that the university has destroyed the 'public intellectual'. An older generation of intellectuals who had addressed a broad audience was literally dying out, and

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<sup>38</sup> Having bases within the everyday is not synonymous with simply decreeing everything to be political. These connections and distinctions are a major component of Arendt's analysis of the *vita activa*. See chapter one for a discussion of these relations.

those who should have succeeded them have instead chosen a life solely within the culture of academe:

Younger intellectuals no longer need or want a larger public; they are almost exclusively professors. Campuses are their homes; colleagues their audience; monographs and specialized journals their media. Unlike past intellectuals they situate themselves within fields and disciplines -- for good reason. Their jobs, advancements, and salaries depend on the valuation of specialists, and this dependence affects the issues broached and the language employed.<sup>39</sup>

For Jacoby, the failure of academe is precisely its retreat from the everyday.

The thesis of Jacoby's work -- that academe is incompatible with public intellectual life -- has provoked sharp responses, of two particular forms. The first of these challenges the accuracy of Jacoby's work. At one level, the broad 'public' of the dying intellectuals Jacoby elegizes was never more than a nostalgic fiction, circumscribed to exclude difference, while the intellectuals were dependent on particular class positions which permitted them to appear as 'independent intellectuals'. At another level, Jacoby fails to recognize public intellectuals who have arisen in the last three decades; he does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the specific intellectuals of various social movements, nor does he acknowledge that such movements constitute new forms of the public, unlike the presumably homogenous one of the past.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, [New York: The Noonday Press, 1987], p.6.

<sup>40</sup> Lynn Garafola's review, "The Last Intellectuals" (New Left Review [no.169; May/June 1988]) presents these critiques of Jacoby's accuracy. Garafola, like many other commentators, notes the similarities between Jacoby's leftist critique of academe and the rightist critique of Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind: how higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987]. See, for example, Paul Piccone, "The Reuniversalization of the University?" in the special section on intellectuals and the university, *TELOS* [no.81; fall 1989]; Bruce Robbins' introductions, "The Grounding of Intellectuals", in *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics*, ed. Bruce Robbins [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990], and "The Public as Phantom" in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce

The second form of critique has been presented by a group of figures loosely clustered around the journal *Social Text*. While accepting the myriad inaccuracies outlined above, the more serious failing of Jacoby's work is its presumption of intellectual representation and intellectual universality -- that the intellectual should and could serve as the articulator of the aspirations of the 'masses', and that the commensurability of such speeches is not a concern. According to these critics, the intellectual --within or without academe -- is repeatedly interpellated into different subject positions, and never presents a single, coherent theoretical position to an integrated public.<sup>41</sup>

What emerges from this debate is an agreement that the theoretical production of academe is incompatible with the practices of everyday life. The valuation of this incompatibility is very different: for Jacoby, it is a sign of intellectual acquiescence; for his critics, an indication of complex structuring. Both positions note the shift from the representative intellectual. No longer are the activities of academics reserved as 'theory', positioned against 'practice' as the prerogative of 'the people'.<sup>42</sup> If everyday life is complex,

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Robbins [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993]; and Charles Lemert, "The Politics of Theory and the Limits of the Academy", in *Intellectuals and Politics: Social Theory in a Changing World*, ed. Charles Lemert [Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1991]. Stanley Aronowitz notes more generally the affinities between Bloom's position and those of a defensive (formerly) left-intelligentsia in the United States. See "On the Politically Correct" in his *Roll over Beethoven: The Return of Cultural Strife* [Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press/New England University Press, 1993].

<sup>41</sup> Variations on this theme are made by a variety of these authors. The essays collected in *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* all address aspects of these issues.

It is worth mentioning that Jacoby has responded to these criticisms, denouncing his critics for moral laxity and bad writing; he has not modified his position. See his "Journalists, Cynics and Cheerleaders" in *TELOS* [no.97;fall 1993].

<sup>42</sup> This is Martin Jay's interpretation of Alvin W. Gouldner's work. Jay claims that for Gouldner, 'theory' equals 'intellectuals' while 'practice' equals 'workers'. See "For Gouldner: Reflections on an Outlaw Marxist", *Fin-de-siècle socialism and other essays* [New York: Routledge, 1988], p.103. It is a claim that would certainly be valid for Karl Kautsky's marxism.

and cannot be reduced to the level of either monolithic compliance or resistance, the same is true for the field of theory.

What remains of Jacoby's position is the detachment of the academic from the everyday. The critical discourses of academe are, at best, marginal to the political discourse/practices of everyday life.<sup>43</sup> Yet they do exist, and not simply within an hermetic site of academe. Before finally turning to the idea of critical theory, I want to consider a more general movement of theory within academe, and in doing so, elaborate upon my own project as an exploration of theory within academe.

### *Economies & imaginations*

As previously mentioned, non-instrumental conceptions of theory are regarded with scepticism outside the university (as well as within). But my discussion of the everyday, and the debate between Jacoby and his *Social Text* critics, suggest that instrumentality is no longer a viable option for theory (though it will, of course, continue). The two tendencies coexist within academe -- within the bureaucratic structures which regiment the university, within the university itself, and within individual departments. Literary critic Wlad Godzich has noted this conflict within English departments in the American university as a conflict between 'the new vocationalism' and 'the struggle for theory'.<sup>44</sup> Comparable divergences can certainly be

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<sup>43</sup> Academic discourse can have a very direct impact on everyday life, as evidenced by the work of Milton Friedman and the Chilean military dictatorship, or the conjuring trick by which the Fraser Institute has eliminated poverty within Canada. It is worth noting that in both of these cases, the activities of 'political' academics have been mediated by the state; these interventions are occurring at the level of the diminished, formal political described by Benhabib in note 4 in this introduction. Even in these instances, academic thought is only intervening in everyday life indirectly.

<sup>44</sup> Wlad Godzich, "Introduction: Literacy and the Struggle for Theory" in his *The Culture of Literacy*.

found within the social sciences, as well as other areas of the university. What is the purpose of the 'knowledge' produced within the university, if it has no utility within capitalist production outside?

Alfred Sohn-Rethel noted that the production of ideas is governed by the same logic as the commodity abstraction.<sup>45</sup> Godzich, drawing upon Jacques Attali's political economy of music, suggests that theoretical production takes place within "the mode of production of repetition".<sup>46</sup> The products of theoretical labour are not annihilated upon consumption, but may be reconsumed again and again. But such repetition will not produce authentic representations of the original product; each repetition is also a transformation: "The effect of the mode of production of repetition is an increase in disorder and... an endangering and a loss of meaning."<sup>47</sup> Through repetition, theory travels within and beyond academe, yet has no guarantee it will remain recognizable.

This 'loss of meaning' affects all products of intellectual labour, whether originating in academe or elsewhere. Yet academe remains a recognizable -- if not a coherent -- construct. While academe might serve as the institutionalization of the philosopher's exclusion from the everyday, it signifies much more than simply the physical proximity of scholars. Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'academe', rather than 'the academy'. With contemporary intellectual life centred upon university campuses, the physical setting -- the academy -- is

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<sup>45</sup> Alfred-Sohn Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a critique of epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel [London: Macmillan Press, 1978].

<sup>46</sup> Godzich "The Semiotics of Semiotics", in *The Culture of Literacy*. Godzich's essay focuses on American Studies, semiotics and cowboy boots.

<sup>47</sup> Godzich, "The Semiotics of Semiotics", in *The Culture of Literacy*, p.204.

often mistaken for the culture of the intellectual --academe. The two are not identical, as the academy is inhabited by many who are not part of the academic culture -- administrators, support staff, and to varying degrees, students. While the culture of academe may be centred within the university, the coexistence of the two is uncomfortable, as academe clashes with or is subject to external demands, from the academy and beyond. Academe, as an intellectualized culture, has attempted to abstract itself from the academy, constructing itself as an exclusively discursive phenomenon.

My project investigates academe, partially through a series of historical recollections of epistemological shifts. My 'history' is found in the present. I rely heavily on the retellings of contemporary authors, and the republished works of dustier figures. In either case, the history which I draw upon leads a contemporary existence. The history which I have invoked is found as part of contemporary academe -- in the term of Cornelius Castoriadis, as part of its social imaginary.

The imaginary of Castoriadis is produced. It is not a representation or an interpretation, but a product, which in turn makes possible the ordering of the world:

It is the unceasing and essentially *undetermined* (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of 'something'. What we call 'reality' and 'rationality' are its works.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987], p.3; emphasis in the original. My usage of the concept of the social imaginary is not intended to be faithful to Castoriadis' formulation, and I make absolutely no claims to fidelity with the "imaginary's" Lacanian roots; I am using it to attempt to clarify the object of my study. Further references in this section are intended to indicate where the ideas which I am adapting are to be found; neither Castoriadis nor Nielsen and Jackson (see below) discuss academic culture at these points.

The social imaginary is not simply an ideological delusion; it is the space in which ideologies are formed. Academe is the social imaginary of the modern intellectual; as an institution it "provides the conditions in and through which social actors fictionalize themselves through images of self and other."<sup>49</sup> Academe is the site through which the intellectuals separate themselves from the rest of the world.

Within the academic imaginary, intellectual epistemologies of modernity are given substance. A new rationalist imaginary supplants previous organizational schema.<sup>50</sup> Within this realm of the imaginary both the concepts of 'social' and 'historical' are constituted. The historical imaginings, which form the basis of much of my thesis, cannot be distinguished from the contemporary academic imaginary; this is where they are to be found. The social culture of academe is inseparable from its historical recollections.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, my exploration of intellectual history is an exploration of the intellectual present, as it is constituted as a social imaginary: academe. My thesis presents one account of how this imaginary relates to the larger social world, and attempts to order it. Academe itself does not contain a single understanding of its social-historical existence: the imaginary is not a unified ideological discourse. My effort has drawn from academe, in order to present an understanding of academe and its potentials. It is only by returning such a project to the present that it takes on its full meaning:

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<sup>49</sup> Greg M. Nielsen & John D. Jackson, "Cultural studies, a sociological poetics: institutions of the Canadian imaginary", *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology* [vol.28,no.2, 1991], p.285.

<sup>50</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p.156; p.130.

<sup>51</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p.215.

Our project of elucidating the past forms of humanity's existence takes on its full sense only as a moment of the project of elucidating our existence, which, in turn, is inseparable from our current *doing*.<sup>52</sup>

Historical turnings are undertaken with the explicit intention of bringing new possibilities for action into the present.<sup>53</sup>

My thesis consists of an extended sifting through the academic imaginary, attempting to locate fragments within this culture which can simultaneously articulate this culture, while bringing thought to bear upon the political status of the contemporary academic intellectual. My objective is not to show the way or to claim to have solved a dilemma which pervades Western philosophy, but to seek an understanding which I see as a necessary precursor to the theoretical return to radical democracy.

The academic imaginary is not a synonym for philosophy or theory. Rather, it is a construct, the predominant site for the circulation of theoretical discourses, and a site in which such circulation may occur in a different manner than beyond. Similarly, the everyday is not synonymous with the political, but the everyday serves as the most inclusive potential locale for participatory politics. By insisting on the legitimacy of distinct practices which comprise these imaginary realms, I am neither arguing for dichotomous relations, nor hierarchical ones. Academe and the everyday have analytic distinctiveness, but they are not hermetic. Critical theory within academe is obliged to perpetually attempt to trespass within the everyday if it

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<sup>52</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p.164; emphasis in the original.

<sup>53</sup> At this point, the methodological influence of Arendt and Benjamin raised in my preface converge with Castoriadis. The similarities between Arendt's and Benjamin's historiography are commonly noted; see, for example, Phillip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History and Citizenship* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], p.3. For the comparison of Arendt and Castoriadis, see Jürgen Habermas, "Excursus on Cornelius Castoriadis: The Imaginary Institution", *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987], p.329.

is to retain its critical designation. With this obligation in mind, I am finally able to turn to critical theory, as the most sustained effort at locating academe and the everyday.

## Critical Theory

The concept of 'critical theory' is as popular as it is wide ranging, but it is generally left unelaborated. The label has been adopted by a wide spectrum of theorists, both those who still situate themselves in relation to some brand of marxism and those who are generally seen as belonging within some form of 'post'-ism. As such, it has become a popular moniker for contemporary work, proliferating throughout academic subtitles. The popularity of the term has no doubt abetted in its avoiding precision: with everyone engaging in critical thought, no one has to explain just what this activity is.<sup>54</sup>

While the term 'critical theory' may be traced back to Marx's correspondence, and beyond that to the Kantian 'critique',<sup>55</sup> its popularization within today's academic community

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<sup>54</sup> Among theorists who have attempted to maintain some substance within the term, the attempts at expansion have been diverse. Axel Honneth, in *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991] extends the term to include Foucault's work in a comparison with Adorno's and Habermas'; Dominick La Capra draws in Heideggerians and psychoanalysis in general as well, in *Soundings in Critical Theory* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989]. In one of the more unusual moves of this sort, Slavoj Žižek suggests that Adorno was actually an anachronism, as he was always a good follower of Lacan, and hence Lacanian psychoanalysis must be encompassed within the term critical theory. See "The Deadlock of 'Repressive Desublimation'", in his *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* [London; Verso, 1994].

<sup>55</sup> On Marx's formulation, see Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender", in *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*, eds. Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], p.31. On the radicalization of the Kantian critique within critical theory, see Thomas McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School", *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in*

is best credited to Max Horkheimer. Horkheimer's counterpoising of critical and traditional theory has established reflexivity as the basis for those philosophies which claim to continue in this tradition. By turning back upon itself and its authors, critical theory seeks to understand itself. It is this notion of reflexivity which runs throughout my thesis, as well as serving as a starting point for my consideration of the reflexive basis of critical theory.

In his 1937 essay "Traditional and Critical Theory", Horkheimer contrasts what he understood as the prevailing theoretical norms with an alternative, a form of theory which recognizes that theory itself can "be understood only in the context of real social processes".<sup>56</sup> Attempting to assimilate itself within the burgeoning scientific worldview of modern European intellectual life, philosophy as traditional theory developed an instrumental self-understanding:

The traditional idea of theory is based on scientific activity within the division of labor at a particular stage in the latter's development. It corresponds to the activity of the scholar which takes place alongside all the other activities of a society but in no immediate clear connection with them.<sup>57</sup>

Yet such traditional theory never truly reconciled itself to such a position within the division of labour. Theory continued to differentiate itself from the mundane world, which remained its object. The activities of theory were themselves separate from this world of lived experience. With this unwillingness to be part of the world, the relationship between theory and the rest of society remained oblique.

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*Contemporary Critical Theory* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991], p.43.

<sup>56</sup> Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell & others [New York: Continuum, 1972], p.194.

<sup>57</sup> Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Theory*, p.197.

In contrast to this traditional mode of theorizing, Horkheimer's critical theory demanded that the scholar serve as a reference point. The existence of the scholar within critical thought is the source of its distinctiveness.

Its opposition to the traditional concept of theory springs in general from a difference not so much of objects as of subjects. For men[sic] of the critical mind, the facts, as they emerge from the work of society, are not extrinsic in the same degree as they are for the savant...<sup>58</sup>

Critical theory is distinguished from traditional theory by its reflexivity; rather than positing the scholar as beyond the world which is being scrutinized, the scholar's own position is also part of this world, and cannot be ignored.

The scholar's position within the world, however, does not allow the scholar to embrace the world. Critical theory, as formulated by Horkheimer, is an attempt to keep alive a socialist project in the face of fascist popular movements. Theoretical identification of the intellectual with the historical mission of the proletariat is no longer possible; without this grounding, many theorists abandon hope altogether. Horkheimer suggests critical theory as the alternative:

When the optimism is shattered in periods of crushing defeat, many intellectuals risk falling into a pessimism about society and a nihilism which are just as ungrounded as their exaggerated optimism had been. They cannot bear the thought that the kind of thinking which is most topical, which has the deepest grasp of the historical situation, and is most pregnant with the future, must at certain times isolate the subject and throw him[sic] back upon himself.<sup>59</sup>

Theory's former referents have collapsed, and the intellectual can no longer be sublimated within the mass movement. The intellectual now becomes the reference point for the act of

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<sup>58</sup> Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Theory*, p.209.

<sup>59</sup> Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Theory*, p.214.

theorizing. With the disappearance of the social grounding for socialist theorizing, Horkheimer invokes the notion of a "dynamic unity with the oppressed class", simultaneously demanding solidarity and distance.<sup>60</sup> The meaning of this relationship within Horkheimer's own work becomes so murky that the character of the project itself is dubious; the critical theorists' criticism of bourgeois intellectuals develops a desperate tone.<sup>61</sup>

For the original generation of critical theorists, the intellectual of critical theory, beginning as a socially engaged intellectual, is eventually driven out of the world. Walter Benjamin and Frederick Pollock both identified with the loneliness of the critical theorist in the original essay,<sup>62</sup> the theorists' sense of isolation intensified as the horrors of Nazism became evident. After the war, Theodor Adorno reconsidered the meaning of the intellectual's solidarity with the oppressed:

For the intellectual, inviolable isolation is now the only way of showing some measure of solidarity. All collaboration, all the human worth of social mixing and participation, merely masks a tacit acceptance of inhumanity. It is the sufferings of men[sic] that should be shared: the smallest step towards their pleasures is one towards the hardening of their pains.<sup>63</sup>

The only grounding for the critical intellectual is now the solitary intellectual; the worldly participation of the philosopher, either in action or utopian imaginings, is the sanctioning of barbarity.

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<sup>60</sup> Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Theory*, p.215.

<sup>61</sup> Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. Benjamin Gregg [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985], pp.54-55.

<sup>62</sup> Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, pp.50-51.

<sup>63</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. [London: Verso, 1974], p.26.

The retreat from the world should not obscure the two vital contributions of the original formulations of critical theory to an understanding of academe: first, the intellectual and the act of theorizing are formed through social processes, a process which is not altered even if the intellectual should attempt to escape from the world; and second, theory must ground itself upon the figure of this intellectual, as a socially constituted, socially situated act by a socially constituted, socially situated being. It is with these two senses that I continue to use the term critical theory.

### *"The Culture of Critical Discourse"*

American sociologist Alvin W. Gouldner suggested that all of the theoretical activities within academe are situated within "the culture of critical discourse (CCD)". For Gouldner, academe is a culture whose entire basis is discourse. Justification within academe is dependent on its discourses being subject to repeated self-examination and self-monitoring; justification depends on the reflexivity of the discourses. Academic discourse is characterized by this reflexivity:

...[T]he culture of critical speech forbids reliance upon the speaker's person, authority, or status in society to justify his[sic] claims. As a result, CCD de-authorizes all speech grounded in traditional societal authority, while it authorizes itself... as the standard of *all* "serious" speech. From now on, persons and their social positions must not be visible in their speech. Speech becomes impersonal. Speakers hide behind their speech. Speech seems to be disembodied, de-contextualized and self-grounded.<sup>64</sup>

Academic speech could not rely upon external referents to establish its validity; justification occurs exclusively within academe, and must withstand the scrutiny of academe. Gouldner

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<sup>64</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* [New York: Seabury Press, 1979], p.29. Emphasis in the original.

suggested that the premises of this critical activity were so firmly accepted within academia that they had, in fact, become an ideology, distinctive to the ascendent academic class.

The culture of critical discourse and critical theory (in the sense of the Frankfurt School) begin to coincide as the twofold reflexivity of the critical theorist becomes part of the discursive reflexivity of academe. The universalized pretensions of the abstract philosopher have been revealed to have a history, just as do the philosophers themselves. As these histories enter the discursive culture of academe, they comprise part of the reflexive response of academic theorizing; however obliquely, social situating becomes part of theoretical self-grounding.

Traditional theory in the sense which Horkheimer conceived of it is at best an endangered creature, certainly within oppositional political thought. The process of formal deduction from indisputable facts -- part of philosophy's assimilation to scientism<sup>65</sup> -- has not vanished, but neither is it hegemonic. With this absence of hegemony, theorists can no longer simply claim aloofness from the world, a claim repeatedly and successfully critiqued on the basis of constructed identities. Moreover, traditional theory is forced at some level to attempt reflexivity; as part of academic discourse, it must respond to this discourse. To the extent that theory and theorist must continually establish claims to legitimacy, there is a plethora of theoretical endeavours currently underway which can all claim the label of 'critical'.

The question now emerges: what does it mean to engage in 'critical thought', in an age where the claim to such critical activity has become commonplace? Instrumentalist explanations for the *telos* of such theorizing have never entirely lost their allure, yet they

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<sup>65</sup> Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Theory*, pp.188-190.

appear increasingly improbable as one revolutionary agent after another fragments. Once the expression of theory as embodied by theorists (in conjunction with practice embodied by the movement) has been lost, what remains to critical theory? Critical theorizing risks simply taking its place within a division of labour, finding itself in the same position for which Horkheimer indicted traditional theory.

Critical theory is driven back onto the figure of the intellectual. This figure now stands at the centre of social critique, yet remains vague. The first generation of critical theorists, despite Horkheimer's admonishment to resist the temptation, did succumb to pessimism (with notable exceptions).<sup>66</sup> But the retreat from the world is not the position of choice for the socially engaged theorist; intellectuals continue to grapple with the significance of being an intellectual in relation to popular movements.

This excursion into the formation of critical theory has been necessary precisely because of the commonness of the term (within academe). Within the mode of production of repetition, 'critical theory' declines in meaning as its frequency of invocation increases. By returning Horkheimer's construction of critical theory, I hope that my own use of critical theory is able to retain its original ambition of attempting to mediate the everyday and the academic. It is in this sense that I speak of the critical theories of Arendt, Mannheim and Althusser.

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<sup>66</sup> ... such as Herbert Marcuse.

## Intellectuals on the Lam: Arendt, Mannheim, and Althusser

Each of the three components of my examination of regroundings of theory in relation to the everyday begins with a particular theorist. The figures -- Hannah Arendt, Karl Mannheim, Louis Althusser -- are disparate; they are neither similar enough to be encompassed within a 'perspective', nor so thoroughly dissimilar to camouflage an attempt at 'representation'. Their productive careers overlap in a span ranging from World War One until the late 1970s. Arendt and Mannheim were both twice exiled, while Althusser spent his working career in France. The former figures eschewed partisan affiliations -- in both theory and public -- while Althusser was both a committed marxist and member of the PCF. Despite their varying specific contexts, the three do share a broad intellectual background. All are informed by Hegel: for Mannheim, as a positive influence; for Arendt and in particular Althusser, as a wellspring of philosophical folly. While only Althusser was a marxist of any breed, both Mannheim and Arendt read Marx seriously, without dismissing his work. All three are driven to return to the European experience of fascism and communism. Most significantly for my purposes, each responds to the collapse of certitude with an attempt to revitalize the act of theorizing within a fragmented modernity.<sup>67</sup>

For Hannah Arendt, the impetus for this process is provided by totalitarianism, not as an outside horror threatening the liberal west, but as a flip side of modernity. The fate of

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<sup>67</sup> I do not, however, want to overemphasize their shared intellectual tradition. Mannheim and Arendt both were influenced and in turn influenced the theoretical traditions of their adopted lands: for Mannheim, the tradition was British sociology; for Arendt, it was early American republicanism. Althusser, on the other hand, emphatically refused to acknowledge the influence of virtually all his contemporaries.

democratic polities rests on their ability to create public politics. In looking for a means of accomplishing such a task, Arendt considers the position of the theorist in such a politics, concluding that such a figure is incompatible with republican virtue. The intellectual within Arendt's work is denied access to everyday life by the ephemeral character of the theoretical enterprise.

Karl Mannheim's crisis is provoked by the degeneration of the Weimar Republic into civil war. Liberal politics was unable to mitigate the intense antagonism of political contestants; Mannheim turns to the intellectual for an epistemological mitigation, not as a reconciliation, but as a relational process, wherein knowledge can only be found within the totality of perspectives. Mannheim's intellectual, as the only figure capable of moving towards such a position, is forced to become the planner of the everyday..

Louis Althusser reacts to the failure of the PCF (and marxist parties in general) to realize its political project. The Leninist party's failure to realize a workers' revolution leads Althusser into the sweeping reconfiguration of theory and practice, wherein the intellectual must carry on class struggle in the realm of ideas, but can never directly enter into the everyday.

Throughout this introduction, I have avoided defining 'the intellectual', and I intend to continue to do so. There is no universal category of 'intellectual', nor theory, nor philosophy, nor politics, whose substance can be translated across the work of the three thinkers whose critical works figure prominently in my thesis; quite to the contrary, in the course of attempting to establish a critical social theory, Arendt, Mannheim and Althusser all attempt to give new meaning to the category. Each begins with an intellectual necessarily

'stealing' from the everyday; I wish to follow through their attempts to find a refuge for this figure.

The following discussions of these writers are not intended to provide a comprehensive recounting nor a thorough-going critique of the enormous body of work of these figures. Instead, I start each of the chapters with the attempt of each theorist to find the basis for a critical theory, and then turn to the breakdown of the attempt. My rationale for such a course lies in the conviction that, while each of the attempts considered is unsuccessful in establishing a grounding for critical theory, each offers an insight into the components necessary to conceive of critical theory within academe. Together, the contributions from these diverse philosophical styles present the rudiments of what it might mean to speak of critical theory today.

## Chapter One

### ***The Vita Contemplativa*** **Hannah Arendt & the isolation of philosophy**

My discussion of the position of the philosopher within critical theories begins with the work of a woman who, despite her intense influence upon her contemporaries, adamantly denied that she was a philosopher:

I am not a philosopher. My profession -- if it can be called that -- is political theory, I have bid philosophy my final farewell. As you know, I did study philosophy, but that does not mean that I have stuck to it.<sup>1</sup>

Hannah Arendt's renunciation of philosophical work is intertwined with her conception of politics, and the incompatibility of the two. One could not be a philosopher and still live within the political world which, for Arendt, was the life which makes us human.

This concern for living in politics marks all of Arendt's work, a concern suspended between the twin heirs of the Enlightenment, republican democracy and totalitarianism. A student of Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, Arendt fled first from Nazi Germany and then from occupied France, finding refuge in the United States. Yet the American republic, so

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, in a 1964 television interview with Günther Gaus, quoted from Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982].

celebrated by Arendt,<sup>2</sup> was never far from sliding into modernity's totalitarian alternative.<sup>3</sup> The dual legacy of totalitarianism and republicanism informs all of Arendt's thought, providing her with the basis to argue against the compatibility of philosophy and politics.

My chapter begins with Arendt's argument, reiterated throughout her writings, on the incommensurability of the life demanded by politics and that demanded by philosophy. Arendt's distinction echoes the attempt made by her teacher, Karl Jaspers, to preserve 'the idea of the university' within a fragmenting modern concept of knowledge. Jaspers' attempt to retain philosophical unity within the post-war German university in turn resonates with the academic reformations of the German Enlightenment and its scholastic predecessors.

Against this line of reasoning, which seeks an ontological distinction between the process of philosophy and the everyday, I next turn to the notion of a technology of knowledge. The shifting status of the body in western epistemology moves towards a detachment of the intellectual from the corporeal. Alfred Sohn-Rethel traces the construction of an intellectual realm of activities which abstracts itself from the everyday, yet none the less retains the characteristics of labour; the ontological purity of philosophy breaks down. In my concluding remarks in this chapter, I return to Arendt's impetus for this duality, in an effort

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<sup>2</sup> Arendt's *On Revolution* [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1977] is a celebration of both the original American constitution and the workers' councils of twentieth-century revolutions, which Arendt viewed as the spiritual successors to the American revolutionaries.

<sup>3</sup> Such fears are expressed most articulately in Arendt's correspondence with Karl Jaspers in the 1950's, wherein Arendt refers to "developments that are all too familiar." Hannah Arendt & Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*, eds. Lotte Kohler & Hans Saner; trans. Robert & Rita Kimber [San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1992], p.213. While many of these comparisons are provoked by America's enthusiastic response to McCarthyism, they are not restricted to it; Arendt responded to the 1952 Republican election victory by calling Eisenhower a "dangerous idiot", drawing parallels between the characters in the Republican campaign and in the Nazis' rise (p.203).

to reconsider her insistence on the separation of philosophy and politics, while retaining the materiality of Sohn-Rethel's epistemological critique.

My choice of Arendt's conception of philosophy as a starting point for this exercise is motivated by the ambiguity of her conception. In significant aspects, Arendt's presentation of the other-worldliness of the philosophical appears to position her stolidly within a tradition of denigrating the physical in favour of the intellectual -- a stance often seen as indicative of western thought in general.<sup>4</sup> But while Arendt maintains the distinctiveness of philosophy and the everyday, she subverts this ranking: freedom is not achieved through the escape from the world, but through living within it. In Arendt's sense, philosophy is apolitical, but she is unwilling to dismiss either philosophy or politics. The tension generated by this paradox provides an entrance into my consideration of academe and politics.

## Public and Private

Throughout the written corpus of Arendt, the necessity of the distinction between public and private remains central for her understanding of politics. Beginning with her *Habilitationschrift* (eventually published in the 1950's *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*), Arendt's central preoccupation emerges with the issue of being able to live in

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<sup>4</sup> It might also be possible to read Arendt's position as the inverse of this ranking: elevating action at the expense of theory; I do not believe either dichotomization is tenable within Arendt's work, however.

public.<sup>5</sup> The brutal logic of totalitarianism distilled the importance of public discourse in Arendt's work, becoming a major theme in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and remaining central in all her subsequent work.<sup>6</sup> An articulated public sphere was the only means through which liberty could be sustained.

This determination to distinguish between public and private has long been a controversial aspect of Arendt's work, earning her dismissals for wanting to revive the Greek *polis*, without regard to the injustices underlying it. More astute critiques have suggested that attempts to base politics in a "public" space, distinct from non-political private spaces, necessarily demand that such a public be homogenized. The strictures which differentiate public from private demarcate the spaces in such a manner that radical difference -- and possibly all difference -- must be purged from the public. Consensus on what constitutes legitimate public concerns necessarily includes the act of banishing those who dispute the bases for these judgements.<sup>7</sup> Within such a framework, Arendt's work is fatally flawed, as it can never escape the exclusions of the public.

Such a critiques, however, overlook Arendt's own demands that the public be a space of diversity. Arendt certainly does find the inspiration for her formulation of the public realm

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<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, revised edition; trans. Richard & Clara Winston [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971]. In this early work, Arendt sets forth Varnhagen's salons as foci of public life. While comparisons of Arendt and Varnhagen are common, this work itself is often overlooked. For one example of the comparison, see Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994], p.15.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edition with added prefaces [San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1968].

<sup>7</sup> Iris Marion Young makes this argument concerning the 'traditional' portrayals of a public realm which she sees as continuing to dominate modern political thought: these conceptions of civic space are predicated on an homogenous male citizenry. See her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990], pp.97-111.

within the Greek *polis* and its philosophers, particularly Aristotle. It is from Aristotle that Arendt draws both the centrality of political life, as well as the discursive character of such politics: "Aristotle's definition of man as *zōon politikon*... can be fully understood only if one adds his second famous definition of man as a *zōon logon ekhon* ("a living being capable of speech").<sup>8</sup> Yet she does not simply try to resuscitate Aristotelian politics; rather, she attempts to develop this configuration into the basis for participatory democracy within modernity.<sup>9</sup>

Arendt's work vocally advocates an understanding of politics as rooted in shared disclosure within a public realm -- the space of politics. Such a sharing of experience constitutes politics; it is the activity which gives meaning to the diversity of human existence:

For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life...<sup>10</sup>

The public realm exists as "a space of appearances",<sup>11</sup> wherein the members of the political community create themselves as a community. It is through this public disclosure that a common world is formed.

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<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958], p.27.

<sup>9</sup> Arendt's commitment to such a radically democratic project is too frequently overlooked by both her critics and advocates, though it is the topic of a major work, *On Revolution*, wherein Arendt proclaims the various workers' councils of twentieth century revolutions to be the spiritual successors to the founders of her beloved American republic. This view remains in her later works, particularly "On Violence" and the interview "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution", both contained in her *Crises of the Republic* [San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1972].

<sup>10</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.57.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* [San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1968], p.viii.

In her work, Arendt is evasive as to specifically what might constitute public realm in the contemporary world. Her frequent references to the ancient *polis* in *The Human Condition* strongly suggest that 'the common meeting ground of all' to be exactly that: a single unified space within the political community. In *On Violence* and *On Revolution*, however, Arendt's examples of authentic political action are very different: student movements and revolutionary councils. Far from being static, institutionalized political structures, Arendt presents these 'spontaneous' political creations as exemplars of the capacity of political creativity. Participation and duration in such political formations is fluid and often brief,<sup>12</sup> but Arendt's space of politics is emphatically not an homogenous area, from which difference has been banished. To the contrary, such a space demands diversity:

Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.<sup>13</sup>

Diversity within public discourse is critical for Arendt's politics, but such diversity must be brought into a common theatre or its meanings are lost, with a corresponding decline in the quality of political discourse.

This public space is held distinct from other activities of life, in particular those of the home. For Arendt, the threat to the modern *polis* is found within the transition through which properly private concerns become public -- through which such concerns become politicized. Arendt interprets this as the rise of the social realm, a realm which interposes itself between the public and private, and threatens to engulf them both. To understand the significance of

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussions of Arendt's concept of political space, see the conclusion to this chapter, as well as the conclusion to chapter three.

<sup>13</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.57.

this separation, and the place of the philosopher, I now turn to Arendt's presentation of everyday life: the *vita activa*.

*The vita activa: labour, work, action*

The *vita activa*, consisting of labour, work and action, is the locale within which politics is situated. By describing the *vita activa* as Arendt's rendition of everyday life, it should be clear that Arendt has a very different image of the constitution of daily life than that of Henri Lefebvre.<sup>14</sup> In Arendt's writings, the components of human existence include not just those activities which produce and reproduce physical life, but those which fabricate the community: political action. Politics is as much a part of Arendt's version of everyday life as labour and work.

The *vita activa* comprised the "unquietness" of the world: the materialities of human existence. Arendt inverts the Christian (and earlier) suspicion of such worldliness, transposing it into the political condition.<sup>15</sup> Of the three components which Arendt identifies -- labour, work, and action -- only action could correspond to politics and public life, because only action offers the possibility of permanence and togetherness.

"Labour", for Arendt, encompasses those activities characterized by the transience of their products. Labour produces materials for immediate consumption, and while it is the necessary precondition for all life, it leaves no lasting traces; while such labour may be performed in company, its impermanence constrains it in the prepolitical. "Work", in contrast

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<sup>14</sup> See the introductory chapter for Lefebvre's classic formulation of the everyday within marxist philosophy.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.12.

to labour, produces the world in which we live -- the products of work outlast those of labour, and are intended to outlast individuals themselves. Yet such production is instrumental; the utilitarian character of such action denies the possibility of togetherness which transcends individual ends.<sup>16</sup> Freedom cannot be founded on a politics rooted in labour or work.

Despite her respect for the popular organizations which instigated modern revolutions, Arendt sees their tragic error as the attempt to politicize labour/work. Issues of physical production and distribution -- in particular poverty -- are 'social questions' which are not appropriate substance for politics; the politicization of such issues foredoomed such revolutions:

No revolution has ever solved the 'social question' and liberated men [sic] from the predicament of want, but all revolutions... have followed the example of the French Revolution and used and misused the mighty forces of misery and destitution in their struggle against tyranny or oppression.... What has always made it so terribly tempting to follow the French Revolution on its foredoomed path is not only the fact that the liberation from necessity, because of its urgency, will always take precedence over the building of freedom, but... that the uprising of the poor against the rich carries with it an altogether different and much greater momentum of force than the rebellion of the oppressed against their oppressors.<sup>17</sup>

The 'social question' is a powerful motivating force, but a profoundly anti-political one. Freedom is the only appropriate subject for political action, and can only be lost in the attempt to resolve the 'social question'.

Action is the only element of the *vita activa* appropriate to politics. Political action results in disclosure in a public sphere. It offers the potential of "earthly immortality", through

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<sup>16</sup> *The Human Condition* is an extended exploration of the *vita activa*, and details Arendt's understanding of the interconnectedness of its components.

<sup>17</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, p.112.

which human words and deeds will be recalled.<sup>18</sup> The public realm is not simply the field for such action; it is the field brought into being through action. The political public thus constituted is the only point where citizens can hear and be heard, and in doing so recognize diversity and community.

This potential for immortality is crucial to Arendt's conception of the political, not out of a desire to immortalize any particular individual, but because such immortality underlies collective remembrance. The diversity of perspectives disclosed in the public realm are not merely fleeting opinions which should be forgotten in the wake of subsequent actions. Deeds performed in public are not merely relevant in themselves, but for their ability to provoke an ongoing series of reflections and reconsiderations. Rather than rendering the political immutable, Arendt's concept of immortality is intended to ensure that it continues to transform, not according to caprice, but according to thoughtful deliberation. A secure public realm offers guidance, but not pre-determination, to the actions of the present.

Arendt's determination to segregate politics from labour and work has provoked the sharpest critiques of her work.<sup>19</sup> Arendt herself had difficulty in demonstrating the distinction

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<sup>18</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.55.

<sup>19</sup> Mary O'Brien demonstrates the potentially misogynist implications of Arendt's exclusion of labour from the public realm in *The Politics of Reproduction* [Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981], pp.99-110. For O'Brien, women can never enter Arendt's public as women because Arendt's conception of labour was inevitably "the labor of our body," and what people "share with all other forms of animal life was not considered to be human." (*The Human Condition*, pp.83;84.) Thus women, by virtue of their role in biological reproduction, were ineligible for public life.

Various authors have attempted to salvage Arendt's public space by demonstrating its compatibility with such 'social questions'. John F. Sitton argues that Arendt herself could not adequately distinguish between issues worthy of politics and those which could be resolved administratively. Sitton suggests that Arendt's confusion is the result of an unclear understanding of property. Phillip Hansen points out while Arendt lambasts revolutionary movements for focusing on the 'social question', she also recognizes that these movements have nevertheless attempted to create revamped political space. See Sitton, "Hannah Arendt's Argument for Council Democracy", *Polity: The Journal of the Northeastern Political Science Association* [v.XX,no.1 (fall 1987)], pp.94-

between properly "political" and "social" aspects of given issues.<sup>20</sup> Without diminishing the importance of these critiques, my focus lies elsewhere. Arendt sets action in a privileged position for the world of politics, but it can never be detached from work and labour. The latter provide the preconditions which make action possible. Action may be distinct from labour and work, but all three share the same world. Entirely absent from this world, however, is philosophy and the figure of the philosopher.

### **The *Vita Contemplativa*: Philosophy**

Arendt's most extensive 'philosophical' text is *The Human Condition*, an extended consideration of the *vita activa*. From the very beginning Arendt makes it clear that philosophy has no place within this world. *Theōria* -- contemplation -- stands in opposition to the worldly noise produced by labour, work and action. Philosophical freedom can only be found beyond this world. In this respect, Arendt recognizes Socrates as the last true philosopher -- a figure who, by eschewing the writing of his thoughts, resisted the temptation of striving for worldly immortality:

...for it is obvious that, no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be

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99; Hansen, "Hannah Arendt: Speech and the Public Space of Appearance", *Toward a Humanist Political Economy* (with Harold Chorney) [Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992], p.155.

<sup>20</sup> See the 1972 exchange, at a conference at York University, between Arendt, Mary McCarthy, Richard Bernstein, C.B. Macpherson, Albrecht Wellmer and George Baird, "On Hannah Arendt" in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979], pp.315-319.

concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them. He has entered the *vita activa* and chosen its way of permanence and potential immortality.<sup>21</sup>

The permanence which philosophy reflects upon is not that of politics; the writing of philosophy transforms it from a contemplative act to an attempted political act.

In her intended three-volume work *The Life of the Mind*,<sup>22</sup> Arendt turns to philosophy, providing the *vita contemplativa* with its own triptych: thinking, willing and judging. Arendt saw this study as necessary because, contrasted with the *vita activa*, "the contrary notion of complete quietness in the Vita Contemplativa was so overwhelming that compared with this stillness all other differences between the various activities in the Vita Activa disappeared."<sup>23</sup> Philosophy was so distinct in its setting in the *vita contemplativa* that its constituent components vanished. The *vita contemplativa* shared no common ground with the *vita activa*.

The central concern of the *vita activa* was immortality: preserving the words and deeds performed in public, so that they might illuminate the future. The appropriate concern of the *vita contemplativa*, in contrast, was not immortality but eternity: a perpetuity necessarily beyond human artifice and incompatible with worldly activity. The distinction is between "various modes of active engagement in things of this world, on one side, and pure

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<sup>21</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.20.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt died after completing a draft of the second volume. The drafts, *Thinking and Willing* have been published as *The Life of the Mind*, including as an appendix "Judging", excerpted from Arendt's lectures on Kant. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, one-volume edition, ed. Mary McCarthy [San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981].

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, volume one: Willing*, p.6. On a typographical note, while *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* are italicized in most publications of Arendt's work, they are not in *Life of the Mind*. In all quotations, I maintain the style of the source from which the quote is taken.

thought culminating in contemplation, on the other..."<sup>24</sup> Within the *vita activa*, all creation is rooted in *technē*, and the potential for immortality is inextricable from continuing transformation through future political actions. Philosophical eternity, in contrast, does not exist within the transient world of lived experience, but in a purified realm of ideas, which is not answerable to the actions of humanity. The experience of philosophy was of a different order than experience in the mundane world. It presumed a radical inversion of the significance of materiality. Philosophy necessarily disdained action, labour and work:

To put it quite simply, in the proverbial absent-mindedness of the philosopher, everything present is absent because something actually absent is present to his mind, and among the things absent is the philosopher's own body. Both the philosopher's hostility toward politics, "the petty affairs of men," and his hostility toward the body have little to do with individual convictions and beliefs; they are inherent in the experience itself. While you are thinking, you are unaware of your own corporeality...<sup>25</sup>

The world of philosophy could not intersect with the world of politics; materiality necessarily distracted from philosophy's attempt at contemplation. The world might remain an object of contemplation, but in the process of contemplation itself, its presence was impossible.

Arendt's detachment of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* establishes separate ontological positions for philosophy and politics. Philosophy can only exist in a realm cleansed of the traces of everyday life. Philosophy, in this ontological category, is not labour -- action rooted in the body -- but a separate 'life of the mind'. As such, it may consist of persistence,

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<sup>24</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, volume one: Willing*, pp.85-86.

inspiration or revelation, but it defies attempts to find a grounding. Intellectual activity, unlike manual labour, is not part of our physical world; it simply is.<sup>26</sup>

While within the *vita activa* Arendt has sought the basis for radical democracy, her construction of the *vita contemplativa* presents a conservative epistemology. The life of the mind is not connected to the life of the body; politics and philosophy have no meeting place, except in so far as the philosopher renounces philosophical purity and inserts words and deeds into the world as texts. In presenting the essential separateness of philosophy, Arendt recapitulates an older notion of the gap between theory and practice, and within this gap the relation of the academe to the larger world.

## The Idea of the University

Arendt's detachment of the intellectual-as-philosopher has strong resonances with the work of her teacher, Karl Jaspers, which itself resonates with much older versions. In the wake of the Second World War, Karl Jaspers published a revised and expanded version of a

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<sup>26</sup> While I will return to Arendt's notions of philosophy and politics in this chapter and those which follow, I must emphasize that my focus in this section of my thesis is on Arendt's conception of philosophy and its relation to the political. As a result, I am not treating her concept of the political as extensively as would be required were I claiming to analyse the entire scope of her thought. In particular, a proper account of Arendt's concept of political cannot be separated from her concept of power, "the ability not just to act but to act in concert." Arendt, "On Violence", *Crises of the Republic*, p.143. The political lies at the core of Arendt's thought; having banished philosophy from politics, philosophy is not central to most of her work.

twenty-year old monograph, *The Idea of the University*.<sup>27</sup> Jaspers' work, republished as part of the effort to resurrect German scholarship after Nazism, is most notable for its anachronistic aura, even at the time of the original publication. Harkening back to the ideals of the university reformers of the German Enlightenment, Jaspers envisioned a university in which 'scholarship' was the unity of research and instruction. The university was to be "a community of scholars and students engaged in the task of seeking truth."<sup>28</sup> Within this community, the tensions of "intellectual battles" contribute to this unity through their conciliation as part of the quest for truth: "True scholars, even in the heat of controversy, remain firmly united with one another."<sup>29</sup>

This collegial unity is part of a greater philosophical unity. The diversity of scholarship is all subordinated to the philosophical ideal of pure knowledge. Knowledge is sought for its own sake, rather than for crass utilitarian purposes. As such, the "philosophical faculty embraces all other branches of knowledge.... Thus from the viewpoint of research and theory alone, the philosophical faculty by itself comprises the whole university."<sup>30</sup> The quest for knowledge within the university demands that all scholarly work contain itself within this vision. In short, the university -- a community of scholars and students -- must be held together by a metaphysical ideal -- the autonomous quest for absolute truth.

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<sup>27</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, ed. Karl W. Deutsch; trans. H.A.T. Reiche & H.F. Vanderschmidt [London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1959.]. The English translation omits the last parts of the German work, which deal specifically with the post-war German university.

<sup>28</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, p.19.

<sup>29</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, pp.75,76.

<sup>30</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, p.100.

The philosopher as academic within Jaspers' ideal owed allegiance to this ideal; all other worldly connections had to be subordinate to this commitment. While Jaspers defends the absoluteness of academic freedom -- wherein all worldviews credited as scientific should be welcomed into the university, even if they deny the validity of Jaspers' ideal<sup>31</sup> -- such freedom does not translate into license for public life beyond academe. Beyond the university, the academic functions only as a private citizen: there is no necessary connection between academic freedom and political freedom.<sup>32</sup> Because of the non-utilitarian nature of the academics' search for truth, they cannot intervene in public life as philosophers.<sup>33</sup>

The English translation of Jaspers' text concludes with a cautionary note on the follies of "professorial interventions" in politics. The idea of the university transcends partisanship and national allegiances:

Thus, while the university is part of a nation, it has its sights set on goals above and beyond nationhood. Differences aside, in this respect, at least, it is akin to the idea of the church.... Members of the university, whether faculty, deans or the president himself, abuse their position if they should choose to hold political rallies in favour of either a particular party or of the country as a whole. They serve their nation and all mankind solely through the medium of intellectual creativity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "The university not only tolerates but demands that persons who oppose its aims be admitted to it." Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, p.82. Immediately after this point, Jaspers suggests that such freedom ceases when it conflicts with the actual functioning of the university as an institution; given the potential contradiction within this position, it is not surprising that Jaspers does not pursue the question of how such conflicts are to be resolved.

<sup>32</sup> "For it is quite conceivable that academic freedom may continue even after the constitutional freedom of speech has been abolished." Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, p.143.

<sup>33</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, pp.142-143.

<sup>34</sup> Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, p.145.

The university's contribution to public life comes not through direct intervention or participation, but through the quest for Truth. Academe is not governed by the same laws as civic life; the two realms cannot merge.

Like Arendt, Jaspers maintains the necessity of withdrawal from the world in order to pursue philosophy. But while Arendt is content to cast the philosopher into eternal isolation within the *vita contemplativa*, Jaspers attempts to maintain a philosophical community apart from the everyday, in the form of the university. For Jaspers, the relevant consideration is not the loneliness of the life of the mind, but its detachment from the mundane. Knowledge is developed for its own sake within academe. Such knowledge cannot answer to the utilitarian demands of the everyday; its governance is the metaphysical refinement of Absolute Truth.

Jaspers' attempt to rehabilitate scholarship, based upon the separation and autonomy of the university, restates a much older distinction between knowledge and everyday life. Jaspers sought to re-establish an idea of the university which was given modern form within the German Enlightenment. The components of Jaspers' ideal -- the unity of teaching and research, the autonomy of knowledge, the detachment of academe from the external world -- reiterate the objectives of this earlier round of reforms. In seeking to consolidate philosophical reflection within the university, Jaspers reiterates the earlier 'idea of the university' promulgated by German idealists a century and a half previously.

In reworking his monograph after World War II, Jaspers concentrated on the political threat posed to scholarship by the public world. But it is not merely political involvement which threatens the sanctity of knowledge within this idea of the university; everyday life

beyond academe itself threatens such an existence. Academe, as a world onto itself, should be beyond the turbulence of mundane existence. Jaspers, attempting to re-establish a discredited intellectual milieu, attempted to capture non-academic fields, such as 'technology', and subjugate them to philosophy. While Jaspers recognized merit in intellectual activity beyond academe, his concern was to draw such activities within, to recover an epistemological monopoly.<sup>35</sup> His own intellectual precursors, however, demonstrated less respect for the world beyond the academy. University-based knowledge was complete -- unitary, absolute and true -- and engagement with the world would only sully this state.

F.W.J. Schelling, part of this earlier reform movement, emphasized this epistemological detachment in his *Lectures on the Method of University Studies*, a series of lectures delivered at the university in Jena in 1802. In one particularly striking passage, on the difficulty of finding fit instructors, Schelling captures the inherent distinctiveness of academic life:

Since our demand - namely, that all sciences should be treated in the spirit of universal absolute knowledge - is inherently right, the question, Where are capable teachers to be found? is easily answered. The teachers themselves have had the experience of a university education; were they but given intellectual freedom, not shackled by scientifically irrelevant considerations, they would be able to rise to the occasion and be in a position to form other capable teachers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> After arguing for the unique position of philosophy above (and encompassing) all other university studies, Jaspers calls for the expansion of university knowledge. "The whole content of modern knowledge and research must be integrated: broadening the scope of the university must initiate a genuine unification of all branches of knowledge." "The university is called upon to preserve the scientific spirit by transforming and assimilating the new materials and skills and integrating them in the light of a few leading ideas." Jaspers, *The Idea of the University*, p.100 and pp.100-101 respectively. Jaspers continues this line of thought in the remainder of his chapter in demonstrating how and why this integration should proceed with 'technology'.

<sup>36</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *On University Studies* trans. E.S. Morgan; ed. Norbert Guterman [Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966.], p.22.

Schelling's point is clear: it is not merely possible to sever the production and transmission of knowledge from the world outside; it is necessary. Suitable instructors must be those raised within the academic community. Knowledge within the university cannot be indebted to the outer world. Quite to the contrary, the "scientifically irrelevant" distractions of life detract from the philosophical quest. Academe in its ideal is self-contained, creating and diffusing its works within its own universe.<sup>37</sup>

The 'idea of the university', promoted by Schelling and his contemporaries, and later reclaimed by Jaspers, is less an epistemological rupture than the humanist reassertion of older conceptualizations of the university as the exclusive site for knowledge. Within the medieval European university the bases of the Enlightenment ideal were formed. Marked as a new means of accessing knowledge, the characteristics of knowledge claimed by the medieval university -- its novelty, the guild structure, the separation from the mundane, the unity of knowledge<sup>38</sup> -- are reformulated by the modern reformers. While the accuracy of such claims has been disputed, what is more significant here is their importance as the basis for an academic imaginary. The conviction of this shared epistemological experience continued to

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<sup>37</sup> Schelling, of course, was not alone in this thinking. For a presentation of Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of the university in relation to these points, see Daniel Fallon, *The German University: A Heroic Ideal in Conflict with the Modern World* [Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1980.], pp 27-31; also Jürgen Habermas, "The Idea of the University - Learning Processes", trans. John R. Blazek, *New German Critique* [no.41; spring/summer 1987], pp.9-10. It is worth noting that von Humboldt's reforms were influential in the American universities (Fallon, p.28).

<sup>38</sup> The literature on the medieval university and its system of learning is vast. Two critical collections which address the basis for these claims to the uniqueness and completeness of university-based knowledge, which have achieved near mythological status in the historiography of medieval learning, are John Murdoch & Edith Dudley Sylla (eds.) *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning* [Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1975] and James M. Kittelson & Pamela J. Transue (eds.), *Rebirth, Reform and Resilience: Universities in Transition 1300-1700* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984]. Both anthologies challenge the veracity of many of these assumptions.

serve as a referent in various attempts to demonstrate the validity of philosophical enterprises. The European university 'proved' the necessity and inevitability of separating knowledge and everyday life.

### *Philosophy & politics*

Arendt diverts her attention from philosophy because it is antithetical to public life. The eternal world of introspective thought is entirely other than the immortal world of political action. Distinguishing between two forms of truth -- factual truth created by human action, and rational truth uncovered by philosophical reflection -- Arendt insisted that rational truth had no place within the political:

... [H]istorically the conflict between truth and politics arose out of two diametrically opposed ways of life -- the life of the philosopher, ... and the way of life of the citizen. To the citizens' everchanging opinions about human affairs, which themselves were in a state of constant flux, the philosopher opposed the truth about those things which in their very nature were everlasting and from which, therefore, principles could be derived to stabilize human affairs.<sup>39</sup>

Politics, concerned with collective disclosure and hearing, was incompatible with the revelatory appearance of philosophical truth. The eternity of such knowledge was contrary to the human action required in the political.

Rather than politics overwhelming philosophy, as Jaspers feared, Arendt sees the threat of philosophy overwhelming politics, as the philosopher is unwilling to accept the transience of public beliefs. As Phillip Hansen observes, the philosopher entering public life will be tempted to destroy the public realm in order to preserve truth:

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<sup>39</sup> Arendt, "Truth and Politics", in her *Between Past and Future: eight exercises in political thought*, enlarged edition [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977], pp.232-233.

For the philosopher, the urge to join knowledge to political power is potentially overwhelming. Of course it is this urge which Arendt finds so problematic in Western political philosophy, and which must be quelled if philosophy and politics, two distinct ways of life, are to be preserved.<sup>40</sup>

Arendt shares an epistemological understanding of philosophy with Jaspers and his precursors: philosophy and everyday life comprise incompatible modes of existence. But while the latter group explored the shape of philosophical community, Arendt's work focused on political community. A philosophical community is at best a pale imitation of a vibrant public; at worst it threatens to supplant such a public.

But while Arendt formally forbids philosophy from intruding upon political life, her assumption of the ontological distinction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* cannot prevent it from insinuating itself into the public realm. As I have previously mentioned, Arendt's work is dogged by her own inability to demarcate political, social and private issues. The absoluteness of these distinctions within Arendt's work is not disclosed within the political, but fixed within the philosophical.<sup>41</sup> Arendt can never resolve this paradox, because philosophy is eternal: politics is created, but philosophy is discovered. Such a distinction becomes untenable, however, once one considers the possibility of a technology of knowledge.

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<sup>40</sup> Phillip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History and Citizenship* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], p.106.

<sup>41</sup> However, this absoluteness dissolves if one accepts Arendt's claim to be a political theorist instead of a philosopher. See the conclusion to this chapter for an elaboration of Arendt's sense of theory.

## Technologies of knowledge

The detachment of philosophy and the everyday can be understood as establishing the dualism of mind and body -- a dualism most evident in Arendt's opposition of the *vita contemplativa* of thinking/willing/judging to the *vita activa* of labour/work/action. It is a mark of Arendt's distinctiveness that she refused to subordinate the corporeal world to the life of the mind. The privileging of the intellect over physical experience is part of a long legacy of mind/body dichotomies within western European philosophy. This point is nothing new; it has been made by a variety of thinkers, in different forms and contexts, from the feminist thought of Mary O'Brien back through Nietzsche, Bergson and the German Romantics. In different ways, all have suggested that modernity (but not exclusively so, and in different guises) has split the body and the mind, privileging the latter.<sup>42</sup>

The point which I wish to make, however, is more than simply that intellectual knowledge is predicated upon such a split. Knowledge does not simply emerge from the amorphous depths of the severed individual mind; the privileging of the intellect in knowledge depends upon a particular method. This method, as a particular means of constructing knowledge, is a technology of knowledge.

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<sup>42</sup> The philosophical importance of corporeality is not merely restricted to the above-mentioned dissidents from the Enlightenment. It also plays a role in the thought of Enlightenment materialists, including Condillac, Diderot and the *idealogues*. For discussions these figures, and the body within Enlightenment debates, see Juliet Flower MacCannell's introduction to *Thinking Bodies* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994], and Mira Kamdar's "Corporal Politics: Diderot's Body of Representation" in the same volume.

*Bodies of knowledge (I): antiquity*

The notion of a technology of knowledge appears antithetical to the very notion of knowledge. In the philosophical tradition commonly traced to Greek antiquity, knowledge and *technē* are traditionally separate; indeed, this separation is presented as the constitutive moment of philosophy. *Theoria* was by definition a contemplative activity, considering the good life as a whole, not simply instrumental know-how.<sup>43</sup> Activities which inhibited this philosophical development were denigrated; in Arendt's rendition, labour and work are foremost among these.

Labour, those activities most removed from contemplation -- actions undertaken for the sake of the reproduction of our physical selves -- comprised activities which were held in common with animals; those who laboured were less than human.<sup>44</sup> Labour was not worthy of public contemplation; labour was remote from theory. Such philosophical contempt was not simply restricted to those whose activities allegedly produced nothing lasting; it also included the artisan, who might produce lasting works, yet still was confined by bodily action. The activities of the artisan were instrumental; the world was a means to an end. As Arendt observes, within Greek philosophy, such an instrumental attitude was contrary to the spirit of contemplation:

It was for no other reason than this attitude of *homo faber* to the world that the Greeks in their classical period declared the whole field of the arts and crafts, where men work with instruments and do something not for its own sake but in order to produce something else, to be *banausic*, a term perhaps

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<sup>43</sup> On this distance, see Don Ihde, *Technics and Praxis* [Dordrecht, Holland: D.Reidel Publishing Company, 1979], p.xix.

<sup>44</sup> "What men[sic] share with all other forms of animal life was not considered to be human." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.84.

best translated by 'philistine,' implying vulgarity of thinking and acting in terms of expediency. The vehemence of this contempt will never cease to startle us if we realize that the great masters of Greek sculpture were by no means excepted from the verdict.<sup>45</sup>

There is no conception of 'intellectual labour' within this interpretation of Greek philosophy, for intellectual activity and bodily labour are absolutely distinct; contemplation is opposed to all worldly activities.<sup>46</sup> This distinction is not only a formative proclamation of the privileging of mind over body; it is indeed a basis for the western exaltation of Greece as the birthplace of philosophy.<sup>47</sup> Philosophy is constituted through its distinction from *technē*.

This concept of philosophical contemplation enjoyed a lengthy domination, and indeed, continues to hold an attraction. Philosophical thought is distinct from experience; the two are incompatible. But to end my tale here would be to lose sight of the destabilization of this concept within early Christian thought. This destabilization, although again resolved in favour of detached intellect, heralded the return of the body to philosophy, displacing the ontological act of contemplation with that of intellectual labour.

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<sup>45</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp.156-157.

<sup>46</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.85

<sup>47</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel (whose work will be discussed below) puts forth this claim explicitly in his discussion of geometry in bronze age Egypt and later Greece. Sohn-Rethel proposes that while Egyptian geometry was a bodily skill involved in measurement, "[t]he geometry of the Greeks is of a purely intellectual character and detached from the practice of measurement." See his *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a critique of epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel [London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978], esp. Chapters 13, "Head and Hand in the Bronze Age"; and 15, "Mathematics, the Dividing-line of Intellectual and Manual Labour". The quote is from p.101.

It should be further noted that this interpretation is not solely found amidst the idiosyncatic collection of philosophers upon which I rely here. Bertrand Russell puts forth a similar argument in emphasizing the role of Orphic ascetism in forming "the conception of philosophy as a way of life." See his *A History of Western Philosophy* [London: Unwin Paperbacks, p.1979], p.43.

*Bodies of knowledge (II): Christian ambivalence*

Medieval Christian thought may appear as an unusual site for the rehabilitation of the body within philosophy; as an era of feudal hierarchies, in which peasant labourers were at the bottom, and familiar tales of the mortification of the flesh, the claim is easily made that this is merely a continuation of antiquity's anti-corporeal conception of knowledge. Such a claim, however, ignores the ambiguous position of the body in Christian thought, and its centrality to religion.

The significance of the body was manifold. Eucharistic devotion emphatically involved physical consumption of the material body of Christ, and was expected to precipitate bodily ecstasies; the doctrine of bodily resurrection was asserted literally, leading to intricate debates concerning the specific form in which the bodies of the faithful and the damned would be resurrected.<sup>48</sup> The veneration of saintly relics was demanded. Bodily experience was central to medieval Christian theology, to the extent that denial of the religiosity of the material body and Manichean dualities of worldly corruption and spiritual perfection were both characteristic and proof of heresies.<sup>49</sup> The theological importance of the body was

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<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of these issues and the overall importance of the body in medieval Christianity, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Christianity* [New York: Zone Books, 1991], in particular the essays "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century" and "Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts".

<sup>49</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Material Continuity...", *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p.240; Jacques Le Goff, "Trades and Professions as Represented in Medieval Confessors' Manuals", *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1980], p.109-110. The persistence of these doctrines can be seen in Carlo Ginzburg's account of the trials of Domenico Scandella at the close of the 16th century, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John & Anne Tedeschi [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982], as well as in the witch craze of the next century.

indisputable (unless one wished to be accused of heresy), and demanded philosophical attention.

The neglect of corporeal matters was a factor in suspicion of academics at the newly founded universities of the twelfth century. As instructors who collected a fee for their services, these figures were doubly suspect: not only did they participate in the dubious world of commerce, but the goods in which they trafficked -- knowledge -- did not belong to the world of mortals. Social historian Jacques Le Goff discusses the offence in conjunction with usury, which involved the traffic in time. The academics were teetering on the edge of mortal sin, by virtue of their status as academics:

St. Bernard, among others, flogged them verbally, calling them "vendors, merchants of words." What they sold was knowledge, which like time, belonged solely to God. But these thieves of knowledge would soon be vindicated, chiefly because of their *labor*.<sup>50</sup>

The academics were accused of selling knowledge, which was necessarily divine; their redemption came about by demonstrating that they were not claiming separation from the world, but were part of it, through their engagement in worldly labour.

The suspicion of the apparent idleness of the new university scholar and the nature of his actions was resolved by the thirteenth century. Bonaventure, a conservative theologian, acknowledged that philosophical investigation was a legitimate activity. If all devoted themselves only to manual labour, there would be no time for clerics to attend to essential religious devotions. But more importantly, the activities now deemed intellectual were also bodily labour:

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages*, trans. Patricia Ranum [New York: Zone Books, 1988], p.41; emphasis in the original.

In reality, except for the infirm, all among us labor: some by studying in order to instruct the faithful, others by reciting the divine office and praise of God, others by collecting alms for [our] common sustenance, still others by taking on domestic tasks in free obedience.<sup>51</sup>

Study, prayer and domestic tasks were all certified as labour. Philosophical contemplation was actually philosophical labour; it was not an activity apart from the world, but very much the result of mundane activity within the world. Those who engaged in intellectual duties still performed labour, no different in kind from manual labour. Although it was not to enjoy its privileged status for long, bodily experience was once more a contributor to knowledge.

### *Bodies of knowledge & bodies beyond knowledge*

While Bonaventure stressed the worldliness of intellectual labour, his contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, was busily weakening its connection with the mundane. While still maintaining the laborious quality of philosophy, Aquinas suggested that manual tasks could distract from a scholar's intellectual labours, and therefore it would be necessary to choose between the two forms of labour.<sup>52</sup> As rationality expressed humanity's distinction from beasts, it was clearly to be cultivated. The choice was clear. It was the scholar's religious duty to privilege intellectual labour, as the expression of humanity's distinctiveness and superiority. The academic philosopher quickly shifted from one whose labour was the equal of the manual labourer to one whose labour, and entire being, was superior.

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Mariateresa Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri, "The Intellectual", in *The Medieval World*, ed. Jacques Le Goff; trans. Lydia G. Cochrane [London: Collins & Brown, 1990], p.191; insertion in Beonio Brocchieri's text.

<sup>52</sup> On Aquinas' differentiation of intellectual and manual labour, see Beonio Brocchieri, "The Intellectual" in *The Medieval World*, pp.192-193; Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan [Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1993], p.61, p.104.

This new philosophical figure continued to engage in intellectual labour, and remain in the world, but it is no longer the world of manual labour. It is now overwhelmingly the world of intellectual labour, and bodily experience is increasingly uncomfortable within this world of intellectual knowledge. This point is noted by Arendt, contrasting the writings of Augustine with the later scholastics:

...[W]hen we study these medieval works we must remember that their authors lived in monasteries -- without which such a thing as "a history of ideas" in the Western world would not exist -- and that means that these writings came out of a world of books. But Augustine's reflections, by contrast, had been intimately connected with his experiences; it was important to him to describe them in detail, and even when he treated such speculative matters as the origin of evil..., it scarcely occurred to him to quote the opinions of a host of erudite and worthy men on the subject.

The scholastic authors use experience only to give an example supporting their argument; experience itself does not inspire the argument.<sup>53</sup>

Augustine's thought remained intimate with the world of experience; Aquinas' world of eight hundred years later was intimate with intellectual authority. The body in medieval philosophy had undergone a radical shift. Experience was no longer a sufficient, or even relevant, basis for knowledge. It was necessary to ground such knowledge in relation to the work of other intellectual labour.

The intellectual is again articulated from the lay person, again on the basis of labour. This time, however, the intellectual also engages in labour, but it is labour different from that of the toiling masses. The academic no longer works upon the world of bodily experience, but on the products of other intellectuals' labour. The transition from the writing of Augustine to the writing of Aquinas encompasses an epistemological shift, from a unity of mind and

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<sup>53</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, volume two: Willing* [San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1978], p.114.

experience to their separation. The process of this separation is also the process through which knowledge becomes the exclusive product of the labour of intellectuals.

*Intellectual & manual labour: Sohn-Rethel*

The articulation of the distinct category of intellectual labour is addressed by Alfred Sohn-Rethel in his work *Intellectual and Manual Labour*. Sohn-Rethel argues that the 'philosophical epistemology' of modernity consists of "the theory of scientific knowledge undertaken with the aim of elaborating a coherent, all-embracing ideology to suit the production relations of bourgeois society," a project which culminates in the work of Kant, "the classical manifestation of the bourgeois fetishism of intellectual labour."<sup>54</sup> For Sohn-Rethel, the process by which this fetishism arises follows the logic of commodity abstraction as outlined by Marx. The purpose of this manoeuvre is to stress that the notion of the independent intellect is not based upon ontological fact, but upon a social postulate.<sup>55</sup> My interest in considering Sohn-Rethel's argument here is to discuss the manner in which the creation of the abstract intellect, embodied as the liberal subject, is predicated upon the splitting of experience and intellect.

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<sup>54</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.14.

<sup>55</sup> Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.68. He suggests that this postulate by which the intellectual abstraction occurs is the same as that of the commodity abstraction. Axel Honneth suggests this is a typical strategy in marxist explanations of consciousness. Honneth likens it to Lukács in that "the forms of consciousness in bourgeois society are thought to have developed from the forces of abstraction of commodity exchange...", in contrast to what he considers to be Adorno's more radical critique in which "commodity exchange is merely the historically developed form of instrumental rationality." See *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991], p.38.

The fabrication of independent intellect depends upon the clarification of the distinction between intellectual and manual labour, between knowledge and experience. The amplification of this trend can be heard within the further articulation of the social division of labour. Intertwined with this articulation is the process through which intellectual knowledge need no longer be grounded in bodily experience. This process is pursued by Sohn-Rethel in his account of the respective status of artisanry and mathematics in medieval Europe. Artisanry, for Sohn-Rethel, utilizes a knowledge form incorporated within the actual productive process:

The artisan or individual manual worker masters his[sic] production, not through abstract knowledge, but by practical 'know-how' and by the expertise of his hands. In terms of 'knowledge', it is the knowledge of how one *does*, not of how one *explains* things.<sup>56</sup>

The defining characteristic of such knowledge should not be interpreted in terms of pragmatism or instrumentality; *technē* is embodied within the act of fabrication. Within production characterized by the artisan, the separation of intellectual and manual labour cannot be made; the concept defies expression: "The language of common usage (devoid of special technical terms) cannot articulate a division of intellectual and manual labour."<sup>57</sup> The ability to speak of this division for Sohn-Rethel requires a symbolic language detached from obvious concrete referents: mathematics.

The non-experiential character of mathematics -- with its ideal and exact forms -- is represented as essential to the burgeoning productive output in Europe.<sup>58</sup> In order to

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<sup>56</sup> Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.112; emphases in original.

<sup>57</sup> Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.112.

<sup>58</sup> Sohn-Rethel concentrates on military imperatives in explaining this point.

demonstrate the incompatibility of mathematical knowledge with the *technē* of artisanry, Sohn-Rethel recounts the work of Albrecht Dürer, who (among his other vocations) was both an artisan and mathematician. Dürer sought to demonstrate the utility of mathematical knowledge to masters of crafts, presenting his work in the vernacular, explicitly challenging the intellectual monopoly of the *literati*. This project demanded the reconciliation of mathematical exactitude with the vagaries of manual labour. Sohn-Rethel recognizes Dürer's attempt at mediation as an innovative effort to escape the distancing logic of head and hand:

What is novel in his method is that it tries to combine workmen's[sic] practice with Euclidean geometry, and to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible elements by aiming at nothing more than approximate results sufficient for practical needs. He writes: 'He who desires greater accuracy, let him do it *demonstrative*, not *mechanice* as I do it.'<sup>59</sup>

Dürer's project failed to elicit the intended response from either artisans or mathematicians. Despite his popularizing efforts, the artisans lacked the required mathematical understanding, while the mathematicians ignored the project as irrelevant. Sohn-Rethel concludes, "Hence Dürer's was not a particular artisan geometry; indeed such a geometry does not exist and cannot be invented."<sup>60</sup>

Sohn-Rethel bases his conclusion on the premise that mathematics, and geometry in particular, is a language whose symbolic ideals signify no material object; they exist solely within the scope of intellectual fabrication. But in his privileging of mathematics as indicative of the division of the intellectual and the experiential,<sup>61</sup> Sohn-Rethel ignores the extent to

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<sup>59</sup> Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.114; emphases in original.

<sup>60</sup> Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.116.

<sup>61</sup> "It is no exaggeration to say that one can measure the extent of division of head and hand by the inroad of mathematics in any particular task." Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.113.

which this separation was already occurring beyond the realm of artisan production. While mathematics may represent a symbolic language, it is certainly not alone in this category.

Symbolic languages, distinct from vernaculars, emerged throughout medieval thought. The western Christian adoption of Aristotle led to logic as the directing mode of all thought. Language itself was now a tool for the intellectual, to be deployed in accordance with intellectual reason. The ordering of the world was the task of the intellectual, through the deployment of particular logic rather than universal faith.<sup>62</sup> In legal matters, the myth of the rediscovery of Roman law and the exclusively Latin operations of legal systems enshrined judicial activities into those demanding professional interventions;<sup>63</sup> in 'medical' matters, the university established a monopoly on the practice of medicine, while surgery was beyond the pale of medicine because of its manual, craft character.<sup>64</sup> The universities were not hermitages for philosophers; students also entered with utilitarian motives, to be accredited with what were now intellectual skills, the acquisition of which demanded the appropriate intellectual regime.<sup>65</sup> Symbolic language was not restricted to mathematics, but pervaded an intellectual

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<sup>62</sup> Eugene Vance, *From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp.16-20; and Wlad Godzich's "Foreword: In *Memoriam*" in Vance, p.xvii.

<sup>63</sup> On this "rediscovery", and the its connection with the revival of Latin, see Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages, volume I: Salerno-Bologna-Paris* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936], pp.98-102. Cornelius Castoriadis aptly describes Roman law as "the institutional equivalent of Euclidean geometry" in his *The Imaginary Institution of Society* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987], Carlo Ginzburg repeatedly notes the clash between the Latin legal culture and the culture of the accused in *The Cheese and the Worms*.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Maria Stanford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991], pp.52-53.

<sup>65</sup> On the utilitarian aspects of university education, see Alan B. Cobban, "Reflections on the Role of the Medieval Universities in Contemporary Society", *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages: essays presented to Margaret Gibson*, eds. Lesley Smith & Benedicta Ward [London: The Hambledon Press, 1992].

milieu whose referents were not experience, but authority. Dürer's popular geometry was not rendered impossible by the inexorable demands of material production, but by the already existing delineation of intellectual activities which insisted upon its own distinctiveness and procedural logic.

The intellectual as a participant within a social division of labour, prefigured by Bonaventure's comments, emerges full-fledged with the waning of the medieval era. With the splitting of manual and intellectual labour, and the privileging of the latter as the realm of knowledge, intellectuals are placed within the world, yet are only able to understand it as they move away from it, a stance eventually to be enshrined as a tenet of modern science.

### *Knowledge without bodies: modernity*

A common tale now emerges: Galilean physics and Cartesian dualisms are invoked to herald in the modern age, convenient markers along knowledge's course away from bodily experience. In this account, the rupture of experience and knowledge marks the formation of the bourgeois ego, eventually to reach its highest form in Kant's epistemology. The individual subject is created and elevated as the exclusive subject of knowledge. Sohn-Rethel's expression of this genre is typical:

As it assumes representation as the *ego cogito* of Descartes or the 'subject of cognition' of philosophical epistemology the false consciousness of intellectual labour reaches its culmination: the formation of thinking, which in every respect merits the term 'social' presents itself as the diametrical opposite to society, the EGO of which there cannot be another.... Nothing can be wrapped in greater secrecy than the truth that the independence of the intellect is owed to its originally social character. Science is equipped for its

socially necessary tasks, but only with false self-awareness. 'Science', here, is understood as divided from manual labour.<sup>66</sup>

The scientific world-view, which Horkheimer would attribute to traditional theory,<sup>67</sup> posits a potentially all-knowing independent intellect, able to formulate knowledge in spite of social experience. Bourgeois false-consciousness relies upon the ontological status of this independent intellect and its products.<sup>68</sup>

This, however, is only part of the story which I wish to relate. The scientific world-view may dismiss the knowledge-potential of experience, but this is not synonymous with the dismissal of experience altogether. Rather, experience is subjugated to the intellect. Giorgio Agamben comments on how experience is rewritten and moulded by the intellect:

The scientific verification of experience which is enacted in the experiment -- permitting sensory impressions to be deduced with the exactitude of quantitative determinations and, therefore, the prediction of future impressions - responds to this loss of certainty by displacing experience as far as possible outside the individual: on to instruments and numbers. But traditional experience thereby lost all real value. For... experience is incompatible with certainty, and once an experience has become measurable and certain, it immediately loses its authority.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, pp.77-78.

<sup>67</sup> See the introductory chapter.

<sup>68</sup> This account of modernity, epistemology and the subject is echoed, in different manners, across a wide spectrum of thinkers. Richard J. Bernstein traces it through Nietzsche, Weber, Adorno and Heidegger while Robert C. Holub discusses this account in the work of Gadamer and Heidegger; both of these depictions are presented as philosophy's fall from grace. Hans Blumenberg's account suggests a "rupture" between the impetus for a theoretical attitude emerging out of the "life-world", and the conditions under which such an attitude must be realized. See Bernstein, "The Rage Against Reason", *The New Constellation: the ethical-political horizons of modernity/postmodernity* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992], pp.35-45; Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the public sphere* [London: Routledge, 1991], pp.54-55; Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983], pp.231-232.

<sup>69</sup> Giorgio Agamben, the title essay of *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron [London: Verso, 1993], pp.17-18.

Harkening back to Sohn-Rethel's work, Agamben echoes the incompatibility of experience with the exactitude of which detached intellect is capable and requires. What is significant is that the independent intellect expropriates this experience, rendering it answerable to the individual subject which is the independent intellect.<sup>70</sup> The independent intellect recuperates experiences as relevant by fragmenting and ordering it. Experience becomes accessible to knowledge by method.

With this recovery of fragmented knowledge, *technē* has returned to philosophy. Knowledge is produced by intellectual labour, through the structuring of the desired material, whether literary authority or experiential. The philosophical labour of the independent intellect exists as a technology of knowledge. Knowledge, to be deemed legitimate, must be manufactured in a specific manner. Production is organized according to the discrete categories of intellectual and manual labour; knowledge is the exclusive product of the former. Only trained specialists may utilize this labour in the manner which generates knowledge.

Using the term technology to describe this process emphasizes that knowledge is not an ontological fact, conjured into existence by philosophical will, but that it is the product of labour. This production is neither arbitrary nor capricious; it is ordered, demanding the separation of the manual and intellectual, the denigration and fragmented recovery of experience, and the formation of the individual intellect. Knowledge is produced according to a methodical work of the intellect upon a detached world, and as such this method

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<sup>70</sup> Agamben stresses the importance of 'non-scientific' thought – Hermeticism, astrology and alchemy – in the creation of the unified, solitary intellectual subject through the abolition of the distinction between mind and soul. Agamben, the title essay of *Infancy & History*, pp.18-24.

constitutes a technology.<sup>71</sup> By virtue of their monopoly on this technology, the intellectual begins the shift from claiming the right to order the world to claiming the right to give orders to the world.<sup>72</sup>

## Philosophy or politics?

Arendt's construction of philosophy, like that of Jaspers, presumes the ontological uniqueness of the contemplative life. While agreeing with Jaspers that politics and philosophy are incompatible, Arendt insists on this incompatibility in part to preserve the space of politics, the only way in which freedom might be created. Should philosophy, with its possession of absolute knowledge, attempt to merge with politics, it will abolish the necessarily human project of collectively fabricating the world: the isolation of philosophy could not abide the togetherness of political fabrication. The eternal truths which philosophy uncovers are anathema if they are forcibly imposed upon the fluctuating political. The separation of philosophy and everyday life within Arendt's work is not so much to preserve the purity of philosophy, but to preserve the potential of politics.

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<sup>71</sup> My use of the term technology to describe this ordering is inspired primarily by the work of Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology* [Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press, 1990], chapter 3. It would be possible to derive the concept from the work of Lewis Mumford, Martin Heidegger, or Michel Foucault.

<sup>72</sup> This is the position adopted by Karl Mannheim, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

As Sohn-Rethel's work suggests, however, the disembodiment demanded by Arendt's conception of philosophy is not an ontological given, but a social construction, premised on the shifting of knowledge to a state of strict intellectual abstraction. By returning intellectual activity to the status of labour, such activity is once again a corporeal activity, and cannot be neatly shriven from the everyday and confined (nor elevated) within the *vita contemplativa*. Intellectual and manual labour do not converge, but they share characteristics.

The conception of philosophy which Jaspers and Schelling both sought to elevate within the university is untenable, in light of Sohn-Rethel's critique of intellectual labour. Philosophical knowledge, developed through a technology of knowledge, does not escape from everyday life, although philosophy continues to reject the possibility of knowledge except that of intellectual labour. Knowledge within the university remains knowledge within the world. Intellectual labour may reserve onto itself the exclusive right to claim knowledge, but it still remains labour, and labour remains within the everyday.

The same critique applies to Arendt's presentation of the *vita contemplativa*. But if Arendt's absolute dichotomy between mind and world cannot be sustained, what does remain from her work is her warning of the consequences for politics should it attempt to operate according to the dictates of philosophy. The political cannot operate in accordance with eternal philosophical notions; to attempt to impose them upon the political would cede philosophy's authority as the guardian of tradition, exchanging that authority for despotism.<sup>73</sup> In place of philosophical intervention within the political, Arendt attempts a theoretical

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<sup>73</sup> On the distinction between authority and despotism, and philosophy's role, see "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future*. For a succinct statement of authority's collapse into despotism, see Arendt's "On Violence" in her *Crises of the Republic*, p.144.

intervention, abandoning eternity for what she terms "thinking without a bannister".<sup>74</sup> Unlike the unchanging truths of philosophy, political theory seeks to intervene in the political, in a political manner: by abandoning the commitments to certainty. Such certainties, for Arendt, serve as "bannisters":

...categories and formulas that are deeply ingrained in our mind but whose basis of experience has long been forgotten and whose plausibility resides in their intellectual consistency rather than in their adequacy to actual events."<sup>75</sup>

Intellectual engagement with politics requires that the engagement occurs according to the terms of the political. As a political theorist, Arendt presents her formulations, fully realizing that their immortality simultaneously assures their transformation. Within the political, her work may inspire an assortment of actions, but cannot hope to control such words and deeds. Political leadership, for Arendt, means no more than "to set into motion";<sup>76</sup> subsequent events rely on the capacity of political participants to reflect on such leadership, and act in concert.

Distinct from the creative capacity of leadership, rulership attempts to complete the act -- no room remains for the ongoing judgement of political actors. Lisa Jane Disch concludes, in Arendt's understanding: "Thus, rulers exert the power of their expertise over subjects whose task it is to execute commands."<sup>77</sup> The usurpation of the political by those claiming exclusive access to knowledge results in tyranny: the political demands diversity and

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<sup>74</sup> Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt", in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, p.336.

<sup>75</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship", cited in Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, p.144.

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.189.

<sup>77</sup> Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, p.31.

participation, but philosophy demands contemplative isolation. The philosophical entry into politics abolishes the political, ossifying its perpetual shifting contours according to eternal truths.

Jaspers confines philosophy within the university; Arendt confines it within the *vita contemplativa*. Neither Jaspers nor Arendt were prepared to acknowledge that such activity was truly part of the world. Others, however, have embraced the separation of intellectual from manual labour. Philosophy, in the guise of knowledge, is brought into modernity by returning it to the world of the everyday. The modern practitioner of intellectual labour emerges as an intellectual bolshevik, ordering the world by virtue of restricted access to the products of the mind. Philosophy does not merge with politics as much as it renders the latter obsolete. With this in mind, I now turn to an advocate of precisely what Arendt dreaded: the intellectual ordering of the everyday, as developed by Karl Mannheim.

## Chapter Two

### **Epistemological Bolshevism Karl Mannheim & the conquest of the everyday**

The political theory of Hannah Arendt is predicated on the incompatibility of philosophy and politics. In this chapter, I now turn to the work of sociologist Karl Mannheim, who drew very different conclusions from the historical conditions which inspired Arendt's loathing of philosophical dabbling in the political. Like Arendt, Mannheim was a refugee from the Nazi regime; like Arendt, the spectre of totalitarianism played itself out in his thought. But while one of the lessons that Arendt drew from totalitarianism was the threat of letting the intellectuals loose in politics, Mannheim reached the opposite conclusion. In the upheavals of modernity, the intellectuals remained the only group capable of the political administration of society. Political administration, for Arendt, was an oxymoron; for Mannheim, it was the only means by which a semblance of freedom might be maintained in a violent world.

A student of the fledgling discipline of sociology, Mannheim was displaced from his native Hungary in the revolutions following World War I. Having settled in Germany, he was stripped of his university position in 1933 because he was a Jew, and fled to the United Kingdom, where he spent the remainder of his life working towards establishing sociology

as a respectable discipline along European lines. Mannheim's preoccupation with the political calling of the intellectuals emerges in his best-known work, *Ideology and Utopia*,<sup>1</sup> originally published in 1929. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim wholeheartedly repudiates the ontological distinctiveness of the philosophical life, embracing instead the potential of its *technē*; the purity of philosophy demanded in the *vita contemplativa* is discarded for its utilitarian possibilities. In his subsequent works in exile, Mannheim refined this position, culminating in the necessity of social planning as the duty of the intellectuals in democratic regimes.

This chapter explores Karl Mannheim's unapologetic advocacy of a political role for the intellectual, which emerges in *Ideology and Utopia* as a response to the chaos unleashed by competing claims to a monopoly on truth -- claims based in a variety of conflicting standpoints, each reserving a privileged knowledge of the world for itself. Through his twofold conception of ideology, Mannheim levels all such claims, arguing that truth exists only as their totality, which can only be accessed by those best able to approach this multiplicity: the intellectuals in concert. Unlike Arendt's desire for the broadest possible participation in the process of public disclosure, Mannheim restricts participation in the production of knowledge to a single group. As the sole proprietors of knowledge, the intellectuals must mould the everyday into the forms most appropriate to its continued well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, expanded English edition; trans. Louis Wirth & Edward Shils [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1936.]

Mannheim, of course, is not alone in his advocacy of the role of the intellectuals in politics, and presents a more sophisticated epistemological basis for this advocacy than most. But in order to examine how seductive Mannheim's position can be, I next turn to Antonio Gramsci, Mannheim's contemporary, who is often read as refuting Mannheim's elitist position. What I wish to demonstrate is the shared epistemological basis for both Mannheim's and Gramsci's conceptions of the intellectuals, which elevates the intellectual-as-philosopher to the status of a collective entity: the New Class. In concluding this chapter, I return to the idea of *technē*, as the New Class transforms itself into its own historical agent.

### **Standpoints in conflict: epistemological relationism**

While writing *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim's primary concern was not an engagement with figures like Jaspers, who sought to retain the other-worldliness of philosophy. As the Weimar Republic appeared likely to be engulfed in civil war, with conflicting political movements attempting to settle debates through street battles, philosophy's claims to absolute truth within academe were of less import than the claims to this absolute within politics. Mannheim's work seeks to displace all such knowledge claims, by accepting them all.

*Georg Lukács: the proletarian standpoint*

A lasting formulation of absolute perspective within politics was provided by Mannheim's contemporary and acquaintance, Georg Lukács. While Lukács, under pressure from the Third International, was to quickly repudiate the ideas he developed in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, his argument for the proletariat's privileged access to knowledge in the modern world remains influential. It remains a brilliant articulation of knowledge rooted exclusively in the everyday, dispensing with philosophy's claims to a monopoly via intellectual labour. Lukács' work merits particular attention here because his argument is not merely a rehash of romantic visions of the proletariat or peasantry; instead he attempts to discredit bourgeois philosophy on its own grounds. Knowledge, Lukács argues, cannot be found within the *vita contemplativa*, but is fabricated within the *vita activa*, wherein true understanding belongs to those immersed within the process of production.

Lukács rejects bourgeois philosophy's claim to knowledge (including those made by the academics). The failure of bourgeois philosophy does "not merely reflect the inability of the bourgeoisie to grasp the contradictions inherent in its own social order."<sup>2</sup> Bourgeois thought, required to observe life from the perspective of the individual capitalist, can never recognize the limitations imposed upon it by its economic system. It can clarify particular issues, but never grasp the totality.<sup>3</sup> This failure of bourgeois thought as a whole includes the

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<sup>2</sup> Georg Lukács, "Class Consciousness", *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968.], p.62. This 'inability to grasp inherent contradictions in the social order' is the basis for Lukács' earlier dismissal of anarchist and peasant revolutionary consciousness.

<sup>3</sup> Lukács, "Class Consciousness", *History and Class Consciousness*, pp.63-66.

repudiation of any distinct arena -- including academe -- from which philosophy can isolate itself from everyday life. Caught within capitalist worldviews, philosophy cannot understand the actually existing social conditions from which it arises; its attempts at self-comprehension necessarily include the delusions of such a fragmented understanding. Bourgeois philosophy remains contemplative and condemned to produce conflicting (and equally false) conceptions of historical processes.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to this failure of bourgeois thought, the proletariat, by virtue of its historically unique position in the relations of production, is the only class which can understand the true structures of society. "[I]ntellectual genesis must be identical in principle with historical genesis."<sup>5</sup> Ideas cannot precede historical development, and by the unique nature of labour as a commodity, the proletariat is the only class able to achieve the unity of social understanding: "when the worker knows himself[sic] as a commodity his knowledge is practical. *That is to say, this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge.*"<sup>6</sup> As the unified subject and object of knowledge, the proletariat becomes able to grasp the totality of social relations. By understanding itself,

the class understands society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and object of knowledge... the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of theory, become possible.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", *History and Class Consciousness*, p.158.

<sup>5</sup> Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", *History and Class Consciousness*, p.155.

<sup>6</sup> Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", *History and Class Consciousness*, p.169. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>7</sup> Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?", *History and Class Consciousness*, pp.2-3.

The theoretical understanding of this unity enables theory to move from a contemplative to active state, rooted as it is in the historical potential of the proletariat.

Achieving this unity of knowledge of the totality can only be accomplished by the proletariat. Such an understanding entails a recognition of the proletariat as the agent of history and its revolutionary potential:

For the proletariat the truth is a weapon that brings victory.... This makes more comprehensible the desperate fury with which bourgeois science assails historical materialism: for as soon as the bourgeoisie is forced to take up its stand on this terrain, it is lost. And, at the same time, this explains why the proletariat can discern in the correct understanding of the nature of society a power-factor of the first, and perhaps decisive importance.<sup>8</sup>

The failure of bourgeois philosophy and the impending triumph of that of the proletariat dispenses with the relevance of the philosopher in all forms, establishing the position of the proletariat as the exclusive site for the production of knowledge. And by virtue of the class specificity of this standpoint, it can never be adopted by the bourgeoisie without negating its own rationale.

Lukács' exposition of the proletarian standpoint contains key elements of standpoint epistemologies, elements which ensured their irreconcilability: historical reason permits only one group to attain a position which produces valid knowledge; as a unity of subject/object, theory/practice this group has exclusive access to totalized knowledge; practioners of intellectual labour offer a revolutionary tool to the privileged group; any other group which attempts to adopt such a tool negates itself. For Karl Mannheim, writing in the Weimar Republic, the existence of multiple exclusionary standpoints ensured a war of annihilation.

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<sup>8</sup> Lukács, "Class Consciousness", *History and Class Consciousness*, p.68. Emphasis in original.

I am not suggesting that Lukács was the first figure to argue for the existence of a privileged class position of knowledge. Lukács maintained in *History and Class Consciousness* that the ideas developed therein were little more than a gloss on Karl Marx. Marx's anarchist opponent, Michael Bakunin, formulated his own standpoint epistemology, based upon a critique of idealist 'abstractions', in his final work, *Statism and Anarchy*.<sup>9</sup> Such philosophies, according to Bakunin, "proceed not from life to thought, but from thought to life." These 'abstractions' fail to recognize that, "[l]ife develops out of its own inexhaustible depths by means of a succession of diverse facts..."<sup>10</sup> Similar formulations could be found across political movements, attempting to reserve truth as the exclusive property of the nation, state, masses, peasantry, and onward *ad nauseam*. Each such position claimed a monopoly on knowledge, necessarily excluding any such competing claims. The philosophical reserve of the *vita contemplativa* had been abolished; Schelling's scholar, seeking freedom from 'scientifically irrelevant considerations', had now been decreed irrelevant according to inexorable progress of History. Philosophy had merged with the political in a manner which denied the legitimacy of any reservation, and of any dissent.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, trans. & ed. Marshall S. Shatz [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.], pp.129-138.

<sup>10</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, pp. 133, 135. Bakunin concludes his critique arguing that the social world can only be understood in relation to and as a product of 'diverse facts', culminating in his claim that, "... the masses bear all the elements of their future organizational norms in their own more or less historically evolved instincts, in their everyday needs and their conscious and unconscious desires..." [*Statism and Anarchy*, p.135.].

*Karl Mannheim's Relationism: the revenge of the university*

Confronted with a situation in which competing epistemologies allowed no possibility of compromise, *Ideology and Utopia* sought to establish a new basis for knowledge, capable of recovering the fragmenting standpoints within a comprehensive social epistemology. In so doing, Mannheim regrounds the monopolistic and absolutist knowledge claims of both philosophy and academe by rejecting the possibility of universal knowledge, while simultaneously positioning the intellectuals as the sole group which approaches such knowledge. In restoring the intellectual as the figure with privileged access to knowledge, Mannheim shifts the epistemological basis of intellectual production, but preserves the characteristic of legitimate knowledge as separate from the everyday. His method of accomplishing this feat is "relationism".

With the collapse of philosophical reserve in favour of burgeoning exclusive epistemological standpoints, Mannheim recognizes meritorious elements in all such standpoints. Identifying five main positions -- including two varieties of conservatism, liberalism, socialism and fascism -- Mannheim concludes that each position is representative of actual historical processes:<sup>11</sup> while unable to attain a true understanding of totality, each contains a partial truth:

All points of view in politics are but partial points of view because historical totality is always too comprehensive to be grasped by any one of the individual points of view which emerge out of it. Since, however, all these points of view emerge out of the same social and historical current, and since

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<sup>11</sup> For Mannheim's account of the components of each of these standpoints, see *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 117-146. For his discussion of what is particularly novel and valuable in each, see pp. 149-151. Very briefly, bureaucratic-conservatism recognized stability within the state; historical conservatism saw traditional organicism; liberalism the rational functioning of society; marxism the extra-parliamentary components of politics; and fascism the potential for manipulating crucial historical moments.

their partiality exists in the same matrix of an emerging whole, it is possible to see them in juxtaposition, and their synthesis becomes a problem which must continually be reformulated and resolved.<sup>12</sup>

Each partial perspectives holds a kernel of validity because it is formed through actual historical processes, yet each of these perspectives is reduced to a kernel because of the broad and fluid extent of the totality which produced them. Yet the attempt at synthesis is as historically valid as these partisan views; Mannheim sees a 'dynamic synthesis' as the required solution to conflicting standpoints.<sup>13</sup>

Mannheim begins his synthesis by responding to the proliferation of standpoints claiming exclusive knowledge with a twofold concept of ideology: that of the "particular conception", by which we regard the ideas of opponents as "more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation",<sup>14</sup> and the "total conception", referring to the ideas of an age or social group, "the characteristics and composition of the total structure of the mind of this epoch or group."<sup>15</sup> The two concepts, for Mannheim, have begun to merge; as social groups struggle, for both physical and intellectual supremacy:

...[P]reviously, one's adversary, as the representative of a certain political-social position, was accused of conscious or unconscious falsification. Now, however, the critique is more thoroughgoing in that, having discredited the total structure of his[sic] consciousness, we consider him no longer capable of thinking correctly.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.151.

<sup>13</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, pp.151-152.

<sup>14</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.55.

<sup>15</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.56.

<sup>16</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.69.

With the inability of any such standpoint to demonstrate intrinsic superiority, Mannheim is left to conclude that no such standpoint is privileged; all are ideological.

At this point, Mannheim is left with a variety of socially situated conceptions of knowledge, which are only intelligible in reference to these situations. The positioning of these conceptions in reference to one another, through which they attain significance, is termed "relationism" by Mannheim.<sup>17</sup> With the recognition of the inability of any single standpoint to grasp totality, the quest for totality is renewed.<sup>18</sup> Absolute knowledge is still the goal, but it can only be produced by a diversity of ideological standpoints. It is in the effort to synthesize this diversity that Mannheim re-introduces the intellectual community as the privileged site for knowledge.

This synthesis of ideologies demands a transcendence of the particularities of social being, without relapsing into a hypostatized metaphysics. Mannheim sees such a synthesis as constituting an entirely new, 'experimental', approach to knowledge. The potential for this shifting transcendence rests with a particular fragment within society:

Such an experimental outlook, unceasingly sensitive to the dynamic nature of society and to its wholeness, is not likely to be developed by a class occupying a middle position but only by a relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order.... This unanchored, *relatively* classless stratum is... "the socially unattached intelligentsia".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.86.

<sup>18</sup> "Only when we are thoroughly aware of the limited scope of every point of view are we on the road to the sought-for comprehension of the whole." Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.105.

<sup>19</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.155.

This intelligentsia is the only group in a position to consciously adopt ideological positions, and through its "common educational heritage", is bound together in a manner surmounting social origins and ideological positions.<sup>20</sup>

The creation of the 'socially unattached intelligentsia' restores the university to its privileged space from which knowledge can be manufactured. As Schelling envisaged,<sup>21</sup> the university serves as the site from which future university scholars must be produced. Unlike Schelling, however, Mannheim no longer needs to demand separation from 'scientifically irrelevant considerations', for such considerations can be part of the particularities being synthesized.

The 'socially unattached intelligentsia' is the exemplary social group within modern society. It is simultaneously nearly infinitely diverse in its beliefs, yet homogeneous in its practices.<sup>22</sup> The lack of intellectual hegemony is not a problem: a unifying idea is not only impossible, but undesirable. Knowledge is now the collective product of individual intellectual labour, within the community of academe.

In this manner, Mannheim dispenses with the intellectuals' long search for an agent of history.<sup>23</sup> The monarch, the state, the proletariat or the nation are no longer required to give life to the political theories of the intellectuals; the intellectuals themselves assume this role.

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<sup>20</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.155.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>22</sup> Mannheim notes this, in a different manner, in acknowledging partisan positions as compatible with instruction in the university. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p.162.

<sup>23</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner refers to this search in "The Social Origins of Marxism", *Against Fragmentation: The Origin of Marxism and the Sociology of Intellectuals*, eds. Janet Gouldner & Cornelius Disco [New York: Oxford University Press, 1985], pp.22-27. For an elaboration of this theme, see the conclusion to this chapter.

The intellectuals are now the subjects of history, the only group with the ability to act rather than merely respond. In this manner, the intellectual subjects, from the relationist space of the university, are able to objectify the world.

### **Intellectuals as academics: the 'new class'**

Karl Mannheim, like Hannah Arendt, approaches the problem of philosophy as knowledge and its relation to politics as a result of the disintegration of political diversity. But whereas Arendt relies on an ancient understanding of philosophy as contained within the *vita contemplativa*, eternally apart from worldly affairs, Mannheim brings intellectual production into the contemporary division of labour. The theories of academe exist within the political world, and as the sole possible site from which totality might be grasped, they bear the responsibility of accepting this worldly role.

Mannheim did not embark explicitly on an attempt to re-establish academe as this privileged locale. Instead, he sought to refute a proliferation of 'ideological' standpoints, and locate true knowledge only in the totality of these perspectives. Only one group can approach this totality -- the intellectuals -- and they can only make this approach in relation to each other, within an intellectual community. Thus, Mannheim returns to the university as the site for the production of knowledge, and as the only site for intellectual labour. The intellectual becomes synonymous with the academic. In its re-establishment of this monopoly, the

equation of intellectual and academic signifies the emergence of this group as a class within modernity.

### *Intellectuals as a class*

The concept of intellectuals as a distinct class, popularized within critical theory by American sociologist Alvin W. Gouldner,<sup>24</sup> has not been easily accepted; many have attempted to dismiss the notion, arguing that intellectuals do not meet an assortment of criteria necessary to warrant the term.<sup>25</sup> Gouldner himself justifies his usage of the term by claiming that Marx's own formulation of class is ambiguous, and therefore little justification is necessary.<sup>26</sup> None the less, an elaboration is required. Mannheim's reformulation of the technology of knowledge earns the university-based intellectuals the moniker 'class' for three reasons: their position within the division of labour within modernity; their specific relation to production; and from these previous points, their position within class relations.

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<sup>24</sup> Gouldner addresses this topic at length in *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* [New York: Seabury Press, 1979]. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the concept does not originate with him. Ivan Szelényi and Bill Martin note three 'waves' of intellectuals-as-class theories, covering the nineteenth century European anarchists, technocracy theories of the mid-twentieth century, and a "knowledge-class" wave in the 1970s, which includes both neo-conservative critiques of the left intelligentsia and leftist evaluations of changing epistemologies. Gouldner is seen as part of this latter group. See Szelényi & Martin, "The three waves of New Class theories", *Theory and Society* [vol.17, 1988].

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Nicos Poulantzas, who broadly incorporates intellectuals within the "New Petty Bourgeoisie". See the sections, "Productive and Unproductive Labour: The New Petty Bourgeoisie and the Working Class" and "The Role of the Mental/Manual Labour Division for the New Petty Bourgeoisie as a Whole" in his *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, trans. David Fernbach [London: NLB, 1975], esp. pp.222-223; pp.252-257.

For a critique of the concept of the new class which is also highly critical of Poulantzas' position, see Heller & Fehér below.

<sup>26</sup> Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals...*, p.8.

Mannheim's formulation of the task of intellectuals represents a move of the category 'intellectuals' into modernity. With earlier sustained considerations of intellectuals, this group was understood within an estate/guild context (the idea of the university), or as a social stratum who could shift their allegiance among more traditional classes.<sup>27</sup> Mannheim's sociology of knowledge reformulates the productive activity of the intellectual within capitalism, as monopolistic production, whereby knowledge no longer needs an external subject in which to situate its claims: the intellectuals become their own agents of history. This is the conciliation of the intellectuals with modernity, wherein the intellectuals are seen to collectively engage in a labour of production, regardless of their intent or cooperation. Contrary to Jaspers and Schelling, the production of knowledge is no longer dependent upon the willingness of the university academics to work in concert; rather, by engaging in intellectual work within the collective space of academe, knowledge is produced as the totality of these (to varying degrees) individualist efforts. The product of intellectual labour is not formed via subjects' intent, but through the act of labour itself.

With this detachment of intent from intellectual labour, the significance of the university is altered. The university no longer serves as the focus of an harmonious intellectual communion; it becomes instead the site wherein labour occurs and its products are revealed.

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Marx's and Engels' statement in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Samuel Moore [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986], p.42: "Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands."

See also George Konrád & Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. Andrew Arato & Richard E. Allen [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979], pp.63-67.

Intellectual labour can only be acknowledged as a contribution towards knowledge in so far as it is recognized from within the relational distribution of perspectives.

The German university historically was a politically important institution; Mannheim's relationist epistemology offered it a new grounding in the face of social and intellectual strife.<sup>28</sup> The requirement that the products of intellectual labour be positioned within a larger intellectual community spells the end of the unaffiliated intellectual as a productive intellectual. The possibility of philosophical withdrawal (with all its flaws) remains, but any attempt at taking up such a position also involves withdrawing from the fabrication of knowledge. Intellectual potential is now the exclusive preserve of the academic. In Mannheim's terms, membership in a 'relatively classless stratum' places restrictions on the extent to which this intelligentsia can be 'free-floating'. University training is a prerequisite for participation in the production of knowledge, but it is not sufficient. Continued participation demands an allegiance to this stratum, the willingness to render the products of the labour process into its milieu.

The academically unaffiliated intellectual becomes a marginal figure. Whether such figures attempt to retreat from the world or to align themselves with some form of princely patron, they remain relevant only in so far as their work is considered by other intellectuals, with different perspectives; although they may have forsaken the academy, their work must

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<sup>28</sup> For the classic statement of the significance of academe and its turmoil in late 19th and early 20th century Germany, see Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969]; for a complementary reading of the influence of academics within the Weimar Republic, see Alice Gallin, *Midwives to Nazism: University Professors in Weimar Germany 1925-1933* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986].

enter academe if it is to constitute knowledge.<sup>29</sup> With this marginalization of the unaffiliated intellectual, the equation of academic and intellectual is completed. Knowledge is a product manufactured only within a specific site, by those within a particular framework of relations. The university becomes both this site and this framework.

This reprivileging of the university, in addition to excluding the non-academic from full-fledged intellectual status, accomplishes another manoeuvre which transforms the intellectual into a class: the counterpoising of the intellectuals to the rest of society. This is the final component for the consideration of intellectuals as a class. The intellectual/academic now is related to society in the guise of the expert, who is the sole proprietor of functional technical knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

### *Intellectuals & social control: democratic planning*

This context of the collective quest for total knowledge becomes the point at which Mannheim identifies the intellectuals' role as *planning*. Knowledge cannot be grasped as such beyond academe; the necessary relational structure is absent, because people are too enmeshed within everyday life to achieve detachment. Academics mediate the knowledge produced within the university to society at large (and its various components); no other

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<sup>29</sup> Another option does exist for the unaffiliated intellectual, which consists of attempting to remain within worldly politics without sheltering under some form of party banner. Such attempts constitute a renunciation of intellectual status, at least from the perspective of academe.

<sup>30</sup> Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér propose dichotomous class relations as a necessary element for identifying social and political classes in their article, "Class, Democracy, Modernity", *Theory and Society* [vol.12, 1983], pp.218-222. While I do not feel their social/political distinction (borrowed from Weber) is particularly useful here, their demand for class relations is. It should also be noted that in the same article, Heller and Fehér specifically exclude the possibility of intellectuals as constituting a class for this very reason [p.223].

group is capable of understanding the situation. The modern world, with its advanced division of labour, cannot be left to its own devices:

[T]he more complex the social division of labour becomes, the more it requires the differentiation of types. The integration and unity of a great society is not achieved through uniform behaviour but by way of the mutual complementing of functions.<sup>31</sup>

Mannheim notes that this complexity first became apparent in Central Europe, where the rise of fascist and bolshevik regimes was an attempt to regulate social and economic situations unable to discipline themselves. Western democracies hitherto had avoided these questions through their wealth and political traditions, but could not expect to continue to do so in an accelerating world.<sup>32</sup>

The academic as expert intervenes to ensure complementary social integration, not by issuing commands but by understanding how such societies operate. Only the intellectuals can comprehend,

...the use of the indispensable spontaneous forces of society in fostering certain desirable aims. [Coordination] means the harmonizing of all the spontaneous and vital forces of society by anticipating the ways in which they are likely to work and the continuous correlation of the necessary adjustments.<sup>33</sup>

The intellectuals' position within this harmony is determined by their exclusive claim to hear the entire composition. Intellectuals are the sole producers of knowledge; 'theorizing' becomes a vocation alongside all others. It is no longer an activity which occurs within pristine

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Mannheim, "Planned society and the problem of human personality: a sociological analysis", *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, ed. Paul Kecskemdi [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1953], p.260.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1950], pp.22-23.

<sup>33</sup> Mannheim, "Planned society and the problem of human personality", *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, p.260.

isolation from worldly life (as with Schelling); it is an activity very much rooted in the world, through Mannheim's twofold conception of ideology.

In *Ideology and Utopia*, written during the disintegration of the Weimar Republic, Mannheim demonstrated few scruples about the authoritarian suggestions contained within the elevation of the intellectuals; his subsequent works in exile continue to acknowledge the fascist and bolshevik regimes as dangerous precursors to the conditions now facing democratic regimes. The later works, however, attempted to counter the undemocratic implications of planning, particularly given the popularity of the concept within the Nazi and Soviet regimes.<sup>34</sup>

Mannheim begins the distinction by claiming that totalitarian<sup>35</sup> regimes err by equating the coordination of social processes -- the objective of planning -- with absolute conformity within such societies.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to this mode, Mannheim argues that democratic planning increases liberty through "social control," by "preventing major maladjustments," whose

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<sup>34</sup> Of Mannheim's later major writings on planning, only the earliest, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (originally published in German in 1935), fails to distinguish clearly between democratic and totalitarian planning. Each of the other three -- *Diagnosis of Our Time*, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning*, and *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* -- devotes major sections to the distinction between democratic and totalitarian planning. See *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: studies in social structure*, trans. Edward Shils [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1940]; *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist* [Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1943]; *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning*; and *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*.

<sup>35</sup> While discussing Mannheim, I am using "totalitarian" in the same sense which he uses the word: a blanket term to cover Nazi Germany, fascist Europe and the Soviet Union. In his final work, 1947's *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning*, Mannheim's attempt to detail the characteristics of such regimes is little more than a caricature. See *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning*, pp.22-28.

<sup>36</sup> Mannheim, "Planned Society and the Problem of Human Personality", *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, p.257.

eventual accumulation would jeopardize individual freedom.<sup>37</sup> While Mannheim does tend towards a totalized conception of democracy -- centralized expressions of popular opinion determined through the merger of community and government<sup>38</sup> -- the intellectuals are to ensure the true reflection of popular will, through their practice of the techniques of social science. The sociologist will apply these techniques to all causes of social tension:

It will be one of the principal tasks of the sociologist to study the conditions under which disagreement arises and where the process of group adjustment and value reconciliation fails to function in the context of everyday life. He[sic] will analyse the causes of failure with the same empirical methods of investigation which in so many other fields pointed out remedies for institutional deterioration.<sup>39</sup>

Mannheim suggests many such "social evils" had been remedied through such means, and with the expansion of intellectual work -- bringing to bear psychology and religion to refine social control<sup>40</sup> -- and its continuing refinement, the planned society will maximize human liberty.

Mannheim embraces *technē* as the means by which the social life might be crafted with the precision of any other form of scientific or manual artisanry. The distinction between the intellectual within the humanities and the technical intelligentsia is dissolved. Technicians

<sup>37</sup> Mannheim, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning*, p.117.

<sup>38</sup> Mannheim, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning*, pp.112-116.

<sup>39</sup> Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time*, p.28.

<sup>40</sup> On Mannheim's optimism concerning the potential of psychology, see "Planned Society and the Problem of Human Personality", *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, p.262. In *Diagnosis of Our Time*, Mannheim devotes major essays to shaping values and the cooperation of sociology and theology. In the expanded English edition of *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim attempts to render the political scientific, in "The Prospects of Scientific Politics". Mannheim's discussion of ideological forms is found in this essay.

may be the engineers of bridges or atoms; the humanist intellectuals are the engineers of human souls.<sup>41</sup>

## Antonio Gramsci: the intellectual and the division of labour

In contrast to Mannheim's unabashedly elitist conception of intellectuals superseding politics, contemporary leftist theorists are prone to look to the analysis of the intellectual provided by Mannheim's temporal contemporary, Italian Communist Party leader Antonio Gramsci.<sup>42</sup> Gramsci provides an alternative coherent attempt to understand the position and significance of the intellectual within the advanced capitalist societies of western Europe. While Mannheim does not problematize the formation of the intellectual itself, Gramsci's formulation of the 'organic' intellectual as distinct from the 'traditional' intellectual is frequently presented as an attempt to mediate between vanguardist and the spontaneist revolutionary projects in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>43</sup> I raise Gramsci's work here not as a critique of Mannheim, but in an effort to show how Gramsci actually shares in the

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<sup>41</sup> The phrase is Stalin's; it is the title of Josef Škvorecký's novel, *The Engineer of Human Souls*, trans. Paul Wilson [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984].

<sup>42</sup> Given that Gramsci was imprisoned before *Ideology and Utopia* was published, and both he and Mannheim died before any of the former's prison writings could be published, there is no evidence of any further connection between the two.

<sup>43</sup> See Carl Boggs, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Modernity*, [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993], pp. 54-55. I do not agree with Boggs' assessment of the plausibility of this project; the Gramscian intellectual remains a vanguardist figure, albeit with a broader scope than the strictly delineated class struggle of Second International orthodoxy. This failure, while significant to a discussion of the intellectual, is secondary for my use of Gramsci here; what remains relevant is Gramsci's move to demystify the concept of the intellectual.

premises underlying Mannheim's intellectuals and their historic mission. Both the Gramscian and Mannheimian intellectuals are quintessentially modern characters, determined to guide society to its ordained goal.

### *Hegemony & counter-hegemony*

The significance of the intellectual in Gramsci's work begins with his rejection of economic determinism. Intellectuals, for Gramsci, are an integral component of any attempt at reshaping society. With Mannheim, Gramsci shares the conviction that such a project must be totalized: it cannot be restricted to a single determining factor. For Gramsci, economy and ideology are inextricably entwined. The separation into discrete categories of 'structure' and 'superstructure' can only be done retroactively, and then only as an analytical tool. While this may be useful for the scholar, it is of little use for the politically engaged intellectual. Within social existence, the distinctions are blurred; consequently, socialist politics cannot focus on only one element. Developing this theme, Gramsci concludes that the world of ideologies has as concrete an existence as that of economics. Socialist struggle must address these ideologies as 'historical facts' in order to revolutionize the economic order. The 'philosophy of praxis' -- marxism -- must recognize the tangibility of these factors:

For the philosophy of praxis the superstructures are an objective and operative reality (or they become so, when they are not pure products of the individual mind). It explicitly asserts that men[sic] become conscious of their social position, and therefore of their tasks, on the terrain of ideologies, which is no small affirmation of reality. The philosophy of praxis itself is a superstructure, it is the terrain on which determinate social groups become conscious of their own social being, their own strength, their own becoming.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs [New York: Schocken Books, 1988], p.196.

The socialist struggle, therefore, does not simply restrict itself to 'economic' areas; on the contrary, the superstructure, as concrete as any economic base, becomes the realm in which social groups must recognize their own potential.

Gramsci notes that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was able to succeed because it merely needed to seize control of the state apparatus in order for the social order to collapse. In the failed revolutions of western Europe, however, "when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed."<sup>45</sup> Bourgeois society was not maintained simply by the coercive apparatus of the state; it was also held together by the "'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population".<sup>46</sup> Socialist action in the west demanded the overcoming of this spontaneous consent, not simply by pointing out the error of such ways, but as part of a concrete alteration of the superstructure -- the remaking of culture.

It is to this end that Gramsci discusses the relation between philosophy and popular culture. The ideological transformation is likened to a "war of position" by Gramsci, a long slow process demanding careful organization, a 'reciprocal siege' of the ruling and the ruled.<sup>47</sup> Within this reciprocal siege, the activist intellectuals work to bring forth the critical component already existent within popular culture, while informing and being informed by this

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<sup>45</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. & trans. Quinton Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith [New York: International Publishers, 1971], p.238.

<sup>46</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.12. It must be noted, against accusations of dualism in this aspect of Gramsci's work, that he makes clear that the state/civil society distinction is an analytic one; "in actual reality civil society and State are one in the same". *Ibid*, p.160.

<sup>47</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, pp.233-239.

culture. Unlike earlier socialist intellectual programs,<sup>48</sup> Gramsci's does not claim to bring truth to the masses, but to clarify that which is already there.<sup>49</sup> In the bringing forth this immanent critical potential, Gramsci also remakes the intellectual, both in action and substance. 'A philosophy of praxis,' writes Gramsci,

must be a criticism of 'common sense', basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that 'everyone' is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of life into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, in making the relationship between the masses and the intellectuals dialectical, Gramsci's philosopher, like Mannheim's democratic planner, finds the basis for theoretical projects within everyday life. In Gramsci's case the project is taken to the point wherein everyone is recognized as being a philosopher.

"All men[sic] are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals."<sup>51</sup> Gramsci's famous formulation of the distinctiveness of the intellectual posits this distinction as situated within the social division of labour. All human actions utilize intellectual faculties; the distinction between intellectual and "non-intellectual"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Foremost among these projects is that of Karl Kautsky. On the intellectuals' introducing socialist consciousness to the proletariat, see his comments from a 1901 article in *Die Neue Zeit*, cited in Carl Boggs, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Modernity*, p.42; for a general statement of Kautsky's understanding of the intellectual within a strictly economically deterministic framework, see Karl Kautsky, *Thomas More and His Utopia*, trans. H.J. Stenning [London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979].

<sup>49</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, pp.327-333.

<sup>50</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, pp.330-331.

<sup>51</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.9.

<sup>52</sup> I use this term guardedly, because as Gramsci notes, it is impossible to speak of the non-intellectual for the very reason that all activity involves intellectual faculties. *Selections...*, p.9.

is one of social recognition of the professional activity of the former. The intellectual is one whose professional activities are "weighted towards intellectual elaboration" rather than "muscular nervous effort".<sup>53</sup> The intellectual is a category within the modern division of labour.

### *"Americanism" & the return of the intellectual*

Much of Gramsci's work on the intellectual is devoted towards democratizing the intellectual division of labour, seeking to draw forth intellectual activity from the masses.<sup>54</sup> What Gramsci does not do, however, is question this very distinction between 'intellectual elaboration' and 'muscular nervous effort'; the simple distinction between mental and manual is presumed to be an ontological truth-as-is for counter-hegemonic action.<sup>55</sup>

By seeking the meaning of the concept 'the intellectual' within the elaboration of the social division of labour, Gramsci does much to demystify the intellectual as a social figure. The intellectual is not the proprietor of a normatively superior science, as in the versions presented by Mannheim and earlier by Kautsky. Instead, everyone is an intellectual, and the struggle within civil society will develop this role, shattering the division of labour which dictates the distinction as part of bourgeois hegemony. But Gramsci does not question 'intellectual elaboration' as an ontological category, nor its privileging over all other experience. Quite the contrary, Gramsci praises the destruction of everyday experience as a

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<sup>53</sup> *Selections...*, p.9.

<sup>54</sup> This is Gramsci's conscious intent, as noted in a letter to his sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht. Cited in Gramsci, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, p.300.

<sup>55</sup> See the discussion of Fordism below.

step in the articulation of intellectual faculties, and thereby revolutionary consciousness. This hierarchy is made clear in his discussion of automation within the United States, and its implications for the emerging Italian factory system.

The automation of production, part of a process Gramsci describes as 'Americanism', is central to the enhancement of the critical capacities of the proletariat. Such a development in the workplace demands the curbing of the (male) workers' bodily vices: "The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfected automatism."<sup>56</sup> The exactitudes of the assembly line necessitated that the destructive passions of the workers -- Gramsci concentrates on alcohol and sexual desire -- be eliminated, because the after-effects of such physical excesses interfered with productive labour. This 'fact' was recognized by the American industrialists, and in particular Henry Ford, who embarked on the surveillance and moral regulation of their employee's lives outside of the workplace. These attempts at remaking morality, necessary in the immediate term for capitalist production, would create a new 'man':

One should not be misled, any more than in the case of prohibition, by the 'puritanical' appearance assumed in this concern. The truth is that the new type of man demanded by the rationalisation of production and work cannot be developed until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it too has been rationalised.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.305.

<sup>57</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.297. It should be noted here that the moral reformation of the working class is intended to have different results for women and men. Gramsci does refer to the need for women to "attain not only a genuine independence in relation to men but also a new way of conceiving themselves and their role in sexual relations" (p.296); much of the rest of his commentary on women, however, focuses on the need for women to learn monogamy, fidelity, and respect for 'the new type of worker', whose woman "is free from affectation and doesn't play little games about being seduced or raped in order to be possessed..." (p.304). The male worker's passions must be controlled in order to develop his rationality, which can only be done when freed from feminine wiles. Gramsci's men become rational; his women, obedient.

Such 'puritanical' measures aid in rationalizing all aspects of the worker's life. Rationality is opposed to passion; the latter must be purged in order that the former may flourish. The entrepreneur seeks such rationalization in order to improve production, yet simultaneously is aiding the counter-hegemonic struggle by taming destructive physical actions which inhibit the workers' rational capabilities.

The final component in the ascent of proletarian rationality occurs at the point when the individual worker's rationality -- intellectual involvement -- is eliminated from the process of production; this is the point of intellectual freedom for the worker: "Once the process of adaptation has been completed, what really happens is that the brain of the worker, far from being mummified, reaches a stage of complete freedom."<sup>58</sup> At this point, the workers' minds are completely freed from the actual experience in which their bodies are engaged; it is at this point that the worker is able to become an intellectual challenging the social order. The worker who need not think as a worker will still think,

and not only does the worker think, but the fact that he[sic] gets no immediate satisfaction from his work and realises that they are trying to reduce him to a trained gorilla, can lead him into a train of thought that is far from conformist.<sup>59</sup>

In this manner the worker, whose body has been wholly subordinated to the rationality of the most modern form of capitalist production, ceases to engage in manual labour. The experience of labour has been completely severed from intellectual experience. The destruction of experience amplifies intellectual potential.

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<sup>58</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.309.

<sup>59</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.310.

In attempting to formulate the conditions of the intellectual development of the worker, Gramsci has once again articulated the complete separation of knowledge from experience. For knowledge, as both specific understandings of how to accomplish tasks as well as the self-understandings of the workers concerning their own positions in the world, are wholly of the intellect. Experience, as the physical presence and experience of bodies, cannot be heard as knowledge. To the contrary, when experience is rendered absolutely mute, the worker reduced to the status of a trained gorilla, this is the point when mind and body are most separated. For Gramsci, this is the point at which the workers are able to realize their intellectual potential, and its revolutionary implications.

The democratization of the intellectual process sought by Gramsci leads him to attempt to abolish the everyday from intellectual activity -- a return to the notion of a separate world for philosophy. Yet Gramsci eventually pulls up short of this demand, reverting instead to a more conservative vision of the intellectual, and one more closely akin to Mannheim's. Having spent so much writing attempting to demonstrate the capacity of all to be intellectuals, Gramsci concedes, "Anyone with a superior intellectual formation with a point of view opposed to him[sic] can put forward arguments better than he and tear him to pieces logically and so on."<sup>60</sup> Yet the "man of the people", who is the subject of Gramsci's concern here, should not be dissuaded by such a logical defeat, because this individual is aware that at some point, some member of their organic group put forth a *better* argument than the current figure with 'a superior intellectual formation.' Our defeated debater,

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<sup>60</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.339.

...has no concrete memory of the reasons and could not repeat them, but he [sic] knows that reasons exist, because he has heard them expounded, and was convinced by them. The fact of having once suddenly seen the light and been convinced is the permanent reason for his reasons persisting, even if the arguments in its favour cannot be readily produced.<sup>61</sup>

In the end, it is impossible to truly expect all to be able to function as intellectuals, even should the vestiges of everyday distraction be purged from their bodies. The authority of the intellectual remains reserved for a few; in the "last analysis," Gramsci concedes that "in the masses *as such*, philosophy can only be experienced as faith."<sup>62</sup>

Through his expansion of the concept of the intellectual, Gramsci hoped to establish the basis for a new epistemological order, in which everyone could be recognized as an intellectual. But by accepting the ontological status of intellectual activity itself, he reiterated the basic methodological premise of modern epistemologies: the privileging of intellect over experience as the exclusive basis of knowledge. Given the unlikeliness of the masses' truly escaping their bodies, Gramsci retreats to intellectuals as authorities. Membership in this exclusive gathering may be transformed, but its exclusivity has been retained.

Despite his attempt to reform the notion of the intellectual, Gramsci remains bound by a dichotomy of intellectual and manual labour. This split eventually collapses Gramsci's organic intellectuals into figures indistinguishable in behaviour from the traditional intellectuals whom Mannheim has elevated into their role of planning. In the last analysis, both Mannheim and Gramsci have reached a distinctly modern understanding of knowledge: the intellectual as bolshevik.

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<sup>61</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.339.

<sup>62</sup> Gramsci, *Selections...*, p.339.

## **Philosophy in modernity: bolshevism**

Mannheim brings intellectual activity into the modern world by establishing it as the exclusive producer of knowledge, a production which cannot be left in isolation. Yet the intellectuals are not merely the producers of this knowledge: they are also its proprietors, as the only group which can mediate between knowledge of the world and societies. The intellectuals' entry into modernity is the formation of the intellectuals as a class, where by virtue of their exclusive productive role, they confront society as a member of a class with exclusive claims to knowledge. For Mannheim, the only solution to the complexity of modern societies is to permit this class to shape the direction of society of a whole.

The significance of regarding academic intellectuals as a new class is its ability to account for the divergent self-understandings within academe. The notion of intellectuals-as-technicians, while by no means universally repudiated, does not hold the same allure within academe today as it did for Mannheim. Yet with the grounding of knowledge as the exclusive product of intellectual labour, and above all academic labour, the opposition between the intellectual and society remains. Personal dissent from intellectual messianism does not extricate one from the relations of academe and society. With the intellectual in modernity

characterized by labour, there is a concurrent marginalization of the non-labouring *literati*.<sup>63</sup> Knowledge is necessarily the product of human artifice.

Mannheim's advance on what might otherwise be mistaken for a restatement of positivist principles is his attempt to negotiate between the *vita contemplativa*, the detached realm of other worldly philosophy, and intellectual labour, the process through which the intellectual actively fabricates knowledge. Scientific awareness is produced in accordance with a specific *technē*, but such awareness only ascends to the status of scientific knowledge within the totalizing framework of relationism. Philosophy, in its broadest sense, exists as an ultimate synthesis of intellectual detachment and involvement.

The vision of the engaged intellectual monopoly of knowledge, with its potential for reshaping society, is a powerful one. Mannheim's formulation of the process is openly elitist, yet the allure of the basic idea is such that Gramsci, while expressly seeking the democratization of intellectual activity, accepted the premise of this monopoly. What makes Mannheim's image particularly powerful and provocative is its integrity. There is no attempt

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<sup>63</sup>Knowledge is the monopoly of a technology accessible only by the intellectual; the other members of literate and artistic groups either followed suit, or were denied intellectual status. The religious clergy lost their status (in so far as they remained clerics); revelatory truths, mandated by the divine, were no longer knowledge. Such truths were only recognized to the extent which they could be represented by the independent intellect of the philosopher-theologian. Revelatory truths constituted knowledge only once they had been produced by the philosopher, within the modernist technology of knowledge.

A similar process ensued within other arts. Within literary realms, the shift is evident at the point when authors began identifying themselves as such: at the point when the teller of a tale accepted credit for its creation, the narrative became the product of intellectual labour. The transition was evident in painting, where the rise of perspective shattered the canvas into uniform fragments, which together portrayed a reality. Art is rendered scientific: it is the product of the labour of discrete individuals, and this is a labour which has recuperated and transformed experience into discrete, utilizable forms. All 'culture' becomes the product of a technology. On the emergence of authorship, see Wlad Godzich & Jeffrey Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose: an essay in prosaics* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], pp.60-63; on the epistemological significance of perspectivism, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], pp.49-61.

to camouflage the elevation of the intellectual; to the contrary, Mannheim demands that the notion of democracy will have to be reworked to coordinate itself with epistemological modernity. Mannheim's intellectual planners are not representatives of social groups produced by the forces of history. Rather, they are the culmination of such groups: the intellectuals are the historical synthesis of all social forces. The intellectuals become their own agent of history.

Mannheim attempts to answer conclusively a question which dogged political thought for ages: with knowledge of the world necessarily restricted to the few, what is the relation between this few and the masses unable to transcend physical experience? The attempt to establish a satisfactory resolution to this question launched the intellectual on a long journey of exploration, searching for a figure which could realize the intellectual imagination in the material world. This proved a difficult task; the marxist search for an agent in the wake of fascism was not a new endeavour. Rather, it was a continuation in the long quest for the modern intellectual, a process Alvin Gouldner termed "shopping for an agent". Gouldner identifies earlier encampments on this expedition: the nation; the *Volk*; the 'Enlightened Monarch' of the *philosophes*; the 'industrial' classes of the Saint-Simonians; and of course, the proletariat.<sup>64</sup> But within these intellectual searches for an historical agent which will effect philosophy, there is immanent a grander scheme for the intellectuals:

"Shopping for an agent" is grounded in certain necessary assumptions. One of the most important of these is that *the shopper assumes he[sic] knows what needs to be done*; those shopping for an agent assume that their *knowledge* of the world is not problematic; what is problematic to them is only the *mobilization of power* to enact that knowledge. It is when the good is

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<sup>64</sup> Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Social Origins of Marxism", *Against Fragmentation*, pp. 23-24. Gouldner notes this search begins earlier, with Plato and Syracuse, and Aristotle in Macedonia.

taken as already known, and thus given, that the search for an agent becomes problematic. The search for an agent is a search for power by those who feel they already have knowledge.<sup>65</sup>

Within the search for agency -- itself a result of the splitting of knowledge and experience -- can be found the basis for the claim eventually to be overtly advanced: that the intellectual must rule, by virtue of being an intellectual.

The Jacobin dictatorship in the French Revolution of 1793 represents a step towards this intellectual self-assertion of leadership, launching the intellectuals into politics as intellectuals.<sup>66</sup> But it is Bolshevism which signifies the intellectuals' declaration that they will serve as their own agent of history. Mysterious forces are displaced by intellectual direction, not only in the course of revolution, but afterwards. In *"Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin discusses the inevitability of the bourgeois intellectual playing a role in the Bolshevik reconstruction of society, until the effects of the 'bourgeois atmosphere' can be overcome. He concludes that the intellectual/bolshevik must be prepared to lead in all realms of life. Nothing is immune from intellectual resolution, and no progress is possible without this resolution:

The attempt to brush aside, to fence oneself off from *one* of the 'unpleasant' problems or difficulties in some sphere of activity is a profound mistake, which will certainly have to be paid for. We must learn how to master every sphere of work and activity without exception, to overcome all difficulties and

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<sup>65</sup> Gouldner, "The Social Origins of Marxism", *Against Fragmentation*, p.26; emphases in original.

<sup>66</sup> The Jacobins interposed themselves as a 'virtuous minority' between the Reason and the People, taking on the role of 'tyrannical educator'. Yet beyond this willingness to direct the citizenry in the conduct of virtue lay a deep ambivalence towards issues of property. The liberal tradition also infused Jacobinism, which could not accept the unreserved privileging of intellectual shaping of economic activity. Jacobinism would not assert the primacy of intellectual production over the entirety of the world. See Ferenc Fehér, *The Fozen Revolution: An Essay on Jacobinism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987].

eradicate all bourgeois habits, customs and traditions everywhere. Any other way of presenting the question is just trifling, mere childishness.<sup>67</sup>

Intellectual knowledge, by which the world is ordered, knows no bounds. Such is its nature that the intellectual must intervene in all aspects of the world if it is to unfold according to the philosophical imagination; blind laws are superseded by rational guidance. The culmination of intellectual labour in modernity is bolshevism.

Mannheim's sociology of intellectuals becomes a coherent expression of epistemological bolshevism -- a debt which Mannheim may have downplayed in his later works, but did not repudiate. Yet this epistemology stumbles upon the lingering vestiges of the *vita contemplativa* which it sought to conclusively abolish. Mannheim's intellectuals rely on knowledge extracted from the everyday through scientific -- in a very broad sense -- techniques. This, in itself, is little more than a continuation of the project of modern science. Yet Mannheim goes further than the simple excision of knowledge from the everyday: he seeks to return this knowledge, in the form of planned societies. As Sohn-Rethel and Agamben both observed in Chapter One, the form of such scientific knowledge involves a separation from the referents of the everyday. Attempting to return this material to the everyday in the form of knowledge is impossible; as Gramsci observed, its return must be at the level of faith.

Faith is the necessary state of the intellectuals' knowledge within the everyday. Arendt argued against the intervention of the philosophers in the *vita activa*, because they would never abide by the refusal of the citizenry to accept the eternal truths of philosophy. It is in

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<sup>67</sup> V.I. Lenin, "*Left-Wing*" Communism, *an Infantile Disorder* [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970], pp.98-99.

this vein that Mannheim's arguments for planned society grow increasingly shaky, and his critiques of totalitarian planning more strident. The conviction in the intellectuals' monopoly on knowledge does not waiver, but their ability to return this knowledge within a democratic society becomes dubious.

Arendt sought to exclude expert knowledge from politics, predicated on an ancient epistemology demanding the absolute separation of philosophy from the world. The *vita contemplativa* cannot be sustained because it cannot allow the extent to which philosophy is an act of fabrication, the extent to which it exists within the world. In contrast, Mannheim sought to render politics irrelevant, by subjecting all social processes to such expert guidance. Mannheim attempted to elevate intellectual knowledge above the world of the everyday, reserving such knowledge to an intellectual vanguard who will order the world. This attempt to transform the intellectual into its own agent of history crumbles when the attempt is made to return knowledge to a world which it is no longer belongs. Neither attempt, absolute disengagement nor absolute engagement, offers a sustainable premise for the act of theorizing the political. The final position, to which I now turn in Chapter Three, attempts to find a place for philosophy which is within the world without claiming to be the whole of that world. It is with this goal that I now turn to Louis Althusser, and the theory of practices.

## Chapter Three

### Writing Space Louis Althusser and the practices of theory

The story so far:

Hannah Arendt, in positing the absolute ontological distinction between the contemplative life and the active life, sought to exclude philosophy from politics. Her attempt at maintaining the complete separation between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* breaks down with the consideration of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's critique of intellectual labour. Philosophy cannot sustain the claim to absolute un-worldliness upon which Arendt bases this portion of her argument: philosophy is always already part of the world. For Arendt, however, the entry of philosophy into the world is profoundly threatening to her concept of the political. In an effort to retain the possibility of a thoughtful politics, without surrendering to philosophical absolutes, Arendt seeks to "think without a bannister": to engage in political thinking in a manner which complements the inevitable shifts within the public sphere.

Karl Mannheim, in sharp contrast to Arendt, brings philosophy into the world unequivocally with his concept of epistemological relationism. Knowledge of the world is the property of intellectuals in their collectivity, and such knowledge can be used to order the

world through planning. Mannheim's argument in favour of planning founders on his attempt at rendering such knowledge as unproblematic, able to convey an accurate awareness of everyday life which can be returned to this everyday as democratic social control -- the processes through which exact intellectual knowledge is able to guide societal affairs. It would be improper to suggest that Mannheim has no concept of the political, nor of the danger posed by invasion of these definitive claims to knowledge. For Mannheim, however, the turbulence of the political is a greater danger than intellectual bolshevism. Yet despite this unabashed celebration of social control, Karl Mannheim's presentation of ideological relationism bears a marked resemblance to my final account of politics and philosophy, that of Louis Althusser and his shifting accounts of theoretical practice.

Althusser is the most problematic of the three figures upon whom I have focused. The work of Mannheim and Arendt, both refugees from Nazism, is informed by a loathing of totalitarianism<sup>1</sup> and a personal commitment to non-partisanship in their later years. Althusser, by contrast, spent his career in the French academy, and remained committed to a marxist-leninism throughout his philosophical career. He was an active member (although not always in official favour) of the PCF, and did not break with Stalinism until the mid-sixties. His political voice was silent or quiescent in the major upheavals of his time: conditions in the Soviet Union, May '68, the crushing of the Prague Spring. His actions are marked by his repeated bouts of mental illness, culminating in the death of his wife and long-term partner, H el ene L egotien, at his hands in 1980. Althusser's activities, both within and beyond his

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<sup>1</sup> Although to be sure, this is mitigated in Mannheim, with his reserved admiration for the positive elements of both fascism and bolshevism.

theoretical writings, make him an unpalatable figure within a thesis addressing (however obliquely) issues of popular politics.

In various cases, Althusser's personal/political activities have led to rejections of the entirety of his philosophical works, amongst writers finding a direct correlation between Althusser's theory and practice. Martin Jay alludes to this when he remarks, "Although he struggled to dissociate himself with the Party's Stalinist past, his efforts to do so were rarely successful because of the arguably Stalinist implications of his philosophy itself."<sup>2</sup> E.P. Thompson is more direct in his connection between Althusser's theory and his political activities: "Thus we can see the emergence of Althusserianism as a manifestation of a general police action within ideology, as the attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory."<sup>3</sup> Thompson associates Althusser's entire concept of theoretical practice with Stalinist ideals, thus placing it beyond redemption.<sup>4</sup> Others have taken this point further, finding in Althusser's philosophy the inevitability and justification of H el ene L egotien's death.<sup>5</sup>

Yet while Althusser's philosophy was undoubtedly affected by his turbulent relationship with a vanguardist party and its attempt to maintain orthodoxy,<sup>6</sup> his

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism & Totality: the adventures of a concept from Luk acs to Habermas* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], p.388.

<sup>3</sup> E.P. Thompson, in the title essay of *The Poverty of Theory & other essays* [London: Merlin Press, 1978], p.323.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, the title essay of *The Poverty of Theory & other essays*, pp.271-272;316-317.

<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Finn, "Why Althusser Killed his Wife", *Canadian Forum* [vol.LXI, no.712; September-October 1981]. This is an intentionally polemical piece, sparked by reactions to the L egotien's death. Finn draws a direct link between Althusser's attempt at scientificity and the killing.

<sup>6</sup> Althusser obliquely renounced the concept of theoretical practice in the 1974 essay, "Is it simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy", in his *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976), declaring it to be a "theoreticist deviation," p.173. Martin Jay, among others, suggests that this retraction was a submission to party discipline. See Jay, *Marxism & Totality*, pp.385-422,

understanding of the role of philosophy and the intellectual and their relationship with the political is not a rehash of Leninist principles. Rather, Althusser, like Arendt and Mannheim, is also responding to the collapse of certainty within the realm of knowledge. With the earlier figures, this collapse was made evident in the withering of politics, under totalitarian regimes and through the proliferation of ideological standpoints. Althusser began his career in the fractious world of French marxism after World War Two, a series of marxisms being pulled into the orbit of a plethora of philosophical strains.<sup>7</sup> For Althusser, the collapse of certainty is located within marxism itself: the failure of marxist parties in western Europe to gain state power, and the less than scintillating example of central and eastern European parties. It is in the absence of this certainty that Althusser introduces 'theoretical practice' as the activity of the philosopher within politics.

In this chapter, I wish to consider how 'theoretical practice' might enhance an understanding of the relation between theory and the everyday. Althusser develops two versions of the concept within his work, initially as the means through which knowledge is produced, and later as the process of claiming philosophical stakes. In both renditions, Althusser argues that theory cannot act upon the everyday, but only upon already existing products of theory. In doing so, Althusser positions discrete realms of practices, which are irreducible to a single causal explanation.

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*passim.*

<sup>7</sup> For a synopsis of French Marxism after World War Two, see Arthur Hirsh, *The French New Left: An Intellectual History from Sartre to Gorz* [Boston: South End Press, 1981]. For a highly critical reading of Althusser's contemporaries (though not of Althusser), see Luc Ferry & Alain Renault, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, trans. Mary H.S. Cattani [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990].

Left at this point, Althusser's presentation of practices can be read as a re-invention of the *vita contemplativa*, and consequently, Althusser has been accused of reverting to pre-marxist idealist notions of philosophy.<sup>8</sup> In order to retain the distinctiveness of Althusser's notion, I proceed to the work of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre and their discussions of the breakdown between writing and orality as incompatible modes of communication. Through de Certeau's work on practices and everyday life, the separation of Althusserian realms is frayed, but not abolished. To conclude this chapter, I turn to the much-abused notion of 'space', in order to develop a site for theory which neither proclaims its imperviousness nor collapses it into the everyday. Revisiting Arendt's notion of "thinking without a bannister", such a site may offer a point from which theory can reclaim its relevance within politics without attempting to bend the political to its will.

## **Louis Althusser: the process of knowledge**

In the midst of the divergence between intellectual labour and the everyday, the work of Louis Althusser is intriguing. Althusser's contribution is notable as an attempt to sort through Cartesian epistemology to the contemporary production of theory and its material bases. Althusser returned to this issue throughout his philosophical career, with variations on

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Jay does make this suggestion, claiming, "The characteristic bourgeois distinction between mental and manual labor of exchange-oriented society was thus valorized rather than undermined in his work." Jay in fact cites Sohn-Rethel against Althusser. See Jay, *Marxism & Totality*, p.412. See also Nancy Hartssock's critique of Althusser within this chapter.

the theme of theoretical practice. Althusser's formulations of this theme mark a dramatic shift from the marxist epistemologies of Lukács and Gramsci.<sup>9</sup> In attempting to purge marxism of all Hegelian vestiges, Althusser rejects the possibility of Lukács' unified subject/object position. While, like Gramsci, Althusser retains an intellectual/manual distinction -- in the form of distinct practices -- he no longer posits this distinction as ontological. Rather, all practices, including the theoretical, are a form of productive labour; the product of theoretical practices is -- in a very broad sense -- knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

For Althusser, a theoretical discourse is one which "results in the *knowledge* of an object."<sup>11</sup> Scientific knowledge -- which is what Althusser's marxism aims at -- cannot be brought into being within the everyday:

...a science, far from reflecting the immediate givens of everyday experience and practice, is constituted only on the condition of calling them into question, and breaking with them, to the extent that its results, once achieved, appear as the *contrary* of the obvious facts of practical everyday experience...<sup>12</sup>

To this point, it may appear that Althusser is recapitulating the intellectual distancing from and appropriation of everyday life. What is significant, however, is that while Althusser maintains this distinction of knowledge and the everyday, it is constituted through the *act* of calling the everyday into question. Knowledge of an 'object' is not simply an object itself, but

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<sup>9</sup> For discussions of Lukács' and Gramsci's epistemological formulations, see chapter two,

<sup>10</sup> At least in the earlier formulation of theoretical practice. See below for Althusser's revisions of the concept.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Althusser, "On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources" (trans. James H. Kavanagh), in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays* (hereafter referred to as *Philosophy...*), ed. & intro. Gregory Elliott; trans. Ben Brewster *et al* [London: Verso, 1990], p.46. Emphases in this and all subsequent quotations in this section are in the original.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle" (trans. James H. Kavanagh), in *Philosophy...*, p.15.

a process.<sup>13</sup> Knowledge is understood as a particular practice, through which theoretical discourses construct knowledge of the world. The original articulation of this practice posits theoretical practice as the production of knowledge; at a later date, Althusser reformulates theoretical practice as an activity which no longer produces knowledge, but claims stakes.<sup>14</sup> Together, these two positions, and the shift which they signify, contain the potential for elaborating the uncertain status of contemporary intellectual labour.

### *Theoretical practice (I): production of knowledge*

'Practice' is a key element of Althusser's depiction of social activity, intellectual and everyday. In the 1963 essay "On the Materialist Dialectic", practices are synonymous with productive activity:

By *practice* in general I shall mean any process of *transformation* of a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production')... [T]he *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men[sic], means and a technical method of utilizing the means.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Knowledge of particular, concrete, real objects is the result of an entire *process* of production of knowledge..." Louis Althusser, "On Theoretical Work...", *Philosophy...*, p.47.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy O'Hagan discusses this transition, presented as the "Old Definition" of "philosophy as the theory of theoretical practice", and the "New Definition", philosophy as "political intervention in the field of theory". See his "Althusser: How to be a Marxist in Philosophy", in *Marx and Marxisms*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson [Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series: 14; supplement to *Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982]. The quotations are from p.244.

In turning to Althusser's formulations of theoretical practice, I am not primarily concerned with his attempts to claim scientific (as opposed to ideological) status for this practice, nor his attempt to establish this as the epistemological basis of a new marxist orthodoxy.

<sup>15</sup> Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic: on the unevenness of origins", *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster [London; Verso, 1979], pp.166-167.

Practice is the activity of transformation; like all other realms of activity, theory also has its own specific means of production, whose product is knowledge. "True knowledge" of society is necessarily the result of a scientific practice, constituted in the rupture with the obfuscation of everyday experience.<sup>16</sup>

A scientific theoretical practice has as its raw materials not empirically given 'facts', but the previously articulated products of intellectual labour. Such material is "constituted either of still ideological concepts, or of scientific 'facts', or of already scientifically elaborated concepts which belong nevertheless to an earlier phase of the science..."<sup>17</sup> A theoretical practice always begins with already constituted knowledge, "an *ever-already* complex raw material", which has already been elaborated and transformed.<sup>18</sup> The labour of knowledge has as its object the already constructed products of other such labour.

Theoretical practice, then, never confronts the everyday, only the already existing abstractions of intellectual labour. Now knowledge is the result of the act of transformation. The distinction between the prior knowledge and the re-produced knowledge occurs as an "epistemological break"; the newly produced knowledge "rejects the old one even as it 'englobes' it, that is, defines its 'relativity' and the (subordinate) limits of its validity."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Louis Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation...", *Philosophy...*, p.24.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic...", *For Marx*, p.184.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy", in Louis Althusser & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster [London: Verso, 1979], p.43.

<sup>19</sup> Louis Althusser, 'On the Materialist Dialectic...', *For Marx*, p.185. To be sure, Althusser invokes Gaston Bachelard's terminology of 'epistemological break' in this passage in reference to "the transformation of an ideological generality into a scientific generality"; however, the quoted passage (in my text above) immediately following, which refers to 'old' and 'new' scientific generalities, is included in the same process of transformation.

At this stage of Althusser's development of theoretical practice, the most mysterious element in the process is the productive moment of transformation, a weakness acknowledged by Althusser. The transformation apparently occurs within the diverse field of the existing theory, a "more or less contradictory unity [which] constitutes the 'theory' of the science at the (historical) moment under consideration..."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the entire process of theoretical practice occurs entirely within the realm of intellectual labour; its past, present and future productions are all separated from the everyday.

Two important considerations for the writing of theory emerge out of this preliminary statement of theoretical practice. First, there is a reiteration that such a practice is already positioned apart from the world of experience; and second, operating in this separately constituted space of intellectual labour, it is impossible to speak of the 'applicability' of these theoretical constructs to other realms. There no longer exists a definitive correlation between 'theory' within the realm of intellectual labour and 'practice' in everyday life. The practices -- theoretical and everyday -- cannot be transported between the areas:

We must recognize that there is no practice in general, but only *distinct practices* which are not related in any Manichaeian way with a theory which is opposed to them in every respect. For there is not one side of theory, a pure intellectual vision without body or materiality -- and another of completely material practice which 'gets its hands dirty'.<sup>21</sup>

Theory must not be imposed upon 'material' practices in the world of the everyday because theory is already composed through a material practice. Intellectual labour, as a practice, does

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<sup>20</sup> Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic...", *For Marx*, pp.184-185. Althusser's recognition of the brevity of this presentation is acknowledged in a note to this particular passage (pp.184-185, note 21).

<sup>21</sup> Louis Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy", in Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p.58.

not operate on immediate everyday life, but on already existing knowledge. As such a practice it already possesses a materiality, through the 'specific structure', people, 'means and a technical method of utilizing the means' through which theory is written. Theory cannot dictate to practice; any attempt to impose it upon everyday life is a relapse into idealist dichotomies. Yet the act of supplanting old knowledge with new, normatively superior knowledge continues to suggest an absolute, self-contained character for this practice. To understand how the relations between these various theoretical practices could co-exist, I now turn to Althusser's reformulation of the concept.

*Theoretical practice (II): philosophical stakes*

In 1967, Althusser delivered a series of lectures as part of the "Philosophy Course for Scientists" at the École Normale Supérieure. These lectures, eventually published as "Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists", present a dramatically different version of the practice of theory. No longer does it claim to produce knowledge: now theoretical practice seeks to intervene in the contested field of theory.

As in the earlier rendition of theoretical practice, philosophy no longer has any 'object' except that internal to philosophy itself, which "consists of words organized into dogmatic propositions called Theses."<sup>22</sup> Deprived of any access to external reality, such theoretical activity can no longer lay any claim to 'Truth'; instead, philosophical theses can at best be determined 'correct', a determination made in relation to other practices.<sup>23</sup> Philosophy no

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<sup>22</sup> Louis Althusser, "Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists" (hereafter referred to as "PSPS"), trans. Warren Montag, in *Philosophy...*, p.77.

<sup>23</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, pp.74-75.

longer seeks to offer solutions, but to intervene in a manner that "*open[s] the way to a correct position with regards to these problems.*"<sup>24</sup>

As it is part of the field in which it intervenes, philosophy cannot claim objects; instead it has stakes in this field.<sup>25</sup> The stakes of a theoretical practice are situated in relation to political struggles and other theoretical practices. The method of the practice is to draw lines of demarcation, differentiating the ideological -- the unreflective -- from self-reflexive science.<sup>26</sup> This activity of demarcation is not an attempt to step into the everyday, but to clarify the clashes within the existing realm of theory. Within this theoretical "ensemble", intellectual practices intervene, acting on the positions which it has marked out. Theoretical practice is part of a philosophical attempt to validate its stakes through the shifting of the lines of demarcation; this shift is "an adjustment *in struggle...* between existing ideas -- some dominant, others dominated."<sup>27</sup> Working on what is already present, an activist philosophy seeks to shift the terms of theoretical discourse.

Much of Althusser's lecture, directed at an audience of scientists, is devoted to attempting such a shift, establishing science as containing a spontaneous "materialist instinct",<sup>28</sup> which, once it overcomes internal ideological constraints, will clearly reveal the compatibility of scientific practice with the marxist orthodoxy of the moment. This

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<sup>24</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, p.81.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, p.104.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, p.83.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, p.104.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, p.131.

denouement to Althusser's lecture is not relevant to my discussion here; its noteworthiness owes more to its demonstrative power, as Althusser's marxism seeks its validation amidst the scientific intelligentsia.

With the presentation of this second version of theoretical practice, Althusser destabilizes his own adamant claim that marxism is a scientific discipline.<sup>29</sup> With the impossibility of completing the process of knowledge, all propositions are ideological raw material for further theoretical practices. The stakes claimed by Althusser's scientific practices are no more immune to this than those of bourgeois pseudo-sciences. Althusser can only retain his claim to marxist science by expanding 'science' to encompass all theoretical activity.

What is significant for my project in this revised theoretical practice is the loss of the conclusive object: knowledge. The practice now consists of stating theses, which draw lines within the theoretical ensemble. Theoretical practice is an intervention in the realm of intellectual labour, which attempts to reorder this ensemble. Theoretical practice remains an activity which does not seek instrumental effects or explanatory powers in the everyday, but it no longer claims completion in the intellectual world. Its relevance is established in relation to other theoretical practices as part of an ongoing 'adjustment in struggle'. Knowledge -- in so far as the term retains any utility -- is never completed; as Althusser observed in an earlier essay, "a completed knowledge is a non-sense", because it returns to the confusions of

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<sup>29</sup> Or, in fact, disciplines: Althusser recognizes two distinct scientific disciplines within marxism: historical materialism ("the science of history") and dialectical materialism ("Marxist philosophy"). For this distinction, and an excellent example of his attempt to demonstrate their scientificity, see his "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation...", *Philosophy...*, esp. pp.5-22.

ideology.<sup>30</sup> Once again, knowledge is an ongoing process, necessarily occurring in relation to other theoretical practices.

*"Mind the gap": from theoretical to everyday practice*

From these two formulations of theoretical practice in Althusser's work, five important points emerge. First, theoretical practice is a process which occurs entirely within the realm of intellectual labour; its referents are not found within everyday life. Second, theory can no longer claim a direct relation to these everyday practices, because of this separation. Third, theoretical practice is a discursive act, which establishes stakes rather than manufacturing knowledge. Fourth, these stakes are established through a process of demarcation; they attempt to adjust the theoretical field in which they intervene. Finally, these adjustments are contested, directed against other theoretical practices. A shift takes place in the versions of theoretical practice. The earlier version echoes the claim that knowledge is the culmination of intellectual labour, but this is a process, one which occurs entirely within theoretical constructs. From here, the entire notion of 'culmination' is discarded, and theoretical practice becomes an activity whose 'production' can be seen only in terms of other theoretical practices.

Althusser provides few direct hints within his work concerning the role of academe in theoretical practices; however, if Althusser's work is understood as *being* theoretical practices, in addition to being *about* theoretical practice, it should be evident that academe

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<sup>30</sup> Louis Althusser, "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation...", *Philosophy...*, p.17.

is significant for such practices. As I have already mentioned, Althusser's second formulation of theoretical practice was presented as part of a "philosophy course for scientists". These lectures are the clearest demonstration of Althusser's demarcating theoretical territory within academe, for an audience of academics, yet they are not alone. Many of Althusser's best-known works -- such as *Reading Capital*<sup>31</sup> -- originated as lectures and seminars within the university. While Althusser may not intend to place such an emphasis upon academe, it is a predominant site for his own theoretical practices. The intellectual labours of academe work upon themselves, not producing knowledge, but reordering the constructs which comprise academe. The stakes of theoretical practice are written into the academic imaginary, a perpetual series of recodings. This imaginary continues to define itself against an homogenized everyday, but this is not the everyday of practices; it is the everyday staked out within the theoretical ensemble which is academe, through theoretical practices. 'Knowledge' within academe exists in the positions and relations of these writings. As such, knowledge is not the product of an individual's intellectual labour. Harkening back to my discussion of Mannheim in the last chapter, such labour only has meaning in relation to other productions within what Michel de Certeau identifies as a "scriptural economy".<sup>32</sup>

Yet while intellectual labour does not act upon any concrete given -- only other theoretical abstractions -- this does not imply the dichotomization of the everyday and academe. Writing has attempted to impose its order on the everyday, but at the same time,

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<sup>31</sup> Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* [Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1994], p.355.

<sup>32</sup> See below.

practices beyond academe have resonated within it, shifting the location of theory's demarcations. Althusser recognized this difficulty, and could not provide a resolution:

For philosophy intervenes in reality only by producing results within itself. It acts outside of itself through the results that it produces within itself. It will be necessary to think through this necessary paradox one day.<sup>33</sup>

The socially engaged philosopher is forced to confront two tendencies: theory must recognize that it acts upon itself, but its effects do not remain confined to theory. Direct intervention in the everyday is as impossible as non-intervention.

Althusser's refusal to concede to older notions of the unity of theory and practice has led to the accusation that the notion of 'theoretical practice', in Althusser's sense, is inherently dualistic. Nancy Hartsock suggests that it constitutes a break with marxist thought, retreating into philosophical idealism: thought exists in/for itself, with no link to an external world. According to Hartsock, Althusser's theoretical practice,

...breaks the links between theory and practice in Marx's work. Theoretical practice, according to Althusser, contains its own theory and its own practice, along with its own criteria for validation, as Althusser describes it, the sphere of theoretical practice is in effect not simply autonomous but independent of other spheres of activity. Althusser has subdivided the social world and built identical houses on undifferentiated plots of land.<sup>34</sup>

By attempting to distinguish between theoretical practice and other forms of practice, Althusser has severed the connection between philosophy and everyday life, returning philosophy to a revamped version of the *vita contemplativa*: possessed of a structuring just as other spheres, but wholly independent of these spheres.

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<sup>33</sup> Louis Althusser, "PSPS", *Philosophy...*, p.107.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy C.M. Hartsock, "Louis Althusser's Structural Marxism: Political Clarity and Theoretical Distortions", in *Rethinking Marxism* [winter 1991: vol.4, no.4], pp.34-35. In the same article, Hartsock stresses that while she finds Althusser's "theoretical advice" untenable, he makes important arguments for the recognition of the complexity of social processes and the importance of economy, and is not to be dismissed out of hand.

Althusser himself foreshadows these criticisms; in his *Essays in Self Criticism*; the theory of theoretical practice is denounced as the pinnacle of his 'theoreticist deviation': "the highest point in the development of this theoreticist tendency."<sup>35</sup> Althusser concedes that any attempt to distinguish between theory as such and practice in general revisits "Epistemology" (always capitalised), understood as "...the theory of the conditions and forms of scientific practice and its history..." Such efforts are a useless diversion: if "Epistemology " is properly based in "Historical Materialism", it needs no such distinction and is no longer epistemology as such; if it lacks such a basis, it is no more than an idealist deception.<sup>36</sup>

Althusser concurs with Hartsock's later critique: separating human activity (which includes the act of theorizing) into hermetic spheres constitutes a relapse into non-materialist philosophy. Left at this point, the theory of theoretical practice is reduced to a marxist and modernist reworking of the *vita contemplativa*. Yet Althusser's statements of theoretical practice are not so definitive on the matter, as his student and colleague Etienne Balibar has observed. Suggesting that readings of Althusser's varied texts often appear to demand either the "primacy of theory" or the "primacy of politics", Balibar seeks a more subtle interpretation:

For these grand alternatives, which have become little more than "Althusserianism's" banalities, let us try to substitute a more refined approach: that of the unceasing *displacement* of an object of thought which quickly reveals itself to be irreducible to the theses in which it was originally presented.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Louis Althusser, "Elements of Self-Criticism", in his *Essays in Self-Criticism*, p.124.

<sup>36</sup> Althusser, "Elements of Self-Criticism", *Essays in Self-Criticism*, p.124, note19.

<sup>37</sup> Etienne Balibar, "Althusser's Object", trans. Margaret Cohen & Bruce Robbins, *Social Text* [no.38, summer 1994],p.161; emphasis in the original. Balibar goes on in this article to argue that five separate "moments" can be discerned in Althusser's work, wherein the 'epistemological break'

Through this continual displacement, philosophical objects are never completed, never able to revert to their previous bases, but are set in unending motion. Philosophy is continually in transit amongst "places of thought". In Balibar's reading of Althusser, the recognition of these locales should not be confused with the privileging of any such 'place'. The systemization of these 'places' is not a hierarchy, but a "limitation of efficacy", wherein thought does not act upon its own conditions, but always elsewhere, where it materializes as an ideological force.<sup>38</sup> Thought impacts beyond its own realm, as ideology (in Althusser's sense).

Althusser has attempted to render the practice of philosophy material, but retains an ambiguous version of the *vita contemplativa* as the site of philosophy. The practitioners of this philosophy are manifestly labourers, but in contrast to Mannheim, they cannot produce objective knowledge. As Balibar points out, a narrow reading of Althusser, which rejects the possibility of moving beyond philosophical segregation, is not the only one possible; as Balibar, Hartsock, and Althusser himself all agree, it is certainly not a politically appealing one.

A different reading is possible. Theoretical practices intervene within a philosophical space, but they are neither formed exclusively within such a space, nor are they confined to it. The possibility of an intellectual vanguard guiding the world is untenable, because it can never manufacture the completed knowledge implicit in Mannheim's faith in planning. The 'scientific' theory which Althusser attempts cannot remain within the everyday, but neither can

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produces different theoretical effects.

<sup>38</sup> Balibar, "Althusser's Object", *Social Text* no.38, pp.180-181.

it escape it entirely. Through the displacement of theoretical objects, the isolation of the realms of practice crumbles, a dissolution which can be traced through the works of Michel de Certeau's and Henri Lefebvre's considerations on the writing of theory.

## Writing and the everyday

Hannah Arendt acknowledged Socrates as the last true philosopher, because of his refusal to preserve his philosophy as a written text. For Arendt, the writing of philosophy was a transgression of philosophy itself, forsaking the *vita contemplativa* for the *vita activa*. Any attempt at mundane preservation of philosophical thought constitutes an attempt to insert philosophy into the realm of politics, the everyday, and in so doing threatens the vitality of that everyday. The eternal truths of philosophy are incompatible with the fluctuating diversity of the everyday; written philosophy demands the banishment of such transience. In abandoning the body of knowledge, intellectual labour seeks its immortality through the written text, and the colonization of everyday life.

Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau reformulate this distinction between theory and the everyday in terms which have now become commonplace: the opposition between writing and orality. Orality is the mode of the everyday; writing is the reification of these practices, through which the heterogenous everyday is brought into conformity with the dictates of knowledge. Through the separation of intellectual and manual labour, and the intellectual-as-academic from the layperson, the antagonism between knowledge and experience is defined,

an antagonism re-presented within writing. The right to order the world claimed by the modern intellectual does not attempt to have a voice; quite to the contrary, it claims this privilege through mastery of the written word. But in articulating the clash between the written and the oral, de Certeau and Lefebvre blur the distinction, permitting the theoretical practices of academe and those of the everyday to mutually diffuse.

### *Thieves of knowledge*

The thesis that the written word symbolizes power is not new. Writing is considered as authoritative, fixed: the written word is removed from the flow of human affairs. For medieval Christendom, the writing provided both its boundaries -- measured by adherence to particular writings -- and its internal logic. Religious texts revealed the structure of the world. The written word was the Word.<sup>39</sup> As divinely ordained law, it was singular; the power to write was not that of humans, only that of a deity. This religious Word may require interpretation within the mundane, but it did not need expansion. Scripture contained the sum total of all writing needed to know the world.

With the rise of the European university, the power to write was claimed by humans. With the transition of the academic from a thief of knowledge to that of a humble labourer with intellect,<sup>40</sup> the permanence of this sacred word began to crumble. Humans laid claim to the manufacture of knowledge; the writings of mortals were now capable of challenging the knowledge of the divine. The emerging academics sought authorial authority, rather than that

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, it was a contentious matter as to who properly understood the Word.

<sup>40</sup> See chapter one.

of the divine. Knowledge was brought into the earthly plane, and composed by humans in relation to the works of other human writers.

The shift from thieves to labourers marks more than simply the replacement of the ecclesiastic by the secularized intellectual as the party with exclusive access to knowledge. The intellectual as labourer not only has access to knowledge, but is also responsible for its production. For revelatory claims to knowledge, the world unfolds according to the divine plan; with the production of knowledge, the entire world becomes alterable. The medieval cleric held a position ordained in the very fabric of the universe (as revealed through his interpretation of scripture), whereas the labouring intellectual creates a position through the very act of labouring to create knowledge. The distinction between the masses and an elite possessing knowledge is maintained, but the basis for this distinction shifts. Michel de Certeau notes the shift in a comparison of the clerical elite of medieval Europe and the bourgeois intellectual of the Enlightenment. The cleric "stat[es] the order of the universe", by virtue of position in a divinely ordained hierarchy. The new intellectual is unable to claim supremacy through divine will; instead, such a position is predicated upon actions:

The elite group of the eighteenth century, however, is not based on the fact of a difference posited by the ordering of the cosmos, but on a practice of rupture, on a *differentiation* that it *effects*. For the elite this action consists in distinguishing itself from the masses by its ability to "produce"... This bourgeoisie-god *makes* the world..., and, in the same movement, it dissociates itself from the masses of the "common" class which in myth or symbol *receives* the world as meaning.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Michel de Certeau, "The Formality of Practices: From Religious Systems to the Ethics of the Enlightenment (the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)", *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley [New York; Columbia University Press, 1988], p.182.

The modern intellectual is marked off from the rest of the world through the production of knowledge: the intellectual produces the world; the masses receive it. This distinction is emphasized through an extension of the knowledge/experience division. The intellectual production of the world contains a practice distinct to it: the practice of writing.

### *Writing and orality*

Everyday life is marked off from the world of intellectual knowledge as the realm of speech, set in opposition to that of writing. Everyday life, the world of experience separated from the world of the intellect, is characterized by the verbal form of its communications. Other forms undoubtedly exist, but the spoken word is presented as the most immediate means of discourse within the everyday. Whatever communicative changes may have occurred, according to Agnes Heller, "...spoken language still remains the primary semiotic communication system in the business of carrying on everyday life."<sup>42</sup> Other theorists offer their variations of this theme. For Henri Lefebvre, the 'zero point of language', its neutral state, is 'everyday speech', within which normative values lose substance and speech becomes the form and content of communication.<sup>43</sup> Dorothy Smith sought to present women's voices directly into the sociological text as part of a sociological method capable of presenting such

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<sup>42</sup> Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life*, trans. G.L. Campbell [London; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984], p.164.

<sup>43</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch [New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984]. On Lefebvre's use of the zero point (borrowed from Barthes), see p.184. On the disappearance of referents in everyday speech, see pp.116-117.

women's accounts without interpretation.<sup>44</sup> Speech is seen as the basis of everyday sociability; while hardly pristine, the spoken word is accessible to (allegedly) all within their everyday.

The spoken language of the everyday, however, is not the language required by the intellectual; it lacks the incisive quality needed for intellectual labour. As Sohn-Rethel noted, "The language of common usage... cannot articulate a division of intellectual and manual labour."<sup>45</sup> Everyday language is embedded within bodily experience; the academic needs a means of marking off intellectual work from the ambiguity of the everyday while simultaneously translating this disorder and ambiguity into the concision of the product of intellectual labour. The expression of intellectual labour in writing constructs the written word as the tool of the intellect, while at the same time assigning the everyday to the realm of orality. Academe appears as a "scriptural economy"<sup>46</sup>.

The accumulation and continuation of knowledge is dependent upon its removal from the morass of everyday language. In the modern world of rationality, knowledge claims its detachment from the pre-modern world of mystification through the act of inscription. The act of writing demonstrates the mortal production of knowledge as the vocation of the intellectual. The advancement of knowledge splits off from the quotidian character of the everyday; the spoken word is that from which written knowledge distinguishes itself:

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<sup>44</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987], p.190: "We are constrained by our commitment to ensure that the women we spoke to speak again in what we write without our reinterpretation of what they had to say."

<sup>45</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: a critique of epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel [London: The Macmillan Press, 1978], p.112. For a discussion of Sohn-Rethel and the everyday, see the subsection "Intellectual & manual labour: Sohn-Rethel" in chapter one.

<sup>46</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], pp.131-153.

The "oral" is that which does not contribute to progress; reciprocally, the "scriptural" is that which separates itself from the magical world of voices and tradition. A frontier (and a front) is established by that separation. Thus, one can read above the portals of modernity such inscriptions as "Here, to work is to write," or "Here only what is written is understood."<sup>47</sup>

The labour of knowledge becomes exclusively written, marking it as a 'legitimate' practice apart from the everyday. Language is split in two, "partitioned between a *writing* fabricating objects and the *song* of a passion without content, of an origin outside the text..."<sup>48</sup>

Writing becomes the only form of knowledge, and knowledge restates its claim absoluteness. It necessarily must recuperate the illiterate everyday, by transcribing into the forms appropriate to knowledge. For de Certeau, this written transformation is the process of vivisection: "It becomes violence, cutting its way through the irrationality of superstitious peoples or regions still under the spell of sorcery."<sup>49</sup> Writing proceeds to construct its own space for production within the realm of intellectual labour, an homogenous "blank page" from which "the ambiguities of the world have been exorcised." On this blank page, a text can now be written, ordering the object of study according to intellectual reason.<sup>50</sup> Knowledge is formalized through writing, the violent dissection and recomposition of the everyday.

The violence with which writing governs the world culminates in what Henri Lefebvre terms "terrorist society", in which "compulsion and the illusion of freedom converge".<sup>51</sup> Such a convergence is possible because all aspects of the everyday have been organized; the

<sup>47</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.134.

<sup>48</sup> Michel de Certeau, "The Formality of Practices...", *The Writing of History*, p.183-184.

<sup>49</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.144.

<sup>50</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp.134-135.

<sup>51</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p.147.

everyday itself disappears, and remaining vestiges "are condemned as madness or perversion."<sup>52</sup> Terrorism accompanies writing because the latter permits the codification and prescription of all life, and the fixed sanctioning of those who deviate. The written world of modernity returns to the world of the revelatory Word. Scripture homogenizes the world; history and place are rendered sensible through knowledge. One can always return to this scripture to understand the world.<sup>53</sup> Lefebvre's terrorist society seeks permanence and transparency through writing, codifying the everyday and thereby abolishing it.

The written word, for both de Certeau and Lefebvre, preys upon everyday life. Writing is the technique for the intellectual transformation of the everyday, attempting to fix, as knowledge, transitory experiences. The process begins with the demarcation of writing and orality, and proceeds to attempt to inscribe itself throughout all language. For Lefebvre, the conclusion of such a process is a society of stasis, wherein all life has been taken apart, codified and frozen through writing. The writing of the everyday ends in the abolition of the everyday. Through writing, the intellectual class spawned from Mannheim claims its authority.

The intellectual world has claimed onto itself the exclusive access to knowledge. In modernity, where knowledge is produced rather than revealed, such exclusivity requires a monopoly over the means of its production: a monopoly on writing. Writing is integral in the intellectual hegemony of knowledge in the modern world; it is the technique by which intellectual labour re-presents the everyday in a form compatible with knowledge. In this mode, the opposition between the intellectual and the everyday is necessarily written. Writing

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<sup>52</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p.148.

<sup>53</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, pp.154-157.

provides form to intellectual labour. The epistemological project of modernity -- the intellectual as bolshevik -- is dependent on this form to give substance to its fabrications. Arendt sought to reject the implications of this epistemology by forbidding the philosopher from writing; Mannheim embraced the project through the collection and recording of the workings of the everyday, for the sake of redirecting them.

Louis Althusser recasts the writing/orality dualism within a marxist lexicon: "science for the few and ideology for the many..."<sup>54</sup> Left unelaborated, Althusser's attempt at constructing discrete practices too easily slips back into an epistemological hierarchy, in which the products of intellectual labour provide the only possible route to knowledge. Within the everyday, subjects are inevitably always already brought into being within ideological discourses;<sup>55</sup> within the realm of theoretical practice, science transcribes such ideological positions into something -- if not knowledge -- more than mere ideology. But the absoluteness of the distinctions cannot be maintained; writing and orality mingle, and with them, academe and the everyday.

### *The diffusion of writing*

Claims to the purity of the scriptural economy have been regarded sceptically by a host of commentators. The purity of written knowledge is premised on the assumption that access to the scriptural is controlled by an elite; critics of such a claim point to examples

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<sup>54</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism & Totality*, p.412.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)", in his *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971].

wherein such elite positions are undermined by marginal figures, through the process of writing. Jacques Attali and Carlo Ginzburg both argue the diffusion of printing undermined the clerical monopoly on knowledge-claims.<sup>56</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht finds the popularization of the Enlightenment in the works of marginal figures denied access to the Republic of Intellectuals.<sup>57</sup> Even Sohn-Rethel, whose case for the abstraction of intellectual labour from the everyday was discussed earlier, finds in Albrecht Dürer's unsuccessful popularized, utilitarian mathematics an attempt to underwrite the monopoly of intellectual labour.<sup>58</sup> While writing may be uneasy within the everyday, it is not absent. In the absence of an absolute dichotomy between the realm of writing and that of the everyday, the case has to be restated, privileging particular forms of writing as exclusively appropriate to theoretical practice.

The struggle between Latin and the vernaculars was one such unsuccessful attempt; more recent renditions exist in the still-twitching faith in "High Theory". In attempts to restrict the accesses to theory, valid forms of writing are those only accessible to an initiate. Returning to the Althusserian vocabulary, everyday literacy remains simply ideological, reflectively interpellating subject positions. Only theoretical practice can constitute writing

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<sup>56</sup> In his *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985], Attali argues that mechanical printing, intended to preserve Latin as the language of scholarship, resulted in the collapse of such a monopoly (p.35); Ginzburg suggests that the diffusion of printed material helped generate individual heretical positions. See his *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John & Anne Tedeschi [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982], pp.32-60.

<sup>57</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht discusses the "Grub Street literati's" role in his "Outline of a Literary History of the French Revolution", *Making Sense in Life and Literature*, trans. Glen Burns [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992], pp.182-183.

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of Dürer's work, see the subsection "Intellectual & manual labour: Sohn-Rethel" in chapter one.

which can shift such ideological hails. Popular writing is deemed simply ideological, while properly theoretical works are granted the status of science.

The academic imaginary, far from homogenous, reproduces such distinctions within itself: legitimate writing must correspond to the conventions of genre/discipline/school, which signify that the content is the product of proper forms of intellectual deliberation. The universal language of scholars is displaced by a multitude of quasi-universal written languages, which seek transparency within a limited universe.<sup>59</sup> In place of the claim to unified knowledge, such writings instead claim specific -- but still objective and completed -- knowledge. The singularity of writing is replaced by multiple forms, each of which denies the possibility of criticism, unless it originates within its own particular realm. In the absence of a secure *vita contemplativa*, theoretical practices generate various microcosms, wherein the incommensurability of practices ensures that their integrity cannot be challenged.

It would be cavalier to dismiss the 'concreteness' of these specialized intellectual languages. The peculiarities of style and jargon make texts incomprehensible to outsiders, whether of other disciplines or beyond academe altogether. Disciplines have attempted to inscribe their boundaries. Yet these attempts to demarcate the boundaries of intellectual production are not determined by the language or content written; fact and fiction, science and fantasy cannot be separated so easily. Raymond Williams has noted the 'multiplicity of writing': the various forms of writing distinguished within bourgeois culture can never be

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<sup>59</sup> Wlad Godzich puts this forward as Jürgen Habermas' position concerning the decline of the public realm. See his "Foreword: Figuring Out What Matters; or, The Microphysics of History", in Gumbrecht's *Making Sense in Life and Literature*, p.xiv. It definitely resembles the position staked out by Russell Jacoby in *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* [New York: The Noonday Press, 1987]. See the introduction for a discussion of Jacoby's position.

distilled so as to leave only a purified essence. The categories constructed can never contain their intended contents. Williams illustrates the point with the co-existence of the extremes of styles:

[A]utobiography ('what I experienced', 'what happened to me') is 'subjective' but (ideally) 'factual' writing; realist fiction or naturalist drama ('people as they are', 'the world as it is') is 'objective' (the narrative or even the fact of narrative occluded in the form) but (ideally) 'creative' writing.<sup>60</sup>

The distinction between intellectual writings and other writings (as well as intra-intellectual distinctions) blurs at the level of style or form; such styles co-exist within any given written product. The specificity of a written work cannot be determined solely on the basis of the act of writing. Such writing cannot establish the lines which separate it from other writings.

The distinction between everyday and intellectual continues to blur, yet they do not become synonymous. The different milieus produce conflicting social processes. Contradictory impulses collide: in one direction, the colonization of the everyday through writing and the relation between writing and terror; in another, the diffusion of writing and the confusion of the writing of intellectual labour and the everyday. The former set is directed towards the restoration of the restricted, written authority; the latter set at shattering the restrictions and the authority. Both sets of impulses exercise influence, and both are heralded by different dimensions of European modernity. They also appear mutually exclusive. Left at this point, what remains is a series of disconnected and unreconcilable discursive stances, developing autonomously.

This unsatisfying position could be resolved through a truncated Althusserian structuralism, in which contradictory ideological impulses totter unsteadily above the

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<sup>60</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], p.148.

infrastructure, determined in the last instance by the absolute materiality of economics. Within such a rendition, theoretical practice becomes little more than an intriguing epiphenomenon, one more ideological discourse. All forms of theorizing revert to Alvin Gouldner's "culture of critical discourse", the ideology of the New Class of academics. Such a version dissolves the specificity of both the everyday and the academic imaginary, and within such a dissolution loses Balibar's recognition of the "unceasing displacement" enacted by theoretical practice. In order to recover the fluidity of philosophy, and with it the idea of theoretical practice, it becomes necessary to turn to the location of philosophy and the everyday, and the implications of discussing the locale of theoretical practice.

## Written Space

Theoretical practices draw lines of demarcation. In doing so, the practices are inextricably entwined with the construction of space: both the larger space of intellectual labour and the specific theoretical spaces constituted through the demarcations. These demarcations are written, the product of intellectual labour. The space of theoretical practice becomes increasingly murky, swirling together theories, theorists and particular texts.

Recent commentators have found Althusser to be complicit in this incoherence, evoking the geographical metaphors of "continents" of sciences, subdivided into disciplinary

"regions".<sup>61</sup> The vagueness of these terms provides Althusser's critics with the basis to claim that he returns to idealist dichotomies, sealing theory into its own impenetrable realm. In order to claim the fluidity of theoretical practice which Balibar desires, it is crucial to develop the concept of 'space' in which these practices claim their stakes. Before turning directly to this space of theoretical practice, I first wish to briefly consider the construction of space, and the relation of the authors and texts which comprise this space.

*"Space: the final frontier..."*

Space is a notoriously ambiguous concept, conveniently invoked because of its lack of precision. Knowledge and space are entwined, but the latter term remains vague. Henri Lefebvre begins his account of space by castigating the perpetrators of this vagueness:

We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological space, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth. Conspicuous by its absence from supposedly fundamental epistemological studies is not only the idea of 'man' but also that of space -- the fact that space is mentioned on every page notwithstanding.<sup>62</sup>

While Lefebvre's own conception of space is complex and multifaceted, his insistence upon analysis of the concept of space draws attention to two significant points: space is a social construction, and the study of such space "represents the political... use of knowledge."<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, p.355, note 23. Gregory suggests that "overdetermination" is the central concept in Althusser's spatial construct, enabling him to posit distinct levels, each with its own temporality (p.400, pp.256-357). Gregory also suggests that Lefebvre's castigation of those who abuse spatial metaphors is directed at Althusser (p.355).

<sup>62</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991], p.3.

<sup>63</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.9.

proclamation of space, in whatever form, is a political proclamation; the fabrication of these spaces is part of an epistemological ordering.

The politics of theoretical practices cannot be separated from a concept of space, particularly in connection with the claim that a theoretical practice engages in demarcations. Two very different conceptions of this space of theory present themselves: the space of comprehension, either predicated upon or concluding with consensus; and the space of incoherence, which is inherently diverse and cannot be distilled into clarity. Both conceptions acknowledge space as a social product, the former as frozen space and the latter as politicized space.

### *Frozen space*

Discursive space is often presented as a realm which is marked by agreement, or the quest for agreement. Iris Marion Young suggests that even models which attempt to break with the presumption of homogeneity as the formative moment of such spaces retain an homogenizing urge.<sup>64</sup> Universal rationality remains the principle which underlies this discursive space, carrying with it a conviction that we can achieve resolution via rational dialogue. Young finds this conviction in the work of Jürgen Habermas:

A faith in the possibility of consensus is a condition of beginning dialogue, and the possibility of such consensus presupposes that people engage in discussion "under conditions that neutralize all motives except that of cooperatively seeking truth."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See the note on Young in reference to Hannah Arendt, in chapter one.

<sup>65</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory", in *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*, eds. Seyla Benhabib & Drucilla Cornell [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], p.69. The internal quotation is Habermas', from his *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol.1, *Reason and the*

Consensus is the goal of this dialogue, and this goal presumes consensual motives upon entering into it.

Habermas has been interpreted as the chief proponent of this version of discursive space,<sup>66</sup> though his revamped critical theory is by no means the only 'tradition' espousing these ideals.<sup>67</sup> As a theoretical practice, it posits a notion of space which depends upon commonality for its existence. This space -- hemmed in by a particular rationality -- has banished radical difference; it is a plane in which already alike theoretical positions can meld into a conciliated, universally accepted stance. It is consolidated as a space through the exclusion of practices which do not concede the basis of negotiated resolution. It may be permeable, but its aim is stasis.

The notion of space as determined by likeness is older than Habermas and his cohorts within critical theory. Georg Lukács presents this space in his discussion of the capitalist regulation of time in the factory:

Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the

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*Rationalization of Society.*

<sup>66</sup> However, see his response to the essays collected in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun [Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1992], "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere", trans. Thomas Burger (in the same text). Habermas does merrily continue to advocate "the validity of norms in the possibility of a rationally founded agreement on the part of all those who might be affected, in so far as they take on *the role of participants in a rational debate*" (p.447; emphases in original); this sphere, however, is to remain "*permeable* to the free-floating values, topics, topical contributions and arguments of the *surrounding* political communication" (p.451; emphases in original).

<sup>67</sup> Chantal Mouffe argues that this is the stance of much of contemporary liberalism, which has collapsed political liberalism into economic liberalism, and presumes the economically rational individual as the political actor. See "Rawls: Political Philosophy without Politics", in her *The Return of the Political* [London: Verso, 1993].

reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his[sic] total human personality): in short, it becomes space.<sup>68</sup>

Whereas time is fluid, space is rigid; the space of quantification presupposes it as the arena for the accumulation of like objects. A space must relate objects within it according to their similarity.

Such a space is necessarily closed (despite the plea for 'permeability'); its homogeneity depends upon this closure, preventing the disruptive, barbarous outside from redefining the order of its unity. It is a space which denies the political, the exchange of difference, as Ernesto Laclau proclaims with his declaration, "Politics and space are antinomic terms. Politics only exist in so far as the spatial eludes us."<sup>69</sup> Laclau has accepted Lukács' opposition of time and space,<sup>70</sup> and is forced from there to conclude that such a space, with its forced identity, is necessarily anti-political.

Within such a conception of space, theoretical practice -- the process of demarcation -- cannot be sustained as a political act. It becomes an act of attempting to close new spaces, and reduce them to homogeneity. The politics of theory becomes a struggle of annihilation, an attempt to impose a new order upon theory, and through it the everyday. As such, it recalls the privileged figure of the philosopher, who by virtue of eternal truths -- whether revealed

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<sup>68</sup> Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971], p.90.

<sup>69</sup> Ernesto Laclau, in the title essay (trans. Jon Barnes) of his *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* [London: Verso, 1990.], p.68.

<sup>70</sup> Laclau, *op.cit.*, p.41. Doreen Massey, in "Politics and Space/Time" [*New Left Review*, no.196; Nov./Dec. 1992] argues this same opposition is shared by others, like Fredric Jameson, for whom space threatens the political. While Laclau is trapped in space, and Jameson is lost in space, Massey argues that both look to History to resurrect politics.

within the *vita contemplativa* or extracted from the everyday through science -- attempts to impose philosophical knowledge upon the everyday. There is, however, an alternate understanding of space in which theoretical practice need not acquire these vicious connotations: the notion of politicized space. It is within this form of space which theoretical practice retains its potential relevance as a component for understanding contemporary critical theory.

### *Politicized space*

Althusser's theoretical practice seeks to present theory as productive labour. The objects of philosophy are fabricated through intellectual labour, transforming already-existing theoretical objects. Alfred Sohn-Rethel notes the necessarily social existence of such products:

Throughout the ages of commodity production, from its initial form of ancient slave society to its ultimate capitalist completion, the products of manual labour are private property whereas the products of intellectual labour are social property.<sup>71</sup>

Once the philosopher forsakes the isolated mortality of the *vita contemplativa* by writing into the political realm, intellectual labour becomes doubly social: it works upon the already-existing products of previous labour, while producing objects which are subject to further labours. As a theoretical practice, such productions are necessarily fabricated in the act of situating them; philosophical stakes are claimed in relation to already existing counter-stakes. A theoretical construct which is reviled, scorned and 'disproved' is established as social

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<sup>71</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, p.77. The accuracy of Sohn-Rethel's claims regarding the proprietorship of the products of manual labour is open to question; that, however, does not affect my point regarding intellectual labour.

property, through this contempt as well as its own demarcations. Theoretical practice always is situated in relation to other such practices; it is inherently social.<sup>72</sup>

As such, the products of theoretical practice are never completed, and never wholly contained. An 'initial' attempt to claim a philosophical stake will be reiterated, interpreted and shifted as further practices attempt their own demarcations. The products of intellectual labour are not consumed, but repeated and represented, with each new practice transforming its object within Jacques Attali's mode of production of repetition.<sup>73</sup> Philosophical stakes are necessarily indeterminant; they can never be fixed, since each effort at establishing certitude sets them in motion. These fluctuating indeterminancies comprise the space of theoretical work.

This theoretical perpetual motion cannot be contained within a static space, but demands a politicized space. In contrast to the homogenized collection of the frozen conception of space, politicized space is the juxtaposition of differences. Of the many possible sources for this alternative, my version is indebted to the work of the Situationists, and

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<sup>72</sup> There is a great deal to be written concerning the fissures which emerge as the social products of theoretical practice are situated within the capitalist economy. Institutional conventions seek to maintain these practices as private property. Plagiarism is the academic crime *par excellence*: the failure to acknowledge the proprietorship of words and ideas. Within the academic imaginary, attempts are made to bring theoretical production into harmony with liberal economics: the individual is the only possible actor in the scriptural economy. Kathryn B. Ward and Linda Grant have attempted to demonstrate the extent of the convention of individual authorship through a study of publication in sociological journals. Their specific project is the relationship between collaborative authorship, gender, and writings about gender; their relevant conclusion here is that in these cases, through a variety of means, the individual author is privileged within academe. See their article, "Coauthorship, Gender, and Publication among Sociologists", in *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*, eds. Mary Margaret Fonow & Judith A. Cook [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991]. The social character of theory clashes with the private character of capitalist production.

<sup>73</sup> See Wlad Godzich's discussion of Attali's mode of repetition in the introduction.

particularly Raoul Vaneigem.<sup>74</sup> Acknowledging space as a social construct, the Situationists embarked upon a program of dis-integrating the spaces of spectacular life, through *détournement*, the diversion of apparent meanings. With a fascination for "psychogeography" and "unitary urbanism", various elements of the Situationists sought to establish space as a potentially playful area of diversity and contrast. Such malleable space offers a political basis for theoretical practice, subject to shifts, influxes and escapes which forestall the possibility of closure.

I have already remarked that theoretical practice is a spatial practice; its stakes and demarcations attempt to mark and adjust theoretical positions. It may appear that implicit in such a practice is an homogenizing impulse, attempting to close a field which theoretical positions can call home. If, however, the products of theoretical practice remain inherently social, such closure becomes untenable. The indeterminacy of the objects of philosophy forestalls any attempt to seal a territory through theoretical practice.

Texts, 'theoretical' or otherwise, are porous. In the act of marking a line through theoretical practice, they become the line. The space of theory cannot be frozen. Any such

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<sup>74</sup> For two brief statements of space and its *détournement*, see Attila Kotányi & Raoul Vaneigem, "Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism", and Guy Debord & Gil J. Wolman, "Methods of Detournement". Both are contained in the *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & trans. Ken Knabb [Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981].

English language accounts of the Situationists are mostly scarce and/or obscure. A useful history of the movement is Peter Wollen's "The Situationist International" [*New Left Review*, n.174; Mar./Apr. 1989]; for an analysis of their work and impact, see Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: the Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* [London: Routledge, 1992]. For a discussion specifically relating to space, see Thomas F. McDonough, "Situationist Space", *October* [no.67, winter 1994]. McDonough's article focuses on Guy Debord, but connects the Situationists' work with that of de Certeau and Fredric Jameson.

Despite an apparent increase in acknowledgements of their influence, the work of the Situationists remains available primarily in heavily edited translations of dubious quality. For this reason, while I feel they deserve recognition at this point, I will not address their work at length here.

attempt to freeze a territory collapses in the act of drawing the line; as soon as a territory is identified, it becomes a boundary, subject to interpretation and therefore change. Within theory, space has no interior; it is always a boundary, a point of adjustment. Soviet philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin presented this frontier-existence as crucial to the vibrancy of any cultural realm:

A cultural domain has no inner territory. It is located entirely upon boundaries, boundaries intersect it everywhere, passing through each of its constituent features.... Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries, and it derives its seriousness and significance from this fact. Separated by abstraction from these boundaries it loses the ground of its being and becomes vacuous, arrogant; it degenerates and dies.<sup>75</sup>

Any cultural creation must be evident within a cultural domain in order to remain alive. Such an existence is always subject to adjustment; it is always located upon a boundary. In the absence of this borderline existence, the existence itself ceases. The products of intellectual labour are necessarily social property, as Sohn-Rethel pointed out. If this proprietorship is denied through forgetfulness, the products cease to exist.

With this exclusively border-line existence, Arendt's attempt at theorizing within the political by 'thinking without a bannister' coincides with Althusser's theoretical practice. The interventions attempted by both techniques serve to shift the political, not by enclosing it, but by providing new potentials. These theoretical objects consist of transformations of already-existing components of the political; in turn, they will be transformed. The potential of political theory is found in the possibility of initiating new vectors, not in controlling them.

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<sup>75</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, "Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art" (trans. Kenneth Brostrom), in his *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, eds. Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990], p.274.

Boundaries, subject to adjustment, are inherently political, and theoretical practices are located on these boundaries. The space of theoretical practice is a politicized space, contested and constantly changing, perpetually under scrutiny from diverse positions. Rather than sealing off a territory, the demarcations of these practices present new points of political engagement. Rather than sealing theory in a frozen space severed from the everyday, Althusser's theories of theoretical practice offer a means of approaching the interplay between the academic and the everyday.

## **Practicing Theory**

Louis Althusser's work on theoretical practice presents the possibility for reciprocity in the relationship between philosophy and politics which neither Hannah Arendt nor Karl Mannheim were able to achieve. Reciprocity was impossible for Arendt, because the permanence of philosophical activity would attempt to overwhelm the crucial fragility of political life. Such reciprocity was undesirable for Mannheim, because the intransigence of ideological standpoints in the everyday could not achieve the "relative unattachment" accessible only to the intelligentsia; without such a collective detachment, the everyday would destroy itself. In contrast to this, theoretical practice recognizes both the distinctiveness of theory and its rootedness in other practices.

It would be dubious to suggest that this is a faithful reading of Althusser, and ridiculous to claim that Althusser achieved this in his own work. Althusser, as a faithful if ill-

regarded member of the PCF, kept any sympathies for a vibrant political space well-concealed; instead, he struggled to demonstrate how his philosophy remained consistent with the fluctuating orthodoxy of French Communism. Despite these presumed intentions, theoretical practice offers a relationship between politics and theory which does not demand the dissolution of one of the elements. Situated in a space which cannot be sealed without ending the process of philosophy entirely, theoretical practice intervenes in the political by attempting to demarcate new positions, which in turn will shift and be shifted. The substance of such practices cannot be reduced to an ontological basis, because these shifting lines include this very substance; at its best, theoretical practice continually draws from the everyday while being appropriated in turn.

At its worst, such practice insinuates the absence of theoretical responsibility, given that linear causality does not apply to the circulation of the objects of theory: if the "age of planning" desired by Mannheim cannot be realized in the absence of unchallengeable knowledge, then the repercussions of any position can be denied. Althusser's work marks both extremes: ardently Leninist in the face of all evidence, while simultaneously establishing an epistemological alternative to the bolshevik epistemology of modernity.

## Conclusion

### Theory as Politics

My exercise in the bases of critical theory now draws to close. The initial motivation for exploring a critical theory -- elaborating upon the notion of socially engaged theorizing -- has been developed in three very different versions, each predicated on the work of divergent figures. Not surprisingly, no single rendition can satisfactorily resolve the dilemma of philosophy and politics. Indeed, attempts at a definitive resolution have resulted in the collapse of critical activity. Yet the work of Hannah Arendt, Karl Mannheim and Louis Althusser each offers insights into the condition of critical theory in late modernity.

The work of Hannah Arendt provides a somewhat unusual starting point for such a process. Arendt sought to deny the possibility of a critical engagement between philosophy and politics. Instead, arguing the ontological distinction between the life of the mind and the life of action, she sought to confine philosophy within the *vita contemplativa*, reserving politics for the *vita activa*. Based in incommensurable ways of knowing, the convergence of philosophy and politics could only endanger the vitality of political life.

Arendt attempted to deny any role for *technē* within philosophy. Yet in maintaining this case, she adopted a notion of intellectual activity elaborated by her teacher, Karl Jaspers, and his predecessors. But such a self-contained philosophy relies upon its own technology of knowledge; such a critique is articulated by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, in his analysis of intellectual and manual labour. By insisting that philosophy be regarded with the same categories as the everyday, Sohn-Rethel destabilizes the ontological basis for philosophical distinction. If philosophy possesses a *technē*, Arendt's claim to incommensurability loses its foundation.

Despite this failing of Arendt's epistemology, her work does make a valuable contribution to the notion of critical theory. Her distinction between philosophy and politics points to the menace which theoretical activity can pose to political life: the dispensation of creative collective action by formalized philosophical constructs. At the very least, Arendt's work serves as a caution against convictions in the desirability of the unity of theory and practice. At a more subtle level, Arendt's own work is a philosophical intervention within the political. While claiming the necessary separatism of philosophy, Arendt simultaneously acknowledges that there have been no philosophers since Socrates: subsequent figures -- including Arendt herself -- have been unable to resist the allure of earthly immortality by preserving their philosophy in writing. Arendt's warning against the philosophical intrusion into politics is conducted precisely as such an intrusion -- what she regarded as political theory. Rather than dismissing this paradox as another contradiction in Arendt's work, it suggests an attempt at a theoretical demarcation in accordance with Althusser's theoretical practice. Rather than accomplishing the closure of the *vita contemplativa*, Arendt draws attention to the modern glorification of intellectual life.

In stark contrast to Arendt's warnings against the merger of philosophy and politics, Karl Mannheim celebrates the potential of this fusion. Reacting to a condition in which philosophical quarrels sought resolution in bloody street battles, Mannheim attempted to incorporate these conflicting perspectives within his relationist epistemology: knowledge could only be obtained through the lens of diverse positions. Through their shared educational experience, only the intelligentsia can transcend the specificity of their origins to participate in this relationist quest. As such, the intellectuals are obliged to use their exclusive access to knowledge of the world to direct this world, through the process of planning.

While Mannheim's intellectual vision is unabashedly elitist, it does not presume the separation of philosophy and politics. Quite the contrary, it is their compatibility which makes intellectual planning possible. Intellectual labour works upon the world, returning to this world the products of its labour. As such, Mannheim has moved philosophy wholeheartedly into modernity, wherein it becomes the ultimate productive activity, capable of ordering all others.

The resonance of this epistemological bolshevism reflects the disillusionment with economist and populist philosophies of history after World War One. The principle of intellectual exclusivity even attracted Antonio Gramsci, often vaunted as the philosophical opponent of intellectual bolshevism. In formulating his category of the "organic intellectual", Gramsci retains the separation of intellectual from manual labour. While Gramsci attempts to democratize intellectual activity, such a process continues the subordination of everyday life to intellectual labour.

Despite these bolshevik tendencies, Mannheim's contribution to critical theory is found in his decentring of philosophical production while recognizing the intellectual cohesion which Arendt denied within the *vita contemplativa*. Arendt's philosophy was fundamentally an individual activity; Mannheim transforms philosophy into a collective endeavour, but breaks with the ontological distinctiveness of this cohesion which Jaspers required. In this fashion, Mannheim establishes the basis for intellectuals as a new class, bound together by their relationship to the production of knowledge within the modern world. While Mannheim's attempt at establishing the intellectual as the agent of history falls prey to both the cautions of Arendt and the critiques of Sohn-Rethel, it never the less makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of the cohesion of theoretical activity without encircling it within a metaphysical ideal.

In the wake of the epistemological stumblings within the work of Arendt and Mannheim, the significance of Louis Althusser's theories of theoretical practice can be appreciated. Arendt was forced to choose the absolute separation of philosophy and politics, or the extinction of the latter; Mannheim's choice was between a struggle for theoretical annihilation, through physical annihilation, or the subordination of all life to the theoretical. In developing theoretical practice, Althusser opens the possibility for negotiation between the realms, for the political practice of philosophy which does not attempt to foreclose the practice of politics.

Theoretical practice dispenses with the possibility of completed knowledge, and of the possibility of the direct philosophical intervention into the political. Instead, theoretical practice transforms the already existing products of other theoretical practices, in a ceaseless

process of production. Such products do not simply exist in a realm of pure thought, but intervene in the circulation of material ideologies. Theoretical practice attempts to shift discursive constructs through acts of demarcation, redrawing the limits of the political.

Althusser retreated from this presentation, labelling it a "theoreticist deviation," a charge echoed in the charges of idealist dualisms from Althusser's many critics. By dividing productive activity into multiple distinct regimes, Althusser opens the way for a reconstruction of epistemological privilege within theory, and an unacknowledged reshaping of the limits of the everyday which harkens back to attempts to oppose writing and orality. In order to avoid this renewed dichotomy, the concept of theoretical practice must be situated within a politicized understanding of space. In such a locale, all products of theoretical activity are opened at every point, subject to processes of revision, diffusion and distortion, through which theory enters the political, but never solely on its own terms. Critical theory can reclaim a political capacity for philosophy, without attempting to subordinate all other activities.

Critical theory finds its inspiration in this ever-shifting oblique relation to the political. Its continuing relevance lies within its borderline existence, and its inability to achieve culmination through theoretical closure. The critical capacity of theory is continually renewed through its indecisiveness, its inability to definitively establish its grounds. Rather, it is the unceasing transient existence of theory through which its political significance is fabricated.

## Academic Marginalia

The permeability of theoretical practice does not dispel the academic imaginary. This porousness does suggest that the imaginary cannot be completed, but this unfinished quality does not imply that there is no longer a distinction between the academic and the everyday. Theoretical practice continually demarcates lines between academe and the everyday. Should such a demarcation actually succeed in fixing the boundary -- enclosing the academic imaginary -- the politicized space of theory would vanish. The political debate on theoretical practice would be exclusive to those initiated into academe, and these initiates would never be able to venture without. The terrorist society of Lefebvre would be inaugurated, with the intellectual governing the everyday through its complete inscription; the intellectual would also 'degenerate and die', deprived of its colonized territory. Academe, despite its occasional epistemological ambitions, cannot achieve this closure. The margins through which the demarcations of theoretical practice pass keep the critical thought of academe alive.

The margins of theory are no more territorially fixed than the practices which produce the theory; they exist exclusively as boundaries. Such margins are not measured from a 'centre', understood as an ideological stance which rules within and without academe, and from which the theoretical margins are at the greatest remove. The margins which I am discussing are not necessarily constituted by material which is ignored or denigrated within academe, nor by theories which intentionally transgresses its conventions (to the extent that they are identified).<sup>1</sup> Marginalization does not necessarily put one at the margins of theory.

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<sup>1</sup> Though such margins do exist, and can and do coincide with theoretical margins at times.

In a manner similar to the unfinished process of theorizing, the political -- as both the object of theory and the subject in which its theoretical practices attempt to intervene -- is always incomplete. Its boundaries should not mark out a closed territory, separating that which is eternally political from that which can never be -- an attempt made by Arendt, one which has led to harsh critiques. Rather, these boundaries constitute the political, as shifting areas of dispute and discussion.<sup>2</sup> Mannheim presented a concept of political which could be closed, rendered transparent to the scientific technique of the intellectual-as-planner; Arendt (despite her attempts at restriction) and Althusser both attempted theoretical interventions within a political space which would be reconstituted through the very act of intervention. The political potential of theory is embodied in the perpetual capacity for change within the political, and in its boundaries. Theoretical practices, originating in academe, are able to move into the political because neither theory nor politics can exist as a sealed realm.

The margins of theory are the points at which entry into and escape from academe occur. The written texts of theoretical practice are such points, passing through academe, and at every boundary, interpreted and altered, with such interpretations comprising new theoretical practices and new boundaries. I am not harbouring any illusions concerning the popularity of theoretical work beyond academe; rather its effects are the repercussions of its indeterminacy. But it is these margins to which critical thought must turn if theory is to retain a role in a broader rethinking of the political.

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Hindess comments on the futility of such attempts to resolve what material is appropriate to the political, in his "'The Greeks Had a Word for It': The *Polis* as Political Metaphor", in *Thesis Eleven* [no.40, 1995].

*Indecisive opposition*

Accepting this indeterminacy may appear as an act of surrender for oppositional political thought, an acceptance of quiescence. It does suggest the renunciation of the notion that there is a 'crisis' in political theory, which must be addressed immediately, with all available resources, as part of a struggle for survival or redemption. To return to Hannah Arendt for a final time, the present, situated in the gap between past and future, is the space of political action, but not predestination. Phillip Hansen notes the indeterminacy of the present for a 'left politics', and for its theorizing:

Such a politics seeks to change the world and must be vitally concerned with the real possibilities of the present. But it must also acknowledge that the present is the milieu within which one must act and that no future state of affairs can be immanently deduced from it by a logic of inevitability, dialectical or otherwise. The other side of this coin is that political life is always, in a manner of speaking, in 'crisis' and only from a (falsely) transcendental perspective can any specific crisis be seen as the 'final' one, *the* definitive historical turning point.<sup>3</sup>

Accepting this indeterminacy of the present is not a rejection of political engagement, but an acceptance of the truly political character of the moment.

To stave off the obvious (and deserved) objections to such a statement, written from the comfort of my office chair, this is not synonymous with proclaiming that everything's all right, and that there are no pressing (indeed, critical) social issues needing immediate attention. But what I am arguing is that political theory cannot solve such issues on its own. The world's ills cannot be banished by theoretical practice; the intellectuals cannot serve as the agent of history.

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<sup>3</sup> Phillip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics: History and Citizenship* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993], p.5. Emphasis in the original.

Far from being an arrogant claim of satisfaction, this move is a surrender of the privilege claimed by the intellectual, that of the exclusive right to order the world. Politics cannot consist simply of the practices of theory, but of the diversity of practices of everyday life, which cannot be dictated. The abandonment of this privilege is not an abandonment of theory, but an attempt to reclaim its significance. This is a significance which is constrained -- not only by the broader milieu of social relations, but also the specific features of intellectual labour and academe -- but remains significant all the same.

*"Betwixt and between": theory and liminality*

Critical theory lives at its own margins; it is within these margins that academe and the everyday come in contact. Such margins are within the academic imaginary, but they are simultaneously those points most accessible to the everyday. To use Anne Norton's term, the "liminal" existence of such margins establish their political importance.

In a work focusing on nation and identity, Norton discusses liminality, "a threshold state 'betwixt and between' existing orders."<sup>4</sup> It is a condition which provides both the criteria of identification and differentiation. Initially providing the basis for recognizing similarity and constituting a collective identity, its status 'betwixt and between' also challenges this act of identification:

After this act of abstraction, however, the significance and function of liminality alters. Once the condition that provided material for the decisive differentiation of subject and object, self and other, it now undermines that

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity* [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988], p.53.

differentiation, providing an illustration of a condition in which like and unlike, the alien and the appropriate, are inextricably entangled.<sup>5</sup>

Theoretical practice and the writing of theory constitute the realm of intellectual labour, demarcating it from an everyday left undifferentiated by intellectual labour. Yet these demarcations continue to serve as boundaries subject to adjustment, the points at which academe can be accessed by its excluded, and therein unravelling its entire claim to distinctiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Texts serve as one such point of access. The book, essay, or lecture, nominally available beyond academe, is the point at which theory encounters an audience only tentatively within academe -- students being the most obvious component. Whatever the audience, through the process of reading and misreading, theory travels from the liminal to the excluded, where it may be trashed, ignored, confused or even used; yet it has the potential of making this journey.

The proliferation of interpretations which become possible within the liminal also attend to academe. The audience of theory may re-present its interpretations, in written and oral forms, in articles, tirades and advocacy. The everyday returns to academe, wherein the proliferation of interpretations resumes. The formal methods of intellectual production meet the multiplicities of the everyday, sending out ripples in both directions. Liminality is the zone

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity*, p.54.

<sup>6</sup> There are many liminal zones within academe and theory, existing as institutionalized contradictions. One such zone worth keeping in mind throughout this discussion is oppositional theory itself, the practice of intellectuals "who maintain an ideological or intellectual alienation but nevertheless remain nominally within the established order." Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity*, p.71. For her discussion of liminars as "constituted in contradiction", see p.67.

of confrontation between academe and the everyday, wherein the diversity of interpretations of theory ensures its political continuation.

## Theories, practices and tensions

The margins of theory, then, are not a place of consensus, but of tension. This is partly the tension of divergent practices seeking adjustment, but also the tension of practices constructing themselves as mutually opposed. The margins are the point where the theoretical practices of academe meet the political practices of social movements, with frequent clashes.

Critical thought in academe and the popular movements with which it identifies often proclaim the desire to resolve these conflicts, perhaps in the form of the production of utilitarian theoretical practices, or the more general desire for cohesion between movement and theory.<sup>7</sup> Tensions are depicted as destructive, hindering the political progress of the movement. The abolition of such tensions, however, is more likely to consist of their denial.

The academic and the everyday, and modernity itself, are constituted through acts of separation: mind from body, knowledge from experience, writing from orality. The oft-proclaimed desire of counter-movements in modernity is to resolve these separations, restoring the wholeness of bygone days. These separations, however, are not merely ideological illusions; they have been embodied as concrete practices. Their resolution cannot simply be an act of will. The proclamation of unity can only come about through a cessation

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<sup>7</sup> These ambitions are discussed in the introductory chapter.

of politics; it is the construction of a frozen space which must establish the preconditions for the consensus. As such, unification becomes the creation of new separations, through new acts of exclusion.

The tensions between academe and popular movements sustain both sides. The liminal space wherein academe and the everyday meet provides theory with its connection to the world, a connection which cannot come about through the practices of intellectual labour. This same connection provides the everyday with a degree of introspection and reflexivity which there is not necessarily the opportunity to practice beyond academe. The relations within this liminal space are never causal, never direct; they are subject to the fragmentation of interpretations, but these fragmentations provide theory with its novelty and its significance.

It is more difficult to elaborate on the significance of theory in the everyday, in the absence of the direct expression of theoretical practices of academe within this realm. The Gramscian organic intellectual -- a figure who is spontaneously produced by a social group to provide it with "awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields"<sup>8</sup> -- has been a popular vehicle to enact theory within the everyday, yet this is ultimately an unsatisfying formulation. The category of intellectual labour is a construction of intellectual labour, formalized in the institutionalization of academe. Conveying the status of "organic intellectual" signifies the ability of the academic to see its own practices reflected within the everyday. As such, it loses its distinctiveness; the organic

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<sup>8</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. & trans. Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith [New York: International Publishers, 1971], p.5. See chapter two for a discussion of the problems with this formulation.

intellectual is the image of the traditional intellectual projected beyond academe. Such an image is not able to offer a different relation between philosophy and the everyday, because it perpetuates the existing distinction.

The everyday is the point at which theoretical practice fails. Attempts to stave off this failure, through the fusion of theory and the everyday, the attempt to push theoretical practice onto the practices of everyday life, is tantamount to the reassertion of the bolshevik project of the modern intellectual. The conflict between the everyday and theory indicates both the limits and the contributions of theory to the political.

### *Going through the motions*

Acknowledging the limits of theory is not the same as claiming its closure. Rather, the act of theorizing is necessarily transitory, a movement between an unknowable everyday and the structured imaginary of academe. There is no unified subject position, which permits a theorist to exist exclusively within the realm of theory. As a practice, theory necessarily exists on the boundaries, as these boundaries. These boundaries can never be fixed, but are continually set in motion through theoretical adjustments provoked by the return of the everyday. Academics are not absolved of their status of thieves of knowledge, but the theft is reciprocal.

Borrowing from the writings of Arendt, Mannheim and Althusser, I have attempted to present a means of theorizing which preserves the integrity of philosophy and the everyday, without renouncing the political implications of critical theory. By bringing together these three disparate figures, none of whom are usually considered 'critical theorists' within the

framework sketched by Horkheimer, this thesis, in some small way, attempts a political intervention as a theoretical practice within the realm of critical theory; the results, of course, will be indecisive. The conclusion -- that critical theory can never be completed -- is of course not a novelty, yet the ongoing critical project demands the continual return to its epistemological bases. At its best, such an act is self-consciously political, aware of its own intervention within discourse, and the indeterminacy of these interventions. Both the writing of theory and its subsequent readings are ambiguous acts, and it is this ambiguity which preserves its political potential.

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