

CHAPTER 4

STUDYING CULTURE, PERFORMING DANCE: ENGAGEMENTS WITH FEMINISM AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

It is certainly easier to create without answering to life, and easier to live without any consideration for art.

-- Mikhail Bakhtin, Art and Answerability.

Given my disciplinary training, my attempt to make dance answerable to life could begin within one of two worlds. The first world is one in which artists, performers or art historians are at home, in which art is critically examined or refashioned, but in which some value, however problematic, is granted to art. This is not the world in which I find myself. I want, therefore, to consider the possibility of a practice of dance which begins within the space--the second world--in which feminists theorize the political. The worlds of performer and theorist are not mutually unintelligible; but they lie on either side of a fault line that makes it impossible for their concerns to coincide. Living in the second world means doubting everything, and especially doubting the transparency of whatever is marked 'private,' 'cultural,' 'aesthetic.' Imagining an 'alternative aesthetic' does not sufficiently answer the demands of this world; as I suggested in the first chapter, one has to

begin with some such question as: is there such a thing as 'the aesthetic'?

Since I am interested in a practice of dance that engages with the sceptical (and expanding) feminist theoretical tradition in India, rather than in offering up something that is too facilely and arbitrarily designated a 'feminist' practice, I have to work through the theory to the question of dance. This is a project that chronologically succeeds the act of historical **reconstruction** (with which I was concerned in the first three chapters of this thesis): it requires engagement with the present. The 'present' is clearly a time of transitions and of inconclusive debates; of struggles, individual as well as collective, to redefine relationships with the social and the political. Feminist theory bears the marks of these struggles. Mapping the terrain of feminist cultural theory in India, which is the object of this chapter, may help clarify the nature of the conjuncture within which a feminist practice of dance might develop.

Problems for Feminist Theorists:
Models of Selfhood and Politics

I find the work [Radhika Santwanam] immensely beautiful, and as it has been composed, not only by a woman, but a woman of our community, I felt it was necessary to publish the proper work.

--Bangalore **Nagaratnamma, Preface,**
Radhika Santwanam.

The feminist critical project Susie Tharu and **K. Lalita**

undertake in Women Writing in India announces itself with a stunning, almost outrageous, genealogical coup. The women editors, collating and arranging, in the era of late capitalism, texts by Indian women through the ages, claim an ancestry that includes two devadasis: Muddupalani, star of the Thanjavur court in the mid-eighteenth century, and the formidable Bangalore **Nagaratnamma**, who went to battle over the reprinting of **Muddupalani's** erotically explicit Radhika Santwanam at the beginning of the twentieth. The contests over the issues of female sexuality and aesthetics that took place when **Nagaratnamma** was preparing the sringara prabandham for republication frame the feminist problematic Tharu and Lalita go on to outline. The editors are obviously hostile to **Nagaratnamma's** British and middle class Indian antagonists and make no secret of the sympathy they feel for the two female progenitors they have claimed. The editorial narrative suggests that this sympathy for Muddupalani and **Nagaratnamma** is based on admiration for the outstanding artistic achievements of these ganikas, and identification with their woman-oriented, sexually candid, unembarrassed aesthetic preferences.

This is implied, at any rate, when Tharu and Lalita cite **Nagaratnamma's** reason for republishing Radhika Santwanam; that it was a perfect creation, "as adorable as the young Lord Krishna"(2). A young, human/divine, male body: the unexpected concreteness of this referent for **Nagaratnamma's** delight in the sringara prabandham stands out in Tharu and **Lalita's** text as belonging to an irrecoverably lost, **pre-modern** sensory-sexual economy. So also--obviously--does **Muddupalani's** appreciative rendering of her heroine's active sexual passion, her

'masculine' ability to demand appeasement. Given how startling or even unthinkable these features are, and given that Tharu and Lalita call attention to their symbolic significance for women, their editorial sympathy momentarily presents itself as the starting point for an exploration of sexual/textual politics in the Indian cultural context.

Astonishingly, then, the theme of the sexually independent woman and the question of aesthetic criteria both disappear from the Introductions. Only one lesson from the Muddupalani-N'agaratnamma parable is carried over into the remaining sections of Women tfr i t i n g's critical outwork: the idea that we need to be attentive to the politics of reading. But while Tharu and Lalita work on this distinctly late-twentieth century motif, the bravura effects of the **Nagaratnamma** story remain with the reader, intimations of the possible plenitude of feminist critique.

Have the devadasis been brought in merely to point one more moral, or to fill out a genealogical fantasy? It becomes obvious on reflection that Tharu and Lalita could not have accommodated them within their critical frame, precisely because of the history I have looked at in this thesis. Not all the will in the world could have kept the devadasis steadily before our eyes as icons from a pre-rational, pre-individualist sexual/artistic Utopia, in defiance of the long intervening narrative, by now a part of the social imaginary, of their sexual victimhood. Nor could Tharu and Lalita, feminist inheritors despite themselves of the modernity that in a sense 'produced' the devadasis' victimhood, claim the devadasis' sexual ethic as their own without the saving distance of fantasy: complete **identifi-cation**

with the devadasis' subject position would in all likelihood be politically suicidal within the straitlaced milieu of modern middle class feminism.

Tharu and Lalita's feminist critique straddles two political/theoretical formations--nationalist/marxist and poststructuralist--and each of the two corresponding interpretive models would rule out the choice of the devadasi as a symbol of sexual agency. The unlikeliness of the choice has a distinct reason in each case. On the one hand, there are the conflicting but also uncannily similar images of the devadasis produced by the middle class nationalist narrative about them (which Tharu and Lalita explicitly set themselves to repudiate) and by the marxist-progressive narrative (which does have a place, however ambiguous, in the theoretical model they construct and deploy). Both nationalist discourse and the Nehruvian state that was established after Independence drew on a Hegelian-progressive model of history; according to this model, the devadasis were rescued from shame and degradation under a feudal regime by the legislative powers of the state. Many features of this model are endorsed by the Left in India, which also deems the devadasis exploited, and deserving of commiseration but not interest. Both nationalist and marxist discourses privilege asceticism over consumption and have no language for the theorizing of any pleasure, let alone 'aesthetic' pleasure or female sexual pleasure.

On the other hand, there are the compulsions of post-structuralist, postcolonial theory, which militate against the accepting of any norms, including colonially-influenced sexual ones, at face-value: since norms are generally given (it is

argued) by some theory of 'essence' or some notion of 'morality.' Such a contention leads to efforts to lay bare the assumptions underlying notions of value and therefore suggests a reading of the devadasi as a pawn in a semiotic game rather than as a 'person' whose life (and aesthetic preferences) might be of interest to contemporary women. In the (post- humanist) post-colonial critic's frame of reference, agency, and the subjecthood that agency rests on, are **fundamentally** undecidable problems, appearing in the discourse, if at all, embarrassedly, modestly, sous rature.

Neither of these models (progressive/post-structuralist) that inform Tharu and Lalita's work, then, has any theoretical room for an active (agentive) demand for sexual or aesthetic pleasure, for the 'taking control of one's sexuality' idea, especially in relation to a woman. What is it that facilitates and frames this historical reconstruction of Muddupalani's or Nagaratnamma's (no doubt genuinely untroubled) acceptance of their active sexual and aesthetic pleasures, blurred as it is by many decades of a caste-specific but also politically circumspect repudiation of women's sexual agency? I would suggest that it is a third kind of political milieu--the one associated with the new feminist movement of the 1960s, which coincided with the individualist, Marcusean/Reichian/ hippie politics that characterized the American New Age. Interestingly, the sixties agenda of sexual liberation was absorbed into precisely the kind of naive individualist feminism that Tharu and Lalita disown in their **Introduction**.

I think of Tharu and Lalita's genealogy as a coup because of the casual way in which it holds these two-- or perhaps

three-- distinct and divergent political programmes and their corresponding theoretical models together, with no trace of strain. What would, in lesser hands, have been a fissured text, acquires an elegance and an **unwrinkled** flow that must be attributed to the expertise of the authors rather than to the intrinsic **compatibility** of the theoretical elements they draw upon. What would the effect be of unpacking these elements in recent feminist cultural theory, isolating the trajectory of the **marxist/feminist** politics of '**progress**' from the post-colonial/post-structuralist/postmodern politics of emancipatory aesthetics, discursive and epistemic **breakthroughs**, textual **disruptions**?

Is There a Feminist Cultural Studies?

The Anglo-American academy has, in recent years, registered a change in interventionary style that has been spoken of as a generational shift. This is Andrew Ross's description; he speaks of his own book on popular culture (No **Respect: Intellectuals** and **Popular Culture**) as spanning

a history that includes the last generation of American intellectuals to swear unswerving allegiance to the printed word and dictates of European taste, and the first generation to use their involvement with popular culture as a site of contestation in itself, rather than view it as a **objective** tool with which to raise or improve political consciousness; the last

generation to **view** culture in the polarized **marxist** terms of a universal class struggle, and the first to accept the uneven development, across a diverse range of social groups and interests, of the **contradictions** of living within a capitalist culture; the last generation of whom the heroic mythologies of the unattached dissident intellectual could still be acted out, and the first to insist **that** the **institutionalizing** or the **commercializing** of knowledge does not seal the fate of political criticism; the last to devolve its politics solely upon the mind, and the labor of production, the first to appeal to the liberatory body, and the creativity of consumption. (11)

Ross, studying the view from the very heart of (unabashedly 'commercialized') post-structuralist **academia**, sees subversion as having moved out of its old sites--party office or student common-room or street march--to new ones--the classroom itself, the text, the **critique**, the lifestyle. He notes that the cultural product itself has changed its role or function, from being a means to a particular social end to being in **itself** a disputed object, or even a politics.

I am interested in the possibility that this shift is being replicated in Indian cultural theory, because if it is, it will undoubtedly have a bearing on the question that has been with **me**, **subliminally** if not overtly, throughout the researching of

my **subject** and the writing of this thesis; the question, namely, of the relationship between dance, feminist politics and feminist cultural theory. How will my re-reading of the history of the devadasis impinge on **my** practice of dance, and on my understanding of myself as located somewhere along the continuum of feminist politics? Would an approach to cultural production that still sees it as instrumental in consciousness raising (obsolete, according to Ross's model of the generational shift), aligned with a politics, naturally, that marks the subject-as-consciousness as the locus of change (also obsolete) be viable in the present; and, to put it briefly, would feminist cultural theory be a means to that consummation I have devoutly wished--a feminist practice of dance? In other words, can one have a cultural '**politics**' that does not abut on a democratic building of equivalences between subjects? And if one reads art as being politically effective in the framework of a **psychological** relationship with notions of truth or justice--a relationship of faith, even when the contingent nature of these notions is **admitted--and** conversely, both truth and justice as concepts that make one act in relation to a (provisional) notion of totality, would the **deconstruction** of totalities end the motivation to produce politically effective art? Would not such a development then either throw the artist back on aestheticism ('art for art's sake' coming in again by the back door) or force her to rely exclusively on critical readings of her work as politically subversive?

A brief glance at any of the texts I identified (in the first chapter of this thesis) as my reference points for cultural theory in India is enough to show that there has been

no 'shift' here of comparable decisiveness--not yet, **anyway--** though there are signs of the incipient opening up of a generation gap. In a sense, cultural theory in India is increasingly subject to the progressive political imperative, if '**progressive**' is construed in its familiar sense of 'moving towards democracy or equality.' It is understood that cultural theory should result in, or itself be, a praxis in consonance with larger social goals. The renewal of interest in the nation as cultural project may be seen as a **manifestation** of this imperative, though there is, also increasingly, disagreement about the substantive content of 'progress.'

Nationalist and **marxist** goals (and, to some extent, also feminist ones) were defined in relation to a 'progressive' or Hegelian scheme, premised on the idea of a universal history whose **telos** is the development of human freedom and whose processes are in accordance with a higher Reason. To this scheme Marx, as everyone knows, added two crucial ideas: firstly, that the Reason of world history works through development in modes of production, with justice being realized in a classless society after the collapse of capitalism; secondly, that the agents of development, going beyond mere study of the patterns of history, ought to actively cause (or help) the revolution to **happen**.

While the discourse of the '**progressive**' in India by no means follows these schemes in every detail, it does take over the central ideas of increasing freedom, of **egalitarianism**, of rational **intervention**, of the importance of the world-out-there. The Left, of course, also assumes a class struggle which will end with the triumph of the working class--the foundational

subject of history. In this political formation, on the whole, structural change in civil society is usually instituted by the State, or, in the **marxist** model, follows (automatically?) **from** economic change.

The women's movement has added to this formation (thus changing its contours) the **problematization** of a range of practices that subordinate women to men, including the gendered division of labour, sexual violence, unequal pay, personal laws and so on. While women have occasionally been seen as antagonistic to the structure of the family, or to religious or party loyalties, the more systematic protests have also positioned them in opposition to the State itself, since the latter has sought to regulate their bodies through medical (**contraceptive**) intervention, sanctioned custodial or caste-based violence, or publicly countenanced **gender-discriminatory** legislation and court judgements. But it has also been through the agency of the State that the remedies were to be applied. Models of activism on behalf of women are either of protest or of melioration in a 'social work' mode, and these models are not always distinct from each other. Familiar modes have included **dharnas**, sit-ins, street marches; medical, journalistic and legal crusades; and literary or cultural work that raised **consciousness** among women and publicized issues like dowry, **sati**, rape. Academic work has been part of this large endeavour.

Historically, the political matrix constituted by nationalism and marxism has been the ground of **interventionist** work in India, whether this work was activist or academic. The thinning out of the discourses of the nation in the age of global capitalism and the dissolution of the marxist alternative

(with the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity), have, therefore, snatched crucial rallying points away from progressives of every stamp, and post-structuralism (which both promises a new political imaginary and offers itself as a '**politics**') comes to occupy this vacant place in the social imaginary. Intellectual production is showing the effects of being thus untethered from **nation-building** and class struggle by turning to new objects of critique (the saturation of everyday life by the media is the chief source of new grist to the theoretical mill) or to novel modes of interpreting the rather **disheartening** facts about the nation, democracy, secularism, gendering and so on.

Post-structuralism, in this context, may be read as a sign that a politics that has neither nation nor Marx as parent-figures is struggling to be born. It has been claimed for the set of theories produced under this sign, in the western context, that they are a political response to the recognition that the **Hegelian-Marxist** project is no longer viable. For example, it has been suggested that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, theorizing **post-structuralism** as a political praxis, are celebrating the very unrealizability of the single '**end**' of history as a guarantee of plural futures. **Post-marxists** in the West have called attention to the political lessons to be learnt from the eruption of 'new social **movements**' that no longer submit to the idea of the one foundational revolutionary subject/class, or to the logic of equivalence, "a logic of comparison of subjects that are essentially construed as equals, through ... [a] discourse of '**rights**,' '**liberty**' and 'equality'" (Barrett, The Politics of Truth 71). In the Indian context, the

liberatory possibilities opened up by the loss of the nation as sovereign space or subject--the spaces and politics of **subalternity**, once swept under the large Nehruvian **carpet--offer** themselves for analysis as the spaces and politics of **difference**. amenable to **post-structuralist** decipherment.

But there is a sense in which even now, with both Nation and Left in disarray, the structures and vocabularies available for political praxis are still largely those of the Nehruvian socialist **establishment** and those of the Left. Whether or not political destinations are clear, the signposts are in the language of humanism, democracy, and distributive or political justice, and serious **interventions** still have to locate themselves somewhere along the road to socialist utopia. This last is the reason why cultural theory in India, or at least that part of it which explicitly aligns itself with a politics, reads **palimpsestically**. It cannot simply follow the logic of post-structuralism--as it has been followed elsewhere, if Ross is to be **believed--and** vacate the domain of humanism and democracy; subtly incoherent though the theoretical results are, most of the critics I am referring to struggle to keep up establishments in both territories. I will consider, below, how this equivocation affects feminist theory in particular.

Feminist Theory in a Time of Transition

Perhaps the earliest sign of the arrival in India of a new way of reading women's history is the loss of faith in the '**development**' model of history. This is linked to an increasingly acute awareness of what is probably the single most

obvious fact about women's history: that in most societies, neither 'tradition' nor 'modernity' inspires unqualified hope of emancipation. In the immediate context of feminist cultural history in India, the sense of disillusion with the grand narratives of nationalism and of nationalist historiography has actually led to the excavating of a whole range of ideologies, social practices and **relationships**, all of which point to the **instrumentalization** of 'the woman question' in various struggles; symbolic victories (usually for the middle class) in these struggles did not necessarily improve women's lot in any real way.

The story of the transition from sadir to bharatanatyam is, of course, a case in point. The broad tenor of my argument in the preceding chapters has been that the transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity' was a painful one for the devadasis. They were forced to trade the freedom to practice their art, a degree of power unusual for women anywhere, and a staunch pride in their female family traditions for the dubious joys of domesticity under the watchful eyes of a modernized and refurbished patriarchy. The other side of the coin is that once individual freedom was established as a **possibility**, it would only have been a matter of time before the rules and rituals that structured the lives of devadasis (i.e., their 'traditions') became impositions that restricted their access to the promises of modernity. In any case, the tradition of the devadasis is available to us through several layers of mediation, whose effect is, on the whole, to reinterpret it for Patriarchal use even in the present.

Feminist historiography, and, by extension, feminist

cultural theory, bring with them a promise and a proviso. The promise is an undertaking to study the past not as empty time, but as pregnant with meanings for the present, especially for **women** in the present; the proviso is that such historiography, while providing "overarching theoretical **formulations**," needs "constant testing and overhauling by historically and materially specific studies of patriarchal practice, social regulation and cultural production" (Sangari and Vaid, "Recasting Women" 1). But paradoxically, as feminist research becomes both more vast and more detailed, it undermines feminist theory's ability to fulfil its initial promise. Simplified and sorted into the categories 'tradition' and 'modernity,' for instance, many practices are available for moral or political judgement (the 'modern' practices are good when democratic; the 'traditional' ones are usually bad, 'feudal'); close up, considered in their actual complexity, most of them move out of the circle of certitudes. Given the ambivalent relationship women have with both sides of the **tradition-modernity** question, and the real difficulties involved in 'choosing' between them, one of the **preoccupations** of feminist cultural critique in India has been to find ways out of this binary.

One way of doing this has been to deliberately tie feminist theory to a current political project within a broadly democratic framework. The implicit claim of feminist theory, seen in this light, is that its problematization of the development model will help distinguish between 'good' modernity and 'bad' modernity from the point of view of their effects on women, while reading 'tradition' itself not as a homogeneous, unchanging and self-evident entity that just existed before

modernity, but as something contentious, as something created by societies, and above all as something that irresistibly interpellated women.

The feminist cultural theory produced early on in India may be read as an attempt to grapple with modernity in this way. For instance, when Sangari and Vaid write in "Recasting Women: an Introduction," in 1989, that "we can perhaps make a broad distinction between the '**modernizing**' of patriarchal modes of regulating women and the '**democratizing**' of gender relations both in the home and in the workplace" (19), they are separating the bad modernity (updated patriarchy) from the good (democratic **relationships**: the democratic revolution, categorically applied both to the public sphere and to **relationships** is a distinctively modern development). This establishes a relationship with a praxis, since it implies a goal, a **telos** (not necessarily a naively progressivist one either): women may demand democratizing of relationships. The rhetoric proclaims Sangari and Vaid's text itself a product of modernity, devoted to the enlargement of the sphere of rights (what Laclau and Mouffe call 'the **egalitarian-equivalential logic**') that in a sense **characterizes** this **socio-political** formation.

The kind of feminist framework Recasting Women exemplifies would be the one within which my own reading of the history of the devadasis would fit most comfortably: not surprising, this, since it was very much part of my own immediate frame of reference. As I have noted in the preface to this thesis, what **motivated** my research was my sense of the cultural snobbery and illiberality of the bharatanatyam establishment as it now stands, and my consequent desire to reconstruct the ways in

which this social exclusivity was built on the ruins of a female community's life and practice.

In the years since I began my research, this feminist theoretical framework has lost some of its initial coherence. The sense of the complexities of the tradition-modernity model has been sharpened by the crisis in '**nationalism**' itself, brought about by recent disruptions (Ayodhya and liberalization, for instance), and this has prepared the ground for certain **post-structuralist interventions**. In feminist theory that has been produced since Sangari and Vaid's pathbreaking anthology, the turn towards **post-structuralism** makes itself known not so much by explicit statement (though perhaps the increasing number of references to continental icons like Derrida or Foucault or to feminists like Judith Butler or Gayatri Spivak are fairly obvious indications of which way the wind is blowing) as by the positioning of feminist cultural theory vis-a-vis feminist politics. Sangari and Vaid's Introduction to Recasting Women identified the anthology, and feminist theoretical endeavours in general, as adjuncts to feminist politics. The intention was to contribute, for example, to a clearer understanding of why certain political initiatives in the past (in the nationalist movement or in Orientalist discourse that hypostatized the Aryan woman) failed to meet the high expectations that were built around them. By extension, since there is always some hope of learning from history, such theorizing aimed to contribute to clarity of vision on political options in the present.

In their Introduction to Interrogating Modernity, four years down the line, Niranjana, Sudhir and Dhareshwar, after

marking "the growth of the women's movement" as a moment in the culture of modernity that they wish to interrogate, withhold comment on how they place this moment politically (emancipatory, neutral or retrogressive?) or how they place their own theory in relation to this moment.⁶ Tharu and **Niranjana's** valuable synoptic essay "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender," which lays out the rationale for changing the object of feminist enquiry, and which I will consider in greater detail below, may be read as another text of the transition. Since the modified framework that is emerging now will have an extended effect on the way feminists theorize the political and therefore (as I have already said), on the way feminist artists theorize the politics of their practice, I want to follow the track of this new feminist theory.

Especially for feminists whose disciplinary starting point is English studies, the logic of the turn to **post-structuralism** seems irrefutable, since it was here that the alliance between feminism and **post-structuralism** was forged. This alliance was built not on any necessary concomitance between the political initiative and the discursive field, as on their joint declaration of hostilities against the **aestheticized** liberal humanism of English studies. The bond was reinforced by two modes, inaugurated by the theory, of doing politics by discursive means:

1) Disciplinary **metacritique**, or the politics of theory, a relatively new possibility that arises out of the Foucauldian insistence on the question: who benefits from this particular way of structuring knowledge? Rigorously applied and tied to a Praxis, such a metacritique can enforce intellectual

accountability, both to students, within the academic context, and in a larger context, to the various people affected by being in one way or the other objects of academic discourse or **manipulation.**

2) The deconstruction of dangerous or disabling representations of women, which acquires the allure of the **end-in-itself**, since post-structuralism unties ideology-critique from the idea that the superstructure is determined by the base 'in the last instance.'^a Releasing the concept of **representation** from the vestigial authority of reflection theory certainly widens the feminist critic's canvas and **significantly** extends her specialized vocabulary of protest. Feminist **professionals**, no doubt, found this theoretical bait difficult to refuse; and it may be justifiably claimed for the resultant critiques that they are momentous, once the current importance of the media in the reception and mediation of political questions is granted.

Thus in Real and Imagined Women, Sunder Rajan defines the task of the feminist critic as a particular kind of textual engagement:

If we acknowledge (a) that **femaleness** is constructed, and (b) that the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism), and (c) that therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves, then the task of the feminist

critic becomes what Jacqueline Rose describes as 'the critique of male **discourse**' born of 'a radical distrust of representation which allies itself with a **semiotic** critique of the sign.' (129)

Such a definition of the feminist critic's task, however, does not specify the theorist's perception of the relationship between theory as politics ('the critique of male **discourse**') and other political moves, such as those that might concern themselves with putting an end to certain kinds of representation (the glorified images of satis, perhaps, or sexual harassment offered as harmless entertainment in films); or between theory and the building of a feminist practice of **representation** (what would a '**female** discourse' be?).

It seems, then, as if feminist cultural theory in India is in the process of morphing: from a more or less humanist, historical materialist paradigm to a post-humanist, post-**structuralist** one.

The logic of alliance with what are still among the few available alternative **interventionist** movements--the **marxist**, the **non-conventional** Left, the **Left-feminist**--requires that **post-structuralism** be presented as an instrumental discourse, a theoretical supplement to a more or less democratic praxis. Since '**politics**' has **traditionally** meant something other than the semiotic revolution or the serious critique of transcendence, feminist critique, in so far as it is still attached by its cord to the mother-body of feminist politics, can be **post-structuralist** only in the extremities; the trunk is still humanist-modern. This schema must not, therefore, be read

as delineating an achieved **transformation**, such as the one Ross looks back on, or the one that many First World theorists describe as the postmodern rupture with earlier normative narratives. This section represents, if anything, speculation on a hypothetical future for feminist cultural theory, not on a fait accompli. This future, moreover, is much under discussion in the realm of oral exchange--seminar talk, corridor talk, informal planning--and since it is not altogether **documentable**, I have added an admittedly sketchy **counterfactual** at the end of it, invoking Gayatri Spivak, to suggest one possible destination.

The very fact of theorizing in a moment of transition exerts contradictory pulls on feminist cultural critics, and these contradictions are reflected in the way they address questions of politics, texts, history, culture, sexuality. So there is still talk of rights or civil liberties; there are demands for distributive justice and for the restoration of the dignity of personhood; there is still an **ethical-political** imperative to change the condition of oppressed or subordinated groups on the basis of a humanist discourse of amelioration or even, **occasionally**, of revolution. On the other hand there is the rejection of normative or Utopian discourses, including, presumably, the discourse of liberal democracy (in the Indian case, partly because this discourse is **colonially-mediated**), and there is the critique of the subject. Neither of these two latter staple themes of **post-structuralism** would be radically new except for one thing: that as they are processed by **the** American academy, they claim not to be a part of efforts to make humanist democratic projects more **just or inclusive**, but to be

delegitimizing these projects themselves. and to be inscribing themselves in a space outside modernity. Thus, as a counter-movement to the logic of alliance with political movements or groups there is the irresistible pull, for Indian critics as well, of post-structuralist theory's internal logic.

I am, as is clear from the above, invoking that ancient and contentious distinction between 'feminist activist' and 'feminist critic': a distinction I myself only half believe in, but one that nevertheless lurks in the shadows even when continuities are noted between these two identities, and sometimes even when the same person represents both identities. The subjectivity of the 'critic' is the site of the potential splitting off of feminist 'theory' from feminist 'politics.' It might be possible to wonder, without underwriting reductionist and **literal-minded** descriptions of what 'real' politics means, why recent feminist theoretical interventions in India seem especially unwilling to clarify two points: first, their debt to **post-structuralist** theoretical models, marking their relationship to (as well as distance from) some of the central preoccupations of that theory (**preoccupations** with epistemology, for instance, or with the subject as an 'effect' of construction, which insists on the **non-reciprocity** of its relationship with its world); second, their relationship with what are still considered respectable though non-theoretical models of public intervention by women. As I see it, in so far as the '**traditional**' mode of political functioning might endure a while longer, creating something like a political contradiction at the site of theory, there **may** be a gradual opening up of a gap between feminist politics and feminist

theory or cultural studies, and the latter might become a sanctuary for **post-structuralist** work.

To state my problem once again: it appears to be time to ask for clarity on the relationship between feminism and post-structuralism. Is post-structuralism a way of expanding and critiquing (more or less) **humanist-democratic** emancipatory discourses like marxism and feminism, deepening the meanings of equality, justice and freedom as they are realized in these political movements or is it a part of an attempt to constitute an altogether new discursive field which will displace humanism and therefore politics as we know it?

A demarcation of the space in which **post-structuralist** theory might serve feminism, rather than dictate to it, is important partly because it is generally understood that feminist theory has a special relationship with practices in the '**real**' world. The requirement (of dialectical engagement) is a useful reference point, though it obviously should not be so rigidly enforced as to make feminist research into 'danger areas' (research that does not yield immediate political gains) a taboo, since the long-term consequences of new knowledge are strictly incalculable. Oddly enough, feminists who would want to foreclose on the possibility of a feminist **psychoanalytic** theory--for example--because psychoanalysis bears the traces of its Victorian bourgeois **masculinist** origin, welcome the **post-structuralist** intervention, whose political effects are equally unforeseeable. This happens because, unlike specialized discourses like psychoanalysis or **sociobiology**, which are transparently dubious, **post-structuralism** appears (in the work of some western theorists like Judith Butler or even Foucault

himself) to have a significance precisely as a mode of political intervention; sometimes, indeed, as the only mode for our time. What, then do feminists make of the **post-structuralist** claim, part of its **self-definition**, that it is also a theory of politics that irreversibly displaces '**politics**' as we know it?

There is obviously a prior question to be asked here: in what way does **post-structuralism** claim to have displaced humanist politics? Foucault offers an answer that, moving outwards from disciplinary critique, finds '**Man**' as such on the verge of extinction: hence the focus on strategies of power rather than on its provenance, or the **intentionalities** behind it; the substitution of '**subject-effects**' for rational subjects; the rejection of the single point of condensation for politics ("Marx doesn't exist"). I will, however, look at Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's answer in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, in which the authors, proceeding inwards from the emergence of new social movements and antagonisms to the theoretical need to register or construct a correspondingly new political imaginary, explore the **possibilities** and the limitations of **post-structuralism** as a means to political ends.

Laclau and Mouffe describe themselves as '**postmarxist**'; they apply themselves to the task of formulating a mode of political practice in a world in which universal history (**for** both epistemological and political reasons) is dead, but in which the 'democratic revolution' (a term they borrow from Tocqueville) is actually a reality. As they perceive it, this revolution is carried forward by struggles incapable of reaching the degree of confluence that would allow all social antagonisms

to be set up in terms of two (and only two) opposing masses, as in the formulation 'aristocracy vs. the **people**' (the Jacobin imaginary) or in the formulation 'capitalist class vs. working **class**' (the **ma'xist** imaginary). Nor can the diverse struggles that make up this revolution, once the 'radical indeterminacy of the social' is granted, be taken as pre-existing their construction through the discursive **transformation** of relations of subordination (relations until that point naturalized in that context) into relations of oppression (preparing the ground for protest, **intervention**).

At the beginning of their excursus on the current political conjuncture, Laclau and Mouffe are at pains to note that many local antagonisms do not develop according to an **ideology** of a 'human **essence**.' They offer examples of the '**new social movements**' (the struggle against **statism** and bureaucracy, the ecology movement, sexual **liberation**, etc.) which are, according to them, **discontinuous from** the orthodox democratic **imaginary**. The **articulation** of these discrete political upheavals into a hegemonic alliance, which is the authors' central **preoccupation**, is imaginable, they note, primarily because **postfoundational** history "transforms into social logics what were previously foundations "(183).

In brief, taking post-structuralism seriously--thinking of politics as actively constructed, and celebrating rather than suppressing alterity, or the idea of constitutive differences between **subjects**--expands the field of contestatory Possibilities and so 'deepens' the democratic revolution. From the point of view of feminists, it is advantageous in that

1) it **problematizes** areas of social existence (inter-

subjectivity, the domestic sphere, the field of knowledge, culture) hitherto untouched by the discourses of **humanism**. These discourses have historically normalized male rationality; the new democratic impulse to equalize relationships therefore, has to be **actively** extended into these areas so crucial to women's lives. In Laclau and Mouffe's language, **post-structuralism**, by stressing difference, allows the relations of **subordination** at these sites to be transformed into relations of oppression or antagonism.

2) It opens up **possibilities** of new alliances, alliances unthinkable in the regime of the single **revolutionary** subject or the single political antagonism.

Arguably, these important political effects may be arrived at through trajectories other than **post-structuralist** ones. If **post-structuralism** beckons Indian theorists, the reasons are, clearly, to be sought elsewhere. I want to examine, in relation to Tharu and Niranjana's essay "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender" how the political problematic Laclau and Mouffe set out (new fields, new alliances) is complicated by **considerations** that arise in the different **geo-political** terrain Tharu and Niranjana occupy.

Recommending a **reconstitution** of the object of feminist enquiry, Tharu and Niranjana consider the consequences of the female subject's coming to occupy the 'modern' position in the comfortable and exclusionary way hitherto reserved for men. Reviewing the feminist political initiatives of the 1970s and '80s, they suggest that a wide range of issues "rendered critical by feminism **are** now being invested in and annexed by **projects** that deflect and contain" those initiatives (233). This

has led to a '**hegemonic mobilization**' of a '**humanist-feminist**' subject, who is characterized by her 'human core.' Produced by law, political theory, and even by **marxist** and feminist discourses themselves, this (fictional) human core precludes enquiry into the construction of this subject by processes of social **stratification**, and therefore into her 'upper caste, middle class, Hindu' coding. The composition of this subject, whose present striking visibility across a range of discourses proclaims her the true '**feminist**,' forecloses the **possibility--** Tharu and Niranjana argue--of alliances with 'other subaltern forces.' After the events of the late '80s and the early '90s, including the **Ramjanmabhoomi** movement, responses to the Mandal Commission Report and the massacre at Chunduru, they suggest, "we face a whole new set of political questions" (234), questions of alliance with newly assertive subaltern groups and of the effects of **liberalization**, and, more crucially, of the colonization of liberal democratic space by the (pseudo-) secular subject.

As Tharu and Niranjana outline their '**metonyms**' for feminist **consideration**, they seem to be offering an overwhelmingly compelling argument for exiting from the contaminated space of modernity. Though they bracket this question, the justifiable aggression and contempt with which they delineate the process of the constitution of the citizen (according methodological priority to the structurings of caste, class, gender, religion; identifying 'humanist' and 'modern,' in a sustained way, with the paradigmatic citizen's **self-promotion**) makes humanism itself sound like the enemy.

One might take issue with the presentation of this as a new

problematic: have the 'new' political questions quite replaced the old ones? The developments of the 1980s and '90s that present both urgent problems and opportunities for feminists-- Hindu **majoritarianism**, liberalization, the dalit **movement** --are certainly 'new' in that they are the most recent and therefore the most newsworthy, but not by any means because the older types of struggles, between women and men, or between classes, have suddenly ceased altogether. It would also seem as if, all impressions of the visibility of the female citizen notwithstanding, her actual situation has not changed substantially; the old problems persist beside the new ones, giving continued relevance to the modes in which they were addressed. But the implicit invocation of the idea of a paradigm shift ("a whole new set of political questions") in Tharu and N'iranjana's essay is precisely what interests me, because it highlights the tension within which its theoretical speculation is produced: the tension between an angry rejection of humanism on the one hand, and a commitment, on the other, to political change on the basis of what are, after all, discursive grounds historically associated with **Enlightenment** humanism, democracy, the emergence of rights.

What are the grounds of the rejection of liberal humanism? At the risk of repeating myself I will lay these out once again:

Firstly, the affiliation Tharu and Niranjana have to postcolonial discourse makes it impossible for them to ignore how the ideas of the 'human' of the 'modern' are encrusted with associations with the European **Enlightenment**, itself used most illiberally by the British, on occasion, to bludgeon its colonies into subjection.

Secondly, the bulky figure of the **'modern'** humanist, who appropriates the discourse of rights or of equality, obscures the vast numbers of small and unassuming people who cannot then present their claims to the benefits of modernity. This middle class male subject's complacent possessiveness about modernity not only allows him to lose all traces of his social structuring and to become paradigmatic, but also justifies the increase of his power and privilege. This citizen, exemplified for his feminist antagonists mainly by the upper caste professional or government official, but also, sometimes, by the marxist comrade (who will not forswear foundational history), can hug his **'modernity'** to himself in this **proprietary** way largely because of the inequalities (of race, caste, class, gender) that **characterized** the moment of its inauguration and of its absorption into Indian life. Post-structuralist approaches to the critique of the category of the subject recommend themselves precisely in this context, as ways of dissecting the idea of selfhood that guarantees this citizen's real power.

More pertinently and more annoyingly, the discourses of liberalism and humanism now appear folded into new kinds of illiberal politics--the Hindutva type, the **anti-Mandal** or **anti-dalit type--that** disguise their illiberality by parading their enlightened credentials. The factor common to these three reasons for rejecting liberal humanism is, in short, that it is not protected from abuse: that it may be used for legitimate as well as illegitimate ends.

One might clarify the third reason by taking a brief look at the ways in which some of the new political movements Tharu and Niranjana refer to are deploying the discourse of liberal

humanism. The prominence in recent years of symbolic struggles points to the reconstitution of group identities in the field of the political. The Shah Bano case and the **Roop Kanwar** case may be taken as typical instances in which questions of group identity (**Hindu**, Muslim, Rajput) have been hung upon isolated events where women have been instrumentalized. Another example is upper caste mobilization around caste **reservations**, which from the upper caste point of view is also symbolic, because what is being contested is by no means employment for everyone, but only for a small section of each community. The assertion of group identity has both **traditionally** been (in the formation of caste-associations, for instance, which were prolongations of pre-modern self-identification through kinship; or in the non-brahmin movements, in which **caste-feeling** and a modern consciousness of equality met each other) and has become, in new ways (as with the autonomous women's movement itself or with the dalit struggle), the path of intervention in public affairs.

A theorist conscious of difference as a legitimate analytic category would treat such assertions of identity without the kind of dismissive scorn the comfortably **difference-blind** middle class liberal humanist (whose **difference-blindness** is a mark of his singular feeling of being at home in the world) reserves for it. The political weight of post-structuralism seems to lie in its offering a subject position from which identity politics (as asserting 'difference': i.e.. social structuring) may be endorsed. though with the theoretical **stipulation--usually unobservable** in practice--that 'identity' be kept distinct from 'essence.' The centrifugal effect of this theory then acts as a valuable corrective to 'modern' self-complacency.

But does post-structuralism (characterized by many critics as politically neutral, anarchist or even nihilist) offer a substantive alternative to the political framework that it thus demonstrates to be vulnerable to abuse? Could the legitimization of all 'difference,' all claims to identity, be the option we might prefer to the legitimization of the 'universal' norms? If we relate the privileging of difference to identity politics, it becomes obvious that 'difference' itself is as neutral a category as 'universal' or 'essence': there is obviously (at least from a feminist point of view) an illegitimate politics of difference (the Hindutva type, the anti-Mandal type) as well as a legitimate one (the women's movement, the dalit movement). Indeed part of the trouble is that 'difference' (as antagonism) is not unmarked: the question is who is marking it, where it is marked, whom it divides. Increasingly, Tharu and Niranjana's analysis suggests, difference may not be marked between men and women (though as I said earlier, it is far from being the case that this representational ploy, by means of which every group legitimates itself, reflects an achieved transformation) but between Hindus, and Muslims; or between dalit men and upper caste women.

The feminist theorist is called upon, in this situation, to distinguish the legitimate politics of difference from the illegitimate ones. Tharu and Niranjana's post-structuralist affiliation becomes visible in the way they negotiate this imperative: by identifying the illegitimate uses of difference (by the new anti-Mandal subject of 'feminism,' for instance) as at base universalist. The crux of their argument, its most compelling point, is that the Hindutva movement or the anti-

Mandal struggle are actually deploying universalist egalitarian discourse **punitively**, against other **groups**, stigmatizing the latter as backward, pre-modern; being modern and egalitarian then becomes (as it did, for instance, under colonial rule, and as it does in the World Bank's dealings with underdeveloped nations; or as it does in Tharu and Niranjana's example of the allegedly happy and, what is more, liberated Hindutva '**family**' which points a finger at gender relations within the Muslim community) another route to **self-aggrandisement** and an instrument for garnering more power. What develops out of the Hindutva appropriation of Enlightenment discourse is indeed an identity politics: but one that can effectively bury the pre-modern associations of caste or communal identities, presenting itself as a 'universal' politics.

It **seems** to me that if one steps back from Tharu and Niranjana's specific project and therefore from their presentation of what 'difference' and 'universalism' mean, what one gets is actually a set of mirror images: Universalism and difference both being deployed both democratically and undemocratically. Tharu and Niranjana, however, do not examine such a possibility. Having piled up the negative images of the age--Mandal, Hindutva, Chunduru--they suddenly switch tracks, presenting the trope of the anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh. The government, the Press in several languages, mainstream and alternative political commentators all alike insist upon seeing this movement of rural women as pre-political, as familial; Tharu and Niranjana reinvest it with a Political charge and set it up, moreover, as a model of a truly **radical** politics. Especially in the face of male (and sometimes

female) stupidity about the political charge of this movement, one is drawn to this inspired construction, tinged with strong feelings of solidarity and, perhaps, just a little romantic sympathy, of an alternative subject of **feminism**.⁶

The persistence by implication, in Tharu and **Niranjana's** text, of the idea of a deeper 'humanism,' and the other sign in it of the endurance of universalisms--the punctuation of it by the idea of a feminist politics that has a bearing on 'women'--are, however, clearly departures from post-structuralist **themes**.⁷ The authors appear to be suggesting that 'feminism' itself needs to be conserved as a radically democratic practice (with all the protocols that this implies), which is the only safeguard of its continuance in the '**egalitarian-equivalential logic**.' To untie it from this project would be to turn it loose for the use of practically anyone who wishes to **instrumentalize** the gender question, including all the **anti-democratic** groups that have been laying claim to it.

Both the theoretical impulses of Tharu and **Niranjana's** text (the critique of the subject, the critique of the Enlightenment) and the reining in of these impulses by a steady attachment to a political context are the effects of a location peculiar to a certain kind of feminist cultural theorist in India. This is partly within, or in sympathy with, the women's movement in India; partly within, or in dialogue with, 'global' developments in theory.⁸ Given that the global location (or the Anglo-American one) increasingly holds out temptations to the feminist in her subject position as 'critic,' the proportion of '**theory**' to '**politics**' in the usual feminist compound might change drastically; what I have referred to as the internal logic of

post-structuralism may become decisive for feminist theory and perhaps, in ways that cannot be foreseen, for feminist practice.

The way problems are delineated and dealt with in the field of **post-structuralist** theory in the western academy may be exemplified by the question of **'essence,'** which recurs with monotonous persistence and which is problematized by several classic meditations on **epistemology.** From a feminist political point of view, as Diana Fuss points out, there are essences and essences; while it is true that some have proved signally pernicious for women, others may even prove serviceable (Fuss xi). The point is that **'politics'** itself is a practice open to contingencies, not concerned with solutions that are internally coherent or valid for all time. But reading certain post-structuralist theorists, one might be forgiven for thinking that essentializing, or forgetting to use the approved language of the **'politics'** of difference, is something on the scale of a cardinal sin.

The relationship between post-structuralism and feminism requires **clarification,** in the final analysis, because of this play on the word 'politics.' Post-structuralism comes to represent politics by re-presenting it in a certain way (to borrow **one** of **Spivak's** favourite constructions), owing to the unresolved tension between its primarily epistemological compulsions and the compulsions of humanist-democratic **politics.**²⁰ It begins by offering itself as a supplement to already existing modes of political practice; it becomes by degrees 'a **politics'** and then, gathering momentum as it rolls down the declivity of epistemological revolution, becomes **'politics' as such,** which seems to obviate the need for post-

structuralists to define their relationship once and for all with politics as democratic struggle.²¹

The example I will offer in passing of the telescoping of post-structuralist epistemological concerns and more straightforwardly political ones is Spivak's magisterially presumptuous reading of the work of the Subaltern Studies group "against the grain of their self-representation." In the essay "Invitation to a Dialogue," Dipesh Chakrabarty sets out the (early) problematic of this group as concerned with the contradictions between elite political language, which is Hegelian-nationalist, and the subaltern pre-colonial political languages, which, though modified by the colonial encounter, nevertheless remain tied to precolonial forms of power and authority. The intention behind studying these contradictions is "to understand the consciousness that informed and still informs political actions taken by the subaltern classes on their own, [relatively] independent of any elite initiatives" ("Invitation" 374). Spivak interprets what the Subaltern collective sees as difficulties in its project (the lack of direct access to a subaltern consciousness, its availability only through filtering narratives of counterinsurgency, and so on) as insuperable theoretical obstacles, so that the specific problem the members give themselves (the recovery of the subaltern consciousness) becomes a theoretical exercise in proving that such, a consciousness cannot exist. This makes the object 'subaltern consciousness' paradigmatic of consciousness in general, proving the post-structuralist axiom that consciousness is a subject-effect; and by this token the Subaltern group either deliberately explores the futility of attempts to pin down the

elusive subject or naively **misrecognizes** the objectives of its own project.

Spivak herself embodies, in a sense, the tension between feminist as critic (in the western academy) and feminist as activist (in her case, on behalf of the erased **epistemes** of postcolonial nations). The brilliance and the irony of her work may indeed stem from the postponing of foreclosure, the refusal to splice together the split halves of her subject position: self/other; critic/activist. Polyglot eiron of postcolonial theory, the tone and content of her **argument--trenchant, sardonic, demanding** that the Subject of the West behave itself--is marvellously at odds with her style--narcissistic, treasonably sophisticated, unable to help embodying mastery of languages, concepts, jargon.

Both the excesses and the glamour of post-structuralism as a substitute for politics come from a profoundly reductive presentation of the opposition's views, and of the principles of competing discursive paradigms in general. Not all those who embark on emancipatory or egalitarian political endeavours are entirely devoid of a sense of the provisional and makeshift nature of either their discourse or their actions. But the language in which post-structuralism caricatures them is hyperbolic and flamboyant, and while it may have no particular resonances for a generation that has grown up within humanist mental frameworks, it is particularly enticing to students who can combine, through a use of this language, a form of political correctness with either heady romantic rebellion or sheer intellectual **dandyism.**²¹ The Foucauldian project, as has been repeatedly pointed out (and this also applies to Derridean

deconstruction) offers no elaborate alternative models of politics that take their justification from the democratic imaginary rather than from libertarian impulses. Nancy Fraser expresses this idea rather more colourfully when she points out that Foucault has all the interestingness of a lover and none of the virtues of a husband.

Thus one might ask: if humanism, democracy and secularism are indeed dead (I am not so sure about this) why do post-structuralist politics (the deconstruction of the subject, the assertion of difference) so insistently present themselves as the inevitable option in the Indian (academic) context? There are, for instance, alternative models of engagement with modernity which are allied to the German intellectual tradition rather than to the pessimistic French one. In Andreas Huyssen's map of the postmodern, the background to Foucault, Derrida and other post-structuralists is the

French vision of modernity [which] begins with Nietzsche and Mallarme and [which] is thus quite close to what literary criticism describes as modernism. Modernity for the French is primarily--though by no means exclusively--an aesthetic question related to the deliberate destruction of language and other forms of representation. For Habermas [in the German tradition], on the other hand, modernity goes back to the best traditions of the Enlightenment, which he tries to salvage and to reinscribe into the present philosophical discourse in a new

form. (203)²⁵

In other words, why is Foucault a feminist resource in India and why is Habermas (or feminist revisionist readings of his work) not?

As a theoretically coherent and specialized discourse, post-structuralism sustains and is in turn sustained by certain professional investments (made largely by academics). This is bound to push the theory in the direction of self-**referentiality**, particularly in the absence of reminders that specializations are (to use a phrase from Lukacs) a 'partial function of society.' ²⁶ If the rules of the post-structuralist game hold, the changeover to this discourse should be a 'paradigm **shift**' and the discourses and strategies generated by modernity should be decisively and irredeemably displaced at some point in the future. At the moment the **pressure** to 'go post-structuralist,' though perhaps stemming primarily from attempts to imagine an alternative politics, is stepped up, at any rate, by new-wave thinking and disciplinary changes in the western academy, changes that are leaning on cultural theory in many parts of the world. The disciplines undergoing transformation include philosophy, English and anthropology; the problems include the apparent **self-enclosedness** of languages, the epistemological confusions resulting from relativism or the perception of differance. the difficulty of separating the effects of discursive regimes from effects that arise in the '**real**' world, the very uncertainty about the reality of this world itself, and of the self-presence of the **subjects** who Populate it.

Post-Structuralism in the Indian Academy

The academic orientation of recent feminist theory—towards debates in continental philosophy, English, anthropology, for instance, rather than towards analytic philosophy or political theory, to think of two options at random—facilitates post-structuralism's opportunistic occupation of the space created by disillusion with both tradition and modernity. This section is an attempt to trace, very schematically, the trajectory by which post-structuralism arrives in India, in order to offer tentative answers to the question of why these disciplines become decisive rather than certain others; and to the question of what the effect might be of these changes on the Indian academic scene, on English studies (since this, as I explained in the first chapter, was also my starting point) and on feminist cultural theory. I am gesturing towards the fact that an honest genealogy of post-structuralism in India remains to be written, rather than actually writing one, which would be a foolish undertaking for a student located in the Third World. The purveyors of the theory are the only people, in a sense, who are really in a position to **objectify** their own practice, though the obligation to do so, embodied in the idea of '**self-reflexivity**' and rooted in **marxist** self-critique as well as in Foucauldian genealogy, is usually honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

The audience for post-structuralism in India is being created by a whole generation of academics, who also, crucially, adjudicate on theoretical alternatives on behalf of this audience. The metal of the filter not being altogether inert, new power relations result from this. A demographic profile of

this group would be most illuminating. These academics are, by and large, Indians who got their doctoral degrees in British or American universities in the last ten or fifteen years, and came back to India--usually temporarily, but sometimes for good, though with renewable contacts abroad--to write, teach, publish. Mapping their road to post-structuralism would take some guesswork, since a considerable stretch of it has been traversed in Anglo-American academia where the landmarks (baffling to students here) include professional turf-battles, political struggles around race and gay rights apart from those around indefinitely factionalizing feminisms, and carefully staged run-ins with conservative authorities on television. No doubt most of these academics read Marx before leaving India ('reading Marx' being a trope here for a whole process of feeling dissatisfied with existing social arrangements and for finding a vocabulary and perhaps a practice in which to express this dissatisfaction) and had political commitments. Most of them also obviously experienced post-structuralism as both intellectual and political breakthrough, the full force of the partnership between post-structuralism and feminism or black studies in the academy hitting them when their teachers were riding the crest of the theory wave. As a redemptive discourse, post-structuralism must have seemed to be a definite improvement on marxism.

For these academics, post-structuralist theory meshed with social critique not so much along its feminist face as along its postcolonial one. To consider the trajectory of post-structuralist theory in India, therefore, one has to take account of the investments of postcolonial theorists in this

theoretical discourse, which necessitates, at this point, a circuitous diversion through the field of postcolonial theory. To minimize the tedium of this digression I will glance at the debate over Aijaz Ahmad's critique (in his book In Theory) of Edward Said and Fredric Jameson, featured in the journal Public Culture.³¹ Read symptomatically, the responses to Ahmad's 'attack' on these two figures, seminal for postcolonial theory, might illustrate the vectors of material interest and psychological identification that characterize the 'postcolonial' as a subject position.

The point is that what Ahmad says about Said and Jameson is by no means wounding or even controversial from the perspective of the Third World critic. As a historically informed scholar, Ahmad takes quite justifiable exception to Said's one-sided presentation of the exchanges between the Orient and the Occident. As a dialectical materialist, he denounces the 'idealist metaphysic' that leads to methodological and historical confusions, in Said's text, about the genealogy of Orientalism (is it an eternal attitude to the East or a historically determinate formation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?). As for Jameson, the colossal arrogance and staggering naivete of his argument ("all third-world texts are necessarily ... to be read as ... national allegories"), with its collapsing of the heterogeneity of Third World economic and cultural formations into the idea of a single Third World 'form' of literature, positively beg for the kind of criticism Ahmad levels at it. Indeed the number of pulled punches in Ahmad's critique suggests caution and moderation rather than a desire to be wantonly destructive.

And how do postcolonial intellectuals respond? For the most part with a sustained vituperation that barely takes time off to respond to the core of Ahmad's arguments. There are displays of condescension and cries of 'unfair!' As Ahmad points out in his riposte, the same interlocutors who accuse him of virulent aggression towards Said and Jameson in their turn accuse him of wanting to start a 'jihad,' pronounce on his psychological maladjustment, question his right to attack anyone, **accuse** him of cheating, deceiving, plagiarizing, feathering his own nest, and so on, giving no quarter. The whole attack on Ahmad expresses a degree of professional outrage that is puzzling to anyone who has taken postcolonial valorizing of subaltern, earthily anti-bourgeois disruptions **seriously--surely** professional etiquette of the kind Ahmad is said to have violated is an aspect of western-bourgeois ethics, and anathema to the Third World marxist, the postcolonial, the flaneur, the Foucauldian, or any other subverter of western norms, to whom all is fair?³⁴

The charged and, ironically, unprofessional tone in which Ahmad is denounced makes sense if one reads his polemic as lese majeste. Nothing less than the discursive terrain of postcoloniality itself is under siege, along with its theoretical hinterland, post-structuralism; the theorists defending these owe fealty to Said, of course, and behind Said looms the figure of the suzerain, Foucault. When Said's Orientalism provided the intellectual grounds for constituting postcoloniality as a discursive field, obviously well-meaning intellectuals from decolonizing nations, Indians among them, finally found a way of studying their own spaces, identities and

cultures without exiting from the western academy.

The fact that Foucault was one of Said's intellectual mentors was probably partly responsible for setting up an early connection between Foucauldian methodologies and postcolonial theory, though there was sufficient reason, in the general atmosphere of the intellectual make-over of the Anglo-American academy, to find Foucault seductive even without Said's advocacy. Gayatri Spivak, meanwhile, eloquently made the case for cashiering Foucault (she finds him conserving 'the West as subject') and setting up Derrida, whom she had been translating, as the prototypical theorist of difference.

The end result of these transactions appears to have been the global generation's strong identification with post-structuralism and its continental progenitors. The call to identify with Foucauldian or Derridean theoretical models was evidently given by more than just overlapping concerns: the very formation of the discursive field of postcoloniality, hooked onto this theory, was at stake, as were, in a sense, various theoretically adjacent projects of the intellectual Left in the Anglo-American academy.

From the number of times actual places or theoretical spaces are mentioned by both parties in the Public Culture debate over Ahmad's book, we might deduce that location is the hidden signifier of prime importance in postcolonial theory. Cities and states ('Delhi,' 'Calcutta,' 'Hyderabad,'; 'Kerala'); professional spaces ('Rutgers,' 'JNU,' 'New Left Books,' 'postcolonials in India'); discursive spaces ('theory' itself, that space Ahmad so rashly tries to storm); countries ('India,' 'Pakistan,' 'the United States'); continents,

intercontinental spaces, 'First World' and 'Third World,' even 'the globe'; the spaces demarcated by political parties, groups, movements ('feminism,' 'Greenwich Village,' 'Third International Marxism,' 'the CPI'): all are places which come up, after all, as open to intellectual occupation. The focus is on the meanings of exile, diaspora, and vagrancy; on nationalism and internationalism. Should this concern with spaces be read, as Arif Dirlik reads postcolonial self-promotion in another context, as the conservation of the territory of a comprador intelligentsia that has arrived in the West?

Dirlik contends that "there is a parallel between the ascendancy in cultural criticism of the idea of postcoloniality and an emergent consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s" and that "the appeals of the critical themes in postcolonial criticism have much to do with their resonance with the conceptual needs presented by the transformations in global relations caused by changes in the capitalist world economy" (331). Postcolonial criticism's complicity with the hegemony of contemporary capitalism is revealed by a sin of omission (its silence about "contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination") and a sin of commission ("its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence ... global capitalism"). Postcolonial theorists like Gyan Prakash, Dirlik alleges, celebrate a postfoundational history which "repudiates any fixing of the Third World subject and, therefore, of the Third World as a category," (335), and, as they affiliate with minorities in the First World, "a politics of location takes precedence over a politics informed by fixed categories" (336). Such a discursive **thematics** may

actually exclude from its scope "most of those who inhabit or hail from post colonial societies....[since it] does not account for the attractions of modernization and nationalism to vast numbers of Third World populations" (337). Dirlik leaves us with a gloomy description of postcolonial discourse as "a discourse that seeks to constitute the world in the self-image of intellectuals who view themselves ... as postcolonial intellectuals" (339).

Whether or not one endorses this stinging tautology, there is a point to be taken in Dirlik's argument, which is that the politics of location in the First World or in the liminal spaces between First World and Third World inflects what we hear from the postcolonial critic about the political/theoretical options suitable for subalterns in the Third World. Thus, for instance, while feminists in India may have grave reservations about democracy as mediated by colonialism or about the political residues of the Enlightenment, those who are not postcolonial theorists may not be as sure as the latter are that we have altogether done with either modernity or Enlightenment.

While Dirlik's view of postcolonial theory might be accurate, as far as it goes, his materialist explanation of the attractions of a postfoundational politics given by location does not cover all the possibilities. What is left out of his account is the psychological significance, for the liminal intellectual who is radically unhoused by a refusal of bourgeois citizenship, radically disembodied by a refusal to identify with the national body, radically unanchored by an abdication of the middle class vanguardist role, homesick in the metropolis for India and in India (or in any of the provinces of the Third

World) for the metropolis, of diacuraive territory as possession or fetish.

The problem of liminality is complicated by the desire to occupy the space, subtly barricaded against Third World invasions, of the intellectual metropolis--which is not quite the same thing as being in an Anglo-American university. The viciously disabling feeling of being structurally relegated to some epistemic backwater or the other is indubitably accentuated for Third World intellectuals by the tantalizing proximity of this intellectually prestigious space; that is, by exposure to First World epistemological battles in the First World.

Poststructuralism then invites postcolonial intellectuals in continued contact with the First World to use it to lever the transcendental subject (always and indelibly imprinted as western and rational) out of his central place in the territories of the Enlightenment. Postcolonials who strategically appropriate Foucault (or who, less convincingly, despite Spivak, use Derrida) in order to 'provincialize Europe,' are, in a sense, performing exercises in decolonizing the mind. In this context, with these personal investments, decolonizing the mind becomes a politics in itself; and the intellectual, disciplinary and professional labour that this calls for, in the highly professionalized western academic setting, precludes identification with now obsolete dissident or heroic stereotypes (the marxist intellectual, the Gandhian intellectual). Conspicuous consumption is scored into the very grain of academic exchange: intellectual authority, now granted to Third World intellectuals, cannot coincide with such elaborate gestures of renunciation as made an earlier version of the

intellectual at home in her world or endowed her with moral authority.

But the endeavour to decolonize the mind is inescapably subject to the approval of the First World. The irresistible pull of the metropolis, where value stubbornly seems to inhere, despite all efforts to detach it, is consequently also the reason why the postcolonial intellectual cannot straightforwardly grant the possibility that local settings might give meaning to theoretical work. Trapped in the familiar spiral of aspiration and exclusion, she feels the enormous psychological pressure, arising from the effortless and enduring intellectual self-valorization of the West, to make herself intelligible everywhere, and especially there. Precisely the real possibility of equivalences between the intellectual concerns of all the significant corners of the globe vitiates, in the age of late capitalism, work that has purely indigenous or, worse still, local value. Thus even if the starting point is a local one, the problem has to translate into a universal language.

What may be of the greatest moment about the discursive domain of postcoloniality is that the segregation and devaluation that constitute the immediacy of the Third World academic's experience of the West in the present are worked into the theoretical apparatus as a retrospective repoliticization of the colonial period. Appiah suggests (as does Dirlik) that the postcolonial intellectual may feel a disproportionate anxiety about colonial remnants, including that large loose package that is called 'modernity,' with its concomitant, 'humanism' (Appiah 149). From the perspective of the colonized country, despite its

having been inducted into universal history without benefit of choice, and perhaps because the negative logic of this induction, represented by vulnerability to neo-imperialist designs, cannot be reversed, it might make more sense to **make** shift with the incidental benefits of modernity. In any case, for the less-mobile citizen of the decolonizing country, a less-anxious subject position may seem more natural; and the audience for postcolonial critique, apart from cheering on the assault on English and its attendant privileges, may stifle its bafflement about postcoloniality's more bizarre projects with recollections of the general good intentions of its representatives.

Indeed, the problem is made more acute by the fact that postcolonial intellectuals can no longer directly address or identify with such audiences. These theorists sometimes explain their avoidance of the local or indigenist theoretical frames (as opposed to practices) in terms of their intention to evolve a theory of the nation without arriving punctually at the bourne of 'indigenism': which sounds as if all theories that lingered over or privileged local intellectual or cultural formations were to be marked as 'indigenist,' but perhaps merely signals their lack of interest in the indigenous setting as discursive limit to their own work. In any case what gets instituted is a 'double exclusion'--from global context as well as from local one. Svati Joshi suggests that part of the fallout of the formation of the national intelligentsia around English is that "[t]he contemporary intelligentsia, in a much more decisive way than the earlier intelligentsia, is cut off from linguistic communities with whom it can speak or share its knowledge, and this has, paradoxically, rendered it **marginal**" ("Rethinking

English: An Introduction" 24). If one substituted 'global' for 'national' in this formulation, and 'theory' for 'English,' one would have a fairly clear impression of the predicament of the postcolonial intellectual. Even in the age of multinational capital, when nearly everyone is dispossessed in some way, the subject position of the postcolonial intellectual stands out as acutely alienated--an alienation masked, however, by the brisk attentiveness to local cultural practices.

Significantly, the need to adopt a 'local' space as a sort of sublime object, as well as the compulsion to interpret that space to the white western academy, are most urgently felt by postcolonials who have firm commitments and have enjoyed a measure of success in the West. No one speaks more lyrically of the space of the subaltern--"the habitat of the subproletariat." "the space of active displacement of the Empire-Nation or colonialism-decolonization reversal"--than Gayatri Spivak, who is both the quintessential postcolonial abroad and something of a special case, since she has successfully and irreverently pitched her tent in the metaphysical centre of western academic terrain while keeping up a conversation about the people of the margins. What needs correction, then, is the illusion created by the postcolonial appropriation of post-structuralist theory--the illusion of the First World's sudden, unprecedented, amazing attentiveness to the Third World intellectual's voice. In the bright flattening glare of global theory we seem to see the silhouettes of the two academic*, face to face, engaged in conversation; if depth is returned to the picture, it becomes evident that one is talking past the other, that both are distracted.

The point of all this is not to set up **'location'** as the new brand of politics, but to pull the question of the genealogy of post-structuralism up to the surface, which might then lead to a clearer view of what inflects or distorts the theory being produced about cultural formations in India. If a discourse is to fulfil a critical function, its genealogy needs to be examined; and in this discourse we may see the operation of certain large structures of power--that between First World and Third World intellectuals in the western academy; the creation of a (possibly) comprador intelligentsia; and another unequal relationship between this intelligentsia and its audience in the Third World. The discourse and its peripheral implications depend crucially on this intelligentsia's becoming self-conscious about the new power relations it is setting up. In other words, we need to reflect on the politics of postcolonial theory and on the conflicts around post-structuralism in the present, rather than accept either as **'natural'** to the Indian context.

Indian students interested in these conflicts can read about them, but mainly in conservative or radical **polemics** on the subject, and these, understandably, offer mutually exclusive facts and figures and conflicting interpretations of them. Students, moreover, are encouraged to consider such reading superfluous; the academics who bring post-structuralism to India, preferring to stem curiosity about its **'original'** context, foreground its concomitance with postcoloniality, which in turn is naturalized as addressing the anxiety and anger about **colonialism** that Third World subjects are assumed to **feel**. In the absence of familiarity with this original context, **Indian**

students receive **post-structuralism** as the only option for theoretical or political intervention, rather than as one tradition among many; and they would certainly be unable to account for the way it is transforming their own academic setting. The answer to the question why Foucault rather than Habermas, then, is that postcolonial theory mediates post-structuralism; that the anti-foundationalism of the latter is congenial to postcolonial theorists for whom western intellectual production is both *Superego* and *Other*.

In a sense, what I am making is an extended plea for the diversification of theoretical and political resources in the Indian context, so that both the 'humanist' or Enlightenment developments (Habermas, the liberal-communitarian debate) and the post-structuralist, post-humanist critiques are available for evaluation against each other: as our access to the debates stands at present, via English, at any rate, the post-structuralists have it all their way. In this case one might ask if one would choose a different theoretical tradition if questions of epistemology and of the intellectual dominance of the West did not loom so large.

The power relations in which post-structuralism is embedded are bound to have an immediate effect on pedagogy, perpetuating an unequal relationship between teacher and student, since the student's ignorance of developments in the First World makes her an uncritical consumer of the theory. The question to ask is: does postcolonial theory really put the tools of critique into the student's hands more readily than, say, English studies did?⁴⁴ If it does not--and what can we know of **post-structuralism** who only **post-structuralism** know?--it will demand as much

mediation on the part of teachers as any of the canonical English texts. If the idea is to displace a hegemonic discourse like traditional English studies with a critical one, it would defeat the purpose to have other unexamined hierarchies (between Theory and practice, between teacher and student) installed in the place of the old ones.

It is particularly disquieting that post-structuralism should institutionalize new, more rigid relations of dependence or thralldom because its initial attraction for students in the Indian context was largely its irreverent and authority-challenging aspect. Intersecting with the genealogy of the postcolonial theorist is the genealogy of a particular type of student--the kind of student who might yet make a real contribution to the reconstructing of disciplines. Since post-structuralist theory arrived in India tied up with postcolonial and feminist challenges to disciplinary structures, the students who occupied more or less oppositional positions naturally cleaved to it; and in a context where many teachers lacked even the bare professional commitment to make their scholarship match their authority--English teachers being peculiarly culpable in this regard--it seemed fair enough to mobilize the resources of post-structuralism against the petty tyrannies of the classroom. The bitter polarization of opinion that attended the entry of post-structuralism into some English departments in India is undoubtedly a reaction to the erosion of the traditional teacher's authority.

The student who is typically drawn to post-structuralism as a subversive discourse (rather than as a clever or intellectually exacting one) might have, if she had been of the

last generation, 'read Marx'; if she is now 'reading Foucault,' it is partly because, like the theorists who encountered post-structuralism some ten years ago in the western academy, she is struck by the previously unimagined political possibilities poststructuralism appears to open up, and perhaps also hamstrung by the shrinking options for the instituting of large-scale social change outside the academy. The woman or dalit student, and sometimes the maverick middle class male student, might harness the restlessness and the volatility of his or her subject position to disciplinary critique, making the classroom or the academy a potential site of social change or at the very least of disciplinary disruptions. I am suggesting that the articulation of certain students' needs with post-structuralism as an oppositional discourse, rather than anything intrinsic to the theory, sparked off interest in theorists like Foucault and Derrida. Which means that these writers were sometimes assimilated to projects quite incompatible with some of their theoretical propositions: politicized despite themselves. To recapitulate:

- 1) The conduits for post-structuralist theory, as far as the Indian context is concerned, are postcolonial intellectuals.
- 2) These intellectuals have a political and professional investment in postcolonialism that takes priority over the kinds of professional and political investments intellectuals or activists who are outside their particular 'global' context might have.
- 3) Postcolonial theory is raised on the rock of post-structuralism; postcolonial intellectuals therefore have an

additional stake in the latter theory, especially in its anti-foundationalist, anti-humanist arguments, since these delegitimize the colonial project most drastically; and this accounts in large measure for why they offer it as the only option that suitably addresses the politics of our time.

4) The exclusivity of this option (given the Indian student's lack of access to competing theoretical models that also address current issues but in relation to traditions distinct from the continental one) and its naturalization (since the many intelligent critiques of this discourse are also not easily available) set up new power relations and exorbitates the role of the mediators. In a sense, post-structuralism has not really been 'tested' as a political option, since the accidental and opportunistic alliances within which it has enabled disciplinary challenges have come out of its audience's structurally limited knowledge.

5) Post-structuralism is not merely promoted in a disciplinary context, where a Foucauldian critique may be entirely appropriate, but also in the context of politics at large. The question then is: can post-structuralism itself be a politics?

Poststructuralist 'Politics': Two Problems

To answer this question, I want to consider, in this section, certain large problems post-structuralism raises when it steps in with its promise to remake the political imaginary; that is, when its theoretical logic urges the displacement of the humanist democratic imaginary.

The opening up of the field of political contestations, precisely through the interventions of marginal groups that are now asserting themselves in both First and Third Worlds, has led to conflict on an unprecedented level. In India, groups that were already established as competitors have been made more aggressive by the liberalized economy; but the gradual percolation of democracy as a social form has also brought forth new rivalries, since it has enabled the articulation of demands that did not dare give themselves a distinct name under even **the** national-modern dispensation. This has several consequences, two of which become important: first, the paradoxical but apparently inevitable fracturing of political identities. Groups excluded from the **project** of the nation by their cultural or other **disqualifications** have formed new groups; those groups shatter into smaller fragments, following the inexorable logic of the democratic revolution. Secondly, the problem of **legitimation** (related to the problem of the separation of justifiable uses of humanist discourse, or of the discourse of difference and identity, from the **unjustifiable**): if the new identities, mobilized in recent struggles, are creating new and far more complex antagonisms than were experienced earlier, what are the common grounds for arbitration between members within each group or, more importantly, between members of different groups? That is, to use one of Tharu and **Niranjana's** examples once again, what rights does the dalit man have against the middle class woman (since clearly this relationship can now be marked as an antagonism) or, what is equally important in my view, the middle class woman against the dalit man? This question also touches upon the problem of alliances: if one of

the reasons for critiquing the humanist **subject** is indeed the possibility of hegemonic alliance with other **subaltern** groups, on what basis is the alliance going to be built, given that the logic of autonomy (presumably endorsed by post-structuralism) pulls these struggles in the opposite direction from the logic of equivalence (set up by democracy, humanism) between all human subjects?

1) Post-structuralism and the problem of factions:

The 'women' that feminism addresses itself to may be seen both as metonymy for a politically mobile Universalism and as a site of a potentially enabling atomism. Both are double-edged, as everyone knows. The women's movement in different parts of the world attempted to create a universal subject for feminism. Where the leadership was middle class, the leaders, with the blindness typical to this class, saw themselves everywhere: the result is that the theoretical paradigm which arose from this version of feminism comes up, sooner or later, against its inherent inability to address the specificity of the needs and problems of women from different backgrounds, and this calls for a rethinking of the universal subject for feminism. The atomism, which might pull women's lives and identities away from the blanketing effects of class, caste, joint family and so on, making possible a freedom not experienced by many of them even at that classic site of individual choice--the voting office--is reinscribed in elite discourses as an individualism that cannot acknowledge its allegiance to any collectivity, and certainly not to the collectivity 'women.' For these reasons, there is some force in the post-structuralist argument that there are no 'women' as such: that 'women' is a concept that functions as a

suture, and that there is an obligation to unpick this **suture**.

If one wished, however, to preserve these concepts ('women,' 'human') that figure at the seams of different identities, while acknowledging this obligation, what might the reasons be? Firstly, the very existence of a pole around which the political interests of women as a group could condense may have an emancipatory force that has not quite become expendable. The autonomous women's movement was always, in some **sense**, an anomalous moment--for what is women's class consciousness?--that briefly held out the promise of an identity for women distinct from their class/caste identities. This autonomous women's movement seems to move at a tangent to women's involvement in other struggles (labour movements, caste/class struggles, and so on). The identity created by it, though riven by the contradictions inherent in this project, at least represented opposition to the welding together of class interests and women's interests, or, rather, to the presentation of women's interests as indistinguishable from class interests. The 'women' of the women's movement (like the 'human' in the 'humanist') was thus an invitation to the female subject to break out of the isolation of class, caste or religious subjectivity, and a promise of collectivity based on a newly constituted definition of interest. But the 'women' in the women's movement, the subjects of 'feminism,' were also inevitably markers of the fact that women's interests were themselves divided: not merely in the sense that desire was often opposed to interest, but that their interests as class subjects were opposed to their interests as female ones. The loss of the (universal) pole of 'women' then means the loss of the unprecedented realm of

emancipatory possibilities that it brings into being as well as of the complex model of female subjectivity that it holds in place, leaving women identified only in terms of class or caste.

One might argue that it is only in the context of a still alive democratic consensus that even the work of dismantling universals acquires its significance. These terms are actually indefinitely subject to modification, since they are indefinitely subject to imperfection and closure (all nomenclature, as Judith Butler points out in Bodies that Matter, involves demarcation and therefore exclusion); but it is obviously their negativity that allows them to continue to invite identification, in the first place, as it also makes for the dissolution of identity. Women's struggles acquire the rhythm of this dialectic between identification and factionalization, and the withdrawal of the fictional pole of 'women' would throw this dialectic out of gear. Thus what one might preserve is not a literal-minded insistence on the sameness of women's interests regardless of their other affiliations, but this play or dialectic of identity and universality. The universal subject may thus be the necessary opposite of the concrete individual, the 'women' addressed by the women's movement the necessary complements to embodied female citizens, both abstractions sustaining the demand for a generalized weighing of interests.

2) The Problem of Legitimation:

While one may distrust norms that claim to pre-exist social movements and therefore to have universal validity, there is no doubt that the discursive grounds of mediation between different social groups or identities, sites of new antagonisms, need to

be actively constructed. **As communication** is revolutionized, not even the most remote struggles can remain isolated: all conflicts inevitably impinge on a news-consuming audience, on public policy, on proximate movements and interests. To withdraw in such a **context--as** post-structuralists tend to do--from **the** extended discussion of legitimating narratives common to as large a number of people as possible may have two results: first, to make political decisions, including decisions about hegemonic alliances between political groups, depend (sometimes defiantly and transparently depend) either on self-interest or on opportunism; second, and more importantly, to make power prior to **justification**, since **justification** can only take place in the space of, and by reference to, a common understanding of politics as the struggle for democracy.

What may be lost in the process of too aggressively dismantling universals is precisely the concepts (**for** which no substitutes are forthcoming yet) that function as common languages between groups or discourses: i.e., the more or less '**universalist**' ideas that in fact set up the equivalences between human subjects. It is not clear, for instance, why concepts or subject-models that underwrite democracy, admittedly constituted in the process of many **excursions**, cannot be made more widely applicable or available. Sabina Lovibond's question about one such **concept--'Reason'--is** a pertinent example: are such concepts inherently gendered? If they are not, and many feminists would vigorously dispute the idea that '**Reason**' is 'masculine' in essence, is there any danger that feminists will meekly accept patently male-oriented forms of modernity or rationality, given, as Lovibond points out, that there is "a

measure of consensus within feminist theory that rationalist values are in crisis--that the very arrival of women on the scene of intellectual activity necessitates a reappraisal of those values" ? (Lovibond "Feminism and the 'Crisis of Rationality'" 72)."

In the process of dislodging the linear model of progress, post-structuralists displace the historically accumulated (rather than 'natural' or 'essential') grounds for arbitration between the new antagonistic positions, or for the building of equivalences between different subjects and groups. To 'start all over again,' without a history, is characteristic of totalitarian societies, as Lefort observes, rather than of democracies. In the absence of explicitly stated grounds for mediation, only one political identity can be addressed at one time, which becomes a major theoretical problem for post-structuralist feminists.

Post-structuralist critique that consistently presents itself as undertaking an analysis of representation has a ready-made response to this problem: to turn the question of 'is this use of power legitimate?' into the question 'who says it is (or is not) legitimate?'. This has the effect of transferring a contentious issue from the binary within which it makes its appearance, where it has an uncomfortable effect--an effect that would call for normative languages similar to those of the Enlightenment--to another, where naming the enemy may cause less discomfort. For instance, if the debate on 'the fatwah against Salman Rushdie' is placed by, say, the 'liberal' press within the binary 'Islamic power vs. freedom of **speech**,' and if Islam is seen as a beleaguered entity, the question can be

transplanted to the binary 'western orientalist projections of Islamic fundamentalism in the media vs. Third Worldist critique of orientalism.' Both binaries are equally valid; the second one has a resonance for Third World subjects that the first one does not have (I am not too sympathetic to Rushdie myself); and the issue travels from one binary to another, while the question of whether the infringement of 'freedom of speech' is a bad thing at all is bracketed as unanswerable, or worse: unaskable.

The problem of legitimation may be further exemplified by the case of the Hindutva use of the language of 'modernity,' as a way of attacking 'backward' Muslims. This was perhaps only to be expected. There is that, however, within the egalitarian imaginary itself, which should see this as unfair, to the extent that it is partly a mere pretext to oppress or deny benefits to certain communities or groups; but to the extent that the pressure on the Muslim community to subscribe to the idea of democratizing gender relations comes not from a power-seeking body (such as, for instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party or the American government), but from a legitimacy-enforcing one (the Muslim women's movement, for instance), it may be celebrated as a way of translating relations of subordination into relations of oppression, which may then be challenged. The 'neutrality' of groups claiming to make neutral judgements may be assessed, and indeed, this is an important task for the cultural critic; but it becomes an impossible task if the very concept or possibility of, or framework for, neutral judgements (i.e., judgements according to the logic of a 'genuine' universalism or a 'genuine' humanist democracy: unspeakable only because of epistemological protocols, but always recognizable in practice)

is exploded.⁵⁶

The absence of normative discourses would dissolve the differences between power-seeking and legitimacy-enforcing bodies, since there would be no checks on the 'free' play of power. In which context, it might be well to recall that Foucault has been extensively criticized for his prevarications on the subject of norms, including such norms as would problematize unequal gender relations; and that Nietzsche, coherent prophet of the 'might is right' school, was Foucault's guru.

Laclau and Mouffe themselves, somewhere in the course of their argument about postfoundational politics, end up acknowledging not only that many current movements continue to arise out of the egalitarian thrust of liberal democracy as instituted by the European revolutions, but also begin to worry about how, if plurality or difference were the only pole, hegemonic articulations between movements might be made. If the logic of the equivalence of subjects is to pervade new areas of society, they conclude, "the task of the Left ...cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy" (176, emphasis in the original).

A broadly democratic framework, which maintains tenuous but definite links with the legacies of the Enlightenment, is outlined in the course of Laclau and Mouffe's narrative. Minus naive views of 'human essence' and the 'privileged points' of class or people, this historically constructed and continually negotiable framework can function as the ground both for the establishment of larger collectivities, and, though they do not

bring up this idea, for the legitimation of social practices. This conjuncture, characterized by the demands for both equality and liberty, counters the internal tendency of the new movements to push for autonomy from all other such movements; at the same time, it contains the principle of unity that allows the enactment of a positive reconstitution of the social, a 'construction of a new order' that would go beyond mere opposition or destruction of the old order through opportunistic alliances. Laclau and Mouffe outline, in brief, a way of holding on to the benefits of modernity--a common court of appeal, principles of equality and liberty that can be applied at short notice to any human institution--without hanging these on the peg of a Hegelian-progressivist teleology.

NOTES

1. In the course of writing my thesis, I was asked by more than one reader why I did not simply set up '**an alternative aesthetic**' that would more closely reflect my own politics, based (it was suggested) on the work of Chandralekha or Geeta Kapur. Both Kapur and Chandralekha, however, work within a context in which the value of art is not fundamentally challenged.

2. Quoted by Tharu and Lalita, "Muddupalani" (headnote to **Radhika Santwanam**). Women Writing in India vol 1, 118.

3. Hegel writes:

That world history is governed by an ultimate design, that it is a rational **process**,--whose rationality is not that of a particular subject but of a divine and absolute reason--this is a proposition whose truth we must assume; its proof lies in the study of world history itself, which is the image and enactment of reason. (Hegel, An Introduction 28)

4. In a sense, Marx left this question sufficiently open to cause disputes among his followers (Luxemburg vs. Lenin, Luxemburg vs. Bernstein); but one might draw some conclusions from his dictum on the philosopher's obligation to change the world.

5. There is a general consensus about the themes of post-**structuralism** (in a nutshell, **anti-essentialism**, anti-humanism, **anti-foundationalism**; the construction of subjects in language, texts, culture; the genealogies of disciplines; the critique of **modernity/Enlightenment**); and its key theoreticians (Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan).

6. Sangari and Vaid write:

Both tradition and modernity have been, in India, carriers of patriarchal ideologies. As such neither is available to us in a value free or **unproblematic** sense, nor is either, as they are usually conceptualized, necessarily the solution.... We think it is time to dismantle this opposition altogether and to look at cultural processes in their actual complexity. (17)

7. See the very first page of the Introduction, for instance:

..our political understanding and experience as observers and participants in women's protest movements of the seventies has left us, like many others, bedevilled with a host of questions about the nature of the social and cultural processes within civil society which determine the working of patriarchy in the daily lives of women. We feel that the implications of the reconstitution of patriarchies in the colonial period bear **significantly** upon the present, and this, in fact, is the **justification** for this venture. (1)

8. Niranjana et al place this Moment within "the astonishing proliferation of seemingly disparate phenomena," the variety of signifying practices that make up what they designate a.m 'culture,' but set it off from the rest, along with certain other politically inflected moments (regionalism, the dalit movement), as less 'visible' than the visual images industry or the ethnic clothes culture (Introduction 1).

9. Sunder Rajan, quoting Judith Butler, suggests that a critique of representation "can be used as part of... a radical agenda" (11). The 'vacating' of the 'space at the centre' offers an opportunity (to feminists, among others) to install a 'resisting subject,' who will "enact more contingent, varied and flexible modes of resistance" (11).

10. This is not a solitary example. One might consider, for instance, the focus on 'signifying practices' (i.e., obvious further references to semiotics, the critique of representation) in Vivek Dhareshwar and Tejaswini Niranjana, "Kadalan and the Politics of Resignification: Fashion, Violence and the Body" and Mary E. John, "Feminism, Culture and the Politics of Signification," especially p. 27. Interestingly, the women theorists who publish as part of this theoretical 'generation' display, in their choice of resources, their engagement with 'real' events. Consequently their theoretical conclusions display significantly more conflict and equivocation than the do those of the men, who see more possibilities of grand (theoretical?) breakthroughs in the emerging social conjuncture. See, for example, Vivek Dhareshwar, "'Our Time': History, Sovereignty and Politics" and "Postcolonial in the Postmodern; or, the Political after Modernity."

11. See Peter Dews, Logics of Disintegration. There are any number of sources for this theory of a coupure that marks entry into the postmodern, including Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition.

12. See Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self; Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," and Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity and Postmodernity."

13. Habermas (see "Modernity vs. Postmodernity"), or Charles Taylor (see Sources of the Self) would claim that the extension of democracy into the 'private' sphere takes place automatically, with the creation of the 'modern' self consequent to the breaking up of the single legitimating structure of religion.

14. Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender," Subaltern Studies IX; Writings on South Asian History and Society (ed. Shahid Amin and Dipeah Chakrabarty, Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996).

15. The road not taken in their critique is the readily imaginable humanist evaluation of the legitimacy of political projects according to whether they are coherent in their Universalism. Critiquing something as 'falsely' universalist or neutral (which is the substance of Tharu and Niranjana's

argument, but a substance belied by the tone, which implies rejection of humanism) would perhaps more carefully conserve something that may be marked 'true' Universalism.

16. But is the choice of the anti-arrack activists as paradigmatic of radically democratized feminism too simple? It may be read as a sign that what is being sought is an uncontaminated area of the political imaginary for feminist occupation, or an untainted language through which feminists can forge bonds with other subaltern groups.

17. For instance, Foucauldian 'politics' is dedicated to showing how the construction of the 'consensus' about a concept like 'democracy' or 'humanism' is arrived at; not to thinking out or encouraging the thinking out of any alternative construction, since all such constructions have an element of the 'positivity' he rejected. Thus, the substantive positive content of feminist thinking, something like a goal-oriented thinking gets left out: an alternative is imagined in the most schematic and unsatisfactory way, or not at all. Foucault sometimes makes what sounds like a demand for historicized 'politics'; but the operative word is 'practice': which is clearly to be distinguished, for instance, from the generalized 'praxis' of marxism, and applied to a disciplinary domain, Foucault's happy hunting ground. He seems to reserve the idea of 'progressive' politics for his own genealogical method, i.e., for genealogy as politics.

18. Unmarked in Tharu and Niranjana's text is the space they share with, say, Spivak: the market of western intellectual production, where certain historic epistemic shifts, consciousness of which appears to have buried in the former colonies themselves with the dismantling of imperial rule, are being excavated and studied.

19. The play on 'essence' is post-structuralism is like the play on 'truth,' a deliberate saturation of a concept with an untenable meaning and with metaphysical rather than everyday significance (for example, 'truth' is said to present itself as 'unchanging') so that the concept can then be disowned. Thus the emphasis on 'the new commonsense.' Progressive movements in the past have, of course, sought precisely to stand facts on their heads, but have done so in a way the true-blue post-structuralist would find thoroughly contaminated by positivism. Alternative facts, which challenged received ideas, were dredged up and offered as truths, hitherto obscured, and were accepted as such. Thus marxist commonsense (Gramsci, it may be remembered, stressed the value of this; and see Marx, see Lukacs, see Bakhtin, their efforts to ground the movement in science, in dialectic, in dialogue) made immediate sense to a mass of people who accepted it as an alternative truth. The early women's movement in the west and the non-academic one offer truths about men, about women--we have more endurance than men, a historical Marie Curie discovered radium, there is no such thing as the vaginal orgasm and so on. The strength of consciousness-raising seems to have been in the speaking of truths hitherto unspeakable--truths about men, truths about women--with epiphanic suddenness, sharpness, **starkness**; these

truths hitting home and precipitating the crises that women looking back on that time claim changed their lives.

20. The epistemological concerns of **post-structuralism** nudge it into a flip-flop mode: a complete theoretical dissociation from earlier models of subjecthood, consensus, debate, undergirded democracy. There is the strange spectacle, consequently, of a programmatic **anti-essentialism** cramming social practice into its models. The trouble with the flip-flop type of change is that it segregates the theorists who have espoused the position of extreme reaction; when their position becomes untenable (as such positions tend to do) a great deal of energy or cunning are required to covering the tracks of embarrassment by retraction or disavowal.

21. The question famously posed by Spivak in the eponymous essay: 'can the subaltern speak?' reflects, once again, the compulsions of epistemology (knowing the subject) as well as the feminist compulsion to read resistance. The choice of sati as a subject of investigation leads to some uncomfortable consequences: no one can ask the sati whether or not she wanted to die; Hindu orthodoxy claims that she did, progressives claim that she did not.

Firstly, there is the problem for postcolonial critics that it was, after all, the British government that banned the practice. Spivak turns this problem to feminist critical advantage by using it to suggest that the colonizer's transactions with the orthodoxy was represented by a male-male allegory (white men saving brown women from brown men) which effectively silenced the subaltern woman. Lata Hani ("Contentious Traditions") wants to argue that the sati is unequivocally a victim, but sees this argument as replicating the British denial of agency and subjectivity to women. However, to assert that the women were agents in their own right then diminishes the force of the critique of patriarchy as enacting violent repressions on women's bodies.

The question now is: does the sati have agency or does she not? Sunder Rajan ("The Subject of Sati"; in Real and Imagined Women: page references to the latter text) deals with this problem by "shifting the emphasis from sati-as-death ... to sati-as-burning" (19), which foregrounds the pain of the sati, physically repellant even to those who condone the practice, and needing to be marked as not ontologically different from ordinary human pain. To see sati as burning is also to see the female subject as having a 'will,' in a sense, since "the subjectivity of pain . . . needs to be conceptualized as a dynamic rather than passive condition, on the premise that the subject in pain will be definitionally in transit towards a state of no-pain (even if this state is no more than a reflexivity)"(22).

Put simply, this might mean: sati hurts, therefore it should not be allowed. But what applies to pain ("sheer aversiveness") applies equally to death. That is, sati kills, therefore it should not be allowed. Sunder Rajan's argument does not really serve to show why sati should not be sanctioned; and if Nietzsche is to be believed it is quixotic to assume that pain is not a pleasing spectacle to some.

22. For instance, Michele Barrett speaks of the post-structuralist registering of "the precarious character of any positivity, of the impossibility of any ultimate suture" (The Politics of Truth 78). Much of the finality of the usages in this formulation seem entirely unwarranted. The ideas repudiated produce a caricature of a dogmatic and idiotically optimistic activist who, mouth agape, pursues visions of the "single definite end to world history," while complacently putting in "ultimate sutures."

23. Fraser, Unruly Practices 65. Fraser, reading Foucault against the grain as a 'humanist,' makes a considered reply to Habermas's contention that he is a 'Young Conservative.'

We could take the late text "What is **Enlightenment**" to be an attempt to explicate the connection between Foucault's method and his program for the self. The bridge between the two appears to be a notion of radical freedom. In this text Foucault sees "the entire history of Western societies" as a "struggle for freedom" with a **corresponding** attempt to disconnect the growth of **technology** ("capabilities") from the "**intensification of power relations**" (47-48).

The labour of developing a historical critique of social formations, part of the project of attaining freedom, is to help identify the limits of possibility for selves (disciplinary, social, historical etc.). The purpose is to experiment, to extend the possibilities of selfhood by breaking down historical limits: Foucault's project may be read as a radically libertarian rather than an egalitarian one. Thus Foucault towards the end of his life--some would say throughout his **life-offered** as a philosophical and political project precisely what for an **earlier** generation would have been the project of the aesthetic, the transcendence of the limits of human possibility, outside the ambience of rationality.

24. Lyotard, of course, suggests that the German intellectual (philosophical) tradition, inseparable from totalizing schemes such as that of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, is just as discredited as the other grand narrative he **identifies--that** of "Humanity as the hero of liberty." The German tradition stands or falls by a philosophical metanarrative whose project, according to Lyotard, is "to restore unity to learning" by linking the sciences together "as moments in the becoming of **spirit**" (31-32).

Thinkers in the German tradition (Habermas, Peter Burger, Andreas Huyssen), with less dramatic effect but more plausibility, trace the French strain of post-structuralism back to modernist avant-gardism and its 'cult of the **new**'.

25. As Huyssen points out, his 'map' is complicated by the fact the Frankfurt School, though German by nationality, is French by virtue of its pessimism. One answer to the question of why Foucault seems interesting in India and not Habermas lies, of course, in the stubborn resistance of Enlightenment-derived discourse to the kind of pluralism that goes beyond the merely **anthropological view, or to attempting genuinely broad definitions of political or social rationality**. This, and the history of imperialism and colonialism which cuts through the very heart of the Enlightenment project, lead to a perfectly

understandable knee-jerk reaction against even the bare mention of the idea; to sift through the lessons of the Enlightenment and select currently usable ones would require, given how the Third World has always played Other to the West's Self, remarkable forbearance.

26. Lukacs is talking of the reification of the division of labour which

enables the artificially isolated partial functions to be performed in the most rational manner by 'specialists' who are specially adapted mentally and physically for the purpose. This has the effect of making these partial functions autonomous and so they tend to develop through their own momentum and in accordance with their own special laws independently of the other partial functions of society.... the more highly developed it is, the more powerful become the claims to status and the professional interests of the 'specialists' who are the living embodiment of such traditions. (History and Class Consciousness 103)

27. A genealogy of a subject or a phenomenon must attempt to present an account of that subject in its determinateness, whether one takes 'determinateness' to mean cause-and-effect or is only willing to venture a theory of correspondence. Determinateness is usually framed within a history-of-ideas model, which to some extent has been the model of choice for the self-objectification of post-structuralist theorists in the Third World; a materialist model, describing the subject in relation to the material conditions of its existence; and a psychological model, which explains the subject in terms of its psychic history. No doubt one could hold all these types of explanation together by pleading some such theoretical nostrum as 'overdetermination,' but as Marx and Freud set up the paradigmatic instances of the last two frameworks, each of them, in spite of careful repudiations of this possibility, has become a 'total' system that competes with the other. Genealogy becomes a fraught exercise, with accusations of 'economism' and 'reductionism' on the one hand and of 'personalization' or 'psychologism' on the other, all of which may be directed towards hostile critics of the phenomenon.

The exchange between Aijaz Ahmed and his critics has been peppered with mutual accusations along these lines. Ahmad is found guilty of vulgar marxism, naive realism, etc.; his interlocutors stand accused of mystifying their material stakes in post-colonial theory. Interestingly, Arif Dirlik's more cogently argued article describing these stakes has not become the focus of debate. I discuss both interventions later in this chapter.

28. The fact that genealogical protocols are not followed by postcolonial theorists itself indicates the magnitude of the investments in this field: as Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests, "... the demands of agency seem always--in the real world of politics--to entail a misrecognition of its arteneajs; you cannot build alliances without mystifications and mythologies" (175). Postcolonials are in the process of strengthening their alliances and are, consequently, in no mood to dismantle the

myths that sustain their practice.

29. One fascinating point of dissemination of Foucauldian or Derridean theory, distinct from the academy, is that of the alternative vernacular journal; fascinating because poised between being exercises in male self-fashioning in relation to avant-gardist interpretation of post-structuralist texts and being political interventions that seek to transform a small audience. My thanks to S.Ravindran for drawing my attention to this phenomenon and for lending me his copies of the relevant journals.

30. From the tone of books like The Politics of Liberal Education (Ed. Glass and Herrnstein-Smith 1992) and English Inside and Out (ed. Gubar and Kamholtz, 1993) it is now time, even in the U.S. academy, for backtracking. The neo-conservative critique of post-structuralist positions (and also, of course, all other positions of the academic Left) has begun to have an effect on the public image, and consequently on the funding policies, of American universities. Jane Gallop, for instance, counsels strategic retreat and consolidation of feminist gains (see "The Institutionalization of Feminist Criticism"; Christopher Norris, once celebrated popularizer of deconstruction, now writes of "the self-engrossed frivolity of current postmodernist fashion" (177). Radical post-structuralist positions no longer have the cachet they used to have; theorists (Derrida himself) are maneuvering to get some distance between themselves and notions like 'il n'y a pas de hors texte' ("Derrida never quite said that!"). John Searle has an amusing description of the deconstructive game: there's the bit where you say it, and the bit where you take it back ("Literary Theory and Its Discontents" 665).

31. The debate was featured in Public Culture 6.1 (1993); Ahmad's interlocutors included Michael Sprinker (Ahmad's editor, and perhaps the one commentator in this group who retains his sense of proportion), Talal Asad, Vivek Dhareshwar, Partha Chatterjee, Nivedita Menon, Marjorie Levinson and Andrew Parker. My intention is not to make a hero of Ahmad: I am much more interested in the debate itself than in his own literary critical output.

32. Ahmad's credentials as a historian come up for much unkind scrutiny; but one argument against him, which undercuts the implication that he has his facts wrong, is that all his anti-Said arguments have already been made—presumably by more able scholars. (Said himself acknowledges, in Culture and Imperialism, that the traffic between Orient and Occident ought not to have been presented so unilaterally.) The lesson one may draw from this questioning of 'credentials' is that the politics of Third World origin or location may indeed be eclipsed by the claims of First World scholarly excellence.

One might quarrel with Ahmad (and several people do) over his tendency to trot out vulgar marxist resolutions of the various theoretical problems he considers. His naivete, at times, and his occasional bursts of marxist moralism, are indeed quite startling, but his opponents make infinitely too much of the fact that he refuses to succumb to the lure of a more

sophisticated theoretical line. 'Theory' appears in the debate like the holy book in the courtroom; recusant that he is, Ahmad is called upon by several stern judges to place his right hand on it and testify.

33. Here are some samples:

"What interests me is the hostility that functions as the formal signature, marking it as harangue, jeremiad, flyting, ethnic cleansing; not to make a mystery of it, jihad" (Levinson 101). "Ahmad's stance is clearly that of the ideological militant in an imaginary party (or, perhaps, not so imaginary, if we were to read between the lines), and the militant, as all of us know, never questions the party line" (Dhareshwar, "Marxism, Location Politics" 52).

34. The debate is particularly interesting because it reads like an extended 'Freudian slip': the participants appear to have lost control of their emotions, and with this, their sense of the coherence of their own arguments. Critics at the cutting edge of theories of intertextuality and capillary politics, masks off, exculpate Jameson for having written what he did in a "minor piece," and Said for having "tossed off" his observations, as if the absent-mindedness with which they produced their solecisms on the Third World made these less regrettable. Ahmad, in his turn, duly gloats over these instances of self-betrayal.

35. See Ahmad's history of this field, potted but useful, in "Disciplinary English: Third Worldism and Literature," (especially p. 225). Crudely put, one can now work in Chicago on the problematization of Indian citizenship, in Columbia on the sastra-sampradaya debate, in New York on the subjectivity of the sati; apparently more usefully than one could work anywhere else in the world. This was not necessarily the result of intentionalities: an incidental but useful convergence of interests allowed the elite upper caste Indian student, who was going abroad in any case, to corner an intellectual/theoretical market, but at the same time to be a political subject after a fashion. Some generations earlier the committed might have gone to do 'grassroots work,' now genuinely not a viable option, since so much grassroots work is supervised by dubious non-governmental organizations.

36. See "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 291-293. Lacan, who usually makes up the trinity of post-structuralist gurus along with Derrida and Foucault, does not seem to have built a noticeable following in India, except for a small number of theorists (Veena Das, Ashis Nandy) who are situated somewhere between sociology and psychoanalysis.

37. Appiah, for instance, sees postcoloniality in the African context as antagonistic to the themes of postmodernism, and writes that what needs to be recovered "within postmodernism is the postcolonial writer's humanism": i.e., humanism as a politics that derives from the African writer or critic's identification with the suffering of her country (see pp. 148-55 of In My Father's House).

38. The postcolonial critic will certainly not recognize such speculatively reconstructed motivations. Talal Asad refutes Ahmad's sketch of postcolonial psychic history thus: "We are told that in Britain and America Third Worldist ideology ... is defended by middle-class immigrants from Asia and Africa, for whom it is a way of addressing personal identity problems. Unfortunately, this kind of familiar rhetorical move will not do because it attempts to assess the soundness of ideas by reference to their supposed psychological function" (34). Presumably 1) middle class immigrants who do Third Worldist work have privileged access to rationality, since they have 'ideas,' not 'ideologies'; and 2) 'ideas' have no relationship with psychic histories.

39. See, for instance, Vivek Dhareshwar, "Valorizing the Present."

40. Addresses to the World or at least to the West in this grand style, in a language calculated to erase local specificities, were last met with in this thesis, it may be remembered, in the discourse of the Theosophical Society. I find this a curious but instructive parallel. In the case of the postcolonial intellectual, the aspiration is not merely, as I noted earlier, to power or prestige, but also, among other things, to the aura of cosmopolitan circulation-citizenship of the world--or of publishing in the West; or even aspiration to the luxuries of unrestricted access to libraries and to intellectual dialogue with peers, imponderables all.

41. If 'indigenism' is either the fascist version of Hindutva that appears on the streets or some recast brahminical version of it in academic work, it is obviously necessary to maintain a distance from it. Simple-minded denunciations of new theories because they do not subscribe to postulated 'indigenous' norms are especially routine when middle class male academics meet feminism, and I would not in the least wish to align my arguments with theirs. One might take Harish Trivedi's polemic on Women Writing in India ("Theorizing the Nation") as an example of the kind of phallic critique that capitalizes on the nation-as-fetish, erasing the conditionalities under which citizens, especially if they are marginal citizens, might accept the idea of their nationality. Trivedi makes spiteful use of a drearily familiar ploy: he taps, on behalf of a reified 'nation,' all the irritation that post-structuralism (anti-national western theory) calls forth among the multitudes of scholars who have no access to it or cannot follow the arguments; following this up with an equation between feminism, post-structuralism and anti-nationalism, he mobilizes anger against feminists.

But not all indigenist scholarship need reify the nation with such regressive political ends in mind. If the term 'indigenism' is not used in a nuanced way, a great deal of Indian language scholarship, for instance, which may be enabling for the Indian student faced with negative value judgements of her own culture, may be discredited. Indigenist scholars may be performing the work that Kwame Anthony Appiah, speaking of the teaching of African literature, recommends:

...stress that the continuities between precolonial forms of culture and contemporary ones are...genuine [i.e., despite the colonial encounter] and thus provide a modality through which students can value and incorporate the African past); and... challenge directly the assumption of the superiority of the West, both by undermining the aestheticized conceptions of literary value... by distinguishing sharply between a domain of technological skills in which ... comparisons are possible, and a domain of value, in which such comparisons are by no means so unproblematic. (69-70)

42. The phrases I have quoted are from "Woman in Difference," but this valuable space is a recurrent theme in Spivak's oeuvre. The fetishizing of the 'space of the subaltern' in the home country is obviously related to the globally mobile academic's guilt (Spivak agonizes about her 'liberal guilt') about her professional class position. Establishing a class solidarity with the subaltern and 'speaking for them' in the western academic context helps define a peculiarly unassailable subject position for the Third World critic, since she acquires some of the pathos that would actually surround the figures of the underprivileged in the Third World. There is some bad faith involved here: the genuine lack of 'choice' in the life of the oppressed in, say, India, no longer stands starkly over against the real abundance of professional or locational choices available to any Indian who has arrived in the western academy. The real deprivation of some people is transformed, by the dogmatic insistence on 'the construction of the subject,' into the ontological condition of all human beings.

43. The best-known neo-conservative critiques of developments in the American academy are Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind, Roger Kimball's Tenured Radicals, and Dinesh D'Souza's Illiberal Education. For these writers, post-structuralism is only one of many evils that need to be eradicated in order to make the world safe for democracy; the others include feminism, the rights of coloured people, gay rights and so on.

The Left in the U.S. is itself divided over the issue of post-structuralism and postmodernism. There is a growing perception of post-structuralist and postmodernist theory as self-indulgent and a vehicle for academic self-aggrandisement. Russell Jacoby, for instance, cannot see the connection between Fredric Jameson's marxism and the eponymous essay in Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Jameson celebrates the 'hyperspace' of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as a brilliantly subversive architectural response to late capitalism. Jameson considers the near-invisibility of the entrances of this hotel part of the effect of hyperspace. Jacoby retorts:

Not quite. [The entrances] are small and unmarked to keep out the local population, predominantly poor and Hispanic.... for the Bonaventure, built on urban renewal land, is not for local inhabitants; the real entrances are by automobile for visitors and businessmen. That a leading Marxist critic can wax

eloquent about the "insertion" of the Bonaventure into the city without stumbling on the fact that it expressly excludes, as well as devitalizes, the city suggests that the Marxist theoretical "explosion" has the force of a seminar coffee break. (171-72)

44. One theory is that the very passion with which the Indian student engages with postcolonial theory will make it easier for her to master its technical points, an advantage absent in classroom interactions over the alienating discipline of English. But engagement, however passionate, will not even begin to supply the place of vocabulary or linguistic competence, and postcolonial discourse demands a much higher level of such competence than even English studies does.

45. Once these theorists are enshrined in the critical canon, and appear as more compulsory reading, a rather different kind of student is likely to be attracted to post-structuralism: the kind who might take Foucault on board not as an iconoclastic figure, but as someone who offers a stylish (Foucault had plenty of personal glamour, a fact that this type of student is quick to appreciate) and difficult way of engaging with texts and ideas. This student may want 'good grades' and may well think that 'oppression' went out with khadi kurtas and chappals. There were also, undeniably, students who 'read Marx' as an exercise in self-fashioning, and their counterparts in the next generation may extend the definition of intellectual machismo by reading Foucault or, more effectively, by reading Derrida. The more esoteric and difficult, the better.

The post-structuralist abdication of the role of public intellectuals is by way of being an oblique comment on their perception of the relationship between their theory and identifiable political practices. None of the major theorists--Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Barthes--wrote or writes for a general public; nor do their acolytes, by and large, and this includes postcolonial theorists. "Younger intellectuals," Russell Jacoby writes, "whose lives have unfolded almost entirely on campuses, direct themselves to professional colleagues, but are inaccessible and unknown to others. This is the danger and the threat; the public culture relies on a dwindling band of older intellectuals who command the vernacular that is slipping out of reach of their successors" (x).

46. The most interesting of the critiques I have encountered include Seyla Benhabib's Situating the Self; Nancy Fraser's Unruly Practices, Gillian Rose's Dialectic of Nihilism, and Peter Dews's Logics of Disintegration.

47. All this is, no doubt, most upsetting to the good 'humanist' who cannot see why so many people are becoming so quarrelsome so suddenly when they were quiet enough before. He takes quietness for contentment; he says petulantly that the new groups are taking over the world; forgetting how all the members of his family are at the moment comfortably settled in well paid jobs, some here, some in the U.S.A., he sees dreadful visions of the job-market overrun by women, backward castes, dalits, Muslims and all the other riff-raff whose merit is undoubtedly not the same as his.

48. See Betty Friedan's The Second Stage, which **may** be read as the classic text of the horror with which middle class feminists may view the forces unleashed by their own efforts, if these forces seem to be driving towards the rapid and unexpected empowering of groups not originally seen **as** wanting a slice of the feminist cake.

49. Historical accounts, both in the western context and in the Indian one, of attempts by women to create movements of their own, suggest that this has always been an extremely difficult task. The fate of **Olympe** de Gouges, denounced by her own supporters and executed after the French revolution for asking for equal rights for women, is exemplary. Traditional perceptions of women's essential **secondariness**, part of the definition of **'femininity' itself**, have time and again forced women to articulate their protests with 'larger' movements--the class struggle, nationalist movements, black rights, the peace movement, the environment movement and so **on--and** to accept the assurance that when the group achieved liberation, women would automatically benefit. This has been a promise seldom kept, of course. In the Indian context, collections like We Will Smash This Prison (Gail Omvedt, 1979) and A Space Within the Struggle (ed. **Irina** Sen, 1981) mark the emergence of the autonomous women's movement out of labour movements, class/caste struggles (**Wynad**, Telengana), environment movements (Chipko) and so on. The relationship between this movement and its predecessors remains a troubled one: is a **'feminism'** that addresses itself to 'women' rather than to these other affiliations by definition a 'western' or at any rate middle class idea?

50. See Bodies That Matter, p. 10, for instance. In any case, identity need not be given, as it is in Slavoj Zizek's reading of the political signifier, by **fantasmatic identification**, but can be a rational and agentive choice--but post-structuralists would not allow this, because of the 'risk of essence' inherent in the idea of agency. See Zizek, For They Know Not What They Do. pp. 15-20.

51. The playing of one pole against another may be a matter of tactics, of course: one may stress the universal subject against the tendency to **fragmentation** within political groups, and, conversely, emphasize identity-politics to batter down the complacencies of the **self-satisfied** humanist; but the destruction of the dialectic is likely to be, in the long run, to the disadvantage of the already weak.

52. See Gillian Rose's Introduction to The Dialectic of Nihilism for an elaboration of an argument along these lines; and **Seyla** Benhabib, Situating the Self. 4-7, for scrupulously clear arguments for **reformulating** the 'universalist **tradition'** without a commitment to "the metaphysical illusions of the Enlightenment."

53. One might, along these lines, ask if concepts are **inherently** caste-identified: the dalit political presence, one might **argue**, will leave nothing in the public sphere **unmarked**.

54. **Lefort**, Democracy and Political Theory: see pp. 19-39.

55. Any number of parallels may be discerned, especially where alliances between feminist struggles and other struggles (minorities, African **American**, class, caste) are at stake, and where, therefore, a certain caution about the condemnation of '**fundamentalisms**,' or even of sexism within these movements appears to be required.

56. Tharu and Niranjana ("Some **Problems**") seem to be suggesting that the promises of modernity are tainted by their Instrumentalization for the ends of power-blocs. Non-neutral figures like the '**Hindutva woman**,' who confidently claim neutrality, deploy them against their (Muslim) enemies, making them entirely unavailable for feminist use. The very fact that the authors themselves make a judgement on the sham 'neutrality' of the Hindutva woman shows that ideology-critique is not entirely unequipped to separate the retrogressive uses of modernity from the progressive uses, and indicates that this degree of anxiety about being tarred with the same brush as, say, the Hindu Right, is perhaps uncalled for.

57. Nietzsche develops the arguments against 'slave morality,' relevant here, in Beyond Good and Evil, and Genealogy of Morals. See The Philosophy of Nietzsche. 369-616 and 617-807.

What Jonathan **Arac**, among several others, has noted about the specific role of ethics as Nietzsche conceived it, is also relevant in this context, and applies to the sphere of 'progressive **politics**' in general:

... Even as a means of legitimating domination, ethics of nature was not imposed from above. Ethics, we recall, is a tool of the "slave", not of the "master", and it offered standards proposed to the **masters.**" (Arac, 266).

That is, feminists, as speaking for women, who have certainly been on the '**slave**' side of this conflict rather than on the 'master' side, perhaps cannot afford to succumb to the dazzle of Foucault's dissembling **identification** with the Nietzschean dismissal of legitimating narratives ('ethics'). Sabina Lovibond pursues the theme of Nietzsche's unabashed celebration of power further, linking it with his scorn for the 'weakness' of reason:

Now, it is well known that any expression of moral revulsion against war is for Nietzsche, a 'symptom of declining life' but there is, perhaps no branch of life in which rationalism and pacifism are more offensive to him than in that of sexuality. The force of his conviction on this point suggests to Nietzsche an intimate, even a quasi-conceptual, connection between the idea of an **emancipation from reason**, on one hand, and that of an **end to feminism**, on the other. This connection is mediated by his concept of **virility**, the quality supposedly expressed in a love of '**danger**, war and adventures' - a refusal 'to compromise to be captured, reconciled and **castrated.**' (Lovibond "Feminism and Postmodernism" 399)

From this angle reason (under revision, of course) may be seen as friendly to feminist ends.

58. They suggest that movements are built through hegemonic articulations: that is, there is no essential or prior connection (in the absence of a common struggle on behalf of essential humanity) between, say, the women's movement, anti-capitalism and the ecology movement; an articulation of their concerns has to be forged, and renewed frequently through negotiation.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION
In Search of a Viable **Aesthetic**

To return to the question I asked at the beginning of this thesis--the question that started off the entire process of writing it: how can contemporary feminist cultural theory help **reimagine** dance? The answer is that it perhaps cannot, since it is encumbered by both historical materialist and post-**structuralist** strictures on aesthetics, and since it engages with cultural production in India primarily through a politics of reading.

Historical materialists did not repudiate aesthetics--indeed, as Tony Bennett points out, **marxist** criticism was the last bastion of philosophical **aesthetics--but** tended, on the whole, to curtail its purview by applying to it requirements that were more appropriate for epistemology. That is, marxist critics from Marx to Althusser considered aesthetics primarily in relation to literary texts, and considered those texts primarily in relation to an aesthetics of cognition: value was assigned according to the ability of the work of art to aid the dispelling of false consciousness, to function as an adjunct to **ideology-critique**.¹ The sustained playful relativism of poststructuralist theory goes very far, though in another direction, towards destroying the grounds for aesthetic judgement altogether, and towards cutting the text off from the reader's subjectivity, as it harps on **the** themes of intertextuality and on **the self-referentiality** of language.

When **marxists** or post-structuralists who are also feminists take up exegetic **projects**, they have something else to contend with besides these theoretical protocols. The idea of the aesthetic or of particular aesthetics can never come up for feminist appraisal on its own, but only as inserted in a **semiotic** cluster that usually includes pleasure-desire-sexuality-body; attempts to isolate any one term from this cluster for analysis are bound to fail, since the proximity to each other of these terms invariably starts off a chain reaction of negative connotations. Trying again on aesthetics means disentangling the **significations**, for women performers, critics, readers or audiences, of each of the terms in this complex. This is a complicated and challenging task, and what might flow from actually taking it on board would probably fill a couple of volumes on its own; what I want to give here, therefore, is an impressionistic and attenuated picture of the possibilities such a task might take into account.

1) Aesthetics:

The pressure to engage with the aesthetics of dance arises, for me, from my being also a performer. Aesthetic codes, applied in an entirely practical fashion to choreography and to the dance itself, are part of the performer's craft or stock-in-trade; subliminal but always present, they blend so imperceptibly into her everyday practice that she seldom pauses to so much as translate them into their verbal equivalents, let alone to **problematize** them. They become problematic, however, when the form is in crisis, as it was, for example, at the moment of the transition from **sadir** to **bharatanatyam**: the process of reinventing the form involved, at this juncture, a

conscious reappraisal and remaking of its aesthetic assumptions. **Bharatanatyam** is, in its turn, undoubtedly in crisis at the present moment. The crisis has been precipitated by its objective and material unfeasibility in the age of cable television, as well as by the **subjective** feeling of alienation from its current practice that is the experience of an increasing number of its performers, both male and female. This sense of crisis has been articulated in terms of doubts or anxieties about the '**relevance**' of bharatanatyam.

One way of solving the problem of relevance has been the adaptation of dance to express 'social' themes. But convincing performances cannot be merely '**socially**' useful or justified; their coherence would depend crucially on the existence of an audience (impossible to guarantee in the face of competition from the mammoth entertainment industry) as well as on the performer's ability to capture that audience's imagination (which calls for technique and stagecraft on the one hand and an ability to tap into something of that audience's desired **mode** of **self-objectification** on the other). Both the audience's and the performer's **imaginaries**, subject to change over time, and dramatically altered by **Rukmini** Devi's ministrations, have gone through another **transformation**. The symbolic space to which Rukmini Devi consigned dance (the home, the nation); the tasks she set the dancer (**beautification**, mothering); the genteel visual evocation of spiritual femininity: these fixed points in the imaginary she constructed no longer appear compelling to either audiences of the new generation or to many performers.

The fact that I have to mark my performer's interest in dance as a special case draws attention to the global shift of

interest, coeval with the media explosion, within which the discursive domain of cultural studies comes into being: the shift from the site of production to the site of consumption. In relation to the study of culture, this manifests as a swing from interest in culture as labour or production (which is how it appears from the performer's or writer's or film-maker's perspective) to concern with the subjectivity, desires and construction of the putative consumer of the cultural product (i.e., the critic's point of view). The dyad producer-critic should not be misread as the dyad producer-consumer: the critic has distinct professional investments in cultural theory, for instance, which makes this subject position not quite the same as that of the consumer, even granting that this consumer is genuinely critical rather than passive.

Seen from the angle of the critic, the formal or technical considerations that allow aesthetic conceptions to become manifest are, understandably, of small consequence. Feminist cultural critique, like a great deal of work in cultural studies that is done by people who are not also performers or writers or **film-makers**, on the one hand declares a moratorium on all attempts to address the aesthetic (except those that decode it as an aspect of the sociology of culture), by alleging that any such attempt is trapped in the fatally exclusionary jaws of the high culture-low culture distinction; and on the other hand proclaims, sometimes with unnecessary **defiance**, the equal status of author (or artist or **performer**, all of whom, no doubt, were equally killed by Barthes's edict) and cultural critic, in order to demystify the concept of 'creativity.' Each operation, one resulting in virtual silence on the site of the production of

art and the other erasing, along with the mystery, even **the** mere **specificity** of the artist's or performer's concerns, and obliquely claiming text-generating powers for the critic, contribute strangely to the apotheosizing of this very critic.

To work from the performer's angle towards re-imagining **bharatanatyam** in the current crisis, one has to reject the critic's stance, while keeping in mind her cautionary adumbrations of the deleterious uses of aesthetics. Why would a performer wish to have a theoretical understanding of the function of aesthetic codes when these are **uncomplicatedly** part of the intuitive, unspoken, but continually active visualization that constitutes the practice of the dance? In a sense, a theoretical understanding simply means verbalization: of the substantive content of the art, of the criteria for judgement, of the performer's imaginary, necessary in a phase of decline or of retrenchment, as a bridge to a renewed practice. If I wish to address the question of the aesthetic, it is partly to act as a corrective to the interiority and flaccidity of the vocabulary that framed the practice institutionalized by Rukmini Devi and her followers.

It might help in this context to mark the specificity of the levels at which the aesthetic functions, noting also that the levels interact:

(a) As the ideology of the aesthetic: the definition of '**the aesthetic**' as something to be pursued in itself, which, paradoxically, opens it up for **instrumentalization** in the cause of some related social privilege or **affectation--an** exaggerated version of the high art-low art divide, class/caste superiority, a postulated spirituality or moral eminence--actually interrupts

the exchanges between the performance and its world, and can be shuffled off without regret.

(b) As codes specific to certain art **forms**: these can be verbalized if necessary, are sometimes codified, or as in the case of **bharatanatvam** can be elicited for appraisal from the followers of a **sampradaya**: i.e., they are available as text, though their effect on either performer or audience is not.

(c) As an aspect of the phenomenology of perception, affect, **self-fashioning** or of the relationship with something one may call 'nature' without necessarily filling out this term with contents that are ideologically contaminated--in fact, without filling it out at all, since I want to use it here precisely to represent the things that are not dreamt of in our philosophy.

Insofar as the last level can be investigated at all, it would belong in the field that Maurice **Merleau-Ponty** called '**aesthesiology**,' situated in the space of the conjunction of several disciplines including, possibly, psychology, **psycho-analysis**, **neuro-physiology**, art, criticism, history, sociology: absurdly vast and engaging with any number of unknown **quantities**.

The actual interpenetration of specific aesthetic codes and physical/mental phenomena that register the affective dimension of art may be expressed in the psychosexual relationships both audiences and performers have to the codes themselves, as well as to their realization through performing bodies. Both of these in are in some measure distinct from (a) the **intersubjectivity** that characterizes art as an irreducibly social activity, and (b) the material conditions under which art is produced. The distinctness of the manifestations of the aesthetic drive from

these other modalities in which art is situated is suggested by the fact, for instance, that the former elude the frameworks of a sociology of taste or surveys of preferences.

For performers, the aesthetic codes that frame specific dance forms function something like the image Lacan calls the 'Ideal I,' the **larger-than-life** reflection that the child identifies in the mirror. The aesthetic code allows the visualization of an '**ideal**' image of the performer's body, a gestalt that, like the child in the mirror, is more stable, more symmetrical, more poised and more effortlessly mobile than the imperfect corporeal original. The gestalt facilitated by the aesthetic stretches the capacities of the performing body by defining, just beyond the horizon of the possible, the ideal towards which it strives; and also conveys, perhaps better than any audience, the degree of convergence with the ideal that has been achieved.

To the extent that the audience is moved by the gestalt expressed by the aesthetic, the latter represents the '**world**'--to use Heidegger's vocabulary for what the work of art brings into being--that the dancer is trying to create, out of the intransigent 'earth' of her art-material, which happens to be a set of human limbs, a trained but still recalcitrant neuromuscular system. If the 'truth' of the work of art (the performance) is to be measured in terms of the conflict between 'earth' and '**world**,' the aesthetic code has the entirely utilitarian role of a yardstick.

The gestalt of the performing body, conceived of as something that evolves in transactions between the performer and the audience and expresses the desires of both, is a promising

site for experiments in transforming the aesthetic of bharatanatyam. The historical development that has to be immediately inscribed on this figure is the one that **Rukmini** Devi and her brahmin followers, talking under the trees at Adyar of the divinity of the dance at the very moment that divinity became unrealizable, most signally neglected to take note of: the loss of its aura. The authority of the dancer's body as art-object is even more comically undercut, if anything, in the present; both by unwitting excursions into coy self-parody and by the thick overlay of references to, and associations with, the dancer's body in the popular cinema. Serious pastiche suggests itself as the only way out of the unproductive image-traps that these resonances have set up.

2) Pleasure:

There is something irreducibly illicit about female pleasures. The history of the devadasis drives home the point that the recasting of tradition for modern use interpellates women as stoical bearers of morality; if female moral standards drop, the entire nation may run to seed. But there is also a feminist work-ethic which declares certain female pleasures out of bounds, since these pleasures invariably emerge along the axis of desire, and in contradiction to women's interests.

Female pleasures are particularly conflict- or guilt-producing because they are seldom imagined in isolation from female sexuality. Cora Kaplan writes: "How difficult it is to uncouple the terms pleasure and sexuality. How much more difficult, once uncoupled, to re-imagine woman as the **subject**, pleasure as her object, if that object is not sexual" ("Wild Nights" 15). Moralists fear the loosening of the bonds that keep

this capacity for sexual pleasure in check, and entertain visions of the contamination of the entire socius by this apparently uncontrollable force; feminists dread the **reinforcement** of women's subordination by their continued subjection to heterosexual and sexist norms. Tharu and Lalita may well celebrate **Muddupalani's** anomalous composition: there are virtually no models for women's comfortable taking of pleasure, sexual or otherwise; for their taking of pleasure as by right, without apology.

Bharatanatyam performers, notwithstanding **Rukmini Devi**, represent the taking of sexual pleasure as well as of other pleasures--of listening to music, for instance, or of play, or of conversation--on the stage. The delineation of pleasure by the female performer is always shadowed by the confusion between subject and object: at the very moment when she is experiencing pleasure as subject, she is aware of herself as object of the audience's gaze, conforming to the unspoken laws of decorum. The relationship between her subjectivity and the source of her pleasure, which can only be represented as intensity or concentration, comes through as narcissism instead; the audience sees itself watching her rather than sees her enjoying herself. Female pleasure is never full, never deep in itself: it is also always female **self-objectification** for the gaze of the other.

3) Sexuality:

What is more strikingly in contradiction to liberal ideas of self-determination, liberty or privacy than women's physical subjection to men, whether in the ideologies of beauty, or in the structural relationships set up by the everlasting possibility of rape, or by the playing out of other radical

inequalities such as those of caste or class on the terrain of sexuality?

Sexuality is peculiarly problematic for feminists because twentieth century feminism itself is instituted within the boundaries of the nature-culture debate, almost to the exclusion of any other framework. In **conjunction** with the ideas of nature and of essence, sexuality has been the terrain on which women's subjection to men has been secured and perpetuated; but in the sense that there really is a fundamental difference in the way human beings are **sexed**, adumbrated despite the overwhelming superimposition on it of the way they are gendered, the problem of sexual difference cannot be resolved through constructed parallels with class struggle or any other struggle that obeys the principle of democratic equivalence. Nor has the 'social **construction**' model, which has been deployed by feminists in India to analyse the construction of the female subject across a range of practices, managed to smooth out the irregularities and aporias suggested by female sexual agency, since this at any rate cannot be slotted into either the category '**natural**' or the category '**socially** constructed' (i.e., historical or technologically **manipulable**). The consideration of the coercion of women through rape or the beauty **myth** has therefore been a necessary but one-dimensional approach in the field of women's sexuality. The absence of any identifiable goals for sexual '**liberation**,' which term itself strikes a vague and self-indulgent note, makes this secondary to other more definable or viable feminist labours.

The problem of female sexual agency has a long history in **feminist** discourse. Cora Kaplan suggests that Mary

Wollstonecraft, demanding women's participation in the rational project of the **Enlightenment**, sees women's sexual self-expression as rankly disruptive, distorting their own development and **disqualifying** them from the kind of citizenship she covets for them. Constrained by her own middle class sexual codes, she repudiated the codes of the aristocracy on the one hand, since they produced unmanly men and wanton women, and the mass violence of mobs on the other, which she read as arising from the sudden lifting of extreme repression. **Wollstonecraft** is hamstrung, Kaplan writes, by "the romantic theory of the unconscious, its operations laid bare [in her text] to draw a particularly bleak conclusion about the fate of women" ("Wild Nights" 26).

There is not that much difference between **Wollstonecraft's** model of the unconscious in the 1790s and Constance Penley's in the 1990s, which perhaps goes to show that sexuality stubbornly resists being prised out of the mind-body frontier that many feminists find too disturbing to contemplate. Penley, speaking from a psychoanalytic theorist's point of view, finds herself having to deal with the limitations on the idea of 'social construction' and, related to this, since all is social and therefore available for change, a simple voluntarist politics. She writes:

...such theories [of sexual difference such as psychoanalysis] do not always contribute to the reconstruction of a new feminine or feminist subject ... because these theories take as their primary focus the role of the unconscious in the constitution

of sexual difference. The psyche is not Utopian: in fact, it is quite conservative" (xiii-xiv).

For the women who set up the aesthetic of **bharatanatyam**, as for the middle class feminists who put in women's claim to rationality and Enlightenment, female sexuality was associated either with slavery or with depravity. The gestural vocabulary for sexual pleasure, after many decades of use by a class of women who were standing in for nation, motherhood and chaste spirituality, is outstandingly inauthentic and devitalized, the visual counterpart to Rukmini Devi's strictures, cited in the last chapter, on sex as sacrament. Vitality might be returned to the delineation of female pleasure not by frantic exaggeration (which is one well-tried and desperate way of displaying conviction) but by the infusion of humour, perhaps, of sauciness, dignity and defiance. Eros need neither be trivialized nor spiritualized. There are **padams** enough, if they can be excavated, to allow the exploration of these emotions in relation to female pleasure.

4) Body:

Neither of the two fields of reference that feminist cultural theory draws **on--historical** materialism and post-structuralism--has very much to say about the body; both trajectories carry the traces of the Cartesian privileging of the **cogito**. Mind is elevated into the ground of human subjectivity or essence; by the time of the Enlightenment, Reason was the force that framed the human subject in the eyes of the law. Human consciousness as manifested in the will becomes the deciding factor in the resolution of legal problems.

In the progressivist episteme, constructed, as I have pointed out, under the sign of universal Reason, the associations of the body—the irrationality of drives, the experience of desire, the irreducibility of pain—have no place. The collective will is a rational force; distortions of its purpose arise not from unreasonable desires, but from ideology--'false consciousness' --**which** is basically faulty cognition. Volition is set right once the science of marxism has made possible the correct 'class **consciousness**,' and once the procedures of the dialectical method are accepted as a safeguard against future false cognition.

Women's bodies are demarcated as reproductive, not productive; medical science and familial ideology compete with each other to provide technologies to facilitate, control, celebrate reproduction. Consumer culture, and a great deal of feminist cultural critique, therefore, focuses on the woman's body as also a site of desire or consumption, or of construction through desire. But Marx's focus on the worker's body offers an opening for a reconsideration of performance as labour. To see performance as labour or production is to leave it unmarked in terms of gender, which is a refreshing variation from the pattern of the insistent gendering of the **bharatanatyam** performance through simulations of maidenly femininity.

Elaine Scarry, re-reading Marx's Capital, remarks that the making of material objects is a mode of human self-extension. Conversely, "[t]he presence of the body in the realm of artifice has as its counterpart the presence of artifice in the body, the recognition that in making the world, man remakes himself..." (251). Dance extends the material body's world, both for the

performer and for the audience, in time (music, rhythm) and in physical space (whose de-realizing emptiness is filled by human movement). Attending to the body as both instrument and product takes the focus away from the body as the site of reproduction or of difference. The process of rethinking dance as a cultural practice may offer feminist cultural theorists, as Elizabeth Dempster suggests, "the possibility of a distinctive mode of action, ...[one] that embraces a concept of the body that is not shadowed by the habits of thought based on Cartesian dualism" (39).

Coda: Turning the Angel of History Around

A Klee painting named "**Angelus** Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly **contemplating**....This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past.... The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

--Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the
Philosophy of History"

One way in which feminists have been deciphering political and cultural formations in the present moment of transition is by re-reading their history. The historical project is designed to deal with the cryptic and the undecidable. Since the impossibility of a '**choice**' between tradition and modernity, between different blueprints for the future, is underscored with each account of **women's** history, **and** with the accretion of

cultural formations studied, history itself **becomes** a practice of the gap, a playing for time, a building of a fence on which to balance, postponing the descent into the chasms of **the** tradition-modernity binary.

History may be vital as a practice of the transition, **but** in order to become critical it must turn towards the future, not the past. Janus, who **resourcefully** looks both forward and back, is an even better prototype for a feminist performer than Benjamin's angel, who is facing the wrong way as he is blown away, or any of those mythological figures, like Lot and Orpheus, who lost their women by looking over their shoulders.

Having played for time by attempting to write a history of **sadir/bharatanatyam**, what I want to do is translate this narrative into dance. I have in mind a script informed by my passions and angers both as feminist and as dancer, presenting a narrative that summarizes not only the **transformation** of sadir into **bharatanatyam**, but also the present contradictions--the homage to tradition strangely aligned with the CD ROM disk **now** available to young green-card Indians who wish to learn dance through their computers--through which bharatanatyam survives, **regardless.**

NOTES

1. Marx's own theories of the aesthetic are schematically laid out, in the Paris Manuscripts, in the idea of the fully realized, unalienated human being's freedom to extend his self through play; an idea that he **adapted** from Schiller.

Lukacs may be taken as the locus classicus of a theory of aesthetics that assigned to the artist the larger share of the responsibility for engendering the correct class consciousness, literary value then being judged according to how effectively the writer exposed the false consciousness that kept subordinate classes ignorant of how things stood with them. Macherey attached this cognitive responsibility to the reader, who, breaking down the 'recognition effect' that seduced her into identifying with the subject position demanded by the realist text, would read **symptomatically**, uncovering the text's hidden meanings in its omissions and rough patches. Althusser, despite having (perhaps unintentionally) done more than almost any other critic to apply ideology-critique to art or literature, actually took his cues from Macherey when he conserved a space for '**great**' art in the work of exposing ideological investments.

2. This is an amorphous but generalized perception (individual dancers sometimes talk of being tired of the nayaka-nayaki narratives whose demure expressions still form the staple of the **bharatanatyam** performance) that would benefit from verbalization.

The arid and devitalized space of the proscenium theatre too, is no substitute for the plenitude of temple or court performance.

3. For Lacan, the Ideal I as the child experiences it is "precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of **identification** with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (Ecrits 2). He goes on to note that the

mirror-stage is a drama whose thrust is precipitated from [the] **insufficiency** [of the **still-foetalized** infant] to **anticipation--and** which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial **identification**, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality.... (4)

4. See Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art."

5. Penley goes on to observe that the picture of human subjectivity that emerges from psychoanalysis is not easily compatible with that espoused by American feminism, in particular, which is grounded in idealism, voluntarism of the will, and a traditional American strain of **utopianism** (its equal commitment to pragmatism notwithstanding). No political movement or ideology could generate itself without an idealistic sense of political will and a vision of a better future. But American feminists have often been reluctant to confront theoretical evidence about the limitations of those idealist and Utopian

ideas which are fundamental to feminist ideology and practice. (xiv).

Jacqueline Rose, among other feminist writers on psychoanalysis, endorses this view when she sees women as partly responsible for the 'misery' within their own psyches (See: "Where Does the Misery Come From?"). Are women, then, 'constructed' to feel aggression towards other women--for instance--or to live out roles that go against their real interests? If we argue for women's participation in or consent to manifestations of patriarchy, are we making concessions to the mentality that says: 'she asked for it'? There is very little theoretical room for manoeuvre between a sort of **Lysenkoism** and a giving away of feminist gains.