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# Epilogue

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Everyday life is lived in the medium of cultural form. Its phenomenological immediacy is the sedimented result of myriad repetitive practices, yet it is constantly open to the randomness of the chance occurrence, the unexpected encounter, the surprising event, as well as to the refiguration of its meanings by more explicit forms of social intervention. The novel is 'a culture of everyday life',<sup>1</sup> as are television and video, the various forms of print journalism and a multiplicity of other, more informal modes of communication. And if, as Bakhtin argued, all literary genres have increasingly been subject to novelization as a process of linguistic familiarization and the creation of a certain semantic open-endedness, so, we might argue, all genres of communication (including the novel) have subsequently been subject to cinematization, the logic of montage and the image, and an intensification of that 'revolution in the hierarchy of times' whereby 'the present becomes the center of human orientation in time and in the world', which Bakhtin associated with the novel.<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to see this process, at one with commodification, in which the present itself shrinks successively towards the instantaneity of what Husserl idealistically (mis)described as its retentive source, as a tendential dehistoricization of life, within which events are consumed as images, independently of each other, and without narrative connection.<sup>3</sup> Yet this is to ignore both the narrative unification of experience inherent in the totalizing structure of temporalization, however internally disjunctive and incomplete (chapter 2), and the potential for new historicizations, new temporalizations of history, created by new cultural forms (chapter 4). Schizophrenia can no more provide a plausible theoretical model for the structure of subjectivity associated with these forms than it can for theory itself, since it would render even the most rudimentary modes of social reproduction impossible; let alone that 'genuinely dialectical attempt to think our

present of time in History' which is the self-conception of Jameson's postmodernism.<sup>4</sup>

It is important in this respect to distinguish the repetition of the everyday, in even its most commodified forms, from that of both the death drive, Laplanche's 'principle of libidinal circulation' (chapter 3), and Heidegger's resolute decision (chapter 5). Ontologically constitutive of the individual as a simultaneously social and natural being, by its internalization of the exteriority of the social as a quasi-natural force (the unconscious), the death drive is indifferent to all specificities of social and historical temporalization. As an existential act, or 'decision of existence', on the other hand, appropriating the past through an act of pure possibility, the repetition of Heideggerian resolution is indifferent to nature. It is part of a purely constructive presencing; hence both its status as an extreme form of avant-garde experience (not so much negating as dissolving the present in a process of pure presencing) and its amenability to the self-fulfilling temporal logic of myth.

Unlike either of these forms, the temporality of the everyday is both internally complex and inherently contradictory, since it must mediate a variety of repetitive cycles (both social and natural) with the inherent directionality of the phenomenologically extended, incomplete present of primordial temporalization. It is the consciousness of these contradictions which allows us to grasp the dehistoricization of life by the commodification of the everyday as the historical process it is, in which the immanent historicity of existential temporalization is turned back upon itself, but can never be fully contained. In the process, the question of possibility – and therefore of politics – is shifted from the structure of primordial anticipation (Being-towards-death) to the *social production of possibility* through the temporalization of historical time. Ontologically, the everyday is no more opposed to history than history can be reduced to war.<sup>5</sup>

To think 'our present of time in history', it was argued in chapter 1, requires not the confusing novelty of the concept of the postmodern, but a rethinking of the dialectics of modernity as a structure of temporalization (the *historically* new) which inscribes the spatial logic of social differences into a totalization of historical time. Modernity, as Bhabha has put it, is about 'the historical construction of a specific position of historical enunciation and address', a specific 'we' that 'defines the prerogative of my present'. It involves 'a continual questioning of the conditions of existence; making problematic its own discourse not simply "as ideas" but as the position and status of the locus of social utterance.'<sup>6</sup> This is a conflicted social process of

identification, interrogation and disavowal – recognition and misrecognition – of extraordinary complexity, which requires the constant production of new pasts to maintain its rhythm of temporal negation and projection, as urgently as new images of the future.

Bhabha has drawn attention to a particular aspect of this process: the importance of colonialism to the historical constitution of its disjunctive form, and the displaced repetition of the structure of colonial difference within the postcolonial, across a series of new racial and ethnic forms.<sup>7</sup> Yet there is not *necessarily* anything specifically ‘postcolonial’ about the reproduction of the more general structure – Bhabha’s bid on behalf of the hegemony of the concept notwithstanding<sup>8</sup> – although the repetition of colonial differences is undoubtedly currently one of its most important, and hence most heavily contested, sites. As Spivak points out, the stories of the post-colonial world ‘are not necessarily the same as the stories coming from “internal colonization”, the way the metropolitan countries discriminate against the disenfranchised groups in their midst.’<sup>9</sup> Nor should they be restricted to the code of displaced repetition, given the plurality of forms of social difference (especially class and gender) making up the world they represent. Indeed, as we have seen in Heidegger’s work, the trope of displaced repetition is liable to a formalist reading which reinstates original difference across its supposed temporal rupture in a more purely constructed form. In this instance, the affirmation of ‘postcoloniality’ is in danger of being transformed into its disavowal, as an ethnicist culturalism becomes the legitimating ground of ‘the very thing it claims to combat’ (neo-colonial structures within the ex-colonial states).<sup>10</sup>

‘Modernity’ can be (and is) produced out of any of the full range of differential social forms; and its representations will only ultimately be adequate to the degree to which they are able to articulate all those which are most important in practice. To this extent, they require an even more ‘interstitial’ perspective than Bhabha himself allows. Furthermore, insofar as it is the name for both an existential and a social process, as well as a project of theoretical elaboration, ‘modernity’ must be understood to embrace dimensions of temporalization beyond the purely *enunciative* present of the sign – material processes of socialization and ‘real abstraction’ which, whilst necessarily coded, cannot be reduced to the temporal logic of the sign. There are (changing) limits to the temporalization of history by and as ‘modernity’, the exploration of which must constitute an ineliminable part of any materialist politics of time.

There is a widespread tendency to counterpose the categories of

'capitalism' (Marx) and 'modernity' (Durkheim and Weber) as competing alternatives for the theoretical interpretation of the same historical object. Yet there is no obligation to continue to use terms in the way in which they have been most consistently abused. For if structural categories of historical analysis, like 'capital', are to be rendered effective at the level of experience, they will have to be mediated by the phenomenological forms through which history is lived as the ongoing temporalization of existence. 'Modernity' is one such form; 'progress', 'reaction', 'revolution', 'crisis', 'conservation', 'stagnation' and 'the new' are others – to name only the most obvious. These are not the products of competing totalizations of historical material across a common temporal frame. They are not just based on different selections of which practices and events are most historically significant. They represent alternative temporal structures, alternative temporalizations of 'history', which articulate the relations between 'past', 'present' and 'future' in politically significantly different ways.

It is in this sense that I write of a 'politics of time'; indeed, of all politics as centrally involving struggles over the experience of time. How do the practices in which we engage structure and produce, enable or distort, different senses of time and possibility? What kinds of experience of history do they make possible or impede? Whose futures do they ensure? These are the questions to which a politics of time would attend, interrogating temporal structures about the possibilities they encode or foreclose, in specific temporal modes. Think, for example, about the way in which the political significance of unemployment in capitalist democracies is determined by the horizon of expectation within which it is received; and of how that horizon is related to broader forms of historical consciousness and social practice. Think, in particular, about the problems posed for a politics of emancipation by a horizon of expectation within which the replacement of capitalism within any current lifetime is no longer a feasible prospect; and the social forces traditionally assigned to the job can no longer be looked upon with any confidence to 'grow into' their allotted political role.

Walter Benjamin wrote that it was the experience of his generation that 'capitalism will die no natural death'.<sup>11</sup> It has been the experience of succeeding generations that it will not die at their hands either. What does 'anti-capitalism' mean, concretely, in this context? This poses a genuinely new political problem for the radical left, inextricably bound up with questions about historical time. For radical politics depends upon the social production of possibility at the level of historical time. 'Possibility' is produced by and as the temporal

structure of particular types of action; it is sustained by others, and eroded and undermined by others still. And it is produced in a variety of temporal forms. It is in this deep structural sense that there is a crucial political significance to culture – culture as formation, not culture as value – and a need for a left cultural politics which would engage in the willed transformation of the social forms of subjectivity at their deepest structural levels. (Cultural politics is subject production.) For it is these forms, including the form of ‘the political’ itself, which determine (and ration) that ‘simple possibility that things might proceed otherwise’, which Bourdieu detects in the probabilistic logic of social laws<sup>12</sup> – a possibility that must nonetheless be produced as experience if the otherwise is to proceed. Under these conditions (the conditions of existence), those with an interest in social change have no option but to rethink ‘modernity’ as the transformation of *its* conditions of existence gather pace with time.