

TELLING STORIES AND MAKING HISTORY:
JOHN BERGER AND THE POLITICS OF POSTMODERNISM

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Roger Rajeeve Mehta

Telling Stories and Making History:
John Berger and the Politics of Postmodernism

The above named thesis is an inter-disciplinary study which considers John Berger's multi-media storytelling project, located in the margins of Europe/ the postmetropolis/ the canon, in the 'global' context of Euro-American postmodernism. This thesis is concerned with the question of how useful 'theory' and/or postmodernism might be in the understanding of Berger's position, and with how Berger's position might be used to re-locate 'theory', and to tell a radical story of postmodernism.

The thesis focuses on Berger's work from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, because it was only after Berger emigrated, in 1974, that he declared himself to be a storyteller. And secondly, because the date of Berger's emigration coincides with the period when the transition from a modern to a postmodern condition began to be felt.

The thesis also focuses on Berger's relation to Walter Benjamin and his writings about the dead, messianism, and storytelling. The argument advanced is that Benjamin's - and Berger's - writings about the dead should be read as emerging from and speaking to a specific historical conjuncture, or constellation; one in which the dominant, (post)metropolitan story of unilinear time and progress is coming to an end.

The thesis is approximately 87,400 words in length.

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Introduction

Ways of Telling and Ways of Reading

John Berger is perhaps best known in Britain for his Marxist art criticism, his contribution to the popular television programme and book Ways of Seeing, and his modernist novel G, the winner of the 1972 Booker Prize for fiction - allegedly his 'greatest novel'.¹ Berger, however, was none too pleased at receiving such a prize, as he makes more than clear in his acceptance speech:

[T]he basic cultural value of a prize depends upon what it is a stimulus to. To the conformity of the market or to imaginative independence on the part of both reader and writer. If a prize only stimulates conformity, it merely underwrites success as it is conventionally understood. It constitutes no more than another chapter in a success story. If it stimulates imaginative independence, it encourages the will to seek alternatives. Or, to put it simply, it encourages people to question (quoted in Dyer 1986, 91).

The prize certainly encouraged Berger to ask a few questions. His first question was, where does the prize-money come from? Booker McConnell's money comes from nineteenth century holdings in the Caribbean; in other words, it can be traced back to colonial exploitation. The second question leads from the first: how could Berger accept such a prize? Berger's novel solution was to 'turn the prize against itself' (92). His 'logic' is simple; 'It was a question of my continuing development as a writer: the issue is between me and the culture which has formed me' (92). Instead of basking in the Booker limelight therefore, Berger gave half his prize-money to the Black Panthers and used the rest to fund his next project, A Seventh Man, a collaborative work which continues the 'experiment' (as Berger puts it) of Ways of Seeing, but which uses 'images and words' not to trace the relations between art and communications, but rather to tell 'the story of a migrant worker in Europe'. Even more significantly, in 1974

¹ Despite working in a number of fields, including television, radio, photography and film, as well as continuing to produce a wide variety of 'cultural criticism' throughout the 1980's and 1990's, Berger's work is not generally included or considered in most 'cultural studies' anthologies or handbooks; and - when he is discussed at all - it is his earlier 'art' criticism which continues to attract the lion's share of attention (see Turner 1990; Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler 1992; During 1993; Storey 1994 and 1996; Marris and Thornham 1996). A similar pattern occurs in the discussion of Berger's 'literary' output: G remains the central focus of attention, and is generally read - either positively or negatively - as exhibiting the formal experimentation which accords with Anglo-American criticism's hegemonic definition of modernism (see Selden 1975; Bras 1984; Stevenson 1993). This 'literary' way of reading also extends to allegedly 'radical' critics. Geoff Dyer, for example, claims that, 'With the passage of time' G can now be seen as the 'modernist masterpiece that it is'; while David E. James goes so far as to declare it to be his 'greatest novel' (Dyer 1986, 94; James 1996, 48).

Berger himself emigrated to a remote village in France, since when a great deal of his work has been committed to representing the peasantry and their way of life. From being a British intellectual, Marxist critic of the 'moment of cubism', and modernist author, Berger became a member of a peasant community, and declared himself to be less a novelist than a 'storyteller' - a 'historian of our time' (WB, 14). His subsequent 'novel', Pig Earth, with its stories, essays and poems about village life was received not with prizes but with some confusion, being interpreted as a step backwards from modernism towards literary realism, and even in some quarters as a form of sociological reportage.² But why was Berger's migration and work received with such confusion? It is, of course, easy to see how a move such as Berger's might invite vague, journalistic questions about why a 'famous' author might give up modern life to get away from it all; but Berger's re-location should also provoke some specific theoretical questions concerning the function of the author, the status of experience, the politics of place, and most importantly what it means to be 'modern'. In saying this, however, the 'modern' differentiation between critical and creative discourses employed by the reviewers of Berger's stories raises a further question: how *should* 'modern' life be 'talked' about in a critical way - that is, how should it be 'theorised'?

In order to theorise Berger's storytelling, it is necessary to think carefully about how we live with stories: not only Berger's specific stories, but also the wider web of conflicting stories societies and communities live their lives by and are interpellated within. Alan Sinfield considers 'the idea of "telling stories"' in this way, 'partly for its accessibility', but also in order to deconstruct the opposition between the supposedly organised stories of 'history', and the disorganised 'stories' of everyday life - the 'stories that are *lived*' (Sinfield 1997, 24-26).³ However, Sinfield notes that there is 'a more substantial phrase' than

² As regards Pig Earth, Terry Eagleton considers it to be a form of retrograde 'literary' 'realism' (Eagleton 1979); whereas, as Berger himself notes, 'When Pig Earth came out in America almost everybody took these as stories that I had heard and that I simply recorded, and they talked about it in terms of ethnography, in terms of rather exemplary sociology and so on and so on. Nobody actually realised that these stories were mostly, especially the more complicated ones like "Lucie Cabrol", completely invented. I mean they were works of fiction, but they were not taken as works of fiction' (Berger 1982a, 19). See Chapter Three for further discussion of realist, modernist, and postmodernist 'literature'.

³ As Sinfield notes, 'It is through ... stories, or representations, that we develop understandings of the world and how to live in it. The contest between rival stories produces our notions of reality, and hence our beliefs about what we can and cannot do' (Sinfield 1997, 23). Sinfield voices the reservation that "'story"' is perhaps not 'the right term', but he sticks with it in order to resist Carolyn Steedman's distinction between disorganised 'stories' and organised 'histories', and also because, as he tritely puts it, 'one person's anecdote is another's guiding light' (24).

“telling stories”, which is ‘*cultural production*’ (26). And in saying this, Sinfield draws attention to the truth-claims of that particular type of story called ‘theory’; a type of storytelling which is supposedly more ‘substantial’ because it is presumably more critical and more organised than the stories of everyday life. And yet, how can we be sure that certain ways of telling stories, or certain modes of cultural production such as criticism or theory or critical theory, are in fact more ‘substantial’? As Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud note,

We are always within opinion, and there is no possible discourse of truth on the situation. And there is no such discourse because one is caught up in a story, and one cannot get out of this story to take up a metalinguistic position from which the whole could be dominated. We are always immanent to stories in the making, even when we are the ones telling the story to the other (quoted in Frow 1995, 139).

What, then, is the *story* of Berger the storyteller; and what kind of history is he intending to make? Berger declares that the peasantry are not so much residual as central to the contemporary world and its futures; and that, in fact, it is the ‘threatened disappearance of the peasantry, and the denial of its age-long experience’ which most importantly ‘confront[s] the present’ (Berger 1979b, 377). Should Berger’s location therefore be theorised sociologically, in terms of a turning away from the problems of metropolitan modernity, the struggles of the working-class, and the possibility of progress? Or should Berger’s work be theorised in terms of a radical Marxism beyond Marxism, which actually reveals a certain ‘urban idiocy’ in contemporary criticism? Crucially, does Berger’s position allow any critical difference between fictional and historical modes of storytelling? Should Berger’s storytelling be read as a ‘literary’ realism or a fabulous metafiction; or does storytelling offer the possibility of dialogically re-situating a radical ideology critique? Indeed, does Berger’s position admit theory at all; and from what position should Berger be theorised? Most importantly, and to paraphrase Berger, how does practising or theorising storytelling ‘help people to claim their social rights’?

In one sense, the questions above relate to a problematic conception of ‘history’; the problematic of whether the ‘grand narratives’ of history and progress have been rendered illegitimate, and/or reduced to the status of ‘text’. Within British cultural criticism, this condition is increasingly referred to as postmodern, involving an increasing number of ‘petit récits’ about the end of Marxism, ideology, reality, truth, value and the role of the intellectual (Lyotard 1984, 60). However, the questions above also involve what might be called a problematic of

'geography': the question of the inter-relationship between the politics of 'place', and the place of 'theory'; of how stories 'take place', and of how telling certain critical stories can involve moving out of one's 'place'. What is more, these stories are often referred to in terms of identity politics, and cultural materialist, postcolonial, feminist and queer theory; stories that often conflict with postmodern 'petit récits' about the end of everything. What the following thesis will therefore address is whether Berger's recent work can be usefully theorised in relation to the much debated transition from a modern to a postmodern condition. Which is to say, this thesis is not only concerned with the question of how useful postmodernism might be in the understanding of Berger's position, but also with how Berger's position might be used to locate and to tell a 'radical' story of postmodernism; a project which by definition is problematic, since it is bound to be treated with 'incredulity' and/or suspicion.

According to Fredric Jameson the 'formal problem' posed by Jean-François Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition is this: 'how to do without narrative by means of narrative itself?' (Jameson 1984a, xix).⁴ Jameson's solution, as stated in his 'Foreword' to The Postmodern Condition, is to look to the 'persistence of buried master-narratives in ... our "political unconscious"'; and yet he soon finds such a thesis untenable (xii). In Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson takes stock of how the 'Unconscious', 'Nature', 'aesthetic production', in fact *everything* has been 'coloniz[ed]' by late capitalism and/or transformed into a 'simulacrum', at which point he appears to lose faith in buried master-narratives, wonders vaguely how the struggle against capitalism will continue, and ends up appealing for some 'new political art (if it is possible at all)' which, he writes,

will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object - the world space of multinational capital - at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of represent[ation] ... (Jameson 1991, 54).

In other words, Jameson's problem is simply this: he finds himself and everybody else to be '*within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt'; but then also finds, to his consternation, that such a position does

⁴ As Jameson notes, Lyotard's proposition about postmodern "'incredulity"' towards metanarratives 'becomes a kind of historical narrative in its own right' (Jameson 1984a, xi). '[P]aradoxically, this revival of an essentially narrative view of "truth" and the vitality of small narrative units at work everywhere *locally* in the present social system, are accompanied by something like a more global or totalising "crisis" in the narrative function in general ...' (xi).

not appear to offer any way forward (Jameson 1984b, 63). One reason why Jameson finds himself in such a quandary is relatively obvious. As Jameson himself notes, 'what is today called contemporary theory - or better still, theoretical discourse - is also ... itself very precisely a postmodernist phenomenon' (Jameson 1991, 12). Which is to say, contemporary theory too has been commodified. According to Jameson's own logic, therefore, it is entirely possible that the 'cultural logic' of postmodernism adds up to little more than its 'facile repudiation' and 'celebration' by postmodern theorists whose job it is to discuss the pros and cons of different postmodern narratives of postmodernism.

Christopher Norris, for one, would certainly go along with such an analysis. In fact, he finds the whole "narrative turn" in recent intellectual debate" to be an anathema (Norris 1985, 21). For Norris, theories which follow the 'vogue for "interdisciplinary" exchange ... by breaking down the genre-distinction between philosophy and literature' sound suspiciously like uncritical theories (Norris 1996, 189). What Norris means by this is that such theories remain confined to 'first-order rhetorics of narrative telling' which lack the kind of 'meta-narrative stance which might permit diverse reports to be channelled into some kind of masterly general "truth"' (Norris 1985, 21-32). Norris's position on the postmodernism debate, therefore, is remarkably straightforward: 'postmodernism', according to him, 'is best viewed as a classic case of the symptom mistaken for a cure, a discourse whose sole purpose - or motivating interest - is to eke out the currency of "radical" talk among those numerous *déclassé* intellectuals on the ex-Marxist left whose lack of any genuine political alignment would otherwise be all too plain' (Norris 1996, 218). This is a position shared by Alex Callinicos, whose book, Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique, provides a conjunctural analysis which seeks to demonstrate that the "discourse of postmodernism is best seen as the product of a socially mobile intelligentsia in a climate dominated by the retreat of the Western labour movement" (Callinicos 1989, 170). I tend to agree. However, a number of troubling questions remain; if Callinicos is right (and I am not saying he is wrong), why has he bothered to write Against Postmodernism? Callinicos himself is more than troubled by this question, and at the beginning of his introduction to the book enquires,

What earthly justification could there be for contributing to the destruction of the world's dwindling forests in order to engage in debates which should surely have exhausted themselves long ago? My embarrassment in the face of this challenge is made all the more

acute by the fact that at the origins of the present book lies that unworthy emotion, irritation (1).

Callinicos does indeed offer a great many cogent reasons as to why and how the postmodernism debate was generated in the 1980s by world-weary intellectuals and academics, partly as a response to the failures of 1968, and partly out of a need to square their increasingly comfortable lifestyles with the uncomfortable 'reality' of counterrevolutionary Thatcherism, Reaganism, Mitterandism etc., but - and its a provocative *but* - why bother to perpetuate a debate which, as I have suggested feeds on being repudiated, by writing yet another book on the subject? Secondly, and related to this question, what makes Against Postmodernism 'radical'? - in other words, what legitimates Callinicos's truth-claims? Lyotard's reply to the kind of Marxist critique put forward by Callinicos is pretty much fool-proof; namely, that 'we are always within opinion' and that there is no 'discourse of truth on the situation'.

Where does this leave me then? Perhaps in a position where it can finally be admitted that there is no way to solve the riddle of 'how to do without narrative by means of narrative itself?' Or, perhaps better to say, in a position where it can be admitted that there is no way to solve such a riddle if it is posed only as a 'formal problem'. What do I mean by this? What I mean is that the telling of such a problematic narrative cannot be constrained by unnecessary formalities. Narratives are also always social; and being sociable, sometimes involve the crossing of certain boundaries of propriety and convention. In theory, of course, narratives often come to sound impressively formal, but what must be admitted surely is that they are never that correct or proper. Narratives go astray; and yet however many times this is pointed out, such playfulness and dissent continues to be looked down on. In which case, perhaps it's also time to admit that 'narrative' itself might not even be the *proper* term here. Sinfield, tellingly enough, avoids 'narrative' precisely because of its dubious 'connotations of strategic organisation' (Sinfield 1997, 24). Instead, he 'use[s] "story" (and "representation") to accommodate the patterns of common sense alongside formal pronouncements, and to avoid prejudging adequacy'; which, in 'oppositional work', he writes, 'has the advantage of throwing all systems, however authoritative, back to first base so that their claims may be re-evaluated' (24). This sounds like a good idea to me. In the present thesis, therefore, I too will aim to use the term 'story' to destabilise some very 'formal pronouncements', namely those pertaining to postmodern theories and narratives which (despite

much of the rhetoric employed) continue to oppose 'theory' and 'narrative' in dualistic binaries, and/or conflate them altogether. What is also crucial to note, however, is that in saying this, what I absolutely do not want to do is fetishise the term 'story' instead! The reason why is quite simple; because, in the last instance, the term 'story' is just another term - in other *words*, there is no proper term to be pinned down. The 'radical' credentials of a story - or a theory or a narrative - depend not just on the way you tell them, but on *where* you tell them. 'Theory', bell hooks explains, 'is not inherently ... liberating, or revolutionary. It fulfils this function only when we ask it to do so and direct our theorising towards this end' (hooks 1994, 61); and to do that, she insists, 'One needs a community of resistance' (hooks 1991, 149). Which brings us back to Callinicos. There is nothing *inherently* 'radical' about his theorising. What makes Callinicos's work 'radical' is that it emerges from and speaks to a 'community of resistance': the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

In order to tell radical stories about how to live in radically new ways, you need to start to live in a different way. You need to inhabit a place where people can feel free to come together and begin to live and tell the kinds of different lives and stories which might eventually lead to some radical and effective opposition to the 'dominant'. In hooks's terms, you need to inhabit a 'community of resistance' - a term she has borrowed from the Vietnamese, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. As hooks explains,

[Thich Nhat Hanh has] created this village in France called Plum Village. It's a place where different people go and grow things, and live a "mindful" life together. Sometimes I get really distressed by the extent to which we, in the United States, have moved away from the idea of *communities* - of people trying to have *different* world views and value systems. In the 60s there was a lot of focus on such communities, but that sort of died out, and a refocus on the nuclear family emerged (hooks 1994b, 222-223).

To refer to the SWP as a 'community of resistance', therefore, might appear to be problematic; it is an organised Party with a national membership, branches, its own newspaper, and so on: it is not a 'hippie' commune - as some might facetiously dismiss 'Plum Village'. In Raymond Williams's terms, the SWP operate as an 'institution' rather than a 'formation'.⁵ Having said this though, I would still maintain that the SWP is not *simply* a collection of branches and

⁵ Williams discusses 'emergent', 'residual', 'alternative' and 'oppositional formations' in relation to larger and more accepted sociological categories, such as 'class fractions' and 'classes', at great length in his books Marxism and Literature and Culture. (see Williams 1977, 121-127; Williams 1981, 57-86).

members; that the membership is also held together by other less formal relations - including friendships, romances and feelings of camaraderie. As Williams notes,

if we deduce significant cultural relations from the study of institutions alone, we shall be in danger of missing some important cases in which cultural organisation has not been, in any ordinary sense, institutional. In particular we may miss the very striking phenomenon of the cultural "movement" ... [whose] immediate social relations are often not easy to distinguish from those of a group of friends who share common interests (Williams 1981, 34, 66).

Sinfield builds on this point:

political identity does not derive directly from class or gender or racial position, or sexual orientation; or simply from personal choice. It derives in a large part, and this is not sufficiently remarked, from involvement in a milieu. So as an individual discovers a certain kind of selfhood in relation to others, learns to inhabit certain preoccupations and forms, a subculture sets the framework of understanding - makes alternative stories plausible. That is not, in itself, political action, but it has implications for how we set out to produce political action (Sinfield 1997, 266).

For Sinfield it is participation in a gay 'subculture' which makes 'alternative stories plausible'. And, once again, distinctions are important. As he notes in his essay, 'Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and the Ethnicity Model', he insists on using the term "subculture", as opposed to "identity" or "community", in order to preserve 'a strong sense of diversity, of provisionality, of constructedness' (Sinfield 1996, 289). This is not to say though, that terms like 'identity' and 'community' are old-fashioned or naive. Sinfield is quite right to note that, while 'blackness', 'femininity' and 'homosexuality' are discursive constructs rather than essential categories, one needs to think and act, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak does, in terms of a 'strategic essentialism' (quoted in Sinfield 1996, 289). 'It is with reason', Sinfield notes, 'that subordinated peoples hold on to ideas of genetic innateness, cultural purity, and other essential notions' - it is because they sometimes need to (Sinfield 1996, 289).⁶

In the following thesis, therefore, I will use the term 'community of resistance'. Firstly, because even though it is necessary to distinguish between 'political institutions', 'oppositional formations' and 'dissident subcultures' for

⁶ As Sinfield notes: 'Stuart Hall traces two phases in self-awareness among British Black people. In the first, "Black" is the organising principle: instead of colluding with the hegemonic versions of themselves, Blacks seek to make their own images, to represent themselves. In the second phase (which Hall says does not displace the first) it is recognised that representation is formative - active, constitutive - rather than mimetic' (Sinfield 1996, 227).

reasons of sociological accuracy (i.e., in order to capture the internal differences of organisation, political coherence, strategy and programme between more tightly organised and provisional groupings and movements), the broader term 'community of resistance' offers a way to encompass diverse groups - for example, the SWP and a dissident gay subculture. Secondly, because the term 'community of resistance' offers a way to explore the problematic between Berger's position, as an English writer in a French peasant community, and my position as a member of a community of readers who might be marginalised and oppositional, but who are not peasants. Of course, in saying this a crucial point needs to be reiterated; although it is undoubtedly necessary to distinguish between 'communities of resistance', 'oppositional formations' and 'dissident subcultures', such debates only matter if they take place *within* a 'community of resistance' or 'oppositional formation' or 'dissident subculture'. Like the term 'story', there is no proper term to be pinned down. The 'radical' credentials of a story about 'communities of resistance' - or 'oppositional formations', or 'dissident subcultures' - depends not just on the way it is told, but *where*.⁷

Returning to the discourse of postmodernism, then, it need not be as politically reactionary or pointless as Callinicos and Norris would have us believe; with one important proviso, so long as an involvement in the particular milieu in which the discourse of postmodernism takes place leads to alternative stories and alliances which are oppositional to the dominant. The big question though, is how to effectively articulate the stories of a wide range of very different subcultures and oppressed peoples across the differences that exist within and between many societies. And for many critics it is a question that remains unanswered. According to Martin Ryle, for example, 'Sinfield's own [cultural materialist] dissolution of humanist universals in many ways [simply] parallels postmodernism's deconstructive scepticism' (Ryle 1991, 160). What Ryle wants to know is how exactly such postmodern scepticism or subcultural resistance can ever be co-ordinated in opposition to something as universal as trans-national, global capitalism? In Britain alone, he writes,

[t]he difficulty of combining diverse groups in such a coalition has been often registered: it is a good few years since Beyond the Fragments, but we seem still to be left with "the fragments" on the one hand - and the Labour party on the other. The point here ... is that the socialist values to which Sinfield is committed, and which would be part of the foundation of any such progressive mobilisation as he envisages, themselves depend on some notion of universal goods and truths ...

⁷ This problematic is interrogated throughout my thesis, particularly in Chapter One (48-61) and Chapter Two (76-81).

(159).

To my mind, however, Ryle is just harking back to the good old times, instead of (like Brecht) getting to grips with the bad new ones. As Sinfield notes, his own 'emphasis on subcultures is in part defensive, a strategy for bad times ... The subcultural sense of shared identity and purpose is necessary for self-preservation' (Sinfield 1997, 302-3). Moreover, I would also question whether the oft-remembered good old times were ever as good or as socialist as Ryle makes out. Did socialist values really use to depend on universal truths and goods? Yes and no. Is this answer a cop out? Not at all. In fact, on this matter I am in complete agreement with Williams. As regards the question of the universal versus the particular, Williams writes that he is 'on both sides of the argument'; he recognises 'the universal forms which spring from [the] fundamental exploitation' of the capitalist system, but also the crucial importance of 'more particular bonds' (Williams 1989b, 318).⁸ 'What socialism offered' he writes, 'was the priority of one kind of bonding - trade unionism, the class bond - this cancelled all other bonds' (Williams 1989b, 241). But what Williams increasingly came to discern as 'more and more true' was 'that where centres of proletarian consciousness developed, their strength really drew from the fact that all bonds were holding in the same direction' (241-2). By which he means the bonds of family, kinship, religion, nationalism, ethnicity, race, sexuality and so on: in other words, all the bonds that go towards making the place you live and work in the place it is, and the person you are the person you are (or, as Sinfield might have it - the milieu you are involved with, and the selfhood you discover). To consider socialism, therefore, purely in terms of one general kind of bonding is actually a mystification of socialism; in effect, it represses all the other 'particular' bonds which made its truth-claims appear 'universal' in the first place. Even more importantly, however, Williams specifically notes that,

The point at which particular interests, properly brought together, can be seen to be a general interest is the moment of socialism. But this moment comes not once and for all. It comes many times; is lost and is found again; has to be affirmed and developed, continually and practically, if it is to stay real (Williams 1983, 163-4).

In which case, Ryle's attack on Sinfield's pursuit of a 'medium-term project' - i.e., to 'validate a range of subcultures' - seems a little odd, since the attempt to affirm and develop such 'particular interests' in the hope of finding some way of bringing them together in the long-term appears to be what the moment of

⁸ What Williams means 'by *bonding*' is the institution and exercise of those relationships which are capable of maintaining the effective practice of social life as a whole' (Williams 1983, 166).

socialism is all about. To be precise (or pedantic), if people are able to make history, but not in conditions of their own choosing, and life does indeed determine consciousness, as Marx asserts, then the moment of socialism Ryle presumably desires can *only* be brought about in the first instance by discovering some particular, alternative, 'subcultural' life, or 'community or resistance'; because it is only then, in those changed 'local' conditions and relations, that different groups of people will be able to start to understand how to organise a movement towards a more 'general' transformation of society.

But who am I to say? - and what's all this really go to do with John Berger? Edward Said, for one, would not agree with the kind of story I've outlined above. In his book Culture and Imperialism, Said writes that 'technocrats [such as Lyotard] are principally competent to solve local problems, not to ask the big questions set by the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment' - which, he asserts, the 'general secular intellectual' alone is qualified to solve (Said 1993, 398). That presumably leaves me out then; but what about Said himself? The problem with Said's line of reasoning is that if grand narratives and general secular intellectuals are all they are cracked up to be, the contemporary world should be a lovely place; but it isn't a lovely place, not when socio-environmental, economic, and military disasters threaten global catastrophe on a daily basis. Said dodges around this issue, but a few pages further on in his book proceeds to call for narratives which are 'not new master discourses, strong new narratives, but, as in John Berger's programme, another way of telling' (405). According to Said's reading of Berger,

When photographs or texts are used merely to establish identity and presence - to give us merely representative images of *the* Woman, or *the* Indian - they enter what Berger calls a control system. With their innately ambiguous hence negative and anti-narrativist waywardness *not* denied, however, they permit unregimented subjectivity to have a social function: "fragile images [family photographs] often carried next to the heart, or placed by the side of the bed, are used to refer to that which historical time has no right to destroy" (405).

This is an important point Said makes here. At the very least, 'Berger's programme' would seem to hold out the possibility of some kind of answer to Jameson's forlorn request for an 'as yet unimaginable new mode of represent[ation]', and, at best, might even provide one way of doing 'without narrative by means of narrative itself'. Said's 'general' approach, however, still manages to leave a few *big questions* begging. What exactly is the difference

between the old, 'grand narratives' Said seems to prefer, and the 'strong new' ones he seeks to replace with 'another way of telling'? Even more pointedly, what is it that makes Berger qualified to deal with 'general' problems when he lives in a peasant village - after all, what could be more 'local' than that? Said does not say, and his silence tells its own story. What it tells *me* is that any consideration of 'Berger's programme' to develop 'another way of telling' itself needs to be told in 'another way'; and that's where Sinfield comes in. Which is to say, the aim of this thesis is to tell the story of Berger the storyteller. That's *my* story anyway; and who knows, if Sinfield is right, such storytelling might even lead to bigger questions being addressed.

What should be more than clear by now, therefore, is that my motivation for writing about Berger is political rather than merely academic. I have chosen to write about Berger not just to get a PhD, but because his work can be used to address some key issues confronting socialism and cultural politics. My consideration of his work, then, is intended more as an intervention than as a scholarly explication; and, I should point out, is not meant to be exhaustive, either with respect to Berger's 'life-work', or any of his specific cultural productions. For one thing, how could my treatment of Berger not be political, or partial? The book, Ways of Seeing, concludes with the following injunction, 'To be continued by the reader ...'. And as Griselda Pollock notes, its insights have been 'massively extended', if not superseded, by feminists in the last twenty-five years (Pollock 1992, 23). (Indeed, if a time comes when Ways of Seeing is superseded, nobody, I suspect, would be happier than Berger himself.) For another thing, I only consider Berger's work from A Seventh Man onwards. Partly, this is for the most pragmatic of reasons: I don't have the time or space to write about everything Berger has ever done. (And, to be honest, Geoff Dyer and Nikos Papastergiadis have already gone over much of Berger's early work in their books, Ways of Telling and Modernity as Exile.) A more important reason for beginning with A Seventh Man, however, is because its publication coincides with the point at which *everybody* is supposed to have started finding time and space more difficult to come by; in other words, the moment 'around 1972' - as David Harvey puts it - when that latest 'round' of 'time-space compression' called postmodernity came into being (Harvey 1990). Needless to say (the postmodern debate being what it is), this date varies; my point, however, is that A Seventh Man was being put together at the very moment when postmodernism was emerging - and, furthermore, was put together in a very 'particular' way. The

book interrogates the problematic relation between the global and the local by telling the 'story' of the 'experience of migrant workers in Europe' in such a way as to make the 'general' connections between global capitalism and the 'experience of migrant workers' *felt*. That, in effect, is what 'another way of *telling*' implies; not just theorising, and not just narrating, but making *felt*.

According to Berger and his co-author, Jean Mohr,

To outline the experience of the migrant worker and to relate this to what surrounds him - both physically and historically - is to grasp more surely the political reality of the world at this moment. The subject is European, its meaning is global. Its theme is unfreedom. This unfreedom can only be fully recognised if an objective economic system is related to the subjective experience of those trapped within it. Indeed, finally, the unfreedom is that relationship (Berger and Mohr 1975, 7).

Of course, as Berger and Mohr put the book together they were well aware that the processes of global capitalism - and therefore their theme of 'unfreedom' - were undergoing profound changes. As the authors concede in their introductory 'Note to the Reader', 'The book was written in 1973 and the first half of 1974 [since when] capitalism has faced its worst economic crisis since the Second World War' (Berger and Mohr 1975, 8). What Berger and Mohr could not know, of course, is where such a crisis would leave many socialists. In limbo. For Jameson, for instance, 'the latest mutation in space - postmodern hyperspace', has come to mean that the 'individual human body' has lost its ability 'to map its position in a mappable external world'; in which case, he suggests, there is little or no chance of being able to 'map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as human subjects' (Jameson 1991, 44). Berger's response to the changed nature of global capitalism, on the other hand, has been to become a storyteller. Whether such a strategy is a *telling* one, of course, is the story of my thesis.

In his new book, Thirdspace, Edward Soja's avowedly postmodern method of representing the dizzying, perspectival shifts of hyperspace is to arrange his chapters in a non-linear fashion, thereby providing, he claims, 'a different way of looking at the same subject, a sequence of never-ending variations on recurrent spatial themes'. The spatial arrangement of the chapters of my own thesis follows a similar arrangement. Indeed, Chapter One, 'A Question of Geography', explicitly considers the problematic spatiality of postmodernism. Of course, the same problematic is also considered from different perspectives in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. But that's really my

point here: the more you look at it, the more postmodernism comes to signify everything and nothing. Postmodernism represents a decentred hyperspace in which everything and nothing is connected, for the simple reason that just about anything and everything can be - and has been - claimed as postmodern. To cut a long story short therefore, the conclusion I come to in 'A Question of Geography' is that postmodernism is in grave danger of becoming little more than an academic discourse, produced by professional postmodernists, hiding in universities, using long words, and getting to be big fish in a small pond. In effect, Callinicos and Norris are right. The difficulty is, I can't just say that at *this* point in my story, because I'm not in a position to: I'm not qualified to make such a claim. Every discourse is a power/discourse. Every story comes with a certain authority which is bestowed upon it by the social position of the author (at least in our society). If the Minister of Culture declares Bob Dylan to be as important as John Keats, that story will get a hearing. If I, on the other hand, interject that Dylan used to be *more* important than Keats, for some people, then my story is a lot less likely to be heard. That's why I've not directly written the words, '*hiding in universities, using long words, and getting to be big fish in a small pond*'; that's why I've quoted them instead. Actually, the words belong to Sinfield (as far as copyright goes), and *his* words come vested with the authority of a Professorship at Sussex University. The full quote goes like this:

I realise that the idea of subcultural intellectuals sounds pretentious, but it's better than getting sucked into professional Englit - hiding in universities, using long words, and getting to be big fish in a small pond (Sinfield 1994, 76).

For me, then, one useful aspect of gaining a PhD is that such a qualification will make my voice more likely to be heard - or at least less easy to ignore. What I am keen to emphasise though, is that the award of a PhD is of no value in itself. As Berger notes, 'the basic cultural value of a prize depends upon what it is a stimulus to'. In which case, gaining a PhD on Berger and postmodernism will be of value only if it serves as a stimulus to my becoming - in Sinfield's terms - a 'subcultural intellectual'.

The work of Walter Benjamin is particularly apposite as regards this last point. According to Benjamin,

[Brecht] was the first to pose to intellectuals the far-reaching requirement that they should not *supply* the apparatus of production without also *transforming* it, as far as possible, in the socialist interest [...] To supply the apparatus of production without also transforming it, as far as possible, [is] a highly suspect procedure even if the materials

supplied appear to be of a revolutionary character (quoted in Wohlfarth 1993, 1).

I agree. More to the point though, I intend to take Benjamin at his word (or rather at Brecht's word). I am determined to avoid supplying a PhD of supposedly 'revolutionary character', without also attempting to transform the 'apparatus of production ... as far as possible, in the socialist interest'. In other words, without contesting the way higher education is currently organised.⁹

Of course, in the context of the present thesis there is a more obvious reason to consider Benjamin, because of his overwhelming influence on Berger. This is most readily apparent in Berger's work from the early 1970s. In fact, he points up the connection himself. At the end of the first essay in Ways of Seeing there is a note informing the reader that, 'Many of the ideas in the preceding essay have been taken from another, written over forty years ago by ... Walter Benjamin ... entitled "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"' (Berger 1972c, 34). Moreover, as many critics have been quick to note, it is not just Berger's work on the relation between art and technology which owes a debt to Benjamin, G does too. As Raman Selden observes, G is, 'at least in part, a fictional embodiment of Benjamin's mysterious and illuminating "Theses on the Philosophy of History"' (Selden 1975, 116). Geoff Dyer seconds this point. The 'arrangement of the "stanzas" of G', he claims, 'bears a formal resemblance' to Benjamin's 'Theses', and is the 'theoretical driving force behind Berger's fictional method' (Dyer 1986, 116). However, one has to wonder at the usefulness of such observations. Noting that G has something to do with Benjamin's 'mysterious' 'Theses' is about as far as such critics are prepared to go. What they fail to recognise is that Berger did not just model his work on Benjamin's, he appropriated it in the Benjaminian manner. What do I mean by this? If, as Benjamin suggests, the 'past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again ... a moment of danger', then it logically follows that Benjamin's own writings themselves need to be 'seized' at such an 'instant' (Benjamin 1973, 256). As I shall argue in Chapter

⁹ In his essay, 'The Thatcher Government's Attack on Higher Education in Historical Perspective', Desmond Ryan considers how, in the last ten to fifteen years, the introduction of management structures, audits, and methods of performance-assessment based on the 'world of business', have all served to transform the nature of higher education, and, crucially, diminish the space available for critical thinking (Ryan 1998). This proposition might sound a little surprising, given the growth in 'theory' courses, periodicals and conferences over the last few years; that is, until one considers the *formation* of such courses, periodicals and conferences. Instead of the discursive practice of 'theory' offering a milieu in which people can come together and tell alternative and oppositional stories, it has increasingly become just another reified, academic subject.

Two, what makes Berger's recent work Benjaminian is not the breadth of his references to the 'Theses', but how he has put himself *in danger*, by going to live and work in a peasant village threatened with the loss of its way of life.

All of which leaves only one question unaddressed, how do I intend to read Benjamin myself? On one level I can answer this question quite simply. In Chapter Two, 'Beyond Marx', I juxtapose Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' with Jacques Derrida's thoughts on 'spectrality' (Derrida 1994c). In Chapter Three, 'The Secretary of Death', I consider Berger's trilogy Into Their Labours and his novel To the Wedding in relation to Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller'. And in Chapter Four, 'Age of Extremes', I discuss Berger's attempt to find 'another way of telling' in relation to Benjamin's work on photography. On another level, however, I feel compelled to provide a more difficult answer to the question of what motivates my reading of Benjamin: *the dead*. According to Benjamin, 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power' (Benjamin 1973, 256).

Given the socialist and cultural materialist politics of my story thus far, mentioning the dead of past generations in this way might sound as if I'm losing the plot. However, I believe that death, and its denial, is central to 'our' notion of the 'modern'. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that the figure of death haunts the modern/postmodern period, and unsettles its theorisation. Consider the work of Michel Foucault. His epistemic narrative of power, as he develops it in The History of Sexuality, defines modernity as precisely that period in which death is vanquished. As Judith Butler notes, Foucault's theorisation of the transition of 'juridical power' to 'productive' power depends on the argument that, from 'the eighteenth century in Europe famines and epidemics start to disappear and that power, which had previously been governed by the need to ward off death, now becomes occupied with the production, maintenance, and regulation of life' (Butler 1996, 60; Foucault 1990, 142). Needless to say, the irony that Foucault should be struck down by a contemporary epidemic has not gone unnoticed. My point here, however, is not to note that death, with the advent of HIV/AIDS, is making some kind of big comeback, but rather to declare that it never left us: that death has always been there, lurking in the shadows, often

defining the contemporary period by its absence. As Jonathon Dollimore notes in his book, Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture, the period from the Renaissance on is marked not so much by an 'increasing denial of death' (as is often posited by social historians), but rather a 'continuing and intensifying preoccupation' with it (Dollimore 1998, xxviii). 'Philosophically, aesthetically and erotically', he writes, 'modernity now intensifies and refines, now struggles against, now seeks to nullify that merciless immanence of death discerned by a formative earlier tradition' (xxviii). Having said this though, as Dollimore concedes, there is

at least one profoundly influential area of modern thought where something like a denial of death does seem to occur. It derives from the belief that change - or at least social change - can be controlled through praxis. The seminal figure here is Marx, and the crucial idea (by no means his alone) is that we can master change and not merely be helplessly subject to it (xxviii).

Needless to say, it is this tradition, and more particularly Benjamin's problematisation of it, in which I am most interested.

In Chapter Two I shall argue that Benjamin's - and Berger's - writings about the dead should be read as emerging from and speaking to a specific historical conjuncture, or constellation; one in which the dominant, (post)metropolitan story of unilinear time and progress is coming to an end. Furthermore, in Chapter Three I aim to discuss how Benjamin's feelings for the dead are closely connected, not only to his conception of messianism, but his notion of storytelling. 'Death' he writes, 'is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell' (Benjamin 1973, 94). Berger echoes this view wholeheartedly - and I do too in a way. At least inasmuch as I believe the dead communicate to the living a sense of the *presence of the now*; an issue which contemporary British socialists would do well to attend to. New Labour's project of 'modernisation' is dedicated to a future that never arrives, and a past that is rendered obsolete, as is the way with all such 'modernising' projects. One need only consider Labour's earlier 'modernising' project of the 1960s to realise this. As Raymond Williams makes plain in The May Day Manifesto 1968,

Modernisation is, indeed, the "theology" of a new capitalism. It opens up a perspective of change, but at the same time it mystifies the process and sets limits to it. Attitudes, habits, techniques, practices must change: the system of economic and social power, however, remains unchanged ... Modernisation is the ideology of the never-ending present. The whole past belongs to a 'traditional' society, and modernisation is a technical means for breaking with

the past without creating a future (Williams 1968, 45).

You may think my assessment of New Labour is unduly harsh, in which case I will leave the last word - at least of this introduction - to Tony Blair, who, in two speeches in 1997 indicated what he meant by 'modernisation'. In his post-electoral victory speech to the Labour Party Conference, Blair declared that, 'Modernisation is not an end in itself: it is for a purpose' (quoted in White 1997). This purpose, he explained to the TUC, was the attainment of 'a more just society'; a society in which the 'flexibility of the labour market' can be maintained (quoted in Milne and Millar 1997). 'The world has changed', Blair tells us, '[b]ut I am a modern man leading a modern country, and this is a modern crisis' (quoted in White 1997). Postmodernism beckons.

Chapter One

A Question of Geography

Introduction

In this chapter I would like to consider some 'straightforward' questions about postmodernism. What does postmodernism mean? Is it a useful critical term? Where and how is it talked about? Unfortunately, these questions are far from straightforward. Since the 1980's the discourse of postmodernism has proliferated within the academy and into the 'wider world', with the term postmodern seemingly behaving as a 'floating signifier' to be attached to any number of diverse and often contradictory trends and signifieds. To use the term 'postmodernism' entails entry into a debate, 'aware', as Patricia Waugh notes, of 'its self-cancelling reference to its own status as a provisional concept' (Waugh 1992, 38); and always, as Fredric Jameson notes, with the 'obligation to rehearse' the term's 'inner contradictions and to stage' its 'representational inconsistencies and dilemmas ... every time around' (Jameson 1991, xxii). Postmodernism, then, according to Linda Hutcheon, is 'not so much a concept as a problematic' (Hutcheon 1989: 15). And different theorists' interventions within this problematic have produced very different results: for example, where Hutcheon reads 'historiographic metafiction', Jameson reads 'postmodern "fantastic historiography"', to which he opposes a 'kind of spatial historiography' (Jameson 1991, 368-70). It is not my intention to provide a history of the meanings of the term 'postmodern', which I leave instead to theorists such as Hans Bertens, who notes in The Idea of the Postmodern that a 'history of the debate on the postmodern is', in any case, 'a doubtful enterprise' (Bertens 1995, 17). Yet it will be necessary to start mapping a number of the terms surrounding postmodernism in order to provide some provisional definitions and positions, and to locate myself within the debate. Of course, in saying this, it also becomes necessary to rehearse the representational inconsistencies of terms such as 'mapping' and 'location'; and to note that any mapping of postmodernism therefore requires an interrogation of the relation between the spatial metaphors of theory, and the material production of space and place. This problematic, I believe, occurs most notably in dominant theorisations of the postmodern metropolis: in the contradictions which occur between the spatial metaphors employed in postmodernist discourse, the spaces and places of the postmodern metropolis, and the metropolitan location of the discourse of postmodernism.

I will begin, therefore, by mapping the postmodern debate, with the intention of providing an oppositional criticism that reads against the grain of the dominant debate's construction of the postmodern. This will involve the dialogical construction of modernisms/ postmodernisms, which will be differentiated from an aestheticised ahistorical interpretation of a unitary modern or postmodern condition. Secondly, I will consider the problematic use of the spatial terms and metaphors of postmodern discourse in dialogic relation to the spaces and places of the postmodern metropolis - and thereby problematise the place of theory itself. Thirdly, I will consider Berger's location in the margins of the postmodern metropolis in order to begin to theorise the possibility of a radical writing practice located in the margins of the postmodern debate.

Mapping the debate

According to Hans Bertens, the 'initial confusions surrounding the debate on postmodernism ... have everything to do with its origins in the American critical scene, with American criticism's specific, and narrow, idea of modernism' (17). Postmodernism, in this case, is viewed in relation to modernism. But does postmodernism entail a reproduction of certain modernist practices, a radical break with modernism, or an academic, postmodern re-reading of modernism? And how does this postmodernism relate to descriptions of the postmodern condition as a disbelief in the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment Project, or 'time-space compression', or the supersession of postmodern 'reality' by simulacra? What, in other words, is the relation between the modern, modernism, modernity, and the postmodern, postmodernism and postmodernity? Indeed, is it useful to start using 'post-' in the first place, and who is using it?

To interrogate these questions I will begin with Alex Callinicos's identification of the convergence of three interrelated but distinct cultural trends associated with postmodernism (Callinicos 1989, 1-3). The first refers to changes in the 'arts' generally, and the movement away from modernism; an architectural example being the move from Le Corbusier to Robert Venturi. The second refers to the philosophies of 'poststructuralism', 'giving conceptual expression to the themes explored by contemporary artists' (2). The third refers to changes in the political economy, from the industrial to the postindustrial economy. It is my intention to use these distinctions to suggest the following

provisional terminology: the debated change in aesthetic and philosophical discourses will be referred to as the relation of modernism to postmodernism; the debated change in sociological discourse or political economy will be referred to as the relation of modernity to postmodernity; and the terms modern or postmodern will be used to identify the overall relation. It must be noted, however, that these distinctions are provisional constructs, since, for instance, the condition of modernity obviously owes a great deal to the modernist philosophies of the Enlightenment; and, more importantly, postmodernism is, in part, a critique or deconstruction of precisely these types of division and hierarchy.¹⁰ However, that being noted, it is my intention to initially intervene by mobilising this provisional (possibly modern) terminology to consider the work of three major theorists of the modern/postmodern debate, J-F Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, in order to demonstrate the problems of periodisation and 'place' in their constructions and elisions of modernism/postmodernism and modernity/postmodernity.

In Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism Jameson explicitly links postmodernism and postmodernity in a 'periodising hypothesis' which suggests that postmodernism should not be read as a 'stylistic description', but rather as the 'cultural dominant' of multinational capitalism: a 'cultural periodisation of the stages of realism, modernism, and postmodernism [that] is both inspired and confirmed by [Ernest] Mandel's tripartite scheme' (36). Jameson counters the 'powerful alternative position that postmodernism is itself little more than one more stage of modernism proper', by noting that there has been a 'mutation in the sphere of culture' whereby Picasso and Joyce 'are no longer ugly'; thus, even if a contemporary cultural product possesses formal modernist features it is inevitably changed because of its postmodernist context (4). More precisely, 'What has happened is that aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production generally' (4); thus, Jameson identifies the most important area of commodification as belonging to the sphere of representation itself. Indeed, Jameson's tripartite scheme appears roughly homologous with the tripartite order of simulacra in Baudrillard's essay 'The Precession of Simulacra': the 'first order' of the 'counterfeit' ushering in the shift

¹⁰ I must emphasise that this differentiation between postmodernism(s) and postmodernity(s) is also a *strategic* construct: one could also differentiate between *modern* philosophies and *modernist* cultural production, as well as within different *modernist* media. As Cornel West notes: 'It is clear that "modern" philosophy begins in the seventeenth century, well before the Enlightenment ... This trajectory is very different from that of *modernist* literary practices, which in turn is quite different from that of architecture ...' (West 1989, 272).

from the feudal to the modern world; the 'second order' belonging to the industrial revolution; and the 'third order of simulacra' in which models begin to determine 'reality' in a hyperreal implosion. Thus, both Jameson and Baudrillard offer periodisations of postmodernism as 'cultural dominant' or 'third order of simulacra' in relation to a postmodernity of, respectively, multinational capital or a 'structural law of value'. In both cases their postmodernism/ postmodernity is seen as part of a radical break with modernism/modernity.

J-F Lyotard, however, does not offer such a tidy periodisation. In 'Defining the Postmodern' Lyotard's aim is 'not at all to resolve' the 'term "postmodern"' and 'close the debate, but to open it' (Lyotard 1989, 7). Lyotard also distinguishes three debates: 'First, the opposition between postmodernism and modernism, or the Modern Movement (1910-1945) in architectural theory' (7). But Lyotard remarks that this "'post-", in the term "postmodernist"... is to be understood in the sense of simple succession, of a diachrony of periods ... [a] chronology that is totally modern' (8). Thus, this "'breaking" is, rather a manner of forgetting or repressing the past. That's to say of repeating it. Not overcoming it' (8). In these terms, Jameson and Baudrillard are not offering adequate accounts of postmodernism/postmodernity, because their philosophical approach is not really postmodern, but rather utterly modern. This accords with Lyotard's conception in 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', 'that 'A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant' (Lyotard 1984, 79). Lyotard's 'second connotation of the term "postmodern", and I admit that I am at least partly responsible for the misunderstanding associated with this meaning' is that one 'can note a sort of decay in the confidence placed by the last two centuries in the idea of progress' (Lyotard 1989, 8); a passing allusion to his 'incredulity towards metanarratives' stated in The Postmodern Condition. 'The third argument' deals with the 'question of postmodernity' which is 'also the question of the expressions of thought: art, literature, philosophy, politics'; where Lyotard chooses to resist the 'dominant idea ... that the big movement of avant-gardism is over' and to compare the work of artists with 'anamnesis which takes place in psychoanalytical therapy' (10).

This being granted, the "post-" of postmodernity does not mean a process of coming back or flashing back, feeding back, but of *ana*-lysing, *ana*-mnesing, of reflecting (10).

Lyotard's position thereby reveals Baudrillard's or Jameson's theorisation to be a 'post-' that breaks with and represses the past, and is therefore unintentionally modern.¹¹

Lyotard's conception of 'ana-lysing' aside, there are a number of other problems with Jameson's periodisation. While Jameson's case 'depends on the hypothesis of some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950's or the Early 1960's' (Jameson 1991, 1), Mike Davis notes that Mandel's Late Capitalism locates the 'break' at the end of the 'long wave' that concluded with the slump of 1974-75; and that Jameson does not make 'sufficient clarification between the experience of (post-)modernity and the vision of (post-)modernism' (Davis 1985, 197).¹² Equally, Jameson's late capitalist cultural spatialisation, with its crisis of historicity, and schizophrenic, depthless pastiche, which he views as the dominant postmodernism, does not adequately theorise any emergent or oppositional postmodernism (see Nicholls 1991; Kellner 1990). And, of course, this is to say nothing of Jameson's sometimes contradictory attempts to reinsert a Hegelian Marxist metanarrative within the postmodern/ postmodernism/ postmodernity debate (see Callinicos 1989).¹³

However, while Jameson's theory is not without its faults - some of which are supplied by a reading of Lyotard - it is also quite clear that the reverse is also true; and that Jameson's theorisation of the postmodern can be just as effectively turned against Lyotard's to reveal a number of faults in his work. For example, Lyotard's third point concerning postmodernity appears merely to repeat his first point on postmodernism, thereby eliding specific cultural and sociological discourses. What, then, has happened to the political economy of postmodernity? Jameson's theorisation of postmodernism as the 'cultural dominant' of late capitalist postmodernity suggests that Lyotard's conception of 'slackening' risks slipping into ahistoricism; a point that Terry Eagleton, writing of

¹¹ This 'divergence' is taken up by Peter Nicholls in his essay, 'Divergences: Modernism, Postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard' (Nicholls 1991).

¹² A criticism which could also be levelled at Terry Eagleton who, in The Illusions of Postmodernism, declares that, 'This distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity seems to me useful, but it is not one which I have particularly respected in this book. I have tended to stick to the more familiar term "postmodernism" to cover both of these things, since they are clearly closely related' (Eagleton 1996, viii). Perhaps Eagleton only finds 'illusions' because he doesn't get around to theorising exactly how postmodernism and postmodernity are 'closely related'.

¹³ This Hegelian approach has always been a problem with Jameson's work. As Jaime Concha notes in the 'Foreword' to Neil Larsen's Modernism and Hegemony, Jameson's 'critical method ... because of its tendency to unify synthetically heterogeneous points of view, at times fails to criticise other methods that offer incompatible concepts of literature' (Concha 1990, ix).

Lyotard, forcefully makes in 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism':

The "modern" is less a particular cultural practice or historical period, which may then suffer defeat or incorporation, than a kind of permanent ontological possibility of disrupting all such historical periodisation, an essentially timeless gesture which cannot be recited or reckoned up within historical narrative because it is no more than an atemporal force which gives the lie to all such linear categorisation (Eagleton 1985, 135).

In fact, Lyotard's description of the postmodern appears to repress an epochal periodisation of its own. As John Rundell notes, there is an 'internal tension between Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition and the later essay 'Answering the question: What is Postmodernism?' (Rundell 1990, 157). According to Rundell, the 'relation between modernity and postmodernity is temporalised' in The Postmodern Condition; 'modernity is the age of metanarratives *per se*, of Enlightenment discourses', whereas postmodernity is precisely 'typified by an incredulity about metanarratives, located in the so-called post-industrial centres of the world' (159). Like Jameson, Lyotard's 'post-' can also be interpreted as a residually modern mode of thinking, and part of the linear chronology of modernity.¹⁴

There is also the problem of where this debate, these reconstructions of modernism/postmodernism, modernity/postmodernity are 'placed', and the 'spaces' excluded - of feminism and postcolonialism. Jameson, for instance, seeks to

remind the reader of the obvious; namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and terror (Jameson 1991, 5).

But it is not clear how Jameson's cultural dominant of postmodernism applies to those who have to live with the 'piles of bones and rivers of blood' (Chomsky

¹⁴ In his 'Introduction' to The Postmodern Condition, Jameson makes a similar point when he notes that Lyotard's 'revival of an essentially narrative view of "truth" and the vitality of small narrative units at work everywhere *locally* in the present social system, is accompanied by something like a more global or totalising "crisis" in the narrative function in general' (Jameson 1984a, xi). In other words, it could be maintained that Lyotard is not only repressing an epochal periodisation, he is also repressing the meta-narrative status of his story of the end of metanarratives. It is for this reason, therefore, that Jürgen Habermas considers Lyotard to be guilty of a performative contradiction: i.e., that he employs 'modernistic attitudes' to justify 'an irreconcilable antimodernism' (Habermas 1985, 15). Lyotard, needless to say, disagrees; instead, he suggests that his work is a 'little narrative [*petit récit*]' - which 'remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science ...' (Lyotard 1984, 60).

1992, 70). It is this postcolonial 'space' within integrated world capitalism that is sometimes neglected, elided or absorbed by postmodernist discourse. To take a 'non-Third World' example, it is more than problematic to discern how postmodern, decentred subjectivity applies to Japanese culture, which feasibly never possessed modern, centred subjectivity in the first place; as Jameson is no doubt aware, and as Masao Miyoshi and H.D Harootunian consider in Postmodernism and Japan (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989). Alternatively, one wonders exactly who Jameson is talking about when he notes that Picasso and Joyce are 'no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather "realistic"' (Jameson 1991, 4). Who is this 'us'? Perhaps they are 'realistic' to somebody immersed in the culture of European and American modernism, who has read and re-read Joyce, but what about the wider public who might not even be so sure what modernism 'was'? This might, of course, actually be a 'symptom' of postmodernism's loss of historicity, but Edward Said is also surely right to note that 'Jameson's assumed constituency is an audience of cultural-literary critics' (Said 1985, 140).

A similar Franco-American axis and cultural constituency can be constructed for Baudrillard and Lyotard. Indeed, Baudrillard's exhortations about America often resort to the most hackneyed, racist and sexist clichés: America as 'realised utopia' (those brash Americans 'do' it, European 'intellectuals' theorise it); America as 'desert', or as 'primitive'; and those New York 'women' etc. (see Kellner 1989). Lyotard is not so 'vulgar' as Baudrillard, but his (postmodern) narrative of postmodern 'incredulity towards metanarratives' can also be read as a 'performative contradiction' and imperialist pronouncement: a rational exposition of the post-rational that simultaneously celebrates the 'play' of difference while sneaking in a totalising Western metanarrative through the back door. As the Muslim critic Ziauddin Sardar has declared in 'The Postmodern Age':

Contrary to popular belief, secularism [in the Occident] did not actually produce a decline in religiosity, it simply transferred religious devotion from the concerns of the Church to the rational concerns of this world. Since the Enlightenment, this religiosity has been expressed in nationalism, communism, fascism, scientism, modernism and has now built its nest in post-modernism (quoted in Gerholm 1994, 204).

As Tomas Gerholm notes, Sardar's criticism is that postmodernism's strong relativism is far from being humble. It is an oblique attack on all fundamentalisms, i.e. on all convictions that there is an absolute

truth, whether that truth be founded on Divine revelation or rationalist endeavour. The obliqueness lies in its readiness to tolerate foreign fundamentalisms. By doing that, relativism *de facto* states that there is no absolute truth. And if postmodernists and other relativists do tolerate such extravagant claims when they come from others, it is because they themselves know better (Gerholm 1994, 210).

According to this interpretation, Lyotard's postmodern condition is yet another backhanded Western compliment that purports to support heterogeneity, while simultaneously recuperating it within an 'Occidental' 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. As Lyotard all too clearly indicates, his own 'petit récit' is limited to the condition of knowledge in the most 'advanced' societies; which means - presumably - that paralogism is too 'imaginative' for those 'less' advanced countries still struggling with old-fashioned metanarratives like 'progress'. (A notion that is not too far removed from 'Western' pronouncements that 'non-Western' countries are unready for 'our' kind of democracy.) Maybe this is too harsh an indictment of Lyotard's conception of paralogism? What makes this question, or any inquiry into paralogism, difficult to interrogate is simply the fact that paralogism is by definition hard to pin down - it is premised on 'instability'. Of course, Lyotard makes this 'instability' a centre-piece of his argument, indicating that what others might consider as a performative contradiction is nothing less than paralogy itself:

What used to pass as paradox, and even paralogism, in the knowledge of classical and modern science can, in certain of these systems, acquire a new force of conviction and win the acceptance of the community of experts. The language game method I have followed here can claim a modest place in this current of thought (Lyotard 1984, 44).

In one sense this position is foolproof, since there is no way to argue against it: paradoxes become paralogisms; contradictions are creative. But where does Lyotard's argument take us? His report ends not with a bang but with a whimper: paralogism, it would appear, depends on giving 'the public free access to the memory and data banks', but there is no indication of how this ideal situation is actually going to be brought about (Lyotard 1984, 67). Ironically, Lyotard's narrative of postmodern knowledge, which is so indebted to the work of Paul Feyerabend, is given a more practicable 'method' (or 'anti-method') and developed much more usefully by Feyerabend himself, who notes that there are many scientists who have started to 'adapt their procedures to the values of the people they are supposed to advise' (Feyerabend 1993, 4). Which only serves -

once again - to raise the question of why the current condition has to be discussed as 'post-'modern?

Consideration of French theory, however, supplies an alternative position that does resist the use of the 'post-'. Thus, while Callinicos is correct to name one of the cultural trends associated with postmodernism as being post-structuralism, it must be added that although post-structuralism has been utilised by Anglo-American proponents of the postmodern, 'post-structuralist' originators such as Derrida and Foucault have not aligned themselves with this debate.¹⁵ Derrida's deconstructions are aimed at putting terms such as modernism 'under erasure', and are precisely not supposed to ontologically obliterate or 'post' them; as Derrida notes in interview with Christopher Norris:

As you know, I never use the word "post", the prefix "post"; and I have many reasons for this. One of those reasons is that this use of the prefix implies a periodisation or an epochalisation which is highly problematic for me. Then again, the word "post" implies that something is finished - that we can get rid of what went *before* Deconstruction, and I don't think anything of the sort. ... I tried - as I often do - to achieve and say many things at once. Of course I am "in favour" of the Enlightenment; I think we shouldn't simply leave it behind us, so I want to keep this tradition alive. But at the same time I know that there are certain historical forms of Enlightenment, certain things in this tradition that we need to criticise or to deconstruct. So it is sometimes in the name of, let us say, a *new* Enlightenment that I deconstruct a given Enlightenment. And this requires some very complex strategies; requires that we should let many voices speak ... That's why I'm reluctant to say that Deconstruction is Modern or Post-Modern ... we have to be very careful with the use of these epithets (Derrida 1989, 72-75).

Derrida's position appears to be more even-handed than Jürgen Habermas's announcement, located in post-Nazi, post-Auschwitz (West) Germany, that postmodernism is simply the work of 'young conservatives', and that modernity is an 'incomplete project' (Habermas 1985). However, is Derrida right to declare that the word "post" implies that something is finished'? As has already been noted, Lyotard's theorisation of the 'post' as 'ana-lysing' or 'ana-mnesing' would appear to contradict this; whereas Derrida's own suggestion of a '*new* Enlightenment' only implies a further problematic periodisation. If we are all irredeemably within the culture of postmodernism anyway, as Jameson suggests, isn't the problematic of *postmodernism* the best way to complete the

¹⁵ Callinicos also makes the useful distinction between Foucault's 'contextualist' post-structuralism of power/knowledge and Derrida's 'textualist' post-structuralism of deconstruction (Callinicos 1989, 68).

Enlightenment project, or at least rethink certain historical forms of Enlightenment?¹⁶ Consider Seyla Benhabib's Situating the Self. Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics, a work which is indebted to Habermas's attempt to 'rethink Enlightenment universalism' (Benhabib 1992, 2). 'A central premise' of the book is 'that the crucial insights of the universalist tradition in radical philosophy can be reformulated today without committing oneself to the metaphysical illusions of a self-transparent and self-grounding reason', since 'reason is the contingent achievement of linguistically socialised, finite and embodied creatures', and therefore 'the legislative claims of practical reason must also be understood in interactionist terms. We may mark a shift here from *legislative to interactive rationality*. This shift radically alters the conceptualisation of "the moral point of view"' - and allows Benhabib 'to "engender" the subject of moral reasoning' (4-8). Benhabib's theorisation of an 'interactive rationality' therefore echoes Lyotard's 'paralogy' and Feyerabend's call for a more publicly responsive science; paying heed to postmodernism, but without giving up on the Enlightenment project. And yet, what cannot be over-emphasised is that Benhabib's theorisation of an 'interactive rationality' uses the arguments 'initiated by feminism' as well as postmodernism in order to 'rethink Enlightenment universalism' (3); thereby raising the crucial issue of feminist criticisms of modern, Enlightenment rationality, and of feminism's highly uneven relationship with postmodernism (see Nicholson 1990; Morris 1992).

As is now widely accepted, 'one stream of thought which has been raising many of the same issues [as the postmodernism debate] and for far longer is feminism' (Massey 1994, 239); which begs Meaghan Morris's question of 'why the major narratives of "postmodernity" have in fact been produced by *Marxists* ... whose work 'depends [up]on a massive exclusion of feminism' (Morris 1992). Of course, one response to Morris's accusation might be to quibble over whether Jameson, Baudrillard and Lyotard *are* Marxists, and to suggest instead that they are post-Marxists, or ex-Marxists. However, to my mind, this simply dodges the issue.¹⁷ What is important to recognise here is that the Lyotard/Jameson/

¹⁶ According to Jameson, 'The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt. Ideological judgment on postmodernism today necessarily implies, one would think, a judgment on ourselves as well as on the artifacts in question' (Jameson 1984b, 63).

¹⁷ The question of moving 'beyond Marx' is a notoriously difficult one, but what should be clear is that post-Marxism and ex-Marxism will always involve some relation to Marxism - even if it is to argue against it. In the words of that (un)orthodox, (neo)Hegelian (post-)Marxist Jameson, performativity can always be 'rephrased as a question about Marxism' (Jameson 1984a, xiii). I will consider the question of post-Marxism more fully in the next chapter.

Baudrillard debate on the modern/postmodern has been produced by men who, while personally considering themselves to be progressive, radical, or of the 'left', nevertheless continue to ignore feminist issues in their writing practices. Indeed, from a feminist perspective it is all too clear that this supposedly radical debate continues to betray the all-too-traditional tendencies of the 'master subject' and its rationality: the assumption of a 'philosophically transcendent space of analysis', repressing the situated self, expelling the 'other', and imposing its own contingent claims as universals (Morris 1992, 273). And, once again, a similar point could be made in terms of the exclusion of postcolonialism and its critique of the modern Enlightenment project - an exclusion that occurs in the strangest places. As bell hooks notes, Morris's collection of essays, The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism and Postmodernism, usefully challenges 'male theoretical hegemony' by presenting a bibliography of works by women on issues related to postmodernism - but, 'There are no references to works by black women' (hooks 1991, 24).

What we learn from the above, then, is that the postmodern debate is not simply highly differentiated, but often contradictory and conflictual. My approach will be that it is necessary to think in terms of modernisms/postmodernisms and modernities/postmodernities, rather than any monolithic concept of a unitary modern or postmodern condition. And that a periodisation of these modernisms/postmodernisms and modernities/postmodernities is available which overcomes Lyotard's anamnesis (which, although it 'positively' avoids a residually modern binary of modernism/ postmodernism, also 'negatively' risks ahistoricism) by adapting Waugh's use of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope:

If we think in Bakhtinian terms, however, we can try to imagine the "post" as an engagement with, and modification rather than refutation of, the "modern", which involves a reciprocal openness (Waugh 1992, 60).

Of great use here is Peter Brooker's argument that

there are postmodernisms as well as modernisms, that between them there is the dialogic traffic of collage and argument, the building and unbuilding of orthodoxies. There is no absolute singular cultural entity or absolute historical break, therefore, and no absolute inside or outside apart from the ideological construction requiring them...

...A map which shows the South of England, the Eastern seaboard of North America, and which marks in Paris, Trieste, perhaps Berlin and Vienna but not Moscow, Petrograd or Milan is not an

acceptable map of “the” world, but might be the map of a certain cultural mentality, and is, as it turns out, the “map” of an Anglo-American construction of modernism (Brooker 1992, 4).

Furthermore, I argue that in order to redraw the map, an oppositional criticism must, in effect, read the postmodern debate itself against the grain; because, as Raymond Williams notes, the dominant culture, ‘does not define the whole of culture, though it tries to, and it is the task of the oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalised voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed, and excluded’ (quoted in Lentricchia 1983, 15).

However, it must be noted that while such an oppositional criticism avoids the ideological exclusions of the dominant map of the modern and postmodern, it is also necessary to consider the representational inconsistencies involved in ‘mapping’ - and associated spatial terms such as location, place, margin, and position. In other words, it is also necessary to interrogate the equally important dialogic relation between the metaphorical ‘terrain’ of cultural theory and the ‘actual’ terrain of radical geography; a dialogue which is often repressed in postmodernist discourse, and which occurs most problematically in dominant theorisations of the postmodern city or metropolis. It is my intention, therefore, to read the dominant theorisation of a unitary postmodern urbanity against the grain, and thereby re-consider those important questions of ‘geography’ which ‘hinge’ on the relative production of ‘real’ and metaphorical spaces and places.

Global cities and postmetropolises

In his essay, ‘Modernity, Postmodernity and the City’, Philip Cooke adapts and extends Marshall Berman’s theorisation of modernity and the city, to consider postmodernity and the city. According to Cooke, Berman uses the term modernity as a specific ‘mediating concept’ to link ‘two related transformative processes’: firstly, ‘modernisation, a diverse unity of socioeconomic changes ... driven by the expanding capitalist world market’; and secondly, ‘modernism’, which is the ‘cultural vision which attends ... this unleashing of change’ (Cooke 1988, 475). Crucially, ‘Berman’s approach to defining modernity’ is made ‘through accounts of early modern Paris, Petersburg and modern New York’: the paradigmatic experience of modernity is to be found in the experience of city life (478). Cooke notes that such a theorisation of modernity does ‘raise questions’,

and duly considers the work of Perry Anderson, Fredric Jameson, Mike Davis, and the 'development of the debate beyond modernity to *postmodernism*' (including a quick nod towards Lyotard's 'alternative theorisation'); however, Cooke insists that most 'Criticism of Berman's thesis tends to be sympathetic and to remain on the terrain of debate which his work has created' (476). In other words, we are confronted with the familiar 'terrain' of the dominant postmodern debate 'mapped' above, albeit with a small but significant difference in terminology: where I use the term modernity/postmodernity to refer to the debated change in the political economy, Cooke refers to 'modernisation' and 'postmodernisation'; while, in his terms, 'modernity' is 'the experience of the economic process and the cultural vision' (475).

What, then, are the characteristics of Cooke's postmodernisation? Cooke offers a 'markedly uneven', 'socio-spatial paradigm' of postmodernisation which consists of the following characteristics: 'the empirical divergence of income and unemployment indices between the classes and the regions'; 'production disposed towards customised output'; 'economic development occurring in areas of privatised consumption (the outer-metropolitan "sunbelt")'; and 'labour market opportunities' that are 'limited and insecure - e.g. the growth of casualization, part-time working, informal activity' (483-5). For Cooke, 'hyperspatial', postmodernist buildings and cities only become 'comprehensible in the socio-economic context of postmodernisation, class polarisation, labour over-supply, capital over-accumulation .. and "overconsumption"'; a theorisation which is clearly and consciously indebted to Mike Davis's work on Los Angeles and the 'spirit of postmodernism' (485). Furthermore, it is Cooke's belief that the 'picture portrayed here for the UK echoes that presented for the USA by Davis'; and he states that the British 'locales in which the postmodern socio-spatial paradigm is most pronounced are mostly, though not exclusively Southern, small-to-medium tentacles of London', including, for example, Guildford, Slough and Cambridge. 'Elsewhere,' he notes, "'southern" towns in the North include successes such as Chester, York, Lincoln and Lancaster, post-Roman and postmodern' (483-5).

How useful is Cooke's paradigm? Leaving aside the fact that his periodisation of (post-Roman?) postmodernisation is 'contrasted with the 1945-75 period' of modernisation (making the pre-1945 era one of pre-modernisation?), there are a number of equally problematic socio-spatial difficulties involved in the theorisation of 'outer-metropolitan', 'southern towns in

the North'. Does this theorisation mean that the 'spirit' of Los Angeles and Lincoln are the same; or that the terms town, city and metropolis are simply interchangeable - pointing only to some 'bigish' conurbation? According to Thomas Angotti the metropolis is not just a bigger city or town, but has a 'qualitatively distinct character' based on the historical development of the division of labour, where the 'spatial division of functions corresponds with the economic division of labour': in other words, the metropolis is indeed larger and more populated (Angotti uses the 'threshold of one million' people), but more importantly he notes that,

The critical economic and social criterion is specialisation of function...It is the consummate service centre ... the metropolis exerts a central leadership role in all economic activity ... [It] is an international centre, the place whence control over capital investment around the world is exercised (Angotti 1993, 17-22).¹⁸

If Angotti is correct, then the term 'city', in discussion of the 'postmodern city', should be replaced by the more historically accurate socio-spatial term, 'metropolis'. Cooke does not clarify this point, or make any explicit differentiation between 'town', 'city' and 'metropolis'. However, he does make 'two brief excursions' that suggest an implicit urban hierarchy. His 'excursions' - revealingly - are not to 'towns' such as Lincoln or Lancaster, but to postmodern Los Angeles and London (Cooke 1988, 486).¹⁹ Of course, it might be considered that such *nit-picking* over urban terminology unnecessarily problematises an otherwise uncomplicated issue; but if so, why does Cooke find it any more useful to define the socio-spatial forms of Los Angeles and London as 'postmodern' - and what does he mean by such a definition?

Let us consider Cooke's two 'excursions'. He forthrightly states that 'Los Angeles is a version of this overconsuming, socially polarised, global-local, postmodern urbanity of which [he has] been trying to write'; and, drawing on the work of Edward Soja, he takes us on a guided tour of the 'Sixty Mile Circle centred on City Hall' - down the 'corridors' of 'high technology jobs ... between,

¹⁸ Of course, such a theorisation need not and should not lapse into a binary dualism of the urban and the rural. Williams was one of the first to deconstruct this tendency in The Country and The City; noting in reference to English country-house poems that, 'The exploitation of man and of nature, which takes place in the country, is realised and concentrated in the city. But also, the profits of other kinds of exploitation - the accumulating wealth of the merchant, the lawyer, the court favourite - come to penetrate the country, as if, but only as if, they were a new social phenomenon' (Williams 1993, 64).

¹⁹ According to Angotti, Los Angeles and London are, respectively, the fifth and thirteenth largest metropolises in the world (Angotti 1993, 27).

neatly packaged socially graded tracts of residential space through segregated' ethnic enclaves and ghettos, and back to 'the heart of this matrix ... the Bonaventure' (496-7). It is unsurprising that at the 'heart' of the 'matrix' Cooke discovers the Bonaventure; but it is surprising to discover how deeply problematic this theorisation remains. Does Cooke mean that the space of the Bonaventure is literally at the 'heart' of Los Angeles; or/and that the hyperspace of the Bonaventure is metaphorically at the 'heart' of Soja and Jameson's theorisation; or/and that the 'heart' of the matrix is an allusion to his own physical/metaphorical 'position'? The nature of these spaces is not adequately theorised. Cooke's explanation depends on Soja's analysis of the Bonaventure as a "concentrated representation of the restructured spatiality of the Late Capitalist city", but Cooke does not *unpack* the critical meaning of Soja's spatiality (487). Whereas Soja is careful to note that 'the geography and history of capitalism intersect in a complex social process which creates a constantly evolving historical sequence of spatialities' (Soja 1989, 127), Cooke does not trace this complex process, or adequately differentiate between the different spaces that are at the 'heart of the matrix'. He simply moves on to London, which he declares to be the 'prototype for postmodern Los Angeles' - with its 'Manhattan-scale skyscrapers', such as the Nat West Tower (Cooke 1988, 487-9). As to whether the Nat West Tower is supposed to resemble (or prefigure) the Bonaventure, and if so, whether it can similarly be viewed as a concentrated representation of the restructured spatiality of London, Cooke does not say. Moreover, if the two buildings are compared, it quickly becomes apparent that there are a number of serious difficulties with Cooke's example.

Soja's theorisation of the Bonaventure is that it is "fragmented and fragmenting ... divertingly packaged yet curiously incomprehensible, seemingly open in presenting itself to view but constantly pressing to enclose" (quoted in Cooke 1988, 487). The Nat West Tower, on the other hand, is neither a hotel (it is an office complex), or curiously incomprehensible; it is boringly open to view, except, of course, when it is surrounded by the scaffolding needed to repair IRA bomb damage - something that demonstrates, even more concretely, the historical difference between Los Angeles and London. It might therefore be maintained that Cooke's theorisation is in serious danger of eliding the different spatialities of New York, Los Angeles and London (not to mention Lincoln and Cambridge) into one unitary postmodern urbanity. And yet even this statement is problematic, because Cooke never really defines what type of space(s) he is

theorising in the first place - conflating a number of different physical and figurative (hyper)spaces within his theorisation of the 'experience' of 'postmodernity' (i.e. what he terms 'the experience of the economic process and the cultural vision').

This being said, Cooke's 'excursions' into the 'terrain' of the city/the postmodern are not entirely without merit. If nothing else, his writing highlights the importance of coming to terms (so to speak) with spatiality. In order to provide a more precise definition of what spatialities and urbanities are under discussion, however, it will be useful to consider Saskia Sassen's theorisation of New York and London as 'global cities', and Edward Soja's theorisation of Los Angeles as a 'postmetropolis'.

Sassen proposes that, 'in order to understand the pronounced social and economic changes in major cities today, we need to examine fundamental aspects of the new world economy' (Sassen 1991, 323). This is the theory of 'globalisation'; that the capitalist system is now a truly global economy, as distinct from a world economy - or, as Manuel Castells defines it, 'an economy that works as a unit on real time on a planetary scale' (Castells 1992, 5). Sassen considers 'key trends' in the new economy, such as the 'growth of the international financial market', and concludes that 'a few cities emerge as leading centres': London, New York and Tokyo (Sassen 1991, 323). Her 'central thesis' is that 'increased globalisation ... has given major cities [global cities] a key role in the management and control' of the global economy, and her 'organising concept' is that the work that takes place there is what she terms 'the *practice* of global control - the activities involved in producing and reproducing the organisation and management of the global production system and global labour force' (324-5). This organising concept allows Sassen to consider the whole range of jobs that go into maintaining 'global control capability' - from senior management staff to cleaning staff, including 'undocumented immigrants' employed 'at below-average [wage] levels' (329). In particular, Sassen takes note of the 'massive tensions and congestions embedded in the spatial structure of large cities today', and concludes that the co-existence of the 'postindustrial [alongside those production processes] that look as though they belong to an earlier pre-industrial era', are not 'anomalous or exogenous to these advanced urban economies, but [are] in fact part of them' (331-7).

The strength of Sassen's analysis, then, is that it offers a precise account of the macro-economic space of capitalist globalisation. Granted, she may not refer to 'late capitalism' or 'postmodernity' *per se*, but her work undoubtedly provides the kind of empirical information with which to corroborate elements of Cooke's more abstract socio-spatial paradigm, as well as to critique his elision of London, New York and Los Angeles.²⁰

Having said this though, it is equally clear that the strength of Sassen's theorisation of the global city is also its main weakness: it is too 'economistic'. Whereas Cooke's theorisation of spatiality is marked by a slippage between a number of different concepts and definitions of space, Sassen's theorisation enforces an overly rigid one - where the spatial is superstructurally determined by social processes, but spatial processes have little or no material effect upon the social. And this economistic approach to the relationship between space and society is echoed in Sassen's reductive approach to the cultural sphere (and the 'experience' of the city); which probably explains why her theorisation of the global city excludes such culturally important cities as Los Angeles. In other words, Sassen's theorisation neglects those 'cultural' discourses on urbanity and spatiality which prioritise and problematise the issue of representation itself (including, of course, the problematic use of the term 'city').

The question is, therefore, whether the strength of a macro-economic analysis such as Sassen's can effectively be retained in any wider discussion of a postmodern urbanity or radical cultural politics?²¹ It is a difficult question to answer. However, Edward Soja believes it can be answered - and positively so. In his essay, 'Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis', and in his new book Thirdspace, he declares his intention to take account of 'the injection of critical cultural studies into the more traditionally social scientific analysis of urbanism', without succumbing to the view that this also entails that 'all macro-level

²⁰ For more details on the 'global city' debate see Urban Studies's special issue on globalisation (Dieleman and Hamnett 1994), and William I. Robinson's essay, 'Globalisation: Nine Theses on our Epoch' (Robinson 1996, 13). In contrast, Ira Katznelson's book, Marxism and the City, provides a good example of orthodox Marxist work on the city (Katznelson 1992).

²¹ For a concise summary of theorisations of urbanity 'from below', such as Benjamin's flâneur, De Certeau, situationist psycho-geography, Bakhtinian dialogical cities, etc., see Bob Shields's essay, 'A Guide to Urban Representation and What to Do About It: Alternative Traditions of Urban Theory' (Shields 1996).

perspectives [are] taboo, off-limits, [and] politically incorrect' (Soja 1997, 22).²² How successful is he in doing this? And how successfully does he avoid the pitfalls of Cooke's and Sassen's theorisations of spatiality and urbanity?

Soja believes it is necessary to make a few prefatory remarks before identifying the 'six discourses' he wishes to consider. Firstly, he states that his work deals primarily with Los Angeles, for the good reason that 'the transformation of Los Angeles represents both a unique urban experience and a particularly vivid example of a more general sea change in the very nature of contemporary *urban process*' (Soja 1997, 19). What this announcement demonstrates, I believe, is that - in contrast to Cooke's elision of Los Angeles, London and New York, and Sassen's focus on London and New York at the expense of Los Angeles - Soja is keen to avoid the criticism that he is either being too general or too particular. According to him, 'the changes that are being described or represented by these six discourses are happening not only in Los Angeles but, in varying degrees and, to be sure, unevenly developed in space and time, all over the world' (20).

Secondly, Soja declares that, although radical changes in contemporary 'urban life ... [and] modes of urban analysis' need to be taken into account, 'we must', he insists, 'understand the new urbanisation and urbanism without discarding our older understanding ... [of the] complex relations between social process and spatial form, as well as spatial process and social form - what [he] once called the socio-spatial dialectic' (20). This is an important point, and one that Sassen and Cooke would have done well to attend to, particularly now that the socio-spatial dialectic is - at least according to Soja - 'significantly different' (20).

Thirdly, Soja deliberately introduces a new term into the debate, 'postmetropolis', in order to draw attention, not only to the new urbanisation, but also to the difficulties involved in its theorisation. As he notes, 'postmetropolis' can be used 'as a general term to accentuate the differences between contemporary urban regions and those consolidated in the middle decades of the twentieth century', and it can be used more precisely to invoke the 'notion of post-industrial ... post-Fordist and post-Keynesian political economies and post-

²² As Soja notes, 'Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis' (anthologised in Imagining Cities) is 'adapted from a keynote address presented at the annual meetings of the British Sociological Association' in 1995, and also occurs in a modified form in Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Soja 1997, 30).

structuralist and post-colonial modes of critical analysis' (19-20). In other words, postmetropolis is less a concept than a problematic (to paraphrase Linda Hutcheon's discussion of postmodernism), and this marks a vast improvement on theorisations such as Cooke's. For example, if Soja uses 'the term postmetropolis as opposed to the late modern metropolis', he is 'not saying that the latter has disappeared or been completely displaced, even in Los Angeles', but rather that the 'overlays and articulations are becoming thicker and denser' (20). Which, in comparison to Cooke's assertion that London is the prototype for the postmodern city of Los Angeles, makes for a more historically and geographically accurate analysis.

For Soja the usefulness of the postmetropolitan problematic therefore cuts two ways: it allows him to emphasise that his 'own work ... [is] part of this increasingly transdisciplinary field' of fashionable *posts*; and also to dutifully reiterate his serious concern at the

over-privileging of what has been called, often with reference to the work of Michel de Certeau, the "view from below" - studies of the local, the body, the streetscape, psycho-geographies of intimacy, erotic subjectivities, the micro-worlds of everyday life - at the expense of understanding the structuring of the city as a whole, the more macro-view of urbanism, the political economy of the urban process (21).

Indeed, Soja feels that he has to make this point over and over again, noting that,

The six discourses I will be presenting are ... precisely the kinds of discourses being hammered at by those micro-urban critics who see in them only the distorting, if not repressive, gaze of authoritative masculinist power, the masterful "view from above" (21) .

Only after spelling out all of the above does Soja believe 'we are ready to begin examining the six discourses' - which he identifies as follows: the 'flexcity', the 'cosmopolis', the 'exopolis', 'metropolarities', 'carceral archipelagos', and 'simcities' (22). According to Soja, the 'first two discourses tend to present themselves as capturing (and effectively theorising) the most powerful processes causing the restructuring of the late modern metropolis' (26). The discourse of the flexcity, or 'post-Fordist industrial metropolis', he writes, 'has become perhaps the hegemonic academic discourse in attempting to explain the differences between the late modern (Fordist) metropolis and the post (Fordist) metropolis' (23). In particular, he notes, the discourse of the cosmopolis, of 'globalisation and world city formation', has been taken up by '[s]ociologists' (24). '[T]he

second pair' of discourses, on the other hand, 'concern themselves primarily with the empirical consequences of these processes' (26). The discourse of the exopolis, he writes, focuses on 'the restructuring of urban form and the growth of edge cities, outer cities and postsuburbia' (22); while the discourse of metropolarities is concerned mostly with 'the restructured social mosaic and the emergence of new polarisations and inequalities' (22). Finally, he notes, 'the third pair [of discourses] explores what might be described as the societal response to the effects of urban restructuring in the postmetropolis' (27). The discourse of carceral archipelagos concentrates 'on the rise of fortress cities, surveillance technologies and the substitution of police for *polis*' (23); while the discourse of the simcity considers how 'simulations of a presumably real world increasingly capture and activate our urban imaginary and infiltrate everyday urban life' (28).

Soja's summary of these discourses is a self-styled *cutting-edge* account of the new urbanism; but it is also *cutting* in other ways, by which I mean, it is certainly not tempered by courtesy to professional colleagues or solidarity with intellectual comrades. Soja is nothing if not acerbic, and he stridently declares his opposition to the discourse of the carceral archipelago 'dominated' by Mike Davis's study of Los Angeles, City of Quartz (27). In fact, he sarcastically alludes to it as 'the best anti-theoretical, anti-postmodernist, historicist, nativist and masculinist book written about a city' (27). Cooke is not mentioned by name, but given the fact that his theorisation draws extensively on Davis's book he is guilty by association; while work such as Sassen's is dismissed merely as old hat. According to Soja's schematic, her 'global city' thesis can be categorised as belonging to the discourses of the cosmopolis, metropolarity, and flexcity - which is a good and a bad thing. It is a good thing inasmuch as her work is sociologically accurate, but bad inasmuch as it fails to take into account all those issues raised within the discourses of the exopolis, carceral archipelago, and simcity.

Of course, Soja claims to be even-handed, and 'do[es] not want to deny the importance of [such] research and interpretive emphases', but he does feel compelled to 'note the dangers of a sort of Manhattanised or Londonised myopia' which,

tends to inhibit more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the spatiality of globalisation and the new cultural politics of identity and difference ... [and] widens the breach

between more sociological studies of globalisation and the increasingly spatialised cultural studies approaches to interpreting the postmetropolis (25).

Any way you look at it, this is a pretty savage indictment of work such as Sassen's. What one can't help wondering though, is how much more 'sophisticated' Soja's theorisation of urbanity and spatiality is? Or, more pointedly, whether it holds up to the kind of combatative criticism he himself meats out? It is to these questions that I would now like to turn.

Lost in space

On the face of it, Soja's work appears to correspond with my own thesis in a number of ways. His theorisation of the postmetropolis might easily be read in terms of my construction of a dialogical collage of (post)modernisms and (post)modernities. Similarly, his declared intention to draw on cultural theory without losing sight of more sociological analyses of globalisation bears more than a passing resemblance to my commitment to a radicalised Enlightenment project (particularly as regards the idea that the theorisation of the modern/postmodern problematic demands a strategic combination of macro-level and micro-level perspectives). Only one problem remains - the disparity between Soja's declared intentions and his actual theoretical practice.

Consider Soja's analysis of Los Angeles. A not too difficult proposition, cynics might say, given the fact that Los Angeles occupies Soja's entire vision of the postmetropolitan. (If you bandy around terms like myopia, you have to be careful you're not too short-sighted yourself.) As has already been noted, Soja's defence of his position is that 'the changes that are being described or represented by these six discourses are happening not only in Los Angeles but, in varying degrees and, to be sure, unevenly developed in space and time, all over the world' (20). But how often can one peer at 'th[e] precession of simulacra and the growing hyper-reality' of Los Angeles without glancing elsewhere (27)? In practice, Soja's work returns us, again and again, to the heart of the matrix, the Bonaventure, which he claims,

reflects the very nature of postmodern experience, both literally and figuratively [The] Bonaventure has been a focal point of the debate on postmodernism, ever since its discovery as a postmodern hyperspace by Fredric Jameson. It began with Fredric

Jameson's own personal experience in the Bonaventure hotel in a professional meeting, where most of the people ... found themselves getting lost within the interior space of the Bonaventure hotel ... The only way you can understand the nature of the argument that Jameson and others have developed over the years is to actually move in and move through the Bonaventure hotel. It's a landscape that is highly fragmented, it's a space that decentres you, makes you feel lost, dislocated, you feel that your only recourse is to submit to authority... One enters the building and one sees a kind of bastille-like fortress... The external elevators going up and down, presumably showing that the outside is inside and the inside is outside, the very metaphor, by the way, of the postmodern city itself, the outside becoming inside, the periphery becoming central, becoming decentred from one's conventional understanding of behaviour in the inner city .. Postmodernism is not the construction of simple Disney worlds of fantasy, but is the production of a kind of hyperreality [according to Baudrillard] that is more "real" than reality itself, and it's a "reality" which has tremendous attractions.²³

There are a great many things that can and should be said about this startling proclamation (and I will return to it again later), but the first and most overwhelming point to make is that it clearly demonstrates the Los Angelised myopia of the dominant postmetropolitan debate: i.e., the construction of a unitary postmodern urbanity which 'marginalises' the very different (post)modernisms/(post)modernities of the so-called 'Second' or 'Third Worlds', as well as large sections of the 'First World'.

Don't get me wrong, I am categorically *not* stating that Los Angeles should be ignored, and/or that its specific historic spatiality is unimportant. On the contrary, I believe micro-level perspectives of cultural developments in Los Angeles are of *global* significance (after all, in a very simple sense, what gets filmed on Venice Beach appears on my television screen in London). Soja is right to consider Los Angeles in his book Postmodern Geographies; and to consider it again in Postmetropolis. However, is it really necessary to consider it *yet again* in Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places? As Stuart Elden notes, Soja's claim that Los Angeles 'is the place where "it all comes together"' is hard to argue with, 'but to use the tools of postmodernism continually to examine one particular place, and with only a cursory nod toward its history, may blunt their critical edge' (Elden 1997). The

²³ Soja's statement is taken from a television interview, broadcast in 1997 as part of BBC2's 'Open Saturday' programme. The extract is also reproduced as 'L.A.: City of the Future' in the Open University course, 'Understanding Modern Societies' (see Hall, Held, McGrew 1992).

question Elden poses to Soja is almost too obvious: 'What *about* Huddersfield?'. Which is to say, what light does an analysis of Los Angeles shed on the historical sequence of Huddersfield's spatialities? Or, more precisely, what is the *relation* between Los Angeles and other (real-and-imagined) urbanities like Huddersfield? Soja mentions questions such as these, but he never actually gets around to answering them. It is one thing to note that there is an uneven relationship between Los Angeles and the rest of the world, but it quite another to consider the banal but necessary details that constitute that relationship.²⁴

The problems with Soja's optic, however, do not end there - his Los Angelised myopia also involves a certain tunnel vision. As I have already noted, Soja repeatedly declares that his six discourses are precisely those which are 'being hammered at by ... micro-urban critics who see in them only the distorting if not repressive, gaze of authoritative masculinist power, the masterful "view from above"' (Soja 1997, 21). What Soja does not seem to (want to) consider though, is that one reason why they are being hammered is because some discourses *are* masculinist, including his own.

Consider Soja's statement that 'the only way you can understand the nature of the [postmetropolitan] argument is to actually move in and through the space of the Bonaventure'. Apart from the fact that this presumably means you have to actually visit the Bonaventure (which is not always feasible), it also implies that everyone experiences space in the same way. But do they? As Elizabeth Wilson and Janet Wolff note in connection with the figure of the *flâneur*, although men in the nineteenth century had the freedom to idly stroll and gaze about the modern metropolis, women had no such liberty - unless, that is, they dressed like 'men'.²⁵ What is more, there is every reason to believe that women's movements through and experiences of postmetropolitan space continue to be

²⁴ Leaving aside such complex issues as the difference between the historical sequence of Huddersfield's and Los Angeles's spatialities, what about the question of climatic difference? Los Angeles is warmer, which means it can entertain a whole range of fashions, streetscapes, beachscapes and cultures which are 'poles apart' from those in Huddersfield. In fact, climate is even pertinent to the discussion of Disney 'worlds' (hyperreal or otherwise) since one of the reasons Walt Disney chose Anaheim as the site for Disneyland was because of the 'good' weather. (Disneyworld, similarly, is located in Orlando, not Seattle.) Perhaps this point seems facile, but if it is acknowledged that the 'spectacle' of sand, sea and scantily-clad babes is a significant part of the relationship between Los Angeles and the rest of the world, it must also be acknowledged that one of the reasons why the babes are perennially on the beach in Los Angeles and not in Huddersfield is precisely because of the climate.

²⁵ As regards Wolff's work, see Chapter Three of Feminine Sentences, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity' (Wolff 1990). The most relevant of Wilson's essays is 'The Invisible Flâneur' (1992a), but see also The Sphinx in the City (1991).

rigorously disciplined by numerous power/discourses, including the discourses of 'race', 'class', 'sexuality', 'ethnicity', and so on. Women in 'Third World' postmetropolises (are expected to) comport themselves in public in a manner which is very different to women in the 'First World'. Similarly, lower-class women loitering in expensive hotel lobbies run a far greater risk than men of being labelled 'loose'.

Of course, I'm not accusing Soja - or Jameson for that matter - of being consciously and deliberately 'sexist'. (Indeed, I imagine they would recoil at any such accusation.) But that's my point, their masculinism is *unconscious*. They take it for granted that everybody experiences moving through the Bonaventure as they do, as middle-aged white men who feel 'lost' and 'dislocated', but it doesn't necessarily follow that everybody does; and that's what they fail to see. In order to understand why Soja and Jameson find postmodern space so disturbing, and to substantiate my claim that such a response is (among other things) masculinist, it is useful to consider the work of Doreen Massey.

In her essay, 'Politics and Space/Time', Massey welcomes how, as a geographer, "'Space" is very much on the agenda these days'. However, she remains concerned about why and how it is on the agenda, and notes her especial frustration with the perpetuation of a 'conception of space and time (or spatiality and temporality)in which the two are opposed to each other, and in which time is the one that matters[and] space is a kind of stasis, where nothing really happens' (Massey 1992, 65-69). In other words, a conceptualisation of 'space and time [which] takes the form of a dichotomous dualism', of 'A/not-A, ... specified in terms of a presence and an absence': in this case, where 'Time ... is conceived of as ... "A", and space is "not-A"' (71-2). According to Massey, this conception can be quite 'general', but is obviously most worrying where it occurs in its most 'sophisticated version[s]', perpetrated by theorists who are supposedly radical, such as Jameson and Soja (69).

How can this be? As has already been noted, Soja stands at the forefront of theorising the 'socio-spatial dialectic'. In Postmodern Geographies he notes that the 'spatiality of social life ... [is] filled with politics and ideology' (Soja 1989, 6); and, in fact, Massey cites this book as an example of critical theory that does generally recognise 'that the social and the spatial are inseparable and that the spatial form of the social has causal effectivity' (Massey 1992, 71). While

Jameson too is hardly ignorant of geographical matters, as his theorisation of postmodern hyperspace and references to Henri Lefebvre's seminal text, The Production of Space, make plain (Jameson 1991, 364).

What Soja and Jameson fail to consider, however, is how dichotomous dualisms, such as the opposition of time and space, are transcoded - in this instance, onto the dichotomous dualism of masculinity and femininity. Put bluntly, Massey writes, Soja's and Jameson's theorisations continue to display a binaristic structure of thinking in which 'time is dynamism', 'history', coded male, and celebrated as modern - and 'space is stasis', 'coded female', and 'denigrated' as postmodern (Massey 1992, 74). What is more, she notes, 'even where the transcodings between dualisms have an element of inconsistency, this rule still applies': 'where space is chaos (which you would think was quite different from stasis ..) [and] time is Order space is *still* coded female, only in this context as threatening' (74). One need only consider the masculinist culture of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century metropolis to see this in action. According to Massey, the 'mixture of fascination and fear' with which men greeted the chaos of metropolitan space, particularly as regards the 'threat' of 'freer' women, increasingly came to be *embodied* in women, who, in literary terms, became 'symbolic of "disorder"' - as demonstrated in 'the dominant response... among male modernist writers' (74). Indeed, it is 'hard to resist the idea', Massey writes, 'that Jameson's (and others) apparently vertiginous terror in the face of the complexity of today's world ... has a lot in common with the nervousness of the male modernist, nearly a century ago, when faced with the big city' (74). After all, what else explains Jameson's paradoxical feelings of being 'lost' and yet threatened by some putative 'authority'? Jameson writes that postmodernist culture is 'increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic', but where exactly is such an authoritative 'spatial logic' supposed to emanate from, given the fact that we are all supposed to be lost in space (Jameson 1991, 25)? Jameson seems to want to have his cake and eat it. All space, he declares, is overbearing - except, of course, where it is chaotic. *Just like a woman*.

What is needed, therefore, according to Massey, is an 'alternative view of space' (Massey 1992, 79). A proposal which, I hasten to add, is by no means unproblematic. As Massey makes quite clear, she is not suggesting that space should simply be elevated over time, but rather that such binary thinking itself needs to be 'overcome' (81). Once she has voiced this reservation however,

Massey does feel free to, if not hazard an alternative view, at least glance in the right direction, suggesting that space needs to be reconceptualised as being 'constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales' (79-80). I quite agree. Nevertheless, there is a further point I want to pick up on here, which Massey (although aware of) does not discuss at any great length. If space *does* need to be reconceptualised 'at all spatial scales', as Massey contends, then this has to include the micro-level of cultural and political theory (with its 'geographical' vocabulary of 'space', 'position', 'margin', 'map', and so on).

As Liz Bondi notes, 'identity politics ... effectively spatialises our understanding of familiar categories of identity like class, nationality, ethnicity, gender and so on'; instead of 'being irreducible essences, these categories become positions we assume or are assigned to' (Bondi 1993, 97). If it is accepted that the spatial is never innocent of the social (or vice versa), the same can and should be said of the relation of the socio-spatial to the cultural and political. The crucial point that needs to be recognised, therefore, is that 'the geographical metaphors of contemporary politics must [similarly] be informed by conceptions of space that recognise place, position, location and so on as *created, as produced*' (99). In other words, it is absolutely necessary to also always consider the dialogical interaction between the socio-spatial dialectic of radical geography and the metaphorical spaces of cultural and political theory; a dialogical relation which, I believe, the dominant postmetropolitan debate mystifies and represses.

Consider Jameson's 'principal point' concerning hyperspace; according to him,

the latest mutation in space - postmodern hyperspace - has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organise its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment ... can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as human subjects (Jameson 1991, 44).

In contrast to Sassen's straightforward theorisation of the space of capitalist

globalisation, or Cooke's theorisation of undifferentiated spatialities, Jameson's theorisation effortlessly moves from the physical body and the built environment, to the social geography of global capital, to the mental 'mapping' of space; all of which is held together within his over-arching theorisation of postmodernism as a 'culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic'. However, Jameson never actually gets round to defining the nature of the interaction *between* the socio-spatial configurations of globalisation and the figurative spatialities of mental life; and, in fact, his theorisation only seems to make matters worse. For example, what *exactly* does he mean by 'cognitive mapping'? If the dialogical relation between different spatialities is never articulated 'cognitive mapping' adds up to very little; particularly when most understandings of mental 'mapping' continue to be modelled on that modern conception of reified, 'absolute' space which capital has used - all too literally - to map and dominate the world.²⁶ What is more, why should hyperspace be so unmappable anyway? If Jameson's alleged postmodern mutation in space is considered dialectically (as he suggests the postmodern ought to be), it should not only involve the disorientation of hyperspace, but also a mutation in our ability to 'map' the world in a more *multi-perspectival* manner. Jameson though, appears unwilling to go along with a spatialised identity politics in which many positions can be assumed simultaneously. He may make the odd remark to the effect that 'everyone "represents" several groups all at once' nowadays, and yet he continues to view this as more of a hindrance than a help to oppositional politics (322).²⁷

Soja, on the other hand, has at least listened to criticism that his work suffers from binarism. To his credit, Thirdspace represents a sustained attempt to

²⁶ The ill-defined use of 'geographical' terms in contemporary cultural and political theory is most concisely critiqued by Michael Keith and Steve Pile in their introductory essay to the book, Place and the Politics of Identity. According to them, 'The geographical is being used to provide a secure grounding in the increasingly uncertain world of social and cultural theory' (Keith and Pile 1993, 6). Michel Foucault's use of spatial metaphors provides a case in point. As Neil Smith and Cindi Katz demonstrate, Foucault's spatial metaphors depend upon a conception of geographical space that is 'absolute' - where "'Absolute space" refers to a conception of space as a field, container, a co-ordinate system of discrete and mutually exclusive locations [which is the] space that is broadly taken for granted in Western societies' (Smith and Katz 1993, 75). Thus, while 'Foucault is correct to see the connection between space and power', he nevertheless 'indulges in a reductive universalisation of this connection ... It is not space *per se* that expresses power, but the thoroughly naturalised absolute conception of space that grew up with capitalism' (76).

²⁷ Raymond Williams notes that the need to occupy a multiplicity of positions is neither that new or that troublesome, and declares that, 'historically, it seems to me to be more and more true that where centres of proletarian consciousness developed, their strength really drew from the fact that all the bonds [which might include religious, ethnic, racial, national, communal, filial and gender bonds] were holding in the same direction. This has become much clearer to me from the experience of the women's movement, where more than one kind of bonding has made for ... significant success' (Williams 1989b, 242).

resist the dichotomous duality of 'real' versus 'imaginary' spaces, in favour (as the title suggests) of a 'thirdspace', and a more 'trialectical' methodology; a move which is clearly indebted to post-colonial and feminist theory (and appears to resemble my own dialogical approach). Indeed, Soja goes out of his way to fill the book with references to Edward Said, bell hooks, Homi Bhabba and others, along with lengthy quotes from their work. However, there is a huge *gap* between what Soja says and what he does. This is nowhere better demonstrated than in the lengthy extract of Soja's writing quoted earlier, which is taken from an interview broadcast in 1997 as part of BBC2's 'Open Saturday' programme. Soja is shown sat on a director's chair in the bright sunshine of Los Angeles with the Bonaventure behind him. As the interview proceeds, tracking shots of the interior and exterior of the building are provided, with Soja's commentary supplying an explanatory voiceover. At one point - as it happens, the precise point where Soja's voice can be heard describing the hyperspace in which Jameson and other academics kept 'getting lost' during an academic convention - the camera pans around the interior of the lobby and shows a figure in sexless overalls next to a cart full of cleaning materials. Presumably this person is not quite as 'lost' as Jameson and his colleagues: if s/he doesn't know her/his way around, s/he will get the sack. On one level, this might sound like a vaguely amusing anecdote, and to a certain extent it is; the juxtaposition of the 'radical' intellectual talking and the worker working is ironic. However, in relating this incident I have no intention whatsoever of it (or myself) being dismissed as flippant. My argument here is a serious one; namely, that what Soja *says* about 'spatiality' is related to what he *does* for a living. Or, to put this more theoretically, that his utterances need to be considered dialogically; i.e., to be related to *where* he is positioned discursively, intellectually, culturally, socially, geographically, and physically.

Soja's theorisation of the Bonaventure, I would contend, is not so much explanatory of some putative postmetropolitan hyperspatiality, as symptomatic of his own specific position as an academic 'lost' in the Bonaventure (who subsequently makes a living talking about the experience of him and his friends being 'lost'). Of course, it might be maintained that the televised interview is an old one, and that Thirdspace's turn to trialectics addresses just the kind of troublesome issues I am talking about here (i.e., tracing the relation between figurative and geographical 'spatialities'). And it's certainly true that Soja does conscientiously devote about three hundred pages of the book to theorising

trialectics. But so what? In the final analysis simply *theorising* trialectics is not enough. To quote bell hooks back at Soja:

the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being; concurrently one may practice theorising without ever knowing/possessing the term just as we can live and act in feminist resistance without ever using the word "feminism"...

Often individuals who employ certain terms freely - terms like "theory" or "feminism" - are not necessarily practitioners whose habits of being and living most embody the action, the practice of theorising or engaging in feminist struggle. Indeed, the privileged act of naming often affords those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place (hooks 1994, 61-2).

Reading hooks one is prompted to ask the following: does Soja's living really embody the practice of theorising or engaging in struggle, or is he using terms like 'thirdspace' too freely? This is not to say that a white, male, heterosexual, and well-salaried (albeit 'radical') professor at UCLA should be disallowed from discussing 'thirling-as-othering' simply because he is not as oppressed, say, as a cleaner in the Bonaventure; it is simply to enquire how Soja's employment of the term 'thirdspace' is supposed to relate to such a worker? The answer to this question is, not too well. As I have previously mentioned, the figure of the cleaner is difficult to 'see' (metaphorically as well as literally), but a macro-economic perspective infers that it is most likely to be a female immigrant, and a micro-level perspective indicates that 'her' experience of the Bonaventure is going to be substantially different to Soja's. The biggest difference of all, of course, being his ability to theorise such experiences. And, pointedly, it would appear he is so busy theorising 'thirling-as-othering' that he is unable to see the 'other' that is right before his eyes.

At the risk of being simplistic, it is one thing to *be* marginal, another thing to be able to *theorise* marginalisation, and yet another thing again to initiate a dialogue between such 'spatialities'. Even if, hypothetically, it turned out that the 'imaginary' cleaner was practicing 'theory' without possessing the term, the opportunities for 'her' to do so and/or be engaged in a dialogue with Soja are limited by a great many 'real' practicalities; not the least of which is that 'she' is paid to clean up after conference delegates like him, not chat to them.

To briefly summarise, then: reading the dominant postmetropolitan debate

against the grain involves, not only critiquing a certain Manhattanised, Londonised *or* Los Angelised myopia, but also the strategic positioning of marginalised and hitherto excluded voices - with careful attention being paid to what 'marginalisation' actually means. As I have sought to demonstrate, the use of geographical terms in cultural and political theory is open to abuse. Where terms such as 'marginalisation' and 'spatiality' are deployed care should be taken to account for their dialogical significance. Moreover, the dialogical position of the situated self of the theorist also needs to be taken into account. After all, as Soja notes, the postmodern debate 'began with Fredric Jameson's own personal experience in the Bonaventure hotel'. What Soja and Jameson fail to consider though (as should by now be obvious), is that people's experiences and ability to theorise them vary enormously, depending on *where* they are positioned and *how* they are situated; a perspective which their 'philosophically transcendent space of analysis' conveniently fails to bring into focus (Morris 1992, 273).

The question I would like to turn to now, therefore, is whether or not all this 'sophisticated' theory-talk about postmetropolitan spatiality actually helps to liberate people from the 'authority' (Soja informs the silent television audience) 'we' have to 'submit' to - or whether it just serves to further mystify this authority and thereby perpetuate oppression? To put this another way, I now intend to give greater consideration to the relation between the theorisation of the 'place' of the postmetropolis, and the postmetropolitan place of 'theory'.

The place of travelling theory

What do people mean when they talk or write about 'place'? What, for instance, is the relation between 'space' and 'place'? According to Anthony Giddens,

in pre-modern societies, space and place largely coincided, since the spatial dimensions of social life were, for most of the population, dominated by "presence" - by localised activity ... [However] modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between "absent" others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to face interaction (quoted in Massey 1995, 50).

However, if in metropolitan modernity the social relations of space are - as

Massey terms it - increasingly “‘stretched out’”, where does that leave place in postmodernity (Massey 1995, 54)? According to some commentators, socio-spatial relations have become so complicated and diffuse, particularly in urban areas, that place has begun to disappear altogether; or, more precisely, people’s sense of place has begun to disappear, since what is termed place - as Russel King notes - is always composed out of all those ‘personal accumulated space-time experiences and inheritances ... cultural origins and social networks’ which make up the place where somebody *comes from* (King 1995, 28). In this sense, talking about place also always involves issues of community and identity; terms which are not simply confined to the discourses of geographical and cultural theory, but are also registered and discussed in more ‘everyday’ discourses (in conversations about belonging, one’s place in the world, the search for ‘roots’, and so on). There’s no place like home, the saying goes; alternatively, some might say you can’t go home again. But *where* does this get ‘us’ exactly; by which I mean, how are ‘sophisticated’ theorisations of the place(-lessness) of the postmetropolis, especially ‘radical’ ones, supposed to relate to and possibly inform ‘everyday’ understandings of place(-lessness)?

In his essay, ‘Prisoners of the City: Whatever could a Postmodern City Be?’, Kevin Robins usefully summarises the contemporary, academic debate about place, paying especial attention to how a ‘new respect for place and tradition’ in the ‘postmodern city’ has been ‘projected as the antithesis of modernist abstraction and anomie’ (Robins 1993, 104). He considers a number of what he terms ‘conservative’ ‘strategies of the ‘postmodern re-enchantment’ of place, including ‘regionalism’ and the ‘global culture of electronic villages’, which he refers to respectively as a ‘kind of neo-romanticism’ and ‘hi-tech neo-romanticism’, as well as the strategy of the ‘re-imaged city’, where advertising dislodges architecture and ‘the image of the city floats free from the “reality” of the built environment’ (304-6). He then proceeds to consider some ‘radical variants’, such as John Montgomery’s and Franco Bianchini’s conception of the postmodern city as a place able to ‘sustain a politics of identity’; in particular, singling out David Harvey’s theorisation (of increasing time-space compression in the context of a post-Fordist regime of flexible accumulation) as a crucial ‘point

of reference and authority for this perspective' (308).²⁸

What comes across in Robins's essay though, irrespective of the many differences that undoubtedly exist between 'conservative' and 'radical' theorists, is that they all share one idea in common: the idea that the postmodern city is becoming 'more and more place-less' (as Harvey puts it); with the only substantial argument between them being over what to do about it.²⁹ This even holds true of 'radical' Baudrillardian theorists such as Iain Chambers, who asserts that, given the proliferation of hyperreal images in the (post)metropolis, it has ceased to exist in any 'real' way. To hear him tell it, 'we can no longer hope to map the metropolis' at all: it 'has been invaded by an infectious presence', whereby 'It is no longer the actual city but an image of it that has taken over'; a state in which 'capital has now lost all its real referents and obligations to any local or immediate reality other than its own' (Chambers 1990, 53-56). This might sound like heady stuff, and a far cry from conservative pronouncements on the subject of architectural 'carbuncles', and yet the underlying assumption here remains the same: the contemporary city has become more and more place-less. Where Chambers differs is simply that he revels in the 'radical' possibilities of such dis-location. It is in this context, therefore, that Robins emphasises that, while 'Harvey is cautious in presenting [his] account', there

has been a tendency to conflate economic, political and cultural spheres ... obscur[ing] the complex rhythms and periodicities of change ... Indeed, in those less cautious than Harvey, the account converges surprisingly with that of conservative postmodernists (Robins 1993, 309).

However, I'm not sure I go along with Robins on this. Most obviously, there is the problem of Robins's account of the 'postmodern city'. Why does he discuss contemporary issues of urbanity in terms of the 'city', as opposed to the 'metropolis' or 'postmetropolis'? Equally problematic is Robins's definition of postmodernism. He declares that he is keen to avoid reducing his argument to a

²⁸ According to Harvey, 'Flexible accumulation, as I shall tentatively call it, is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterised by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production ... It has entrained rapid shifts in the patterning of uneven development, both between sectors and between geographical regions ... It has entailed a new round of what I shall call "time-space compression" in the capitalist world - the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space' (Harvey 1990, 147).

²⁹ Harvey's assertion that the postmodern city is becoming 'more and more place-less' is referred to by Massey in her essay, 'The Conceptualisation of Place' (Massey 1995, 54).

'binary opposition of modernism to postmodernism, or of universalism to particularism', and yet, after advocating complexity and heterogeneity in relation to periodisation, and arguing for caution in relation to the tendency to conflate the economic, cultural and political, Robins flatly states that '*the* postmodern perspective encourages soft optimism and voluntarism in the policy and political arenas', being unable to address the so-called 'real problems' which remain 'part of urban modernity': i.e., 'the modernist city in all its contradictoriness and ambiguity' (310-23). Robins seems to have brought us around in a circle: 'If there is an urban crisis,' he notes, 'it will not be resolved in the straightforward way the postmodernists suggest' (313). But, one might well ask, in *which* straightforward way? And who are '*the*' postmodernists' anyway? As has already been noted, there is no unitary modern/postmodern perspective, or modern/postmodern urbanity. Finally, there is the issue of whether Harvey's theorisation of increasing time-space compression should be praised for its caution and complexity. A number of feminist critics have expressed reservations about the underlying assumptions of this notion, and it is these I would now like to focus on.

As has already been noted, space is 'created out of social relations [it] is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation' (Massey 1992, 81). If this is the case, then Harvey's theorisation of time-space compression runs into some immediate problems. Firstly, the issue should not be one of an undifferentiated and unlocated capitalist time-space compression, but rather, as Massey notes, of 'power-geometries' (Massey 1993, 62). 'This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement' (62). According to Massey, Harvey's 'flexible sexism' derives from his continued tendency to relegate issues of gender, along with questions of

ethnicity, race and sexuality, to social class.³⁰ Secondly, Massey questions why an increase in socio-spatial flows necessarily implies some kind of loss of place anyway? The flaw in Harvey's thinking turns out to be surprisingly obvious. As Massey indicates, it is not so much that places are becoming increasingly place-less, than that a certain definition of place is becoming increasingly untenable; to be precise, an understanding of places 'as distinct ... different, separable, probably bounded, areas within a wider whole called space' (Massey 1995, 54). This conceptualisation of place, as boundaried and discrete, is firmly associated with the 'common-sense' notion of place as 'home', a site of safety, security and privacy; but, as feminist critiques have illustrated, the dichotomous duality between public and private spaces and places needs to be deconstructed, since 'home' is the major site in which women's labour and oppression takes place on a daily and nightly basis. As Gillian Rose notes, one fact that should never be lost sight of is that 'Concepts of place and space are implicitly gendered in geographical discourse' (Rose 1993b, 62). In particular, she comments, the concept of place in geography is invariably 'associated ... with "the timeless, infinite vanishing-point of the maternal"' (Rose 1993a, 71).³¹

³⁰ Consider the essay, 'Class Relations, Social Justice and the Politics of Difference', in which Harvey considers the 1991 fire in a chicken processing factory in Hamlet, North Carolina. 'Twenty-five of the 200 workers employed in the plant died and a further 56 were seriously injured', Harvey reports (Harvey 1993, 41); 'Of the 25 people who died in the Hamlet fire, 18 were women and 12 were African-American' (44). 'The thesis' Harvey wants to explore is that 'it was raw class politics of an exploitative sort which created a situation in which an accident (a fire) could have the effects it did' (44). I agree. Where I differ with Harvey is over what to do about it. Harvey's conclusion is that raw class politics is the answer; 'that pursuit of working-class politics might protect, rather than oppress and marginalise, interests based on gender and race even if that working-class politics regrettably makes no explicit acknowledgement of the importance of race and gender' (59). Harvey's 'regrettably' is insufficient, especially for those of 'us' in Britain who are brown, and have had to live with working-class politics which makes no explicit acknowledgement of race - or gender. What is more, Harvey's 'working-class' strategy is flawed. As I noted in my introduction, as regards the question of the universal versus the particular I endorse Williams's view. Williams recognises 'the universal forms which spring from [the] fundamental exploitation' of the capitalist system, as Harvey does, but also the crucial importance of 'more particular bonds' (Williams 1989b, 318). 'What socialism offered', Williams writes, 'was the priority of one kind of bonding - trade unionism, the class bond - this cancelled all other bonds' (Williams 1989b, 241). But what Williams increasingly came to discern as 'more and more true' was 'that where centres of proletarian consciousness developed, their strength really drew from the fact that all bonds were holding in the same direction' (241-2). By which he means the bonds of family, kinship, religion, nationalism, ethnicity, race, sexuality and so on: in other words, all the bonds that go towards making the place you live and work in the place it is, and the person you are the person you are. To be quite explicit, Harvey is guilty - in Williams's terms - of prioritising 'one kind of bonding - trade unionism, the class bond' and of 'cancell[ing] all other bonds'.

³¹ As Gillian Rose also indicates, another reason great care must be taken with terms like space and place is because 'what is described as a feminised *space* in much contemporary philosophy and cultural studies is in geographical knowledge performed by the notion of place' (Rose 1993b, 178-9). Needless to say, my attempt to articulate the dialogical relation between the discourses of cultural theory and radical geography aims to confront just such issues.

Instead, therefore, of mourning the loss of some patriarchal conception of place, Massey proposes the radical concept of a 'global sense of place': 'a sense of place, an understanding of its "character", which can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond' (Massey 1993, 68). This theorisation is useful in a number of ways. In symbolic terms, Massey's geographical theorisation corresponds with and substantiates a spatialised identity politics in which it is possible to simultaneously accommodate different discursive positions - of 'class', 'gender', 'race', and so on. Furthermore, as soon as one begins to take account of the socio-spatial and symbolic relations stretched out *between* different places, it becomes possible to see that the colonised margins of global capitalism have been experiencing Harvey's postmodern time-space compression - from very different perspectives - for hundreds of years.³² In fact, Massey's critique reveals that Harvey's meta-theoretical conception of place is paradoxically achieved *precisely* because he represses his own place of theorisation; i.e., his own specific, intellectual, cultural, social, geographical, and intellectual position(s) in a 'Western', postmetropolitan centre of higher education.

Am I being too harsh on Harvey? I do not think so. Morris provides a devastating critique of Harvey's theorisation of the 'condition of postmodernity', paying close attention to his misleading 'rewriting' of Lyotard (258); his dismissal of the struggles of an 'open set of Mixed Others ("women, gays, blacks, ecologists, regional autonomists, etc.") ... as "place-bound"' (257); his vulgar 'reflection model of culture' (268); and, most fundamentally, his assumption that a geographical "'global" space requires a philosophically *transcendent* space of analysis' (Morris 1992, 273). I agree with Morris. What Harvey's work highlights (albeit symptomatically) is not only how theories (and metaphors) of space and place are always dialogically related to the place of the theorist, but also how the *place of theory* itself is problematic. Harvey's flawed theorisation of place provokes the following question: what is it about the discursive practice of theory that makes it any more critical than 'everyday' discourses which, for example, naturalise specific conceptualisations of place as universal? Indeed, what makes any kind of theory critical?

In his essay, 'Travelling Theory', Edward Said addresses these questions. The way to proceed, he suggests, is to 'distinguish theory from critical

³² As Massey notes, Harvey's sense of dislocation 'must have been felt for centuries, through a very different point of view, by colonised peoples all over the world' (Massey 1993, 59).

consciousness' (Said 1984, 241). According to Said,

the latter is a sort of spatial sense, a sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory, and this means that theory has to be grasped in the place and the time out of which it emerges as a part of that time, working in and for it, responding to it; then, consequently, that first place can be measured against subsequent places where the theory turns up for use. The critical consciousness is awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported ... Indeed I would go as far as saying that it is the critic's job to provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests ... (241-2).

Said's critical 'spatial sense' of the 'place' of theory therefore marks an advance over Harvey's theorisation of place-lessness. If Harvey had spent a little more time self-consciously criticising *where* his Marxist theory was *coming from*, he might have been more alert to some of the *gaps* in his thinking. The theoretical practice of Marxism has to be grasped in the 'situation' out of which it first emerged - nineteenth century, 'Western', European, industrial capitalism - which, it must be noted, was not only a time and a place in which urban, working-class communities were exploited, but one in which such communities organised themselves in resistance to capital - thereby providing the conditions in which it became possible to theorise Marxism. In one sense, therefore, Said's 'travelling theory' serves as a reminder of what Marxism (at least of the 'Western Marxist' variety) is supposed to be all about: a unity of theory and 'revolutionary' practice in which 'organic intellectuals' emerge from (or join) working-class communities to be the thinkers and organisers of that class in the struggle against capital (see Gramsci 1988, 300-311).³³

³³ The debate on Marxism, critical theory, and the role of the intellectual is a voluminous one; however, in his essay, 'The Dialectics of Modernity', Göran Therborn makes a good stab at providing a potted history of the subject (Therborn 1996). As Therborn notes, 'Critical theory, as opposed to "traditional theory" ... first of all rejected the intellectual division of labour, and with it all existing conceptions of theory, in the social as well as the natural sciences' (63). But this only raises the question of where critical theorists fit into society? According to Therborn, 'critical theorists do not stand outside or above classes', but somewhere in between; in pursuit of some "'dynamic unity"' between critical theorist and working-class (63). But what's a 'dynamic unity'? Gramsci's theorisation of the 'organic intellectual', along with his concept of 'hegemony', probably provides the most useful attempt to come to terms with this question - at least as regards British Marxism and contemporary cultural theory. Of course, any reference to Gramsci then raises the further question of how well his theories and concepts have 'travelled'. As David Forgacs notes in the essay 'Gramsci and Marxism in Britain', Gramsci was 'a Communist of inter-war Europe...[and]...a yawning chasm now divides us from [that place and time] in economic, political and cultural terms' (Forgacs 1989, 87). As should by now be clear, therefore, the problematic of how to 'theorise' the 'place' of 'theory' is a complex one, which (by definition?) needs returning to again and again; and I will be returning to this problematic again and again throughout the course of the present thesis.

However, when that first place of Marxism is measured against subsequent places where it turns up, this unity between theory and practice becomes less and less apparent. Harvey's Marxist critique of 'postmodernity' emerged as an academic text while he was the Halford Mackinder Chair of Geography at Oxford University; but as to how his theory is supposed to turn up in any 'working-class' community he does not say - although that may well explain why he feels so out of place. Said, on the other hand, as an 'exiled' Palestinian working in the United States, is used to feeling out of place, and, unlike Harvey, knows there is nothing really that new or exceptional about such a condition. Indeed, Said has turned it to his advantage. On the back of theorising 'Western' cultural imperialism in books such as Orientalism, (which, incidentally, Harvey fails to refer to in The Condition of Postmodernity), he has become relatively famous. Of course, the emphasis still remains on the word *relatively*. Even when his work became the subject of fleeting notoriety, as his writing on Jane Austen did in Britain in 1994, it still remained something to be alluded to by the self-styled 'chattering classes' - and who knows if they actually read it or not? In other words, it appears that 'travelling theory' itself needs to be evaluated in terms of how well it 'travels'.

Consider, for example, the 'situation' in which Iain Chambers employs 'travelling theory'. As has already been noted, Chambers does not so much lament loss of place as celebrate dis-placement. In his book, Migrancy. Culture. Identity, he notes that,

to be a stranger in a strange land, to be lost ... is perhaps a condition typical of contemporary life. To the forcibly induced migrations of slaves, peasants, the poor, and the ex-colonial world that make up so many of the hidden histories of modernity, we can also add the increasing nomadism of modern thought. Now that the old house of criticism, historiography and intellectual certitude is in ruins, we all find ourselves on the road (Chambers 1994, 18).

The 'road' by which Chambers (believes he) has arrived at this kind of position is that 'travelled' by Said, as Chambers makes quite clear, noting that 'migrancy and exile, as Edward Said points out, involves a "discontinuous state of being", a form of picking a quarrel with where you come from. It has thereby been transformed "into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture"' (Chambers 1994, 2). According to Chambers, being an exile or a migrant, it would seem, is a positive boon. But *do* we all find ourselves on the road? And, to flog a dead metaphor, are we *all* travelling in the same direction, along similar power-

geometries? Even more problematically, can the nomadism of modern thought simply be *added* to the actual experience of migrancy? How, for instance, does Chambers's 'travelling theory' dialogically relate to the material conditions and physical hardship of actual migrancy? One way to answer these questions is to consider the work of bell hooks.

In her essay, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', hooks thinks back to her childhood:

As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world, but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town (hooks 1991, 149).

The first point to note here is that hooks has had to cross a number of tracks in her life to get to the place where she can theorise *crossing tracks* in terms of 'marginality'. The crucial point to note though, is that she has not forgotten what *crossing tracks* actually entails. Let me put this another way: for hooks, *crossing tracks* is not just a phrase, a transgressive cultural metaphor to be employed in a fashionable theory seminar, it is an act which has to be undergone, physically and materially; and it is this understanding which dialogically informs her theorisation of the margin as a 'profound edge' (149).³⁴

hooks's conception of marginality recognises that migration occurs in a number of ways, materially and culturally, *and* in a number of directions: that the experience of space and location is not the same for black folks who have always been privileged, or for black folks who desire only to move from underclass status to points of privilege; not the same for those of us from poor backgrounds who have had to continually engage in actual political struggle both within and outside black communities to assert an aesthetic and critical presence (148).

This is in stark contrast to Chambers's conception of 'travelling theory', which neglects such power-geometries, and works to conceal the histories and experiences of 'real' migrants.

³⁴ hooks is careful to make the 'definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance - as location of radical openness and possibility' (hooks 1991, 153); and she is also quick to point out that in saying this she is 'not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as "pure"' (151).

Consider Chambers's declaration that the 'city has been invaded by an infectious presence' (Chambers 1990, 53). For all his post-colonial pretensions this statement is irredeemably racist, since the pathological metaphor of the simulacrum or 'image' is unconsciously transcoded or dis-placed onto the 'infectious presence' of the immigrant - thereby concealing the historical reasons for actual migration to the postmetropolis. What is more, this 'colonising' theory even occurs where the experience of migrancy is directly called upon, as demonstrated by Nigel Wheale's description of the postmodern sublime:

Postmodern subjectivity is peculiarly the response of persons in crowds in the shopping mall; emerge from the subway station at the Lexington and Fifth Avenue intersection, and take your first walk down into Manhattan to know what this means. Be awed like a peasant as you pass - no, are passed - in front of the Trump Tower, knowing that somewhere in the sublimity of its highest apartments Sophia Loren leases a whole floor! (Wheale 1995, 54).

Again, like Soja, there is the appeal to experience; but, again, the actual experience of the migrant is dis-placed - recuperated within the discourse of postmetropolitanism. The peasant's 'awe' becomes the hyperbolic metaphor of postmodern sublimity - at least from where Neale is theorising.

The point to emphasise, then, is that if *migrancy* or *travelling* or *marginality* is chosen as a theoretical trope, it needs to be practised not only 'in words, but in habits of being and the way one lives' (hooks 1991, 149). A point which applies as much to Said as it does to Chambers. After all, the reason why Chambers loses his way is not because he fails to follow Said's perfectly adequate directions, or because his 'spatial sense' deserts him, but rather because there is no inherently critical 'spatial sense' to guide him in the first place. Simply put, although Said attempts to shift the burden of truthfulness from 'theory' to 'critical consciousness', and from 'critical consciousness' to 'spatial sense', which is a neat trick, he fails to resolve the issue of where his conception of 'spatial sense' is situated (see Bennett 1990, 197-202). His theorisation of 'travelling theory', in other words, is without foundation. But that doesn't mean his work should be dismissed out of hand. Said hasn't so much 'travelled' in the wrong direction as not 'travelled' far enough. What he fails to see, from the position he has taken up, is simply and dauntingly this: that what makes theory 'radical' is nothing less or more than whether it is situated within a movement which 'travels' with it towards a more egalitarian society - a socialist society (for want of a better word). As bell hooks notes, 'Theory is not inherently ... liberating, or revolutionary. It fulfils this

function only when we ask it to do so and direct our theorising towards this end' (hooks 1994, 61). The most allegedly 'radical' theory-talk in the world is next to useless unless it is situated in and 'travels' with those communities in whose name it is practiced (as Marx was the first to be able to grasp in his specific time and place); and this is certainly true of theorisations of postmetropolitan spatiality. The reification of the dialogic relation between different orders of spatiality in the dominant postmodern debate can be traced to the fact that it is not simply a discourse *on* the postmetropolis, but also a discourse *of* the postmetropolis: of a small community of predominantly white, male academics talking about their postmetropolitan experience in a rhetoric which appropriates the experiences of the 'other', but does not let the 'other' speak. As hooks notes, 'Often this speech about the "Other" is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking This "we" is that "us" in the margins, that "we" who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance' (hooks 1991, 151). What makes the discourse of postmetropolitan theory so insidious is that while it purports to invite the 'other' to speak (it demands dialogue!), it is monologically conducted in a certain sophisticated discourse which excludes the 'other'. hooks herself, she writes, is

Disturbed not so much by the "sense" of postmodernism but by the conventional language used when it is written or talked about and by those who speak it, I find myself on the outside of the discourse looking in. As a discursive practice it is dominated primarily by the voices of white male intellectuals and/or academic elites who speak to and about one another with coded familiarity (23-4).

In the context of hooks's writing, therefore, it also becomes necessary to consider the language and location of my own discursive practice - which, by now, should be all too 'familiar' to the present reader. And therein lies the problem. In order to provide an oppositional reading of the dominant postmetropolitan debate, the present thesis has had to become so 'familiar' with the discursive practice of the debate that it too has become postmetropolitan. Narratives of postmetropolitan theory beget postmetropolitan theoretical narratives. And what could be more 'postmodern' than writing that? As Fredric Jameson notes, 'Postmodernism, postmodern consciousness, may then amount to not much more than theorising its own conditions of possibility, which consists primarily in the sheer enumeration of changes and modifications' (Jameson 1991, 9). Indeed, according to Steven Connor, this 'self-reflection is, if anything, more significant than th[e] reflection upon, or description of contemporary culture which seemed to be offered in postmodernist theory' (Connor 1989, 7).

Thus, in one sense, what makes the postmodern (or postmetropolitan) condition 'postmodern' (or 'postmetropolitan') is the very knowledge that it might consist of little more than the limited discussion of whether or not it is just a discussion. In which case, writing 'against postmodernism' (as Alex Callinicos does), only serves to keep the show 'on the road' - and that includes the 'little narrative' outlined here. In its present form, my thesis is not 'oppositional' at all, it just says it is. (Which is, of course, an eminently postmetropolitan strategy.) And yet, how can the postmetropolitan debate be described as 'dominant', or a criticism of it be described as 'oppositional', when all such theory-talk - including this - remains confined to such a small community of academic theorists? To describe the debate as 'dominant' merely attributes to postmodernists, postmetropolitanists and fellow-travelling theorists the kind of social importance they like to think they have. And to write this much, at least in the manner I have just written, only serves to keep this particular academic language game going, and so on, and so forth, *ad infinitum* ...

... Or *almost* *ad infinitum*, because, as hooks's writing indicates, what really needs to be contested is *how* and *where* postmetropolitan theory is produced - beginning here and now, with the present thesis. Needless to say, this is easier said than done, and it's not even that easy to say. That is because what needs to be addressed here is precisely what is considered *needless to say*. As Terry Eagleton notes, what criticism does is set 'the limits of the acceptably sayable'; limits which he himself has been challenging since the early 1970s (Eagleton 1984, 12). My concern, however, is that the limits of the acceptably sayable have not been challenged nearly enough. Granted, the fact that Eagleton can write and publish what he currently does demonstrates that what is acceptably sayable now, in theory, includes a great deal more than it did just a few years ago. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that, in British higher education today, within the discursive boundaries of postmetropolitan criticism, it is not only acceptable to theoretically discuss ideology, or feminism, or post-colonialism, or queerness, or whatever, it is the height of 'sophistication'; but - and it's a big *but* - that is the limit! What postmetropolitan scholars continue to find unacceptable is that the 'other' speaks in different voices, and has different things to say - such as

to enquire, 'What the hell is all this?'. That's the limit, right there.³⁵ It is difficult to test the boundaries of the acceptably sayable without being ignored; or perhaps worse still, without your words being tolerated, with a patronising smile, and then rephrased. However, as long as an utterance makes its point heard it should *not* be rephrased. Like bell hooks, then, and in *her words*,

I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me ... It is no easy task to find ways to include our multiple voices within the various texts we create ... I feel it even now, writing this piece when I gave it talking and reading, talking spontaneously, using familiar academic speech now and then, "talking the talk" - using black vernacular speech, the intimate sounds and gestures I normally save for family and loved ones. Private speech in public discourse, intimate intervention, making another text, a space that enables me to recover all that I am in language (hooks 1991, 146-147).

The question, 'What the hell is all this?', says something about the place I am coming from. My use of the phrase might be understood as being 'situated' 'in the margins' of postmetropolitan theory, but my point here is that it is not good enough to just *theorise* such talk - you have to actually *practice* what you theorise. Theory, we are told, consists of a 'type of heterogeneous cross-disciplinary critical investigation [which] engages in a reflective self-questioning of its own discursive practices and boundaries' (Kreiwirth and Cheetham 1990, 3). Fair enough, you might think. However, if theory engages in the kind of 'reflective self-questioning' it advocates, it quickly becomes apparent that its discursive practices remain firmly situated within the 'boundaries' of academic institutions, which - crucially - continue to be administered in ways that are far from theoretically informed, let alone politically progressive. In which case, any project which identifies postmetropolitan theory as less than 'radical' is useful, certainly, but only up to a point - i.e., the point at which the current academic situation of 'radical' postmetropolitan theory is not only theorised, but *challenged*. What is needed - in terms 'acceptable' to Eagleton - is the formation and institution of a 'counter-public sphere' (Eagleton 1984). In hooks's terms, 'theory'

³⁵ In one sense, the question 'What the hell is all this?' could not be more theoretical. In The Function of Criticism, Terry Eagleton declares that 'the theoretical question' that needs to be asked 'is less a polite "What is going on?" than an impatient "What the hell is all this?"' (Eagleton 1984, 89-90). What Eagleton neglects to mention though, is that different social formations employ different discourses. In some places Eagleton's 'theoretical question' might sound all too 'polite'; in which case, the boundaries of the acceptably sayable might be better tested by asking 'What the *fuck* is all this?'. Given the fact that the present thesis is to be submitted for a PhD however, I believe the question 'What the hell is all this?' will suffice.

needs to take place in a 'community of resistance' (hooks 1991, 149). Once again, however, the important point that needs to be maintained here is that any such theorisation - whether it is of a 'counter-public sphere', a 'community of resistance', or whatever - is 'radical' only if it serves to get things moving towards a different society. And it is to the possibility of practicing such a 'theory' that I would now, finally, like to turn.

The place of John Berger

In his essay, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community', Edward Said asks how criticism can come to have a 'secular, political force in an age determined to deny interpretation anything but a role as mystification?' (Said 1985, 152). Of course, this question should not be restricted to 'critical' work, it should equally be applicable to so-called 'creative' work, the whole point in fact being the 'crossing' of such 'borders and obstacles', instead of 'noninterference and specialisation' (157). Said's suggestion is that whatever is termed 'artistic' and hence is 'supposed to be subjective and powerless' will have to cross-over into 'realms now covered by journalism and the production of information, that employ representation but are supposed to be objective and powerful' (157). On the face of it, this sounds like pretty *familiar* stuff. Where Said moves into *unfamiliar* territory, however, is in his declaration that 'we [already] have a superb guide' as to how crossings should be made 'in John Berger' - 'in whose most recent work', Said claims, 'there is the basis of a major critique of modern representation' (157).

One reason Said's claim appears to come out of nowhere is probably attributable to the fact that Berger has been living and working in the middle of nowhere for the last twenty-four years; to be precise, in Quincy, a small peasant village in the French Alps. Another reason is that, despite working in a number of fields, including television, radio, photography and film, as well as continuing to produce a wide variety of 'cultural criticism' throughout the 1980's and 1990's, Berger's work is not generally included or considered in most 'literary theory', 'media studies' or 'cultural studies' handbooks. Simply put, Berger has crossed the kind of 'borders' which make it difficult to 'place' him in any convenient category: his work is difficult to market, and to set on courses. This is not to say that Berger does not receive any 'critical' attention, because he does. My point

here, however, is that it is *only* 'critical'. When Berger's work receives the kind of attention which acknowledges that 'borders' need to be crossed, such 'criticism' continues to leave a great many of its own boundaries unproblematised. Bruce Robbins, for example, may well be quite right to note that Berger has been 'Writing outside the shelter of the university for a quarter of a century' in an attempt 'to negotiate between a broadly Marxist view of the world and a broad nonacademic readership', but what he paradoxically fails to note is that he himself is writing from within that very shelter (Robbins 198, 147). And a similar accusation can be levelled at Said's 'criticism' of Berger. 'You can't talk about aesthetics', Berger writes, 'without talking about the principle of hope and the existence of evil' (WB, 5). Politically forceful this may be, but it is surely mystificatory for Said to claim such writing as 'secular'. Berger's work, I would suggest, is more than just *unfamiliar*, it poses a certain *challenge*.

Consider A Seventh Man. The cover of Penguin Books's 1975 edition is taken up with the monochromatic blue and black image of a man seated (on luggage?) in the crowded aisle of a train, hands resting in his lap, eyes downcast, the window of the carriage at his back. At the top of the cover the words 'A Pelican Original' are accompanied by a small design of a pelican. Above the man's head the words 'John Berger and Jean Mohr' are printed in white letters. The title, 'A SEVENTH MAN', is printed in large, white, capital letters next to the man's eyes. In smaller, blue and black letters, printed across the man's knees, are the words 'The story of a migrant worker in Europe'. Such details are usually passed over or taken for granted (particularly the corporate logo). This is because a book cover is generally considered as packaging. The cover of A Seventh Man, however, is remarkable to the extent that it lacks all the usual marketing copy. (There is not even one reference to 'Berger, winner of the Booker prize!'.) Instead, there is just a short statement by Berger himself on the back cover.

Why do the industrial European countries depend for their production on importing 22 million hands and arms to do the most menial work? Why are the owners of those arms and hands treated like replaceable parts of a machine? What compels the migrant worker to leave his village and accept this humiliation?

Today the migrant worker experiences, within a few years, what the working population of every industrial city once experienced over generations. To consider his life - its material circumstances and his inner feelings - is to be brought face to face with the fundamental nature of our present societies and their histories. The migrant is not on the margin of modern experience;

he is absolutely central to it.

To bring this experience directly to the reader we needed political analysis and poetry. We needed to quote economists and to write fiction. Above all we needed photographs. Jean Mohr and I have continued the experiment begun in "A Fortunate Man" and continued in "Ways of Seeing". We hope that the way this book is made - not just what it states - may question any preconceptions about its subject.

The way the book is made certainly poses difficulties for Penguin Books, who classify it as 'Sociology and Anthropology/World Affairs'; a classification which notably excludes 'Literature' and 'Photography'. Categorising a book which crosses the 'borders and obstacles' between 'critical' and 'creative' writing and photography, it would seem, is a tricky business. It is also tricky for most British readers to get their heads round. Particularly when you consider that even *seeing* the image on the cover of the book is a struggle - let alone seeing it as something other than advertising. And yet that is what Berger and Mohr are working towards: different 'ways of seeing' and of writing; of representing those who are not usually represented in a different way.

Said identifies 'two concrete tasks ... adumbrated by Berger': 'opening the culture to experiences of the Other which have remained "outside" (and have been repressed or framed in a context of confrontational hostility), the norms manufactured by "insiders"'; and the use of the 'visual faculty... to restore the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity as fundamental components of meaning in representation' (Said 1985, 157-8). Such 'tasks' sound like a great idea, but Berger doesn't talk about the 'Other' or 'nonsequential energy' - at least not in the way that Said does. In their introductory 'Note to the Reader', Berger and Mohr write that, 'This book concerns' the 'lived experience' - the 'dream/nightmare' - of 'migrant workers in Europe' (Berger and Mohr 1975, 7-8). They acknowledge that this is a problematic position to take, and ask, 'By what right [they] can ... call the lived experience of others a dream/nightmare?' (7). Their explanation, however, is equally problematic. 'In a dream the dreamer wills, acts, reacts, speaks and yet submits to the unfolding of a story which he scarcely influences. The dream happens to him' (7). In this 'Note', therefore, 'the reader' is confronted with the prospect of a sociological text about migrant workers which is also something more than sociological - something that deals with (and in) the stuff that 'dreams' are made of. But what are 'dreams' made of exactly? A more acceptable or familiar way for a left-wing intellectual to discuss the 'dream' of 'lived experience'

would be to talk about 'ideology'; and it is certainly safe to assume that - given the time and place in which A Seventh Man was put together - Berger and Mohr's 'Note' could be read in terms of Althusserian theories of the interpellation of the subject. But so what? How useful would that be? Not very. What I believe is more useful to consider is how A Seventh Man creatively addresses what Althusserian modes of theorisation critically neglect: how to talk and think about dissidence in a manner which challenges the way people talk and think about dissidence. '[S]ometimes a dreamer tries to break his dream by deliberately waking himself up. This book', Berger and Mohr write, 'represents such an intention within a dream which the subject of the book and each of us is dreaming' (7). The book's intention, then, is clear:

To outline the experience of the migrant worker and to relate this to what surrounds him - both physically and historically - is to grasp more surely the political reality of the world at this moment. The subject is European, its meaning is global. Its theme is unfreedom. This unfreedom can only be fully recognised if an objective economic system is related to the subjective experience of those trapped within it. Indeed, finally, the unfreedom is that relationship (7).

A 'reader' could not really ask much more of a book. The question is, is A Seventh Man successful? And if so, what else is there to say? Such a reservation is not as daft as it sounds. Indeed, it is pretty much the conclusion Geoff Dyer comes to in his book, Ways of Telling. The Work of John Berger. A Seventh Man, he writes, is a 'fiercely political book [which] more than any other work of Berger's ... speaks for itself' (Dyer 1986, 111). A book 'concerned with the lived experience of others' is a tricky prospect; but a book which 'speaks for itself' puts the 'critic' out of business. The 'reader' - particularly the kind of 'critical' 'reader' who writes about books for a living - is put in a difficult position. Open the book, turn the pages, and look for *yourself*: *you* will find that the words 'you yourself' are the key here. The first section is titled 'Departure' (the rest of the page is blank). Overleaf there are two photographs, one placed above the other. Both photographs are of roads, and both have been taken from a raised perspective. The first photograph shows a switchback, on a steep, barren, mountainside upon which some indistinct figures can be seen walking. The second photograph is of an urban motorway fly-over (10). There are no words directly supplied to frame the two photographs, and the same goes for most of the images in the book. The reason for this, according to the 'Note', is that the photographs, 'taken over a period of years by Jean Mohr, say things which are

beyond the reach of words. The pictures in sequence make a statement: a statement which is equal and comparable to, but different from, that of the text' (7). If Berger and Mohr are taken at their word, then one challenge posed by the book is clear - words will not suffice.

On the next page of the book (opposite the two photographs) the 'reader' finds a poem. The title, 'The Seventh', is at the top of the page. The poem begins some way down, and runs onto the next page.

If you set out in this world,
better be born seven times.
Once, in a house on fire,
once, in a freezing flood,
once, in a wild madhouse,
once, in a field of ripe wheat,
once, in an empty cloister,
and once, among pigs in a sty.
Six babes crying, not enough:
you yourself must be the seventh.

When you must fight to survive,
let your enemy see seven.
One, away from work on Sunday,
one, starting his work on Monday,
one, who teaches without payment,
one, who learned to swim by drowning,
one, who is the seed of a forest,
and one, whom wild forefathers protect,
but all their tricks are not enough:
you yourself must be the seventh.
If you want to find a woman,
let seven men go for her.
One, who gives his heart for words,
one, who takes care of himself,
one, who claims to be a dreamer,
one, who through her skirt can feel her,
one, who knows the hooks and snaps,
one, who steps upon her scarf:
let them buzz like flies around her.
You yourself must be the seventh.

If you write and can afford it,
let seven men write your poem.
One, who builds a marble village,
one, who was born in his sleep,
one, who charts the sky and knows it,
one, whom words call by his name,
one, who perfected his soul,
one, who dissects living rats.

Two are brave and four are wise;
you yourself must be the seventh.

And if all went as was written,
you will die for seven men.
One, who is rocked and suckled,
one, who grabs a hard young breast,
one, who throws down empty dishes,
one, who helps the poor to win,
one, who works till he goes to pieces,
one, who just stares at the moon.
The world will be your tombstone:
you yourself must be the seventh.

How should such a poem be read? The poem is attributed to Attila József, but the words of the poem (as well as the words 'Attila József') have been placed at the front of A Seventh Man by Berger and Mohr in order to tell the 'story of a migrant worker in Europe'. Who then do the words belong to, and to whom do they refer? On the cover of the book, the words 'a seventh man' appear to refer to the 'migrant worker' who is represented sitting on the train (perhaps the man is even supposed to represent *the* migrant worker); furthermore - and despite Berger's disclaimer - the photograph of the people travelling on the mountain road appears to reiterate such a 'story'. The poem, however, tells a different 'story' - or at least provides a different perspective. In the words of József's poem, it is 'you' who is addressed; in which case, the word 'you' also refers and belongs to *you* the 'reader'. Reading the words 'you yourself must be the seventh', *you* the 'reader' are moved into the position of becoming 'the seventh'. In other words, 'a seventh man' is now *you*. However, the word 'you' only belongs to *you* to the extent that *you* address somebody else as 'you'. The word 'you' divides down the middle, so to speak. To be addressed as 'you', then, is a difficult position for the 'reader' to be in, and it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as a position as the 'story' carries on down the page, and the narration shifts from poetry to prose. Directly after the poem come the following words: 'In Germany (and in Britain) one out of seven manual workers is an immigrant. In France, Switzerland and Belgium about 25 per cent of the industrial labour force are foreigners' (12). What is going on here? On one page 'a seventh man' appears to signify 'a migrant worker', on the next 'you', and on the following page 'an immigrant'. What is going on, quite simply, is a clever trick: unless *you* (the 'reader') are an immigrant there is no way this 'story of a migrant worker' can be centred in any single, fixed point-of-view or unified subjectivity (and even if *you* are an immigrant, it's very difficult). What is more, destabilising shifts in narrative

and perspective continue throughout the entire book: they make the book what it is.

Turn the pages of the book. On the page opposite the poem there is a photograph of an old photographer, cigarette in mouth, busy with the lens cover of an archaic camera; in the street behind the photographer represented in the photograph people are gathered; they, however, are busy watching Mohr and - consequently - are caught gazing out of the photograph at the 'reader'. Coming after a 'literary' poem and an 'economic' statistic this photograph is difficult to place, particularly as the only direct explanation of its meaning is anecdotal. 'A friend came to see me in a dream. From far away. And I asked in the dream: "Did you come by photograph or train?". All photographs are a form of transport and an expression of absence' (13). Do these words make everything cohere? No. Although the sentences form one continuous paragraph, the mode of writing and perspective is fissured: the writing moves from a 'fictional' 'I' narrating a 'dream', to a more 'factual', anonymous statement on the nature of photography. Who is the 'I' who is narrating, and what does the 'I' see? My play on words here is intentional (the placing of a photograph of a photographer at this point in the book suggests that the 'authors' similarly intended such a play on words and images), but my question is rhetorical: there is no all-seeing 'I'. See for *yourself*.

On the next double-page spread there are five photographs, each representing a man: the four on the left-hand page are small, passport-sized photographs; the one on the right-hand page is a larger photograph (14-15). Each of the men has been photographed looking towards the camera - which is to say, also towards the 'reader'. Once again, there are no words directly attached to the images. Overleaf, at the top of the next page, are the following words: 'He. The existence of a migrant worker'(16). The word 'He' forms a single sentence. Maybe 'He' is supposed to signify one of the men previously pictured; maybe all of them? 'He', implicitly, does not speak for 'himself' to clarify the matter; and that's the 'story' of A Seventh Man. It is the 'story' of how a 'migrant worker' has the ability to speak for 'himself' taken away from 'him', *and* the 'story' of how to tell such a 'story'. That's the point of the book: it is not just the 'subject' of the 'story' which is important, but also how it is told. 'He' and 'You' are referred to, but there is no all-seeing 'I'. That, in one sense, is what I meant by writing that A Seventh Man puts *you* the 'reader' in a difficult position; but not just that of course. The most difficult position A Seventh Man puts the 'reader' in -

particularly the kind of 'reader' who writes about books for a living - is that of recognising that being a 'reader' is 'not enough'. Or that being a 'writer' is 'not enough'. Or a 'photographer'. Or a 'critic'. Or a 'lecturer'. Or a 'theorist'. Because 'you yourself must be the seventh'.

The position that A Seventh Man puts the 'reader' in, therefore, obviously explains why so many academics have chosen not to write about it. On the one hand the book 'speaks for itself', in which case there is little more to say on the matter. On the other hand, the book suggests that being an 'academic' is 'not enough', and most academics don't want to think about that at all. The challenge of A Seventh Man is clear: it not only points to the fact that the capitalist division of labour needs to be overcome, it also points to the fact that simply theorising the capitalist division of labour is 'not enough' either. Even more challenging, however, is the position the book put Berger in. His way of reading and acting upon the injunction, 'be the seventh', was to become a migrant himself - albeit a very different kind of migrant than that represented in A Seventh Man. Instead of following the usual pattern of migration, which moves from the village ('Departure') to the metropolis ('Work') and back again ('Return'), Berger's 'travels' have taken him from the metropolis to the 'margins' (Quincy), and *then* back again. A Seventh Man therefore stands at a very important crossroads. In terms of Berger's 'life-story', his migration from urban Britain to rural France not only involved a transition from metropolitan to village life, it also involved crossing over from being a novelist (and art historian and social critic) to being a 'storyteller' (WB, 14). It is this story that I would like to focus on in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

Beyond Marx

Introduction: mining the keywords

When the just cause is defeated, when the courageous are humiliated, when men proven at pit-bottom and pit-head are treated like trash, when nobility is shat upon, and the judges in court believe lies, and slanderers are paid to slander with salaries which might keep alive the families of a dozen miners on strike, when the Goliath police with their bloody truncheons find themselves not in the dock but on the Honour's List, when our past is dishonoured and its promises and sacrifices shrugged off with ignorant and evil smiles, when whole families come to suspect that those who willed power are deaf to reason and every plea, and there is no appeal anywhere, when gradually you realise that, whatever words there may be in the dictionary, whatever the Queen says or parliamentary correspondents report, whatever the system calls itself to mask its shamelessness and egoism, when you gradually realise that They are out to break you, out to break your inheritance, your skills, your communities, your poetry, your clubs, your home and, wherever possible, your bones too, when finally people realise this, they may also hear, striking in their head, the hour of assassinations, of justified vengeance. On sleepless nights during the last few years in Scotland and South Wales, Derbyshire and Kent, Yorkshire, Northumberland and Lancashire, many, as they lay reflecting on their beds, heard, I am sure, this hour striking. And nothing could be more human, more tender than such a proposed vision of the pitiless being summarily executed by the pitiful. It is the word "tender" which we cherish and which They can never understand, for they do not know what it refers to. This vision is occurring all over the world. The avenging heroes are now being dreamt up and awaited. They are already feared by the pitiless and blessed by me and maybe by you.

I would shield any such hero to my fullest capacity. Yet if, during the time I was sheltering him, he told me he liked drawing, or, supposing it was a woman, she told me she'd always wanted to paint, and had never had the chance or the time to do so, if this happened, then I think I'd say: Look, if you want to, it's possible you may achieve what you are setting out to do in another way, a way less likely to fall out on your comrades and less open to confusion. I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges,

pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past has suffered, so that it has never been forgotten. I know too that the powerful fear art, whatever its form, when it does this, and that amongst the people such art sometimes runs like a rumour and a legend because it makes sense of what life's brutalities cannot, a sense that unites us, for it is inseparable from a justice at last. Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting place of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts, and honour'.

The words above are not my words; they are not the words I would choose to use exactly. They are the words of John Berger, from 'Miners', an essay originally published in 1989 in an exhibition catalogue, Painting and Drawing by Knud and Solwei Stampe, for the Cleveland Gallery, in Middlesbrough, and subsequently collected in Keeping a Rendezvous (KR, 8-9). Needless to say, the strike in question is that of the British miners in 1984-5; and why it hardly needs a mention is because everybody *knows* about miners and their strikes. Miners occupy a special place in the history and the 'mythology' of the organised working class. The word, 'miners', conjures many competing images; the most immediate being one of men working, tired and dirty. The paintings of Knud and Solwei Stampe are made out of such images; they show men who are instantly recognisable as miners, not just because of the titles of the paintings, but because of the men's uniforms, and their expressions, and the dirt. Many different stories can be read into their labours: their work is hard and dangerous; they are working-class heroes; they are trouble-makers out for themselves; they bring down Governments. Such stories are part of the struggle of the miners.³⁶

However, the defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-5 has come to occupy a specific place within the dominant story of British politics and culture, that of an 'ending': of socialism, of industrialism, of class, of confrontation, or of bloody-mindedness - depending on your point of view - but still an 'ending'. This is not to say that the end of socialism or industrialism or whatever is down to the defeat of the miners, but rather that during the 1980s, a general air of resignation and weariness began to be felt; and that one of the major points where this 'structure of feeling' crystallised - in Britain, at least - was around the defeat of the miners. In the practices of everyday life, it continues to be felt in the tacit recognition that there is no alternative. (A shrug. What can you do?) In the political sphere, this

³⁶ Consider the historic relevance of the strikes of 1972-4; as Perry Anderson notes, 'A bourgeois government had been brought down by the direct action of a strategic group of industrial workers - the only time in modern European history that an economic strike has precipitated the political collapse of a government' (Anderson 1992, 176).

'ending' has been acknowledged - and regulated - in the shift from the corporatist consensus of the British postwar settlement, to a 'spin-doctored', neo-liberal, Thatcherite agenda.³⁷ Alternatively, in more 'theoretically-minded' circles, this sense of an 'ending' has been related, directly or indirectly, to more widespread feelings of resignation and failure; a sneaking suspicion that such grand narratives as modernity, history, progress, and reason themselves are breaking down. Significant 'endings' continue to occur, like the end of apartheid, the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the demise of 'Old Labour'; but such events come to seem like post-scripts to the main conclusion: *New Times, New Labour, New Britain, New World Order*.³⁸ The moral of the story seems to be, learn to live with it; and most people do learn to live with it in one way or another, simply because it is the most insistent story. Which is to say, if one thinks 'miners' now, or considers the paintings of Knud and Solwei Stampe, it is difficult not to do so without reading the dominant story into them. Difficult, but not impossible; for what is also clear is that there are always also different and subordinate stories, and also different and opposing ways of telling and reading. Berger's essay, 'Miners', is presumably included in the exhibition catalogue in order to resist the dominant story; but what kind of statement is being made, and how should we go about reading it?

In 1984, in a Marxism Today interview with Geoff Dyer, Berger pledged his 'support [to] the miners' strike', while ruefully admitting that he was also 'a bad Marxist', since he had an 'aversion to political power whatever its form' (Berger 1984, 37). Fair enough, one might be tempted to say, Does it really matter if he's not that good a Marxist, as long as he's a good socialist? But that of course is the

³⁷ Labour's shift to a Thatcherite settlement should not be reduced to the 'Blair revolution'. Instead, as Colin Leys and Leo Panitch's analysis of the 1997 general election demonstrates, this shift can be traced to the failure of the 1960s Wilson governments. According to Leys and Panitch, Wilson's failure gave rise to a new Labour left, whose struggle with conservative elements in the party resulted in nothing less than the '1983 election disaster' - or at least their being blamed for it. 'With their defeat', Leys and Panitch note, 'the die was cast for the moderniser's project: accepting the legacy of Thatcherism as a kind of "settlement" akin to the Conservatives' accommodation to the legacy of the Attlee governments in the 1950s' (3). Ironically (or perhaps not so ironically), Perry Anderson uses virtually the same words to describe this process of modernisation: 'The new programme accepts the basic parameters of the Thatcher settlement, in much the same way that the Conservative governments of the fifties accepted the parameters of the Attlee settlement' (Anderson 1992b, 346). However, this is not an analysis that is simply the preserve of the 'hard left'. Robin Cook accepts that, 'An integral part of the crisis for the left during the Thatcher years was that we were transformed into the political force that defended the post-war settlement ... It is vital that the left does not now accept a role of merely conserving what was best in the New Right revolution of the "eighties"' (Cook 1997, 10). Which begs the question, whatever happened to the 'best' of the the post-war settlement?

³⁸ The when, where, how, and what of this 'ending' is, precisely, debatable: one place it is debated is called the 'Postmodernism Debate' (see Chapter One).

big question. Does the writing of 'Miners' further 'good' socialism? I must admit that the first time I read 'Miners' my initial response was, Well, maybe, but what exactly is the point of all this? Is it just another example of preaching to the converted? No, it seems too different for that: Berger actually does seem to be *preaching* in some way; and his position is certainly not an orthodox one. In fact, it almost appears to come out of nowhere. It is for this reason that I have deliberately omitted the inverted comma from the beginning of my quotation of 'Miners'. It is an attempt to read these words again, as if for the first time: but only *as if*, because reading is always necessarily re-reading. Read these words again then: 'nobility', 'evil', 'blessed', 'art', 'judged', 'suffered', 'justice', 'assassinations', 'guts', 'honour', and 'tender'. They are all, of course, 'political', and have long histories and struggles running through them. Many of them are words people actually use. What makes them different, however, is that they have been used in an art gallery, and have been published in a book by a reputable publisher, and we are therefore supposed to take them seriously; in other words, they are used in places which have the power to make them *legitimate*. What is also clear is that these words do not belong to any legitimate 'mainstream' discourse; they are not the kinds of words you hear on television, or on the radio, or in the national press. In terms of British political parties, and what passes as the 'left' or 'right', talk of 'evil' and 'assassinations' is terrorist talk; and Art and miners do not mix at all well. And this also applies to the alleged 'hard left', whose straight-talking historical materialism quickly comes into opposition with such terms as 'nobility' and 'blessed'. 'Theoretically' speaking, the situation is not much better: the cultural politics of 'Art' and 'Literature' might now be finding their way onto the 'Critical Theory' syllabus, but Berger's reference to 'lies' is not exactly in line with contemporary academic debates on ideology, deconstruction or discourse; while the mythologising of miners only seems to perpetuate a 'cult of masculinity' and violence which is already far too prevalent in the British labour movement (Campbell 1984, 98). Is there, then, any other way to read the words Berger uses? To read them, in effect, again themselves as noble and honourable?

In 1985, in the essay 'Mining the Meaning; Key Words in the Miners' Strike', Raymond Williams claimed that it was the 'duty of socialists, not only to continue to support' the miners, but 'to clarify and campaign on the central issues on which, over the coming decades, the future of this society will be decided', to which end he identified 'four keywords of the strike: management; economic; community and law-and-order' (Williams 1989b, 120). There is no need for me to

repeat or justify the importance of Williams's analysis of these four keywords. If anything, they have become even more important, and are currently being given a particular 'spin' by a New Labour government whose stated aim is a 'compassionate society', but whose actual policy, according to Tony Blair, is of 'flexible labour' in the 'free market'; in other words, 'a compassion with a hard edge' (quoted in White 1997). You do not have to be a Marxist or a socialist to understand that a more compassionate society depends not just on friendly sentiment, but on troublesome concerns like Britain's long-term economic decline, 'structural adjustment' to the capitalist global economy, and the particular failings of Westminster's 'constitution'; in fact, the 'left-liberal' argument and commercial success of Will Hutton's The State We're In testifies to this (see also Anderson 1992; Coates 1996; Blackburn 1997). On the other hand, does such a critique mean that compassion should simply be dismissed as the ideology which 'social liberalism' uses to conceal its hard capitalist heart? I do not think so. 'Compassion' does not just win votes because people are easily duped, but precisely because people care. In other words, stories of compassion are also part of the struggle; and they were in fact central to the miners' strike, which was made by families and communities coming together in their *caring* for each other, and as a 'class': but also against the competing story that they were *only* caring for themselves - for a sectional *interest*. In which case, perhaps another keyword should be considered: 'tenderness'.

According to Berger, 'It is the word "tender" which we cherish and which They can never understand'. 'Tenderness' is what separates us from Them; it is what allows us to forgive the calls for 'justified vengeance' which come in the 'sleepless nights' - 'nothing', in fact, 'could be more human, more tender'. Which is fine as far as it goes, but if one is a Marxist what is it that separates us from Them, if not class? What separates Berger's tenderness and retribution from liberal humanism, or even 'compassion with a hard edge'? Can tenderness be theorised at all? One highly suggestive answer to this question is supplied by Herbert Marcuse, who, on his deathbed, is reported to have summed up his long debate with politics, philosophy and aesthetics in the following manner: 'Look, I know wherein our most basic value judgments are rooted - in compassion, in our sense for the suffering of others' (quoted in Habermas 1985b, 77). Tenderness or compassion, it seems, should not be too quickly dismissed; such feelings may at first appear 'untheoretical', but only until you find yourself confronted by one of those long sleepless nights. Where this story is problematic, however, is that

Berger's position appears to be fixed on the deathbed: They cannot understand tenderness *because* They are 'evil', Berger tells us. At this point, what the reader surely cannot fail to understand is that Berger's tenderness and judgement is biblical.

The statement made by 'Miners' appears to be about as unequivocal as you can get: a statement of religious conviction. It certainly does not appear to leave much space for historical materialism, no matter how 'bad' a Marxist Berger is. Geoff Dyer's attempt to redeem Berger's 'left' credentials by claiming his work as 'a spiritual materialism' only seems to make matters worse (Dyer 1986, 134). Berger's 'faith', we are informed, 'is sternly secular; as such it attempts a restoration of the religious instinct to the human world and human relations. The danger of Marxism turning itself into a theology is utopianism Berger's is a pessimistic faith' (134). Dyer's argument is clearly unsatisfactory; however, the term 'spiritual materialism' does at least point to a crucial problematic which Berger's work addresses: the *relation between* the spiritual and the material. A clue as to how this problematic operates in Berger's work can be discerned in an article Berger wrote for The Guardian in 1995; a review of a collection of the letters and communiqués of Subcommandante Marcos of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, titled Shadows of Tender Fury. The tenderness and the vengeance of which Berger wrote in connection with the British miners' strike of 1984, surfaces again in connection with a group of peasant guerrillas who, on New Year's Day 1994, invaded the town of San Cristobel, in Chiapas, Mexico. Berger is quick to put this uprising in historical context; that of 'neo-liberal shock treatment': an accurate if somewhat uninteresting comment to make (Berger 1995f). What *is* interesting is what Berger goes on to say - or rather quotes Marcos as saying. "[O]ut of our spent and broken bodies must rise up a new world" Marcos writes. "Will we see it? Does it matter? I believe that it doesn't matter as much as knowing with undeniable certainty that it will be born, and that we have put our all - our lives, bodies and souls - into this long and painful but historic birth. *Amor y dolor* - love and pain: two words that not only rhyme, but join up and march together" (quoted in Berger 1995f). The bricolage of the spiritual and the material, so close to Berger's heart, is evident in this quote. Furthermore, this 'join' is reinforced by the quote Berger chooses to conclude his review of Shadows of Tender Fury.

"It happens that one feels that something has remained between the fingers, that there are still some words that want to find their way into sentences, that one has not finished emptying the pockets of the

soul. But it is useless, there never will be a postscript that can contain so many nightmares ... and so many dreams" (quoted in Berger 1995f).

Subcommandante Marcos, Berger feels, is 'addicted to post-scripts' (Berger 1995f). What is implicit in Berger's review though, is that he is too.

Berger's review of Tender Fury, I believe, allows us to discern the genuine insight as well as the general limitations of his own work. It becomes clear that Berger himself is addicted to post-scripts, because there *are* always loose ends and words that 'remain between the fingers', like 'tenderness'. Berger's own attempt to dip into the 'pockets of the soul' can therefore be understood as having been made in response, partly, to a certain strain of pessimistic 'theory' in Western Marxism and contemporary cultural and political criticism; and, in this sense, Berger's 'pessimistic faith' offers a useful antidote to the current faith in pessimism. What is just as important to note though - if not more important - is that Berger's writing, such as 'Miners', also emerges out of his recent experience of life in the French peasant village of Quincy; a geographical and discursive position which not only goes beyond the scope of Marxism (with its focus on the working-class), but also beyond a great deal of 'English' experience (since England has lacked a peasantry for nearly two hundred years). And, in this sense, it is possible to view Berger's 'pessimistic faith' as being, if not *mis-placed*, then at least somewhat *dis-placed*.

For example, Berger may well be right to suggest that there have been many 'sleepless nights during the last few years in Scotland and South Wales, Derbyshire and Kent, Yorkshire, Northumberland and Lancashire', but how likely is it that one night working people in Britain 'may also hear, striking in their head, the hour of assassinations'? Is such a claim believable, or is this kind of talk simply what Berger imagines he hears from his vantage point in the French Alps? Furthermore, are 'we' to believe that this same 'hour of assassinations' is now to be heard echoing in the mountains of Chiapas? It is a long way to travel - literally and metaphorically - from the jungles of Lacandon, to the streets of Bolton, to the mountains of the Huate Savoie; and it is difficult to see how Marxism ('good' or 'bad') provides a map for such a journey.

Perhaps, then, Berger's position in 'Miners' should be understood as being one that goes beyond Marx? And yet what does it really mean to say such

a thing? 'Miners' can be approached from all sorts of perspectives, most obviously, from a perspective which focuses on the role of 'art' - which, incidentally, Berger pretends not to understand. In this chapter, however, I will tend to confine my argument to 'politics', and specifically, the relation between the spiritual and the material. Firstly, I will consider how Berger's move beyond Marx relates to contemporary discussions of post-Marxism; particularly, the question of what it means to be called a 'Marxist', or a 'post-Marxist'. Secondly, I will consider the question of why Berger left England and Britain, and how his work, especially on peasants, should be read in a country which has no peasants. Thirdly, I will assess Jacques Derrida's recent proclamation that there are many 'spirits, or spectres' of Marx, and that 'an inheritor always has to choose' one (Derrida 1994b, 39). In particular, I will interrogate why it is that Derrida chooses to introduce 'spectrality', 'messianism' and the possibility of a 'new International' at this moment in time. As Williams notes, the heralding of Marxism's or socialism's demise is nothing new: 'Every few years some people announce that socialism, finally is dead. They then read the will and discover, unsurprisingly, that they are its sole lawful heirs..... The parting shots are heaviest when there has been some notable failure. That's it, they say, pointing to Stalin and the Gulag, or to the last three Labour governments' (Williams 1989b, 288). In the wake of the current parting shots, therefore, I will discuss what kind of 'inheritance' Berger provides.

The question(ing) of Marx(ism): 'modernist sins' and 'post-Marxian heresies'

In the last few years, discussions of 'post-Marxism' have become increasingly prevalent in the 'left-liberal' intelligentsia. But how useful is this 'post-ing' of Marx, and Marxism? However contentious it might be for critics such as Göran Therborn to assert that 'Marxism is nevertheless the major manifestation of the dialectics of modernity' (Therborn 1996, 59), it is perhaps even more contentious to propose that some putative post-Marxism is the major manifestation of the dialectics of post-modernity - or, in fact, to discern if such a statement has any clear meaning. There are, of course, good and urgent reasons why a thinking through and even beyond Marx and Marxism is necessary. One need only consider the victory of the New World Order over 'actual existing socialism', or the chauvinism and racism of certain 'universal' conceptions of class struggle, or the postmodern suspicion of grand

emancipatory narratives to acknowledge this much. In fact, post-Marxism comes to seem inevitable, even worthwhile, in a world where a 'post-contemporary' re-evaluation of Marxism at least raises the 'spectre' of Marx, and hints at some movement down the long roads to socialism. But what does it mean to declare oneself a post-Marxist, and what kind of movement is involved? Is post-Marxism for, against, or beyond Marx, and Marxism; and where does that leave socialism and communism?

In one sense, to be post-Marxist is to return to Marx, since Marx himself asserted that, whatever he was, he was *not* a Marxist. In another sense, post-Marxism merely recalls the anti-Marxist 'revisionism' of Edward Bernstein, and such 'revisionism' is cited by Norman Geras in order to historically preface his critique of the contemporary post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Geras 1987, 40-41). Geras is more than keen to deflate the myth of post-Marxism. What is it, he wants to know, that differentiates Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism from ex-Marxism, or 'ordinary, old-fashioned' non-Marxism? (43-44). Is it simply that the sobriquet of post-Marxist sounds more fashionable and risqué than the title of ex-Marxist? Geras's conclusion is that Laclau and Mouffe do go beyond Marxism in one very significant way: for them, 'virtually *any* framework of historical explanation, any principle of sociological *intelligibility*, can be condemned in the name of "the openness and indeterminacy of the social"' (47). Beyond Marxism, certainly, but also beyond any form of practical politics. As Tony Bennett notes: 'In reducing politics to a struggle for the rhetorical construction of the social, they [Laclau and Mouffe] are unable to offer any convincing account of the mechanisms through which rhetorical constructions of political interests and subjects are able to connect with and concretely influence differently constituted spheres of political relations' (Bennett 1990, 264; see also Eagleton 1991, 215-218). As far as Geras and Bennett are concerned, therefore, Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism turns out to be little more than ex-Marxism.

What of Michèle Barrett's post-Marxism? In 1980, in Women's Oppression Today, Barrett maintained that the task of the Marxist-feminist was 'to identify the operation of gender relations as and where they may be distinct from, or connected with, the processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism' (1980, 9). However, in her more recent book, The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault, Barrett declares that 'the materialist (in practice economic reductionist) premises of Marxism are inadequate as a basis for

thinking about political, cultural and social life in a late twentieth century whose “determinations” are so different from those of [the] mid-nineteenth century’ (1991, 139). The point I want to focus on here is what Barrett puts in parenthesis. If ‘materialist’ means ‘economic reductionist’ ‘in practice’, does the same go for materialism *in theory* - or am I just splitting hairs here? Gregor McLennan carefully considers Barrett’s work in relation to reductionism, functionalism, essentialism, and universalism; which, he notes have been demonised by her to the point of almost being considered ‘sins’ of ‘modernist theorising’ (1996, 54). In these terms Barrett would clearly appear to be against Marx, and Marxism. However, McLennan detects an interesting tone to Barrett’s work. According to him, Barrett’s argument appears to simultaneously sound in a ‘major’ and a ‘minor’ key: the ‘major’ key sounding a note of repudiation (of Marxism’s alleged reductionism, functionalism, essentialism, and universalism), but in time with a ‘minor’ key which signals ‘a commendable awareness that, without some version of the four modernist methodological sins, the very notion of explanation in social theory simply cannot be sustained’ (55). In which case, once again, post-Marxism only serves to return us to the question of Marx and Marxism.

The problem with post-Marxism, I believe, lies not in the answers Laclau, Mouffe, Barrett - and their critics, Geras and McLennan - come to, but in the asking: in the misunderstanding and underestimation of what is at stake in the question of Marx and the *labelling* of somebody as ‘Marxist’ or ‘post-Marxist’. Raymond Williams considers the nature of this misunderstanding in his essay, ‘You’re a Marxist, Aren’t You?’. He recalls how a ‘kind of flat labelling with this term “Marxist” became increasingly common in the 1960s’, until, by 1975 (the date of the essay), it could be used from what might be called the right to describe someone as left-wing, and from the left to describe someone else as not quite left-wing enough, thereby mystifying what actually were a wide range of positions (Williams 1989b, 65). Today, the use of ‘Marxism’ considered by Williams in 1975 might be more explicitly theorised in terms of multi-accentuality and hegemony, and it is not insignificant that Williams was studying Bakhtin at the time; but what does this teach us about the current use of the term ‘post-Marxist’?

Certain sections of the academy have been admirably quick to learn the lessons of Bakhtin, Gramsci, Foucault and many others, and to use them to deconstruct the discourse of Marxism from the safety of ‘newer’ positions, some

of which have come to be termed 'post-Marxist'. However, where contemporary, postmetropolitan 'theory' (and/or 'cultural studies', and/or 'post-marxism') has been regrettably slow to respond is in applying those lessons to its own formations and discourses. As Williams notes, 'a quite central theoretical point which to me is at the heart' of cultural-political theory, 'but which has not always been remembered in it ... is that you cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation; that the relation between a project and a formation is always decisive; and that the emphasis' of such theory 'is precisely that it engages with *both*, rather than specialising itself to one or the other..... (Williams 1989a, 151). The crucial point, however, is that this should include the project and formations of theory itself.³⁹ In other words, it is all very well for cultural theorists to gain an identity by coming together in conferences and universities to deconstruct a flawed 'Marxist' concept from a position which is termed 'post-Marxist'; but if this precludes the application of dialogical and deconstructive analyses to their own formation(s) and discursive practice(s), then 'post-Marxism' simply becomes another flat label, and continues to mystify what might be genuinely useful ideas and substantial allegiances.

In the essay, 'In the Same Boat?', Terry Eagleton considers the current debate on Marxism and post-Marxism; and he does so in a manner which avoids any mystification. Eagleton's argument goes something like this: why bother to talk about all this? Why bother assuming a post-Marxist position, since Marxism has never been adequately defined in the first place. Or, as he puts it: 'How then can Marxism be over, when we cannot even agree on what it is or was?' (Eagleton 1997, 37). For Eagleton what first needs to be considered is Marxism itself, and the relation between Marxism and socialism. Is it simply the case that Marxism is the theory of historical materialism, and socialism its revolutionary practice? Not so, apparently. 'Most Marxists speak of their creed as a unity of theory and practice, but it is hard to see what a specifically Marxist practice would consist in, as opposed to a non-Marxist revolutionary one' (37). Admittedly, Eagleton does try to pin down this relation of theory and practice, but his way of doing it is to make great play of how difficult it actually is to say what Marxism 'adds to socialism theoretically, and arguably impossible to say what it adds to it practically' (37). Is Marxist theory, he enquires, 'The philosophy of dialectical materialism ... the doctrine of base and superstructure ... the labour theory of

³⁹ As Williams notes, 'We have to look at what kind of formation it was from which the project of Cultural Studies developed, and then at the changes of formation that produced different definitions of that project' (Williams 1989a, 152).

value ... a contradiction between the forces and relations of production ... a "materialist" theory of socialism .. a progressive' view of history (37)? Eagleton's answer is that Marxism is probably not any of the above; and that bits and pieces of said philosophies have also been accepted, at one time or another, by non-Marxists, as well as refuted by declared Marxists. Furthermore, the belief that what marks out Marxism is its practical politics is 'even harder to credit. Not all Marxism has been revolutionary, and not all revolutionary socialists have been Marxist' (38). However, having neatly abbreviated over a hundred years of Marxist beliefs and struggles to a handful of off-the-cuff remarks, Eagleton finally picks out a definitive Marxist claim: 'that the genesis, flourishing and demise of social classes, in their conflicts with other classes, is finally determined by the dynamics of historical modes of material production. It is hard to think of any other place where the *articulation* of these two narratives is so decisively cemented, even if the exact nature of that articulation has been the subject of much debate' (38). It is also hard to think of a larger understatement than that the nature of this articulation has been the subject of much debate.⁴⁰

Eagleton's argument sometimes seems flippant (in effect, that it's not what you say you do, but the way that you are seen to do it), but what becomes more and more apparent is that through the ducking and diving of this (disingenuous, dialectical?) argument he (and we) are returned, again and again, to the following point: 'The bonds between Marxism and socialism may indeed be in principle less tight than some have previously assumed; but the historical fact of the matter is that the Marxist tradition has been one of the most precious bearers of socialist beliefs of more general import, and it is mere academicism to imagine that the former could be dismantled without grave detriment to the latter' (38). In other words, that 'It doesn't much matter in my view whether one calls oneself a Marxist as long as one is a socialist in something like the senses defined by that tradition; but without that tradition, it may not be possible in the long run to do even that' (38). Marxism doesn't matter very much it seems, unless of course you are Terry Eagleton, in which case it matters a great deal. The problem, once again, lies not in the questions themselves, but in the asking. Which is to say,

⁴⁰ Williams's cultural materialist intervention has been crucial to this debate; and, despite Eagleton's criticisms of Williams, he sometimes sounds just like him. In the essay 'You're a Marxist Aren't you?' Williams notes that: 'The fundamental approach of historical materialism, as Marx defined it, seems to be to be profoundly true. Men (sic) make their own history within certain limits that are set by the conditions of their social development, conditions which are themselves profoundly affected by the state of their economic relations which are in turn related to a particular stage of the mode of production. But at every point in a summary like that there is in practice detailed and important dispute about what exactly is meant and implied' (Williams 1989b, 71).

with the fact that the *question* put by Marxism is also always a *demand* - made by many peoples - to make the world a better place. 'Marxism' is an affirmation *and* an accusation; and one that can quite literally be a matter of life and death. People have died for being Marxists and ex-Marxists, which is also to say for being flatly labelled 'Marxists' and 'ex-Marxists', but nobody has been put to death for being a 'postmodernist' - at least not yet. On this last point, therefore, I differ with Eagleton, since to suggest as much is not to denigrate postmodernism, but rather to recognise it. In other words, to recognise that if postmodernism and/or post-Marxism come to be implicated in a movement which is as *demanding* as socialism and Marxism, then postmodernism and post-Marxism matter a great deal.⁴¹

It is in the context of these variable positions and their historical formations that I believe Berger's long engagement with Marxism should be considered.

Since I first started writing I have been labelled a Marxist. A convenient category for others, sometimes a shelter for me. I believe in the class struggle and the historical dialectic; I am convinced by Marx's understanding of the role and mechanisms of capitalism. Within the world historical arena, the fighting is mostly as he foresaw. The questions I ask now are addressed to what surrounds the arena (Berger 1985b, 212).

Berger states that he is convinced by Marx; and that he also wants to move beyond or outside of Marx's arena. Does this mean he is a 'post-Marxist'? If he is, it is hardly news. In fact, it is over forty years since Berger's work was first described as a 'post-Marxian heresy' (quoted in Dyer 1986, 14). However, while it is obvious that the label 'post-Marxist' means differently today than it did in the 1950s, it is also clear that Berger's work seems to be different in 'tone' from the contemporary post-Marxist theorisations of Barratt, or Laclau and Mouffe etc. One difference, I think, lies in the way Berger pitches his questions. Consider, for example, that the above extract is from an essay, 'Go ask the Time', which was published in Granta magazine in 1985, and also appeared as part of an anthology connected to the Channel 4 television series, About Time.⁴² This is a piece of work which might loosely be described in terms of its distribution as 'popular', in terms of its thoughtfulness as 'academic', and in terms of its commitment to 'Marxism' as 'political' - perhaps even 'typical' of Berger the

⁴¹ A good example of what I mean here is demonstrated by a Brazilian church leader, who wondered, 'Why is it that when I give help to the poor they call me a saint, but when I ask *why* they are poor in the first place, they call me a communist?' (quoted in Icke 1990, 4).

⁴² Berger's essay, 'Go ask the Time', appears in a slightly modified form in the book About Time, under the title 'Once upon a Time' (Berger 1985c).

'intellectual' and 'media celebrity'. To consider Berger's work involves continually coming up against the shortcomings of such categories; a fact he himself is only too aware of. His reference to the convenient categories of others, clearly alludes to the 'media' pastime of ideological 'mud-slinging', which Berger was so often on the receiving end of as 'Art Critic' for The New Statesman - and which continues today. In 1996 Radio 3 broadcast a programme, 'But Will It be a Likeness', presented by Berger. The reviewer from The Guardian declared that 'Berger is a Marxist with compelling things to say about culture', but that in this programme Berger joked *and* also talked about 'societies where everything is commodified', and that it was just not on. 'Can we have our old Berger back please?', was the entreaty (Karpf 1996). Why does the reviewer want Berger to confine his Marxism to talking about (allegedly) uncommodified culture; and to being deadly serious, not funny? A case, perhaps, of better the Marxist you know, than the post-Marxist you don't. In one sense, of course, this is understandable, and it is possible to have some sympathy with the reviewer from The Guardian; *coming to terms* with Berger is difficult. However, the question of 'Marxism' or 'post-Marxism' is not just about categories; it is also - to take Berger at his word - about shelter. It is here that a second difference between Berger and contemporary theorisations of Marxism and post-Marxism become apparent. What kind of shelter, for example, is offered in the essay, 'A Different Answer'?

I travelled not long ago to the four corners of Europe - except that Europe, not being square, has more than four corners. I went to northern Finland, to the start of the Anatolian plains east of Istanbul, to the *meseta* in Spain, and to the Outer Hebrides. In each corner of the continent the substances of the centre, the stuff of life as lived in the centre, are rare. Yet to say that the corners are poor would be to miss the point. In the corner-pockets there's simply a change of currency ... Yet now there are signs that the centres are losing their historical initiative. They no longer announce the future, or if they do, they are no longer altogether believed. Maybe this is why, in the four corners of Europe, I had the impression not of escaping but of facing up to certain questions usually avoided ... When you look up at the balcony of the sky from Barra, another answer comes to one of the oldest questions - a different answer to the one given in the Age of Enlightenment. With things changing every hour, and for ever repeating themselves like the tide, you understand that the Creation, for all its beauty, was begun out of suffering (KR, 220-224).

It is certainly possible to read a large part of this passage in terms of the end of Enlightenment, the end of History, the suspicion of metanarratives, the liberal ideology of the End of Ideology, and so on: a not unfamiliar story. On the other

hand, it is also possible to read this passage in relation to feminist and post-colonial criticisms from beyond the 'centre', to the effect that the (possible) ending of this period and its time-spaces is being experienced and understood quite differently from the margins (or the 'corners' that are not corners, if you will), and that 'space-time compression' should in fact be theorised in terms of 'power-geometries', and so on: another not unfamiliar story.⁴³ But having said this, what is and continues to be unfamiliar about Berger's story is that he takes a world-historical approach, and *also* steps beyond it into another discourse to declare that 'the Creation ... was begun out of suffering'. Modernist sins and post-Marxian heresies, indeed. If Marxism once provided Berger with some form of shelter, his post-Marxism - if that is what it is - appears to be built on little more than what would normally be thought of as the shaky, metaphysical foundations of religious discourse.

However, I do not believe that Berger's 'answer' should simply be heard as the cry of an old Marxist finally recanting and taking shelter in 'religion'. It is more fruitful, I believe, to attempt to 'theorise' the 'suffering' Berger identifies. In this respect, the date of 'A Different Answer' is important; it was published in May 1989, about the time that 'actual existing socialism' entered its final collapse. In other words, the 'answer' is in response to a question which is also a *demand* - made by many peoples - to make the world a better place. A point which Berger reiterates in an essay from 1990, 'The Soul and the Operator'.

The resurgent nationalisms [and] Independence movements all make economic and territorial demands, but their first claim is of a spiritual order. The Irish, the Basques, the Corsicans, the Kurds, the Kosovans, the Azerbaijanis, the Puerto Ricans and the Latvians have little in common culturally or historically, but all of them want to be free of distant, foreign centres which, through long, bitter experience, they have come to know as soulless (KR, 235).

Berger's use of a religious discourse is not incidental. His point, it seems, is precisely to inform us that we ignore the 'spiritual' at our peril; at the risk of misunderstanding what is at stake in these 'nationalisms'. He avoids the facile link between the collapse of 'actual existing socialism' and nationalist resurgence; these nationalisms are global, not just East European. He also accepts that such nationalisms should not be uncritically accepted, and that they certainly include the 'danger[s]' of 'bigotry, fanaticism, racism' etc. (236). Nevertheless, Berger's fear is that, having said this much, such nationalisms will continue to be too conveniently categorised and too easily dismissed. A fear that

⁴³ This geographical problematic is discussed in greater detail in Chapter One (51-52).

is well founded, given 'Western' 'media' coverage of 'fundamentalism', 'Balkanisation', 'Islamic militancy', 'Seikh militancy', 'sectarianism' etc.; and one need only consider David Harvey's symptomatic disdain for 'geopolitics and of faith in charismatic politics', in order to gauge how this logic is perpetrated by the 'left' intelligentsia - let alone the 'right' (Harvey 1990, 306). However, the critique of Harvey's structure of thinking also provides one way of coming to terms with Berger's 'spirituality'; by which I mean, one way of gaining some *sense* of his 'spirituality'. In Chapter One, I concurred with Massey's critique that the dominant theorisation of the postmodern perpetuates a dichotomous dualism in which 'time is dynamism, ... history', male and modern - and 'space is stasis ... coded female and denigrated' as postmodern (Massey 1992, 74). What Massey also makes clear is that such binary thinking admits a wide variety of transcodings; in which case, to the dualities of time/space, male/female, and modern/postmodern, we can also add metropolitan/margin, and material/spiritual. Berger's spiritual claims might be a heresy or a sin to the more orthodox, but excommunication is not the answer either. 'Theoretically-speaking', Berger's work need not be read as a return to an unreconstructed spirituality, but rather as the recognition that the very formulation of spirituality/materiality in terms of this kind of dichotomy needs to be deconstructed and overcome. Of course, such a story still leaves a few other questions which need to be addressed. After all, it is no accident (to use an old communist phrase) that Berger's ability to hear such a different answer coincides with his decision to take shelter on the postmetropolitan margins of Europe - i.e., in a French peasant village. And it is to such 'questions of geography' that I would now like to turn.

Some English questions - and peculiarities

The first question, surely, is why are the questions English? England, Britain, the U.K. are generally used as interchangeable terms; and yet it is also quite clear that 'England' and the 'English' are dominant - whether this is in terms of 'nationhood', 'literature', 'accent', or whatever. As Perry Anderson makes clear, the question of being 'British' is always fraught with problems of identity: 'In Britain .. the organising definition of the national ... [is] ... inescapably imperial - the "British" people, strictly speaking, emerging as an artifact of the empire-state, from the various island nationalities' (Anderson 1992, 10). The declaration at the outset that these are 'English' questions, allows us to avoid being coy about

whose state-nation this is. It is, in effect, a post-colonial recognition of what it means to be 'English', and to use words which are never simply one's own.⁴⁴

This being said, it quickly becomes apparent that the question of being English involves many other peculiarities. What marks out Great Britain's place in the world is that the British Empire once ruled over it, or at least *ruled the waves*. As Anderson's writing indicates, what put the Great into Britain was its 'maritime supremacy', coupled with the fact that England was the 'first *industrial* capitalism - a subsequent lead inseparable from superior natural endowments in size, location and mineral resources', which gave it the edge over its non-industrial, capitalist competitors, and enabled Britain to achieve world-hegemonic dominance (Anderson 1992, 332). What England's singular position as the first industrial capitalist power has meant in the long-term, however, is that the 'logic of serial slowdown' has been more hard to avoid here than elsewhere (334-7).⁴⁵ Which brings us to another interesting question: whether Marxism's own 'slowdown' is perhaps attributable to the fact that Marx's theorisation of capitalism is peculiarly English? How is one to understand the lack of a revolution in Britain, when faced with the fact of revolutions in Russia? Not to mention China, Vietnam, and Iran. The working-class will make history, Marx tells us; but it turns out instead that it is the peasantry who have most often made history: and, true to peculiar form, the English lack a peasantry. This would suggest that there are not only different chronologies of 'progress' which need to be recovered here, but - just as importantly - other cartographies of 'progress'.

Justin Rosenberg argues that 'the course of twentieth-century history appears to diverge dramatically from any Marxist understanding', particularly because socialist revolutions occurred, not 'in the industrialised heartlands of capitalism' but 'in the peasant periphery' (Rosenberg 1996, 9). Was Marx wrong, or was he just reading an English peculiarity as a universal? According to Rosenberg, an understanding of such peasant revolutions, 'far from refuting Marx', actually supplies the 'lost history of international relations' (10). What needs to be recovered is the '*international dimension*' of capitalist development;

⁴⁴ As Alan Sinfield notes, 'it is often unclear whether "England" or "Britain" is the proper term, since many cultural phenomena might be said to derive from English hegemony, yet they do occur throughout the islands and to suggest otherwise would misrepresent experience as it is lived at the moment' (Sinfield 1997, 128).

⁴⁵ As Anderson notes, 'In any given economic space, new blocs of capital possess an inherent competitive advantage over old, since they embody later technology' (Anderson 1992, 334). As he makes clear, a 'logic of serial slowdown' is not inevitable, it is just that, 'The principal correctors of the post-war epoch ... [such as] specific types of civil bureaucracy, banking system or labour movement' have been absent from the 'British experience' (337).

that the development of almost all states other than Britain occurred within the 'pressure of an already existing world market' in which, 'by definition, almost all countries except Britain would share [a] condition of relative backwardness', and where 'combined development was going to be, not the exception, but rather the norm' (8). In other words, the 'lost history of international relations' is 'the tragedy of the uneven and combined development of capitalism internationally' (13). However, what needs to be reiterated is that Rosenberg's thesis also suggests that the uneven and combined development of world capitalism, 'even as it incorporates other societies, fuses with them in unpredictable combinations', and therefore produces, '*within its own movement*', the continual possibility of revolutionary conjunctures (8-13). In these terms, not only can the 'apparently anomalous' appearance of the Russian revolution be explained through a conjunctural analysis of Czarist Russia's position within the capitalist world market, but the failure of the revolution can also be explained and even predicted, since that too depends on the Soviet Union's uneven development and international position (9). Indeed, the impending failure of the October revolution, partly due to Russia's relative backwardness, was foreseen by the Bolsheviks; and Lenin declared that, "At all events, under all conceivable circumstances, if the German revolution does not come, we are doomed" (10). The rest, so to speak, is history; as Rosenberg notes, the contradiction between 'town and country deepened' in what is known as the 'so-called scissors crisis of the late 1920s', the German revolution never materialised, and the result was Stalinism (10).

Rosenberg's exhortation to the current generation of socialists is to 'reincorporate into our understanding of the present that lost world history of the twentieth century' (15). A lot of such work has already been done: in the light of Rosenberg's lost history, the organisation of post Second World War U.S. hegemony becomes explicable as the 'geopolitical management of combined development and its consequences on a world scale' (12); and one need only consider Chomsky's analysis of the U.S. and its 'Overall Framework of Order' in order to understand many of the details of this geopolitical management as formulated and implemented by U.S. planners at the beginning of the Cold War (Chomsky 1987, 5-26). However, an analysis such as Chomsky's is made from the postmetropolitan centre and from 'above'. In order to further understand this lost world history, it is necessary to make an analysis from the margins and 'below', since - as Williams notes - it is 'the "rural idiots" and the "barbarians and

semi-barbarians" who have been, for the last forty years, the main revolutionary force in the world' (Williams 1993, 304).

Not everybody agrees with such an analysis. Andrew Milner remains unconvinced, and terms Williams's work a form of 'Leavisite Maoism' (Milner 1993, 51). Berger, however, is close to Williams on this point. In fact, in A Seventh Man, published in 1975, two years after The Country and the City, he deposits a large chunk of Williams's critique of 'metropolitan' bias, quite unannounced, in the main body of the text; signalling not only the socialist value of sharing, but also his and Mohr's indebtedness to Williams's thinking (Berger and Mohr 1975, 21). And yet, what is also clear is that A Seventh Man explicitly avoids the issue of migration to Britain; while Berger's overall relation to English 'cultural theory' and/or politics remains nebulous to say the least. Williams would appear to be the figure with whom Berger shares the most concerns and allegiances, but what exactly is Berger's formation?⁴⁶

Unlike those members of the 'non-aligned left' who departed from the Communist Party Historians' Group in 1958, Berger never actually joined the Communist Party. He also seems to have fallen between generational stools. According to Dyer, Berger's art criticism for The New Statesman was 'characteristic of a generation that briefly jolted the literary establishment in the mid 1950s'; in other words, the so-called 'angry young men' (Dyer 1986, 11). However, although Kenneth Tynan, Berger and Penelope Gilliat were undoubtedly 'friends', Berger was 'not asked to contribute to Declaration ... a collection of essays that has since acquired something of manifesto status for the contradictory and intemperate impulses of the angry young people' (12). Of course, part of the difficulty of locating Berger's position in relation to the 'angry young people' of the 1950s might be put down to the vagueness of a term like 'generation'. In which case, Dyer's criticism might be read more usefully in conjunction with Alan Sinfield's story of subcultural middle-class dissidence, as elaborated in Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain. Except, that is,

⁴⁶ That there is a relation between Berger and Williams is occasionally noted. According to Raymond Mazurek, for instance, 'The Country and the City [is a] book... like Berger's [A Seventh Man] ... [which is] a recent Marxist attempt to take seriously "country" and "city" as basic structures of thought and feeling' (Mazurek 1984, 137). However, despite both Williams's and Berger's best efforts to transgress the boundaries between 'creative' and 'critical' cultural production, the relation that continues to be drawn between the two is a binary one in which Williams's work is constituted as 'theoretical', and Berger's work is constituted as 'artistic'. Geoff Dyer for one commits this error. According to him, Williams's work 'underwrites theoretically what is present in Berger as a basic and urgent imperative' (Dyer 1986, 156-7).

for the fact that in 1960 Berger left postwar Britain behind him. 'I didn't become a Soviet spy' he jokes, 'I was a bit younger, but I decided that I wanted to get the bloody hell out of that country and never have much to do with it again. Above all, with its ruling class. Because that's what we're talking about, the ruling class' (Berger 1989, 3). Berger's self-imposed exile might explain why he is not immediately associated with the British New Left, but it does not excuse why he gets no mention at all, as is the case with Lin Chun's recent study of The British New Left (Chun 1993).⁴⁷

Getting 'the bloody hell out' is hardly much of an explanation however. As Berger himself concedes:

There was not a single reason for going, there were many. It was partly because there were people working in France whom I felt close to: Sartre; in a different way, Camus; Merleau-Ponty. In the Britain that I left there were no thinkers like that. But that is just one reason among many (Berger 1984, 18).

In one sense, therefore, I tend to agree with Nikos Papastergiadis, who asserts that Berger's migration can be understood in terms of his 'yearn[ing] for the position that Gramsci described as that of the "organic intellectual"' (Papastergiadis 1993, 67).⁴⁸ However, doubt still remains as to whether Berger's position is *best* understood as that of an 'organic intellectual'. As far as Perry Anderson is concerned Berger is little more than a 'public sharpshooter'; in contrast, presumably, to his own assaults on the public (Anderson 1990b, 90). Berger might reply that sharp shooting is what is needed; but such sniping is

⁴⁷ The omission of Berger would certainly come as no surprise to Dorothy Thompson, who notes that herself and 'many other active workers, seem to have been completely written out of the narrative': 'There ... is no mention of Ken Coates and only a passing reference to the Institute for Workers' Control' (Thompson 1996, 93-5).

⁴⁸ Papastergiadis aside, the dominant way to read Berger's 'life-story' continues to be in terms of that 'traditional' narrative of 'artist-moves-to-France-because-Frenchies-know-more-about-wine-women-and-song' scenario. Indeed, as recently as 1996, Colm Toibin was busy reiterating such stereotypes in The Observer Magazine: 'Berger', Toibin writes, 'whispers in our ears, slightly Frenchified, full of awe and wonder, about art and nature, the body and the soul' (Toibin 1996). This being said, French 'literature' and 'politics' undoubtedly had an influence on Berger. As Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders note, the "'Swinging Sixties"' was marked by a 'mood ... of rebellion [where] novelists tried to break out of the constricting forms of the English novel by assimilating the modes and techniques of foreign writers - particularly French and American writers. In The Foot of Clive and Corker's Freedom John Berger examined the relationship between the private and the social self in the manner of Jean-Paul Sartre' (Davies and Saunders 1983, 44). What Davies and Saunders neglect to mention, however, is that by the Sixties Berger had already 'left England for good' (Dyer 1986, 31).

beside the point.⁴⁹ What none of the above adequately explain is how Berger has ended up living not just in France, but with a bunch of so-called 'rural idiots' in France. There is, therefore, a crucial question which still needs to be addressed here; namely, what was it in Berger's formation which prompted his commitment to marginal postmetropolitan issues?

Berger's explicit comments on British politics are relatively few and far between. When asked in an interview with Geoff Dyer in 1984 what his current view of British politics was, Berger offered the following:

Well, let's go back to the 1940s, to Labour Monthly. Palme Dutt wrote virtually the whole magazine and he foresaw, it seems to me, in large outline, everything that has happened: the economic evolution, the economic collapse - everything. He was very prophetic. He had a great influence on me so that nothing that has happened in Britain has surprised me (Berger 1984, 38).

Despite Berger clearly indicating a major intellectual debt and political allegiance, Dutt is not mentioned in Dyer's monograph on Berger; or Nikos Papastergiadis's for that matter. An explanation for this omission is not too hard to find: Dutt was a Stalinist. In fact, he was the brains behind the British Communist Party for nearly fifty years. To dismiss him as nothing *more* than a Stalinist, however, is to commit a grave error. Dutt was the most vocal opponent of imperialism in Britain from the 1920s right up until the 1960s. He was also of Indian and Swedish parentage. The reason why I mention this is not simply because I too am of Indian extraction and find Dutt's family life personally interesting, but because Dutt's *brownness* is crucial to his politics. His being brown, and being educated to be white, meant that he was forced to come to terms with the 'inescapably imperial' nature of being 'British' some years before Perry Anderson theorised the fact. This is not to denigrate the New Left's theoretical breakthroughs of the 1950s and 1960s. On the contrary, I believe the British New Left managed to articulate many concerns which Dutt was either unable or unwilling to address himself, for example the failure of 'communism' in the Soviet Union. However, the relative merits of the New Left and the CPGB are not what is at issue here; Dutt's 'influence' on Berger is. And what Dutt's writings from the 1940s allowed Berger to gain a sense of, I would contend, is how the 'international dimension' of capitalist development is also always inscribed within

⁴⁹ One need only consider that 'A Different Answer' was published in Tages-Anzeiger, or that 'The Soul and the Operator' was published in Expressen, in order to gather who is shooting blanks and who is not. Keeping a Rendezvous contains writing previously published in mainstream newspapers and magazines in Spain, Sweden, the United States and Britain.

our identities. In other words, Dutt's writings offered Berger a way to engage the sort of 'geographical' issues which until quite recently were hardly considered issues at all.

Most histories of the British labour movement contain little mention of the British Communist Party, and next to none of Dutt and his crucial relation to anti-imperialist struggles.⁵⁰ In fact, if Dutt is mentioned at all, it is usually in connection with Harry Pollitt, and only then in order to confirm the patronising double act of Dutt the 'forbidding and very serious intellectual', and Pollitt the earthy, working-class boiler-maker from Lancashire - who 'learnt to fart the Internationale' when he was imprisoned during the 1926 General Strike (Davies 1992, 107).⁵¹ The relevance of Dutt's Euro-Indian heritage to his politics remains largely undiscussed; and Francis Beckett even goes so far as to refer disparagingly to Dutt's 'deep, precise, academic's voice. Words like "'stand" came out of his mouth as a tightly controlled "stind" (Beckett 1995,29). However, while a limited articulation of race and class might be less than surprising in older and more 'rightwing' histories such as Henry Pelling's, its persistence in contemporary, 'left-wing' analyses of the British labour movement points to a more symptomatic failure. Consider, for example, Tony Cliff and Danny Gluckstein's, The Labour Party: A Marxist History, which reports on Dutt's editorship of Labour Monthly without ever mentioning his 'race', or why and how it might have something to do with the newspaper's singular focus on issues of international socialism and anti-colonialism; added to which - and most damningly - there is not one reference to Shapurji Saklatvala, the Indian communist and Labour Party Member of Parliament for Battersea from 1922-23, and 1924-9. (Cliff and Gluckstein 1988). At least Davies makes mention of Saklatvala - that 'it was hatred of imperialism that made him join the Communist Party' - even if such a reference only prompts the question of why hatred of imperialism did not send people in the direction of the Labour Party (Davies 1992, 109). This structure of thinking occurs repeatedly: in Mike Squires's Saklatvala: a Political Biography, figures such as Saklatvala continue to be discussed predominantly in terms of class; and the fact that Saklatvala - or Dutt, for that matter - are brown, and the wider implications of what that involves are not admitted, or even able to be considered (Squires 1990). As Danny Reilly notes in his review of Saklatvala for Race and Class, 'Squires does not tell us'

⁵⁰ Dutt is all but written out of the history of the 'left' (offenders include Laybourn 1998, and 1992; Pelling 1978, and 1987).

⁵¹ The stereotype of the rough and ready Pollitt and effete Dutt occurs time after time (offenders include Wood 1959; and Thompson 1991).

about the contradictions Saklatvala must have faced over such events as the racist 1925 Coloured Seamen's Order; and, in fact, he appears unaware that 'there may be a story to tell' (Reilly 1991, 101).

In the 1940s Dutt was perhaps 'the *only* informed socialist critic' who was alert to the extent of the Atlee government's colonial exploitation (Callaghan 1993, 235-6). Here is a peculiarity of the English worth recalling; the most radical 'left-wing' Labour government in British history not only continued the exploitation of the Empire and Commonwealth, arguably they attempted to increase it. As Nicholas White notes,

Sir Alfred Cripps, Minister for Economic Affairs, told a conference of African governors in November 1947 that with the sterling area's dollar deficit running at £600 to £700 millions a year, "we should increase out of all recognition the tempo of African economic development", boosting production of anything "that will save dollars or will sell in a dollar market" (White 1999, 9).⁵²

It is, we may surmise, Dutt's writings on imperialism, rather than his attachment to Stalinism which prompted Berger in 1963 to declare Dutt to be 'the most brilliant political commentator writing today in English' (quoted in Callaghan 1993, 282). When this history is recovered, Berger's political formation and the source of his commitment becomes a great deal more comprehensible.⁵³

However, the form Berger's commitment has taken - i.e., his decision to

⁵² 'Despite the anti-colonial leanings of many Labour Party members', Nicholas White notes, 'socialist principles were sacrificed to metropolitan self-interest in Labour's colonial policies between 1945 and 1951' (White 1999, 7). Simply put, as sterling faced crisis after crisis, well-meaning ideas of extending welfare to the colonies and dominions were jettisoned. What was given with one hand in the name of 'welfare' and 'development' was more than taken back with the other in the name of keeping the sterling area afloat. As Michael Havinden and David Meredith note, 'The growth of the colonial sterling balances by about £850 million in the eight years between 1947 and 1955 represented the accumulation abroad of a considerable potential purchasing power for imports of goods and services. By building up these funds the colonies were foregoing imports from Britain. In a sense they were investing their "surplus" funds in Britain as most of this money was held in British government securities. A situation in which some of the poorest and least-developed countries were effectively lending to one of the richest and most developed did not escape critical comment, especially in view of the contrast between the size of the funds being accumulated ... and the flow of capital from Britain to the colonies in the form of colonial development and welfare (£118 million)' (Havinden and Meredith 1993, 267; see also Porter 1996, 316-321; Darwin 1988, 69-125).

⁵³ According to John Callaghan, Dutt's experience of British racism and Indian nationalism was a major 'factor in his early political formation and sense of injustice'; and also serves to explain why 'the Bolshevik Revolution and Leninism' were 'especially appealing', since 'the revolution seemed to be the first that was specifically anti-imperialist' (Callaghan 1993, 10-30). Dutt's subsequent hardline adherence to Stalinism becomes more comprehensible in the context of the Comintern's commitment to anti-imperialism; and, in fact, it was largely due to the Comintern's policing of the CPGB that it could become 'the only socialist party in Britain which accorded ... anti-imperialist struggle the importance Dutt himself attached to it' (96).

actually live in a peasant community - raises a further question; namely, how 'we' in a non-peasant society and culture are supposed to engage with the 'lost history' of the peasantry ourselves? In the essay, 'The Peasant Experience and the Modern World', Berger considers whether the peasantry is just 'a relic of the past' (Berger 1979b, 376). Berger's conclusion is that not only are peasants *not* relics of the past, they are actually vital to all our futures.

Instead of being dismissed as a relic, peasants might be thought of as representatives of the past. Apart from them, the past is represented by monuments, works of art, texts, photographs, and many vestiges of previous social structures and practices... Peasants, as they disappear, can confront the present. And in doing so, they both provoke and represent a question: how much does the future now being constructed correspond to the popular hopes of the past? (377).

The 'theory' of history Berger employs here is Walter Benjamin's, and Berger makes no bones about it. In his essay, 'Walter Benjamin', Berger claims that Benjamin's work, particularly the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', speaks directly to 'our present preoccupations' (Berger, 1972a, 92).⁵⁴ Berger's writing on peasants explicitly draws upon the concepts and even the phrasing of Benjamin's 'Theses'. Benjamin writes that the 'past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again ... a moment of danger' (Benjamin 1973, 256). 'History', he writes, 'is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now', or *Jetztzeit* (263). In which case, according to Benjamin, the task of the radical historiographer is to find some way of 'grasping the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one'; or, even more strongly, to find some way to 'blast open the continuum of history' (263-5).

Clearly, Berger views the eradication of the peasantry as a Benjaminian 'moment of danger'; or, perhaps better to say, his experience of French peasant life has allowed him to grasp such a 'moment'. For Berger the threatened disappearance of the peasantry provokes and represents the 'question' of 'past' hopes in a number of ways: 'First ... as people who have scarcely lived the division of labour'; 'Secondly... as people to who consumption ... is closely connected with the notion of shame'; 'Thirdly, they represent the question as

⁵⁴ I believe the relevance of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' to Berger cannot be overstated. As discussed above, a number of critics have identified this link, but only in relation to G (see Introduction, 12). Of course, most critics simply omit to mention the 'Theses' at all (Anant 1992; Bras 1984; Mazurek 1984; Robbins 1986; Szanto 1987; James 1996).

people for whom normally the claims of family interest (egotism) and solidarity (mutual aid) may be contradictory, but are not opposed'; 'Fourthly ... as people whose lifelong physical outgoing effort so connects them with the earth that they do not make a distinction between their own physical being and its being'; 'Fifthly as people for whom the presence of the dead, their efforts, their suffering, their wisdom, their hopes, is close and precious'; as well as 'the way peasants grant a place to animals so that man as a species is not alone'; and other ways that are 'too numerous to cover' (Berger 1979b, 378). In these terms, the 'question' of the peasantry is as important to non-peasants as to peasants.

What should be equally clear, however, is that while there are many correspondences between Berger's and Benjamin's 'moments of danger', there are also a number of crucial differences. But then again, what could be more Benjaminian than that? As Terry Eagleton notes in his book, Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism, Benjamin's own writings on 'blasting' have themselves to be 'blasted' out of the continuum of history (Eagleton 1981). In other words, to be like Benjamin *now* you have to be unlike him; or, more precisely, you have to find some way to 'grasp' hold of the 'constellation' which momentarily exists between his conjuncture and your own. And, as I have already noted, unlike Benjamin, Berger's thinking is not only informed by a historiographical problematic, but also a geographical one; i.e., the spatial constellation postmetropolitan society has formed with the peasant margins.

Having said this though, there is still an unresolved issue here. Capitalism's division of labour, consumption, solidarity, connections with the earth, and the place of animals can all readily be understood in relation to 'the movement of green socialism' - as Dyer points out (Dyer 1986, 125). What is a great deal less easy to come to terms with, however, is the 'presence of the dead'. Once again, Benjamin's work appears to be crucial. 'Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past', he writes, 'who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins' (Benjamin 1973, 257). Which is to say, Berger's reference to the 'presence of the dead' can be read in terms of the material problematic of who *makes* history. However, such a material reading represses the spirituality of the 'Theses'. According to Benjamin, 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation

that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak Messianic power*' (256). Indeed, his entire 'conception of the present as the "time of the now"' is by definition 'shot through with chips of Messianic time' (265). Which raises the question, should Berger's work also be understood in relation to some kind of 'weak Messianic power'?

My answer to this question is, no and yes. On the one hand, for all Berger's talk of a coming 'hour of assassinations' he never uses the term 'messianism' *per se*. On the other hand, once emptied of all 'messianic content' Berger's 'moment of danger' comes to little but talk (after all, if the 'messianism' is written out of the 'Theses' so is the concept of *Jetztzeit*). Does this mean, then, that I'm hedging my bets? I don't think so. As I have previously indicated, Berger's 'spiritual materialism', rather than presenting an impasse, perhaps offers a way to rethink and even *deconstruct* the binary relation between spirituality and materialism. In which case, the work of the arch-deconstructionist Jacques Derrida would appear to be more than relevant here; particularly given the fact that he has recently offered a reading of Marx and Benjamin in which he proposes the possibility of a 'messianics without messianism'. It is, therefore, to Derrida's 'spirit' of Marx that I would now like to turn, in order to think through the issue of Berger's reference to the 'presence of the dead' a little further.

The presence of the dead

As Terry Eagleton scathingly observed in 1982, Derrida has been more than reticent in considering a radical politics such as Marxism in relation to deconstruction.

In 1972, in Positions, Jacques Derrida remarked that as far as he was concerned the encounter with Marxism was "still to come". One decade and one global capitalist crisis later, Derrida is, as the actress said to the bishop, a long time coming (Eagleton 1982, 79).

In interview Derrida has continually procrastinated about his political positioning; for example, in the 'Dialogue with Jacques Derrida' in 1984, when asked directly whether the radicalism of deconstruction can be aligned with a radical praxis, Derrida responded, 'I must confess that I have never succeeded in directly relating deconstruction to existing political programmes' (Bernstein 1992, 215). However, as Eagleton wryly notes in his review of Specters of Marx: The State of

the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International, Derrida has 'finally, in some sense, arrived' (Eagleton 1995, 35). The stated reason for Derrida's intervention in the debate surrounding Marxism and post-Marxism is 'because it is urgently necessary to rise up against the new anti-marxist dogma'; and to this end he has stepped forward to offer the concept of 'spectrality' (Derrida 1994b, 38). The question is, how useful or comprehensible is such a concept? And, more specifically, how useful is it to our study of Berger?

Derrida's hypothesis concerning the 'spectre' is that '*there is more than one of them, there must be more than one of them*' (Derrida 1994a, 33).

To speak of spirit is immediately to evoke a plurality of spirits, or spectres, and an inheritor always has to choose one spirit or another. An inheritor has to make selections or filtrations, to sift through the hosts or the injunctions of each spirit (Derrida 1994b, 39).

Moreover, the 'spectre' does not just relate to the different 'spectres' or 'spirits' or 'ghosts' of Marx that is our 'inheritance', it also extends to the concept of 'spectrality'. Derrida poses the question of 'what is the *being-there* of a spectre? what is the mode of presence of a spectre?'; and answers that the '*spectrality effect* consist[s] in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual effective presence and its other' (Derrida 1994a, 35-6). In other words, Derrida's 'argument with Marx' is - on one level - an ontological one: Marx, he alleges, 'does not like ghosts any more than his adversaries do' (37). As Fredric Jameson notes, 'a world cleansed of spectrality is precisely ontology itself, a world of pure presence, of immediate density, of things without a past: for Derrida, an impossible and noxious nostalgia, and the fundamental target of his whole life's work' (Jameson 1995, 102).⁵⁵

The term 'spectrality', then, can be understood as being closely related to a whole host of terms, such as 'trace', which Derrida has employed throughout his career. Indeed, he is only too happy to keep piling term on term, announcing that the 'question of the spectre' is also crucially 'networked with those of repetition, mourning, and inheritance, the event and the messianic, of everything that exceeds the ontological oppositions between absence and presence, visible and invisible, living and dead ...' (Derrida 1994b, 38). What I am particularly

⁵⁵ Jameson 'impressionistically' refers to the 'object of this Derridean critique' as the "unmixed", and notes that 'Derrida's philosophical life's work will now be discovered in the tracking down and identifying, and denouncing, of just such resources, of just such nostalgias for some "original simplicity", for the unmixed in all its forms' (Jameson 1995, 91-92).

interested in here, of course, is how Derrida's 'deconstruction of actuality' leaves him 'struggling with' Benjamin's 'impossible concept of messianic arrival' (32).

According to Derrida,

the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be determined (Derrida 1994a, 79).

And, while he concedes that 'it is difficult to give a justification, even a provisional, pedagogical one, for the term "messianic"', he nevertheless hazards the following:

A desert within a desert, one signalling to the other, the desert of a messianics without messianism and therefore without religious doctrine or dogma. This dry and desolate expectation, this expectation without horizon, has one thing in common with the great messianisms of the Book: the reference to an arrival who may turn up - and may not - but of whom, by definition, I can know nothing in advance (Derrida 1994b, 32).

This being said, Derrida does at least admit to knowing one thing in advance; that it is not enough to just 'discuss Marx - which is to say also a few others', it is also necessary to 'go beyond scholarly "reading"' (Derrida 1994a, 32). His 'dry and desolate expectation' is therefore accompanied by a call for a 'new International', which, he notes, while breaking with 'the "party form" or with some form of the state or the International does not mean to give up every form of practical or effective organisation':

The name of a new International is given here to what calls to the friendship of an alliance without institution among those who even if they no longer believe or never believed in the socialist-Marxist International, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the messiano-eschatological role of the universal union of the proletarians of all lands, continue to be inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism (they know now that there is *more than one*) and in order to ally themselves, in a new, concrete, and real way, even if this alliance no longer takes the form of a party or of a workers' international, but rather of a kind of counter-conjuration, in the (theoretical and practical) critique of the state of international law, the concepts of state and nation, and so forth; in order to renew this critique, and especially to radicalise it... (53-54).

To briefly reiterate, therefore: Derrida's reading of Marx reveals that there is more than one 'spectre' of Marx; that Marx's ontological disposition for a

revolutionary working class (or 'universal union of all proletarians') can be discarded; and that actuality is 'spectral'. All of which necessitates a 'messianic affirmation', to 'counter-conjure' a 'new International'. Derrida emphasises this above all else, stating plainly that 'if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce' it is:

a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one try to liberate from any dogmatics, and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism* (54).

What, then, does Derrida's 'argument with Marx' have to do with Berger? On the most obvious level, it allows us to understand Berger's work as being in the 'spirit' of Marx. More importantly though, it allows us to 'liberate' Berger's 'spiritual materialism' from any purely metaphysical 'dogmatics'; and, crucially, it allows us to do so without repressing the 'spirituality' of his work. To be precise, Derrida's 'spectrology' provides a way of reading Berger's reference to the 'presence of the dead' deconstructively; i.e., in terms of the 'spectral' 'undoing' of the 'ontological oppositions between absence and presence, visible and invisible, living and dead'. After all, what defines the 'presence of the dead' - at least to the living - is their *absence*. In which case, one might even be tempted to suggest that Berger's work can itself be read as deconstructive of ontological oppositions. Consider, for example, one of Berger's own pronouncements on the 'spectre':

When in 1872 Marx wrote, "A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre; Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police spies", he was making a double announcement. The rich feared revolution, as they still fear it today. The second announcement was of a different order. It was a reminder that every modern society is aware of its own ephemerality. (In the third World, as the century approaches its end ... hope is increasingly joining forces with religious faith.) (AOF, 11-12).

Although the term 'ephemerality' might sound a little old-fashioned or idiosyncratic, I believe it to be just as legitimate and certainly as telling as the term 'spectrality', to which it can at any rate be 'networked'.

There are, however, certain problems with this Derridean reading of Berger, not to mention with Derrida's 'spirit' of Marx in general; and these general problems will need to be fully considered before I return to my analysis of Berger.

In his essay, 'Reconciling Derrida: "Spectres of Marx" and Deconstructive Politics', Aijaz Ahmad welcomes Derrida's 'gesture of solidarity', but remains 'unclear as to what it is that he [Derrida] is mourning...' (Ahmad 1994, 92). Is it the collapse of the so-called communism of the Eastern bloc countries? Derrida maintains that current debates on postmodernity and post-Marxism leave him with a troubling sense of "deja vu", because, 'For many of us, a certain (and I emphasise *certain*) end of communist Marxism did not await the recent collapse of the USSR and everything that depends on it throughout the world' (Derrida 1994a, 33). On the face of it, Derrida appears to be saying that he too knew the false communism of the Soviet Union. However, Ahmad draws the reader's attention to a particularly revealing passage by Derrida:

For many of us the question [of *deja vu*] has the same age as we do. In particular for those who, and this was also my case, opposed, to be sure, *de facto* 'Marxism' or 'communism' (the Soviet Union, the International of Communist parties, and everything that resulted from them, which is to say so very many things.....), but intended at least never to do so out of conservative or reactionary motivations or even moderate right-wing or republican positions (Derrida 1994a, 33).

The key word here, as Ahmad indicates, is 'everything': 'He [Derrida] is opposed then, on the most general level, to *everything* that could be associated with the actual history of Communist parties' (Ahmad 1994, 93). And this includes, Ahmad notes, 'the most vigilant and most modern reinterpretation of Marxism by certain Marxists (notably French Marxists and those around Althusser)..'. (Derrida 1994a, 56). Which leads Ahmad to suggest that:

this metaphor of mourning has a very precise and restricted application, to that side of Derrida's philosophising imagination which *wants* to inherit the legacy of Marxism (now that Marxism is, in his view, as dead as a ghost).....[Derrida] had hoped that the collapse of historical Marxism would coincide with at least the philosophical and academic triumph of deconstruction, not of the neo-liberalist right wing (Ahmad 1994, 93).

Perhaps Ahmad is over-stepping the mark, yet any history of Marxism, such as Raya Dunayevskaya's Marxism and Freedom (1982), reveals that Derrida's 'everything' is more than sweeping in its condemnation. Given that Derrida's Marxist 'inheritance' means '[o]ne need not be a Marxist or a communist to accept' the fact of an inheritance, the question that inevitably arises is how many 'spectres' or 'spirits' of Marx can one dismiss before one is not a Marxist at all - of any 'spectral' variety (Derrida 1994a, 33)? Consider the

question of class, the absolute priority of which has become increasingly hard to defend from any traditional Marxist position, and which, as Jameson notes, Derrida dismisses 'in passing' (Jameson 1995, 92). The problem here is not that class is dismissed, but that it is summarily dismissed. Where is the analysis? The work of Raymond Williams provides an anodyne comparison in this regard. In Towards 2000 the problematic of class is worked through slowly and carefully, leading Williams to conclude that 'received definitions of class' often have 'the effect of confusion', but also that they do continue to have 'some general indicative value' (Williams 1983, 160). In fact, if anything Williams's critique sounds more like deconstruction than Derrida's; the operation, in effect, of putting 'class' 'under erasure'. Derrida's claim may be that '[d]econstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalisation, which is to say also *in the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a certain *spirit of Marxism*. There has been, then, this attempted radicalisation of Marxism called deconstruction' (56). However, the moment of Derrida's intervention, post-1991, and his dismissal of 'everything', suggests that all Marxisms are to be replaced by deconstruction.

If this were not enough of a sticking point, there still remains the contentious issue of Derrida's 'impossible concept of messianic arrival'. For Ahmad, Derrida's use of Benjamin's 'messianic' terminology, 'seems to renounce the idea of socialism as a logical possibility arising out of the contradictions of capitalism itself and pushes it into the voluntaristic domain of acts of faith' (Ahmad 1994, 94). And I am tempted to agree with Ahmad. Except, to my mind, it is not Derrida's 'messianic' discourse which is the problem, but rather his specific conception of 'messianic affirmation'. Or, perhaps better to say, his tendency to mystify the relation *between* 'messianism' and 'affirmation'. As Kate Soper notes, Marx always was 'spectral', at least in terms of the 'ontological voids' he quite rightly left open by refusing to prophesise a future socialism or communism (Soper 1996, 31). However, what Soper also crucially recognises is that 'ontological voids' are not valuable in their own right, and will always tend to be filled by practical political forms; and that, in fact, it is the existence of such 'voids' which has in many ways provided the space for so many Marxist problems (Stalinism, Maoism, actual existing socialism) to develop (31). In other words, 'ontological voids' are only ever *part* of the story; as Alex Callinicos makes plain. Benjamin's messianism, he notes, 'states an important truth about revolution: namely, that it constitutes a break in the causal chain'; and that, 'There is an

irreducible sense in which they take everyone by surprise' (Callinicos 1996, 40). But, as Callinicos knows only too well (as a member of the SWP), a further important truth about revolutions is that they never occur in a vacuum. They can be *affirmed* by socialist organisations and formations and ideas, or they can be distorted or denied, often in the most brutal and obvious ways, by oppressive organisations and formations and ideas.

In short, although there is some correspondence between the 'questioning stance' of deconstruction and that of Marxist critique, what must be asserted is that where the many traditions of Marx definitely part company with the 'spirit' of deconstruction is over the question of what brings such a 'questioning stance' to bear (Derrida 1994a, 54). The working class may not be what it once was, and it may no longer be possible to be an organic intellectual in the sense defined by Gramsci, but if there is a 'spirit' of Marx I will never be ready to renounce it is that of praxis. Without the affirmation of some kind of 'community of resistance' it is barely possible to think critically at all, let alone set about changing the world.⁵⁶ And that's where Derrida really comes a cropper. His conception of 'messianic affirmation' appears to have no bearing upon - or connection with - any 'real' or 'concrete' 'community of resistance'.⁵⁷ As Eagleton acerbically indicates: a "New International" that is "without status, without title, and without name .. without party, without country, without national community" ... [and] as one gathers elsewhere in [Derrida's] book, without organisation, without ontology, without method, without apparatus' is just a 'post-structuralist fantasy' (Eagleton 1995, 37).

In all honesty, then, the question of 'messianic affirmation' is hardly as complex or mystifying as Derrida - or, for that matter, Jameson, Soper, and Callinicos - make out. As Eagleton rightly notes, Benjamin's final proposition 'is simply false': 'not every moment is the strait gate through which the Messiah may enter; socialist revolution occurs only in particular material conditions' (Eagleton 1981, 81). What Eagleton neglects to mention, however, is that Benjamin pretty much says the same thing himself. 'A historical materialist', Benjamin writes, approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognises the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order

⁵⁶ As discussed in the Introduction (7-10), and Chapter One (57-58).

⁵⁷ With all this talk of 'hauntology' it is worth recalling that 'real' and 'concrete' are not dirty words, since Derrida himself mentions them in calling for a 'new International' (Derrida 1994a, 53).

to blast a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework ... (Benjamin 1973, 265).

Benjamin's 'blasts' were brought to life by the 'revolutionary' moment in which he was writing. Of course, what makes Benjamin's work so open to endless interpretation is that he doesn't always acknowledge the fact. Which brings us back to Berger, since what marks out his work is that it *does* frankly emerge from a specific 'community of resistance'; that of a late twentieth-century, French, peasant village in a 'moment of danger'.

It is difficult to under-estimate the importance of this last point. What makes Berger's work Benjaminian is not the breadth of his references to the 'Theses', but how he has put himself *in danger*; something Benjamin scholars have been eager to avoid considering, let alone doing - and quite understandably. It is much easier to pretend to practice 'radical' theory from the safety of the postmetropolitan academy than it is to put yourself *in danger*. And yet that is what must be done: 'one must grasp [a constellation] firmly by the horns', Benjamin writes, 'if one is to question the past. It is the bull whose blood must fill the pit, if the spirits of the departed are to appear around the edge' (quoted in Wohlfarth 1993, 9).

As far as Berger's reference to the 'presence of the dead' goes, therefore, one can indeed view it as being 'spectral', i.e., as undoing ontological oppositions. The crucial point to note though, is that simply deconstructing ontological oppositions is not enough; one has to make certain sacrifices. In Berger's case, this has meant grasping the bull by the horns - literally and metaphorically - and involving himself in the struggle of the peasantry; a class which, as I have already noted, Raymond Williams declared to 'have been, for the last forty years, the main revolutionary force in the world' (Williams 1993, 304). The question is, what about now? Williams's comment was made in 1973, over twenty-five years ago. How 'revolutionary' a 'force' is the peasantry in today's world? By which I mean, after Benjamin, not just what kind of 'revolutionary chance' the present moment offers, but, just as importantly, how should such 'a Messianic cessation of happening [be] recognise[d]'?

A class of survivors

In his 'Historical Afterword' to Pig Earth Berger takes stock of the myriad differences that exist between peasant communities all over the world. However, he also stresses that, whether

[t]heir implements, their crops, their earth, their masters may be different, [and] whether they labour within a capitalist society, a feudal one, or others which cannot be so easily defined ... [to say nothing of] differences of climate, religion, and social history ... the peasantry everywhere can be defined as a class of survivors (PE, 196).

Berger appears to shift from one extreme to another, and this raises two related questions. What does Berger mean by defining the peasantry as 'survivors'? And to what extent do these 'survivors' constitute a 'class'?

Berger's use of the term 'survivor' borders on the patronising, as he himself notes.

To say that peasants are a class of survivors may seem to confirm what the cities with their habitual arrogance have always said about peasants - that they are backwards, a relic of the past. Peasants themselves, however, do not share the view of time implicit in such a judgement (200).

The point Berger makes here, I believe, is a crucial one. Time, as it is lived, is also always - at least partly - culturally produced; which is to say, the way time has been constructed and lived in the metropolitan and postmetropolitan centre is very different to how it has been constructed and lived in the peasant margins.

According to Berger, because the nature of peasant existence is '[i]nexhaustibly committed to wresting a life from the earth', the peasant 'sees life as an interlude' (201). This view of life, however, does not just come about because of 'endless work', it is also 'confirmed by ... daily familiarity with the cycle of birth, life and death' (201). The 'peasant sees life as an interlude', Berger alleges, 'because of the dual contrary movement through time of his thoughts and feelings which in turn derives from the dual nature of the peasant economy' (201). The 'dream' of the peasant, he writes, 'is to return to a life that is not handicapped' by the 'preliminary obstacle' of having [one's] "surplus" removed before fulfilling [one's] own needs' (198). What this dual movement also means, however, is that although the 'ideals' of the peasantry 'are located in the past', their 'obligations are to the future' (201). This dual movement is quite difficult to

get to grips with, but not impossible.

These two movements, towards the past and the future, are not as contrary as they might first appear because basically the peasant has a cyclic view of time. The two movements are different ways of going round a circle ... [A peasant] accepts the sequence of centuries without making that sequence absolute. Those who have a unilinear view of time cannot come to terms with the idea of cyclic time those who have a cyclic view of time are easily able to accept the convention of historic time, which is simply the trace of the turning wheel (201).

Perhaps, then, what I should have written is that such a view of time is difficult to get to grips with today if you happen to live in a 'city'. Which is Berger's point: he 'came to terms with the idea of cyclic time' through his experience of village life. This is not to say Berger had not begun to think through such issues before he migrated to Quincy, because he undoubtedly had; his essay on Benjamin and his novel *G* demonstrates this. But what I want to make quite clear here is that Berger's developing *sense* of cyclic time - as opposed to his merely conceptual understanding of it - depended on his living in a peasant community.

The reason why I emphasise the point is because our senses so often are dismissed. In particular, our *sense* of time - which, as the saying goes, goes without saying. Consider your own sense of time. An hour is an hour is an hour is an hour. Or is it? An hour spent working in an office, or in a factory, or an hour spent as a prison inmate, or as a patient in a hospital, is not the same as an hour passed talking with friends, or playing with your children, or making love. An hour at the office drags, whereas - as 'we' all know - time flies when you're having fun. How can this discrepancy in our sense of time be explained?

According to Berger,

Time is created by events. In an eventless universe there would be no time. Different events create different times. There is the galactic time of the stars; there is the geological time of mountains; there is the lifetime of a butterfly. There is no way of comparing these different times except by using a mathematical abstraction. It was man [sic] who invented this abstraction. He invented a regular "outside" time into which everything more or less fitted... (Berger 1985b, 201-2).

Part of what Berger is interrogating here - I feel - is the conceit that all things can be reduced to 'abstract' equivalents. One way to talk about this conceit is in terms of the fetish of the commodity, but such talk is not free from its own conceits - as Berger is well aware. In fact, the passage above is taken from the essay, 'Go

ask the Time', which I have previously mentioned (in passing) in connection with Berger's self-confessed use of Marxism as a 'shelter'. Reading this essay again, however, Berger's relation to Marxism begins to appear less and less 'abstract'.

For Berger, the 'problem' with human time and 'abstraction' is this:

Man [sic] himself constitutes two events. There is the event of his biological organism ... And there is the event of his consciousness. The time of his life-cycle and the time of his mind. The first time understands itself, which is why animals have no philosophical problems. The second time has been understood in different ways in different periods. It is the first task of any culture to propose an understanding of the time of consciousness: of the relation between past, present and future, realised as such.

The explanation offered by European culture of the nineteenth century - which for nearly two hundred years has marginalised most other explanations - is one which constructs a uniform, abstract, unilinear law of time which applies to everything that exists, including consciousness. Thus, the explanation whose task is to "explain" the time of consciousness, treats that consciousness as if it were comparable to a grain of rice or an extinct sun. If European man has become a victim of his positivism, the story starts here (Berger 1985b, 201-2).

Of course, that is still not the whole story. According to Berger, 'Modern history begins - at different moments in different places - with the principle of progress as both aim and motor of history' (203). 'This principle', he alleges, in his 'Historical Afterword',

was born with the bourgeoisie as an ascendant class, and has been taken over by all modern theories of revolution. The twentieth-century struggle between capitalism and socialism, is, at an ideological level, a fight about the content of progress. Today within the developed world the initiative of this struggle lies, at least temporarily, in the hands of capitalism which argues that socialism produces backwardness. In the underdeveloped world the "progress" of capitalism is discredited (PE, 203-4).

Berger's problematic relation to Marxism and socialism is here writ large, and is reiterated in similar remarks throughout his work of the 1980s.

Of all that has been inherited from the nineteenth century only certain axioms about time have passed largely unquestioned. The Left and Right, evolutionists, physicists, and most revolutionaries, all accept - at least on an historical scale - the nineteenth century view of a unilinear and uniform "flow" of time' (AOF, 34-5).

All, that is, except for Benjamin and his 'inheritors' - or rather, his 'inheritor', since, as Derrida notes, 'one must always choose'. And I choose Berger.

Berger has steadfastly refused to accept the dominant metropolitan and postmetropolitan 'view of ... unilinear time'. Instead, by taking up a position in the margins, he has been able to grasp hold of the peasantry's view of time as cyclical. And, in doing so, he has come to an even more important realisation: that the story of modern progress may well be coming to a close (albeit at different moments in different places). In the essay, 'The Soul and the Operator', Berger considers the 'events of 1989 in Eastern Europe' (KR, 228). 'Many refer to what is happening as a revolution', he writes, but is 'revolution' the right term? These uprisings, he suggests, are not made with the 'dreaded classic exhortation of *Forward!*'. Instead, they are made in 'the hope of a return'. The people are not so much making a revolution, he insists, as 'keeping a rendezvous'. The question is, 'With whom?' (229). The 'dead and the unborn', is Berger's answer (235). 'Today the living are remeeting the dead, even the dead of long ago, sharing their pain and hope' (236). Of course, Benjamin's theory of 'messianic agreements between generations' could easily be read into such pronouncements, as could Derrida's concept of spectrality. And yet much more pertinent, to my mind, is Berger's conceptualisation of 'life as an interlude'. As Berger notes in Pig Earth, the peasant's conception of death does not so much involve being 'transported into the future', as 'return[ing] to the past' (PE, 201). In other words, 'keeping a rendezvous' with death - which is how Berger also chooses to read the communiques of Subcommandante Marcos. 'The Zapatistas' he writes, 'have no political programme to impose', instead,

they have a political conscience which they hope will spread through their example. The excess comes from their conviction (which personally I accept completely) that they also represent the dead, all the maltreated dead who are less forgotten in Mexico than anywhere else in the world. No mystics they, they believe in words being handed down through the suffering and the centuries, and they hate lies (Berger 1995f).

I believe Berger is right in what he says about the Zapatistas and the dead. However, as I suggested in the introduction to this Chapter, Berger's review of Tender Fury not only highlights the insight of his work, it also reveals its limitations. Reconsider, for example, the essay 'The Peasant Experience and the Modern World', in which Berger suggests that, '[p]easants, as they disappear, can confront the present'; that they 'provoke and represent [the] question [of] how much ... the future now being constructed correspond[s] to the popular hopes of the past' (Berger 1979b, 377). This Benjaminian formulation is fine as far as it goes, and yet it is obvious, surely, that the Mexican Zapatistas are confronting the

present in a much more energetic way than any French peasant 'community of resistance': the Zapatistas are fighting, quite literally, *against* being 'disappeared'. To be blunt, then, although Berger's understanding of the Zapatistas, and their relation to the dead, emerges out of his living in a French peasant 'community of resistance', such a community is very different to that of the Mexican Zapatistas - not to mention very different to any British 'community of resistance' (or 'dissident subculture'). In fact, one could argue that the Zapatistas should be described as something more concrete than a 'community of resistance'; that they should be described as an 'institution' - a 'party'.⁵⁸ And yet, they are a very different kind of 'party' to that which has gone before. Consider Subcommandante Marcos's answer to Medea Benjamin's question - have the Zapatistas learnt anything from Cuba?

Well, I don't know if you can call them lessons, because we didn't take Cuba as our frame of reference. But we learned that you can't impose a form of politics on the people because sooner or later you'll end up doing the same thing that you criticised (quoted in Benjamin 1995, 61).

Such answers, writes Régis Debray, 'end fifty years of the self-proclaimed vanguard' - a not unimportant development (Debray 1996, 135). Perhaps the question the Zapatistas pose, therefore, is not how '[p]easants, as they disappear, can confront the present', but how they can intervene in it. Or, to put this more 'theoretically', how disparate peasant 'communities of resistance' can not only become a 'class of survivors', but one that fights back?

The most obvious criticism that can be levelled against the Zapatistas is that their struggles are merely local; i.e., that the peasants involved are unaware of the complex spatiality of global or late capitalism, not to mention their own class position within it. Such a criticism, however, is ill-conceived. Just because the Zapatistas are organised from the grassroots up does not mean that their horizons are limited to the state of Chiapas, or, for that matter, the borders of Mexico. As James Petras notes in his essay, 'Latin America: the Resurgence of the Left', the 'new peasantry' are currently on the rise *because* of their 'principle, "every member an organiser"', not despite it (Petras 1997, 19). Indeed, as he is keen to underline, rather than being isolated, spontaneous uprisings, '[t]he new peasant movements are linked together in a Latin American regional

⁵⁸ Although it is possible to argue that the Zapatistas might more precisely be defined as a 'party' rather than a 'community of resistance', I believe that they do conform to the broad conception of 'community of resistance' outlined in my Introduction (7-8). Furthermore, I think the Zapatistas challenge the 'traditional' definition of the 'party' - as Régis Debray's point about vanguardism indicates.

organisation, the *Congresso Latinoamericano do Organizaciones del Campo* (CLOC), and are increasingly involved in the international formation called *Via Campesino* which discusses ideas and experiences pertaining to rural struggles' (21). A point which Guillermo Gomez Pena seconds, noting that what distinguishes contemporary peasant uprisings, such as the Zapatistas, from earlier 'guerrilla movement[s]', is their 'self-conscious and sophisticated use of the media' (Pena 1995, 90). In particular, I am thinking of the Zapatistas's use of the Internet - not only to communicate their beliefs, but to bring people together. This occurred most dramatically in 1996, when the Zapatistas established a website inviting 'all oppressed peoples of the world' to come to their *Enceuentro*, a hoped-to-be annual event (see [www. pangea.org/enceuentro](http://www.pangea.org/enceuentro)).

Initially, no doubt, the chances of success for such an event, located in a *de facto* war zone, looked to be slim. Debray was on hand to observe the *Enceuentro*'s humble beginnings, and describes a 'small, sixteen-year-old-militia man' guarding the site where 'thousands of foreigners [were] expected ... for the meeting of "galaxies against neo-liberalism"' (Debray 1996, 137). What Debray could not know, of course, was that the 'thousands of foreigners' would actually turn up. According to Petras, the *Enceuentro*, 'organised by the Zapatistas in the jungles of Chiapas in 1996', gathered together '4,000 participants ... from 41 countries' (Petras 1997, 39). Furthermore, Gibby Zobel notes (in *The Guardian*), the 'Second Intergalactic Encounter for Humanity and Against Neo-Liberalism', held in 1997, in a 'squatted farm in Andalusia', proved to be equally successful, and 'will now roll on with the creation of the International Network of Alternative Communication (RICA), a kind of activists' news agency' (Zobel 1997).

What needs to be understood, in other words, is that the 'new peasantry' have not only risen out of the contradictions of global or late capitalism, but that they themselves are fully cognizant of the fact. As Noam Chomsky notes, in his essay 'Time Bombs', it is no coincidence that 'the New Year's Day uprising of Indian peasants in Chiapas ... coincided with the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement' (Chomsky 1995, 175). Indeed, if anything, the Zapatistas are *more* than class conscious enough to understand how capital impinges on their everyday lives. In her essay, 'Seeds of a Revolt', Alberto Huerto describes how, after 'sitting for several weeks in the town square of San Cristobal de las Casas late in the summer of 1993', she fell into talking with some

'Indios', who had some very interesting observations to make (Huerta 1995, 29-30). The 'Indios', she writes, talked of Zapata and the Mexican government's repeal of Article 27, concerning land rights: 'I played devil's advocate and asked, "What changes?"' (30). The Indios were outraged, she reports, and declared that not only had "[t]he dismantling of Article 27 privatised all lands", but that, "Already we hear that the Japanese want a part of the Chiapas highland for timber here near the village of Juan Chamula, where the Maya believe the creation was born" (30-31).

I believe this statement is a crucial one - for two reasons. Firstly, for what it says about the Zapatistas's sense of timing (i.e., staging their uprising to coincide with the implementation of an international trade agreement). And secondly, for their *sense* of time. As the Zapatistas make clear in the 'Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle', their uprising should be seen as 'the product of 500 years of struggle':

first against slavery; then in the insurgent-led war of Independence against Spain; later in the fight to avoid being absorbed by North American expansion; next to proclaim our Constitution and expel the French from our soil; and finally, after the dictatorship of Porfiro Díaz refused to fairly apply the reform laws, in the rebellion where the people created their own leaders (Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1995, 51).

Which is to say, the 'Declaration' reveals, not just a sense of historical time, but a *sense* of the *time of the now*; or, as Berger would have it, of the 'presence of the dead'. And, I would contend, it is that sense of *jetztzeit* - as much as anything else - which heralds the dawn of a 'new International'. As Benjamin notes,

Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren (Benjamin 1973, 262).

For the Zapatistas, however, belonging as they do to a 'class of survivors', the 'image of enslaved ancestors' is one which has never ceased to provide 'nourishment'. Subcommandante Marcos's writing makes this quite plain. 'Who must ask for pardon and who can grant it?', he asks in response to the Mexican government's offer of an amnesty:

Those who for years and years have satiated themselves at full tables, while death sat beside us so regularly that we finally stopped being afraid of it? Those who filled our pockets and our souls with promises

and empty declarations?

Or should we ask pardon from the dead, our dead, those who died “natural” deaths of “natural causes” like measles, whooping cough, breakbone fever, cholera, typhoid, mononucleosis, tetanus, pneumonia, malaria, and other lovely gastrointestinal and lung diseases? Our dead, the majority dead, the democratically dead, dying from sorrow because no one did anything, because the dead, our dead, went just like that, without anyone even counting them, without anyone saying “ENOUGH!” which would at least give some meaning to their deaths, a meaning which no one ever sought for them, the forever dead, who are now dying again, but this time in order to live? (Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1995, 83).

Post-Scripts

As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, Berger’s description of Subcommandante Marcos as a man ‘addicted to post-scripts’ is one which just as easily fits Berger himself. What I neglected to mention though - although it should by now be obvious - is that I too am similarly addicted. When Marcos writes that, ‘It happens that one feels that something has remained between the fingers, that there are still some words that want to find their way into sentences, that one has not finished emptying the pockets of the soul. But it is useless, there never will be a postscript that can contain so many nightmares ... and so many dreams’, I nod in agreement (Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1995, 30). The trouble is, if Marcos is right, what kind of a post-script can I hope to offer? A post-Marxist P.S.? A post-modern P.S.? A post-colonial P.S.?

Consider the issue of Berger’s Marxism. It does not really matter, I would suggest, whether Berger is identified as ‘Marxist’, ‘post-Marxist’, ‘socialist’, ‘postmodernist’, or whatever, just so long as his work, and the questions it poses, emerge from a movement which is as *demanding* as socialism and Marxism once were. Maybe such a movement will emerge from the ‘new peasantry’ and maybe it won’t, I cannot say in advance, but what I can say, with some certainty, is that Berger’s work has asked a number of demanding questions of me; chief among which has been the question of the ‘presence of the dead’.

Berger’s appropriation of Benjamin’s work, and his writing about ‘the dead’, is difficult to come to terms with; in particular, his willingness to put himself *in danger*. Indeed, for many commentators observing events from the

postmetropolitan centre, it has proved a lot easier simply to dismiss Berger's reading of Benjamin as 'untheoretical' than to consider it in any meaningful way. Needless to say, I think this is a cop-out. As Terry Eagleton notes in his book on Benjamin:

Benjamin and his friend Adorno are "modernist Marxists", poised on some ultimate threshold of meaning where it might just be possible to think Marxism through again in terms often bizarrely remote from mainstream Enlightenment assumptions. The results, as we might expect, are partial and varied; but they outline a daunting, exhilarating project whose shape we are perhaps only dimly beginning to discern (Eagleton 1981, 175).

Eagleton himself has hardly been receptive to any attempt to rethink Marxism and the Enlightenment in the last few years. (When he hears the term 'postmodernism' he reaches for his gun.) But perhaps in Berger's work it is possible to dimly discern the kind of project Eagleton does at least point to, however bizarrely remote - or marginal - such a project might appear from the perspective of what currently goes by the name of 'theory'.

Try this for a post-script then...

One sunny summer day, by the side of a French 'municipal swimming pool', in a 'suburb to the south of Paris, France', an old man's attention was lifted from the book in his lap to a young boy, walking on his hands, 'his feet in the air ... laughing' (Berger 1995f). The man's thoughts are written on his face. 'Clowns go on', he thinks to himself, but not in 'French public life', where 'humour has practically disappeared, for there is not enough energy left to spare for it'. This need not be the case though. '[I]n the mountains', he reflects, looking at the young boy, 'the Subcommandante still has that energy'. How is it that I can read the thoughts of this old man so clearly? Well, because the old man, Berger, wrote them down in his review of Shadows of Tender Fury; in an attempt, I think, to convey Subcommandante Marcos's good humour. Like Marcos he wanted to draw attention to certain borders, and their crossing. The border between the critical and the creative. The border between the serious and the humorous. But most of all, the border between the living and the dead. As Marcos has noted in interview,

I think it's the kind of life I'm leading now that makes me write (he draws a line in the dirt). On one side is life and on the other is death. And since January 1st [1994], I'm right on the border. I can easily pass to the other side any day now. So I can't have any ambitions to write a great novel or to have some great career. The only thing I'm sure of is this moment. So while I never wrote anything before, now I write as if

every day were the last ... Being on the edge of life and death causes this kind of explosion in me (quoted in Benjamin 1995, 69).

One is tempted to say, a Benjaminian 'blast'. If death is 'the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell', as Benjamin insists, then Marcos is a storyteller *par excellence* (Benjamin 1973, 94). And it is this relation, between storytelling and death, which I aim to consider in the following chapter.

P. P.S. 'On 22 December 1997', Amnesty International reports, '60 heavily-armed men attacked the county of Acteal in Chiapas State. The attack began at midday and carried on until nightfall, yet state police units stationed nearby did not intervene. The attack left 45 people dead - including 15 children and a new-born baby - at least 25 injured' (Amnesty 1998, 8).

Chapter Three

The Secretary of Death

Introduction

In 1974 Berger moved to Quincy, and began work on a project which would effectively occupy him for the next fifteen years, the trilogy Into Their Labours, consisting of Pig Earth, Once in Europa, and Lilac and Flag. As Berger describes them, the 'first volume [is] a book of stories set against the traditional life of a mountain village', the 'second volume ... is a collection of love stories set against the disappearance or "modernisation" of such village life', and the 'third volume tell[s] the story of peasants who leave their villages to settle permanently in a metropolis'. But what kind of 'metropolis' are we talking about here? In Pig Earth Emile Cabrol travels to Paris, returning home with 'a silver-painted model of the Eiffel Tower' for his sister Lucie (PE, 108). In Lilac and Flag though, the 'metropolis' Sucus and Zsuzsa live in is called 'Troy', a place as seemingly 'unreal' as its mythical namesake - containing a 'Champs-de-Mars', a 'King's Cross', and the all too 'real' shanty towns of 'Barbek'. And what about Berger's way of telling? What does he mean by suggesting that Once in Europa is a 'collection of love stories', or declaring Lilac and Flag to be 'an old wives' tale of a city'; a rhetorical ploy which advertises the text as obviously fabricated, dubiously 'feminine', and possibly even postmodernist?

In order to answer these questions it will be necessary to consider not simply the 'metropolis' that is represented *in* the text, but, more fundamentally, the text's formation *in the margins* of the 'metropolis'. Into Their Labours was written in a small peasant village in the Haute Savoie - a point which cannot really be under-estimated. As Raymond Williams notes in his discussion of modernism, 'The most important general element of the innovations in [modernist] form is the fact of immigration to the metropolis, and it cannot too often be emphasised how many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants' (Williams 1989a, 45). Stein, Eliot, Joyce, Pound et al, Williams notes, 'found the only community available to them: a community of the medium; of their own practices' (45). Which is an important point to make, because in doing so Williams neatly sidesteps the accusation that his interpretation of culture is merely 'reflectionist'. Or, I might add, unhistorical or

ungeographical. '[A]bove all', he writes, it is necessary to see

the imperial and capitalist metropolis as a specific historical form, at different stages: Paris, London, Berlin, New York. It involves looking, from time to time, from outside the metropolis: from the deprived hinterlands, where different forces are moving, and from the poor world which has always been peripheral to the metropolitan systems. This need involve no reduction of the importance of the major artistic and literary works which were shaped within metropolitan perceptions. But one level has certainly to be challenged: the metropolitan interpretation of its own processes as universals (47).

To paraphrase Williams, then: in this Chapter I shall argue that, in migrating *from* the 'metropolis', Berger has been able to find a different kind of community: a community of the storyteller; of gossip and rumour-mongering. This is not to say that you need to be a peasant to read his work (Berger is not a peasant, and neither are the majority of his readers), but it is to insist that the reading of Into Their Labours 'involves looking, from time to time, from outside the metropolis' - or, perhaps better to say, the '*postmetropolis*'. As I have already discussed, the term is Edward Soja's, and he employs it in a number of ways: firstly, 'as a general term to accentuate the differences between contemporary urban regions and those consolidated in the middle decades of the twentieth century'; and secondly, to invoke the 'notion of post-industrial ... post-Fordist and post-Keynesian political economies and post-structuralist [postmodern] and post-colonial modes of critical analysis' (Soja 1997, 19-20).⁵⁹

Soja's theorisation is a useful one, inasmuch as it allows us to see the capitalist postmetropolis as a specific historical form. There's only one problem; as I have already discussed, it is my belief that Soja's discourse *on* the postmetropolis is also a discourse *of* the postmetropolis: of a small community of predominantly white, male, often 'left-wing' theoreticians who, although they make reference to the marginalised, and draw upon their experience, do so in a way which precludes any meaningful dialogue with them.⁶⁰ Of course, in making this kind of accusation one has to be careful to avoid propagating the idea that 'theory' is 'bad' *per se*. Contrary to the 'right-wing' view that there is no place for 'theory', my position, once more, is that it needs to be *re-placed* - in a 'community of resistance'. And to this end I aim to provide an oppositional criticism of Into Their Labours which - at the very least - challenges the postmetropolitan interpretation of its own processes as universals.

⁵⁹ See Chapter One (36-39).

⁶⁰ See Chapter One (58-61).

I will begin by interrogating the continued presence of the ideology of 'literature' within prevailing theorisations of postmodernist fiction. As Williams notes, 'literature' is not a neutral term that simply applies to 'well-written books of an *imaginative* or *creative* kind' (Williams 1976, 152), but rather 'a central example of the controlling and categorising specialisation of "the aesthetic"' (Williams 1977, 150; see also Eagleton 1983, 1-53). Various postmodernist fictions might be touted as having transgressed the boundary between 'high' and 'low' culture, and 'text' and 'reality', but I shall argue that they continue to be constructed and read as 'literary'; in effect, merely providing the postmetropolitan institution of 'English Literature' with an expanded canon, and a new way to approach certain hybrid texts. Which leads me to my second point: if Berger's way of telling is not to be interpreted in a 'literary' way, how should it be interpreted? Or, more precisely, how should 'we' who live in the postmetropolis go about 'looking, from time to time, from outside' it? Before turning 'our' gaze towards storytelling, therefore, it will be useful to glance towards the genre of science fiction, which - although postmetropolitan - offers the perspective of an alternative reading formation.

Thirdly, I aim to consider the influence on Berger of Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller', and in particular his assertion that 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell' (Benjamin 1973, 94). It goes without saying that death comes to everybody, and yet the way people think 'death' in the secular postmetropolis is remarkably different from the way it is approached in the peasant margins. Unlike his former comrades in London and Paris, Berger notes, his neighbours in Quincy are 'people for whom the presence of the dead, their efforts, their suffering, their wisdom, their hopes, is close and precious' (Berger 1979b, 378). The question is, does Into Their Labours convey such a structure of feeling?

Finally, given Berger's claim that 'storytellers are Death's secretaries' I would like to consider why To the Wedding, which deals with HIV/AIDS, is subtitled A Novel (WB, 240)? If it is indeed 'Death who hands [the storyteller] the file', as Berger asserts, then surely it is the storyteller who is best equipped to deal with the subject of HIV/AIDS, not the novelist (240)?

Postmodernist metafiction

A wide range of fictions have been described as 'postmodernist', including those of Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie, Kathy Acker, John Barth, Ishmael Reed, Angela Carter, William Burroughs, J G Ballard, and William Gibson; not to mention James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Jorge Luis Borges. Indeed, in his introduction to the Selected Short Stories of D. H. Lawrence, Brian Finney goes so far as to claim that Lawrence's stories develop from 'pre-Chekovian social realism ... to the verbal play and self-conscious artifice of post-Modernist writers such as Borges and Beckett' (Finney 1985, 11). Postmodernist fiction, then, becomes a loose formal term that perhaps has something to do with textuality, knowingness, and irony, or, as Patricia Waugh would have it, 'metafictionality' - by which she means 'writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (Waugh 1984, 2). Not everybody would agree with Waugh however; consider, for example, Brian McHale's, Fredric Jameson's and Linda Hutcheon's theorisations of metafiction.

McHale suggests that postmodernism represents a shift from an epistemological 'dominant' to an ontological one; from centredness to fragmentation; from the signified to the signifier; etc., etc. (McHale 1987, 10). Such a schematic offers a seductively accessible way to approach contemporary writing. However, as Jameson's work illustrates, McHale's way of thinking is flawed. While Jameson readily affirms that there has been a radical 'shift in the dynamic of cultural pathology', he rightly resists any formalist reduction of the 'dominant' to that of 'stylistic description' (as McHale tends to), through his 'periodising hypothesis' of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1991, 3-14). Only after voicing this reservation does Jameson feel free to identify postmodernism's 'constitutive features'; namely, that it is 'schizophrenic', 'depthless', and takes the form of 'pastiche' - which is to say, a form of 'blank parody' (16-17). Above all, he stresses, the 'one fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms' is the 'effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture', as postmodernisms 'no longer simply "quote," as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance' (2-3). Jameson's term for such metafiction is 'postmodern fantastic historiography',

which includes 'the legendary generational strings of the writers of the Boom, like Asturias or García Márquez' or 'the tedious autoreferential fabulations of the short-lived Anglo-American "new novel"'; and he judges this "return to 'storytelling'" and 'making up of unreal history' to be a 'substitute for the making of the real kind' (367-369).

As has already been noted, however, Jameson's influential theorisation of postmodernism tends to overlook alternative, oppositional and residual formations and practices. For example, while Jameson concedes that E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime offers a 'kind of spatial historiography' which 'has unique things to tell us both about postmodern spatiality and what happened to the postmodern sense of history' (Jameson 1991, 370), he neglects to mention Doctorow's other works, such as The Book of Daniel, which, as Peter Brooker notes, 'offers a mode of supposedly impossible cultural critique' (Brooker 1996, 88).

Jameson's pessimism though, is more than outweighed by the optimism of Linda Hutcheon, who suggests that 'historiographic metafiction' (as she terms it) offers a 'paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world' (Hutcheon 1989, 12-13). Hutcheon makes it clear that historiographic metafiction 'is not simply a case of novels metafictionally revelling in their own narrativity or fabulation', since 'modernism had already ... explored the limits of narrative's ability to represent "life", but rather that the return to 'story-telling' ... is a historical and political act [because] postmodern culture at large ... may have become "novelistic"' (51). To briefly summarise, then: while McHale reads the 'revisionist historical novel' as a challenge to an official history (McHale 1987, 90), and Hutcheon reads historiographic metafiction 'in terms of a de-naturalising of the conventions of representing the past in narrative' (Hutcheon 1989, 59), Jameson reads postmodern fantastic historiography in terms of a 'crisis of historicity' and failure to retain critical distance (Jameson 1991).

At first glance, therefore, the above theorisations of metafiction would appear to be not only divergent but conflictual; and yet something is amiss here. Despite all the rhetoric about postmodernist metafiction having effaced the border between 'high' and 'low' discourses, such texts continue to be read *in*

opposition to 'low' discourses. In other words, postmodernist metafiction continues to be read as 'literature'. Steven Connor articulates this point most succinctly: 'the postmodernist literary text from Borges to Beckett to Rushdie', he writes, 'is an ideal object of analysis for a theory of reading which has grown suspicious of every form of identity or fixity, but still requires some object upon which to practice ... allowing the business of the literary academy - the interpretation of texts, the production and accreditation of readings and methodologies - to go on as usual' (Connor 1989, 128). To assess whether Connor is correct, let us briefly consider 'cyberpunk' science fiction, since, according to Jameson, it is, 'for many of us, the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself' (Jameson 1991, 419).

The term 'cyberpunk' was originally coined by Gardner Dozois (in the magazine Isaac Asimov's SF), to refer to a loose group of writers centred around William Gibson, Pat Cadigan, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, Marc Laidlaw, and the self-appointed spokesperson of the group, Bruce Sterling. 'The cyberpunks', Sterling writes,

are perhaps the first SF generation to grow up not only within the literary tradition of science fiction, but in a truly science-fictional world. For them, the techniques of classical "hard SF" - extrapolation, technological literacy - are not just literary tools, but an aid to daily life. They are a means to understanding, and are highly valued (Sterling 1991, 344).

It is no surprise, then, that cyberpunk has been identified with postmodernism. In his editorial introduction to Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction, Larry McCaffery echoes Jameson's call for a 'new kind of "political art"' capable of representing the "'world space of multinational capital'", and declares that postmodern science fiction - i.e., cyberpunk - 'should be seen as precisely the breakthrough "realism of our time"' (McCaffery 1991, 16).

Jameson himself, in a footnote to Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 'regret[s] the absence' of a chapter on cyberpunk (Jameson 1991, 419). However, as Damien Broderick points out, while Jameson might not have written about cyberpunk *per se*, he has published a number of uncollected essays on science fiction - for example, on Philip K. Dick - in which 'a Jamesonian theory of postmodern sf' is discernible (Broderick 1995, 111). Broderick notes that 'Jameson's rendering of Duane Hanson's postmodern

simulacra precisely captures Dick's characteristic effect' of making the world disappear in a puff of logic (110); a good example of which occurs in Dick's novel Time out of Joint, where the character Ragle Gumm, on approaching a soft-drink stand, sees it replaced by a piece of paper informing him that it is a 'soft-drink stand'. Dick's text, in other words, could be said to operate 'metafictionally'; and yet Broderick is unsure about the use of such terms. As he makes quite clear, the relation between postmodernist metafiction and science fiction is problematic:

The ontologically devastating fact to keep in mind through this passage is that luckless Ragle Gumm's experience is *not*, at the diegetic level, a metaphor, *not* a psychotic hallucination. This is the stuff of his being-in-the-world. It is a postulate possible only in an sf text, the concretisation of what elsewhere, even in the postmodern, would almost inevitably *have* to be read as figurative (110).

The science fiction writer and critic Samuel Delany reiterates this point.

'[T]he vast overlap with literature aside', he writes,

SF is a paraliterary practice of writing; its mimetic relation to the real world is of a different order from even literary fantasy. It grows out of a different tradition. It has a different history... The difficulty is having to bring the vocabulary of literary criticism to science fiction with great care; to remember that you're taking a vocabulary vouchsafed by literary studies and moving it outside the literary precinct. You have to proceed very, very carefully. It involves critiquing literary studies themselves, as you appropriate one term after another - or as you decide that you can appropriate this term but that you can't appropriate that one (Delany 1994, 182-3).

Delany's warning is one that McHale would do well to attend to. Although he nods towards the fact that 'cyberpunk tends to "literalise" or "actualise" what in postmodernist fiction occurs as metaphor', he steadfastly refuses to consider his own position within the 'literary institution', declaring such issues to be irrelevant (McHale 1992, 236-246). As Connor notes, McHale's account of postmodernist fiction is 'characterised by a serene belief in the givenness of the category of literature, or the "literary system"', and he appears undaunted by any 'charge of metaphysical illusion' in his search 'for the "underlying" systemacity" of postmodernist literature' (Connor 1989, 126). This probably explains McHale's confusion over Kathy Acker's Empire of the Senseless, which appropriates and reworks material from Gibson's Neuromancer:

What *point* is being made about Gibson's original? None whatsoever, so far as I can see. In other words, Acker's strangely untendentious rewriting of this passage [where Molly's leg has been injured] from Neuromancer is an example of what Jameson has called "blank parody". Literally "pointless", Acker's rewrite has no discernible

purpose apart from that of producing the “sampling” effect (McHale 1992, 234).

I disagree; I think Acker’s ‘sampling’ is only ‘pointless’ to a ‘literary’ critic such as McHale. If a piece of writing is moved from a text which is identified as ‘science fiction’ to one which is identified as ‘postmodernist’ its meaning changes.

Consider the following passage from the opening page of Gibson’s novel Virtual Light:

The air beyond the window touches each source of light with a faint hepatic corona, a tint of jaundice edging imperceptibly into brownish translucence. Fine dry flakes of fecal snow, billowing in from the sewage flats, have lodged in the lens of night (Gibson 1993, 1).

From a ‘literary’ viewpoint the phrase ‘fine dry flakes of fecal snow’ is figurative. Read as ‘science fiction’, however, the phrase takes on a literal meaning: the snow really is fecal. The text can be read in either way, of course, but I think it makes more sense to read it literally. Moreover, science fiction readers are accustomed to making such meanings.

According to Delany, science fiction criticism has always differed from ‘literary’ criticism because ‘science fiction has always been immeasurably more intimate with its readers, with its critics, than has literature - at least than literature has been since World War One (when some critics, like Terry Eagleton would say “literature” as we know it began)’ (Delany 1994, 188). Thus, when Jameson gnomically declares that, ‘for many of us, [cyberpunk is] the supreme *literary* expression ... of postmodernism’, a certain question arises: which ‘us’ - which reading formation - is he talking about exactly? Is he talking about ‘literary’ critics, postmodernists, ‘everyday’ science fiction readers, or what? This thesis is not the place in which to answer such questions. My point is simply this: that postmodernist theorisations of cyberpunk threaten to mystify and conceal science fiction’s alternative formations of production and reception. Furthermore, I would contend that other ‘paraliterary’ discourses are equally ignored and misrepresented, in particular the discursive practice of ‘storytelling’. The postmodern ‘return to storytelling’ is conceived of in terms of metafictional fabulation, but how useful is this theorisation? Specifically, how useful is it when it comes to reading Berger, a writer who claims not only to *be* a storyteller, but to live in a *community* of storytellers - and a peasant one at that? It is to such questions that I would now like to turn.

A question of place

Pig Earth is a very different kind of book to Berger's other writings from the 1970s. G, for example, is widely interpreted as exhibiting the formal experimentation which accords with Anglo-American criticism's definition of 'modernism'. Raman Selden notes that Berger's importance as a 'committed Marxist novelist derives from his relative success', in G, of 'overcoming the apparently incorrigible individualism of the novel form without abandoning the formal advances achieved by modernism' (Selden 1975, 113). This view is endorsed by George Szanto, who claims that G is a 'revolutionary' text whose 'juxtaposition of images [provides] oppositional patterns of human activity' (Szanto 1987, 71-92). However, Selden is quick to point out that it is precisely this modernist and potentially radical mode of narration which Pig Earth abandons, in favour, he writes, of 'an essentially humanist and mimetic approach', whose 'low style has the attributes of Auerbachian realism' (Selden 1982, 47,55).

Consider the opening paragraph of 'A Question of Place', the first piece of writing in Pig Earth:

Over the cow's brow the son places a black leather mask and ties it to the horns. the leather has become black through usage. The cow can see nothing. For the first time a sudden night has been fitted to her eyes. It will be removed in less than a minute when the cow is dead. During one year the leather mask provides, for the walk of ten paces between fasting-table and slaughter-house, twenty hours of night (PE, 1).

The text provides an omniscient narrator's 'readerly' description of a cow being led to the slaughter; a particular detail of village life which appears to lack any dialectical or structural relation to the world of capital in general. Of course, it might be argued that Pig Earth's 'Historical Afterword' supplies just such a structural relation, and yet England's foremost Marxist critic of 'literature', Terry Eagleton, does not think so. According to him, Berger's ability to 'interleave poems and political essays of equivalent intricacy is a gloomy symptom of the ideologically convenient division of labour which paralyses our culture' (Eagleton 1979, 876). As Eagleton sees it, Berger is unable to overcome the 'rift between the complex speculations of the "Afterword" and the graphic immediacies of the tales themselves' (876). Pig Earth, he writes, 'remains a relentlessly realist work' (876).

What I want to know though, is which realist tradition is being discussed here? Raymond Mazurek, for example, declares that 'The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol' - although generally 'realist' - has some kind of 'fantastic quality' to it (Mazurek 1984, 141). While Kierdan Ryan claims that the text exhibits both the 'sensuous depth and penetrative immediacy ... of Hardy', *and* 'the utopian ... "magic realism" ... of García Márquez' (Ryan 1982, 184). What is more, Pig Earth has also been read as a form of sociological reportage; a description which Berger has drawn attention to himself:

The only thing that I can say - which I say very, very proudly - is that when Pig Earth came out, not so much here [in Britain] but when it came out in America, there were many, many reviews of it, mostly favourable - that I'm not so sure about - but what did please me is that almost everybody took these as stories that I had heard and that I simply recorded, and they talked about it in terms of ethnography, in terms of rather exemplary sociology and so on and so on. Nobody actually realised that these stories were mostly, especially the more complicated ones like "Lucie Cabrol", completely invented. I mean they were works of fiction, but they were not taken as works of fiction. In other words the author had completely disappeared in the minds of those readers, and that I am proud of because this is what I would like (Berger 1982a, 19).

Berger's conception of the author 'disappearing' appears to substantiate the argument that Pig Earth is 'realist', and yet the question remains - how can the same text be read as both 'factual' *and* 'fantastic', 'realist' *and* 'fabulist'? Even the term 'magic realism' cannot yoke together reportage and fantasy. The very fact that the term is invoked at all though, is interesting, and its ideological deployment is worth considering in more detail.

'Magic realism' is most commonly associated with the writing of the Latin American 'Boom' of the 1960's, which culminated with García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude. However, if Regina James is to be believed, far from being an unproblematic term, it is one over which 'a guerrilla war is being fought against Anglo-American cultural imperialism' (James 1991, 98). James's argument is that numerous very different Latin American texts and practices have been grouped together under the umbrella term of 'magic realism', simply because they don't accord with the 'conventions of nineteenth-century European realism', and/or early twentieth-century modernism. 'Magic realism', she notes, has been associated with Latin American paintings from the 1920s (in opposition to European 'surrealist' ones); with Alejo Carpentier's conception of the 'marvellous real' (a phrase he coined in an attempt to capture Latin America's

'marvellous reality'); and with folk stories told by people who still believe in magic (98-104). What James finds most infuriating, needless to say, is the fact that 'Anglo-American' critics are 'so confident' of their usage of the term 'that, from London, Edwin Williamson has assured us' that there is not even a 'dispute' about its meaning (101-102).

James's scathing attack on Williamson is undoubtedly deserved, but is it fair for postmodernist critics such as Hutcheon to be tarred with the same brush? Hutcheon cites García Márquez's 'magic realism' as an example of her paradoxically complicit and critical historiographic metafiction; a thesis which Gerald Martin supports and develops. According to Martin,

García Márquez presents most aspects of reality from the standpoint of his characters, while he himself, as narrator, adopts a perspective based - largely but not entirely ironically - on the mainly metaphysical views of the *pensadores*, those "thinkers" or ideologists who dominated Latin America's interpretation of its own history until the Second World War ... This novel is not about some undifferentiated fusing of "history-and-myth", but about the myths of history and their demystification ... and examines Latin American fiction through Latin America's own self-generated myths and stereotypes ((Martin 1989, 222-224).

Martin's argument, particularly about the *pensadores*, is useful. Nevertheless, he fails to take account of a crucial point. Ian Watt has traced the 'rise of the novel' in the 'West', but, as Mario Vargas Llosa notes:

As you probably know, the novel was forbidden in the Spanish Colonies by the Inquisition .. [producing] a world without novels, yes, but a world into which fiction had spread and contaminated practically everything; history, religion, poetry, science, art, speeches, journalism, and the daily habits of people. We are still victims in Latin America of what we could call "the revenge of the novel". We still have great difficulty in our countries in differentiating between fiction and reality (Llosa 1987, 5).

In other words, Vargas Llosa proposes a very different historical reason for the fictionality of everyday life in Latin America than Hutcheon, whose theorisation of a return to 'story-telling' is posited on the world having been 'novelised' by the 'media' (Hutcheon 1989, 51).

Thus, while a Latin American 'magic realist' text might formally resemble a postmetropolitan English one (such as Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop), any similarity between the two should be viewed as a matter of historical dialogue

rather than identity. As Carlos Fuentes notes, the reason why 'modernism' does not emerge in Latin America until the time of his own generation is because of the continent's distinctive 'chrontope' (Fuentes 1987, 141). Whereas in England the conception of time as abstract, homogeneous and linear became dominant in the early nineteenth century, the same cannot be said of Latin America, where a large peasantry - whose oral traditions of narration remained intact - sustained alternative temporalities. According to Fuentes,

we simply rediscovered our time along with the European revolution in time wrought by the novel and the poetry of the twentieth century. It is a very interesting phenomenon of cultural integration, of mutual discovery on a cultural plane. It is the closest we've ever been to the West and to Europe thanks to this cultural phenomenon (142).

Indeed, García Márquez comments on this 'cultural phenomenon' himself. According to William Rowe, García Márquez is reported as saying that 'he realised he was going to be a writer when he discovered that Kafka told things in the same way as his own grandmother' (Rowe 1987, 193).

Of course, as Fuentes makes quite clear, he is talking about a 'phenomenon ... of mutual discovery'. Writers in the 'West' have also had a great deal to learn from their Latin American counterparts. Which brings us back to Berger. What makes the claim that Pig Earth is 'magic realist' doubly interesting, I think, is Berger's self-confessed 'discovery' of García Márquez. In his review of Chronicle of a Death Foretold, Berger declares that the book's mixed - if not confused - critical reception in the 'West' is attributable to the fact that García Márquez is less a novelist than a 'storyteller' (WB, 240). Moreover, Berger declares that García Márquez and himself are 'colleagues' in the 'art of... storytelling' (240). According to Berger,

The tradition of storytelling of which I am speaking has little to do with that of the *novel*. The chronicle is public and the novel is private. The chronicle, like the epic poem, retells more memorably what is already generally known; the novel, by contrast, reveals what is a secret in a family of private lives. The novelist surreptitiously beckons the reader into the private home and there, their fingers to their lips, they watch together. The chronicler tells his story in the market-place and competes with the clamour of all the other vendors: his occasional triumph is to create a silence around all his words (241).

Berger's definition of storytelling is remarkably different from Jameson's and Hutcheon's; it is not, however, without critical precedent. As Geoff Dyer observes, Berger's distinction between the novel and the chronicle is clearly

shaped by Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller' (Dyer 1986, 119-127). According to Benjamin, 'What distinguishes the novel from the story is its essential dependence on the book' and printing, and that 'it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it'; whereas 'the storyteller takes what he tells from experience', and 'in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale' (Benjamin 1973, 87). Storytelling is the 'ability to exchange experiences', and 'contains, openly or covertly, something useful', it offers 'counsel' (83-86). Obviously Benjamin is not suggesting that storytelling and writing cannot co-exist. As he points out, 'tales' can be written down (84). Indeed, his essay 'The Storyteller' concerns the writing of Nikolai Leskov. However, the mark of a great tale, Benjamin insists, is that its 'written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers' (84).

Furthermore, Benjamin suggests that any 'examination of a given epic form', be it storytelling or novel, 'is concerned with the relationship of this form to historiography', and he refers to the difference 'between the writer of history, the historian, and the teller of it, the chronicler' - noting that in the 'storyteller the chronicler is preserved' (95-96). '[M]emory in the novel', he writes, 'manifests itself in a form quite different from the way it manifests itself in the story': the novel perpetuates 'remembrance' while the story prompts 'reminiscence' (Benjamin 1973, 97-98).

The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is exactly what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of today ... In the storyteller the chronicler is preserved in changed form, secularised as it were (96).

Benjamin's essay, I would suggest, goes a long way towards explaining why postmetropolitan critics find Pig Earth so difficult to come to terms with. Although there is an ideological division of labour between the making of 'facts' and 'fictions' in 'our' culture, what needs to be accepted is that the writing of Pig Earth is concerned with a peasant culture in which such ideological divisions may not operate, or at least operate differently. To echo Samuel Delany, Berger's storytelling is a paraliterary practice of writing which grows out of a different tradition, and to which a critical vocabulary vouchsafed by literary studies ought to be brought with great care - if indeed it can be brought at all. The resonance of the title of 'A Question of Place' then comes to bear: it calls

attention to Berger's place in the postmetropolitan margins; 'our' place as non-peasant readers; and the placing - after 'A Question of Place' - of 'An Explanation'.

An explanation

Berger begins 'An Explanation' with the following question: 'What is the writer's relationship with the place and the people he writes about?' (PE, 5). By way of an answer he tells a story about haymaking with a family of peasants, detailing how back-breaking the work is in the hot sun. 'My anger that afternoon', Berger notes, 'joined me to the field, the slope, the hay' - and one could also add, to the peasants (6). However, he notes that '[a]t other times [his] relationship to the place and people' he lives with is more complicated: 'I am not a peasant. I am a writer: my writing is both a link and a barrier' (6). 'The act of writing', Berger *writes*,

is nothing except the act of approaching the experience written about; just as hopefully, the act of reading the written text is a comparable act of approach. To approach experience, however, is not like approaching a house. "Life," as the Russian proverb says, "is not a walk across an open field." Experience is indivisible and continuous ... experience folds upon itself, refers backwards and forwards to itself through the referents of hope and fear; and, by the use of metaphor, which is at the origin of language ... And so the act of approaching a given moment of experience involves both scrutiny (closeness) and the capacity to connect (distance). The movement of writing resembles that of a shuttle on a loom: repeatedly it approaches and withdraws, closes in and takes its frame. As the movement of writing repeats itself, its intimacy with the experience increases. Finally, if one is fortunate, meaning is the fruit of intimacy (PE, 6).

Berger's metaphor of the 'shuttle' is a potent one, and helps to explain how an English intellectual can justify going to live in a French peasant community. His 'writing about peasants', Berger writes, 'separates me from them and brings me close to them' (PE, 7). However, he notes that since moving to Quincy he has felt less like a writer and more like a 'witness'; a feeling he can only explain by telling another story:

Once I was walking in the mountains with a friend of seventy. As we walked along the foot of a high cliff, he told me how a young girl had fallen to her death there, whilst haymaking on the *alpage* above. Was that before the war? I asked. In 1833, he said (8).

'All villages tell stories' Berger writes: 'Stories of the past, even of the distant past ... And equally stories of the same day. This ... is what constitutes so-called village *gossip* ... the function which ... is close, oral daily history [allowing] the whole village to define itself (8-9).

What distinguishes the life of a village is that it is also *a living portrait of itself*: a communal portrait, in that everybody is portrayed and everybody portrays ... Every village's portrait of itself is constructed ... out of words, spoken and remembered: out of opinions, stories, eye witness reports, legends, comments and hearsay. And it is a continuous portrait; work on it never stops.

Without such a portrait - and the *gossip* which is its raw material - the village would have been forced to doubt its own existence. Every story, and every comment on the story - which is a proof that the story has been *witnessed* - contributes to the portrait and confirms the existence of the village (9-10).

Finally, Berger concludes his 'explanation' by returning to the story of haymaking he began with. 'After working in the morning we used to drink coffee together ... From time to time I caught an expression in [the old man's] eyes, a certain look of complicity ... And one day I realised what it was. It was his recognition of our equality: we were both story-tellers' (12).

The key point here, of course, is that Berger has to 'explain' that he is a storyteller, because most of the people who read Pig Earth are not peasants, and/or privy to their meaningful glances. In other words, 'An Explanation' not only addresses the question of Berger's relationship with the place and the people he writes about, it also addresses the question of the *reader's* relationship with the place and the people he writes about. What sets Berger's 'explanation' apart, however, is that he addresses these questions in such a *telling way*. As I noted earlier, in his essay, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community', Edward Said considers how criticism can come to have a 'secular, political force in an age determined to deny interpretation anything but a role as mystification', and proposes that whatever is termed 'artistic' and hence is 'supposed to be subjective and powerless' will have to 'cross-over into realms now covered by journalism and the production of information, that employ representation but are supposed to be objective and powerful', and vice versa (Said 1985, 157).⁶¹ According to Said, 'we [already] have a superb guide' as to how such crossings should be made 'in John Berger' - 'in whose most recent work', Said claims, 'there is the basis of a major critique of modern representation' (157). Simply put, Berger does not just theorise

⁶¹ See Chapter One (61-64).

storytelling he tells stories about storytelling; while, crossing the border in the other direction, he draws attention to the 'fact' that Pig Earth's tales are not entirely 'fictional' either. In contrast to the metafiction of 'literary' postmodernism, in which Philip Stevick can point to the 'single quality that most firmly unites postmodern writers' as being 'the recovery of the pleasure of telling, cut loose from the canons of possibility' (Stevick 1985, 140), Berger offers a way of telling which 'is not a vanity or a pastime', but 'part of the life' of a community (PE, 11).

'Very few stories', Berger writes, 'are narrated either to idealise or condemn; rather they testify to the always slightly surprising range of the possible. Although concerned with everyday events, they are mystery stories' (8-9). Moreover, as Berger notes in his review of Chronicle of a Death Foretold, such stories are told to *preserve* mysteries, not provide solutions (WB, 239). The story of the girl who fell to her death in 1833 is one such 'mystery story'; and the story of Lucie Cabrol's murder is another - albeit a less everyday one. What is significantly more mysterious, however, is the story of Lucie Cabrol's *return* from the dead. In the secular postmetropolis, when you're dead you're dead; but this is not necessarily the case in the peasant margins.⁶² As Berger notes in his 'Historical Afterword', because the nature of peasant existence is '[i]nexhaustibly committed to wresting a life from the earth', the peasant 'sees life as an interlude' (PE, 201). Partly, this is because of the peasant's 'daily familiarity with the cycle of birth, life and death', but it is also, Berger alleges, 'because of the dual contrary movement through time of his [sic] thoughts and feelings which in turn derives from the dual nature of the peasant economy' (201). This dual movement is quite difficult to get to grips with, but not impossible: 'These two movements, towards the past and the future, are not as contrary as they might first appear because basically the peasant has a cyclic view of time' (201). And it is this cyclic view of time which accounts for the spectres that haunt the pages of Into Their Labours.

In the first stories of Pig Earth one can see Berger, fresh from the postmetropolis, attempting to get his head round the idea of cyclic time. The story of 'A Calf Remembered', for example, is told in reverse: it begins with a nameless calf being led to the slaughter, and ends with its owner, Hubert, awaiting its birth in a stable.

He sat on a milking stool in the dark. With his head in his hands, his breathing was indistinguishable from that of the cows. The stable itself

⁶² See Chapter Two (94-97).

was like the inside of an animal. Breath, water, cud were entering it; wind, piss, shit were leaving ... In the darkness, which precedes sight or place or name, man and calf waited (21).

And it almost feels as if Berger is waiting there too. At least, that's the impression he'd like to give. As he notes at the end of 'An Explanation', 'The stories which follow (not the poems) are printed in the order in which they were written during the years 1974-8 ... so that the reader may accompany me, and we can make the journey side by side' (13). At first the 'journey' seems to be going nowhere. There is a story about a goat conceiving. And a story about a pig being slaughtered. And a story about a cow falling over and having to be sold off. After travelling on this 'journey' a certain distance, however, the reader begins to realise that she or he is being led *round in circles*. Unlike a 'literary' collection of short stories, Berger's paraliterary tales accrue meaning through repetition. As Benjamin notes,

We have witnessed the evolution of the "short story", which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings (Benjamin 1973, 93).

Each one of Berger's tales, on its own, adds up to very little. However, as the 'thin transparent layers' of the tales are piled 'one on top of the other' their meaning slowly emerges. 'Life is an interlude', they say.

The last story in Pig Earth, however, is told from a slightly different perspective than the others. '[A]s the stories succeed one another', Berger notes, 'they become longer and look more deeply into the subjectivity of the lives which they narrate' (PE, 13). 'The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol' is narrated by Jean. And what the reader sees - looking through his eyes - is Lucie's birth, death and return from the grave. At her funeral Lucie's spectre taunts Jean, and later, when he is picking blueberries in the alpage, she guides him to a clearing where the dead are building her a chalet.

All right, Lucie? The hammerer who shouted this with virile impertinence was Armand who had been carried away by the Jalet and drowned. Next to him hammered Gustave who had fallen from the mountain. Georges, who hanged himself because he knew that he would become a pauper, was sewing paper flowers to the branches of a tiny spruce; the flowers were white like silver and yellow like gold. Adelin, who was killed by a tree in the forest was tying a rope. Mathieu who was struck dead by lightning was measuring with a yellow ruler.

Then I recognised Michel who died of internal bleeding after being kicked by a horse, and I saw Joset who was lost in an avalanche (177).

It is easy to dismiss the passage above as 'fantastic', as Raymond Mazurek does (Mazurek 1984, 141). However, as I have been at great pains to point out, Berger's storytelling is a paraliterary practice of writing; which is to say, 'its mimetic relation to the real world is of a different order from ... literary fantasy', or, I might add, postmodernist metafiction (Delany 1994, 182). The spectres Jean sees should not be viewed metaphorically, but rather considered as part and parcel of his being-in-the-world; a world in which time is experienced as cyclical.

This being said, Pig Earth does border on the metaphysical. Apart from anything else, Jean appears to transcend 'reality' by literally climbing up a number of ladders. He climbs one ladder onto a cross beam of the chalet, where he encounters a man he has never met before:

Who are you? I asked, you're not from here.
Lucie knew me as Saint-Just, he replied.
You were in the Maquis!
We were ordered to dig our graves and were shot.
I will tell you something, I said. There were Nazis who escaped after the Liberation and came to the Argentine, they changed their names and they lived off the fat of the pampas.
They only escaped for a moment.
You can't be so sure, can you?
Justice will be done.
When?
When the living know what the dead suffered.
He said this without a trace of bitterness in his voice, as if he had more than all the patience in the world.
I climbed a second ladder with the tree across my shoulder (PE, 187).

What is the reader to make of this? The text itself offers an 'explanation' - of sorts. When Jean returns to the land of the living, and goes back to Lucie's house, he is reminded of her 'story of the *curé* climbing up to [her] house and being taken ill' (191). 'What was it that he muttered when she loosened his clothes on the table?' Jean asks himself (191). According to Lucie, the *curé* muttered the following:

He started to speak as if he were reading the Bible in church. It is written, sadness has killed many, and there is no profit in it. You are right, my daughter, to believe in happiness. Lie down, Father, I told him and rest a moment. Where? he asked, I see no bed. I got him to the table. He lay down, closed his eyes and smiled. The angels, he

murmered, who descended and ascended on Jacob's ladder, they had wings, yet they did not fly and they trod the gradual rungs of the ladder (143).

To my mind, this is the most important single image in 'The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol'. It is an image which *marks* another time: a time in which the seasons do not pass, but return, like the dead, to offer redemption. And it is at this point, I think, that the reader comes face to face with an all too familiar spectre: the spectre of Benjamin. According to Benjamin, 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power' (Benjamin 1973, 256).

Benjamin's work is not for the faint-hearted. As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, the term 'messianism' is a profoundly suspect one, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to refer to the ghosts in Berger's work as 'spectres'. Jacques Derrida's concept of 'spectrality' provides a way of reading the ghostly presences in Pig Earth deconstructively; i.e., as serving to 'undo' the text's 'ontological oppositions' between reality and fantasy, fact and fiction, and so on (Derrida 1994a, 36). However, a Derridean reading of the text sidesteps the question of what death *is*. Where *do* the living go when they die? Do they live on somewhere else, or only in our memories of them? I don't know the answers to these questions, and neither does Berger, but he does at least confront them. 'A moment's reflection', Berger writes,

shows that any story drawn from life begins, for the storyteller, with its end. The story of Dick Whittington becomes that story when he has at last become mayor of London. The story of Romeo and Juliet first begins as a story after they are dead. Most, if not all stories begin with the death of the principal protagonist. It is in this sense that one can say that storytellers are Death's secretaries. It is Death who hands them the file. The file is full of sheets of uniformly black paper but they have eyes for reading them and from this file they construct a story for the living. Here the question of invention, so much insisted upon by certain schools of modern critics and professors, becomes patently absurd. All that the storyteller needs or has is the capacity to read what is written in black (WB, 240).

Berger is right to knock 'certain schools of modern critics and professors'; however, there are a small number of theorists whose work would appear to support his. The claim that storytellers can read sheets of uniformly black paper

is not that far removed from Pierre Macherey's assertion that, 'What is important in the work is what it does not say' (quoted in Forgacs 1982, 149). Moreover, the 'feminist' critic, Hélène Cixous, at times sounds positively Bergeresque, or vice versa. According to Cixous, 'fiction' - particularly fiction 'which has an autobiographical starting point' - is bound to be 'violent':

Writing is a going to the realm of the dead, but we're not always aware of it. Why is it that we mainly speak about the dead? Because writing is violent. Writing is supposed (I think so at least) to try and say the truth ... And truth is always violent; it is a synonym of violence. Therefore you can't say the truth except in a posthumous voice, either because you are dead or the others are dead. And at the same time - it's paradoxical - if you don't speak about people when they're dead, then they disappear. Writing is about or above or on or alongside death - my death or your death, it's the same. Besides, it's only with the dead that we are free, to love them and to hate them. I can even love people whom I would not have loved if they were alive, or if I were alive (Cixous 1990, 18-19).

Cixous's point about love is a crucial one. To read the 'uniformly black' pages of Lucie's 'file' one needs to look at them through the eyes of a lover - through Jean's eyes. As Berger admits in interview,

In real life there was such a woman called Lucie Cabrol who was in fact murdered like I tell it in my story. Again this was a story that I tried to write on many occasions, but couldn't until I realised that the story should be told by a man who had once loved her when she was young. As soon as I found or invented that man who had emigrated to the Argentine and come back, then I could write the story. The voice came (Berger 1992e, 92-93).

And the voice that came, of course, was a storyteller's. The best storytellers, according to Benjamin, are those who combine the 'lore of faraway places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place' (Benjamin 1973, 84-5). Returning home, Jean is that 'much-traveled man', confronted with his past. When he looks at Lucie he looks at her from the 'distance' of the Argentine, and with the 'scrutiny' of a lover.

Berger's tales, then, particularly his later ones, are not just 'mystery stories' but also love stories. Indeed, according to Berger, the stories in Once in Europa should be viewed quite precisely as 'love stories'. What the reader cannot fail to notice though, is that at the same time Berger starts telling 'love stories' his narrative voice becomes increasingly and problematically 'feminine', if not 'maternal'; and that this shift coincides with the movement of his stories - along

with the peasantry - to a 'metropolis'. It is not for nothing that Lilac and Flag is sub-titled An Old Wives' Tale of a City. And it is to this question of gender that I would now like to turn.

Once in Europa

In many ways, the stories in Once in Europa and Pig Earth overlap. For example, the themes addressed in Once in Europa's 'The Accordion Player' and 'The Time of the Cosmonauts' - of survival in a village which is increasingly populated by the elderly, and the sense of loneliness and isolation which ensues - are not dissimilar to those articulated in Pig Earth's 'An Independent Woman' and 'Addressed to Survivors'. Indeed, intertextual links between the tales are often quite explicit. When Marius delivers a calf in 'The Time of the Cosmonauts', and carries it to its mother, the Comtesse, Danielle informs the reader that, 'The sound she made was high and penetrating - a mad sound' (OE, 83). Which is exactly how Berger describes the sound the cow Fougère made when she was calving in 'An Explanation': 'She mooed making a sound I've never heard a cow make on other occasions - not even when in pain. A high, penetrating, mad sound' (PE, 12). However, there is an obvious difference between the way these two births are reported. Whereas the birth of Fougère's calf is 'witnessed' through Berger's eyes, the birth of the Comtesse's calf is observed through Danielle's eyes; and the world through her eyes, we are led to believe, looks very different - *because she is a woman*. 'No woman, young or old, would suffer like' Marius suffers, we are told (OE, 82). The point to note here is that while Danielle acts as a focaliser, it is Berger who is the narrator, and it is difficult to tell - when he puts himself in her place - whether he is attempting to critique an essentialist conception of gender, or whether he is inadvertently perpetuating one.

Consider the story 'Boris is Buying Horses'. Berger's storytelling credentials are on fine display here:

I told you once, [Boris] says, that I had enough poems in my head to fill a book, do you remember? Now you are writing the story of my life. You can do that because it's finished. When I was still alive, what did you do? Once you bought me a packet of cigarettes whilst I was grazing the sheep above the factory.
I say nothing. I go on writing (42).

Death hands Berger the file, and the story he has to tell is a mystery story: why

did Boris die? In the days leading up to Boris's death he showers Marie-Jeane, a married woman from Lyons, with gifts - including the gift of one of his houses.

Years later, people asked: how was it possible that Boris, who never gave anything away in his life, Boris, who would cheat his own grandmother, Boris, who never kept his word, how was it that he gave the house to the blond? And the answer, which was an admission of the mystery, was always the same: a passion is a passion (57).

This is quite an 'explanation'. Indeed, it could easily grace the pages of Pig Earth, in which Berger provides a number of examples of what he means by 'mystery stories':

How is it that C ... who is so punctilious in his work, overturned his haycart? How is it that L ... is able to fleece her lover J ... of everything, and how is it that J ... who normally gives nothing away to anybody, allows himself to be fleeced? (PE, 8).

As Berger notes, however, not everybody in the village thinks Boris's story is that mysterious:

Women did not ask the same question. It was obvious to them that, given the right moment and circumstances, any man can be led. There was no mystery. And perhaps it was for this reason that the women felt a little more pity than the men for Boris (OE, 57).

But if the women are right, and 'Boris is Buying Horses' is not a mystery story, what kind of story is it - a simple love story? Well, yes and no. According to Berger, Boris was less in love with the 'the blond', than with what she symbolised. 'Her laughter', Berger writes, 'was like a kind of promise' (44): the dizzying, dangerous promise of the postmetropolis. As the character Edmond warns,

City women are not the same, he said, and I ought to know. I've seen enough. They're not built the same way. They don't have the same shit and they don't have the same blood. They don't smell the same either. They don't smell of stables and chicken mash, they smell of something else. And that something else is dangerous. They have perfect eyelashes, they have unscratched legs without varicose veins, they have shoes with soles as thin as pancakes, they have hands white and smooth as peeled potatoes and when you smell their smell, it fills you with a godforsaken longing. You want to breath them to their dregs, you want to squeeze them like lemons until there is not a drop or a pip left. And shall I tell you what they smell of? Their smell is the smell of money. They calculate everything for money. They are not built like our mothers, these women (52).

Women from the 'city' don't know their place, at least in Edmond's scheme of things. The question is, whether Berger shares this view? According to

Doreen Massey, the 'mixture of fascination and fear' with which men greeted the chaos of metropolitan space in the nineteenth century, particularly as regards the 'threat' of 'freer' women, increasingly came to be *embodied* in women, who, in literary terms, became 'symbolic of "disorder"' - as demonstrated in 'the dominant response... among male modernist writers' (Massey 1992, 74). Berger is a late-twentieth century writer famous for critiquing how 'men act' and 'women appear' (Berger 1972c, 47); but even the author of Ways of Seeing is not above suspicion. Berger's way of seeing is not Edmond's, but the same logic guides their thinking: women in the village are 'good' because they are more in touch with 'nature'. Or, to put this more theoretically, 'Boris is Buying Horses' enforces a binaristic structure of thinking in which a male/female dichotomous dualism is transcoded onto various other dualisms, such as the city/country. Of course, Berger attempts to elevate the 'feminine' over the 'masculine', but that only serves to invert the male/female binary not deconstruct it.

Consider the story which gives Berger's 'collection of love stories' its title, 'Once in Europa'. The story opens with the following paragraph:

Before the poppy flowers, its green calyx is hard like the outer shell of an almond. One day this shell is split open. Three green shards fall to the earth. It is not an axe that splits it open, simply a screwed-up ball of membrane-thin folded petals like rags. As the rags unfold, their colour changes from neonate pink to the most brazen scarlet to be found in the fields. It is as if the force that split the calyx were the need of this red to become visible and to be seen" (OE, 111).

Although this paragraph does not open with speech marks, it comes to a close with them. Moreover, they are the only speech marks in the book. The impression this gives is an odd one, it is as if the reader is being addressed directly, but by whom? Who do these words *belong* to?

The story is narrated by Odile, a middle-aged woman, and it is told from an unusual perspective - a hang-glider:

White the page of the world below. Like the traces of tiny animals in the snow, the scribbles of what I knew as a child. Nobody else could read them here. I can see the roof, the pear tree by the shit-house, the byre we stored wood in with hives on the balcony ... (115).

Poised in the hang-glider Odile is afforded the opportunity to 'read' the story of the village below. It is the same village in which Boris died, and Lucie was murdered. 'Who killed Lucie Cabrol for her money?', Odile asks (119). The village looks different than it did in Pig Earth however. Now it has a molybdenum

factory in the middle of it. As Odile flies over it 'she can smell the fumes in its smoke', and she thinks back to when she first met Stepan, a migrant worker living in the company barracks, with whom she fell in love (114).

I'd never before seen a man naked like Stepan. I'd seen my father and my brothers at the sink washing all over, I'd seen everything, but I'd never seen a man naked like that ... My heart was pounding with excitement at the news it received: its life would never be the same again, the body it pumped for would never be the same again.

Father was an expert grafter of fruit trees. He scarcely ever failed ... He knew at exactly which moment to graft, where to cut, how to bandage. It was as if the sap were in his thumbs. He's grafting me! I said to myself with my arms round Stepan's body. Along the new branches fruit will come like we've never known, neither he nor me. It wasn't easy for Stepan. I wasn't easy to break through (146).

In other words, the story Odile has to tell is the same old story; that 'men act' (or graft in this case), and 'women appear' (and are grafted).

Odile becomes pregnant, and bears 'fruit', giving birth to a son, Christian, and later a daughter, to whom she gives the following advice:

Look in a mirror if you pass one this afternoon in the hearing aid shop in Annency whilst you're waiting for Papa, look at your hair which you washed last night and see how it invites being touched. Look at your shoulder when you wash at the sink and then look down at where your breast assembles itself, look at the part between shoulder and breast which slopes like an alpage - for thirty years still this slope is going to attract tears, teeth clenched in passion, feverish children, sleeping heads, work-rough hands. This beauty which hasn't a name. Look at how gently your stomach falls at its centre into the navel, like a white begonia in full bloom (176).

The identification of women with 'nature' is complete here. Odile is 'nature' personified: she is 'mother nature'. And I would suggest that it is 'her' voice which introduces the story; or, perhaps better to say, it is 'her' voice that Berger would like to have us think introduces the story.

Hovering above the earth Odile feels that, 'The wind is holding us up and I feel safe, I feel - I feel like a word in the breath of a voice' (113). How is one to read this? One can only assume that Odile feels herself literally *uttered*, in much the same way that the opening paragraph is uttered. Which is to say, uttered by Berger. While the *énoncés* in the story belong to Odile, it is Berger who remains the subject of *énonciation*. It is he who puts the words in her mouth - and phallogocentric ones at that.

My main criticism of 'Once in Europa', therefore, is not simply that Berger adopts a 'maternal' voice, but the manner in which he does so. He fails to problematise his own position as a 'masculine' storyteller, and then proceeds to identify 'femininity' with 'nature'. Indeed, in a recent essay on Aesop, Berger contends that the 'role' of the storyteller 'in the countryside' is one 'which old women fill far better than men. Their reputations are behind them and count for nothing. They become almost as large as nature' (KR, 58). What, then, is the reader supposed to make of Lilac and Flag. An Old Wives' Tale of a City? The telling of such a tale by a male writer is not only problematic, it verges on the presumptuous. Who does Berger think he is, assuming the role of an 'old woman' storyteller?

Lilac and Flag

The central characters of Lilac and Flag, Zsuzsa and Sucus, live in a 'city' called 'Troy', but what kind of 'city' is it, and how should it be mapped? 'From the Champs-de-Mars, outside the main gate' of the prison where Zsuzsa and Sucus first meet, it is possible to see 'the docks, the district around the railway station known as Budapest, and the industrial area to the north' (LF, 7). Zsuzsa is there to visit her uncle, an inmate in the prison, and Sucus is there to sell coffee to the inmates on their release. Later, the two of them wander around the 'city' together, idly chatting about where they come from and where they are going. They talk about 'Chicago', where 'the water's turned off every night', and walk through 'the Escorial', where the 'lawns [were] greener in the summer than anything else in Troy' (19-20). Moreover, as they walk through the downtown area of Troy it becomes apparent that the 'city' is also a major centre of international commerce, with sky-scrapers 'as high as glaciers', below which, 'Thousands of people [can be seen] strolling after work ... [past] shop windows [full] of silver shoes, leather boots, raincoats, handbags, necklaces, document cases, bottles of perfumes, cars with convertible rooves', and so on (14). It is the centre to which immigrants come from the margins, like Sucus's father. He left the village of his birth when he was seventeen, and 'got a job opening oysters' - a job he 'did for the rest of his life' (39-40). Indeed, most if not all of the manual labourers in Troy would appear to be immigrants. When Zsuzsa visits Sucus at work, on the construction site of the 'Mond Bank', one of Sucus's co-workers asks where she comes from: 'Not from here', Zsuzsa replies; but '[w]ho [i]s from here?'

her interrogator wonders (64).

Perhaps, then, Troy is best understood as what Saskia Sassen terms a 'global city'? As I discuss in Chapter One, Sassen's 'central thesis' is that 'increased globalisation ... has given major cities [global cities] a key role in the management and control' of the global economy, and her 'organising concept' is that the work that takes place there is what she terms 'the *practice* of global control - the activities involved in producing and reproducing the organisation and management of the global production system and global labour force' (Sassen 1991, 324-5). This organising concept allows Sassen to consider the whole range of jobs that go into maintaining 'global control capability' - from senior management staff, to cleaning staff, including 'undocumented immigrants' employed 'at below-average [wage] levels' (329). In particular, Sassen takes note of the 'massive tensions and congestions embedded in the spatial structure of large cities today', and concludes that the co-existence of the 'postindustrial [alongside those production processes] that look as though they belong to an earlier pre-industrial era', are not 'anomalous or exogenous to these advanced urban economies, but [are] in fact part of them' (331-7). This would certainly appear to be the case in Troy, where I.B.M. and other multi-national companies do not merely function alongside the shanty towns of 'Barbek' and 'Rat Hill', but draw on their labour-power: Zsuzsa's mother, for example, works as 'a cleaner ... [in] the I.B.M building' (LF, 11).

However, Sassen's 'global city' thesis only goes so far towards mapping Troy. When his father dies, Sucus runs from the hospital:

He ran ... He did not stop to look at the beggars or the flower-seller.
His one idea was to get to Cachan. He turned left out of the hospital.
He took the Boulevard Cantor. He turned down Kibalchich Street. He
crossed Lions. He went over the Hind Bridge. He passed by
Swansea and he came into Cachan High Street by Rémaur
Monument (LF, 52-3).

What Sassen neglects to mention is that 'cities' - even 'global cities' - are not quite the *places* they used to be. As Kevin Robins notes, 'the crisis of the city' is not simply brought about by the 'social problems of the city', but also because, 'The very idea of the city itself is now thrown into doubt' (Robins 1993, 314). According to many commentators, socio-spatial relations have become so complicated and diffuse in urban areas that people's sense of place has begun to disappear altogether (see Robins 1993). The 'city' has become '*aporetic*', Bob

Shields writes; it has become 'a "crisis-object" which destabilises our certainty about "the real"' (Shields 1996, 227). And it is this crisis which has prompted Edward Soja to coin the term 'postmetropolis', in order to draw attention, not only to the new urbanisation, but also to the difficulties involved in its theorisation (Soja 1997).

Postmetropolises such as Paris, Berlin, London, New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo are not merely described by various - often conflicting - stories, in a certain sense they always already are stories: the myth of 'Paris' in the spring-time is part of what makes Paris Paris. And Berger's choice of Troy as the setting for Lilac and Flag draws attention to this problematic. The Troy you see depends on how you approach it. For example, if you come at it from a perspective akin to David Harvey's, Troy's shifting terrain looks to be symptomatic of postmodernity's increasing place-lessness (Harvey 1990). However, as noted above, the flaw in such an approach is that Harvey looks at the changing relation between space and place from an eminently postmetropolitan perspective.⁶³

According to Doreen Massey, it is not so much that places are becoming increasingly place-less, than that a certain definition of place is becoming increasingly untenable; to be precise, an understanding of places 'as distinct ... different, separable, probably bounded, areas within a wider whole called space' (Massey 1995, 54). This conceptualisation of place, as boundaried and discrete, is firmly associated with the 'common-sense' notion of place as 'home', a site of safety, security and privacy; but, as feminist critics such as Massey have pointed out, the dichotomous duality between public and private spaces and places needs to be deconstructed, since 'home' is the major site in which women's labour and oppression takes place on a daily and nightly basis. Instead, therefore, of mourning the loss of some imperialist and patriarchal conception of place, Massey proposes the radical idea of a 'global sense of place': 'a sense of place, an understanding of its "character", which can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond' (Massey 1993, 68). Which is, I think, how Troy should be viewed.

There is another point to note here though. While it is undoubtedly useful to consider the postmetropolis represented *in* Berger's text, it is much more important to consider the text's formation *in the margins* of the postmetropolis. The reason for this is obvious: if Berger had not written Lilac and Flag in a small

⁶³ See Chapter One (51-52).

peasant village in the Haute Savoie, he would not have approached Troy in the way he has. Berger's tale of Troy - as the sub-title of the book tellingly announces - is 'an old wives' tale'. In interview Berger expands on what he means by this by referring to Latife Tekin's book, Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills:

This book was very important to me in writing Lilac and Flag. I owe a lot to her. It is a book about a shanty town outside Istanbul, where she was born and spent her childhood. It is a book entirely made up of rumours and full of incredible inventions. It is not a novel in the ordinary sense, because how can you have a novel about a shanty town, it's a contradiction in terms, for a novel in the classical sense a minimum of security is necessary. Here where everything is inexplicable, then the only voice for this is the voice of rumour ... She showed that it was possible to write about this incredibly shifting world of the poor in a big city. There are shanty towns in other books but only as decor, or as a moral and political problem. She makes it possible to see how such a place can be seen as the centre of the world, somewhere between earth and sky (Berger 1992e, 95).

Lilac and Flag is likewise full of 'incredible inventions', but to read them as metafictional or fantastic is to miss the point; namely, that Berger's 'old wives' tale' does not belong to the tradition of the 'literary' novel, but the paraliterary chronicle.

In migrating from the postmetropolis Berger has been able to find a community that earlier modernist writers neglected or overlooked: the community of the storyteller. This is not to say that modernist writers never used the 'voice of rumour', only that it was never dominant in their work. As Berger himself notes in his preface to the British edition of Berji Kristin:

There are comparable pages by Joyce where he found the male voice of drunken rumour. [But] Tekin's rumour is feminine and sober. Never maudlin. Never shocked. Never rhetorical. Never flinching. As if rumour were an angel with a sword ... Why say angel? She brings a promise that nobody can not believe in and yet nobody thinks true. The promise is that again and again, from the garbage, the scattered feathers, the ashes and the broken bodies, something new and beautiful may be born (Berger 1996c, 8).

In Lilac and Flag Berger attempts to make a similar promise; that from the garbage of 'Rat Hill' a new kind of love may be born.

In the chapter titled 'food', Zsuzsa takes Sucus to a restaurant:

Zsuzsa led Sucus along a narrow street with bright lights and through a door where there was the smell of cooking and the sound of voices, then down some steps into a cellar ...

I don't understand, he said.

Aren't you hungry?

I'm starving.

You're going to eat me, flag, eat me for ever and ever! (LF, 26-27).

Zsuzsa's declaration is not simply 'political' in that she and Sucus have no food to consume in a 'consumer' society, resulting in her having to sell her body to feed them (although that is important enough), but because of the nature of their love. Raymond Williams discusses this kind of love - or a similar structure of feeling - in his essay on the Brontës:

I think we need to start from the feeling, the central feeling, that an intensity of desire is as much a response, a deciding response, to the human crisis of that time as the more obviously recognisable political radicalism. Indeed, to give that kind of value to human longing and need, to that absolute emphasis of commitment to another, the absolute love of the being of another, is to clash as sharply with the emerging system, the emerging priorities, as in any assault on material poverty (Williams 1984, 61).

Williams notes that Cathy in Wuthering Heights declares that her love for Heathcliff "resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (quoted in Williams 1984, 66). 'These words,' Williams notes, 'have been called mystical, or a romantic extravagance', but instead Williams insists they should be read as the 'central relation of everything else that happens' (66). 'What happens really is that this central affirmation - not desire for another but desire *in* another' is what is crucial here, 'and which is there and absolute before anything else can be said ... it is where social and personal, one's self and others, grow from a single root' (66-67). Such a reading is not unhistorical and pre-social - as Williams's interviewers in Politics and Letters consider his metaphor of the 'root' to be - for the reason that the image of the root 'was only meant to suggest that the relationship and the most personal identity come from the same experience - not that the experience is pre-social, but that it emerges before the separated categories of social and individual are relevant' (Williams 1979, 255). In other words, Williams's formulation of 'desire *in* another' questions the manner in which the bourgeois division of the 'public' and 'private' takes place. And I think the same can be said of the desire *in* another felt by Zsuzsa and Sucus.

Zsuzsa's exhortation to Sucus to eat her need not be read as a mystical or romantic extravagance, but rather as a feminist rearticulation of the relation between the 'private' and the 'public'. Indeed, Berger's calling the text an 'old wives' tale' raises the question of whether Lilac and Flag is an example of *l'écriture féminine*? Consider the first chapter of the book, 'birth', which begins with a voice describing Zsuzsa and Sucus as butterflies:

Three butterflies rise from the field like white ash above a fire. Let my dead help me now. One of them reappears and, flying over the tall grass which I will soon have to scythe, alights on a blue flower and opens its wings. On each of her wings the same sign is printed in blackish grey - the grey of the first marks if you draw with a burnt stick on paper. I begin to think of Zsuzsa - or perhaps it is she who begins to think of me. A second butterfly comes down and covers the first; the second one is Sucus. The two of them, wings spread, quiver like four pages of a book open in the wind. Suddenly Sucus flies off. Let my dead help me now. Zsuzsa shuts her wings, slips off the scabious flower, and joins the other two butterflies to fly away over the tall grass which I will soon have to scythe. I have loved them all (LF, 3).

A number of the elements commonly associated with a feminine writing practice are present here: the non-hierarchical repetition; the metaphorical heterogeneity; the association of language and the voice and the body; the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and child. Berger is not unaware of such narratives. In an essay on Henry Moore, Berger considers how Moore's work addresses the tactile experience of the mother's body, the 'vague memory of an experience in which everything was erotic and nothing was identifiable' (KR, 158).

Furthermore, Berger is granted the leeway of Cixous's diverse range of contradictory, anti-theoretical, 'theoretical' remarks on the subject of *l'écriture féminine*. 'First of all', she writes,

writers are free, they are what they are, who they are and no one can reproach anyone for anything, either for being a woman or for not being a woman. There are different types of writing or approaches to writing. *Personally*, when I write fiction, I write with my body. My body is active, there is no interruption between the work that my body is actually performing and what is going to happen on the page. I write very near my body and my pulsions. This doesn't mean that everybody does it the same way nor does this mean that it should be done. There are texts that are made of flesh. When you read these texts, you receive them as such (Cixous 1990, 27).

However, I am not sure Cixous's writing legitimates Berger's 'old wife'

announcing: 'If I could find in my blouse the bosom which was once there, two full breasts and their nipples, dear God, for the time it takes to be sucked dry by a child!'; or, 'We women, rivers of pain and relief' (LF, 34-6). While it's true to say that theorisations of *l'écriture féminine* have a tendency to lapse into essentialist conceptions of 'femininity', it's equally true to say that such writing will read differently if it is a female embodied social subject doing the writing. When Berger declares that, 'Zsuzsa's desire was different from his... She didn't have to leave her forest. The forest was her nature', his representation of Zsuzsa's desire becomes deeply suspect (108). Once again, 'femininity' is re-inscribed on the female body.

Berger means well, I think, but I am not sure his decision to tell 'an old wives' tale of a city' is a wise one: Lilac and Flag often comes across less as feminist than masculinist. What is more, although Berger has obviously gained much from positioning himself as a storyteller, it is a role he has become less and less happy with. In 1995 Berger published To the Wedding; a book, I would suggest, he could only have written after twenty years of storytelling, but which - surprisingly - he identifies as 'a novel'. It is this return to novel writing that I would now like to consider.

To the Wedding

To the Wedding is narrated by a blind man who sells *tamata* in a market in Athens, and to whom voices come - some from the past, some from the other side of Europe, and some from the dead - but who professes not to 'know how to fit everything together' (TW, 3). Maybe so, and yet the text itself is put together in an exceptionally knowing way. The first voice that comes to the narrator is that of Jean Ferrero, a railwayman: 'I sat there. I could hear the cranes loading, they load all night. Then a completely silent voice spoke, and I recognised it as the railwayman's' (11). Jean is heard speaking on the telephone. He is about to travel from 'Mondane on the French side of the Alps' to the wedding of his daughter, Ninon, in Italy (11). Over the course of the next few days, as he travels across the Alps on his motorbike, Jean 'hears only the noise of rushing air' (81). The narrator, meanwhile, hears something more than this: in the 'shaking, buffeting slipstream' caused by Jean's bike, he hears the 'voices' that make up the text (81).

The narrator hears Ninon's voice:

When I take the train with Papa, he talks railway talk. When I'm alone, I see soldiers. I know why. Ever since the History Prof. told us about the accident that took place in 1917, I've seen them. When the train's empty, like this morning, they are there ... The coaches are rolling down to the plain full of soldiers going home on leave and I'm with them. I'd give a lot not to be. I know the tragedy by heart, yet I can't take this line without seeing them. Every time I take the train I ride down with the soldiers ... The first uncoupled coaches derail and hurtle into the wall. The next coaches telescope into the first. The last ones leap on top, wheels grinding on to roofs and skulls. A hurricane lamp spills and the wood and the kit bags and the wooden seats of the coaches catch fire. In the crash that night eight hundred die. Fifty survive. I don't die of course (29-31).

This final admission is a telling one. Why does Ninon bother to say that she doesn't die? Well, because as the reader of Into Their Labours knows, the dead do speak. In fact, it is difficult not to see the spectres of Lucie and Boris and Sucus among the dead soldiers, and I wouldn't be surprised if Ninon, looking out the corner of her eye, didn't catch sight of Berger himself, recording the silent conversations of the dead in the uniformly black pages of his storyteller's notebook.

However, although To the Wedding clearly employs many of the narrative strategies associated with storytelling, Berger is eager to distance himself from the role of Death's Secretary. In an essay collected in Keeping a Rendezvous he declares that:

I once referred to story-tellers as Death's Secretaries. This was because all stories, before they are narrated, begin with the end. Walter Benjamin said: "Death is the sanction of everything that the story-teller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death." Yet my phrase was too romantic, not contradictory enough (KR, 59).

What has brought about Berger's change of heart on this subject? I think it is the specific kind of death that is faced in To the Wedding. Ninon is not just surrounded by the dead, she herself is dying - of HIV/AIDS.

For Berger, the significance of Ninon being infected with HIV/AIDS is that she cannot have unprotected sex and reproduce. Ninon says:

All I had to offer, old as the world, god-given, balm for pain, honey for taste-buds, promise for always, silken welcomes, oh to welcome, to welcome, knees turned on their sides, toes extended - all I had has been taken (81).

The sexual politics of this statement are hardly progressive. Apart from the fact that 70% of seropositive women go on to have perfectly healthy babies, Berger's representation of Ninon serves to perpetuate the idea that women are good for only two things: having sex and having babies (see Amaro 1993, 34).

There is another point to make here though: a narratological one. It would appear that Berger sees Ninon's inability to have sex and bear children as bringing the cycle of life - if not cyclic time itself - to an end. Whereas in Into Their Labours life is lived as an interlude, in To the Wedding life is simply lived out; which is something a novelist is far better equipped to deal with than a storyteller. According to Berger,

The tense of the chronicle, the narrative of the storyteller, is the historic present. The story refers insistently to what is over but it refers to it in such a way that, although it is over, it can be retained. This retaining is not so much a question of recollection as of coexistence, the past with the present (WB, 241).

Ninon's life story cannot be told in the 'historic present', it demands a more conditional tense; one orientated towards a future that *could* happen, but will not. One can see this most clearly in Berger's narration of Ninon and Gino's wedding:

The marriage service in the church of Gorino will take place at 11.30 a.m. Afterwards a hundred people, wedding guests and villagers, will be waiting in the square. Opposite the church porch is a massive plane tree. Around it have been arranged tables with dozens of sparkling glasses, and along one edge, dark green bottles of *vino spumante* ... [Gino] will show [Ninon] the *lucio-perca* lying on the silver platter, varnished with aspic ... and he will turn the platter so Ninon can see the *lucio-perca* standing on her tail ... They will sit side by side at the large table, surrounded by thirty people, and she will notice everything which is happening ... Then they will eat the meat. ... Roberto and Gino will carry the meat, sliced and served on boards as square as an arm is long, into the orchard ... Ninon will offer a slice of the cake to everyone who has come to the wedding, offer it herself. They will make a wish, they will remember, they will relish the sweetness of it (TW, 176-187).

In narratological terms, Ninon and Gino's wedding is a *pseudo-iterative* event. 'The pseudo-iterative', Steven Cohan and Linda Shires note,

places an event in a series consisting of other similar events and, at the same time, distinguishes it from them. The resulting conflation of similarity (iteration) and difference (singularity) gives the event a temporal significance that can be realised only in narration, not in story (Cohan and Shires 1988, 86).

Ninon and Gino's wedding is like any other wedding; and at the same time it is unlike any other wedding. Their wedding is the end of weddings.

Afterword

In the middle of To the Wedding, the following passage appears:

There appeared before my blind eyes something which was part of the story, yet I could not say how.

The cross is not made of a noble wood like cedar. It's a common wood, like that used for shuttering concrete. Christ's hair with his head slumped forward hides one of his eyes and falls over half his face. The nails nailed through his feet, and the thorns of the crown tugged over his head by hands wearing gloves, show forever the cruelty of men. This cruelty can use anything. This is why the Christ has a body. His body is also loved. He was betrayed, abandoned, forsaken and he was loved. His body - pallid, fragile, doomed - shows this love. Don't ask me how. Ask the criminals, ask children, ask the Magdalen, ask mothers ... (TW, 103).

Like the blind narrator, I don't know how the above passage fits into To the Wedding either. In fact, there are many parts of Berger's recent writing which I - and other critics of his work - have found difficult to place. One need only consider the blurb on the back cover of the Chatto and Windus edition of Pig Earth, announcing it as the 'most important, and first, novel of John Berger's trilogy' to see what I mean here. Despite the fact that Pig Earth consists of stories and essays and poems, the advertising copy remains determined by the ideology of 'literature': the text is read as a novel. And it is to counter such readings that I have attempted to place Berger's tales in the paraliterary tradition of storytelling. But what about his poetry?

The first voice in Lilac and Flag is not the 'voice of rumour', whispering through the shanty towns, it is the voice of lyric poetry, declaiming an 'old love poem'. Once in Europa begins and ends with poems, and in Pig Earth stories are interleaved with poems. Consider how the poem 'Ladder' finds a voice in the story, 'The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol':

Far above the ladders head
instantaneously
their white wings change into blue
and they disappear
like the dead

Descending
and ascending
this ladder
I live (42).

In the following chapter I will consider Berger's poetry in more detail, particularly Pages of the Wound; a book which - if its publishers are to be believed - has been a long time coming. As the flyleaf of Pages of the Wound states, 'While John Berger has "smuggled" poems into nearly all of his books, until very recently, owing to his own astonishing reticence about claiming to be a poet, he had never published a book of poetry'.

Is Berger's 'reticence' 'astonishing'? I don't think so. His entire life-work has been dedicated to crossing the boundaries between different discourses, and Pages of the Wound is no exception. It might be Berger's first book of poetry, but it still has photographs 'smuggled' into it. Indeed, in an interview given at the time the book was published, Berger emphasises how important the connection between words and images has always been for him:

By the time I was 18 I was very politicised and militant, involved in seeing how opinions are formed and manipulated, especially in the press. I became interested in how a photo was changed by the words put round it, how the words changed the meaning of the photo for the readers. I began to develop a very critical sense that the juxtaposition of words and images is not at all innocent. It is always for a purpose. Later that realisation also became creative because, usually working in a group rather than by myself, we began putting images and words together in order to create the meaning we wanted (Berger 1994/5, 40).

Berger is of course talking about collaborative, multi-media projects such as Ways of Seeing and A Seventh Man. Just as importantly though, he is also talking about Pages of the Wound, which was put together by Berger and John Christie - with whom Berger had worked previously on the television series based on Another Way of Telling. Which raises an interesting question: why is it that Berger has 'smuggled' photographs into Pages of the Wound, and not 'smuggled' photographs into Into Their Labours?

This question is given added weight, I think, by the fact that Another Way of Telling, which explicitly deals with images of peasant life, was put together at the same time as Into Their Labours. What is more, the two projects cross paths. In an earlier version of 'Time of the Cosmonauts', titled 'Hearing Him', a photograph

of an old man is 'smuggled' into the text (1982b, 26). The same photograph also appears at the end of Another Way of Telling - opposite a poem (AWT, 293).

What is it, then, that Berger feels poems and photographs say to each other that stories and photographs do not?

Chapter Four

Age of Extremes

Introduction

In Keeping a Rendezvous Berger publishes an article, 'Napalm 1991'. The title is an evocative one. Mention of napalm in the 'West' conjures a certain image - a photograph, reproduced many times, of a Vietnamese girl, Kim Phuc, running down a street, her body covered in burns. The title is haunted by the spectre of this atrocity, and the reader is given pause to wonder what contemporary atrocities she or he will find overleaf. The reader turns the page ... There is a photograph, but not of a young girl. The photograph, taken from above - presumably from an aeroplane or a helicopter - shows a number of cars, trucks and buses abandoned by the side of a road. Around the vehicles possessions are strewn in the dirt. No people are visible. Beneath the photograph is a caption, 'KUWAIT 1991'. And on the page opposite there is a poem:

Mother let me cry
not letterpress
nor telex
nor stainless speech -
bulletins
announce disaster
with impunity -
but the pages of the wound.

Mother let me speak
not adjectives
to colour
their maps of wretchedness
nor nouns to classify
the families of pain -
but the verb of suffering.

Our mother tongue taps
the sentence
on the prison wall.
Mother let me cry
the voices
howling in the falls (KR, 239).

There is no further explanation of the photograph, or political analysis of the events in Kuwait in 1991; the photograph and the poem are simply left facing each other across the page. What is going on here? What is the reader

supposed to make of this? There are no obvious answers to these questions. Indeed, I would suggest that 'Napalm 1991' tells us less about the Gulf War, than it does about Berger himself, and his attempt to find another way of telling. Let me explain what I mean by this.

Every picture tells a story

The road in the photograph is undoubtedly the road to Basra, but the reader only knows this because of the stories, supplied in newspaper and television reports, which surround - and are interwoven with - 'Napalm 1991'. As Berger himself notes in an essay on photography, 'Photographs in themselves do not narrate. Photographs preserve instant appearances' (AL, 55). The dominant story of the Gulf War is that the 'Allies' invaded Iraq to liberate Kuwait. A more subordinate story is supplied by Jean Baudrillard, who claims that it never happened (see Norris 1992). And a more radical story is put forward by Noam Chomsky, who discusses the Gulf War in terms of the 'US domination of the Middle East', if not the whole world: 'As bombs and missiles were raining on Baghdad and hapless Iraqi conscripts hiding in the sands, George Bush proudly announced the slogan of the New World Order, in four simple words: "What We Say Goes"' (Chomsky 1996b, 133).

In 1995 Maggie O'Kane, writing in The Guardian, offered proof that '489 napalm bombs' had been dropped during the Gulf War (contrary to what the U.S. military had claimed at the time), and supplied photographs to support her argument (O'Kane 1995, 16). One photograph is especially striking. It is a colour photograph, taken in the desert. It must have been taken at around dawn or dusk, as the sky is tinged with a deep red light. The photograph is sharply focused, but the image is indistinct; it looks like black sand piled on black sand. Slowly, an arm, a head, a body, a face, the outline of eyes, nose and ears, emerges from the sand: the photograph is of a person spreadeagled on its back, burned to a crisp. It does not look human. It is the victim of a napalm bombing.

Obviously, my words do not do the photograph justice; no words could. Firstly because, as Berger notes, 'appearances and words speak so differently [...] the visual never allows itself to be translated intact into the verbal' (KR, 120). And secondly, because it is a photograph of an atrocity. According to Susan

Sontag,

images of suffering [do] not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. [They] can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more - and more. Images transfix. Images anaesthetise. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs - think of the Vietnam War ... But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real ... The same law holds for evil as for pornography. The shock of photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewings, just as the surprise and bemusement felt the first time one sees a pornographic movie wear off after one sees a few more (Sontag 1979, 20).

Witness the photograph used by O'Kane. Does it threaten the workings of capitalism? No it does not. The proof lies on the page following the photograph, which is taken up with an advertisement for Breitling watches - 'Instruments for Professionals'. It too uses a photograph to get its message across: a photograph of a helmeted fighter pilot in the cockpit of his plane.

Berger would no doubt find this juxtaposition of images a revealing one (see Berger 1972c, 152). The fact that the advertisement for Breitling watches can be published in the body of O'Kane's essay speaks volumes about how the media operate. Indeed, for Berger, what 'the Gulf War' demonstrates above all, he writes in an essay in Keeping a Rendezvous, is the complicity of the capitalist 'media network': its 'essential nature', he suggests,

is most clearly revealed by its aesthetic and iconography ... [a] dominant ... style of winners and would-be winners, not of conquerors, not really of supermen, but simply of those who do well and succeed because they have come to believe that success is natural ... Like all aesthetics, this one entails an anaesthetic: a numbed area without feeling (KR, 248).

What the above passage also demonstrates, of course, is the similarity of Berger's thinking to Sontag's.

In her book, On Photography, Sontag nods in the direction of Berger's work; while Berger dedicates his essay, 'Uses of Photography', to Sontag. More fundamentally though, the similarity between the two can be traced to the influence on both of Walter Benjamin, and his work on photography. In the essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin makes the following statement:

Fiat ars - pereat mundus, says Fascism, and expects war to supply,

just as [the Italian Futurist] Marinetti confesses that it does, the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been altered by technology. This is the obvious perfection of *l'art pour l'art*. Humanity that, according to Homer, was once an object of spectacle for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it is capable of experiencing its own destruction as an aesthetic enjoyment of the highest order. So it is with the aestheticisation of politics, which is being managed by Fascism. Communism responds with the politicisation of art (Benjamin 1973a, 242).

Benjamin's comments on Fascism and Communism clearly situate his work in a specific historical conjuncture. However, his injunction remains - how can photography be mobilised by those on the *left*? Or, as Berger would have it, how can 'an alternative photographic practice' be developed? (AL, 60). Berger does not aim to 'belittle' the efforts of those who use 'photographs as a weapon in posters, newspapers, pamphlets and so on', but recognises that the 'current systematic public use of photography needs to be challenged, not simply by turning round like a cannon and aiming it at different targets, but by changing its practice' (60). How? Well, to begin with, by considering how photographs are used in 'private'. As Berger notes, 'The private photograph - the portrait of a mother, a picture of a daughter, a group photo of one's own team - is appreciated and read in a context *which is continuous with that from which the camera removed it*' (55-56). This is an interesting point, and it offers a way to rethink how photographs can be used 'publicly'. However, great care must be taken here. If I understand Berger correctly, he is not suggesting that the dichotomous dualism of 'public' and 'private' uses of photography needs to be inverted, but rather that it needs to be deconstructed. It is not possible - never mind desirable - to replace 'public' photographs in contexts 'continuous with that from which the camera removed' them. Rather, '[t]he task of an alternative photography', Berger writes, should be to 'incorporate' photographs 'into social and political memory' by 'construct[ing] contexts' for them 'with words', and 'with other photographs', in an 'ongoing text of photographs and images' (62-64).

In Another Way of Telling Berger and Jean Mohr put these ideas into practice. The text, as well as containing further essays on photography, includes an experimental sequence of photographs, 'If each time...'. The photographs are expected to speak for themselves - quite literally. In the essay 'Appearances' Berger explains how photographs, unlike drawings and paintings which 'translate' appearances, 'quote from appearances'; and, crucially, that

appearances 'constitute something approaching a language' - or at least 'a half language' (AWT, 128). Maybe so. And yet, in their introductory 'Note to the reader', Berger and Mohr quite deliberately construct a context for the photographs with words. While claiming 'it is impossible for us to give a verbal key or storyline to this sequence of photographs [because to] do so would be to impose a single verbal meaning upon appearances and thus to inhibit or deny their own language', the two authors declare that the 'sequence of images ... attempts to follow an old woman's reflections on her life' (133). In other words, they tell the story that the photographs tell their own story, and then tell the story that the photographs are images from a peasant woman's memory.

However, I do not think it is the case that Berger and Mohr cannot get their stories straight. Rather, I think their 'Note to the reader' is meant to *oppose* a certain story; the dominant story that images such as those in 'If each time...' are documentary. Try looking at the photographs without the 'Note to the reader'. They become a report, provided by Mohr, on the peasantry. As Berger indicates in the essay 'Stories', the trouble with the 'reportage photo-story' is that, although the photographs 'narrate', they tend to 'narrate descriptively from the outsider's point of view' (279). In contrast, Berger and Mohr's introductory story to 'If each time...' invites the reader to look at the photographs from a different perspective:

There is, as it were, no seat supplied for the reader. The reader is free to make his [sic] own way *through* these images. The first reading across any two pages may tend to proceed from left to right like European print, but subsequently one can wander in any direction without, we hope, losing a sense of tension or unfolding (284).

Berger is the first to admit that the 'experimental narrative form' of 'If each time...' is problematic, and that if the text 'does narrate, it does so through its montage' (287). I agree; the photographs speak to the reader because they speak first *to each other*: it is the montage which makes them *telling*. And this achievement should not be underestimated. Putting together a sequence of one hundred and fifty images is no mean feat. This being said, and at the risk of being churlish, I would suggest that 'If each time...' does have a number of shortcomings. The 'Note to the reader' is quite a fragile device, and the need to avoid 'impos[ing] a single verbal meaning upon appearances' probably limits the usefulness of such a way of telling. For example, it is striking that, although Into Their Labours and Another Way of Telling share the same subject matter, Berger keeps the two projects at arms length. One reason for this, I think, is that if the

texts were combined, and the written tales were juxtaposed with 'If each time...', the story that the photographs tell would all too quickly be inhibited or denied. Simply consider A Seventh Man, 'a book of images and words about the experience of migrant workers in Europe'. Berger and Mohr's hope was that the images and words in the book would 'be read in their own terms'; that the 'pictures in sequence make a statement: a statement which is equal and comparable to, but different from, that of the text' (Berger and Mohr 1975, 7). It was a vain hope however. The images and the words are, at the very least, in continual dialogue, and, more often than not, the words threaten to overwhelm the images - reducing them to the status of illustrations. As Sontag notes, 'words do speak louder than pictures' (Sontag 1979, 108).

There is a more pressing problem with Berger's theory and practice of photography however. Despite everything he has written about constructing contexts for photographs with words and images, Berger still seems to believe that some photographs, on their own, can be as telling as montages. In his concluding remarks to the essay 'Appearances' Berger asserts that, 'The camera completes the half-language of appearances and articulates an unmistakable meaning. When this happens we suddenly find ourselves at home amongst appearances, as we are at home in our mother tongue' (AWT, 129). This is patently incorrect. How can a photograph 'articulate an unmistakable meaning'? And if so, why does Berger follow 'Appearances' with 'If each time...', a work which is dedicated to avoiding the imposition of 'a single verbal meaning upon appearances'? I can only assume that the conclusion to 'Appearances' is wishful thinking on Berger's part. After all these years of theorising photographs it would appear he still occasionally wishes they would do what they cannot do: speak out against social injustice. Which returns us to 'Napalm 1991'.

Look at the photograph: if the caption 'KUWAIT 1991' is erased from the page and replaced with 'JUNKYARD' or 'FILM STILL', the photograph's meaning changes before your very eyes. Berger knows this only too well of course. In Another Way of Telling he discusses how he was once given a photograph of a man and a horse, about which he knew nothing: not the identity of the man, the photographer, or even when the photograph was taken. 'The photograph', Berger writes, 'offers irrefutable evidence that this man, this horse and this bridle existed. Yet it tells us nothing of the significance of their existence' (86). Likewise the photograph in 'Napalm 1991'. It offers irrefutable evidence that a

number of cars, trucks and buses were abandoned by the side of a road, but it does not tell the story of why they were abandoned - or the significance of the road.

The photograph, I would contend, says less about the retreat of the Iraqi army, than it does about Berger's retreat from reasoned argument. A historical explanation of the Gulf War is insufficient for Berger; he demands another way of telling - a less rational, more emotional one; an image, a poem. For Berger, at his most Romantic, or postmodern, photography and poetry are related practices. In a world that is increasingly difficult to map, photography and poetry offer a way 'home': a way of once again being 'at home amongst appearances'; a way of once again being 'at home in our mother tongue'. When faced with the 'stainless speech' of the capitalist media, whose 'bulletins/ announce disaster/ with impunity', it comes as no surprise that Berger opts for the voice that 'taps/ the sentence/ on the prison wall': the 'mother tongue'.

Logocentric or not, Berger's talk of a 'mother tongue' is understandable. Sometimes, looking at the way the world is, you want to cry out. Criticism simply seems beside the point. As Berger notes in his essay 'The Hour of Poetry', collected in The White Bird,

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many protests against social injustices were written in prose. They were reasoned arguments written in the belief that, given time, people would come to see reason; and that, finally history was on the side of reason. Today this is by no means clear ... The future cannot be trusted. The moment of truth is now. And more and more it will be poetry, rather than prose, that receives this truth. Prose is far more trusting than poetry: poetry speaks to the immediate wound (WB, 248-249).

I cannot go along with Berger on this; but neither can I condemn him. In many ways I think his desire to overcome compassion fatigue and speak 'to the immediate wound' is admirable. In other ways I think his ideas about poetry are mystifying. Whether you agree with him or disagree with him, however, a certain question arises: *does his poetry speak 'to the immediate wound'?*

Pages of the Wound

A phrase from the poem in 'Napalm 1991' becomes the title of Berger's

first collection of poetry, Pages of the Wound. Poems drawings photographs 1956-96. Originally the book consisted of a limited edition of ninety hard-bound copies, each one numbered and signed by Berger, and each one costing the sum of £270.00. This is puzzling to me, as it seems a backward step for Berger. Twenty years after putting together Ways of Seeing, which owes so much to Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Berger appears to have designed a book to convey an 'aura' of 'craftsmanship' - if not 'artistry'. Moreover, even the Bloomsbury edition published two years later, for the more accessible price of £9.95, has a rough-hewn cover that hints at home-made authenticity. Needless to say, this is the edition I own, and the one to which I will be referring.

Opening the book the first thing the reader sees is a note by Berger in which he declares that 'Pages of the Wound is the result of a collaboration between John Christie, who printed the original book, and myself'. The note is printed in the manner of Berger's own hand-writing, in brown ink. It is followed by a copy of an etching, a 'Self-portrait' of Berger from 1945, reproduced in the same brown ink. This is no accident. In interview, Berger has commented on the importance of this brown colour to the book. In the original edition the colour of the paper was brown; a colour Berger describes as being 'rather like bread':

Bread is a so-old symbol of daily life, of survival and a certain sense of stability ... so there is an interesting relationship to a lot of the text because a lot of it is about the homesickness of exile. The poems in the book become a bit like bread. One of the things about homesickness is that you can never find the bread of home anywhere else (Berger 1994/5, 41).

Once again we are confronted with the theme of being 'at home', or rather, of feeling exiled from 'home'.

The introductions to the book do not stop there however. As with so many of Berger's books, the reader is not left to wander just anywhere, but is nudged in a certain direction. Pages of the Wound comes with 'Road Directions':

Since the age of twelve I have written poems when I could do nothing else. Poems are born of a sense of helplessness - hence their force.

Writing a poem is the opposite of riding a motor bike. Riding, you negotiate at high speed around every fact you meet. Body and machine follow your eyes which find their way through, untouched. Your sense of freedom comes from the fact that the wait between decision and consequence is minimal, and what resistance or delay there is, you use as ricochet. When riding, if you want to go on living,

you think of nothing else but what is there.

Poems are helpless before the facts. Helpless but not without endurance, for everything resists them. They find names for the consequences, not for the decisions.

Writing a poem you listen to everything save what is happening now. Like the dress, the shoes kicked off and the hairbrush, they speak of what is not there. Or, rather, of what is not there in front of you ...

On a bike the reader weaves through, and poems head in the opposite direction. Yet shared sometimes between the two, as they pass, there is the same pity of it. And in that, my love, the same love ...

These are not exactly easy directions to follow; they are as metaphorical as the poems themselves. I wonder though, whether comparing the act of writing poetry to riding a motor bike is that effective a metaphor; it seems quite arbitrary. What is more, it is a metaphor Berger has used before: in relation to photography.

In the essay 'How Fast Does it Go?', collected in Keeping a Rendezvous, Berger considers some photographs reproduced on a French postcard:

Looking at these photos I have the impression I've just arrived by motor bike ... Except for the protective gear you're wearing, there's nothing between you and the rest of the world ... And speed is of the essence. By this I do not necessarily mean the speed at which you are travelling ... The fastness that counts most is that between decision and consequence ... This immediacy bestows a sense of freedom ... between oneself and space. It touches the notion of *aim*, both spatially and subjectively.

And it is with your eyes that you first take aim ... Your "gaze" directs you, but it is also as though what you are looking at pulls you ... Watch a great rider - like Jean Michel Bayle - at a moto-cross meeting. What clearly distinguishes him from the others ... is simply the way he appears to allow himself to be drawn by something very far ahead. What he has fixed his eyes on is calling him (KR, 194-196).

The rhetoric employed in the passage above is almost identical to that used in Berger's 'Road Directions'. But whether this is significant or not is difficult to assess. If '[w]riting a poem is the opposite of riding a motor bike', and looking at certain photographs is like 'arriv[ing] by motor bike', then writing a poem must be the opposite of looking at certain photographs.

Is Berger guilty of mixing his metaphors here? Is there some reason he has mentioned motor bikes other than he happens to like them? Where is all this going? The key to understanding where Berger's 'Road Directions' lead, whether they take us 'home', or simply on a wild goose chase, lies in the book's

mode of address. It is addressed to 'my love'. This is a deliberately ambiguous phrase, but a telling one. Berger could be talking about his feelings *of* love, or he could be addressing himself *to* a lover. Consider the 'At Remaurian' series of poems and photographs. I would suggest that, for Berger, the photographs operate in the opposite way than they do for the reader: for him they speak *to* a lover; but for the reader, if they speak of anything, they speak *of* love. The reason for this disjunction is that the photographs are Berger's. They are photographs he took of Anya Bostock when the two were lovers; and that changes their meaning a great deal. In A Seventh Man there is a photograph of a young boy. The boy, Berger writes, 'is unknown to you or me. Seen in the dark-room when making the print, or seen in this book when reading it, the image conjures up the vivid presence of an unknown boy' (Berger and Mohr 1975, 17). For 'his father' though, Berger notes, the photograph 'would define the boy's absence' (17). And so it is with the photographs of Anya Bostock in Pages of the Wound: for Berger they 'define' her 'absence'; while for readers such as 'you and me' they conjure up her 'presence'.

The 'At Remaurian' poems and photographs were originally published over thirty years ago, in 1965, in Typographica magazine. Thirty years can change a man; and, just as importantly, change the meaning of his work. As Berger concedes in interview:

thirty years later I read the sequence differently. I don't know whether the difference is because I'm thirty years older or because there's a distance of thirty years, which is not the same thing. When I wrote the poems and took the photographs I thought they were turbulent, passionate, sensually hot. Now what strikes me is their serenity. It's very odd (Berger 1994/5, 40).

Berger is being a tad disingenuous here. The 'difference' in his readings is not 'because there's a distance of thirty years' between them, but because Berger is 'thirty years older'. He is no longer 'hot' for Anya Bostock (or at least not prepared to admit he is). Furthermore, the difference in his readings is more than just 'odd'; it suggests that Berger's work is not speaking 'to the immediate wound' in the way it once did - if indeed it ever did speak 'to the immediate wound'.

In the essay, 'The Hour of Poetry', Berger writes that,

The boon of language is not tenderness. All that it holds, it holds with exactitude and without pity, even a term of endearment; the word is impartial; the usage is all. The boon of language is that *potentially* it is

complete, it has the potentiality of holding with words the totality of human experience - everything that has occurred and everything that may occur. It even allows space for the unspeakable. In this sense one can say of language that it is potentially the only human home, the only dwelling place that cannot be hostile to man ... One can say anything to language ... Yet its very openness can signify indifference ... Poetry addresses language in such a way as to close this indifference and to incite a caring. How does poetry incite this caring? ... by its continual labour of reassembling [through metaphor] what has been scattered (WB, 249-250).

Of course, all language is, in a very general sense, 'metaphorical': it is a signifying practice. If Berger is to be believed though,

Apart from reassembling by metaphor, poetry reunites by its *reach*. It equates the reach of a feeling with the reach of the universe ... Poetry makes language care because it renders everything intimate. This intimacy is the result of the poem's labour, the result of the bringing-together-into-intimacy of every act and noun and event and perspective to which the poem refers (250-251).

I think Berger's 'explanation' of poetry is at least as *telling* as his 'explanation' of storytelling - to which it is clearly related. As quoted in the previous chapter, Berger writes that,

the act of approaching a given moment of experience involves both scrutiny (closeness) and the capacity to connect (distance). The movement of writing resembles that of a shuttle on a loom: repeatedly it approaches and withdraws, closes in and takes its frame. As the movement of writing repeats itself, its intimacy with the experience increases. Finally, if one is fortunate, meaning is the fruit of intimacy (PE, 6).

All too often, however, Berger's poems do not bear 'fruit'. The 'labour' of 'bringing-together-into-intimacy' of which he speaks is painfully delicate. One needs to 'shuttle' carefully between 'closeness' and 'distance', and Berger often fails to do this. He either gets too 'close' to what he is writing about, and/or pitches his ideas at too great a 'distance', never quite managing to 'shuttle' between extremes.

The 'At Remaurian' series of poems, for example, have a very short 'reach'; like his photographs of Anya Bostock they say a lot more to Berger than they do to the reader. Consider the fifth poem in the series:

Let the drawing stand up
And every dot
Yield a line

As the field that was sown
Is raised by its crop
And my nipple by the slow-growing tree
Let the drawing stand up
And make of my legs
The legs of the table
On which this land is
Laid out like a towel
And placed like a bowl
Awaiting its water

Let the drawing stand up
And its weight bear down
Till very line is opened
And the distance they cover
Is the format of the sky
Above my lover

Let the drawing stand up
And pour from its lip
All that can turn my wheel.

Even if the reader connects the dots between 'crop', 'nipple' and 'slow-growing tree', it is difficult to see what the 'drawing' is of. The poem does not 'render everything intimate', it speaks only of a certain 'intimacy' - that shared between Berger and his 'lover'.

In other poems Berger over-reaches himself. Consider the following poem from 1983, titled 'Born. 5/11/26' (in other words, Berger's birthday):

Redder every day
the leaves of the pear trees.
Tell me what is bleeding.
Not summer left early.
Not the village
for the village though drunk on its road
has not fallen.
Not my heart
for my heart bleeds no more
than the arnica flower.

Nobody has died this month
or been fortunate enough
to receive a foreign work-permit.
We fed with soup
let sleep in the barn
no more thoughts of suicide
than is normal in November.
Tell me what is bleeding

you who see in the dark.

Hands of the world
amputated by profit
bleed in
streets of bloodsheds.

Beginning with 'Redder every day', Berger attempts to 'reach' out in a number of 'directions': towards the colour of autumn leaves on the trees, and the passing of time, including the time of his own life; towards his first collection of essays, Permanent Red, in effect proclaiming that he is still a 'red'; and towards the 'Hands of the world/ amputated by profit', and the red 'streets of bloodsheds'. However, the poem 'brings-together-into-intimacy' very little. Rather than approaching and withdrawing from experience, shuttling backwards and forwards towards greater intimacy and meaning, Berger's writing in this poem lacks the capacity even to connect the first two stanzas to the last one.

Perhaps the most disappointing of Berger's poems though, is 'Twelve Theses on the Economy of the Dead', from 1994. In the third 'thesis', if one can call it that, Berger claims that, 'The rarity of clear exchange is due to the rarity of what can cross intact the frontier between timelessness and time'. Possibly this 'exchange' is between the living and the dead, and Berger is hinting - in the manner of Walter Benjamin - that there 'is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one' (Benjamin 1973, 256). The title of the poem certainly invites comparisons to Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', but there the comparisons end. Berger's 'Road Directions' may take us across a number of frontiers, but the 'frontier between timelessness and time' is not one of them. In poetry at least, Berger fails to 'shuttle' between the living and the dead.

This being said, I think Berger is right to try and extend his 'reach'. As I noted earlier, the key point about Pages of the Wound is that it is addressed to 'my love'. It is his feelings of 'love' which prompt Berger to 'reach' out, and yet at the same time it is his 'love' which often limits the 'reach' of his poetry. Interestingly, Berger makes an oblique reference to Pages of the Wound, or at least part of it, in Another Way of Telling. At the beginning of the essay 'Appearances', he remarks that some years ago,

I had the project of taking a series of photographs which would accompany, and be interchangeable with, a sequence of love poems.

Just as it was not clear whether the poems spoke with the voice of a woman or a man, so it should remain uncertain whether the image inspired the text or vice versa. My first interest in photography was passionate.

To learn how to use a camera, in order to be able to take these photographs, I went to see Jean Mohr. Alain Tanner gave me his address. Jean instructed me with great patience. And for two years I took hundreds of photographs in the hope of telling my love.

This is how my close interest in photography began. And I recall it now because, however theoretical and distanced some of my later remarks may appear to be, photography is still, first and foremost for me a means of expression (AWT, 83).

This story is interesting, I think, for a number of reasons. Firstly, for what it says about the 'At Remaurian' series of poems and photographs. And secondly, because it suggests that Berger's experiments in Ways of Seeing, A Fortunate Man, A Seventh Man, and Another Way of Telling can all be traced back to his interest, not only in how words and images are manipulated in the media, but just as importantly, 'in the hope of telling [his] love'. And in the light of this revelation I think one should include another text here: Photocopies. Although Pages of the Wound and Photocopies appear, at first glance, to be remarkably dissimilar, the same pre-occupations are visible in both of them. Both of them have photographs 'smuggled' into them. And both are books which are about people 'for whom Berger has felt a kind of love'.

Shedding some light on the matter

What kind of a book is Photocopies? The table of contents reads like a list of photographic or painterly portraits: 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree', 'Woman with a Dog on Her Lap', 'Passenger to Omagh', 'A Man Wearing a Lacoste Sweater', 'An Old Woman with a Pram', 'A Young Woman with Hand to Her Chin', 'A Man in One-Piece Leathers and a Crash Helmet Stands Very Still', 'Two Dogs Under a Rock', 'A House Designed by Le Corbusier', 'A Woman on a Bicycle', 'A Man Begging in the Métro', and so on; twenty-nine in all. Given Berger's reputation therefore, one might feel safe in assuming the book consists of writings about art and photography; or, even more specifically, about looking at the work of art in an age of electronic reproduction. Not so. In Photocopies, we are informed on the back cover,

Berger traces in words moments lived in Europe at the end of the millennium. These moments are not fiction. They happened. As he

wrote them Berger sometimes imagined a frieze of "photocopies" arranged side by side, giving future readers a panoramic view of what this moment of history was like when lived. Each "photocopy" is about somebody for whom Berger felt a kind of love, but the book also becomes an unintentional portrait of the author as well.

If this is meant as an explanation or an advertisement, it is not much of either. As things stand I am left none the wiser as to what these 'photocopies' are supposed to be, or why I should want to read them.

A more expansive introduction, however, is to be found inside the book. It is located on the double-page spread between the 'Contents' and the first 'photocopy'. One page is taken up with a photograph, and the other one looks to be blank. The photograph is of two blurred figures against a background of leaves and foliage. The taller of the two figures has his or her arm around the smaller one, who is leaning into that person's body. There is no caption explaining who the people are, or why their image is blurred. What is the story of this photograph then? What story does the photograph tell? The photograph appears to be of an informal occasion rather than a formal one. Perhaps the photograph tells of the occasion of a family member's departure? Or, perhaps, the return of a prodigal son? Or the photograph might be of significance because of what it does not show. It might stand as a reminder of an event that occurred, so to speak, off camera: one which caused the people to move thereby rendering their image indistinct. From the photograph itself though, there is no way of telling. The story of this photograph - the story it tells - appears to be as indistinct as the figures represented in it. Appearances though, can be deceptive. Look again, carefully. Berger is written all over the photograph, and all over the blank page opposite. Or, more precisely, *his theory of photography* is written all over them. In invisible ink. Let me read to you what I see there, written clearly, in Berger's own handwriting.

Every photograph, Berger writes,

is authentic like a trace of an event: the problem is that an event, when it is isolated from all the other events that came before it and which go after it, is in another sense not very authentic because it has been seized from that ongoing experience which is the true authenticity. Photographs are both authentic and not authentic (Berger 1979c, 21).

A photograph can be reproduced alongside different photographs, stories and events, eliciting very different meanings. As can be witnessed here, in my

placing of Berger's theory of photography alongside the photograph which introduces Photocopies. In effect, Berger's theory of photography provides an invisible caption for the photograph. What it says, silently, is this: what photographs 'trace' in images the following 'photocopies' will 'trace in words'.

Consider the first 'photocopy', 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree'. It begins with the description of the arrival of a stranger at Berger's home. 'At seven in the evening a yellow car pulled up by the house ... The driver wore jeans and a dusty black shirt with white buttons. She had come from Galicia' (PC, 3).

I had seen her once previously in my life. For five minutes in Madrid. I was giving a public reading there, and, afterwards, this woman, about thirty years old, came and handed me a roll of brown paper. It is a present for you. I unrolled it and saw a drawing. She earned her living, she said, restoring frescos in churches ... Before I could ask her anything [more], she had disappeared (3).

Her arrival at his home affords Berger the opportunity to find out more about her. 'I discovered her name', he writes (4). However, he neglects to tell the reader what it is; an omission which, far from being trivial, tellingly presages many other absences and silences in the text.⁶⁴ For example, the silence of the unnamed woman upon seeing a drawing, with writing around it, which Berger has framed on his kitchen wall.

The writing was a quotation from the Eumenides about the Furies demanding vengeance, and another from the Gospel of St. John: "...my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid".... The woman doesn't make any sign ... Her face was turned away. Simply her body announced how she was familiar with these words. Her body made no movement. No gesture. Just a withdrawal which might be mistaken for insolence (6).

The reader is left wondering what is going unsaid in this exchange, or, for that matter, in the following one. 'We talked of this and that: of Galicia, peasants, Paul Klee, the Documenta exhibition in Kessel. It seems we talked of nothing. If she came, it wasn't really to talk' (4). Notice that Berger writes that it only '*seems*' as if they 'talked of nothing', suggesting that something unsaid did pass between them. But what? If the woman did not visit Berger to talk, why did she visit him?

⁶⁴ In fact, the reader has to wait over seventy pages to discover the identity of this woman. In the 'photocopy', 'Sheets of Paper Laid on the Grass', Berger writes that, 'Many months afterwards, Marisa Camino sent me a print of the photo taken under the plum tree' (PC, 77). Perhaps what he should have written is, many '*photocopies*' afterwards.

According to Berger, the woman from Galicia came to visit him,
like one of her drawings about the world of fishes, or perhaps about
the world of animals. She lives with animals. Certain animals. She
knows their secrets, which are not secrets to them, but secrets from us.
I doubt whether she chose the animals she lives with; they, I guess,
chose her. Which would be normal, for it is they who live in her.
Inhabit her. They were sitting invisibly inside her at the table (4).

Presumably Berger did not really see animals 'sitting invisibly inside her', he is speaking figuratively. But if so, he's not exactly writing factually, which is what he is supposed to be doing. 'These moments are not fiction', the *copy* on the back cover declares, 'They happened'. In which case, either a mistake has been made, and the book is falsely advertised, or, much more interestingly, the text's ontological status is open to question. Perhaps things become a little clearer as one reads on?

The 'photocopy' concludes with the unnamed woman asking Berger whether she can 'take a photograph?'.
We were drinking coffee in the kitchen.
You saw my camera? she asked.
No.
You didn't notice it last night?
She nodded to where her haversack was, on the floor near the door. Beside her haversack was a box which I had indeed noticed because of its silver colour. About the size of a mechanic's tool box. In places it had been repaired with black sealing tape ...
Like the original camera, she said ...
We went out to the plum trees where there's a table in the grass and there she looked up at the still cloudy sky. Between two minutes and three, she calculated out loud, and placed the box carefully on the edge of the table ...
The two of us stood there facing the camera. We moved of course, but not more than plum trees did in the wind. Minutes passed. Whilst we stood there, we reflected the light, and what we reflected went through the black hole into the dark box.
It'll be of us, she said, and we waited expectantly (6-7).

That is all the 'photocopy' shows. Berger and the woman are left waiting expectantly for their photograph to be taken; i.e., the self-same photograph which 'introduces' the book. Moreover, just as Berger and the woman are left waiting expectantly, so too is the reader - for although in one sense the significance of the 'photocopy' is obvious (it explains the photograph), in another sense its significance is difficult to fathom. The 'photocopy' is banal, prosaic, pointless even. And yet, paradoxically, it is the story's simplicity, its artlessness, which

makes it so provocative. In effect, the reader is forced to read between the lines. Or, to put this more 'theoretically', the reader is put in the critical position of having to read the text symptomatically. What 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree' does not itself say, but what it prompts the reader to see, is that it is not just a story *about* a photograph being taken, it is also written *like* a photograph. Which is to say, in a manner which appears to be simple and artless but which is actually quite dramatic.

Let me be quite clear about what I am saying here, or rather not saying. The 'photocopy', 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree', is unable to show what the photograph shows. As Berger himself notes, 'because appearances and words speak so differently ... the visual never allows itself to be translated intact into the verbal' (KR, 120). Images 'say things which are beyond the reach of words', he writes, and I agree (Berger and Mohr 1975, 7). What I am suggesting is that the 'photocopy' is *like* a photograph in a very specific way; in the way it 'traces' a simple event and makes of it something *surreal*. I am using the term 'surreal' advisedly here. I am using it, to be exact, in the sense Sontag uses it in her book, On Photography. According to Sontag,

The Surrealist legacy for photography came to seem trivial as the Surrealist repertoire of fantasies and props was rapidly absorbed into high fashion in the 1930s, and Surrealist photography offered mainly a mannered style of portraiture, recognisable by its use of the same decorative conventions introduced by Surrealism in the other arts, particularly painting, theatre, and advertising. The mainstream of photographic activity has shown that a Surrealist manipulation or theatricalisation of the real is unnecessary, if not actually redundant. Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of a duplicate world, of a reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision. The less doctored, the less patently crafted, the more naive - the more authoritative the photograph was likely to be.

Surrealism has always courted accidents, welcomed the uninvited, flattered disorderly presences. What could be more surreal than an object which virtually produces itself, and with a minimum of effort? (Sontag 1979, 52-3).

What indeed? Well, a 'photocopy'. After all, what is a 'photocopy' if not a 'duplicate'?

Just as, in 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree' all one has to do to take a photograph is pull 'off the white plaster to reveal an aperture, a hole', then all one has to do to read the 'photocopy' is reveal the gaps and silences in

the text (PC, 7). At which point, one is able to see the text is not so much unrealistic as surrealistic. Berger's observation that his uninvited guest from Galicia has animals 'sitting invisibly inside her at the table' sounds rather like one of Max Ernst's collages collected in Une Semaine de Bonté, which depicts a woman sitting in a parlour talking to a friend, seemingly unaware of a large lizard attached to her body (see Hughes 1991, 226). Of course, one should not make such comparisons lightly. 'Surrealism' is a loaded term which can be used all too easily to explain away those aspects of a text that fail to accord with the ways of reading and looking which have been normalised within the discursive practices of 'English Literature' and 'Art History'. As I discussed in Chapter Three, a similar problem occurs when reading Into their Labours. It is much easier to read Berger's trilogy as 'magic realist', than go to the trouble of deconstructing 'literary realism'. To say though, as I have said, that 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree' is surreal in the sense that it *is written like a photograph*, should enable us to move away from any recuperative definition of the term.

In response, therefore, to the question I initially posed, what kind of a book is Photocopies?, I would define it as a surrealist text: a book of writings arranged *like* a set of photographs - or, in this case, like a 'frieze'. Which raises the question of how the 'frieze' is arranged? As Berger notes, 'If one is now thinking not just of a single photograph but of a whole system of photography, I think the answer is that photography is rather like memory' (Berger 1979c, 21). Perhaps, then, Berger's 'frieze of "photocopies"' should be viewed as being arranged 'rather like [his] memory'? This idea is not as far-fetched as it sounds. What Berger's 'frieze' resembles more than anything else, I believe, is the sequence of photographs in Another Way of Telling, 'If each time...', which 'attempts to follow an old woman's reflections on her life' (AWT, 133). Indeed, the second 'photocopy', 'Woman with a Dog on Her Lap', seems to say as much itself.

Images from a peasant woman's memory

At first glance, 'Woman with a Dog on Her Lap', like the 'photocopy' which precedes it, looks to be a straightforward piece of autobiographical writing. The opening lines show the author remembering a woman he once knew.

When it comes to my imagination, Angeline - as might be expected of

her - is obstinately independent. Try as I do, I cannot imagine her as a young woman. And try as I do, I cannot really accept that she's now dead, that she's been dead for three years (PC, 9).

What could be more innocuous than that? Given the fact that most autobiographical writing is written in later life, it's hardly surprising to find that the subject of death crops up, particularly in relation to a person the author once knew. However, in this 'photocopy' death crops up in a particularly telling way. 'She keeps watching me', Berger writes; 'I always amused her, the more so when I wasn't trying to, and now that she's dead she laughs out loud - even if silently!' (9). It would seem that Angeline is more than just a memory, she is some kind of ghostly presence; and I don't think it is at all inaccurate to say that. The 'photocopy' concludes with Berger's description of an incident which befell him one morning as he was approaching the village in which he now lives.

I was thinking about [how the farms are arranged like loges in a gigantic green theatre] as I approached the village this morning in the winter sunlight. A lot has changed recently, but from a distance in the winter sunlight, it might still be the village it was at the beginning of the century. And suddenly this morning I saw it like that. It was different from the ten thousand other times I'd seen it. It was full of mysterious promises.

I knew I would be married in its church, I knew that my children would go to its school, that my husband would take the mare each spring on March the 14th to be blessed by the *Curé*. It was at that moment I heard her silent laughter. It was she who had been looking at the village, not I, and she had made me see it through her eyes. And she was laughing because she had made me see it through her eyes when young (PC, 12-13).

If Berger really is claiming to have seen the village through the eyes of a dead woman, it would appear he is in the throes of some kind of psychotic episode, or religious experience. What, then, should the reader make of Berger's claim?

'It seems to me', Berger has noted in interview, 'that as soon as you begin to think of writing about another being you begin to efface that border' which exists between self and other (Berger 1992e, 87).

Think, for example, of how we dream, and in particular of how we dream of people, either of people who are dead but whom we knew, or people who we once knew and are still alive. We say that they come back to us in our dreams, but what it means is that they are already within us. Writing about other people at the most primary and deep level, is writing about those who are already inside us (87).

These comments have an obvious bearing upon 'Woman with a Dog on Her

Lap'. They suggest one way to approach the 'photocopy' is to read it psychoanalytically, and in particular from a Lacanian viewpoint. As Terry Eagleton notes, what Lacanian psychoanalysis 'makes us recognise [is] that the unconscious is not some kind of seething, tumultuous, private region "inside" us, but an effect of our relations with one another' (Eagleton 1983, 173). 'The unconscious is, so to speak, "outside" rather than "within" us - or rather it exists "between" us, as our relationships do. It is elusive not so much because it is buried deep within our minds, but because it is a kind of vast, tangled network which surrounds us and weaves itself through us' (173). I agree with Eagleton on this point. But more importantly, I believe Berger's text makes a similar point itself - albeit in a very different way. What 'Woman with a Dog on Her Lap' makes us recognise, I believe, is not so much the theory of the 'death of the subject', as what it *feels* like to live with the 'death of the subject'.

If, as Eagleton alleges, the unconscious is not so much 'within' us but 'outside' us, like 'our relationships', then it follows that we can also rethink what (and how) we mean by 'our relationships'. Instead of thinking that people simply exist 'outside' us, we should also be able to feel that they exist 'within' us, as Berger imagines Angeline to be 'within' him. While post-structuralist narratives of identity allow us to abstractly conceptualise how decentred subjects are inscribed within different texts and discourses, what Berger's 'photocopy' of Angeline allows the reader to do is *feel* how the unconscious actually 'weaves itself through us'. Or, to put this another way, *feel* how we are haunted by the memories of others.

Angeline has come back to haunt Berger; and I am using the term 'haunt' quite precisely here. Angeline's status in the text is what Jacques Derrida describes as 'hauntological' (Derrida 1994a). The 'photocopy' is neither purely autobiographical or merely fictional: instead, the 'spectre' of Angeline serves to deconstruct such oppositions. Which is to say, 'Woman with a Dog on Her Lap' can be read as a ghost story in much the same way that 'The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol' can be.⁶⁵ And it's hardly surprising that this should be the case. One of the reasons why Berger is able to imagine Angeline's 'spectral' presence residing 'within' him is precisely because he has been writing with her in mind for many years now. As Berger has admitted in interview,

⁶⁵ As I discuss in Chapter Three, Berger's storytelling practice involves a different diegetic mode of narration. In the stories of *Into Their Labours* what might normally be read metaphorically can just as easily be read literally; and the same apparently goes for Berger's 'photocopies'.

There was a woman who is dead now called Angeline. Before we moved to Quincy we lived with her. She was the inspiration, not in the sense that I told myself that the story will be told by Angeline, but when thinking of the old woman [narrator of Lilac and Flag] I would think of Angeline quite often (Berger 1992e, 94).

The point I want to pick up on, however, is that Angeline can also be understood as having been the inspiration for the peasant woman whose memories haunt the photographs of 'If each time...'.⁶⁶

At a conference on 'Peasants and Countrymen in Literature' held in 1981, Berger and Mohr presented a sequence of photographic slides, 'Images from a Peasant Woman's Memory: If each time...', which Berger introduced in the following way.⁶⁶

What we have tried to do here doesn't have anything to do really with the cinema. Nor has it anything to do with written stories, but it does have to do with images. What we have tried to do is to invent - because it is a work of fiction if you wish; it is a work of fiction in images. We have invented an old woman, but who could be one of the old women in that village ... She is now about seventy to seventy-five, alone, and in the evenings when she is not watching the telly she knits and like us all, particularly like people after a certain age, she reflects about her life and through her own life about life in general and its important, recurring and yet always different moments. And she reflects in images from her memory or from that store of images which is not exactly memory which we all carry around within us and which we put together - or rather which we don't put together but put themselves together - and which to some degree really think us rather than us thinking them (Berger and Mohr 1982a, 7-8).

The trick Berger pulls here, as I have already noted, is a clever one. To reiterate: while simultaneously claiming the photographs in 'If each time...' constitute a 'story without words', he creates the 'fiction' that they are the 'store of images' of an 'old woman', thereby allowing them to be read as something other than photo-journalistic, documentary-style images of village life (7). In effect, the significance of the text depends on it *not* being read as 'factual'; or, even more bluntly, on the 'old woman' in question *not* being identified as an actual person called Angeline. However, the opposite is true of Photocopies.

Whereas Mohr's undoctored photographs depict a world that is patently 'real', but which Berger asks the viewer to look upon as 'fictional', 'Woman with a

⁶⁶ The conference, 'Peasants and Countrymen in Literature', was held at the Roehampton Institute over the course of three days in 1981. The sequence of photographs presented there by Berger and Mohr was subsequently published in amended form in Another Way of Telling.

Dog on Her Lap' tells of an event that allegedly 'happened', but which surely has to be 'fictional'; namely, Berger looking 'through [Angeline's] eyes when young'. The reason for this *volte-face* is obvious: Mohr's photographs and Berger's 'photocopies' approach the dialogic relationship between words and images from opposite directions. Berger's 'photocopy' of Angeline is like a photographic negative - in which, quite literally, she is defined by her absence.

Having said this though, Berger's being haunted by the 'spectre' of Angeline still troubles me - as well it might. How could thinking *death* not be troubling? Although deconstruction is useful when it comes to addressing metaphysical impasses, it starts to sound a little coy when faced with the literal presence/absence of death itself. Nobody actually knows what happens when somebody dies, or how the dead live on in our memories. And that's why 'Woman with a Dog on Her Lap' makes for uneasy reading. However worthwhile it might be to demonstrate that the text's unconscious manifests a certain spiritual ideology, what must be conceded is that we are forced to use words like 'spirituality' precisely because death *is*, in one sense, beyond words. Angeline is dead ...

Of course, when one steps back from the metaphysical brink, one sees that death is not so much beyond words themselves, as beyond what they have come to signify in the dominant societies of the 'West'. When I write that *Angeline's memories are thinking Berger*, and suggest that *people should be able to feel how others exist within them*, I do not mean to mystify, it is just that (the meanings of) words fail me. The prevalent stories which explain the world and myself to me no longer seem to make sense; a condition which is sometimes described as 'postmodern' - a term I have come to use with some trepidation. No doubt Berger would be unhappy at my mentioning the word at all, let alone in relation to his own work. 'The debate of post-modernism', he writes, 'is simply about the loss of public nerve' (KR, 177). However, I think Berger protests too much. Even though a great deal of what is talked about as 'postmodernist' is undoubtedly recuperative and reactionary, that does not mean the entire debate need be dismissed. Indeed, as a 'store of images' which serves to challenge the boundary between 'outside' and 'within', Photocopies can itself be read as an intervention in the debate; i.e., as a way of confronting the 'loss of public nerve' Berger laments. As the *blurb* on the back cover of Photocopies notes, when Berger was writing the book he 'sometimes imagined a frieze of "photocopies"

arranged side by side, giving future readers a panoramic view of what this moment of history was like when lived'. Let us therefore proceed to look at things a little more 'panoramically'.

Photo-montage

One of the first things that strikes the reader on leafing through Photocopies is the amount of *terrain* it covers. The text not only shuttles backwards and forwards from Berger's home in the French Alps, to London, Madrid, Paris, Galicia, Barcelona, Derry, Delhi, Pakistan, Prague, Athens, Moscow, Betanzos, and Mexico, it also addresses a wide-ranging number of subjects, such as the nature of incarceration ('A Man Wearing a Lacoste Sweater', 'A House Designed by Le Corbusier'), the joy of painting ('A Painting of an Electric Light Bulb', 'Room 19'), the rigours of rally-driving ('A Man in One-Piece Leathers and a Crash Helmet Stands Very Still'), the cycle of birth and aging ('Two Men Beside a Cow's Head'), and the meaning of friendship ('A Woman on a Bicycle'). This is an impressive achievement; and yet even more to Berger's credit is that he never pretends that such a 'panoramic' view is anything but partial. Unlike Fredric Jameson, David Harvey and Edward Soja, whose attempts to map the global space of late capitalist postmodernity are dependent upon a 'philosophically transcendent space of analysis', Berger's view of the world comes from looking at things from a position in the margins; from the point of view of a storyteller.⁶⁷

Consider the eighth 'photocopy', 'Two Dogs Under a Rock'. It begins with one storyteller, Tonio, talking to another, Berger.

I've known Tonio longer than any of my other friends. Almost half a century. Last year after we'd been unloading hay, and, hot and thirsty, were drinking cider with coffee, he began a story.

I've seen Antonin the shepherd cry twice. He was married. He didn't see much of his wife, shepherds are like soldiers in this way. She died, and he wept when he told me about her death. The second time I saw Antonin weep - well, I'll tell you (47).

Or rather Berger will. 'Two Dogs Under a Rock' is not Tonio's story, but Berger's

⁶⁷ As I discuss at great length in Chapter One, Meaghan Morris is quite right to say that, from a feminist perspective, it is clear that a great deal of what is written about postmodernism continues to betray the tendencies of the 'master subject' and its rationality; i.e., the assumption of a 'philosophically transcendent space of analysis' that represses the situated self, expels the 'other', and imposes its own contingent claims as universals (Morris 1992, 273).

'photocopy' of it, a duplicate. And a pretty good one at that. Like the stories in Into Their Labours, it is very much a *mystery story* (see PE, 8). What, the reader wants to know, made Antonin weep a second time?

Berger's way of answering this question is notably circumspect. He appears to be more keen to describe *where* Antonin wept than *why*. The story takes place in the 'valley of El Requenco, just north of Madrid', in Tonio's 'cabin', which is '[p]erched at an altitude of 1,000 metres on a mountainside of broken boulders and ilex trees, perched like a leaning tomb or a man sitting at a corner of a table' (PC, 47). Or, at least, that's one way of locating the story - Tonio's maybe. Berger, however, draws the reader's attention to another way. 'On a large-scale ordinance map of the area', he notes, 'you can find a building marked on the southern slope of the valley and beneath the little square are printed the words "Casa Tonio"' (47). This is a crucial observation. In effect, Berger is juxtaposing a storyteller's way of looking at 'Casa Tonio' with a postmetropolitan way of looking at it; one which tells little of 'broken boulders and ilex trees', and even less of Antonin's view-point. 'After days alone in the valley with his herd', Berger writes, 'the "Casa Tonio" is, for Antonin when he spots it, like a photograph in a frame: a solemn reminder of otherwise forgotten occasions' (48-9). Or, dare I say it, like a 'photocopy' in a book.

The point is, the reader can only appreciate what made Antonin weep after learning how he looks at the 'Casa Tonio'. 'One day Antonin came by when Tonio was preparing a meal: potatoes with bacon. Tonio invited the shepherd to join him' (49). 'When, however, the shepherd crossed the threshold into the single, unique room of the *casa*, something unforeseen by either of the two men occurred. One knew his way about blindfolded and the other did not' (49). Tonio was left to make the meal, leaving Antonin to sit at the table. After eating, Antonin attempted to pay for the meal; an offer that Tonio took as an insult, and refused to accept. And so Antonin began to weep, in wordless gratitude at Tonio's hospitality, perched as it is, precariously, on a mountainside of broken boulders and ilex trees.

From a high-theoretical vantage point, such occasions as Antonin's weeping are all too easily overlooked (witness the writings of Jameson, Harvey and Soja). Berger, however, goes out of his way to draw attention to such events. Consider the twenty-fourth 'photocopy', 'A House in the Sabine

Mountains'. Once again it begins with a mystery: 'About her I know for certain only two things. The first is that she's the mother of my friend Riccardo and the second I'll tell you at the end' (143). Its formal construction, then, is similar to 'Two Dogs Under a Rock'. What is more, the story is set in a landscape, and concerns a house, which is reminiscent of 'Casa Tonio'.

A dust road runs along the crest of a long undulating hill. Sometimes the slopes on either side are steep enough for the hill to merit almost the name mountain. The road runs through olive groves and leads past two or three small houses until it reaches the last one, which is where Riccardo's mother was born in the 1920s, at about the time Mussolini took over the country, and there it stops because the hill stops....

To the north there's a small town built on a hill-top like a fortress. In its town hall thousands of documents are stacked in piles, recording marriages, deals, litigations, deaths, transfers of property, the birth of children legitimate and illegitimate, fines paid, years of military service completed, criminal charges, debts paid and unpaid, yet, as the years pass and the recorded events recede, the ferocious choices made on these occasions are forgotten and only the recurring names - since all the families were related - only the recurring names still murmur like the sea (143).

As in 'Two Dogs Under a Rock', the official records are juxtaposed with the unofficial history of the area; in other words, with the gossip and storytelling which, until recently, has served to preserve all those 'otherwise forgotten occasions' of village life. I repeat, *until recently*. With the peasantry facing eradication the 'ferocious choices' made through the centuries stand to be forgotten. The shelter Riccardo's family home once offered, and the stories it once held, will fall into ruin. 'The beams sag. The damp, which nags old mortar to dust, has entered everywhere. The doors no longer hold true. The house is savable but to restore it will cost money' (145).

What, then, is the answer to this particular mystery story?

[E]ighteen months ago, Riccardo's mother made a decision of her own. She obtained a jasmine plant. She went to the house at the end of the road, the house in which she was born, and in the earth, against the southern wall by the side of the door, she planted the jasmine plant and tied it carefully with raffia to a stick, so it might resist the wind and, when there are storms, the rain.

It's doing well and is 50 centimetres high. This is the second thing I know for sure (146).

It is an answer of sorts. But that is because it is only a story of sorts. A story which, like those in the village Berger inhabits, is told and retold, not in order to

solve a mystery, but to preserve something mysterious: memory.

In the 'photocopy', 'A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka', Berger takes this way of telling to the limit. Whereas, in 'A House in the Sabine Mountains' Berger professes to know 'two things' for certain, in 'A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka' he admits to knowing only *one* thing for certain: that a young woman wearing a chapka was 'in Moscow on the evening of Sunday October the 3rd, 1993' (153). How is it that Berger knows this? Did he see her on a visit to Moscow? Did she pass him in the street? Who is this woman, and what is Berger's relation to her?

Although Berger addresses her directly, the woman appears to be a stranger to him. He calls her 'Olga' because he does not 'know [her] name', or her age for that matter - his 'guess is nineteen' (153). The reader sees the woman through Berger's eyes; or rather, sees the character 'Olga' focalised through the eyes of 'Berger' the narrator. However, the way she is focalised puts her at a distance from him. 'You have a head wound with a bandage', he tells her (153). If Berger were close to her, socially or spatially, he wouldn't say such a thing, he would move to comfort her. He doesn't though; and that's because he is, so to speak, a distant admirer of Olga - albeit a distant admirer of a very special kind.

The bandage is not very visible because you're wearing a chapka which you took from a soldier who had just been killed. You also took his fur jacket and army belt which you are wearing. I guess you took his gun too, but it's not in the photograph. You took them as if he had bequeathed them to you. He was fighting on your side. Probably he was one of the Cossacks who crossed the lines to join Routsikoy...

Tomorrow, Olga, a friend will change your bandage.

Of the photograph I make this verbal photocopy so that some who missed the photo in the French press on Tuesday, October the 5th, will see you (153-5)

The reason for Berger's mode of address should now be obvious. By addressing 'Olga' as 'you', the 'photocopy' puts *you*, the reader, in her place. It puts *you* in the picture.

You were wounded when you and several thousand others, barely armed, tried to take the television building of Ostakino. Now you have come back to defend the parliament in the White House: the parliament that has been under siege for twelve days ... The news headlines pretended you were nostalgic for communism and were a threat to democracy. According to them you took your country to the

brink of civil war, Olga, then, fortunately, the people were saved by Yeltsin, backed by the statesmen of the West (153-4).

The 'photocopy' confronts postmodernism's alleged 'loss of public nerve', not just by raising public opinion about events in Russia (although it does), but more fundamentally by deconstructing the binary relation between 'public' and 'private'.

This strategy is repeated throughout the text, within specific 'photocopies', as well as in the dialogue *between* them. Turn, for example, to the fifth 'photocopy', 'An Old Woman With a Pram'. It begins with a documentary-style opening:

Near Oxford Circus, London. In the nineties. Difficult to judge her age, probably around forty-five. Her belongings were in a shopping chariot, lifted from a supermarket. She wheeled it along the pavement, her face slightly inclined, as if it were a pram and she were looking at a baby. Her belongings in the chariot were in plastic bags. She wore a scarf round her head and a fur hat ... Much of its fur had fallen out ... She was wearing a pair of American-style sneakers (31).

So far so good. However, before this tone of journalistic objectivity can be firmly established it is undercut by a more subjective one. We are informed that the woman 'found' the sneakers 'in a dustbin on New Cavendish Street, which is near Hallam Street where my mother once lived when she was alive'. What is more, these interjections become increasingly personal. Berger watches the woman feed the pigeons, and is reminded of when he was a boy, watching his mother put out food for the birds in their garden. He notes that the old woman singles out 'one sick bird', which she feeds from a 'baby's bottle'. 'Each day, before coming to Oxford Circus', he writes, 'she prepares the bald pigeon's bottle and each day, after feeding the rest of the flock, she gives the bald one its milk'. Passers-by stop to watch this, and Berger reports the following incident:

They can't see through the walls, can they? the homeless woman says to the bald bird. If they want to stare at the garden, let 'em!
Mummy! (33).

Berger's identification with a helpless animal, and exclamation of 'Mummy!' is provocative enough, but other connections are made here as well - some of which are even more provocative. Berger notes that the 'fur hat' the old woman wears is 'what the Russians call a chapka' (31). In other words, as well as being identified with his mother, the old woman is made to resemble Olga. Of course, the reference to a 'chapka' might be dismissed as coincidental, but I don't

think so. On reading 'A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka' one is reminded of 'An Old Woman With a Pram', not simply because the two women in the 'photocopies' share the same taste in discarded hats, but because both of them are of indeterminate age. While the old woman may be a lot younger than she looks, Olga sometimes looks a great deal older. Moreover, both of them are viewed as life-giving and maternal. According to Berger, 'It is hard to decide whether you [Olga] are a child or a grandmother. (At historic moments, two, three, even four generations are sometimes compressed and co-exist within the lived experience of a single hour...)' (PC, 154-5). In his review of Photocopies Colm Toibin suggests that this comment is indicative of 'the old Marxist in Berger com[ing] to life' (Toibin 1996). He neatly avoids explaining what he means by this. Nevertheless, I think it is accurate to say that Berger's comment is written in a certain 'spirit' of Marx: Walter Benjamin's. As quoted above, Benjamin maintains that, 'There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power ...' (Benjamin 1973, 256). In other words, we are returned once again to the subject of the dead. As I have previously discussed (in Chapter Two), I think Benjamin's and Berger's writings about the dead should be read as emerging from and speaking to a specific historical conjuncture, or constellation; one in which the dominant postmetropolitan story of unilinear time and progress is coming to an end.

Consider the 'photocopy', 'A Friend Talking'. Ostensibly it concerns the death of a friend of Berger's, a painter - Abidine Dino. The usual biographical details are provided. According to Berger, 'Dino lived with his beloved Guzine on the ninth floor of an HLM in one of those artists' studios built, at a certain period, by the city of Paris for painters'; and he 'died in the Paris hospital of Villejuif ... three days after he lost his voice and could speak no more' (PC, 128). At least, that is, after he could speak no more in person. 'Not long ago', Berger writes, 'he gave me photocopies of some drawings he had made about the tortured. (Like many of his friends he had been in prison in Turkey.) Look at them, he said, as he accompanied me to the lift on the ninth floor, and one day some words from far away may come to you' (128). And come they do, from very far away indeed: from beyond the grave. Dino's drawings and paintings, particularly his last ones, speak to Berger of the dead, and what they signify.

They were of crowds. Images of countless faces, each person distinct,

but together in their energy similar to molecules. The images, however, were neither sinister nor symbiotic. When he first showed them to me I thought this multitude of faces were like the letters of an undeciphered writing. They were mysteriously fluent and beautiful. Now I ask myself whether Abidine had not travelled again, whether these were not pictures of the dead?

And at this moment he answers the questions, for suddenly I remember him quoting Ibn al Arabi: "I see and note the faces of all who have lived and will one day live, from Adam until the end of time" (129-130).

The dead speak to us from another time; or, perhaps better to say, of another conception of time. The time of the now, as Benjamin terms it; or, as I have discussed it in relation to the peasantry, a marginalised cyclic time. In an essay on the photography of Marketa Luskacova, 'The Christ of the Peasants' (collected in Keeping a Rendezvous), Berger discusses the issue of the dead and the time they keep at great length. '[H]ow', he wonders, looking at 'the pilgrim photographs of Marketa Luskacova', should he explain them to 'city-dwellers' who, 'finding themselves before the photographs', still have 'difficulty in seeing them?' (KR, 120). Berger's answer is as follows:

I'm inclined to believe that Marketa Luskacova had a secret assignment, such as no photographer had had before. She was summoned by the Dead. How she joined them I don't know. The Dead live, of course, beyond time and are ageless; yet, thanks to the constant arrival of newcomers, they are aware of what happens in history, and sometimes this general, vast awareness of theirs provokes a kind of curiosity so that they want to know more. This curiosity led them to summon a photographer. They told her they had the impression - and it had been growing for a century or more - that they, the Dead, were being forgotten by the Living to an unprecedented degree. Let her understand clearly what they were talking about: the individual Dead had always been quickly or slowly forgotten - it was not this which was new. But now it appeared that the huge, in fact countless, collective of the Dead was being forgotten, as if the living had become - was it ashamed? or was it simply negligent? - of their own mortality, of the very consanguinity which joined them to the dead. Of this, they said they needed no proof, there was ample evidence. What they would like to see - supposing that somewhere in the heart of the continent in which she lived they still existed - were people who still remembered the dead. Neither the bereaved (for bereavement is temporary) nor the morbid (for they are obsessed by death, not by the Dead), but people living their everyday lives whilst looking further, beyond, aware of the Dead as neighbours (121).

The answer Berger provides is a useful one. It offers a way of looking at Luskacova's photographs as something other than representations of simple-

minded, religious peasants; not to mention a way of looking at Berger's own work. Take a look at the 'photocopy', 'A Man Baring His Chest'. It is set in a crowded, urban marketplace in the 'Omonia district of Athens just below the Acropolis' (PC, 138). 'A crowd. So large that one can't imagine it, even when one is part of it. A crowd in which all that the past has left is bursting out, searching, cheating, achieving, hoping, waiting, despairing for a future' (137-8). In other words, a crowd not unlike one of those depicted in the paintings and drawings of Abidine Dino. A crowd of the dead. Or rather, a crowd among whom - after reading Berger's essay on Luskacova - it is possible to see the dead as neighbours. Such a reading is made plausible by the the fact that 'A Man Bearing His Chest' and 'A Friend Talking' are printed in such close proximity. Indeed, one might be tempted to say that, like the crowds they purport to describe, Berger's 'photocopies' rub shoulders with each other. A Man Bearing His Chest jostles with A Friend Talking; A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka bumps into An Old Woman With a Pram; and as they do the meaning of one 'photocopy' rubs off on another. Berger, however, is not prepared to speculate on what might result from such chance encounters.

In the 'photocopy', 'Men and Women Sitting at a Table and Eating', Berger comments that he does not know why, but there are '[t]wo lunches' he has had, at different times in his life, which 'in memory ... are filed side by side' (157). 'The two occasions', he writes, 'may seem to be in contrast, yet I doubt whether this is why my imagination persists in placing them together. Anyway, the two photocopies are for ever on the same page' (157). This is a rather trite if not disingenuous comment. Even if Berger is unable or unwilling to trace the workings of his own unconscious, and/or the unconscious of the text, Photocopies is hardly a book that has been thoughtlessly thrown together. After all, why else would Berger choose to end the book with a 'photocopy' of Subcommandante Marcos, spokesperson of the Mexican Zapatistas? To finish on a note of such revolutionary élan is of undoubted significance.⁶⁸

This being said, however, there are still problems with Photocopies. As Berger notes at the beginning of 'A Friend Talking', 'Sometimes it seems that, like an ancient Greek, I write mostly about the dead and death. If this is so, I can only add that it is done with a sense of urgency which belongs uniquely to life' (127). Maybe so. Nevertheless, one begins to suspect that the way Berger writes about

⁶⁸ 'Revolutionary' is perhaps the wrong term; 'rendezvous' might be a better one. See Chapter Two for a discussion of this point.

the dead and death has subtly altered over the years. To be blunt, one begins to think that he is increasingly writing about his own death at the expense of writing about the collective dead.

A portrait of the artist as an old man.

Consider the 'photocopy', 'Passenger to Omagh'. It begins as follows:

There's a painting by Jack Yeats which shows a woman bare-back rider, a rider of the *haute école*, with her thoroughbred horse, and she's talking to a clown who sits hunched up on a box near the entrance to the Big Top. It's entitled: *That Grand Conversation Was Under the Rose*.

When Jack Yeats was very old, I spent an evening with him in Dublin. An unforgettable evening of stories and whiskey. I didn't ask him then because I didn't know I would need it, but thirty years later (he'd be 125 years old today) I fancy he'd agree if I borrowed his title for the duration of a bus ride (PC, 15).

Berger first wrote about his 'unforgettable evening' with Yeats in 1958, in the essay, 'The Life and Death of an Artist', published in Permanent Red; and it is interesting to compare the earlier essay with the later 'photocopy'. The essay is typical of the 'art criticism' Berger produced for the New Statesman during the 1950s. It begins with Berger's description of Yeats and himself swapping stories and 'drinking [Yeats's] Irish whiskey', and then assumes a more formal tone in order to address such diverse issues as the cultural geography of European romanticism, the history of English imperialism, and how the meaning of an artwork is subject to change, especially at the moment when an artist dies (Berger 1960, 142-7). '[H]owever much the keep-art-pure-sirs may hate it', Berger insists, 'it is impossible to appreciate Yeats fully without understanding' the broader historical circumstances in which his work was made and received; in particular,

the Irish conviction that there was something beyond the facts of that poverty which quite simply halved their population in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even today the IRA flickers with something of the same spirit. Ireland has not yet reached the critical point where she can only defend her way of life: she is still striving, staggering, suffering and dreaming towards one (Berger 1960, 148).

Which explains how Berger, as 'a Marxist, can find so much truth and splendour in the art of an arch-romantic such as Yeats'; because of his 'sense of the future, an awareness of the possibility of a world other than the one we know' (148).

'Now that [Yeats] is dead', Berger writes, 'he teaches us hope' (150).

'Passenger to Omagh', however, contains no such explicit historical or geographical analysis; it merely traces Berger's meeting and subsequent conversation with a young woman, Kathleen, on a bus-ride 'between Dublin and Derry' (PC, 16). It is she who initiates the conversation. Why, she wants to know, is he travelling to Derry. 'We're working in Derry with some actors', he answers (16). He does not say which actors, or what play, or who the other people are he is travelling with. Such details, the reader presumes, are irrelevant, particularly to Kathleen, who announces that she too is in a play: '*A Christmas Carol*. My first role, when I was very small, was the infant Jesus. Two years back it was the Lady Macbeth I played' (16).

Very different, I say, very different, So you want to be an actress?

It was probably then that she calculated that I was a little stupid.

I'm going to be a hairdresser.

In Omagh?

No, I'm at school in Omagh. I've been home for the weekend. I'm sixteen. Were you taking me for being older.

A little.

It happens.

You have brothers and sisters?

We're five but we have different fathers. Now Mum lives with Bill. He's younger than she is and she's pregnant.

Is the baby due soon?

In April. I get on with Bill, he's easy. I'm pregnant as well.

I see (16-17).

What Berger sees is clear enough, Kathleen is spinning him a yarn, but what is it that the reader is supposed to see? 'We're having a grand talk, aren't we?', he reports Kathleen saying, which is to say, in the manner of *that grand conversation* alluded to at the beginning of the 'photocopy' (19). And that's it; pretty soon afterwards their conversation comes to a close.

[A]t the second stop [in Omagh] Kathleen gets to her feet ... and walks down the aisle without a word.

I watch her climbing a steep path towards a building which could be a school. She looks weighed down.

Sheila! she'll tell her girlfriend, I met a stranger on the bus and I spun him the tallest stories ever!

Did he believe you?

And Kathleen will nod her smiling and wounded and slightly mocking head

(22).

Reading the 'photocopy' alongside the essay on Yeats, it becomes possible to see that Kathleen's tall stories are not just perfidious talk. Her traveller's tales also speak of the romantic 'possibility of a world other than the one we know'. Moreover, it is equally possible, given the nature of Berger's writing in Into Their Labours, to see Kathleen as a storyteller, or even more romantically as a Secretary of Death.⁶⁹ The problem is, although it is certainly possible, it is not probable. However 'panoramically' the 'photocopy' is viewed, the reader tends to focus on one thing in particular, the author. Or, to put this another way, what 'Passenger to Omagh' reveals is nothing less or more than Berger's discovery - thirty years after spending an 'unforgettable evening of stories' with the octogenarian Yeats - that he too has become an old man: the 'clown' in Yeats's painting being talked down to by a haughty 'rider'.

'Passenger to Omagh' therefore serves to illustrate an important point about the text as a whole. As the *copy* on the back cover of Photocopies notes, although the book is designed to provide a 'panoramic view of what this moment in history was like when lived', it also 'becomes an unintentional portrait of the author as well'. A portrait of the author as an old man.

I am not suggesting that Photocopies is simply a book *about* old age. My point is, it is a book that could only have been written *in* old age. It contains Berger's reflections on life; or, perhaps better to say, his reflections on coming to the end of life, and approaching death. Although we all reflect on our lives and their passing, such reflections are 'particularly' the preserve of 'people after a certain age', as Berger himself notes in his introduction to 'If each time...' (Berger and Mohr 1982a, 7-8). Needless to say, this 'certain age' will vary from person to person, and from culture to culture. However, it is worth recalling that Photocopies was written at a time in Berger's life when he was approaching a very specific age indeed: the age of three score years and ten. Biblically-speaking, this is our allotted time on earth, it is all that is supposedly granted to us. A fact which informs the writing of the book, as well as 'our' reading of it.

According to Colm Toibin's review for the Observer, '[t]here is a haunted quality to much of' Photocopies. Berger 'knows what a vigil by an open coffin is like, and is willing to describe it ... [He] whispers in our ears, slightly Frenchified, full of awe and wonder about art and nature, the body and the soul, [life] and

⁶⁹ See Chapter Three (143).

death' (Toibin 1996). It goes without saying that I don't agree with this interpretation. I believe it is more accurate to read the text 'hauntologically', rather than to suggest it has a 'haunted quality' about it. However, what Toibin has to say should not be dismissed out of hand. His review represents not so much a facile *misreading* of the text, as a relatively powerful 'literary' reading; one which seeks to reinvent Berger 'the old Marxist' as Berger the elderly sage. I mean this quite precisely. In his book, The Function of Criticism, Terry Eagleton considers how the 'modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of the liberal, bourgeois public sphere in the early eighteenth century', and its fragmentation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Eagleton 1984, 10). It is against the background of 'the abandonment of literature to the market and the anonymous urbanisation of society', Eagleton writes, 'that we can perhaps best evaluate the birth of the nineteenth century "sage"' - who, 'deprived of ... any permanent particular readership', purports to speak 'not idiomatically but universally, not in class accents but in human tones' (39-43). Moreover, Eagleton insists, the problems that gave rise to the formation of the sage in the nineteenth-century remain 'unresolved even today' (56). Witness the Observer Review. Now that the author of Ways of Seeing is an old man, and has turned his hand to writing about art, nature, life and death, the critical establishment can more easily accept him as a colleague, a fellow man of letters; a sage whose 'beautiful style', according to Geoff Dyer, 'is conceived solely as a conduit and distillate of humanity' (Dyer 1996).

What is more, the way Photocopies is put together doesn't exactly help matters. Consider the 'photocopy' of Henri Cartier-Bresson, 'A Man Begging in the Métro'. Cartier-Bresson is shown in his Paris apartment being interviewed by Berger. Nowadays, he tells Berger, he is more interested in 'painting and drawing' than in photography, which he claims to have given up 'twenty years ago' (PC, 68-9). During the course of the interview, however, Berger notices that there is a 'small camera on the table beside' Cartier-Bresson, which - in between telling anecdotes - he picks up, and begins to look at his interviewer through (68). Or rather, not quite at his interviewer, but 'around' him (70). This happens a number of times, until the moment when he looks 'around [Berger] again', and 'this time ... clicks' (74). Once again, as in the first 'photocopy', 'A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree', Berger has unexpectedly had his photograph taken. However, there is a crucial difference between the first photograph and the second. Whereas the first photograph is used to 'open' the text, and to raise

questions of identity, the second is used to 'close' the text. It is easier for the reader to see what I mean by simply looking at the back cover of the book. There is a photograph there, of an old man with a white shock of hair, one hand outstretched, eyes appealing to the reader. A photograph of Berger. But not just any old photograph. As the copyright indicates, it belongs to Cartier-Bresson - to Magnum Photos. In other words, it is (in all likelihood) the very same photograph Berger describes being taken in a 'A Man Begging in the Métro'. Reproduced on the back cover though, its meaning and function becomes fixed in a very specific way. It doesn't just offer up an image of Berger, it gives the 'text an Author'; i.e., 'furnish[es] it with a final signified' (Barthes 1977, 146). What the photograph says is not, *here is John Berger, author of Photocopies*, but rather, *here is John Berger, origin and final arbiter of the work's meaning and value*.

Of course, Berger is categorically *not* the final arbiter of the text's meaning and value. Different reading formations - not to mention different generations - will read the text in different and conflicting ways. After all, it is not just Berger's age that effects the way the text is approached, the reader's does too. In the 'photocopy', 'A Painting of an Electric Light Bulb', when Berger stands in Rostia's studio and smells the oil used to mix paint, it takes him back, he tells us, 'half a century to a promise. The promise of painting and painting, the promise of doing it every day of your life, and thinking about nothing else until you are dead!' (PC, 119). For a younger reader this 'promise' is still present as a possibility, whereas for an older reader it is present only as a memory. And one could make similar points about race, class, gender and sexuality. For example, even in the most explicitly 'political' of his 'photocopies', 'A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka', Berger can't help informing 'Olga' that it is her 'delicacy' which is 'at stake' (PC, 154).

Almost everybody's autobiography

In interview in 1989, Berger noted that, 'from time to time' he had been writing 'tiny bits of text', 'autobiographical' pieces, but that he couldn't 'imagine' writing 'an autobiography' (Berger 1989, 4). The reason why, he maintained, was because of his 'weak sense of [his] own identity' (4). Of course, he could have added a further reason, because autobiographical writing tends to perpetuate the 'literary' function of the Author. Hence, one surmises, Berger's

decision to write Photocopies; a book in which 'tiny bits of text', rather than being organised into a 'traditional', linear narrative, are arranged spatially, in a 'frieze of "photocopies"'. A 'store of images' which, as I have sought to demonstrate, is not so much photo-realistic as surrealistic. If you don't believe me, just ask Angeline. After all, 'A Woman with a Dog on Her Lap' is her 'photocopy' as much as Berger's. Indeed, feel free to ask André, Marcel, Mohammed, Théophile, Marisa, or Rostia, all of whom face each other across the pages of the book. Photocopies is less *Berger's Autobiography* than it is *Everybody's Autobiography*, or almost everybody's.

However 'panoramic' the text is supposed to be, it tends to focus on 'moments lived in Europe', and to deal with people 'for whom Berger [has] felt a kind of love'. I have no qualms with this. Berger's refusal to speak on behalf of 'others' is laudable. Moreover, in a society suffering from *compassion fatigue* his 'kind of love' is politically enabling. For example, 'A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka' allows the reader to see 'Olga' as a person, not just a statistic; as a woman, not just an image. It makes *you* feel for her by putting 'you' in the picture.

More problematic though, are 'photocopies' such as 'Passenger to Omagh'. According to Geoff Dyer, 'There is a strong sense in Berger's latest work that he has reached a pitch of sensitivity where everything that happens to him - going to the post office to post some beetroots, meeting a mute on the train to Amsterdam - trembles with significance' (Dyer 1986, 130). The question is, for whom? Like the poems and photographs in Pages of the Wound, which are written 'in the hope of telling [his] love', Berger's meeting with Kathleen on the bus ride between Dublin and Derry may tremble with significance for him, but it doesn't for the reader. The connections which could be made - by 'shuttling' between Kathleen's storytelling, Irish romanticism, and British imperialism - aren't; which provides 'literary' critics with enough leeway to transform Berger the troublesome Marxist into Berger the elderly sage - and not without some justification. Photocopies does occasionally lapse into rheumy-eyed reminiscence. In 'photocopies' such as 'Room 19', 'A Painting of an Electric Light Bulb', and 'Psalm 139: "... you know me when I sit and when I rise"', Berger

looks back wistfully to his years as a teenage art student.⁷⁰

Colm Toibin is right - or at least half-right - to say that '[t]here is a haunted quality to much of' Photocopies (Toibin 1996). To be accurate, it is haunted by the melancholic 'spirit' of Walter Benjamin, and the certain knowledge of approaching death. In the story, 'Addressed to Survivors', published in Pig Earth, Berger comments that, 'Perhaps one of the reasons why the old are so rarely [heeded], is that they insist so little on the truth of their observations, and this is because they see all such particular truths as small, compared to the immense single truth about which they can never talk' (PE, 66). Twenty years later Berger's observation would now appear to be applicable to himself, and specifically to his writing of Photocopies. The text is full of 'particular truths', but they are not insisted upon because, in comparison to the 'single immense truth' Berger now faces, they are insignificant.

⁷⁰ 'Psalm 139: "... you know me when I sit and when I rise"' is easily the most cryptic of Berger's 'photocopies'. It consists of a drawing of a naked woman, face turned away from the reader, around which a number of hand-written and mostly illegible words have been printed. The way I have chosen to read it is as a reference to Berger's lost youth. In interview Berger has noted that, 'from the age of 16 I was continually writing words down in the same sketchbooks in which I was drawing' (Berger 1994/5, 41). 'Psalm 139' appears to be from just such a sketchbook.

Conclusion

Time Will Tell

On 9 September 1999 David Blunkett announced the new national curriculum to run from September 2000. 'For the first time', The Observer's Education Correspondent Martin Bright reported, 'it will contain an eclectic ... [and] controversial[ly] ... left-leaning ... list of recommended non-fiction authors for 11-14 year olds':

In a section called Viewpoints on Society, William Cobbett, the eighteenth-century rural reformer, is placed alongside Beatrice Webb, the founder of the socialist Fabian Society, and John Berger, the novelist and critic ... author of Ways of Seeing, a classic of art criticism ... and well-known for being a lifetime communist (Bright 1999).

Is Berger's acceptance a cause for celebration? I am not so sure. And neither is Berger himself. When asked what he thought about being included in the national curriculum, he replied: 'If this was a list of thinkers against racism I would be proud to be there. I think the young kids who are really going to benefit from reading are those that make their own discoveries' (quoted in Bright 1999).

I agree with Berger. Even the most telling work, if read in a certain way, can be recuperated. This might sound defeatist, and yet simply consider the way of reading that is normalised within the national curriculum. Despite having spent his entire adult life collaborating on multi-media projects which cross the boundaries between different discourses, not to mention critiquing the idea that the author is the final arbiter of a work's meaning and value, Berger stands to be canonised as a 'non-fiction' writer - the celebrated 'author of Ways of Seeing'. But where does that leave all the other people who worked on Ways of Seeing? Or Jean Mohr, for example, who collaborated with Berger on A Seventh Man and Another Way of Telling?

In a recent interview with Nicholas Wroe, Berger observes that, in Britain, the more your work spans different media and different genres, the more your reputation suffers. 'If you are a gadfly, or a bastard, like me', Berger says, 'there is a tendency for critics to say that you're not serious. But the freedom it gives me well out-weighs the disadvantages' (quoted in Wroe 1999). The fact that reactionary critics have tended to neglect Berger's work is unsurprising; what is surprising, however, is that 'left-wing' theorists have done likewise. If 'theory',

particularly of the postmodern and post-structuralist variety, consists of a 'type of heterogeneous cross-disciplinary critical investigation [which] engages in a reflective self-questioning of its own discursive practices and boundaries', as Martin Kreisworth and Mark Cheetham assert (Kreisworth and Cheetham 1990, 3), then surely Berger's work is exemplary? And yet, as I have discussed, judging from Berger's absence from theory readers, collections of essays, and so on, the academic community does not hold with this view. The reason why, I think, is because Berger questions the place of 'theory' - which is to say, its discursive practice in higher education. Of course, when I say this I am not suggesting that there is no place for 'theory'; rather, I believe it needs to be *re-placed* - in a 'community of resistance'; as Berger has attempted to re-place it.

Simply put, then, the story of Berger's attempt to find 'another way of telling' demands to be told in a manner which is equally *telling*; and that is what I have tried to do in the present thesis. I have tried to write in a way that is informed by theory without being weighed down by it. Or, to put this another way, I have tried to write in the margins of theory. This being said, the story of Berger the storyteller has a twist in the tale. I began this thesis, in 1994, with the aim of concentrating on the storytelling project of Into Their Labours. However, in the last five years Berger has gone on to publish six very different books, some of which appear to renege on his concept and practice of storytelling: a 'novel', To the Wedding; a book of letters written with his daughter Katya, Titian. Nymph and Shepherd; a book of essays, Photocopies; a book of poetry, Pages of the Wound; a biography with Nella Bielski, Isabelle. A Story in Shots; and most recently, King. A Street Story. In addition, Berger has also collaborated with the Theatre de Complicité on a stage version of The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol. And, in February 1999, with Simon McBurney, he performed a work called Vertical Line in a disused London tube station at Aldwych.

It has not been practical to critically consider all of the above texts. Some of them I have dealt with and others I have not, for differing reasons. My decision not to write about Titian is a deliberate one. On those rare occasions when Berger is discussed by critics, it is invariably his 'art criticism' which is the focus of attention - at the expense of everything else that he has done. I wanted to buck this trend. Nevertheless, I believe that Titian can be read in terms of the argument I have developed in the preceding chapters. As I have already mentioned, the text consists of a written correspondence between Berger and his

daughter. Katya's first letter tells of her meeting and conversation with an old man at an exhibition of Titian's paintings. After he departs though, she begins to think it was Titian's ghost. Berger's letter in response to Katya's story is instructive: he takes her at her word and reads 'fiction' for 'fact'. In other words, the text is 'haunted' by the same kind of 'spectres' that 'haunt' the pages of Into Their Labours.

My reason for not writing about Isabelle and King, however, is a little more prosaic; quite simply, by the time they were published I had all but completed my thesis. Nevertheless, I could not bring the story of Berger the storyteller to a close without at least making a couple of observations about them. Unlike Berger's 'novel', To the Wedding, both Isabelle and King are explicitly billed as 'stories'. What is more, Berger's name is not present on the cover of King. In interview, Berger explains why this is:

It isn't that I want to play coy or be modest, but it is a way of making this object a little different and maybe it will be read differently rather than immediately accommodated in the literary output of a guy called Berger ... [F]or me writing a book is not to be original, but to say some small thing that belongs to human experience but hasn't quite been said before. And when people read it they are in some way able to continue the struggle of life with a little bit more energy. That's why I say that I'm a storyteller, not a novelist, although what I write often passes as novels (quoted in Wroe 1999).

Berger's wish to keep King from being 'accommodated in the literary output of a guy called Berger' is admirable, but not, I think, successful. To be blunt, declaring the text to be a 'story', and himself to be a 'storyteller', does not serve to place King in the paraliterary tradition of the chronicle. Whereas in Pig Earth Berger provides a full 'explanation' of storytelling, there is no such 'explanation' in King - or Isabelle for that matter. And this probably explains that if Berger's recent books 'pass as novels', it is because they are.

The most worrying development, however, is that even Pig Earth is not the book it once was.⁷¹ In the 1999 Bloomsbury edition of the book the 'Historical Afterword' has become an 'Introduction', and 'An Explanation' has disappeared altogether. Berger's discussion of village 'gossip', his ideas about language, his story about looking into the eye of a peasant and seeing a fellow storyteller, all of

⁷¹ This is not to say that a text's meaning should be written in stone. As Alan Sinfield notes, texts are 'inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history' (Sinfield 1994, viii); added to which, 'Closure is always inadequate. The complexity of the social formation and the multi-acculturality of language combine to produce an inevitable excess of meaning' (37).

this is gone. And without it Berger's storytelling project is at best transformed, and at worst denuded.

In interview Berger readily concedes that his recent work is as much a surprise to him as he expects it is to the reader:

I realise I am concluding my life's work as a writer in a way I did not foresee thirty or even ten years ago. I find myself writing only stories about people *in extremis*. Five years ago I wrote a book about a young woman who is told she is seropositive. In Africa today about a fifth of the population is seropositive and for most of them there is no prospect of any medical treatment at all. King is about the homeless. Last month 300 people in the streets of Europe died from the cold. The total amount of people in Europe who are homeless is at least three million, probably more. This choice of themes is not part of a personal predilection. Far from it. I prefer drawing exotic flowers with charcoal, riding long distance motorbikes, going to Italian restaurants, listening to Gregorian chant. Yet more and more people in the world - and they will soon be the majority if they are not already - are living *in extremis*. And I cannot, as a storyteller, shut my eyes and close my imagination, so I am bound to follow (quoted in Wroe 1999, 9).

There is of course another reason why Berger has felt a greater urgency to write in the last few years; because they *are* his last few years. Finally, the self-styled Secretary of Death must face his own inevitable demise; and, unsurprisingly, this has had an effect on his way of telling.

The death of a storyteller? The death of storytelling? I have toyed with a number of such phrases in attempting to write the conclusion to this thesis. Where should a line be drawn under Berger's work? Obviously, it is difficult to bring any story to a conclusion, but the story of Berger the storyteller demands to be left open, not simply because he is still working and might produce another six books in the next five years, but because his work, informed by the cyclic time of the peasantry, promises to keep a certain rendezvous - with the dead and the unborn. The struggle of life lived in the peasant margins, Berger has found, contains a lesson for us all:

If one looks at the likely future course of world history envisaging either the further extension and consolidation of corporate capitalism in all its brutalism, or a prolonged, uneven struggle waged against it, a struggle whose victory is not certain, the peasant experience of survival may well be better adapted to this long and harsh perspective than the continually reformed, disappointed, impatient, progressive hope of an ultimate victory (PE, 212-3).

List of abbreviations of texts by John Berger.

AWT	and Mohr, Jean <u>Another Way of Telling</u> . (London: Granta, 1984).
WB	<u>The White Bird</u> . (London: Chatto/ Tigerstripe, 1985).
AL	<u>About Looking</u> . (New York: Vintage, 1991).
OE	<u>Once in Europa</u> . (London: Granta, 1991).
LF	<u>Lilac and Flag</u> . (London: Granta, 1992).
PE	<u>Pig Earth</u> . (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992).
AOF	<u>And our Faces, my Heart, Brief as Photos</u> . (London: Granta, 1992).
KR	<u>Keeping a Rendezvous</u> . (London: Granta, 1993).
TW	<u>To the Wedding</u> . (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).
PC	<u>Photocopies</u> . (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

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