

**(Post)colonialities and Deconstructions: On Some
Heterogeneous (Mis)takes, Double-binds, and the
Always Already Non-present Perhaps**

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore three key debates within postcolonial theory. I argue for the efficacy of deploying deconstructive readings in postcolonial contexts. I closely analyse the debates in order to identify a number of important questions for the theorisation of postcoloniality. My discussion of the first debate between Gayatri Spivak and Benita Parry focuses on the problematics of representation, through an analysis of the questions of subalternity, native agency/resistance/insurgency, and, crucially, the question of the political positionality of the postcolonial intellectual as investigating subject. Jacques Derrida's debate on *apartheid* with Anne McClintock and Robert Nixon, although not expressed in the terms of postcolonial theory, raises questions of context, the necessity of ethics in intellectual discussion and the politics and ethics of deconstructive engagements with material situations. In the debate between Homi K. Bhabha and Benita Parry, I examine the question of the most apposite way to read the contribution of Frantz Fanon's work. I argue the latter debate offers a politico-theoretical insight or strategy that would be important for the development of postcolonial theory. Finally, I demonstrate how the South African appropriation of postcolonial theory (and the subsequent critique) rehearses some of the preoccupations of the previous debates. I argue that the particular version that South African advocates of postcolonial theory sought to install into the literary-cultural agenda in the early 1990s, highlights an inattentiveness to the theory which it is concerned to appropriate. My thesis is concerned to argue that the debates need to be reread given some of the (mis)taken arguments I identify. The urgent, difficult and complex questions in contemporary South Africa are what postcolonial critics need to think through. I argue the urgency and difficulty of the South African case can be fruitfully interrogated by a deconstructive postcolonial theory.

I declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

Brian Fulela

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1 Introduction

In this thesis I will argue for the particular efficacy of a postcolonial theory informed by deconstruction. My own reading of the texts of deconstruction is largely informed by an engagement with (and by commentaries on) Jacques Derrida's work. Consequently, I will analyse the work of theorists who acknowledge an inheritance to deconstructive practices (or whose work commentators identify as such), and the critics of that inheritance. Taking Benita Parry's (1997) assertion that no overview or survey of postcolonial theory should begin without a discussion of the debate on the connotations and denotations of the term 'postcolonial', I here signal at that debate¹. This debate was animated by, among other things, the question of the spatiality and temporality of what is constructed and delineated by the term postcolonial. The debate was no less vociferous around the question of the politics cohering to the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory as an explanatory model for the history of (the discourse of) (neo)colonialism. As it will be clear from the key questions I examine, this latter debate on the politics of postcolonial theory is related to what will be one of the major concerns of this thesis.

In order to delimit an expansive field of study, my investigation will proceed through the close textual analysis of selected areas of critical contention within postcolonial theory, particularly where the theorisation of postcoloniality intersects with deconstruction. I should also acknowledge that I am aware that the term 'deconstruction' has itself not been without debate². However, this thesis is particularly preoccupied with the enunciations of postcolonial theory. As such, the debate on the term deconstruction lies outside the bounds of my study. As for the usage of the term postcolonial within this thesis, the term will be contextualised within a discussion of the selected debates in postcolonial theory. Before delineating exactly what these sites of critical contention are, I should first like to set out the key questions to be addressed.

¹ For a discussion of the temporal singularity of the term 'postcolonialism', see Anne McClintock (1992); see also Ella Shohat (1992), Masao Miyoshi (1993) and Arif Dirlik (1994) for the adverse political implications connoted by the term; for an analysis of the metropolitan provenance of the term see Laura Chrisman (1995) and Aijaz Ahmad (1992); for the continuing importance of the term, despite the problems associated with it, see Parry (1997).

² For discussions on the term deconstruction, see Derrida (1991) and Nicholas Royle (2000).

Firstly, what are the functions of postcolonial intellectual production given that (according to Arif Dirlik) the contemporary situation of 'Global Capitalism' is a (necessary) condition of its emergence? That is, in what ways are the strategies employed in postcolonial theory and criticism complicit – given that the bulk of postcolonial intellectual production is produced in the 'Western' academy – with the dynamics of, among other things, the contemporary international division of labour? Secondly, in what ways are the questions of subalternity, alterity, representation and 'native' agency, resistance or insurgency presented within postcolonial theory? Thirdly, how efficacious is the use or deployment of 'derivative discourses' – including deconstructive practices themselves – within both the counter-discourses of the anti-colonialist/liberationist/nationalist tradition and contemporary postcolonial theory? Fourthly, what are the attendant politics, ethics and pragmatics of deconstructive practices? Fifthly, in what ways have the contributions of anti-colonialist liberation theory – particularly, the work of Frantz Fanon – been appropriated within postcolonial intellectual production? And lastly, how have postcoloniality (and postcolonial theory) and deconstruction been appropriated or read within the discourses of the South African literary-cultural establishment.

These questions, as I have stated, will be addressed through the close textual analysis of particular debates within postcolonial theory. In chapter two I will analyse the debate initiated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), as well as Benita Parry's attack on Spivak, in "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse" (1987)³. After detailing Spivak's brief response to Parry's essay, I will open the discussion to an exploration of the exchange between Laura Chrisman and Robert Young in *Textual Practice* (1997). Also, I will illustrate how this exchange foregrounds a possible misreading or (mis)taking of Spivak's insistence that postcolonial intellectuals mark their political positionality. My discussion will be principally concerned to explore how the questions of representation, subalternity and 'native' agency, insurgency or

³ The dates of publication I give for the Spivak and Parry's essays seem to reverse the trajectory of the debate. My own discussion refers to the reprinted edition of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), whereas Parry's attack is animated by, among other things, Spivak's initial articulations in "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice" (1985).

resistance emerge in the debate. Before briefly signalling one of the important questions raised in the debate – namely, the question of the ethico-political viability of deconstructive practices when they are brought to the analysis and theorisation of (post)colonial contexts – I will explore the value and limitations of both Parry and Spivak’s arguments. As such, I will have recourse to further responses to the debate by other commentators and critics. One of the concerns briefly touched upon in the exchange between Chrisman and Young concerns the exemplary status South Africa has seemed to enjoy for postcolonial criticism. I will engage with this question more closely in my conclusion.

In chapter three I will examine Derrida’s intervention into the debate on apartheid, in his essay “Racism’s Last Word” (1985), as an unequivocal instance of what Derrida has articulated as the relation between “deconstruction and the ‘yes’”. I will explore the charge that Derrida’s work or deconstruction in general is too esoteric, interesting yet only theoretically or philosophically so – only concerned, as it were, with a deconstruction of the ‘Western metaphysics of presence or logocentrism’. What I will investigate here is precisely how Derrida’s appeal in his essay on apartheid risks an ethico-political intervention in ‘the real-world’ or ‘the material’, as a call for the demise of apartheid and an invocation of responsibility to the future remembrance of its text. Thus my argument will attempt to illustrate how McClintock and Nixon’s response, “No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida’s ‘Le Dernier Mot du Rascisme’” (1986), and some subsequent commentary, misreads the deconstructive reformulation of the concept of (con)text.

Given the accusation that Derrida’s gesture is an attempt to exteriorise the text of apartheid as a distinctively South African phenomenon – in order to occlude an understanding of the West’s complicities and duplicities with (among other things, the political, economic, theological and military discourses of) the apartheid South African regime – I once again consider the question of the political positionality of the intellectual as investigating subject. Given the intensity of this debate, I will then explore the question of an ‘ethics of discussion’, to which Derrida elsewhere states his commitment.

Finally, I will discuss the charge that Derrida's work and deconstruction in general, far from being radical, is apolitical, if not anti-revolutionary and conservative, and consider how this is related to the 'political demand' made of Derrida's work – the demand that he express his politics in the conventional grammars of political philosophy.

In chapter four I will critically analyse the debate around Homi K. Bhabha's (post)colonial intellectual production, but particularly his appropriation and reading of the work of Frantz Fanon. I will here proceed through the analysis of Bhabha's essay "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative". The latter essay offers a useful point of entry into the debate. This is because it encapsulates a number of the concepts Bhabha has already theorised elsewhere. Once again, Benita Parry's attack in "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse" will be important not only for its critique of Bhabha's appropriation of Fanon, but also its brief delineation of her own reading of Fanon's work. However, given that I already explore some of the limitations of Parry's position on native agency and resistance in my discussion of her attack on Spivak, I here explore her (revised) position on Fanon and the anti-colonialist tradition in "Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism" (1994).

Once again, my analysis of this debate aims to test the central question of my thesis. That is, what I will explore here is the extent to which Bhabha's deconstructive practices are flexible in addressing both the stereotypes of the politico-institutional discourse of colonialism, and also the articulations of anti-colonialist discourse. I will tender my own brief account of Fanon's thought on politics, native agency and resistance. It is my hope that this will highlight some of the possible misunderstandings in both Parry and Bhabha's readings of Fanon. In this chapter, I clarify the major politico-theoretical insight or strategy that a reading of Fanon's work opens for any conception of an intellectual counter-hegemonic practice. Also, I here briefly engage with Robert Young's "Subjectivity and History: Derrida in Algeria", in which Young argues for a rereading of Derrida's intellectual production (and some of the articulations of what came to be known as "poststructuralist theory") as a possible enunciation of postcolonial theory.

This thesis is concerned to argue that the presuppositions and questions raised in the debates under discussion are important for postcolonial theory. As it should be clear from the altogether tendentious title I have given to my study, I believe that the importance of re-reading the debates – with the care, rigour and patience that the strategy of close analysis perhaps opens – lies precisely in the residual or remainder expressed by and in the antagonism and agonism of the debates. I believe that the misreadings or what I denote as (mis)takings call for the debates to be reread. This remainder – what I call the “non-present perhaps” – is both interstitial and futural, as it attempts to leave open the movement of another knowledge or practice between (and yet always never quite arriving) the sometimes seemingly disparate standpoints of the participants to the debates. The title of my thesis already exhorts the need for the dynamics, experiences and temporalities of (post)coloniality to be understood as heterogeneous, so that its theorisation will not be narrowly explanatory. That is, there is a need for postcolonial critics to remain aware that, for instance, Fanon’s theorisation of the Negro’s alienation in Martinique or his interrogation of decolonisation in Algeria, and Spivak’s articulation of ‘*sati*’ as a particular instance of subalternity, should not be uncritically appropriated to other contexts.

Thus in my conclusion I will read the South African literary-cultural appropriation of postcolonial theory within the purview of the previous metropolitan debates in order to investigate the relays traced by this particular appropriation as both a possible retrospective lesson for the previous debates and an introspective lesson for the South African case. That is, I will explore in a condensed way the significance of the metropolitan debates for the South African appropriation of postcolonial theory and the counter-significance of the South African debate for the former. Thus I will investigate the ways the debate on the South African appropriation of postcolonial theory possibly rehearses some of the concerns of the previous debates. Given that the exchange between Laura Chrisman and Robert Young takes place some five years after the South African debate, this signals that the debates *do* need to be reread. When we consider that the South African debate occurs within its own distinctive milieu, the consequences of that rehearsal emerge differently. I will here explore the particular takes on postcolonial

theory that David Attwell, Leon de Kock and Annamaria Carusi attempted to install onto the South African literary-cultural discursive agenda in the early 1990s. So too will I examine Nicholas Visser and Kelwyn Sole's critiques of this appropriation. The importance of this period for the South African calendar cannot be underestimated. It was during this space of transition that the conditions of possibility for South Africa's negotiated settlement were officially sketched out – the final programme for the dismantling of the apartheid state and the constitution of a new republic where the fruits of citizenship were opened to all South Africans. In short, a future where the colonial past will finally be transcended.

We shall see that the four major concerns I identify in the South African debate reiterate some of those I discuss in the earlier debates. The first of these has to do with the applicability of the term postcolonial or a notion of postcoloniality for the South African experience. This preoccupation questions the appositeness of holding South Africa to be an exemplary instance of postcoloniality. I then discuss the concern that the demonstrations or readings of a deconstructive postcolonial theory lead to the critical disablement of the investigating intellectual. The latter concern is related to both the question of the political implications of postcolonial theory in South Africa, and the question of the focus on race and cultural difference within that appropriation. Finally, I speculate on some of the contradictions of the transition to democracy that have manifested themselves in contemporary South Africa. The latter will not be an attempt to dispute the necessity and the achievement of the constitutional settlement in South Africa, but rather an attempt to highlight some of the urgent questions that have yet to be answered in the country. Nor will I claim the originality of foregrounding the contradictions of the South African democratic project. Rather, I will be attempting to highlight some possible sites of intervention and intellectual practice for postcolonial theory in South Africa. An intellectual practice that I will argue can learn from the (mis)takes within the debates on postcolonial theory. Indeed, this is what I try to suggest in the title to my thesis.

**Subaltern Hearings: Postcolonial Intellectual
Positionality and the Problematics of Representation**

The prolific and fragmentary intellectual production of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is perhaps one of the most significant contributions to postcolonial theory and analysis. Her dense and sometimes cryptic writing style, together with the complexity of its inflection with 'high' theory, has meant however that her work is some of the most challenging in the field. This complexity has resulted in the regrettable tendency to arrive at what are often uncritical summations of her work. My own investigation will largely proceed through the strategy of close textual analysis of the two major texts informing what came to be known as the Spivak/Parry debate. That is, Spivak's provocative essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and Benita Parry's attack on her position in "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse". This chapter will however not restrict itself to the moment of the debate's emergence.

After undertaking a close reading of Spivak's essay, I will analyse Parry's own lengthy essay, inasmuch as her criticisms relate to Spivak. I will however have recourse to Parry's other arguments – on Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha and Abdul JanMohamed – insofar as these inform her general complaints against Spivak's work. I will explore what seems to be a rehearsal of the debate almost a decade later, in the encounter between Laura Chrisman and Robert Young in an issue of *Textual Practice* (1997). I will investigate how the latter encounter is an exemplary repetition of some of the terms of the debate between Spivak and Parry. Then I will argue that the encounter highlights a particular misreading or (mis)taking of Spivak's insistence that it is imperative for the intellectual to mark his/her political positionality as investigating subject. Various drawing from other contributions to the debate, I will then expose the value and limitations of both Parry and Spivak's arguments – largely focusing on questions of subalternity, 'native' agency/resistance and political positionality. In closing my discussion of the debate, I will signal at one of the major issues informing the debate: namely, the specific relations between deconstructive practices and the questions of politics, pragmatics and ethics – especially for the analysis or theorising of (post)colonial contexts.

After briefly setting out the broad concerns of her paper, it comes as no surprise that Spivak should invoke her own positionality. She rhetorically muses that whatever “power” her meditations command is perhaps “earned by a politically interested refusal to push to the limit the founding presuppositions of [her] desires, as far as they are within [her] grasp” (1988:271). This precarious invocation of her positionality – which she attempts to foreground throughout her paper – is levied to emphasise what she sees as the vacuity associated with much of the calling into question of the place of the researcher which surrounded critiques of subjective sovereignty at the time. As will become evident later, this is precisely one of the directions that the Chrisman/Young exchange erringly takes. Spivak then asserts that most radical criticism produced in the West effectively conserves “the subject of the West, or the West as Subject” (1988:271). In order to demonstrate how this “concealed” Subject is precisely inaugurated by the critique of the sovereign subject – as in the theorisation of pluralized “subject-effects” – she closely reads a text by two of its most influential practitioners: “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze”. She notes that the conversation highlights the salient

contributions of French poststructuralist theory: first, that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive – a persistent critique is needed; and second, that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other. (272)

Despite these contributions, according to Spivak, Foucault and Deleuze are methodical in their elision of the question of ideology and their own roles as functionaries in “intellectual and economic history” (272)¹. Although primarily concerned with the critique of the sovereign subject, Spivak notes that their exchange coheres by signalling “two monolithic and anonymous subjects-in-revolution: ‘A Maoist’ and ‘the workers’”

¹ It should be noted that Foucault does (once) signal at the complicities of intellectual production with contemporary power relations: “Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power – the idea of their responsibility for ‘consciousness’ and discourse forms part of the system” (1977:207). However, it is this very idea of limited responsibility – I would say limited liability – that leads Foucault and Deleuze to pronounce the end of representation. My assertion of course already follows the track of Spivak’s analysis.

(272). For Spivak, the respective appeals to these latter subjects effectively renders “Asia” transparent and ignores the international division of labour. She thus asserts that the connection to the workers’ struggle is located in a totalised anarchistic valorisation of “*any* desire destructive of *any* power” (272).

Given the assertion that the connection to the workers’ struggle is merely located in desire, Spivak then illustrates the limitations of their alternative revision of the psychoanalytic definition of desire. Their revised definition in no way alters the particularity of “the desiring subject (or leftover subject-effect) that attaches to specific instances of desire or to production of the desiring machine” (273). For Spivak, Deleuze and Guattari are unable to articulate a “theory of interests” because of their inattention to the significance of ideology and failure to attend to “the relations between desire, power and subjectivity” (273). Drawing on Althusser’s attempt to schematise the dynamics of an “immense institutional heterogeneity”, she asserts that Foucault – and in a similar manner, Deleuze and Guattari – comes close to this in his consideration of “the pervasive heterogeneity of power” (1988:274).

However, Spivak argues that Foucault’s commitment to “genealogical” analysis does not allow him to “admit that a developed theory of ideology recognizes its own material production in institutionality, as well as in the ‘effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge’” (274). In ignoring the apprehension of the textuality of ideology, Spivak contends that Foucault and Deleuze can only theorise a mechanical relation between desire and interest. Their “orthodox” schema is thus for her a “parasubjective matrix, cross-hatched with heterogeneity” – the result of conceptualising an “undifferentiated desire as agent” (274), whose effects are created by the elusive intervention of power. For Spivak, this singular opposition of desire to “being deceived” is a rehearsal of the sort of thinking which defines ideology as mere “false consciousness” (274). Thus, “in the name of desire, [Foucault and Deleuze] reintroduce the undivided subject into the discourse of power ... [and reinscribe] the Subject of Europe” (1988:274).

Spivak reemphasises that the negation of the role of ideology in reproducing relations within “socialized capital” necessarily valorises the “oppressed as subject” – through essentialising the materiality of the experiential – and forecloses the necessary though “difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production” (1988:275). For Spivak, Deleuze’s pronouncement about the end of signification – and thus the signifier “representation” – within theoretical production, is the mark of an intellectual anxiety that seeks to prove the equivalence of intellectual and manual labour. Deleuze’s latter articulation arises from the problematic conflation of the “irreducibly discontinuous” (275) double inscription within the term and concept of representation. For Spivak, submerged within this move is an untenable “subject-privileging” of the intellectual as speaking-agent over subjects (or remnant subject-effects) whom Deleuze and Foucault define as those who “act and struggle”. That is, Deleuze and Foucault effectively define the latter as unspeaking automatons. Moreover, she asserts that this highlights an attempt to elide the presence of the intellectual at the very site of inscribing a “list of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns” (275) – a move that Spivak argues “leads to an essentialist, utopian politics” (1988:276).

Spivak then precisely delineates her understanding of the textuality of the double inscription of representation. “*Vertretung* [is] representation in the political context. Representation in the economic context is *Darstellung*, the philosophical concept of representation as staging or, indeed, signification” (1988:278). She garners this understanding of the two senses of representation – which she signals by hyphenating the second instance – from an extensive reading of a passage in Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. This is done in order to suggest that an even more radical decentring of the subject is implicit in Marx, than in the contemporary critiques of the sovereign subject articulated by Deleuze and Foucault:

Not only does [Marx’s] model of social indirection ... imply a critique of the subject as *individual* agent but a critique even of the subjectivity of a *collective* agency... [And], the event of representation as *Vertretung* (in the constellation of rhetoric-as-persuasion) behaves like a *Darstellung* (or rhetoric-as-trope), taking

its place in the gap between the formation of a (descriptive) class and the nonformation of a (transformative) class. (1988:277)

For Spivak, the non-articulation of “a theory of exploitation as the extraction (production), appropriation, and realization of (surplus) value as *representation of labor power*, capitalist exploitation must [in Foucault and Deleuze] be seen as a variety of domination (the mechanics of power as such)” (1988:279). In a different register – though reiterating an earlier call for the need of a developed theory of ideology – Spivak argues the “relationship between global capitalism (exploitation in economics) and nation-state alliances (domination in geopolitics) is so macrological that it cannot account for the micrological texture of power” (1988:279). A developed theory of ideology would precisely open up the space of interrogation by the intellectual concerned to intervene within that micrological dissimulation.

As such, Spivak calls for a “radical practice” within intellectual production that would attend to the “double session” of representation. Given the discursive authority of the ‘intellectual as investigating subject’, this would minimally suggest vigilance, at the very site of intellectual articulation, and attention to any reconstitution of the ‘oppressed as subject’. Although Spivak is obliged to note the subterfuge in Marx’s appeal to the binary opposition nature/culture, she argues that his suspending of the realm of “class practice on a second level of abstraction” effectively keeps open Kant and Hegel’s various “critique[s] of the individual subject as agent” (1988:279). As such, “in the context of poststructuralist claims to critical practice”, she finds Marx’s project seemingly “more recuperable than the clandestine restoration of subjective essentialism” (279). To Edward Said’s critique of power in Foucault as a thoroughly hegemonic and “mystificatory category”, Spivak adds the notion of the clandestine “subject of power and desire” evidenced by the assumed transparency of the intellectual, which she argues arises from the denegation of “the critic’s institutional responsibility”. Hence Spivak’s suggestion that in light of

the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self's shadow, a possibility of political practice for the intellectual would be to put the economic "under erasure", to see the economic factor as irreducible as it reinscribes the social text, even as it is erased, however imperfectly, when it claims to be the final determinant or the transcendental signified. (1988:280)

Spivak is not here asserting that the possibility of a counter-hegemonic intellectual practice emerges from the elision of the economic domain. If I interpret her correctly, she is here attempting to highlight the foreclosures entailed by an intellectual practice that essentialises the economic as the final horizon of interpretation. Such determinism resonates with assumptions about the self-evidence of 'the material', which would in the final analysis foreclose the apprehension of the heterogeneity of the Other through other relays of difference.

In the next section Spivak explores this "persistent constitution of the Other as the Self's shadow", the clearest example being for her the "remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other ... [An] asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity" (1988:281). She questions the normativity of Foucault's monofocal location of epistemic violence in the redefinition of psychosis at the end of the European eighteenth century; it does not acknowledge the possibility that the project of "epistemic overhaul" included the colonies. Spivak leverages a "schematic summary of the epistemic violence of the codification of Hindu Law" (281), in order to give credence to her final analysis of widow-sacrifice. She briefly motivates her choice of Indian material, yet cautions that the "Indian case cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures, and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self" (1988:281). This caution is precisely for intellectuals to avoid the easy, uncritical appropriation of her investigation of the violent function of the colonial and imperial episteme within the particularities of the Indian context; to remain aware, as it were, of the differential histories of colonial experience.

She exposes how, at the end of the eighteenth century, Hindu law, “operated in terms of four texts that ‘staged’ a four-part episteme defined by the subject’s use of memory: *sruti* (the heard), *smriti* (the remembered), *sastra* (the learned-from-another), and *vyavahara* (the performed-in-exchange)” (1988:281). Spivak notes how the possible discontinuity of origin between the heard and the remembered presented a problem in the discourse and application of Hindu law. This was due to the uncertainty of legal theorists and practitioners at the time as to whether the structure *described* the corpus, or *prescribed* four ways of settling a dispute. She thus offers this narrative of (bifurcated) codification of “the polymorphous structure of legal performance” (1988:281) as an example of epistemic violence. Given the currency of the story of Indian education, Spivak explores the dynamics of epistemic violence manifested in its narrative:

The education of colonial subjects compliments their production in law. One effect of establishing a version of the British system was the development of an uneasy separation between disciplinary formation in Sanskrit studies and the native, now alternative, tradition of Sanskrit “high culture”. Within the former, cultural explanations generated by authoritative scholars matched the epistemic violence of the legal project. (1988:282)

Spivak then traces the Orientalism that coheres to those scholars, and comments that the piecemeal effect of their authority succeeded in establishing a version of history in which the intentions (and consequent legitimation) of the codifying British were seen as identical to those of the Brahmans. These “authorities” are not the Other as Subject that she earlier affirmed are inaccessible to intellectuals like Foucault and Deleuze; but rather, Spivak is “thinking of the general nonspecialist, nonacademic population across the class spectrum, for whom the epistemic operates its silent programming function” (1988:282-83). In response to Foucault and Deleuze’s pronouncement that the oppressed, if given the chance, (by the beneficent – though transparent – intellectual) en route to “solidarity

through alliance politics ... *can speak and know their conditions*"², she poses the provocative question that is her paper's title:

On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?* (1988:283)

The term and concept of subalternity has a history, and it is for this reason that Spivak proceeds to delineate its functioning within her own thinking.

Spivak acknowledges – and notes the limitations of – Gramsci's work on "subaltern classes" as a contribution to the "class-position/class-consciousness argument". For her, Gramsci's account of the phased development of the subaltern is ruptured when "his cultural macrology is operated, however remotely, by the epistemic interference with legal and disciplinary definitions accompanying the imperialist project" (1988:283). Spivak then analyses the work of the "Subaltern Studies" group, whose project is to re-present (*darstellen*) "Indian historiography from the perspectives of the discontinuous chain of peasant insurgencies during the colonial occupation" (1988:283); thus the group's methodology insists that they ask whether or not the subaltern can speak. Spivak cannot entirely concur with Ranajit Guha's "insistence on [the] determinate vigor and full autonomy" (1988:284) of subaltern consciousness. She identifies in Guha's construction of a definition of "the people" as "identity-in-differential" – this is done in order to assuage charges of essentialism – a program that self-professedly investigates and measures the third of the four groups, who "*ideally speaking*, [belonged] to the category of people or subaltern classes" (1988:284). This slippage, within the text of the Subaltern Studies group, occurs "because of the violence of imperial epistemic, social, and disciplinary inscription" and, as such, the group's "text articulates the difficult task of rewriting its own conditions of impossibility as the conditions of possibility" (1988:285).

² Here is an instance of this in the Foucault/Deleuze conversation: "In engaging in a struggle that concerns their own interests, whose objectives *they clearly understand* and whose methods *only they can determine*, they enter into a revolutionary process" (1977:216, my emphasis).

Nonetheless, Spivak does concede that the group's recognition of the discontinuity between interest and action in the third group of their taxonomy, and Guha's articulation of "interest in terms of the social rather than the libidinal" is – in coming closer to Marx – more salutary than Deleuze's pronouncement on the matter. She briefly explores Ajit K. Chaudhury's critique of Guha's historiography and concludes that Chaudhury's "variety of 'internationalist' Marxism", Foucault and Deleuze, and the Subaltern Studies group are "united in the assumption that there *is* a pure form of consciousness" (1988:286). For Spivak, what is missing in each of the latter is a "developed theory of ideology". Reading Pierre Macherey's formula for the interpretation of ideology in literary texts within a differential register, Spivak affirms "something like a collective ideological *refusal* can be diagnosed for the codifying practice of imperialism", which – unlike the analysis of literary texts – certainly requires the task of "measuring silences" (1988:286). Macherey's "notion of what the [literary] work *cannot* say becomes important" when the concomitant question of subaltern consciousness is considered. It is here that Spivak more extensively rearticulates her notion of a postcolonial intellectual radical practice:

In the semioses of the social text, elaborations of insurgency stand in the place of "the utterance". The sender – "the peasant" – is marked only as a pointer to an irretrievable consciousness ... The historian, transforming "insurgency" into "text for knowledge," is only one "receiver" of any collectively intended social act. With no possibility for nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her consciousness ... so that the elaboration of insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness, does not freeze into an "object of investigation", or, worse yet, a model for imitation. "The subject" implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups. The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. In this they are a paradigm of the intellectuals. (1988:287)

For an entry into the discussion of the subaltern as female, Spivak comments on the similar engagements with the question of the feminine between both the deconstructive interrogation and (certain strands of) feminist critique, and Subaltern historiography. Unlike the deconstructive demonstration of this question, which already fits into a “phallogocentric tradition” (1988:287) that minimally predicates the figure of “woman” as indeterminate – a figuration whose elisions, marginalisations and interests has been traced by feminist criticism – Subaltern historiography experiences the impossibility of its scene of writing. That is, the latter must realise that “both as object of colonial historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (1988:287). Spivak motivates that the contemporary international division of labour is a spatial and temporal displacement of the text of nineteenth-century territorial imperialism. The maintenance of the international division of labour is achieved through the withholding of consumerism in comprador countries and, in the case of women, is exacerbated by patriarchal social relations: “On the other side of the international division of labor, the subject of exploitation cannot speak and know the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making a space for her to speak is achieved” (1988:288). Thus if intellectuals exercise their institutional responsibility it becomes clear that to confront the heterogeneous Other “is not to represent (*vertreten*) them but [for intellectuals] to learn to represent (*darstellen*) [themselves]” (1988:288-89).

In returning to the conversation between Foucault and Deleuze, Spivak comments on the limitations of their articulation of a resistance program based on alliance politics. For Spivak, such a program is “confined to the third-world groups that are directly accessible to the First World” (1988:289). As a consequence of Foucault’s methodological presupposition of a “Subject-of-power”, she asserts that he is unable to acknowledge the ‘First World-ist’ geopolitical specificity of his invocation of “geographical discontinuity”. However, his inability (or refusal?) to see contemporary “geographical discontinuity” as a displacement of an earlier territorial imperialism – a move that Spivak

suggests purchases a hermetic version of the West – discounts “its production in the imperialist project” (1988:291). Such foreclosures within Foucault’s project would minimally necessitate the rethinking of the assumptions informing the appropriation of his work by all manner of academic and intellectual practitioners.

Consequently, Spivak assesses the appropriation of French intellectual theory and criticism within the U.S. academy in general: “Foucault deals with real history, real politics, and real social problems; Derrida is inaccessible, esoteric, and textualist” (1988:291). Spivak argues the latter is the general pattern of the contrasting views about Foucault and Derrida held by a number of Anglo-American critics and intellectuals. To demonstrate the continuing usefulness of Derrida, Spivak considers a chapter in *Of Grammatology*, entitled “Of Grammatology as a Positive Science”. Here Derrida offers a program for the “benevolent *Western* intellectual”: “The question is how to keep the ethnocentric Subject from establishing itself by selectively defining an Other” (1988:292). The importance of this question for my thesis cannot be underestimated.

Although Derrida specifically proffers a program for the “benevolent *Western* intellectual”, his demonstration is particularly useful when taken with Spivak’s call for the institutional responsibility of postcolonial intellectuals – who are, as she has asserted, a paradigmatic instance of the intellectual as such. To follow Derrida and Spivak here means to begin to fashion an intellectual practice that would be vigilant before any constructions of an “ethnocentric Subject”. For postcolonial intellectuals, who are particularly concerned to rearticulate a differential figuration of the Third World – which would precisely no longer be figured as Third World – this would also mean to be critical of any constitution of the Other in a program of anti-ethnocentric ethnocentrism. It is a question, no doubt, of the ‘political positionality’ of the postcolonial intellectual as investigating subject – nothing less than a question of interrogating the postcolonial intellectual’s own discursive authority. For Spivak, it is precisely Derrida’s interrogation of “the European intellectual’s ethnocentric impulse” (1988:292) that begins to suggest an intellectual practice that would not efface the place and interest of the intellectual as investigating subject.

Spivak then notes Derrida's comments on the convergent problems faced by empirical investigation and "grammatological" knowledge, and thus his assertion of an obligation to proceed through examples. As such, his examples "come from the appropriate ideological self-justification of an imperialist project": the three kinds of "prejudices" operating in seventeenth-century European histories of writing. That is, the "theological prejudice," the "Chinese prejudice," and the "hieroglyphist prejudice" (1988:292). After exposing the self-referential collusion of these three prejudices, as illustrated by Derrida, she argues that the efficacy of the grammatological project, is evidenced in Derrida's concession of

the vulnerability of his own desire to conserve something that is, paradoxically, both ineffable and nontranscendental. In critiquing the production of the colonial subject, this ineffable, nontranscendental ("historical") place is cathected by the subaltern subject. Derrida ... [shows] again that the project of grammatology ... is not just a critique of presence but an awareness of the itinerary of the discourse of presence in one's *own* critique, a vigilance precisely against too great a claim for transparency. (1988:293)

Although she complains that the program of the constitution of the Other can be more fruitfully traced in "the imperialist constitution of the colonial subject than in repeated incursions into psychoanalysis or the 'figure' of woman", for Spivak, Derrida's work is exceedingly useful for its articulation of "the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other". Not completely abandoning Foucault, she adds that he remains useful in his analysis of "the mechanics of disciplinarization and institutionalization, the constitution, as it were, of the colonizer" (1988:294). Despite the usefulness of Foucault's project, Spivak once again reiterates the danger posed by his inattention to the function of intellectuals as investigating subjects.

In the final section of her essay Spivak cautions intellectuals to watch out for the persistent "recognition of the Other by assimilation" (1988:294) – especially in the case

of the poor-black-female subaltern as subject. For Spivak, the transposition of a chromatic identity politics “from the first-world context into the postcolonial” loses its persuasive significance: “The necessary stratification of colonial subject-constitution in the first phase of capitalist imperialism makes ‘color’ useless as an emancipatory signifier” (1988:294). For Spivak, this does not foreclose “antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World” (1988:295). Rather, what needs to be interrogated are the dangers implicit in the long run consequence of such anti-sexist work. Effectively sustained by “the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject ... [it] will cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization” (1988:295). Despite the difficulty of the question of the subaltern woman’s consciousness, the postcolonial intellectual, in seeking to learn to speak to ‘her’, needs to methodically “unlearn” female privilege – a process that involves “the persistent critique of postcolonial discourse ... and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized” (1988:295). For Spivak, this would be as important for feminist criticism(s) as it would be for postcolonial critics in general, although perhaps more so for the former, given the interest to interrogate the sites of marginalised and elided female subjectivity or subject effects.

Spivak argues against Jonathan Culler’s suggestion that the result of the insistence on the heterogeneity of subaltern woman consciousness and experience is to produce an empty difference based on essentialising and privileging the “concrete experience” of a particular sexual identity. For Spivak, the feminist project as envisaged by the likes of Culler – which she acknowledges was a “necessary stage” in the development of feminist criticism – often positions itself as a critique of “positivism”, which it marks as equivalent to “essentialism”; all of which is done in the name of “theory” (1988:295). This construction of a binary opposition between positivism/essentialism and “theory”, not only represses the “ambiguous complicity between essentialism and critiques of positivism ... [but] also errs in implying that positivism is not a theory. [It is a] move [that] allows the emergence of a proper name, a positive essence, Theory” (1988:296).

Such moves repeat the elision of the question of the investigator's position. In order to confront the question of the consciousness of the female as subaltern, Spivak reinscribes the problem in a sentence – “White men are saving brown women from brown men” – and transforms the latter into the object of investigation. With this sentence she draws an analogy “between the ideological victimization of a Freud and the positionality of the postcolonial intellectual as investigating subject” (1988:296). That is, Spivak's sentence is not dissimilar to Freud's construction of the sentence, “A child is being beaten”, from whose “general methodological aura” (1988:297) she is attempting to borrow an investigative strategy. She thus considers the feminist criticism of Freud's investigation of his own sentence to be invaluable for an understanding of challenges faced by her own investigation.

Spivak acknowledges Sarah Kofman's contribution to the critical understanding of the double-entendre involved in Freud's use of women as scapegoat: it is a “reaction-formation” to an originary and persistent “desire to give the hysteric a voice, to transform her into the *subject* of hysteria” (1988:296). Spivak thus argues:

[T]he masculine-imperialist ideological formation that shaped that desire into “the daughter's seduction” is part of the same formation that constructs the monolithic “third-world woman”. As a postcolonial intellectual, I am influenced by that formation as well ... Thus, when confronted with the questions, Can the subaltern speak? and Can the subaltern (as woman) speak?, our efforts to give the subaltern a voice in history will be doubly open to the dangers run by Freud's discourse. (1988:296)

That is, if the politics of Freud's attempt to recover the voice of the hysteric into something other than its construction within phallogentric or ‘patriloical’ rationality ends up precisely cohering to a construction of the “*subject* of hysteria” as woman, then Spivak's desirous attempt to recover the historical consciousness of the subaltern woman at the interstices of “masculine-imperialist ideology” is in danger of recognising the ‘subject of subalternity’ as woman by assimilation to the doubly enunciated (or forked

tongue?) of “masculine-imperial ideology”. For Spivak, recognising these dangers should not impose closure – something like the subject of the subaltern female as taboo – on intellectual practice. Spivak proceeds to apply something similar to Freud’s strategy on “the Marxist narrative to explain the ideological dissimulation of imperialist political economy and outline a history of repression that produces a sentence like the one [she sketches]” (1988:297). Although, surprisingly, Spivak’s essay is largely an examination of subalternity through a discussion of the question of “widow self-immolation”, the main debate that the essay initiated has not turned on this question as such. The occlusion of this question from the debate would require analysis whose texture lies outside the bounds of my thesis. For this reason, what follows will be a summary of Spivak’s interesting and complex discussion of the history of widow self-immolation. This is because it illustrates the kind of deconstructive reading Spivak advocates, and it is fastened upon in Parry’s critique.

Spivak explores the double origin of this history in the British abolition of widow sacrifice in 1829 and the classical and Vedic texts of Hindu India. The former is generally understood to be a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men”, whilst the latter, in an “Indian nativist” counterargument, asserts that “The women actually wanted to die” (1988:297). These sentences, she argues, are conjoined and successfully slur over any evidence of the “women’s voice-consciousness”. On the one hand, the British abolition of widow sacrifice was in deference to the “civilising” mission or the project to found a “good society” within the colony. On the other hand, “*sati*” was cathected by the “native ‘colonial subject’” (1988:298) seeking a strategy – as proof of conformity to a threatened native custom/law/way-of-life – against acculturating to the British.

For Spivak, although the first historical origin of her sentence might be lost in the Marxist explanation of the “history of humankind as work” and “narrative of modes of production” within both the colony and the colonising country, she holds that “to ignore the subaltern today is, willy-nilly, to continue the imperialist project” (1988:298). To approach the question of an ideological shift from “Britain” to “Hinduism”, she turns her

attention to what she calls the “archaic origin” of her sentence, “the *Rg-Veda* and the *Dharmasāstra*” (297). Within the categories of sanctioned suicides in the latter text, widow self-immolation is acceptable only as the dissolving of “the proper name of suicide through the destruction of her proper self ... on a dead spouse’s pyre” (1988:300). Thus within this text, Spivak suggests that widow self-immolation is inscribed as (non)suicide.

Exploring the early debate by learned Brahmins on “the doctrinal appropriateness of *sati* as of sanctioned suicides in sacred places in general”, Spivak finds that “the woman as widow, by the general law of sacred doctrine ... effectively defines the woman as the object of *one* husband ... The self-immolation of the widow thereby becomes the extreme case of the general law rather than an exception to it” (1988:302-03). For Spivak, the irony in locating woman’s freewill in the act of *sati* is that the latter act possesses agency in the weak sense. That is, the husband’s pyre is the (only?) site where the female body can rescind its participation in *samsara* (the perpetual cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth). Spivak then argues that foregrounding the obviously violent materiality of *sati* hides the “broader question of the constitution of the sexed subject” and thus occludes the “task of recovering a (sexually) subaltern subject [which] is lost in an institutional textuality at the archaic origin” (1988:303).

Spivak briefly explores what she sees as a “peculiar and transparent misreading [of *sati*] at the very place of [its] sanction” in the *Rg-Veda*, by Raghunandana, a late fifteenth/sixteenth-century Indian legalist who is taken to be “the greatest authority” (1988:304) on the passages in the sacred texts that supposedly sanction *sati*. She then discloses that the other historical origin of “*sati* or *suttee* as the proper name of the rite of widow self-immolation commemorates a grammatical error on the part of the British ... The word in the various Indian languages is ‘the burning of the *sati*’ or the good wife” (305). Thus the British abolition of widow self-immolation – in trying to save brown women – imposed upon them “a greater ideological constriction by absolutely identifying, *within discursive practice*, good-wifeness with self-immolation on the husband’s pyre” (305). The violence of the episteme here operates to displace the figure

of the “third-world woman”, who is “caught between tradition and modernization”, “between patriarchy and imperialism” (1988:306). This however, as Spivak has continually reiterated, does not mean that the task of recovering the female subaltern subject is somehow obviated:

The case of *suttee* as exemplum of the woman-in-imperialism would challenge and deconstruct this opposition between subject (law) and object-of-knowledge (repression) and mark the place of “disappearance” with something other than silence and nonexistence, a violent aporia between subject and object status. (1988:306)

Finally, she offers that “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak”, and (following Derrida’s insistence on the covalence between grammatical knowledge and empirical knowledge) proceeds to interrogate the exemplary suicide of Bhuvanewari Bhaduri. This is done in order to show that “individual examples of this sort are tragic failures as *models* of interventionist practice” (1988:307). However, this does not forestall the task of the “non-self-abdicating” intellectual, who should apprehend these *models* as “objects of discourse analysis” and possibly “illuminate a section of the social text” (307). She retrieves a possible (mis)reading of Bhuvanewari’s suicide as “an unemphatic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting of the social text of *sati*-suicide as much as the hegemonic account of the blazing, fighting, familial Durga” (308). Between these is marked the place of “disappearance” of Bhuvanewari through epistemic violence. In the last, Spivak discloses the familial happenstance of her knowledge of Bhuvanewari case and that initial investigation revealed that that her suicide might very well have been prompted by an “illicit love affair” (1988:308).

At this point, I wish to note that I am here using the original version of Spivak’s essay as it appeared in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), and not the revised version, as it appears in Spivak’s *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). However, as I will be using Parry’s revised edition of “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, as it appear in *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (2004), I

should note the updating of Spivak's argument in the later publication of her essay. Aside from minimal stylistic rewriting of some of her essay, Parry makes no substantial changes to the revised edition. She admits to this much in the introduction to her book, "Beginnings, Affiliations, Disavowals" (2004) – a point to which I will return to later. The first clear revision in Spivak's essay is the critical historicising and explanatory impulse evident in the typographical intrusion of footnotes that crowd out the discussion in the essay proper. There are two particularly interesting instances of this impulse that are related to my discussion.

The first goes to my earlier assertion that the debate I analyse here does not take into account Spivak's interrogation of the text of *sati*. As can be seen from the page long footnote Spivak dedicates to a discussion of Lata Mani's "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India", a somewhat different account of "how the 'reality' of widow-sacrificing was constituted or 'textualized' during the colonial period" (Spivak, 1999:285). Clearly, for Spivak this particular debate on *sati* is important given that she is at pains to respond to Mani's reading and criticism. The second more interesting instance is Spivak's response – strangely referring to herself in the footnote in the third person – to how the notion of subalternity has been sometimes appropriated as a catch-all category for marginality, experiences of oppression, or even "inferiority" (1999:271)³. Nonetheless, the substance of Spivak's argument remains *largely* unchanged. What has changed in revised book version is Spivak's attempt to lighten the polemically charged texture of the initial essay. However, Spivak does *seem* to accept some of the criticism in the closing remarks to her essay – criticism that I now turn to in the form of Parry's attack on Spivak's work.

I will draw on Parry's criticisms of Homi Bhabha, her (partial) approval of Abdul JanMohamed, and her advocacy of the work of Frantz Fanon only inasmuch as they highlight Parry's specific criticisms of Spivak. This is because I wish to (largely) suspend that discussion until my own consideration (in chapter four) of critical engagements with

³ See also, the uncontrolled vehemence of Spivak's discussion of the response (discussed in my conclusion) to "Can the Subaltern Speak?" some six years after the initial debate, in her interview with Leon de Kock (1992:44-47).

liberation theory and Fanon. Parry is critical of what she saw at the time as a tendency in contemporary dissident criticism “to disown as necessarily less subversive of the established order, work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciated heterodoxies” (2004:13). Consequently, Parry begins with the reminder, that contrary to how some critics constitute the study and critique of colonialism, Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism, though different in strategy, was in no way ordinary but rather “fed into and augmented colonial discourse analysis”. For Parry, “the construction of a text disrupting imperialism’s authorized version was begun long ago within the political and intellectual cultures of colonial liberation movements” (2004:13) and she considers the work of Frantz Fanon in the 1950s of singular importance to this project. Hence, she is concerned to reread and reassess the contributions of the anti-colonialist/liberationist tradition.

For Parry, invocations of Fanon by critics producing a critique of colonialism do not engage with his work on its own terms. That is, Parry contends these invocations do not necessarily validate Fanon’s problematic, which serviced “an epistemology of dialectical process, replete with notion of alienation, existential freedom and authentic human experience; nor [do they] invariably read the texts as discourses of emancipation” (2004:13). For Parry, invocations of Fanon’s work by critics “concerned with deconstructing the texts of colonialism” (14) view his intervention as unsatisfactory inasmuch as his strategy is seen to constitute a reverse discourse that replicates and therefore reinstalls the semantic oppositions “devised by the dominant centre to exclude and act against the categorized” (14). Parry finds highly questionable the politics of (deconstructive) projects – here naming the principals as Spivak and Bhabha – which, she argues, rescind the binary opposition coloniser/colonised. This is because they rewrite “the permanently embattled colonial situation constructed by anti-colonialist theory, [installing] either a silent place laid waste by imperialism’s epistemic violence, or an agonistic space within which unequally placed contestants negotiate an imbalance of power” (2004:14):

What then is the politics, on the one hand, of a criticism that sets out to identify both the dominant and oppositional ideologies embedded in texts as expressions, transformations and functions of an extra-linguistic situation, and on the other, of textual paradigms where discourse is privileged as the primary form of social praxis and which seek to expose the making, operation and effects of ideology by stirring up and dispersing the sedimented meanings dormant in texts? (2004:17)

Briefly acknowledging the signal contribution of colonial discourse analysis as the shifting of “the discussion away from the colonialist text as an authentic portrayal of reality, to the system of ideological representation which such writing produced” (2004:17), Parry notes too that this discourse has produced its own “theoretical difficulties”. She argues that one such problem is that the model of colonial discourse turns on a prodigious concern with “processes of othering” which it detaches from “the more extensive and multivalent discursive practices of the imperial project” (2004:18). As such, Parry contends that the re-visioning of the history of colonialism should not be in deference to theory. Where theoretical re-visioning repudiates the authority of the official western archive and its methods, “rejects a Marxist version charged with ‘reducing out imperialism-as-history’, and distances itself from liberationist histories accused of weaving a seamless narrative, but does not produce its own account of change, discontinuity, differential periods and particular social conflicts, there is a danger of distinctive moments being homogenized” (18).

The consequence of this homogenization is that the specificity of colonialism as a “mode of the imperial project’s many and mutable states ... is treated as identical with all its variable forms” (2004:18). For Parry, this is evident both in the elisions of Bhabha’s “engagement with the civil discourse of England’s liberal conservative imperialist culture”, and, she argues, Spivak’s position that the “‘axiomatrics of imperialism’ are an unspecified ‘territorial and subject constituting project’” (2004:18). She argues these positions are permutable promulgations of the cultural hegemony of Occidental norms and values being imbued with universality. She contends another deficiency of theorising

colonial discourse by using deconstructive practices is the myopic focus on the colonialist text, that

either erase[s] the voice of the native or limit[s] native resistance to devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority. Positions against the nostalgia for lost origins as a basis for counter-hegemonic ideological production (Spivak), or the self-righteous rhetoric of resistance (Bhabha), have been extended to a downgrading of anti-imperialist texts written by liberation movements; while the notion of epistemic violence and the occluding of reverse discourses have obliterated the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of other knowledges and producer of alternative traditions. (2004:18-19)

It should be clear that Parry's major complaint is that Spivak's "learned disquisitions" constitute a lacunae issuing from a (poststructuralist) theory that assigns "absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native" (2004:19). From a (rather brief) summary of the arguments in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and "The Rani of Sirmur", Parry argues that the theoretical dictum that these essays reiterate derives from Spivak's meditations on the (narrow) discourse of *Sati*, from which she "derives large, general statements on woman's subject constitution/object formation in which the subaltern woman is conceived as a homogeneous and coherent category" (2004:19). Parry contends that Spivak is here confusing discourses of representation with the material realities of the colonial situation:

Since the native woman is constructed within multiple social relationships and positioned as a product of different class, caste and cultural specificities, it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women's voice on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, and by this to modify Spivak's model of the silent subaltern. (2004:19)

Parry asserts that this model of the silent subaltern breaches the confines of its discussion of the subaltern woman, through extending the theorem of imperialism's epistemic

violence to posit “the native, male and female, as a historically muted subject” (2004:20). Thus Parry complains that “Spivak in her project gives no speaking part to the colonized, effectively writing out the evidence of native agency recorded in India’s two-hundred-year struggle against British conquest and the Raj” (20). She argues that Spivak’s strategy overemphasises the role of postcolonial woman intellectual as investigating subject, “for it is she who must plot a story, unravel a narrative and give the subaltern a voice in history” (2004:20), whilst it displaces and repudiates liberationist/nationalist discourses of resistance. This, for Parry, allows Spivak to not only write out the conflict immanent to the colonial encounter, but also means that Spivak’s work “displays a process more insidious than naked repression, since here the native is prevailed upon to internalize as self-knowledge, the knowledge concocted by the master”:

Where military conquest, institutional compulsion and ideological interpellation was, epistemic violence and devious discursive negotiations requiring of the native that he rewrite his position as object of imperialism, is; and in place of recalcitrance and refusal articulated in oppositional discourses and enacted in movements of resistance, a tale is told of the self-consolidating other and the disarticulated subaltern. (2004:20)

This is the crux of Parry’s objection to deconstructive readings of colonialism undertaken in Spivak and Bhabha’s work.

I have already stated that I will not be exploring the intricacies of Parry’s arguments as regards the work of Bhabha (discussed in chapter four) and JanMohamed. Although the following discussion will pre-empt my analysis of the exchange between Chrisman and Young, perhaps this is the place to reflect on Chrisman’s assertion that “Parry’s critique does not, in fact, charge ‘the three’ black writers (Spivak, Bhabha, JanMohamed) with silencing the ‘natives’; it is only Spivak’s work that is thus represented” (1997:40). Parry’s critique, as I have illustrated, certainly argues that “Spivak’s deliberate deafness to the native voice, where it is to be heard” (2004:23) amounts to a silencing of the ‘natives’.

However, I would argue that Parry does *effectively* accuse Spivak, Bhabha and JanMohamed of silencing the ‘natives’. This would be inasmuch as Parry criticises Bhabha’s work for theorising relations of power “in terms of psychoanalytic categories” (2004:26) that limit native resistance to mimicking colonial discourse. This, together with her argument that Bhabha’s work displaces “the traditional anti-colonialist representation of antagonistic forces locked in struggle with a configuration of discursive transactions” (2004:26), means that Parry does indeed accuse Bhabha of silencing or severely limiting native resistance. Although Parry approves of JanMohamed’s retention of Manichean colonial relations, in his *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, his work is also criticised. For Parry, JanMohamed’s work forecloses a place for “emergent discourses initiating new modes of address to construct not-yet-existing conditions, while the notion of counter-discourse is [in his work] bound by its role as a defensive, reactive reply to the hegemonic construction” (2004:31). Consequently, Chrisman’s complaint is shown to be incorrect as Parry does argue – although for different reasons – that the three theorists silence the natives. Thus “Spivak’s generalization of a racial ‘we’” would not seem to rest so much on a misreading of Parry’s analysis, as Chrisman complains, but most certainly “does not respect the nuances of Parry’s argument” (1997:40).

Chrisman’s complaint is motivated by Spivak’s brusque response, in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993), to Parry’s attack. Here, Spivak argues that postcolonial intellectuals should beware of “becoming complicitous in the preparation of a ‘new orientalism’” (1993:56). For Spivak, Parry’s argument is in danger of such complicity because Parry has recourse to “identitarian ethnicist claims” (1993:60) of native originality. Here Spivak is precisely recalling her assertions in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that a chromatic identity politics loses its persuasive function within the postcolonial context. Accordingly, for Spivak, “the political claims that are most urgent in decolonized space are tacitly recognized as coded within the legacy of imperialism” (1993:60). It is precisely Parry’s desire “to hear the voice of the native” (1993:60) that Spivak finds troubling. Here then is Spivak’s summation of Parry’s work:

I have no objection to conscientious ethnography, although I am a bit frightened by its relationship to the history of the discipline of anthropology. My especial word to Parry, however, is that her efforts as well as mine are judged by the exclusions practiced through the intricate workings of the techniques of knowledge and the strategies of power, which have a history rather longer and broader than our individual benevolence and avowals. (1993:61)

This is precisely the point of departure that is taken in the exchange between Chrisman and Young in an issue *Textual Practice* (1997). The exchange is initiated by Young's 1996 review of Spivak's *Outside in the Teaching Machine* in same journal. Besides reflecting on the contribution her book makes to postcolonial theory, Young picks up on Spivak's response to Parry. For Young, "Spivak's rejoinder points to the political irony of three Black writers being attacked by an emigré South African critic during the era of apartheid" (1996:230). The ensuing exchange is important for the ways in which it rehearses (or perhaps more aptly, 're-presents') a possible (mis)take in reading Spivak's insistence that the intellectual mark her 'political positionality' as investigating subject. As I have shown, and as Young appositely notes in *White Mythologies*, for Spivak, the marking of one's positionality as investigating subject, results from her unerring concern "to introduce the question of the desire of the analyst, of the historian as well as her own, countering the tendency to neglect the investigator's own involvement by giving detailed descriptions of her own place, history and special interests during the course of her analysis" (1990:170-71). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" already predicts, as it were, the identitarian politics that inform both some of Parry's criticisms and those that provoke Chrisman's defence of Parry.

Chrisman complains, in "Questioning Robert Young's Post-colonial Criticism", that it is "interesting that Spivak's defensiveness [in her response to Parry] should have recourse to the very 'ethnic identitarianism' to which she elsewhere is frequently opposed" (1997:39). I would argue that Chrisman not only misreads Spivak's insistence on the

inscription of positionality – or what Chrisman calls “Spivak’s self-representation as a ‘postcolonial native’, in response to Parry” – but also (provisionally though) problematically collapses the latter into “an example of the ‘strategic essentialism’ that is part of [Spivak’s] theoretical arsenal” (1997:40)⁴. As I interpret Spivak’s notion of ‘strategic essentialism’, it is – in the second part of the phrase – to posit an assumption of essence with regard to a particular subject, with a particular ethico-political objective in mind, whilst not forgetting that such assumptions are philosophically unsound. As Spivak notes, “For Marx, the curious persistence of essentialism within the dialectic was a profound and productive problem” (1988:295-96).

The ‘strategic’ part of this move would be the intellectual vigilance entailed in the persistent critique of one’s own constructions, so as to recognise, as I have shown, that the postulation and production of a consciousness that sustains such objectives, will in the long run necessarily lose sight of the heterogeneity of the investigated subject and as such “cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution” (Spivak, 1988:295). Young’s definition of strategic essentialism is more economical: “Spivak speaks of the ‘strategic’ use of essentialism and universals in certain situations, which describes, perhaps, the way in which class and the economic operate [within her work] as implicit, undisturbed collectives against which the anti-individualism and heterogeneity are driven” (1990:173). Although I am not sure that the critique of the sovereign subject is merely ‘anti-individualist’, as I understand him, Young correctly explains that Spivak sometimes places the categories of class and the economic under erasure in order to disturb their essentiality. In this vein, Chrisman’s complaint about Spivak’s supposed ‘ethnic identitarianism’ emerges as entirely misdirected⁵.

⁴ Here is Laura Chrisman’s questionable comment: “Quite possibly both Parry and Spivak have misread one another” (1997:40). Chrisman pleads this case by asserting that Spivak gives “retrospective and clarificatory account of her subaltern argument” in an interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, and leverages Neil Lazarus’s “contribution to the Spivak/Parry debate in his ‘Nationalist Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)colonial Intellectualism’”. However, Chrisman’s assertion about a *mutual* misreading is not supported by either of the two references she uses to bolster her claim.

⁵ Here is Spivak’s complaint about how ‘strategic essentialism’ has been taken up in the Anglo-American academy: “I have ... reconsidered my cry for a strategic use of essentialism. In the personalist culture, even among people within the humanities, who are generally wordsmiths, it’s the idea of a strategy that has been forgotten. The strategic has been taken as a point of self-differentiation from the poor essentialists. So long

The misreading of the insistence on marking one's positionality is particularly evident, as Young points out, in Chrisman's (repeated) confusion of "the personal with the positional" (1997:49). Thus Chrisman finds it necessary to report – in her postscript⁶ – her "own experience as the daughter of a black Marxist academic ... [is] crucial in making sense of [her] own responses to post-colonial debates" (1997:44). Chrisman is not incorrect then, insofar as she argues that when an identitarian politics informs postcolonial intellectual production, it can be seen to be "a kind of anti-democratic practice [that allots] the post-colonial franchise to a selected few, removing it from others on the grounds of their natality" (1997:43). However, as I have shown, inasmuch as Young follows Spivak in posing "a question about the political priorities, agenda and genealogy of [Parry's] work" (1997:48), his comments do not foreclose the 'post-colonial franchise' on the basis of ethnic identity. I am however generally sympathetic with Chrisman's anxiety that "precisely because 'South Africa' has acquired, in the West, the fetishistic status of racial allegory, the danger is that Western-located academics assume ... a relation of 'sanctioned ignorance' of that country" (1997:41-42). I also agree with Chrisman's related apprehension that "granting colonial epistemological primacy to India" obscures investigations into the dynamics of colonial subject-formation and the differing politics informing the imperial project outside of the Indian case.

I would argue that Parry's position is admirable for its concern to reinscribe 'native' resistance into discussions of the colonial encounter. I also agree with her attempt to install a closer engagement with the work of the anti-colonialist tradition. The latter will be one of the preoccupations of my analysis (in chapter four) of Bhabha and Parry's different readings of Fanon's work. Parry quite rightly reminds us that it was the texts of these theorists that inaugurated the contemporary critique of colonialism and imperialism. As Ania Loomba points out in her contribution to the debate in

as the critique of essentialism is understood not as an exposure of error ... but as an acknowledgement of the dangerousness of something one cannot not use" (Spivak, 1993:5).

⁶ There is credence in Young's assertion that Chrisman's 'defence' of Parry is – as evidenced by the "Post-script/Supplement" to her complaint – perhaps little more than an attempt to allay the "'political' postcolonial censure" (1997:43) she complains to have been subjected to for her essay "The Imperial Unconscious? Representations of Imperial Discourse" (1990). That is not to say however that the specific points of discussion that Chrisman invokes are not themselves of critical interest.

“Overworlding the Third World”, Parry (and JanMohamed) seek to retain a “Manichean dichotomy between colonizer/colonized ... as the means to recover (a) the socio economic and historical referents of the colonial encounter and (b) the agency and oppositional impulses of the individual colonized subject and nationalist discourses and movements in general” (1994:308). As such, I am sympathetic to Parry’s argument that, perhaps, Spivak’s position on nationalist movements as (always?) being a “‘nativist’ attempt driven by ‘nostalgia for lost origins’” (2004:28) elides the significant differences between a bourgeois nationalism and, as what Neil Lazarus calls, “a liberationist, anti-imperialist, nationalist internationalism” (1994:198) or “nationalitarianism”. However, Parry’s arguments are not without their own problems.

Parry’s argument that Spivak has an absolute position on ‘nativist’ re-memberings of the past, undoes the complexity of Spivak’s position – perhaps due, in no small part, to her self-admittedly “raw and selective summary of what are complex and subtle arguments” (Parry, 2004:20). Spivak’s critique of nativism as a ‘nostalgia for lost origins’ does not mean that all recuperations of a native past are completely unwarranted; as she says in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, her “chief project is to point out the positivist-idealist variety of such nostalgia” (1988:281), with the proviso that such recuperations avoid the persistent ‘recognition of the Other by assimilation’. Spivak’s caution would require that postcolonial critics read the texts of anti-colonialist nationalism more carefully.

Loomba warns that critics engaged in countering current theory’s “effect of neglecting the radical potential of nationalism ... cannot construct an alternative which will be in danger of romanticizing it” (1994:314), and should thus acknowledge its determination within the social forces and processes shaping its articulation⁷. Parry too falls into such an uncritical endorsement of nationalism when her analysis does not attend to the heterogeneity of colonised subject positions and thus privileges, as Lazarus observes

⁷ Loomba makes an interesting argument: “Parry’s critique draws upon her reading of the African experience of colonialism ... and its theoretician, Frantz Fanon. But she goes on to offer this as the only politically correct model for a theory of colonialism. It is difficult to accept that any notion of hybridity will dilute the violence of the colonial encounter ... The paralysing dichotomy black skin/white masks can be questioned without downgrading indigenous cultures and subjects” (1994:308). This would be related to Spivak’s assertion that the negation of the role of ideology forecloses the necessary though “difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production” (1988:275).

following Spivak's own argument, "a certain kind of native agency – a certain kind of subjectivity and of 'speaking': that of the *colonised subject* who 'speaks' as an *Indian nationalist*" (1994:208). This is evident in, in among other things, Parry's valorisation of "the evidence of native agency recorded in India's two-hundred-year struggle against British conquest and the Raj". Lazarus remarks on the saliency of Spivak's critique of nationalism, in light of Parry's invocation of native agency, and the abundance of scholarship illustrating that "local struggles and everyday forms of peasant resistance were often entirely divorced from and unassimilable to the 'vertical' political concerns of elite anticolonial nationalists" (1994:207):

Peasant insurgents in India during the colonial era ... did not necessarily think of themselves as Indians, and they did not necessarily believe themselves to be fighting for the liberation of India. Parry does not provide us with an explanation as to why, under these circumstances, the acts of native agency to which she refers should automatically be thought of as moments in *India's struggle against the Raj*. (1994:208)

These issues are highlighted in Parry's criticism of Spivak's deconstructive reading of Jean Rhys's novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Parry argues that "Spivak's strategy of reading necessarily blots out ... Christophine's inscription as the native, female, individual self who defies the demands of the discriminatory discourses impinging on her person" (2004:22) and thus "demonstrates the pitfalls of a theory postulating that the master discourse preempts the (self) constitution of the historical native subject" (2004:21). The full discussion of their variously opposed interpretations of the novel lies outside the boundaries of this study⁸. As Anne Maxwell points out in "The Debate on

⁸ Though I should also not like to discuss it in any great detail, this also seems to be place to recall Chrisman's complaint – which itself recalls her earlier argument in "The Imperial Unconscious: Representations of Imperial Discourse" – that "Spivak's reading of *Jane Eyre*, particularly her contention that the Caribbean Bertha Mason's death-by-fire required to be read in the context of colonial contests over Indian practices of *sati*, [reflects] an Indiacentrism found elsewhere in her work" (1997:43). However, Spivak herself warns that 'Indiacentrism' should not inform postcolonial theory or analysis: "Yet the Indian case cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures, and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self" (Spivak, 1988:281). Spivak's reading of Bertha Mason is not an a reflection of Indiacentrism as such, but rather, as Bart Moore-Gilbert observes, an instance of the use of 'catachresis': a "tactical manoeuvre, which involves wrenching particular images, ideas or rhetorical strategies out of their

Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, Parry’s “reference to an individual self” admits to an undisclosed positionality within First World feminist discourse, “which attempts to articulate a separate women’s identity for western and non-western women alike through the recovery of a separate female tradition, while ignoring its own privileged positioning on the other side of the other side of the international division of labour” (1991:80). That is, Parry’s position – though she accuses Spivak of this – amounts to what Young, in his exposition of Spivak’s work, calls an unconscious reproduction of imperialist assumptions, that includes “the unquestioned promotion of feminist individualism as the greatest good” (1990:162). As I have illustrated, this is precisely the import of Spivak’s summary response to Parry.

Parry’s position on subalternity and native resistance undoubtedly arises from her endorsement of nationalism – as well as her distaste for deconstructive practices or poststructuralist theory. Also, Parry’s positionality and wish to reinscribe conflict and native resistance into the theorisation of ‘alternative narratives of colonialism’ displays a marked similarity to Foucault and Deleuze’s invocation of ‘the workers’ struggle’. Here is an instance of this in Parry’s argument: “Those who have been or are still engaged in colonial struggles against contemporary forms of neo-colonialism could well read the theorizing of discourse analysts with considerable disbelief at the construction this puts on the situation they are fighting against and the contest in which they are engaged” (2004:26). To be sure, the ‘totem’ of native agency (or more specifically, resistance) seems an insufficient critique of Spivak’s notion of subalternity. This is because, as Spivak argues, it does not attend to the heterogeneity of native publics as subjects in difference. As is evident from her criticisms, Parry seems (without analysis) to extend Spivak’s notion of subalternity to the colonised population in general. Thus for Parry, Spivak’s “theorem of imperialism’s epistemic violence extends to positing the native, male and female, as a historically muted subject” (2004:20). Lazarus provides an invaluable discussion of the reductive tendencies of Parry’s reading of Spivak’s “theory of subalternity”, which for him does not seem

place within a particular narrative and using them to open up new arenas of meaning (often in direct contrast to their conventionally understood meanings and functions)” (Moore-Gilbert, 1997:84).

to be a theory of 'native agency' at all, but a theory of the way in which disenfranchised elements of the 'native' population are *represented* in the discourse of colonialism ... [I]n assuming that the discursive category of the subaltern models for the disenfranchised subject of colonialism in Spivak's thought, Parry seems to misread Spivak. (1994:205-06)

Interesting also, is the manner in which Lazarus seeks to qualify Parry's complaint that Spivak 'effectively writes out evidence of native agency'. He argues that in Spivak's work "the deconstructive interrogation of subalternity is typically given precedence over the radical historiographical account of native agency" (1994:206). The emphasis of Spivak's intellectual production on subalternity, and its saturation of claims for colonial discourse could make it seem "*as though she did*" (1994:206) write out evidence of native agency, though Parry's claim of a 'deliberated deafness' is unsustainable⁹. So too is Parry's polemic that Spivak's work exhibits an the "exorbitation of the role of the postcolonial woman intellectual" (2004:20), which as Lazarus convincingly argues, runs contrary to Spivak's argument: "almost invariably when she comes to talk about intellectualism, the weight of Spivak's emphasis tends to fall on the question of circumscription, on the checks and constraints governing intellectual practice and on the severe limitations of what intellectuals – especially radical intellectuals in the context of imperialism – can hope to achieve as intellectuals" (Lazarus, 1994:209).

Nonetheless, there have been some valid criticisms of "Can the Subaltern Speak?", and Spivak's notion of subalternity in general. One of the most striking contradictions of Spivak's work is that it too falls prey to her critique of the tendency in western intellectual production about the Third World to conserve the 'West as Subject'. This is evident not only in the fact that Spivak's work largely addresses the western intellectual, but also the language of the address. This assertion is perhaps modified by the recognition that critique, as such, always already intimately inhabits its subject.

⁹ Though she for the most argues that Spivak silences the natives, Parry does once admit an uncertainty of this position. Her use of 'restricts' and the tentatively parenthesised 'eliminates?' signals such uncertainty: "Spivak in her own work severely *restricts (eliminates?)* the space in which the colonized can be written back into history" (2004:23, my emphasis).

However, I am here not claiming that ‘high’ theory should not be used for subaltern material, which as Young notes, “involves a category mistake and an epistemological confusion ... The argument assumes that all political categories can only be sustained ontologically and epistemologically through experience” (1990:169). Rather, I seek to argue that her deconstructive mode as the (privileged) language of address does not sit well with her concern to ‘learn to speak to the subaltern’. As I have already illustrated in my discussion of Parry’s attack, even Spivak’s notion of subalternity has been open to criticism.

Bart Moore-Gilbert argues subalternity, as it is constituted in Spivak’s work, “contradicts a crucial corollary of the articulation of subalternity with hegemony in Gramsci’s thinking ... This is that the oppressed can ... organize to overthrow the hegemonic order” (2005:464). This does not yet in itself amount to a critique, for, as Spivak argues in her interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” settles itself on a very specific (though reworked) definition of subalternity: “the space as defined by Ranajit Guha, the space that is cut off from the lines of mobility in a colonized country ... [E]very moment that is noticed as a case of subalternity is undermined. We are never looking at the pure subaltern. There is, then, something of a not-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity” (1996:288-89). Loomba thus complains, “to say that if the subaltern could speak she/he would not be a subaltern is a neat enough formulation, but somewhat inadequate if the ‘Third World’ is not to be, yet again, theorized into silence” (1994:320). That said, Spivak’s focus on the ‘itinerary of silencing’ endured by the ‘historical’ subaltern, can at times be detrimental, as Moore-Gilbert argues, to a discussion of “how the *contemporary* subaltern might ‘come to voice’” (2005:464, my emphasis). This is despite her stated concern that “to ignore the subaltern *today* is, willy-nilly, to continue the imperialist project” (1988:298, my emphasis). It does not, however, fit into Parry’s diagnosis of a ‘deliberated deafness’ within Spivak’s work. Moore-Gilbert asserts that there is an evident “political pessimism” in Spivak’s work:

An insistence on the irreducible alterity and muteness of the subaltern, one might argue, paralyzes not just the subaltern, but the would-be ally of the subaltern –

who is left in the double-bind of being required to show solidarity with the subaltern without in any way ‘selfing’ that Other or ‘assimilating’ her to the degree that solidarity perhaps inevitably demands. (2005:464)¹⁰

As I have already demonstrated, this is a major concern of the “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, where Spivak argues that a closer analysis of the international division of labour be brought to postcolonial intellectual production. One of ways she confronts this is through her retention of Marx.

Spivak leverages both the Marxist critique of the individual as oppressed subject and Marx’s theories of value, whose utility, she argues, extend beyond his specific deployment of them in the realm of the economic. This renders untenable the contention – when applied to Spivak’s work – that “the Marxist analysis of colonialism has been eschewed”(2004:8). This question of the eschewal of Marxist critique will be especially important for my later discussion (in chapter five) of the South African debate about postcolonial theory. For Parry, what is “at stake is whether the imperial project is historicized within the determining instance of capitalism’s global trajectory, or uprooted from its material ground and resituated as a cultural phenomenon whose intelligibility and functioning can be recuperated from tendentious readings of texts” (2004:8). I would argue that it seems as if Parry is attempting to occlude the Marxist thrust of Spivak’s arguments. However, Parry does signal the possible discrepancies involved in Spivak’s “syncretic” use of poststructuralism and Marxism, when she refers to Young’s discussion in *White Mythologies*:

Young is sanguine about bringing the distinctive theoretical projects [Marxism and poststructuralism] into alignment within postcolonial studies; yet the rejection by poststructuralism of the Marxist notion underpinning left anti-colonial thinking – the capitalist system, structural divisions, nationalism, an emancipatory

¹⁰ Lazarus makes a similar argument in “National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)colonial Intellectualism” (1994:209-10).

narrative, universalism – suggests that the discrepancy between the informing premises is not readily negotiated. (2004:7)

Finally, I would like to discuss Parry's *apparent* aversion to 'theory', 'textualism' or what, in "Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies", she calls "the linguistic turn in its strong form" (2002:74). We shall see how this preoccupation with 'strong' and 'weak' or 'hard' and 'soft' theory unfolds in my discussion (in the conclusion) of the South African appropriation of postcolonial theory. Insofar as Spivak addresses "the processes of subject-constitution and material exploitation as complementary components" (Moore-Gilbert, 1997:100), Parry's unsustainably argues that "the significant differences in the critical practices of Spivak and Bhabha are submerged in a shared programme marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis" (2004:26). Ato Quayson makes a point similar to Parry's – not so much an argument, as it is a statement, for he makes it after referring to Spivak's work only in passing: "the interpretative modality interposes theory firmly between the indigenous or local sphere and the present. The subaltern, of whom Spivak famously concludes that he or she 'cannot speak', is twice removed from speech in colonial discourse analysis because the psychoanalytic categories that are deployed to adduce the mentalities of the colonized do not partake of the native's own discursive modalities" (2000:74). As Loomba succinctly notes, "at one level, such a distinction, and indeed any demand to attend to 'the social' can be and is dismissed as subscribing to the traditional, and by now variously and thoroughly critiqued, model of the political as lying outside discourse, language and culture" (1994:306)¹¹. I will return to this issue in my analysis of McClintock and Nixon's attack on Derrida's politics (in chapter three) and in my reading of Parry's attack on Bhabha's work (in chapter four). For Spivak, to insist on an irreducible distinction between 'the social' and 'the discursive' "entails a notion of the social as essence. If one carries the notion of the social as an essence, that can very quickly lead to an unexamined assumption of capitalist sociality as a kind of essence, as *the social*" (1996:294). That is,

¹¹ See for instance Anne Maxwell's (1991:71-73) argument, although Maxwell more specifically relates it to Parry's criticisms of Bhabha's use of theory.

the danger of positing the social as essence is that such a position feeds into assumptions about the given-ness and thus unchangeability of the most dominant mode of social relations in the contemporary world: capitalism. However, as I have illustrated, Spivak herself *strategically* deploys the social as essence and her strategy of persistent critique is leveraged precisely in order to confront the danger I mention above.

I would suggest that the debate turned on a number of key questions for the development of postcolonial theory. The first question is about the necessity that the postcolonial intellectual – and indeed, intellectuals in general – mark her political positionality as investigating subject. The difficulty of this question was illustrated by the misreadings or (mis)takes I have argued have informed the debate. The difficulty here is that Spivak's insistence on marking political positionality is something other than mere self-reflexivity. It is precisely what Spivak calls for when she asserts that the intellectual needs to 'unlearn privilege'. The difficulty is also because there is no schema for the unlearning of privilege. Were there one, a register of calculable set of procedures or method to unlearn privilege, it would achieve the opposite of what it intended. The realm of the calculable cannot confront heterogeneous difference. This goes directly to the questions of subalternity and native agency and resistance, and of course, the question of how postcolonial critique should position itself in relation to previous theorisations of native resistance and the critiques of colonialism in the anti-colonialist tradition. These latter critiques necessarily entailed a particular intellectual practice, given their conditions of possibility within movements for decolonisation dictated the need to mobilise native resistance and uncover sites of disarticulated agency. One of the problems immanent with the latter practice – a problem already articulated from within anti-colonialist discourse – and indeed a problem for (postcolonial) intellectuals as such, is the apprehension of native subjectivity or resistance as a search for 'lost origins'. As such, the debate also turned on the question of an appropriate counter-hegemonic or radical practice for the postcolonial intellectual.

Doubtless, there are problems attending to Spivak's deconstructive preference or failures that she, as Moore-Gilbert argues, might elsewhere call "repetitions-in-rupture"

(1997:100). Nevertheless, her criticisms of the (unacknowledged) complicity of contemporary western intellectual production – whether ‘benevolent’ or ‘disinterested’ – within the international division of labour, and consequent insistence that postcolonial intellectuals should mark their political positionality, as well as her persistent critique of the simple assimilation of the Other as the Self’s shadow, remain critically enabling as a call for the ethical engagement with the Other. As Spivak herself acknowledges, the debt of this practice of ‘persistent critique’ or ‘affirmative deconstruction’ appeals to Derrida’s project. I will move to consider Derrida’s intervention into the debate on *apartheid*. This will be done precisely to assess the question of the relation between deconstructive practices and, politics and ethics.

**“Deconstruction and the ‘yes’”: Incursions into the
Debate on Apartheid**

I should state from the outset that I do not, in this chapter, wish to reclaim or refashion Jacques Derrida as a postcolonial theorist. The tension of this latter assertion will become clear in my analysis of the debate between Homi Bhabha and Benita Parry (in chapter four). Rather, what will be examined here is an instance of what Derrida has called an attempt to articulate the relation between “deconstruction and the ‘yes’” or ‘affirmative deconstruction’¹. That is, ‘practical’ interventions in ‘real-world’ examples or the ‘material’. Derrida’s “Racism’s Last Word” (1985) irrupts into the purview of ‘(post)coloniality’ not merely as a reading of the text of *apartheid*, but in large measure as an ethico-political call for the demise of *apartheid*, a summoning of a future responsibility to the memory of its anteriority. As such, Derrida’s text on *apartheid* is an important moment for testing the principal question of my thesis: how efficacious is deconstruction when brought to the analysis of ‘postcolonial’ contexts? My use of scare-quotes around the last two references to postcoloniality and postcolonial contextual determination is an attempt to keep open the space for my later discussion (in the conclusion to this study) of the applicability of the term ‘postcolonial’ to the South African case. The contention around the question of (con)text is central to the *Critical Inquiry* (1985-86) debate on *apartheid*, initiated by “Racism’s Last Word”.

My own discussion of the debate will, once again, proceed through the close textual analysis of the three major texts informing the debate. That is, Derrida’s aforementioned text, Anne McClintock and Robert Nixon’s response, “No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida’s ‘Le Dernier Mot du Rascime’”, and Derrida’s scathing rejoinder, “But, Beyond ... (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)”. As the text of the debate on *apartheid* neither begins nor ends in *Critical Inquiry* I will variously draw from other contributions. What I seek to argue here is that the debate illustrates the various misreadings of how deconstructive practices engage with the questions of politics, ethics and pragmatics. At issue, I believe, are four major questions.

¹ “In the different texts I have written on (against) *apartheid*, I have on several occasions spoken of ‘unconditional’ affirmation or of ‘unconditional’ ‘appeal’. This has also happened to me in other ‘contexts’ and each time that I speak of the link between deconstruction and the ‘yes’” (Derrida, 1988:152).

Firstly, I examine how the misunderstanding of the deconstructive reevaluation of the question of '(con)text' informs the debate. Secondly, I argue that Derrida's gesture in "Racism's Last Word" is not an attempt to (dis)place the text of apartheid as a distinctively South African. His gesture is not, as it were, a characteristic reticence or denial of the question of complicity by the metropolitan intellectual. Thirdly, prompted by the interpretive violence of the interlocutors – which should not be separated from the emotive subject of the debate – I consider the question of an "ethics of discussion" to which Derrida elsewhere states his commitment. Finally, I discuss the denigration of deconstructive practices as unethical, apolitical, conservative or anti-revolutionary, and the related question of the demand made by some commentators that Derrida explicitly declare his politics in the conventional terms of political philosophy, or even political activism.

In her translator's note to "Racism's Last Word", Peggy Kamuf gives a brief genealogy of the paper and reminds the reader that it was a translation of 'Le Dernier Mot du Rascime', which was written for the catalogue of an international art exhibition against *apartheid*. The particular purpose of "Le Dernier Mot du Rascime" was, then, to introduce the project of the travelling exhibition, described by the organisers as awaiting (in transit) and seeking to hasten the day when it could be "presented as a gift to the first free and democratic government of South Africa to be elected by universal suffrage" (1985:290). Derrida's own reckoning of the exhibition is that it is not a presentation, as nothing 'is delivered here in the present, nothing that would be presentable'. His opening (textual) analysis of *apartheid* begins with the appeal that it remain,

from now on, the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many. May it thus remain, but may a day come when it will only be for the memory of man ... Confined and abandoned then to this silence of memory, the name will resonate all by itself, reduced to the state of a term in disuse. The thing it names today will no longer be. (1985:291)

For him, *apartheid* is “the last” both in the French sense of “*le dernier*” – qualitatively though not necessarily quantitatively – signifying “the worst”, “the lowest degree, the last of a series”, and temporally as that which arrives (though never quite) “at the end of a history, or in the final analysis, to carry out the law of some process and reveal the thing’s truth, here finishing off the essence of evil, the worst, the essence at its very worst – as if there were something like a racism par excellence, the most racist of racisms” (1985:291). This coterminous thinking of *apartheid* as the last, as “the most recent”, as both “the oldest and the youngest” means that we must keep in memory that “although racial segregation didn’t wait for the name *apartheid* to come along, that name became order’s *watchword* and won its title in the political code of South Africa only at the end of the Second World War” (1985:291).

Briefly commenting on the “material” consequences of the legislated acts of *apartheid*, Derrida argues *that* the name has never been translated in other languages possibly signals a lexical defence “against a sinister incorporation of the thing by means of the word”, a refusal to be “contaminated through the contagious hospitality of the word-for-word” (1985:292). He extends the discussion of the untranslatibility of the word *apartheid* in a direction already set out – to name but one instance – as early as “The Violence of the Letter: From Levi-Strauss to Rousseau” in *Of Grammatology* (1976). Derrida submits that “within the limits of this untranslatable idiom, a violent arrest of the mark, the glaring harshness of abstract essence (*heid*) seems to speculate in another regime of abstraction, that of confined separation. The word concentrates separation, raises it to another power and sets separation itself *apart*: ‘apartitionality’, something like that” (1985:292). The consequent corruption by the word of this separated separation into what he calls “a quasi-ontological segregation” is due precisely to hypostatisation or essentialisation of being apart. For him, the outrage of this political idiom, extreme though not dissimilar to other racisms, lies in its naturalisation of segregation. Following this, he makes the *apparently* implausible claim that “there’s no racism without a language”:

The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth – or rather, *because* it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse – racism always betrays the perversion of a man, the ‘talking animal’. It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates. (1985:292)

It is here that Derrida notes that *apartheid* is also “the last” for the pageantry of its political constitution; its status as the only racism “on the scene that dares say its name and to present itself for what it is: a legal defiance taken on by *homo politicus*, a juridical racism and a state racism” (292). As such, he reiterates that the uniqueness, the “sinister renown”, the infamy of “this name apart” is due to its manifestation of “the lowest extreme of racism, its end and the narrow-minded self-sufficiency of its intention, its eschatology, the death rattle of what is already an interminable agony” (292-93). For Derrida, this would mean, “something like the setting in the West of racism – but also, and this will have to be specified below, racism as a Western thing.” (293)

The next section of “Racism’s Last Word” deals specifically with the event of the exhibition as a particular ethico-political response to *apartheid*. That is, in “order to respond to this singularity or, better yet, to fling back an answer, the singularity right here of another event takes its measure ... Actually, it measures itself against *apartheid* only so as to remain in no measure comparable with that system, its power, its fantastic riches, its excessive armament, the worldwide network of its openly declared shamefaced accomplices” (1985:293). Derrida figures this itinerant exhibition as an exemplary “satellite of humanity” whose trajectory rushes impulsively, commemorating “in anticipation – not its own event but one that it calls forth: ... South Africa beyond *apartheid*, South Africa in memory of *apartheid*” (293). He is in no way reticent before the “material” effects of *apartheid*, noting precisely that it is “an evil that cannot be summed up in the principal and abstract iniquity of a system. It is also daily suffering, oppression, poverty, violence, torture inflicted by an arrogant white minority (16 percent

of the population, controlling 60 to 65 percent of the national revenue) on the mass of the black population” (1985:293). Derrida here reminds us that the question of what safeguards can be taken to ensure that the truth the exhibition exposes, “is not taken over and controlled, thus becoming another technical device, the antenna of some new politico-military strategy, a useful machinery for the exploitation of new resources, or the calculation in view of more comprehensive interests” (1985:294) is not one that can be answered in advance. He argues that to better conceive of this question of ethics, and of politics, we should return to the circumstances:

In this collective and international exhibition ... pictorial, sculptural idioms will be crossing, but they will be attempting to speak the other’s language without renouncing their own. And in order to effect this translation, their common reference henceforth makes an appeal to a language that cannot be found, a language at once very old, older than Europe, but for that very reason to be invented once more. (1985:294)

This reminder, of an “old language of the West” in relation to the exhibition is then not trivial. The “exhibition exposes and commemorates, indicts and contradicts the whole of a Western history”; that is, it shows up “a contradiction internal to the West and to the assertion of its rights” (1985:294). It is for this reason Derrida proceeds to consider how the text of *apartheid* is inscribed onto or by the West and Western history.

Derrida argues the primary reason for *apartheid* being a “European ‘creation’” is its status as a legislated state racism: “The judicial simulacrum and the political theater of this state racism have no meaning and would have no chance outside a European ‘discourse’ on the concept of race. That discourse belongs to a whole system of ‘phantasms’, to a certain representation of nature, life, history, religion, and law, to the very culture which succeeded in giving rise to this state takeover” (1985:294). For the remainder of the third section of “Racism’s Last Word”, Derrida seeks to expose the complicity of a large part of Europe with *apartheid*:

Since the Second World War, at least if one accepts the givens of a certain kind of calculation, the stability of the Pretoria regime has been a prerequisite to the political, economic, and strategic equilibrium of Europe. The survival of Western Europe depends on it ... Direct or even indirect Soviet control of South Africa would provoke, or so think certain Western heads of state, a catastrophe beyond all comparison with the malediction (or the 'bad image') of *apartheid*. (1985:295)

He offers that this co-dependence for stability between the Pretoria regime and Europe constitutes *apartheid* as "the first 'delivery of arms', the first product of European exportation". This is despite the "symbolic condemnations" of *apartheid* issuing from Europe, a contradiction he sees as sharpest in France, "which provided more support for [the aforementioned] exhibition than anywhere else" (1985:295), and adds the supplementary contradiction of certain Eastern European countries themselves continuing economic relations with Pretoria. He urges the reader to bear in mind that the pressures applied to the South African regime to relax certain forms of what was then called 'petty apartheid' were "not always inspired by a respect for human rights" (295). For Derrida, sometimes submerged beneath such pressure, was "a liberal current according to which '*apartheid* is notoriously inefficient from the point of view of economic rationality'" (296). That is, the sometimes vociferous outcry against the policies and practices that came to be called 'petty apartheid', was at times nothing more than a call for business as usual – the business of profiting from the continued economic exploitation of the majority of the South African population:

This too will have to remain in memory: if one day *apartheid* is abolished, its demise will not be credited only to the account of moral standards – because moral standards should not count or keep accounts, to be sure, but also because, on the scale which is that of a worldwide computer, the law of the marketplace will have imposed another standard of calculation. (1985:295-96)

The penultimate section of the essay focuses on the "theologico-political discourse of *apartheid*", whose logic, Derrida argues, illustrates the "same intra-European

contradiction". He gives a brief chronicle of some of the inventions and prohibitions of *apartheid*, the "most repressive legal apparatus in the world", and argues "this law is also founded in a theology and these Acts in Scripture" (1985:296), all in a Calvinist reading that reviles democracy. He observes an example of this in the "charter of the Institute for National Christian Education (1948) [which] sets out the only regulations possible for a South African government". Among other things, the charter offers the Will of God as imposing on "the Afrikaner the duty of assuring that the colored peoples are educated in accordance with Christian-National principles", and that the "well-being and happiness of the colored man resides in his recognition of the fact that he belongs to a separate racial group" (1985:297). For Derrida, the 'quasi-ecumenical' fact that "*apartheid* is upheld ... but also condemned in the name of Christ" (1985:297) is an exemplary instance of the contradictions of European discourses, practices and policies regarding *apartheid*.

Finally, Derrida catechises the essentiality of "South Africa", an enigma – in its "concentration of world history" – whose complexity he hopes to have isolated. This complexity, its alterity as such, which resists most conventional forms of analysis, is precisely what "calls for another mode of thinking"². Knowing full well that it is not entirely possible he proffers that if "we could forget about the suffering, the humiliation, the torture and the deaths, we might be tempted to look at this region of the world as a giant tableau or painting, the screen for some geographical computer. Europe, in the enigmatic process of its globalization and of its paradoxical disappearance, seems to project onto this screen" the schedule of contradictions and complicities already mentioned, "the double-bind of its national and multinational interests" (1985:297-98). For him, dialectical reasoning seems to provide "only a provisional stasis in a precarious equilibrium, whose price today is *apartheid*", that is secured at an-other's expense. Even the "customary discourse on man, humanism and human rights" continued to have no effect – despite the 1973 United Nations verdict of *apartheid* as a 'crime against humanity' – because it encountered, in *apartheid*, "its effective and as yet unthought limit, the limit of the whole system in which it acquires meaning" (1985:298). This is

² For an attempt to read *apartheid* in deconstructive mode, see Aletta J. Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (1996).

why, throughout “Racism’s Last Word”, Derrida has appealed for (and perhaps demonstrated) ‘another mode of thinking’, a differential thought of the questions of ethics and politics:

[I]t was, it will have to be, it is necessary to appeal unconditionally to the future of another law and another force lying beyond the totality of this present. This, it seems to me, is what the exhibition affirms or summons forth, what it signs with a single stroke ... Even the future perfect can no longer translate the tense, the time of what is being written in this way – and what is doubtless no longer part of the *everyday current*, of the cursory sense of history. Isn’t this true of any ‘work’? Of that truth which is so difficult to put into words? Perhaps. (1985:298)

In their response, “No Names Apart”, it is clear that McClintock and Nixon locate their complaint against “Racism’s Last Word” in the second part of their title: “The Separation of Word and History in Derrida’s ‘Le Dernier Mot du Racisme’”. It is not so much that they doubt Derrida’s “signal opposition to the South African regime”, for they recognise in their introduction that his paper “is tendered as a call to action” (1986:140). (Neither is it insignificant that they choose to refer to his paper by the antecedent French title that appears in the catalogue of the exhibition – which I will return to later.) However, they find, in what one (in error) could call the ‘philosophical’ tenor of his arguments, the preponderance for merely examining “certain metaphysical assumptions” without pointing “to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime” (1986:140). They argue “Derrida’s protest is deficient in any sense of how the discourses on South African racism have been at once historically constituted and politically constitutive” (1986:140). This deficiency requires a serious consideration of what they call his “method”. Their prognosis of the latter is that it “entails, in particular, pondering the political implications of both his extended reflection on the word *apartheid* and his diffuse historical comments” (1986:140)³. In their understanding at least, the remedy is probably that of the enterprising ‘historical materialist’:

³ One could of course play on the essential ‘pervertibility’ of the word “diffuse” in their comment: That is, Derrida’s historical comments are precisely sparse, “spread out, diffused, not concentrated” (*OED*).

For to begin to investigate how the representation of racial difference has functioned in South Africa's political and economic life, it is necessary to recognize and track the shifting character of these discourses. Derrida, however, blurs historical differences by conferring on the single term *apartheid* a spurious autonomy and agency. (1986:140)

McClintock and Nixon's task is then to release the word *apartheid* "from its quarantine from historical process" in Derrida's analysis, the consequence of his being simultaneously "repelled by the word, yet seduced by its divisiveness, the division in the inner structure of the term itself which he elevates to a state of being" (1986:141). This is precisely why they find it necessary "to part ways with him" (my emphasis) in order "to face the challenge of investigating the strategic role of representation" by examining *apartheid* "in the context of developing discourses of racial difference" (1986:141). A differential reading of their phrase, "to part ways with", could of course highlight that this phrase is symptomatic of their strategy of reading as a whole. That is, as Derrida argues, what McClintock and Nixon part ways with here (but also from the beginning of their paper) is nothing short of reading "Racism's Last Word". As such, "No Names Apart" is not a "response"; the texture of a response is one of responsibility, of duty, to reading. Derrida suggests as much in his rejoinder when he states that they "quite simply *did not read* [his] text, in the most elementary and quasi-grammatical sense of what is called *reading*" (1986:157). However, this already pre-empted an analysis I wish to defer, of what Derrida elsewhere calls the 'ethics of discussion'.

As such, I will not be parting ways with "Racism's Last Word", choosing rather, to read it *partially* with their response. This strategy is then not only rhetorical, but also has the pragmatic effect of saving space by introducing some of Derrida's arguments in his rejoinder, where he himself already closely reads "No Names Apart". *Partially* then, in both senses of this term: it both already prejudices and interrupts McClintock and

However, by isolating what is concentrated in *apartheid*, his comments are also not diffuse. Derrida argues this much in his response, for instance, as we shall see when he draws McClintock and Nixon's attention to the context and necessary brevity of his text.

Nixon's arguments, and disjointedly, thus incompletely, reads Derrida's response. Their 'politically' interested refusal to read is, once again, motivated by, for them, the necessity of chronicling and periodising the changes to the rhetoric, ideology and lexicon of racism in the official discourse of the South African regime: "If an examination of South Africa's representation of racial difference is to be at all *politically* enabling, the changing hegemonic functions of the word *apartheid* and its kindred terms must be investigated in the context of an active, social language" (1986:145, my emphasis). As I will show, and as Derrida himself argues, the 'enabling politics' McClintock and Nixon refer to are other than the politics that motivate their response.

The first section of their essay is entirely dedicated to this 'historicising' tendency, for as they state, it was "as far back as the mid-fifties the South Africans themselves began to recognize that the term *apartheid* had become sufficiently stigmatized to be ostentatiously retired" (1986:141): "The word *apartheid* was coined by General Jan Smuts ... in 1917"; it only gained prominence and currency under D. F. Malan as the "rallying cry of the Nationalist party's victorious electoral campaign of 1948" (141); "in 1958, with the election of Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd as prime minister ... 'separate development' came to replace *apartheid* ... in the rhetoric and ideology of South African racism" (143); Prime Minister B. J. Vorster, Verwoerd's successor, sustained the "conciliatory rhetoric of multinationalism" (1986:144); this "discourse of multinationalism graduated ... into the even more desperately appeasing rhetoric of 'plural democracy'" under P. W. Botha's "new proud language of [a Reaganite or Thatcherite] democratic federalism" (145). Given this, McClintock and Nixon contend the accuracy of "Derrida's claim that South African racism is 'the only one on the scene that dares to say its name and present itself for what it is'" (1986:141-42) and therefore find misleading his reference to *apartheid* as the "order's watchword".

Surprisingly, this is in spite of their reference to *apartheid* as the name of South African racism: "South African racism has long since ceased to pronounce *its own name*" (1986:142, my emphasis). That is, McClintock and Nixon acknowledge that '*apartheid*' is precisely the name (for itself) that South African racism seeks to disavow. Though they

seek to deny it by delineating the disappearance of the name from the official discourse, McClintock and Nixon's acknowledgement that *apartheid* is the name of South African racism is precisely contained within their phrase "its own name". Indeed one could also argue that by italicising the word '*apartheid*' within the terms of their own response, McClintock and Nixon concur with Derrida's argument on its 'apartitionality' and 'untranslatability'. The particular function of italicisation would here be the foregrounding of a certain typographic metonymy.

The next section of McClintock and Nixon's paper proceeds in much the same fashion as the first, although this time they turn their attention to the "history" of the South African economy under *apartheid*, "the Nationalist's Bantustan policy" in particular, which they chronicle. They praise Derrida for his "indictment of Western complicity with South Africa" and see this as "possibly the most valuable contribution of 'Le Dernier Mot'", but are once more troubled by "his blindness to the unfolding of the racial discourses in their historical context" (1986:147). For them, Derrida's comments about the complicities and alliances between capital and *apartheid* elide a whole "political and economic debate on South Africa since the 1930's" whose two rival interpretations – "the liberal-reformist school" and "the 'revisionist' school" – are at odds "on whether the rational forces of capital are in contradiction with the irrational, archaic policies of white racism, or whether *apartheid* can profitably coexist with modern capitalism" (1986:148):

The liberal-reformist school has argued that *apartheid*'s cumbersome racial laws serve only to hamper the forward-thrusting momentum of the country's capitalist economy ... [Whereas] the 'revisionist' school has argued that *apartheid* and modern capitalism are bound in a flourishing blood brotherhood, a pragmatic and flexible alliance which is collaborative and of spectacular mutual benefit. (1986:148)

Sketching the "historical context" of "South Africa's 'economic miracle' ... in terms of [the] shifting alliance between capital and racial ideology" (1986:148), McClintock and Nixon assert that this alliance "was refined, not undermined, and the overall goals of

apartheid remained the same” (1986:152). As such, they propose that “the ‘revisionists’ argue against Derrida” and the liberals’ “optimistic vision of *apartheid* brought to its knees by a liberalizing capitalism”: “Indeed, if Derrida takes to its logical conclusion his argument that *apartheid* may be abolished by the imposition of the ‘law of the market’, he will find himself in the position of advocating accelerated international investment in order to hasten the collapse of the regime” (1986:153).

In his response, Derrida complains that McClintock and Nixon read him in ‘bad faith’ – an accusation variously asserted in his rejoinder – when they characterise him in this way: “it is quite simply indecent to make me out to-be pleading for capitalism or suggesting that laws of the marketplace ought to be allowed free rein because *all by themselves* they would take care of *apartheid*” (1986:166). He argues that he has of course always considered this “revisionist” view to contain some truth. However, he challenges them to find even but the slightest suggestion of what they call his “optimistic vision of *apartheid*” in his text:

Had I such a ‘vision’ I would not have written anything ‘against *apartheid*’. I would have thought: *laissons faire le capital!* That said, there again things are complex, heterogeneous, and contradictory ... *Apartheid* can at the same time serve the interests of capitalist accumulation *and* get in the way of capitalist development. One has to distinguish here among different phases and *various* capitalisms or different, even contradictory sectors of capitalism ... Have you ever heard of the contradictions of capitalism? ... You see, I fear you have a simple, homogeneous, and mechanistic vision of history and politics. (1986:166-67)

Finally, McClintock and Nixon are satisfied that their own response and analysis does not separate ‘word and history’, given that they have regarded “with a historical eye the uneven traffic between political interests and an array of cultural discourses” (1986:154). For them, it is precisely due to his inattentiveness to “racial and class difference” and a

largely singular attention to the “solitary word *apartheid*” that his “method” carries no “strategic force”. On this they deserve to be quoted at some length:

For an analysis of racial representation, at least, this would mean abandoning such favored monoliths of post-structuralism as ‘logocentrism’ and ‘Western metaphysics’, not to mention bulky homogeneities such as ‘the occidental essence of the historical process’ and a ‘European “discourse” on the concept of race’ ... Derrida’s call to fling back an answer to *apartheid* is inspiring, but until one recognizes, with Dan O’Meara, that ‘racial policy is open to a sequence of somersaults, deviations, and permutations which endlessly confuse those who regard it as the product of a monolithic racial ideology’, and until one embeds the analysis of racial policy in the dense everyday life of South Africa, such calls to action will remain of limited strategic worth. (1986:154)

Derrida defies and finds perfidious this comment that his text illustrates a penchant for “monoliths of post-structuralism” and “bulky homogeneities”, and reminds them he rather “constantly emphasized heterogeneity, contradictions, tensions and uneven development” (1986:165). In fact, what Derrida argues in “Racism’s Last Word” (and reiterates in his response) is that “the history of *apartheid* would have been impossible, unthinkable without the European concept and the European history of the state, without the European discourse on race – its scientific pseudoconcept and its religious roots, its modernity and its archaisms – without Judeo-Christian ideology, and so forth” (1986:165).

Whence issues McClintock and Nixon’s claim that Derrida’s singular attention to the “solitary word *apartheid*” blinds him to the nuances of its historicity? Derrida is precisely aware of the complexity of the text of *apartheid*, as he illustrates in his discussion above, with which they seem to have no substantial quarrel. In part, what seems to authorise McClintock and Nixon’s complaint against Derrida’s gesture in “Racism’s Last Word, is a pre-theoretical apprehension of the ‘historical’ and what constitutes the ‘political’. That is, they appeal to the historical as mere datum or archive and the political as self-evident

quotidian episteme. It thus seems – and Derrida argues this much in his response – that McClintock and Nixon’s complaint is directed at their conception of “post-structuralism” rather than to Derrida’s text in particular.

In “But, Beyond ...” Derrida admits that he is exceedingly grateful to McClintock and Nixon for having brought some “useful details to the attention of [those] ill-informed readers” who desire “to fight *apartheid* in South Africa [but still as yet] know little of the history of this state racism” (1986:155). However, Derrida hastens to add that on reading their response he could not find any “serious objections” to his own arguments, despite the ostensibly “serious tone” of their paper: “In your impatient desire to dispense a history lesson, you sometimes say just anything. The effect you want to produce is quite determined, but in order to arrive at it, you are willing to put forward any kind of countertruth, especially when, in your haste to *object*, you *project* into my text whatever will make your job easier” (1986:156). He thus contends McClintock and Nixon’s reading of “Racism’s Last Word” entirely disregards the question of its original “context” as “an eight-page text accompanying an art exhibit” which he knew quite well “couldn’t be a historical or anthropological treatise”. For Derrida, the contextual overdetermination and dimensional constraints of the original context of his intervention meant that his gesture “could only be an *appeal*, an appeal to others and to other kinds of action” (1986:157). As such, I agree with Derrida’s charge that McClintock and Nixon did not read his text. This is the result of their not taking into account the rules of grammar, of rhetoric, and of pragmatics, to which “the text of an *appeal*” necessarily conforms.

Derrida freely agrees with their assessment that the text of an *appeal* has “limited strategic worth” but urges them to remember that such assessments are always in large measure complicated, difficult to evaluate and overdetermined by the criterion of “context”. He asserts that the “complex ensemble”, that is the exhibition, of which his text was a part, cannot simply be reconstituted, as “its limits are by definition not fixed and are in the process of shifting at the very moment [he is] writing to [them]”. He argues that although “such calls to action” will indeed remain of “limited strategic worth”, they are far from being of no consequence.

As for its limits, they are no more restricted than those of a 'response', yours, which not only *supposes* the appeal to which it responds in its own fashion but also, without appealing to any action, is content to chronicle the word 'apartheid', while advising that, rather than making history, we ought to become more like historians ... In this domain, as in all domains, no one strategy is sufficient; there is, by definition, no ideal and absolute strategy. We have to multiply the approaches and conjugate efforts. (1986:157-58)

Once again, McClintock and Nixon's failure to attend "to the context and the mode" of his text is quite determinate, as they are led by this failure into taking "a *prescriptive* utterance for a *descriptive* (theoretical and constative) one" (1986:158). He argues that an example of this occurs when they state that it is because "he views *apartheid* as a 'unique appellation', [that he] has little to say about the politically persuasive function that successive racist lexicons have served in South Africa" (1986:141). However, he asserts "he never considered (or 'viewed') *apartheid* as a 'unique appellation'", and reminds us that the first sentence of his text "is an appeal, a call to condemn, to stigmatize, to keep in memory; it is not a reasoned dictionary definition of the use of the word *apartheid* or its pseudonyms *in the discourse of the South African leaders*" (1986:158). Derrida argues, "although it is not limited by the form of descriptive observation, [his] "appeal" in no way contradicts the historians truth". However, "to treat it as one would an historian's observation" is for him proof either of an inability to read or a readiness "to shortchange the ethics, to say nothing of the politics, of reading and discussion" (158). Besides being "a call to action", as McClintock and Nixon put it, the appeal is for Derrida, first and foremost, "an ethical appeal, as indicated by that which, in both ethics and politics, passes by way of memory and promising, and thus by way of language and denomination" (1986:159):

Thus, my appeal is indeed an appeal because it calls for something which is not yet, but it is still strategically realistic because it refers to a massively present reality, one which no historian could seriously put in question. It is a call to

struggle but also to memory. I never separate promising from memory.
(1986:160)

It should be clear then that his (undeniable) wish is for *apartheid* to “remain” a “unique appellation”. As he himself argues, the tense in his assertion implies that *apartheid* already is the “unique appellation” for the “ultimate racism”, despite the singular denegations in the officially sanctioned or sanitised lexicon. Derrida is not here arguing for the demerits of reading the contortions and tensions of the official discourse on *apartheid*. He acknowledges “one should also pay attention to the rhetorical contortions of the ideologues and official politicians of *apartheid*” (1986:159), although it does not suffice to merely reproduce that official discourse.

The next section of Derrida’s rejoinder proceeds much like the first and analyses yet another error in McClintock and Nixon’s response, another “question of reading, still just as elementary and directly linked to the preceding one” (1986:160). However, the debate now turns on their assertion that Derrida considers *apartheid* to have “‘always’ been the *literal* ‘watchword’ *within* the Nationalist regime”. He thus reminds McClintock and Nixon that his reference to *apartheid* as the watchword of South African racism is “precisely in order to say that this ‘watchword’ has a complex history, with its dates and places of emergence and disappearance” (160). Peggy Kamuf, in a translator’s note, interestingly highlights that “Derrida’s term *mot d’ordre*, translated as ‘watchword’, could also have been rendered by McClintock’s and Nixon’s term: ‘rallying cry’” (1986:161). This is an instance of what Derrida identifies as McClintock and Nixon’s arguing “against themselves”, and further supports his contention that they have no ‘serious objections’ to make to him.

Their argument that Derrida’s analysis in “Racism’s Last Word” seeks to put *apartheid* in a “quarantine from the historical process” is thus turned against them: “It’s you, and not me, who also seem to be frightened by this word because you propose that we take seriously all the substitutes and pseudonyms, the periphrases and metonymies that the official discourse in Pretoria keeps coming up with: the tireless ruse of propaganda, the

indefatigable but vain rhetoric of dissimulation” (1986:159). As such, Derrida finds it necessary to dispense his own lesson on historical reality, belittlingly referring to them as his “dear comrades”. “A watchword is not just a name. This too history teaches us, as you should know since you’re concerned with history. A watchword is also a concept and a reality ... One must be attentive to what links words to concepts and to realities but also to what can dissociate them” (1986:163). The lesson continues as Derrida answers their charge that he is inaccurate in stating South African racism is the only one that “dares say its name”. Once again, McClintock and Nixon’s appeal to the disappearance of *apartheid* in official discourse misses “the fact ... that the system of *apartheid* is not only practiced but *inscribed in the constitution* and in and impressive judicial apparatus”:

To speak one’s name in politics ... is not simply to make use of a substantive but to present oneself as such, for what one is, in complex discourses, the texts of the law and of socioeconomic, even police and ‘physical’ practices. In politics, as history should have taught you, a ‘watchword’ is not limited to a lexicon. You confuse words and history. Or rather, you make poor distinctions between them. (1986:163).

In the closing analysis of his paper Derrida returns his attention to McClintock and Nixon’s reproach of what they call his “method”. I wish to recall their assertion fully, for I left it unchallenged in my reading of their analysis: “If, then, Derrida seeks not merely to prize open certain covert metaphysical assumptions but also to point to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime, then the strategic value of his method has to be considered seriously” (1986:140). Derrida notes the wily allusion they make in their reference to the word “text” (which in their phrase, “*beyond* the text”, undoubtedly gestures to *Of Grammatology*’s (in)famous statement: “there is no outside the text”) and use of words like “post-structuralism”, “Western metaphysics”. As such, Derrida correctly assesses that McClintock and Nixon “mean to contest, beyond the precise context of *apartheid*, the ‘strategic value’ of [his] ‘method’ *in general*” (1986:167). The “method” to which they are signalling here is of course what they apprehend to be deconstruction.

Derrida charges that contrary to McClintock and Nixon's view, "text", "no more than writing or trace" (1986:167), is not limited to the book. To be sure, Derrida's articulation of the concept of trace – as evidenced in his theoretical production since the late 1960s – generalises "it almost without limit, in any case without present or perceptible limit, without any limit that *is*. That's why there is nothing '*beyond the text*'" (1986:167)⁴. This calculated reconsideration of textuality allows him, he claims, "to bring together in a more consistent fashion, in the most consistent fashion possible, theoretico-philosophical necessities with the 'practical', political, and other necessities of what is called deconstruction" (1986:168):

That's why deconstructive readings and writings are concerned not only with library books, with discourses, with conceptual and semantic contents ... They are also effective or active (as one says) interventions, in particular political and institutional interventions that transform contexts without limiting themselves to theoretical or constative utterances even though they must also produce such utterances. That's why [he does not] go '*beyond the text*', in this *new* sense of the word text, by fighting and calling for a fight against *apartheid*, for example. (1986:168)

For Derrida then, McClintock and Nixon's "response" is exemplary for it reflects the willed interest of both the 'Left' and the 'Right' "to represent deconstruction as a turning inward and an enclosure by the limits of language, whereas in fact deconstruction *begins by* deconstructing logocentrism, the linguistics of the word, and this very enclosure itself" (1986:168). On both sides of this self-proclaimed "political" divide the impatience with deconstructive practices arises from the (denegated) recognition that the latter "are also and first of all political and institutional practices ... [that create the space for and even necessitate] the most open kinds of political (but not just political) practice and

⁴ Elsewhere, for it bears repeating: "What I call "text" implies all the structures called the 'real', 'economic', 'historical', 'socio-institutional', in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that 'there is nothing outside the text' ... [This means] that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this 'real' except in an interpretive experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring" (Derrida, 1988:148).

pragmatics” (1986:168-69). Here, Derrida reiterates that McClintock and Nixon do not respond to his paper as such, but rather, in their own fashion, to a politico-institutional “imperative” that admonishes interdisciplinarity:

Each must stick to his role and stay within the field of his competence, none may transgress the limits of his territory. Oh, you wouldn't go so far as to wish that some sort of *apartheid* remain or become the law of the land in the academy. Besides, you obviously don't like this word. You are among those who don't like this word and do not want it to remain the 'unique appellation'. No, in the homelands of academic culture or of 'political action', you would favor instead reserved domains, the separate development of each community in the zone assigned to it. (1986:169-70)

It should be clear that Derrida's remarks in the above – and this is consistent with the whole texture of his rejoinder – highlight the bitterness that characterises the debate. His damning suggestion here is that the disciplinary and institutional politics to which McClintock and Nixon's response adhere, (uncritically) follows the logic of *apartheid*. Derrida's rather severe assertion underscores the question of an 'ethics of discussion', a discussion to which I will later return.

To be sure, the scant criticism and commentary there is on the present debate, is to varying degrees united in the assessment of McClintock and Nixon's response as (not) completely missing the point – although I am not asserting that this consensus somehow renders their response wrong in advance. The chronologising of the lexical denegations of *apartheid* in the discourse of South African regime does not constitute in any way a critique of Derrida's gesture in “Racism's Last Word”, as he himself undoubtedly (and quite forcefully) illustrates in his response. There are four major questions that the debate raises which I would like to expose more closely here.

The first of these is none other than the question of (con)text. It should already be clear that for Derrida the context and mode of his appeal are quite determined, thus his

assertion that that McClintock and Nixon's misapprehension of this leads them to "take a *prescriptive* utterance for a *descriptive* (theoretical and constative) one". This does not mean, as Paul Cilliers seems to think in "On Derrida and Apartheid", arguing with himself in the most confused fashion, that Derrida's justification of the appeal constituted in the first line of "Racism's Last Word" is an attempt to extricate prescription from description. Derrida is precisely aware, as Cilliers himself acknowledges, that the distinction between prescription and description is irreducible: "It is prescriptive concerning the *name* of the ultimate racism, but the statement is descriptive of what the ultimate racism *is*, namely Apartheid" (Cilliers, 1998:81). Cilliers' objection is thus unclear, for as Derrida states, "although it is not limited by the form of descriptive observation, [his] 'appeal' in no way contradicts the historian's truth" (1986:158)⁵. Thus, the mistake or "enormous blunder" that McClintock and Nixon make is the degree to which they take his "appeal" to be *only* a descriptive utterance.

Cilliers usefully notes that the "context in which McClintock and Nixon, as well as the rest of us, encounter 'Racism's Last Word' is *not* in the catalogue, but in the pages of *Critical Inquiry*, an academic journal" (1998:80). He adds, "there is nothing wrong with an academic article, especially one with an ethical focus, in the form of an appeal. The point here is that Derrida was, *by his own lights*, a little more than unfair to chastise McClintock and Nixon for not realizing what the *correct* context of his text was – a context that should apparently have fixed their reading of the text" (1998:80, first emphasis mine). "By his own lights" then, for Cilliers seeks to argue that Derrida is in contradiction with his own assertion in "Afterword: Toward an Ethics of Discussion" (the Afterword to *Limited Inc*) which reflects on, among other things, an earlier debate with

⁵ So too is Rosemary Jolly's objection in "Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa". She argues, "the academy needs to accept as its crucial project the task of promoting a language that ruptures the division between the prescriptive and the descriptive on which Derrida's defense of 'Racism's Last Word' rests. The acceptance of such a language would mean that the theoretical would no longer be confined to the descriptive and opposed to the prescriptive, as it is in Derrida's formulation" (1995:24). Jolly even goes so far as to add that Derrida's "error" reflects Stanley Fish's claim "that, theoretically, his own arguments have 'no consequences' – despite his extraordinarily public persona" (1995:28). However, as I have shown, Derrida nowhere commits such an 'error', nor does he claim that his arguments have 'no consequences'. Derrida acknowledges McClintock and Nixon's assertion that his text is of 'limited strategic worth', but asserts that the strategic worth of his text "would be far from nil" (1986:157).

John R. Searle. Here, Derrida asserts that “the simple recalling of a context is never a gesture that is neutral, innocent, transparent, disinterested” (1988:131). However, to remain faithful to reading Derrida or to remedy what he sees as a contradiction, Cilliers would have to contextualise Derrida’s above statement:

The reconstitution of a context can never be perfect and irreproachable even though it is a regulative ideal in the ethics of reading, of interpretation, or of discussion. But since this ideal is unattainable, for reasons which are essential and to which I will doubtless return, the determination, or even the redetermination, the simple recalling of a context is never a gesture that is neutral, innocent, transparent, disinterested ... The putative or pretended ... reconstitution of a context always remains a performative operation and is never purely theoretical ... [It] may not be something ‘politically suspect’ to be sure, but it also cannot be apolitical or politically neutral. And the analysis of the political dimension of all contextual determination is never a purely theoretical gesture. It always involves a political evaluation, even if the code of this evaluation is overdetermined, resists classifications (such as right/left), and is yet to come – promised – rather than given. (Derrida, 1988:131-132)

Perhaps I did not need to reconstitute the context of Derrida’s statement to the extent that I have in the above quote. For Derrida already states, in the fragment supplied by Cilliers, that what is at issue is “the simple recalling”, or as the rest of the quote affirms, the “putative or pretended reconstitution of a context”⁶. Derrida’s own comments to McClintock and Nixon about the criterion of context are far from simple and putative. They are not merely a supposedly apolitical theoretical gesture but a political evaluation, however overdetermined. As he notes in his rejoinder, contextual determination has limits that are “by definition not fixed and are in the process of shifting at the very moment [he] is writing”. As such, Derrida does not affirm, as Cilliers offers, anything

⁶ Of course then, my own recalling of the context of Derrida’s statement is not arbitrary. It serves to preempt and modify the discussion of Cilliers and Jolly’s respective (though coterminous) assertions that Derrida’s meditations in “Racism’s Last Word” and his rejoinder effectively place *apartheid* “over there, in South Africa”, and that it sought to construct South Africa as the “atavistic other”.

like “the *correct* context of his text – a context that should apparently have fixed [McClintock and Nixon’s] reading of the text”. No, not fix their reading of the text, but to some extent inform their reading, especially since, as Derrida reminds, they “are concerned not to dissociate words and history” (1986:157). In a not merely superficial sense then, Niall Lucy correctly assesses that McClintock and Nixon’s reference to Derrida’s paper “by its (original) French title in the catalogue and not by its (translated) English title in *Critical Inquiry*” problematises the chronology of “the object of their critique in relation to the critique itself” (1995:2). Their reference to the French title of “Racism’s Last Word” is significant, for it bears directly on the question of (con)text which I have already discussed:

It is important to understand that their complaint against Derrida depends on their separation of (the) text from (the) real, which becomes their warrant for accusing Derrida of separating ‘Word’ from ‘History’ ... Their separation of the text from the real (or refusal of the statement, ‘there is no outside the text’) supplies McClintock and Nixon with a warrant to accuse Derrida of separating word from history. (Lucy, 1995:4-5)

The second critical issue raised in the debate, related to the first, is question of whether Derrida’s appeal has the effect of (dis)placing *apartheid* as “an untranslatable name for the evil perpetrated by *them*, ‘over there in South Africa’” (1998:82), as Cilliers argues – or as Jolly asserts, seeks to construct South Africa as the “atavistic other” (1995:19-20). Cilliers however, who positions himself as “sympathetic to the strategies of deconstruction”, admits that some “aspects of this reading may seem too deliberate ... and are perhaps at times unfair” (1998:83) and as such offers that Derrida could with some justification defend against them. Once again, it is not difficult to ascertain precisely why Cilliers should pen his text of complaint against Derrida’s gesture in “Racism’s Last Word”. For Cilliers hastens to add that his “target is not the person Jacques Derrida, but those who preferred to see apartheid as something perpetrated *only* by a specific group of (white, South African) people” (1998:83).

Given that Cilliers himself argues that Derrida is not one of “*those* [metropolitans] who preferred” (my emphasis) to extricate themselves from *apartheid* his precise objection is against no one in particular. But then again “those” who sought to displace *apartheid* as specifically South African are never named. Consequently, the rhetoric of Cilliers’ objection could be seen as effectively arguing the opposite of what he contends he is asserting – for the only name he gives is Derrida’s. It soon becomes clear that Cilliers’ interest is to motivate for a species of geopolitically disseminated *apartheid*: “there is a serious danger involved in reserving the notion of apartheid for that specifically South African thing”, and, “Apartheid, as a modernist strategy to structure and control, was never confined to South Africa” (1998:85). Of course, but only to a point. A point to which I will soon return, as it goes directly to Derrida’s articulation of *apartheid* as a “unique appellation”. As I have alluded, Jolly is also concerned that *apartheid* not be seen as phenomenally South African.

Jolly considers the rhetorical effects of Derrida’s gesture in “Racism’s Last Word” as “analyzed in the context of [its] performance, [to be] radically at odds with its stated goal, the condemnation of racism ... This plea certainly invites readers to be complicit in the text’s condemnation of apartheid, but it does so by appealing to South Africa as spectacularly other” (1995:19). Jolly’s problem is thus located in the exhibition:

The artworks represent the atrocity of apartheid, thus *presenting* apartheid as a spectacle to be condemned. The notion of exhibition as just condemnation ... depends on the viewer or reader’s assumption of an authority, an objectivity, that enables condemnation ... The authority of the art exhibition, once used to construct the other, must now deconstruct it”. (Jolly, 1995:20, my emphasis)

Rather than an ethico-political intervention, she argues that Derrida’s text is “neocolonial”, as it simultaneously invites the reader to “condemn” and “dissociate” herself from *apartheid*. For Jolly, Derrida’s assertion “that the aforementioned exhibition exposes and commemorates, indicts and contradicts the whole of a Western history” is indicative of his anxiety not to afford the audience “the comforts of such dissociation”

(1995:20). However, it should be clear that Jolly elides Derrida's own arguments about the exhibition. To recall: for him, the exhibition, "beyond the present of the institutions supporting it or of the foundation that ... it will itself become ... neither commemorates nor represents an event" but rather, it calls forth or "commemorates in anticipation" (1985:298-99). Christopher Fynsk's discussion is instructive on this point:

Thus the exhibition, *exposition* in French, presents nothing that is, Derrida says, describes or illustrates nothing present – since truth is no thing that is; if the exhibition *exposes* a present, it does so in projecting upon a future of which it presents no images. The exhibition does not work in the manner of a representation of any kind, or points beyond, for example, its various representations of atrocious suffering in South Africa. (1989:4)

Derrida's formulation of *apartheid*, as "the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many" should be clear, although Cilliers continues to be baffled: "We are still trying to figure out *why* anyone would refer to apartheid in South Africa as the 'ultimate racism' without condemning, referring, or comparing it to any other specific form of racism ... why, for what reason, would someone transpose the worst evils of racism onto a single term, and then situate that term in one specific context *outside* of himself, even if he is correct on a purely descriptive level?"⁷ (1998:85-86). To be sure, already in "Racism's Last Word", Derrida offers *apartheid* as "the essence at its very worst – *as if* there were something like a racism par excellence, the most racist of racisms" (my emphasis); or a page later, "*Apartheid* is famous, in sum, for manifesting the lowest extreme of racism" (my emphasis). That "as if" and "renown" – or as he offers in "But Beyond ...", "the history of *apartheid* (its 'discourse' and its 'reality', the totality of its *text*)" (1986:165) – is precisely what Derrida asserts no serious historian can call into question. As this is insufficient for Cilliers, Lucy puts it quite succinctly:

⁷ Cilliers also argues that the terms of Derrida's rejoinder make it possible to read "Racism's Last Word" as "an example of an attempt by the West to deny their complicity in perpetrating apartheid themselves". However, it is strange that his assertion is not modified in the least by a reading of the "post-script" to Derrida's response. Here Derrida forwards two cursory reasons why *apartheid* is also an "American problem". Of course Cilliers has read the "post-script", for it is indeed here that he finds the quote he decontextualises, "over there, in South Africa", and on which his deliberate reading rests.

What if the word 'apartheid' is so saturated with history, like the word 'Auschwitz', that it seems to stand apart from history and to stand in for the ultimate form of its type? Apartheid is the ultimate form of racism; Auschwitz, the ultimate form of genocide. Each word is the extreme form of a (different) same – racism is not *confined* to 'apartheid'; genocide is not *confined* to 'Auschwitz' – only on the basis of the *history* that each records and which separates it from other words. For although there are other forms of racism, there is no *single* word for the injustice of all racisms that bares the history of the word 'apartheid'. (1995:16-17)

However, I should state my own reservation regarding two points Derrida makes in his appeal. The first of these is his reminder that *apartheid* "is also daily suffering, oppression, poverty, violence, torture inflicted by an arrogant white minority (16 percent of the population, controlling 60 to 65 percent of the national revenue) on the mass of the black population" (1985:293). This does perhaps highlight an oversimplification of the political allegiances or otherwise, of the white minority in South Africa, and seems to somewhat paint all white South Africans as identifying with *apartheid*. Also, in a certain sense, everyone (some more than others) suffers under *apartheid*; something like Fanon's exposition of the alienation and, obsessional neuroses and psychoses suffered sometimes suffered by both the coloniser and colonised in colonial social relations, or the tortured and the torturer during the armed struggle for liberation⁸. Nevertheless, one could also see Derrida's assertion as an appeal to the empirical fact of the effects of the renowned and obsessive juridico-legislative apparatus that was *apartheid*. As such, this (unpleasant) assertion could be rescued by reference to the fact that Derrida also states, "that a *certain* white community of European descent imposes *apartheid* on four-fifths of South Africa's population" (1985:294, my emphasis). Of course one could still complain about the unclear specificity (or homogenising tendency) within that "certain white community", no less also about the reference to four-fifths.

⁸ See Fanon's comments on the effects of the violence of decolonisation in his psychiatric case studies at the end of *The Wretched of the Earth*, in the chapter entitled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders".

Derrida's statement that "the white resistance movement in South Africa deserves our praise" is however, more problematic. I agree with Cilliers to the extent that he notes that the above statement implies "a divide between those worthy of praise and those who feel that they are in a position to hand out praise" (1998:85). Certainly, the meting out of praise "is not the same as declaring one's solidarity", but it does not necessarily imply, as Cilliers goes on to offer, "that some have the ability to escape the messiness of interaction with the other, to reach some higher ground where they are morally safe" (1998:85). For to claim this Cilliers has to temporarily forget the ethico-political imperative of the text of an appeal, which he himself earlier acknowledges in both that Derrida's approach is "ethical through and through" (79) and that Derrida takes a "firm ethical position on an abomination" (83). No "escape from the messiness of interaction with other" then, if one already acknowledges an ethical relation – which, of course, is already a declaration of solidarity. In this view, to commend the merits of white resistance can be seen as supplementing the ethical relation – as recognition (or appeal) that white resistance, whose "members" constitute part of the juridico-legislated "beneficiaries" of *apartheid*, might hasten its end.

It should be clear that I have not discussed the question of the texture of Derrida's response – its 'style', its 'rhetorics'. For some critics, Derrida's response is not responsible, as it does not remain faithful to the "ethics of discussion" that he proposes in the "Afterword" to *Limited Inc*⁹. Right from the beginning of his rejoinder, Derrida states: "Whenever I take part in a debate or, which is not often, in a polemic, I make it a point to quote extensively from the text I am discussing, even though this is not standard practice. *Since I am going to be doing that here*, by addressing you directly I will save space (and I'm thinking also of *Critical Inquiry*'s hospitality)" (1986:155, my emphasis). It could be argued that the ambiguous objective specificity of "Since I am going to be doing that here" rhetorically signals that the logic of the text of the present discussion does not follow an either/or, but rather, a both/and in the relation between debate and

⁹ "I think it is possible, if not for McClintock and Nixon, then at least for some other readers [of Derrida's rejoinder], to be a little more than unhappy with *how* Derrida did what he did in this case. In sum, his reaction was not responsible" (Cilliers, 1998:83).

polemic. This can be seen in among other things, the texture of his response (its infantilising and unkind terms), and his reiterated contention that McClintock and Nixon “have no serious objections” to make to him.

There is perhaps the need to recall, as Lucy does, that “not all debates are necessarily productive or transforming; not all debates are conducted with good will” (1995:19). For Cilliers then, there is a contradiction between Derrida’s reiterated charge that McClintock and Nixon consistently read him in “bad faith” given his “bad faith” reading of them, and his commitment to an “ethics of discussion”. Reed Way Dasenbrock’s paper, “Taking it Personally: Reading Derrida’s Responses”, does not specifically examine “the exchange with McClintock and Nixon over *apartheid* in detail since the substance of this exchange is at some remove from the more technical debates over meaning and interpretation on which the others focus” (1994:264)¹⁰. However, Dasenbrock is given to argue that Derrida is either in contradiction, or that he is a “recanting revolutionary” (273). For Dasenbrock, any assertion or complaint of ‘bad faith’ reading issuing from Derrida is counter to his earlier insights about authorial intention and textuality; most notably, the manner in which Derrida reads Searle in *Limited Inc*. That is, Dasenbrock’s complaint is directed at Derrida’s insistence on an ‘ethics of discussion’ and his assertion of the necessity to read in ‘good faith’. However, in order to declare a contradiction here, it is necessary to ignore Derrida’s thinking on ethics. Geoffrey Bennington is relevant here:

Ethics, then, is ethical only to the extent that it is originally compromised or contaminated by the non-ethical. According to a logic laid out more than thirty years earlier in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, the chance of avoiding the worst violence is given by a compromise involving an acceptance of, and calculation of, the lesser violence ... In this case, Derrida will say that ethics is essentially *pervertible*, and that this pervertibility is the positive condition (to be affirmed,

¹⁰ This assertion is untenable, for I have already illustrated that the exchange with McClintock and Nixon is itself quite technical and is at its core a debate about meaning and interpretation. Niall Lucy asserts this much regarding the debate: “There is something critical at stake, then – something critically political, fundamentally ethical at stake – between competing theories of language that contest an understanding of the world” (1995:7). Fynsk’s rather “philosophical” account of Derrida’s gesture and reading of the itinerant exhibition as signalling his indebtedness to Heidegger (1989:4), although at times apparently and self-admittedly reductive, also renders Dasenbrock’s assertion questionable.

then) of all 'positive' values (the Good, the Just, and so on) ethics enjoins us to seek. (Bennington, 2000:42)

In this view then, his commitment to an "ethics of discussion" does not preclude their "pervertibility". Nor does it entail a contradiction of the kind asserted by Dasenbrock¹¹. It is not so much that Derrida's rejoinder responds to McClintock and Nixon, but rather that theirs is not a "response" as such. That is, as Lucy asserts, their "response" is "irresponsible". Lucy is correct in noting that the belligerence of Derrida's response illustrates him losing "patience with those who (in 1986, still) read him so perversely ... that they have clearly not registered at all the significance of the word 'text'" (1995:20). Derrida might argue his response involves "an acceptance of, and calculation of, the lesser violence" compared to McClintock and Nixon's own. He does indeed argue this when he charges that "the effect [McClintock and Nixon] want to produce is quite determined, but in order to arrive at it, [they] are willing to put forward any kind of countertruth". In this view, his rejoinder is an extreme form of the manner in which they presume to give him a lesson on history and politics.

Finally, the opposition to deconstruction (in general) or, as McClintock and Nixon figure it (and in this they are not alone), something called Derrida's "method" (in particular) – on the supposed basis that it is 'apolitical' or that its implications are 'politically suspect' and thus supposedly 'textualist' – forms part of a desire (by both those opposed and sympathetic commentators) for Derrida to explicitly declare his politics. I agree with Bennington's suggestion that what these commentaries fail to grasp is precisely the trajectory of Derrida's thought. The demand is for Derrida not to largely deal with questions of politics, ethics or justice obliquely, as he admits¹². This would

¹¹ Despite assertions of contradiction by detractors and (some) commentators alike, for Derrida on why "it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy", see "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion" (1988:146).

¹² For Derrida's own discussion of why deconstruction *seems* to deal with the questions of justice (and thus of politics, ethics, responsibility and duty) obliquely, see "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" (1992:9-10;15-16). For commentary on how 'the political' is figured in Derrida's thought, see Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political* (1996). For a lengthier discussion of "the political demand" (made of Derrida) or the "political imperative" within humanities scholarship see Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (2000:18-33), and Niall Lucy, *Debating Derrida* (1995:72-98).

require that he enunciate the political of his thought through the inherited terms and modalities of a tradition of (political) philosophy whose hierarchal oppositions and very “oppositonality” – Bennington’s term (2000:9) – he has spent his intellectual career questioning; concepts whose nonessentiality and deconstructibility he has already attempted to demonstrate. Catherine Zuckert’s discussion in “The Politics of Derridean Deconstruction” is an example of this “political demand”, here articulated in accusatory mode. She argues that far from being “radical”, Derrida’s work “has an anti-activist, if not strictly speaking conservative thrust”. Zuckert then turns tack and argues that if Derrida’s work “is not conservative ... [then it is at least] profoundly anti-revolutionary” (1991:354-55). Although I hope to have sufficiently demonstrated it in my analysis of the debate, perhaps I need only recall Derrida’s reminder:

There is no one, single deconstruction. Were there ^s only one, were it homogeneous, it would not be inherently either conservative or revolutionary, or determinable within the code of such oppositions. That is precisely what gets on everyone’s nerves ... As deconstruction is inherently neither ‘conservative’ nor the contrary, the political evaluation of each of the gestures called deconstructive will have to depend, if it is to be rigorous and in proportion to what it is addressing, upon analyses that are very difficult, very minute, very flexible with regard to the stereotypes of political-institutional discourse. (1988:141)

In her own manner, Zuckert follows McClintock and Nixon in what Lucy offers is “the one (mis)taken-for-granted assumption about Derrida’s work ... is that it bears no relation to pragmatic politics” (1995:1). Why the oblique, indirect address of the questions of politics and ethics? Because for Derrida, in a logic he already sets out as early as *Of Grammatology*, ethics, like justice, is an experience of the impossible. This aporetic moment of undecidability is necessary if an ethics is to be true to its name; that is, if it is to exceed mere calculation or subsumption to some prior rule, norm or case.

Can it still be said that Derrida’s work or deconstructive practices in general are lacking in “political implications” (or otherwise apolitical), and say nothing on “ethics”? (And I

am in no way trying to limit this question to the comparatively noticeable interventions in “concrete” or “worldly” politics, or in contexts where Derrida attempts to enunciate what he calls a relation between “deconstruction and the ‘yes’.”) Certainly. Only if the deontological responsibility to read with rigour and patience is ignored in favour of partisan politico-institutional imperatives. Only if the ostentatious reference to “politics” is enough, by itself, to insure some sort of self-congratulatory radicality. That is, only if the inherited concepts of politics and of ethics are to remain unquestionable, occupying, as Bennington’s exposition on Derrida thought testifies, a position of “transcendental contraband” (2000:19). To ask the question of politics and of ethics is not in itself already political or ethical – that is, cannot propose or institute a politics or ethics. It precisely exceeds proposition and institution, in striving, as Bennington notes, “to keep open the event of alterity which alone makes politics possible and inevitable, but which political philosophy of all colours has always tried to close” (2000:33). But how useful is this in a postcolonial context?

Of course Derrida’s intervention into the debate on *apartheid* is not articulated in the familiar terms of postcolonial theory. However, it is possible to argue – and I have shown that Derrida suggests this – that *apartheid* is the manifestation and crystallisation of a particular instance of the European imperial and colonial mission in South Africa. As an intervention into the text of South Africa, Derrida’s text and the debate that it initiates, seems to highlight the kinds of issues with which postcolonial theory engages. Also, as a particular gesture to the text of *apartheid*, “Racism’s Last Word” illustrates how deconstructive reading practices might be useful for postcolonial analysis. I have attempted to show this through foregrounding the major questions that I believe emerge from the debate. Derrida’s reminder that “there is no one, single deconstruction” and his assertion of the rigour, difficulty and flexibility of deconstructive gestures – in addressing the question of the political – would seem to find answer in Homi Bhabha’s work. Thus, by turning to an analysis of Bhabha’s work, I will not only be returning to the more familiar terms of postcolonial theory, but I will once again test the central question of my thesis through an analysis of Bhabha’s reading of the work of Frantz Fanon.

**Posting Frantz Fanon's Call: A Political/Theoretical
Insight for Postcolonial Intellectuals?**

In this chapter I will critically analyse the debate around Homi K. Bhabha's deconstructive/(post)colonial intellectual production. I will pay particular attention to his reading of the work of Frantz Fanon, and the subsequent attack against this reading by Benita Parry. The discussion will disclose not only Parry's own reading of Fanon, which she offers as a rescue of his work from the exorbitances and exhortations of an overly esoteric postcolonial textualism, but also other contributions to the debate. The theoretical eclecticism of Bhabha's work, no less than the density (and metaphoricity) of his prose, poses a difficulty much like that which comes from engaging with Spivak's work. It has also led to similar charges of theoretical elitism and obscurantism¹. Earlier, in the discussion of the debate inaugurated by Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", I referenced Parry's attack as it relates to Bhabha's reading of Fanon's work. I will in this chapter not be attempting to engage with Bhabha's theoretical production as a whole, but rather with his particular appropriation of the work of Fanon – an appropriation inflected by a deconstructive practice indebted to amongst other things, Derridean deconstruction, Foucauldian discourse analysis, Bakhtinian dialogism, and Lacanian (partially Freudian) psychoanalysis.

Bhabha's most sustained (single) engagement with the heritage of Fanon's thought is represented by his Foreword to the 1986 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition". Bhabha reworked this Foreword (without any particular change to his reading of Fanon) as "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative" for David Goldberg's *The Anatomy of Racism* (1990), and reprints the latter version in his own collection *The Location of Culture* (1994). This is not to say however, that Bhabha's intellectual production is, prior to his penning the Foreword, devoid of any engagement with Fanon's texts². Parry's attack in "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse" testifies to

¹ I have already noted (in chapter two) Parry's objection to the dense texture of Bhabha style and his deployment of a specialised terminology: Bhabha's "enchantment with troping, punning and riddling all too often sends the signifier into free-fall, rendering arbitrary the link between word and signified" which for his reader "presents the hazard of inadvertent misconstruction" (Parry, 1994:7); Moore-Gilbert concurs with this assessment, see (1997:115); see also Arif Dirlik's less generous reading of the implications of Bhabha's style as "political mystification and theoretical obfuscation" (1998:333).

² Bhabha's earliest notable engagement with Fanon's work is "Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", the latter reworked and reprinted in *The Location of Culture* as "The Other

(at least) this much. Bhabha's work in the early 1980s is variously acknowledged to have reinvigorated the serious engagement with Fanon's work. Bhabha sought to critically reappraise the incisiveness of the anti-colonialist critique of colonial discourse and relations, given his particular reservations on what he saw as a marked quietism in Edward Said's *Orientalism*³.

Bhabha's reading of Fanon in "Interrogating Identity" relies on his theoretical articulations in his earlier essays. It is thus not merely for the ease of organisation that my own discussion of the debate surrounding Bhabha's appropriation of Fanon proceeds through the close textual analysis of his essay "Interrogating Identity". For not only does the latter essay assume and lay out the concepts and arguments of the earlier essays that animate Parry's attack, but it also inscribes some of Bhabha's responses to his detractors – more fully, although generally, laid out in "The Commitment to Theory" (1989). What I seek to investigate through my analysis of this debate is then, precisely whether Bhabha's deconstructive practices – in his theoretisation of (post)coloniality – are flexible in addressing both the stereotypes of the politico-institutional discourse of colonialism, and, crucially, the articulations of anti-colonialist discourse. In order to arrive at a discussion of what is critically at stake in the debate, I will highlight some misunderstandings in the debate through a brief reading of Fanon's enunciation of politics, native agency and resistance. This discussion will be punctuated by a brief reading of Robert Young's insistence on Derrida's Algerian connection in "Subjectivity and History: Derrida in Algeria" (2001).

In the first section of "Interrogating Identity" Bhabha sets out the central argument, proposing that the radicality of Fanon's thought rests not so much on his articulation of the project of decolonisation – the transformation not only of colonial relations, but of humanity as a whole. Rather, Bhabha argues what remains enabling in Fanon's work is his enunciation of/from the tentative liminality of the space of

Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism". The former essay is collected in proceedings of the 1982 Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, *The Politics of Theory*.

³ For Bhabha's affirmation and assessment of the contributions and limitations of Said's *Orientalism*, see particularly "Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" (1983:199-201).

ambivalent racial and sexual identification. This was done in an attempt to think through the as yet “unresolved contradiction between culture and class” (1994:40) and rearticulate the political as the space of introjection and interaction between the psychic and the social⁴. That is, anti-colonial/liberationist struggles refract not only the direction of Western history, but also challenge its progressivist assumptions and linear conception of temporality: “If the order of Western historicism is disturbed in the colonial state of emergency, even more deeply disturbed is the social and psychic representation of the human subject” (1994:41-42). Bhabha thus argues that in Fanon’s summary dismissal of an essential Negro and White identity, “*The Negro is not. Any more than the white man*”, emerges a disturbance and dispersal of racial identity grounded in “the narcissistic myths of negritude or white cultural supremacy” (1994:40).

The intransigent alienation of the colonial Algerian that Fanon encountered during his time as Chief psychiatrist at Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital enlightened him to the complexities of institutional psychiatry in the discourse and reality of colonialism⁵. This realisation also resulted in what Bhabha has noted as Fanon’s impatience in his “search for a conceptual form appropriate to the social antagonism of the colonial relation” (1994:41). Bhabha argues this incessant movement at the margins of the conceptual forms organising Fanon’s thought marks his “doomed search for a dialectic of deliverance” (41) which Bhabha offers is illustrated by Fanon’s reformulation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, his evocation of an existentialist black subjectivity and his articulation of psychoanalysis within the dynamics of colonial relations. For Bhabha, the triple logic informing Fanon’s work serves both to restore the promise of freedom’s attainability and to reinscribe the presence of the colonised, as well as to illuminate “the madness of racism, the pleasure of pain, the agonistic fantasy of political power” (41).

⁴ Note that Bhabha’s reading of Fanon’s articulation of the racial drama or scene of colonial discourse and relations – as a scene of racial difference – relies on sighting/citing the latter scene as analogous to Freud’s articulation, in *On Sexuality*, of the scene of sexual difference as functioning through fetishism. For Bhabha’s justifications of this theoretical orientation, see (1983:201-202).

⁵ See Fanon’s letter of resignation from Blida-Joinville, “Letter to the Resident Minister (1956)”, in *Towards the African Revolution* (1988:52-54).

The theoretical eclecticism that Bhabha identifies in the work of Fanon could also be seen to apply to his own work⁶.

In his confrontation with colonial alienation Fanon poses the question of the colonised black man's desire in the language of psychoanalysis. Bhabha reads this as Fanon's privileging of the psychic domain, which Bhabha argues changes not only our conception of what constitutes "a *political* demand but transforms the very means by which we recognize and identify its *human agency*" (1994:42). Not surprisingly, Bhabha chastises – not for the last time – what he sees as Fanon's erstwhile lapses into an 'existentialism' that poses the question of political oppression as a violation of human essence; the consequence of the subsumption of the question of colonial man in the universalist terms of a discredited 'liberal-humanism':

Fanon's question is addressed not to such a unified notion of history nor to such a unitary concept of man. It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provides a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. (1994:42)

Bhabha claims for Fanon's articulation of "the problem of colonial cultural alienation in the psychoanalytic language of demand and desire" a radical questioning of "both individual and social authority as they come to be developed in the discourse of social sovereignty" (43). Thus, the colonial situation – given the manifest splitting or segregation that characterises the colonial space, what Fanon calls "Manichean delirium" – entails a fundamental contradiction in the assumptions of social authority. This is because the latter assumptions of social authority rest on the "myth of Man and Society" (43). For Bhabha, these split representations of colonial relations reveal the "in-between"

⁶ Here is Bhabha's meditation on Fanon: "As Fanon's texts unfold, the scientific fact comes to be agressed by the experience of the street; sociological observations are intercut with literary artifacts" (1994:41); compare this to Young's comment that we see Bhabha in his essays, "move from the model of fetishism to those of 'mimicry', 'hybridisation', and 'paranoia'" (2004:186).

space of “a deep psychic uncertainty” (1994:44) that enacts the ruse of (an unfettered and stable) conception of identity⁷. Such “ambivalent identification in the racist world” of colonial relations, in the perverse insertion of the colonised as absence, not in terms of the mutual recognition of Self and Other, but rather as “the otherness of the Self”, “turns on the idea of man as his alienated image”. For Bhabha, what emerges is a “figure of desire”, of the Other as Self’s “tethered” shadow, which threatens to its core the very image of the coloniser’s identity.

In the second section of his essay Bhabha turns his attention to the problem of identity in the postcolonial through a reading of two poems: the first by Bombay poet Adil Jussuwalla, elaborating the spectre of a denegated native subjectivity, “that haunts the identity of the postcolonial bourgeoisie”, which is echoed in the second, “the verse of a black woman, descendant of slaves, writing of the diaspora” (1994:45). Through his reading Bhabha seeks to argue that the problem of identity returns in postcoloniality as “a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – “missing person”, “invisible eye”, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other” (1994:46). The unfolding drama in these foreclosures of the identities of the marginalised native by the postcolonial bourgeoisie, and that of diasporas in the metropolitan centre, is one that elides any recognition or contemplation “of what is missing or invisible”. As such, Bhabha asserts these negations illustrate the impossibility of originary claims “of Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalising, plenitudinous object of vision” (1994:46). That is, what is exposed here is the unfeasibility of claims in the language of the Self to *fully* know the Other, to behold the Other as object, given that “the secret art of invisibleness of which the migrant poet speaks changes the very terms of our recognition of the person”:

This change is precipitated by the peculiar temporality whereby the subject cannot be apprehended without the absence or invisibility that constitutes it ... so

⁷ Bhabha here deploys his articulation of ambivalence as disturbing colonial authority and identity; see “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1985b:150-153).

that the subject speaks, and is seen from where it is *not*; and the migrant woman can subvert the perverse satisfaction of the racist, masculinist gaze that disavowed her presence, by presenting it with an anxious absence, a counter-gaze that turns the discriminatory look, which denies her cultural and sexual difference, back onto itself. (1994:47)

To be sure, Bhabha has thus far sought to affirm the important role that the counter-discourses and practices of anti-colonialist/liberationist struggles have had in challenging the inherent contradictions – when one examines colonial contexts – of, among other things, the Enlightenment ideals civilisation, freedom, individuality and legality. In the writings of this anti-colonialist tradition, Bhabha singles out Fanon's work as the most incisive and original, given the latter's interrogation of colonial authority and identity in the psychoanalytic language of demand and desire. For Bhabha, this interrogation opens up the space for rearticulating the question of the political beyond the conventional terms of political philosophy. Through privileging the significance of the psychic domain, it also opens for him the site of reinscription of the colonised as an agent of history and, reveals the contradictions and fissures in colonial authority and identity. Consequently, he argues that such ambivalent identification in the relations of the Manichean colonial world occludes recognition of the otherness of Other; a denegation of native subjectivity in the appropriation of the colonised as the absent presence of the coloniser's alienated Self-image. This is precisely the problematic of the representation of identity that returns in postcoloniality as the confrontation with the alterity of cultural and sexual difference. In the latter, Bhabha's discussion would seem covalent with my earlier analysis (in chapter two) of Spivak's assertion that postcolonial theorists and critics need to be aware – in their attempts to reinscribe subaltern subjectivities – of the persistent appropriation of 'the Other as Self's shadow'.

Through a reading of Roland Barthes' meditations on the symbolic sign and the function of the sign of "resemblance" in the "act of signification", Bhabha next seeks to reinscribe the "*perspective of depth*" as offering a certain authenticity to the sign of identity. His definition of the space of the enunciation of identity at those moments where

it exceeds the boundary of the image, leaving a “resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance”, is an attempt to articulate a “discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics” (1994:49-50). Through this response to other questions, Bhabha argues, “we are faced with the dimension of doubling”⁸. He emphasises the importance of the space of doubling, as the enunciatory space through which the “problems of meaning and being enter the discourses of poststructuralism, as the problematic of subjection and identification” (1994:50). That is, Bhabha’s discussion here attempts to show the possible channels through which poststructuralism – and this is not an attempt to homogenise the differential projects variously identified as ‘poststructuralist’ – *meaningfully* thinks through the problematics of subjection and identification; ‘meaningfully’ then, because there is not here the caricature of an adherence to some sort of infinite dissemination of meaning through the play of the signifier that collapses into an impotent nihilism.

For Bhabha, Fanon’s (so often quoted) meditations in *Black Skin, White Masks* before the disorienting gaze of a white child – “Look, a Negro ... Mama, see the Negro!” – reveals precisely the enunciative space of the doubling of identity. It is important to remember here that the psychoanalytic procedure of identification is “only ever the problematic of access to an image of totality” and that this psychic image marks the site of an ambivalent identification: “The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence or loss” (1994:51). Fanon’s answer to the question of psychoanalytic demand and the desire of the black man emerges as a demand for the “objectifying confrontation with otherness” (51). Bhabha disputes Fanon’s fixed inscription of an image of the Other as representative of a fundamentally opposed and “alien cultural consciousness” (52). For Bhabha, the Other should rather be seen as enabling the introduction of cultural difference “as a linguistic, symbolic and historic reality” (52). Following Lacan’s extension of Freud’s work on the primal Oedipal scene, Bhabha stresses that the place of the “Law of the father or the

⁸ For Bhabha’s fuller articulation of this ‘space of doubling’ as the moment of (post)colonial hybridity, see “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1985b:153-58;160-162).

paternal metaphor” in the language of psychoanalysis cannot be taken at face value. Rather, he proposes that the ‘Law of the Father’ be seen as the space of an ambivalent identification resulting in “a conflict of authority”, given its inscription of “a normative, normalizing place for the subject” whose “metaphoric access to identity is exactly the place of prohibition and repression” (1994:52)

There should be no surprise when Bhabha criticises Fanon for what he calls Fanon’s “analytic” (as opposed to psychoanalytic?) mode. Although he acknowledges that the Algerian struggle for liberation from which Fanon writes requires “more immediate identifications”, Bhabha complains about what he sees as Fanon’s turn away “from the ambivalences of identification to the antagonistic identities of political alienation and cultural discrimination” (1994:60). Bhabha thus refuses Fanon’s retention of the binary opposition coloniser/colonised, as he finds in this gesture the deplorable hasty naming of the Other. As I will soon more fully explore, this is precisely the aspect of Bhabha’s reading of Fanon that Parry finds most objectionable. To be sure, Fanon’s explicit naming of the white man’s Other as the black man, and the converse, is seen by Bhabha as evidence of Fanon’s adherence to the racist lexicon of the “political time and cultural space” (1994:60) from which Fanon was writing. The ambivalent identifications that characterise the psychic projections of fear, desire and demand do not entail a neat exchange and nor are they authorised in perpetuity. Bhabha blames this trend in Fanon – his attempt to explain away his contributions to the thought of the complex psychic projections characterising colonial relations – on the exigencies of his “sociodiagnostic psychiatry”:

It is as if Fanon is fearful of his most radical insights: that the politics of race will not be entirely contained within the humanist myth of man or economic necessity or historical progress, for its psychic affects question such forms of determinism; that social sovereignty and human subjectivity are only realizable in the order of otherness. It is as if the question of desire that emerged from the traumatic tradition of the oppressed has to be modified, at the end of *Black Skin, White*

Masks, to make way for an existentialist humanism that is banal as it is beatific.
(1994:61)

What Bhabha repudiates here is the thrust of Fanon's humanism, which he argues is "overcompensation" for the 'Manichean psychology' that characterises colonial relations. This "deep hunger for humanism" (1994:61) arises from Fanon's reinsertion of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic in an attempt to affirm recognition of the colonised native's subjectivity. For Bhabha, this is despite Fanon's earlier understanding of colonial relations as founded on "narcissistic indifference" (61). Consequently, Bhabha argues, Fanon's insistence on humanism, his "Hegelian dream for a human reality *in-itself-for-itself*" (1994:61), is foreclosed by his own assertion of colonial relations as Manichean and illustrative of an interrupted dialectic. For Bhabha, this "*non-dialectical* moment of Manicheanism", as an instance of the threat of cultural difference that springs from paranoid identification, provides "a strategy of political subversion":

In occupying two places at once – or three in Fanon's case – the depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place ... At the edge, in-between the black body and the white body, there is a tension of meaning and being, or some would say demand and desire, which is the psychic counterpart to [the] muscular tension that inhabits the native body. (1994:62)

This strategy of subversion is for Bhabha an attempt to follow the subaltern or metonymic instance in a "form of power that is exercised at the limits of identity and authority, in the mocking spirit of mask and image" (1994:62). He argues that this is the paradigmatic lesson taught by the revolutionary consciousness and combat of the veiled Algerian woman in the liberation struggle for Algerian decolonisation. By crossing psychic, political, patriarchal and geographical Manichean boundaries, she lays claim to her own liberty. Finally, Bhabha asserts that Fanon's signal achievement lies in his "shifting the focus of cultural racism from the politics of nationalism to the politics of narcissism" (1994:63). This shift in focus, as he hopes to have argued, "opens up a

margin of interrogation that causes the subversive slippage of identity and authority” (1994:63).

If I interpret him correctly, the key issue in Bhabha’s reading of Fanon is the (inordinate?) attention he pays to Fanon’s articulation of the ‘agonism’ that informs the psychic and social identifications of the colonial world. Bhabha does indeed take seriously Fanon’s schematisation of colonial relations as being (manifestly) constituted by Manichean psychology. Thus when Bhabha admonishes Fanon for his retention of the binary opposition coloniser/colonised, it is not so much that Bhabha refuses the antagonistic relations characterising the colonial world, nor that he undervalues the anti-colonialist/liberationist tradition and its calls to *armed* insurrection against colonialist oppression and dominance. These calls to armed rebellion contributed to the statutory dismantling of colonial imperialism and to the realisation of the colonised’s right to self-govern which no serious commentary can of itself call into question.

Bhabha too already acknowledges that the colonial world, during a program of decolonisation, is in a ‘state of emergency’ – the result of the colonised’s revolutionary challenge to the apparatuses and functionaries of colonial authority. For Bhabha, what is ultimately untenable in Fanon’s work is his reinscription – as mere reversal – of colonial identification in antagonistic terms, given his insights into the forestalling of ‘mutual recognition’ within colonial relations (in what Fanon himself calls “dual narcissism”). That is, although this reinscription is tendered as an attempt to reaffirm the colonised native’s subjectivity in the face of the weight of the latter’s elision in the racist discourse and reality of colonial authority and identity, it nonetheless abrogates the subversivity in the menace of the alterity of cultural difference.

I have already (in chapter two) touched on some of Parry’s complaints against Bhabha’s reading of Fanon, in her essay “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”. Parry strongly objects to what she sees as Bhabha’s rejection of the fundamental enmity of colonial relations in favour of a psychoanalytical/deconstructive reading that rather foregrounds the fissures in colonial identity and authority as a result of

the process of ambivalent identification. For Parry, “Fanon’s writings intercede to promote the construction of a politically conscious, unified revolutionary self, standing in unmitigated antagonism to the oppressor, occupying a combative subject position from which the wretched of the earth are enabled to mobilize an armed struggle against colonial power” (2004:15). She argues that Bhabha’s emphasis on Fanon as opening the space for an interrogation of cultural difference through the “politics of narcissism”, seeks to rescue Fanon as ‘proto-poststructuralist’ and is thus an attempt to “annex Fanon to Bhabha’s own theory” (2004:16). Parry argues that by not following the trajectory of Fanon’s thought, from his initial concern to analyse the ‘psycho-existential complex’ arising from “the juxtaposition of the white and black races”, to his later articulation of the programme of decolonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha “obscures Fanon’s paradigm of the colonial condition as one of implacable enmity between native and invader, making armed opposition both a cathartic and a pragmatic necessity” (2004:17)⁹.

Parry does however admit that Bhabha follows the anti-colonialist interpretation of the motive of colonial discourse as being the deployment of racial discrimination and the stereotyping of the colonised as a figure of degeneracy in order to facilitate the imperialist project of conquest, hegemony and pillage. However, in his psychoanalytical articulation of the ambivalence of colonial discourse, Parry argues that Bhabha limits native resistance to “returning the look of surveillance as the displacing gaze of the disciplined” (2004:24). Parry offers that Bhabha’s theorising is particularly effective

in making visible those moments when colonial discourse, already disturbed at its source by a doubleness of enunciation, is further subverted by the object of its address; when the scenario written by colonialism is given a performance by the native that estranges and undermines the colonialist script. (2004:25)

For Parry, the value of anti-colonialist/liberationist discourse lies in the recognition by its proponents that the processes of subjection and oppression characterising colonial

⁹ See Fanon’s Introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986:14).

relations necessarily produce resistance by the colonised, given the incommensurable demands made of the marginalised subject. Contrary to Bhabha, Parry argues that what remains enabling in Fanon is that the counter-discursive political demand of his analysis, although initially invoking a native past in seeking to dispel the disparaged history of the native's cultural difference, surpasses a simple search for lost origins or traditions. This counter-discourse, although derivative of colonial discourse, is forged in the cultural consciousness of resistance against colonial hegemony, and ultimately ruptures the colonial episteme. This is because such resistance by the colonised calls forth an uncertain future that promises the attainability of freedom through the rescinding of the 'psycho-existential complexes' that result from the cultural denigration, the sexual, racial and economic exploitation and discrimination that characterise colonial relations.

As I have already argued in my earlier discussion (in chapter two) of Parry's attack on Spivak's work, Parry's concern to retain the anti-colonialist articulation of the colonial scene as ordered by the Manichean binary opposition coloniser/colonised is indeed admirable. What motivates this retention of colonial Manicheanism, as Ania Loomba has pointed out in "Overworlding the Third World", is nothing less than the attempt to recover both the material socio-economic and historical reality of colonial relations and, the multivalent oppositional colonised subjectivities, whether individual or found in anti-colonialist/liberationist/nationalist discourses. However, I also wish to reiterate that Parry's analysis of what she sees as the problematic disparagement of the counter-discursive radicality of anti-colonialist/nationalist articulations in the work of Bhabha (and Spivak), undoubtedly (as I argued in chapter two) falls prey to an uncritical endorsement of nationalism. In this vein, I wish to recall Neil Lazarus's assessment that Parry's invocation of native agency and resistance, privileges a particular type and mode of native subjectivity and resistance.

In the introduction to her *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, Parry seems to acknowledge the latter shortcoming in her invocation of native agency when she says "some of the chapters advance arguments I would no longer present in their initial form or vocabulary, and contain concessions made out of politesse or diffidence to

theoretical positions I now consider unsustainable” (2004:3). Arguably, her reading of Fanon in “Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or two Cheers for Nativism”, published some seven years after her initial valorisation of a particular type of insurgent native subjectivity in “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, is a corrective of her prior uncritical endorsement of anti-colonialist nationalism and native resistance. “Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance” is paradigmatic for the apprehension of what it is critically at stake in both Bhabha and Parry’s differential appropriations of the insights of Fanon’s work. As such I will briefly explore Parry’s rearticulation of her position on native resistance.

That Parry has revised her position on how native resistance is to be theorised becomes apparent in her mild castigation – as seen in the first footnote to her essay – of what she sees as Fanon’s view of the colonised as altogether passive before modern liberation movements. Parry now critically acknowledges the heterogeneous forms of native resistance beyond its narrow instances in the discourses of native elites:

Traces of popular disobedience can also be recuperated from unwritten symbolic and symptomatic practices which register a rejection or violation of the subject positions assigned by colonialism. Such modes of refusal are not readily accommodated in the anti-colonialist discourses written by the elites of the nationalist and liberation movements. (2004:38)

Parry is keenly aware of the possible danger of mythologizing aboriginality, and she affirms “Robert Young’s caution that the search for a nativist alternative may simply represent ‘the narcissistic desire to find an other that will reflect western assumptions of selfhood’”(2004:42). Nevertheless, she argues that the interest of postcolonial critique concerned to re-present the informal narrativisations of dissent and opposition to colonial authority and identity, “is to retain in the discussion that realm of freedom which these histories prefigured or configured, as well as to register decolonising struggles as an emancipatory project despite the egregious failure these brought in their wake” (2004:42). Parry could have acknowledged the similarity of this caution to Spivak’s

concern (as I have already discussed in chapter two) that postcolonial intellectuals should be mindful of the ‘persistent recognition of the Other by assimilation’ as the reinscription of ‘the subject of the West or the West as Subject’.

As such, Parry also notes that a committed postcolonial critique, in retracing these counter-narratives of resistance, should be wary of countersigning the “erasures, suppressions and marginalizations, evident for example in the foregrounding of male figures of praxis and authority”. Once again, to borrow her own phrase, Parry shows that she is now aware of the problems in current correctives of theorisations of colonial discourse: “Such attention to the retention of patriarchal positions in anti-colonialist discourses points up the inadvisability of using the sources to write an optimistic narrative of liberation struggles as ‘ideologically correct’” (2004:43). And of course, this is the particular danger that threatens her own reading of native resistance as she concentrates on the articulations of anti-colonialist nationalism in the work of Fanon (but also Aimé Césaire).

Before detailing the many objections to Négritude, Parry states her commitment to historicise the performance of resistance in her discussion of Fanon and Césaire as liberation theorists who “affirm the invention of an insurgent, unified black self, acknowledge the revolutionary energies released by valorizing the cultures denigrated by colonialism” (2004:43). This is despite their visions of a post-ethnocentric future – illustrated in their commitment to a post-European conception of Man as being a necessary goal of programmes of decolonisation. For Parry, *Black Skin, White Masks* can be read as Fanon’s attempt to affect the depersonalisation of the Antilean black through

learning or being weaned from the errors of both assimilation and Négritude, and hence charting the move from the reactionary ... to the actional. But perhaps it traces the path of the author affecting his own cure within the space of its pages – Négritude marking the transgressive moment of emergence from the colonized condition, and the transition from Négritude to universal solidarity signalling disalienation and the transcendence of ethnicity. (2004:51)

Parry goes on to trace the development of Fanon's position on Négritude – in what was at times a simultaneous rejection and affirmation. Finally, she argues that for the later Fanon of *The Wretched of the Earth*, the rehabilitation of a rediscovered native past is valuable only when forged as part of the shaping of national culture by the insurgent native subjectivities in the struggle for liberation. Parry reads Fanon's denigration of the notion of an essential continental African culture – or even a homogeneously defined notion of a 'Pan-Africanist' culture that includes diasporic Africans – as his affirmation of the heterogeneity of African cultural difference. For Parry, this position, in Fanon's "On National Culture", also illustrates his "disenchantment with the official cultural nationalism of the newly independent African states" (2004:52), and leads him to carefully distinguish between the notion of a transformative and liberatory national culture and narrow bourgeois-elite nationalism. Although Parry argues that Fanon is perhaps overly optimistic in his articulation of the dawn of what he calls 'true decolonisation', she takes the import of his arguments seriously, as articulating something other than a bankrupt 'derivative discourse':

In turning away from Europe as a source and model of meanings and aspirations, Fanon's last writings look not to the fulfilment of the Enlightenment's ideals within the existing order but to decolonization as the agency of a transfigured social condition; hence holding in place that vision of the anti-colonial struggle as a global emancipatory project and projecting the radical hope of a realized humanism. (2004:54)

As with Parry's quarrel with Spivak's work (already discussed in chapter two), the debate once again turns on the question of the most appropriate and enabling politics for recovering native resistance, agency and subjectivity. This question is one both of the political positionality of the postcolonial intellectual – in the service of theorising an oppositional practice within the contemporary geopolitical/social/economic terrain of Global Capitalism, and a question of how to read and to relate to the articulations of oppositionality in the counter-discourse of the anti-colonialist/liberationist/nationalist

tradition. At stake in the debate is something like the slippage between the aims and claims of the postcolonial intellectual's reading of Fanon: that is, what theoretical/political insight/strategy is offered by his work? As I have already argued some of the problems and potentialities of Parry's initial reading of native resistance, I will here summarise her position on what can be garnered from a reading of Fanon.

Parry herself is precisely aware of what is critically at stake in the debate when she asserts that "proposals on how resistance is to be theorized display faultlines within the discussion that rehearse questions about subjectivity, identity, agency and the status of the reverse-discourse as an oppositional practice, posing problems about the appropriate models for contemporary counter-hegemonic work" (2004:37). Admirably, she reaffirms Fanon's articulation of a 'new humanism' that would be something other than the customary European discourse of humanism – the latter being understood to have been part of the conditions of possibility of the colonialist/imperialist mission¹⁰. Parry's reading of Fanon notably focuses on his call for 'the wretched of the earth' to fashion an insurgent subjectivity, which she argues attempted and succeeded in challenging colonial authority and identity in the violent upheaval that was the Algerian movement for liberation¹¹. As such, Parry argues against what she sees as the occlusion of Fanon's relationship to Négritude in readings of his work that seek to claim him as largely refusing (though at times accusing him of) a nativist or essentialist politics.

However, Parry seems to affirm Bhabha's theorisation of the ambivalence of colonial discourse – albeit Fanon's anti-colonialist articulation of a counter-discourse – when she asserts that "Fanon's writings function at a point of tension between cultural nationalism and transnationality, without 'resolving' the contradiction and without yielding an

¹⁰ Bhabha modifies his earlier negative stance on Fanon's humanism as "an existentialist humanism that is as banal as it is beatific" when, in a conversation with John Comaroff, he holds that "the anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa were movements fired by a moral purpose, seeking a new ethico-political order – a new humanism, as Frantz Fanon put it" (2002:15-16).

¹¹ Laura Chrisman argues: "Dominant Foucauldian – and Fanonian – convictions of the all-engulfing nature of colonial power have another unfortunate corollary: the exclusion, or ideological dismissal, of early anti-colonial theorists" (1995:207). *Pace* Chrisman, Fanon nowhere argues for an all-pervasive and engulfing notion of colonial discourse and authority. Nor are his patient critiques of the positions of Négritude and his predecessors a "structural exclusion" or mere "ideological dismissal".

attachment to the one or the aspiration to the other”(2004:49)¹². In the final analysis, although she states her task as being to refigure the place of nativism or Négritude within the body of Fanon’s thought, in her unremitting analysis of the latter – even with her assertion that it occupies an ambiguous space within his thought – Parry seems to construct it as pre-eminent. Her reading of Fanon is tendered as both a corrective to what she sees as the disparagement of the counter-discourse of nationalism, and a refusal to allow the reclamation of a native past from which the colonised can construct an insurgent subjectivity in their struggles for liberation.

This disparagement, she argues, issues from (Bhabha’s) theorisations of colonial discourse that rely on a “language model in its ‘strong’ form” (1994:9). Such a model also refuses the Manichean ordering of colonial relations in the binary opposition coloniser/colonised, which Fanon affirmed, with the result of figuring the colonial encounter, not as a struggle between implacably and unevenly positioned participants, but rather as “a configuration of discursive transactions” (2004:26)¹³. As I have already argued, her complaint is precisely against Bhabha’s reading of Fanon’s major breakthrough as being Fanon’s affecting a shift of the discussion of “cultural racism from the politics of nationalism to the politics of narcissism” (1994:63). One could easily note that in her hurry, Parry misreads Bhabha’s latter assertion. That is, Bhabha’s statement above only asserts that Fanon shifts the focus of the discussion of *cultural racism* to a politics of narcissism. This would not necessarily mean an absolute shift of focus in the discussion of *colonial discourse* from the politics of nationalism.

I have already (in chapter two) mapped out some of the problems of Parry’s distinction between the ‘social’ or ‘material’ political intervention, and the ‘theoretical’. I wish to recall Parry’s assertion that both Spivak and Bhabha’s work is “marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic

¹² Here is another instance of this tendency: “The retreat from a wavering empathy with Négritude becomes an ambiguous [or ambivalent?] critique in Fanon’s address to the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956” (Parry, 2004:51)

¹³ See also Abdul JanMohamed’s similar criticism in “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist literature”: “Though he cites Frantz Fanon, Bhabha completely ignores Fanon’s definition of the conqueror/native relation as a ‘Manichean’ struggle – a definition that is not a fanciful metaphoric caricature but an accurate representation of a profound conflict” (1985:60).

and political institutions and other forms of social praxis” (2004:26). In “Signs of Our Times” Parry goes even further:

[In] subordinating, the cognition and explication of social forms, institutions and practices, and which are ultimately dependent on empirical enquiry, to deconstructions of the signifying process, and by reiterating that the structure of linguistic difference and the vicissitudes in the movement of the signifier alienates and overwhelms content, Bhabha registers his affiliation with the language model in its ‘strong’ form. (1994:9)

In “Interrogating Identity” (1994:64) Bhabha already responds to this sort of criticism when he argues for his articulation of the moment of hybridity as a question that intercedes into the calculations and subsumptions of political thinking, for a demonstration of the as yet “unthought” contingency of the political. Contrary to Parry, in “The Commitment to Theory”, Bhabha argues that “textuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression” (1994:23) to be subsumed by the moment of political action. He thus asserts the “emphasis on the representation of the political, on the construction of discourse, is the radical contribution of theory. Its conceptual vigilance never allows a simple identity between the political objective and its means of representation” (1994:27).

One could argue that Parry’s quarrel with Bhabha is precisely a question of emphasis on particular aspects of Fanon’s program of decolonisation: whether to recoup his work as an interrogation of identity and authority (*primarily* from a reading of *Black Skin, White Masks*) or a call for the colonised’s liberation through an affirmation of the solidarity and exigencies offered by an anti-colonialist nationalism (*primarily* from a reading of *The Wretched of the Earth*)¹⁴. However, I am in no way suggesting that Fanon’s articulations from his early to his final works are diametrically opposed – as is highlighted by my emphasis on ‘primarily’ in the above assertion. Of course, as my

¹⁴ This is highlighted by even a cursory inspection of the respective emphases of Bhabha and Parry’s quotations from their footnotes and bibliographies.

analysis of Bhabha's reading of Fanon has shown, Bhabha does indeed claim Fanon's most radical insights are his interrogation of the ambivalent space of colonial identity and authority. As Parry herself acknowledges, what remains enabling in Bhabha's reading of Fanon is his recognition of the elisions and marginalisations of particular subjectivities with the discourse of colonialism. To this, I would add Bhabha's similar attention to anti-colonialist counter-discourses, as well as to the dynamics of postcolonial bourgeois-elite nationalism:

The extent of his influence suggests the power of Bhabha's rethinking of culture 'as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value', his insights into the hierarchy retained by the liberal ethic of multiculturalism, his attention to the differential histories of race, nations and peoples, his innovative work on the inflections of colonialism within western thought, and his contributions to opening up the categories of identity, culture and nation to their heterogeneity. (Parry, 1994:7)

However, as Parry also criticises, Bhabha's reading of Fanon is not without its problems. The differences in Parry and Bhabha's reading of Fanon are then not merely a question of emphasis, but rather indicative of a particular politico-theoretical investment. One could argue that Bhabha's reading of Fanon in "Remembering Fanon", specifically written as the Foreword to the 1986 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, commits itself carefully and rigorously – in the attention it gives to what follows it – to the question of the preface. What would emerge here is an appraisal of something akin to my previous discussion (in chapter three) of the question of context as it relates to Bhabha's enunciations in his Foreword. It should be noted that upon close examination, Bhabha does illustrate his reading of Fanon from some of his later works. Take for example Bhabha's assertion of the Algerian woman's participation in the liberation movement (in "Algeria Unveiled") as a paradigmatic instance of hybridity that threatens colonial identity and authority¹⁵. Perhaps such a view should serve to countermand the

¹⁵ Parry's reading of Bhabha's project as not attentive to the interconnections between the 'the social' and the theoretical would in this instance have to be modified.

exasperations and complaints expressed by some critics about the attention Bhabha gives to *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Of course the view I assert above becomes untenable inasmuch as Bhabha's own stated claim in the Foreword, as seen from its title, is to remember (the main body of) Fanon's thought. Also, as I noted in the introduction to this chapter, Bhabha revises and reprints the Foreword as "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative" in another context, where the claims he makes emerge as a reading of the totality of Fanon's contribution. Neil Lazarus argues this much when he asserts, "although Bhabha predicates his theory of colonial discourse upon the work of Fanon, he contrives to read him 'back to front' – that is, from *The Wretched of the Earth* to *Black Skin, White Masks* – thereby falsifying the testimony of Fanon's own evolution as a theorist" (1993:87).

However, I cannot as yet endorse Lazarus's next claim that Bhabha uses his reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* "to disavow Fanon's political commitments and his theorization of 'the African Revolution'"¹⁶. For as I have already illustrated, Bhabha acknowledges Fanon's political investments and articulations of the project of decolonisation together with what he sees as its shortcomings. Nonetheless, I would have to agree with Lazarus's argument that the movement of some of Bhabha's objections to Fanon do seem to appropriate Fanon to Bhabha's own project. For instance, when he identifies Fanon's reinscription of "the antagonistic identities of the political alienation and cultural discrimination" as an attempt "to restore the dream to its proper political time and cultural space" (Bhabha, 1994:60) – is Bhabha here complaining against Fanon's attempt to historicise the colonial encounter? Or is Bhabha rather attempting to illustrate the shortcomings of the oppositional political practice entailed in that reinscription?

The following reading of Fanon's positions on politics, subjectivity and the programme of decolonisation does not constitute an attempt to critique his articulations.

¹⁶ So too Moore-Gilbert's similar assertion: "Bhabha almost completely discounts those later works of Fanon which call for violent action against the colonizer. Indeed, in reading his mentor's development as a thinker backwards, and so persistently ignoring his later work, Bhabha might even be accused of not so much of 'remembering' as 'dismembering' Fanon" (1997:138); See also Cedric Robinson's belligerent assessment, (1993:85).

It is rather tendered as a necessarily compressed and selective reading of those sites in his work that are of critical importance to the debate. However, this is not to say that Fanon's work is without its own problems – as is highlighted by some five decades of critical assessment of his work. Although Fanon argues, in his introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, that “only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of” colonial narcissism, he is keenly aware that “the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities” (1986:12-13). Fanon already registers the need for “*collective catharsis*” (145) as necessary to affect the disalienation of the colonised: “In every society, exists – must exist – a channel, an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the form of aggression can be released” (145). Despite Fanon's claim for the efficacy of psychoanalytic interpretation, he asserts his disagreement with (and reformulation of) some of the terms and conclusions of European psychoanalysis:

There has been much talk of psychoanalysis and the Negro. Distrusting the ways in which it might be applied, I have preferred to call this chapter “The Negro and Psychopathology”, well aware that Freud and Adler and even the cosmic Jung did not think of the Negro in all their investigations. (1986:151)

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon foregrounds the implacable oppositionality of colonial relations, highlighted by his recognition of the violent upheaval in the Negro's struggle for liberation – his articulation of the Manichean ordering of colonial relation around the binary opposition coloniser/colonised. This is not to suggest that Fanon's interrogation of identity is obviated at the end of his first work. Such a psychoanalytic interrogation is not somehow foreclosed when Fanon resigns from his position as Chief psychiatrist at Blida-Joinville. Even here, as he leaves his post in the recognition of the non-viability of his psychiatric intervention at the hospital, Fanon is aware of the need to

interrogate the dynamics of colonial identity together with an articulation of an oppositional practice for the colonised in the movement for decolonisation¹⁷.

Consequently, Fanon's task in *L'An Cinq de la Révolution Algérienne* – translated into English as *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* – is precisely both to catechise and historicise the colonised's construction of insurgent subjectivities in the fifth year of the Algerian Revolution. In some of the chapters of the latter work, Fanon variously explores how the Algerian woman's participation in the movement for liberation granted her channels through which to challenge both the functions and apparatuses of colonial authority and, the sometimes sexist and patriarchal discourses of her own society. So too Fanon's analysis of the colonised's subversive and politically expedient use of the technological devices of the coloniser and the decoupling of the coloniser's medical innovations from colonialist oppression and discrimination. No less important here is Fanon's thesis about the changes wrought by the movement for liberation on some of the conservative strictures of the colonised's familial relations.

Fanon does indeed figure colonial relations as Manichean and hence his assertion that decolonisation is immanently violent. For Fanon, colonialism "is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (2001:48). This violence is a response in equal measure to the violence of the colonial world that was responsible for the repudiation and destruction of the native's pre-colonial cultural, economic, social, and psychic difference. Thus, the violence of decolonisation is for Fanon crucial for the re-emergence of the native into history:

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder ... Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature ... Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. (2001:27-29)

¹⁷ Fanon's resignation from Blida-Joinville was also informed (and the two are not unrelated) by the political necessity of avoiding imminent arrest by the Algerian authorities. It was at this point that the authorities had traced his connections to the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN).

However, it is important not to read Fanon's assertion about the "absolute violence" entailed by a programme of decolonisation – in the oft-cited essay, "Concerning Violence" – in isolation from Fanon's work as a whole. Although Fanon argues for the instrumentality of this violence of decolonisation for the native's construction of a revolutionary consciousness and the overthrowing of colonial authority – its discriminatory episteme and quotidian material oppression and exploitation – he admits that such violence should not become an uncritically endorsed prescription for revolutionary movements: "If need be the native can accept compromise with colonialism, but never a surrender of principle" (2001:114), and he warns against an "unmixed and total brutality, [which] if not immediately combated, invariably leads to the defeat of the movement within a few weeks" (117)¹⁸. Fanon is then not advocating the native's violent insurrection for itself, but rather sees it as necessary for a revolutionary consciousness through which a national culture is formed. As I have already highlighted in Parry's attack on Spivak and Bhabha (in both chapter two and the current chapter), Fanon is at pains to delineate his thought on the politics of national culture from those of bourgeois-elite nationalism:

The nationalist militant who fled from the town in disgust at the demagogic and reformist manoeuvres of the leaders there, disappointed by political life, discovers in real action a new form of political activity which [in] no way resembles the old. These politics are national, revolutionary and social and these new facts which the native will now come to know exist only in action. They are the essence of the fight which explodes the old colonial truths and reveals unexpected facets, which brings out new meanings and pinpoints the contradictions camouflaged by these facts. (2001:117)

¹⁸ Although Fanon has observed the Manichean ordering of colonial relations, he tempers this view somewhat in his essay, "Algeria's European Minority" in *Studies of a Dying Colonialism*, where he illustrates that this latter constituency is "far from being the monolithic block that one imagines" (1989:148). This point is evident even in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon notes a paradigm shift at a certain point in the violent struggle as a result of an inauguration of revolutionary consciousness: "As they look around them, [the natives] notice that certain settlers do not join in the general hysteria; there are differences in the same species. Such men, who before were included without distinction and indiscriminately in the monolithic mass of the foreigner's presence, actually go so far as to condemn the colonial war" (2001:116); For Hannah Arendt's discussion of Fanon's meditation on violence, see *On Violence* (1970:14; 20; 65).

A more patient deconstructive engagement with Fanon's work might pose the question of whether Fanon is locked in Manichean binaries, or whether his texts show colonialism already in deconstruction. Posing that question has however not been the aim of my own compressed reading of Fanon. Rather, I hope to have illustrated what Bhabha's particular deconstructive/postcolonial reading of Fanon, as well as Parry's alternate reading, contributes to the theorisation of postcoloniality. The following sketch should not, as I allude to in my remarks above, take the place of a more rigorous demonstration, but rather signals the conditions of possibility (and impossibility) of such a deconstructive demonstration.

One can leverage a deconstructive reading of the discourse of colonialism in a reading that would demonstrate deconstruction as already in decolonisation. Perhaps the movement of such a reading would, among other things, trace in the discourse and reality of colonialism, and its counter-discourses – what Derrida in his text on *apartheid* calls “the totality of its text” (1986:165) – something like the call of decolonisation as a call to justice, and an appeal for an ethical relation with the Other in the dismantling of colonialism. This is precisely what Bhabha's reading of colonialism attempts. That is, Bhabha's enunciation of a “strategy of subversion” as the movement of the subaltern or “metonymic instance” of interruption/irruption is an attempt “to keep open the event of alterity which alone makes politics possible and inevitable, but which political philosophy of all colours has always tried to close” (Bennington, 2000:33). The latter recalls my discussion (in chapter three) of the deconstructive thought of the question of ethics.

Here, decolonisation could be seen as a “paragon” for deconstruction. In what is more than a strained metaphor – given Derrida's sometime reminder of his Franco-Maghrebian status – decolonisation and deconstruction (or Fanon and Derrida) would, in this reading, meet somewhere on the scene of the Algerian movement for liberation. In proposing such a reading, I am of course relying heavily on Derrida's enunciation of the deconstructive engagement with/to the question of ethics and justice, in his essay “Force of Law: The

‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” (1992). This reading would entail the kind of rigour, nuance and patience that is somewhat absent in Azzedine Haddour’s “Fanon through the Poststructuralist Speculum” (2005).

In what is otherwise an informed reading of the texts of the debate and of deconstruction, Haddour falters when he represents deconstruction in the singular and as a set of procedures, a toolbox of strategies or method. (Once again, and not for the last time, this is similar to McClintock and Nixon’s understanding of deconstruction, as discussed in chapter three.) Although Haddour correctly notes the importance of Derrida’s articulations on ‘supplementarity’, ‘mimesis’ and ‘the hymen’ for Bhabha’s theorisation of a “politics of subversion” – through Bhabha’s own enunciation of the concepts of mimicry and hybridity – Haddour elides the differences (or *différance*) within not only the terms of Derrida’s articulation, but also Bhabha’s reading of them. Hence Haddour argues the following: “What holds for the supplement holds for mimesis and the hymen” (2005:55); “*The deconstructive strategy is, in Derrida’s terms, an operation that both sows (disseminates) confusion between the two opposites and stands between them at once*” (2005:56, my emphasis). The conditions of possibility for the reading of decolonisation I have sketched would also have to be mindful of the following assertion, which also illustrates Bhabha’s concern not to uncritically deploy some set of procedures labelled deconstructive:

The difference of other cultures is other than the excess of signification, the *différance* of the trace or the trajectory of desire. These are theoretical strategies that may be necessary to combat ‘ethnocentrism’ but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness. There can be no inevitable sliding from the semiotic or deconstructionist activity to the unproblematic reading of other cultural and discursive systems. There is in such readings a will to power and knowledge that, in failing to specify the limits of their own field of enunciation and effectivity, proceed to individualise otherness as the discovery of their own assumptions (1983:197)

In reading Bhabha's caution against the grain one could note that Robert Young's *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990), is precisely (although partially) such a reconstitutive analysis of the conditions of emergence of poststructuralist theories in general, and Derrida's work in particular. Here, Young already offers something like the possible reading I offered for apprehending deconstruction as already in decolonisation. Young himself acknowledges that it is not merely the aforementioned title – taken from a chapter of Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy* (1982) – that he gleans from Derrida's work. For Young, the point missed by criticism of Derrida's work that asserts Derrida merely reinscribes the hegemonic discursive authority of the West or that his work involves only the critique of "Western metaphysics" as such – and this, I recall, is precisely the criticism expressed by McClintock and Nixon (in chapter three) – is that his critique of logocentrism is at once also a critique of ethnocentrism:

In its largest and perhaps most significant perspective, deconstruction involves not just a critique of the grounds of knowledge in general, but specifically of the grounds of Occidental knowledge. The equation of knowledge with 'what is called Western thought, the thought whose destiny is to extend its domains while the boundaries of the West are drawn back' involves the very kind of assumption that Derrida is interrogating – and this is the reason for his constant emphasis on its being the knowledge of the West. (Young, 2004:49)

Thus, in "*White Mythologies Revisited*", Young reminds that his own political intervention was firstly an attempt to challenge the totalising discursive authority of European Marxism by arguing for "an epistemological critique of the West's greatest myth – History". Such a critique was leveraged, he claims, in order to examine "the ways in which the West's most radical dissident, critical perspectives shared the same assumptions" (2004:2). Secondly, his project aimed to explore how those considered peripheral and non-European articulated a differential understanding of history that highlighted the contradictions and fissures in the hegemonic Western conceptualisation of History. "This 'History' is contrasted with non-European accounts in which history is

conceived not as a single overarching narrative, but in terms of networks of discrete, multitudinous histories that are uncontainable within any single Western schema” (2004:3). Young thus has recourse, in the opening of *White Mythologies*, to highlight the colonial provenance of what came to be known under the rubric of “poststructuralism”:

If so-called ‘so-called poststructuralism’ is the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968 but rather the Algerian War of Independence – no doubt itself both a symptom and a product. In this respect it is significant that Sartre, Althusser, Derrida and Lyotard, among others, were all either born in Algeria or personally involved with the events of the war. (2004:32)

Young’s essay, “Subjectivity and History: Derrida in Algeria”, as the title undoubtedly suggests, is a singular engagement with the assertion he set out earlier, in *White Mythologies*. Here, Young is concerned to argue for Derrida to be seen as a postcolonial theorist and for poststructuralism to be apprehended as “Franco-Maghrebian theory” (2001:414). That is, Young’s task is to illustrate the historical links between the philosophers and theorists who came to be known as poststructuralist and Algeria, or the war for Algerian independence. Derrida was there, Young argues, on the scene of the unthinkable violence that was the Algerian Revolution: “Others, such as Fanon and Lyotard, went to Algeria to work or on military service and became actively involved with the revolution ... and saw Derrida frequently when he had returned to Algeria to do his military service there” (2001:414). Young is at pains to assert that Derrida’s marginality, as part of the “Jewish” population of colonial Algeria, further meant that his identity was cut through by ambivalent identification within colonial relations¹⁹:

The Jews live in ... an in-between limbo world in which on the one hand they identify with the colonizer with whom they can never be fully assimilated, but

¹⁹ “Yet yours were the ideas that ... were taken up by many refugees and minorities, migrant and immigrant groups, because they felt that it was your ideas that expressed, embodied their own disembodied devalued cultural and political situations ... Because you were one of them and thus spoke with them from their subject positions on the margins, theirs was already the language with which and through which you reconceptualized the world from their perspective and asserted the power of the marginalized in the heartlands of western institutions” (Young, 2001:425-26).

whose life they try to live in abject mimicry, while on the other hand they remain always condemned to live the life of the colonized. (2001:422)²⁰

In this homiletic manner, Young hopes to demonstrate that Derrida's work – even in its earliest articulations – is distinctly postcolonial. “From the first, then, your target was, we would say these days, western globalization, conceptual in form but material in its effects, and the eurocentricism of western culture” (Young, 2001:412). In this vein, the poststructuralist interrogation of “the idea of totality was born out of the experience of, and forms of resistance to, the totalizing regimes of the late colonial state, particularly French Algeria” (415). This re-vision of the conditions of possibility of deconstruction is aimed particularly at postcolonial intellectuals who reject postcolonial theory as ‘Western’, and therefore incapable of answering to the questions of the ‘Third World’ – incapable of partaking, to paraphrase Quayson (from my discussion in chapter two), in the native's discursive modalities.

I would suggest that although Young's essay is an important historical intervention into the debate about the eurocentricity of postcolonial theory, what remains disquieting is the possible slide towards conflation that occurs in Young's effort to reclaim deconstruction as postcolonial. Thus although Young acknowledges the differences between the anti-colonialist discourses of liberation and poststructuralist deconstructions of the ideas and ideals of Western philosophy and culture, they are too easily enunciated together in the following: “Many of those who developed the theoretical positions subsequently characterized as poststructuralism came from Algeria or had been involved in the war of independence. Fanon, Memmi, Bourdieu, Althusser, Lyotard, Derrida, Cixous – they were all in or from Algeria” (2001:413). Not only is Derrida offered as theorising postcoloniality, it would seem that Fanon and Memmi are now also poststructuralist.

It is of course imperative to attend to the historico-political conditions of possibility of work that has come to be called ‘poststructuralist’. I cannot in the last instance dismiss

²⁰ Given Young's claim for Derrida's colonial Algeria connection, he could have included Fanon's analysis of Jewish Algerians in *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, “Algeria's European Minority” (1989:153-157).

Young's historico-political re-visioning of deconstruction. In my reading, however, deconstructive practices, as theoretical demonstrations/interrogations of the questions of politics, ethics, culture, economics, literature or whatever, should stand or fall on the basis of the flexibility with which they facilitate the posing of the latter questions, rather than on their geographical provenance. As I hope to have demonstrated in my assessment of the present debate, those theoretical interrogations are not self-sufficiently or exclusively theoretical. Also, I hope to have illustrated the importance of question of context, in my discussion of the debate between Derrida and, McClintock and Nixon. What I remain uneasy with in Young's reading of Derrida in Algeria is the manner in which Young's argument strains towards an assertion of context as the final determinant of Derrida as a postcolonial theorist.

To return to the question of Bhabha's reading of Fanon then, I hope to have demonstrated Bhabha's deconstructive practices are also ethico-political interventions that seek to keep open the space for the arrival of the other that refuses appropriation and identification as the Self's alienated image – to frustrate the economy of narcissistic identification. Doubtless, there are also problems with Bhabha's reading of Fanon, and no less so with Parry's attack and her own reading of Fanon. Perhaps it would be rather crass to assert that whereas Bhabha's reading attempts to pose the question of politics as politics-in-question or the political as question, Parry's reading assumes the inherent radicality of politics. Both are joined in an attempt not only to read the contributions of the anti-colonialist tradition, but also to fashion an enabling postcolonial critique as a counter-hegemonic practice within the contemporary situation of a thoroughly hegemonic Global Capitalism.

Perhaps, then, the differences in these readings of Fanon illustrate the problematic question of the positionality of the (post)colonial intellectual, and the function of the intellectual's theoretico-political intervention. That is, what can perhaps be salvaged from Fanon's work is a political insight or strategy as a theoretical insight into the problems of all political strategies – this would include Fanon's own articulations within the counter-discourses of anti-colonialist/liberationist nationalism. It seems to me that such critical

vigilance might be important for the discourses of South Africa – a South Africa that has enjoyed exemplary status for postcolonial inquiry. What I intend to investigate in the following conclusion is precisely the modalities of postcolonial theory or postcoloniality that have been appropriated within the limited domain of the South African literary-cultural academy.

In a number of important ways, the appropriation of postcolonial theory and postcoloniality within the South African academy rehearses some of the earlier concerns I identified in my analysis (in chapters two to four) of the Spivak/Parry, Derrida/McClintock and Nixon, and Bhabha/Parry debates. However, to say the South African debates on postcolonial theory are a rehearsal is not to assert that the latter debates are but a mere repetition of those within metropolitan academy. That is, the occasionality of the appropriation of postcolonial theory, and the consequent debate in South Africa, occurs within a particular and differentiated politico-historical and institutional environment. At the macro level this would be the transitory space of the negotiations to bring a formal end to the discriminatory and exploitative practices of *apartheid* South Africa between the state, lead by the National Party (NP), and the movement considered the spearhead of the 'National Democratic Revolution', the African National Congress (ANC). It is principally within this space that I wish to conclude by investigating the modalities of postcolonial theory and deconstruction that have gained currency within the literary-cultural discourses of the South African academy.

Perhaps more than anybody else in the South African academy, David Attwell and Leon de Kock are acknowledged as seeking to install postcolonial theory onto the literary-cultural discursive agenda. Although this attempt at a reorientation can be seen in much of their intellectual production in early 1990s, and after, the most exemplary instances are Attwell and de Kock's respective interviews with Bhabha and Spivak. So too are Attwell's "Introduction", as editor of a 1993 special issue on postcolonial theory in *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, and de Kock's "Postcolonial Analysis and the Question of Critical Disablement", his contribution to the same issue of the journal. Also important here will be Annamaria Carusi's contributions to postcolonial analysis in South Africa – in "Post, Post and Post. Or, Where is South African Literature in All This" (1991) and "The Postcolonial Other as a Problem for Political Action" (1991). As a critique of the appropriation of postcolonial theory, Nicholas Visser's "Postcoloniality of a Special Type: Theory and its Appropriations in South Africa" (1997) will be especially important for my investigation. In this vein, I will also draw on

Kelwyn Sole's, "South Africa Passes the Posts" (1997), and his "Democratising Culture and Literature in a 'New South Africa': Organisation and Theory" (1994a)¹.

I will discuss what I believe to be the four major concerns in the South African debate through a critical analysis of the positions on postcolonial theory held by the above critics. As with the previous international debates, the first question is none other than the question of the applicability of the term postcolonial or a notion of postcoloniality as an explanatory discourse for the South African case. It should be clear that this question is related to earlier suggestions (in chapters two to four) about the exemplary status South Africa has seemed to enjoy for postcolonial inquiry. To some measure this was highlighted in my discussion (in chapter two) of the exchange between Laura Chrisman and Robert Young. To recall, Chrisman, borrowing Spivak's phrase, complained about the possible danger of "sanctioned ignorance" on historical specificity posed by the metropolitan theorisation about South Africa, due to the country acquiring "the fetishistic status of racial allegory" (1997:41-42).

This is similar to McClintock and Nixon's charge (in chapter three) against Derrida's intervention into the debate on apartheid. So too Rosemary Jolly and Paul Cilliers' respective assertions (also in chapter three) that there is, within metropolitan politico-theoretical enunciations, the tendency to construct apartheid South Africa as the "atavistic other" (Jolly, 1995:19-20) or to (dis)place the text of apartheid as an exclusively South African phenomenon. I also examine here what emerges in the debate as the question of critical disablement of the investigating intellectual who deploys postcolonial theory informed by deconstructive practices. In its own manner, the latter concern reiterates my discussion (in chapter two) about both Parry's complaint against the closure she argues is constituted by Spivak's politics and Moore-Gilbert's suggestion that Spivak's work is 'politically pessimistic'. In a different register, it also rehearses my analysis (in chapter three) of McClintock and Nixon's assertion that Derrida's gesture in "Racism's Last Word" merely invokes a 'textual' politics that does not enable an activist politics. The

¹ In 1998 Sole was one of the recipients of the Thomas Pringle Award for his essay, "South Africa Passes the Posts", awarded by the *English Academy of Southern Africa*.

latter preoccupations are related to the last two questions I will examine here: namely, the question of the political implications of postcolonial theory as appropriated in the South African academy, and the question of the focus on race and cultural difference at the expense of an analysis of class.

That South Africa has been seen as a “paragon” of postcoloniality is not to say there has been no debate of that very designation. Attwell and de Kock’s positions on postcolonial theory are in this regard perhaps amongst the most filial. Although Attwell acknowledges that there exists the prevalent suspicion within the South African literary-cultural establishment that postcolonial theory is merely the latest hegemonic (though ephemeral) attempt to theorise the histories of (especially Euro-American) colonialism and imperialism, he argues, “South Africans are hardly in a position to decline the term” (1993a:1). This assertion is informed by an understanding of “postcoloniality as to an historical and cultural condition, one in which the legacies of colonialism have yet to be transcended” (1993a:1).

Attwell further argues that “we cannot avoid asking what relevance international discourses of postcoloniality have for South Africa” (1993a:4, my emphasis). Furthermore, the “broadest agenda” of the issue of *Current Writing* under his editorship “is to begin looking for the most useful points of entry for local scholarship in an international sphere of activity” (1993a:6). As I will argue, there is a particular tendency – something other than mere generosity – contained in both Attwell’s contention about the impossibility for South Africans to refuse the term postcolonial and the “imagined community”² constructed in his use of the unificatory “we”. From the very first paragraph (the first line even) of his “Introduction” to the issue of aforementioned publication, Attwell claims discursive authority for his articulations, through the consensus implied by his use of “we”.

This is also evidenced in his assertion that “we have always known we are ‘postcolonial in one sense or another’” (1993a:2). Attwell recognises the “untheorised” status of such

² The phrase is Benedict Anderson’s (1991).

knowledge – hence his appropriation of a postcolonial “critical-theoretical language” (1993a:2) – and its potential vulnerability “to self-contradiction or to sceptical questioning from *international* quarters” (1993a:3, my emphasis). I highlight “international” in Attwell argument in order to illustrate the focus of his appropriation of postcolonial theory. This also demonstrates the manner in which he construes the relationship between metropolitan discourses and peripheral reception. Thus Attwell claims: “As real or at least aspirant participants in critical theory, we find ourselves already in a relationship with these discourses. South Africa continues to be seen as a crucible wherein many of the questions being addressed elsewhere burn with unusual intensity” (1993a:2). This latter assertion resonates with my discussion (recalled in my initial comments to this conclusion) of the claims for South Africa as an exemplary instance of postcoloniality. Attwell’s concern is, in fact, to speculate “about the South African case as instance of the postcolonial” (1993a:5). That is, it seems his speculation occurs post the assumption of South Africa’s postcoloniality:

The South African case is marked (and it is not the only instance of this) in that both ‘settler’ and ‘native’ forms of consciousness ... are shaped to a considerable degree by the emergence of another form of articulation. That is to say, the poles are attracted not merely by their opposition to one another; rather, their construction is founded on a dialogic principle – sometimes imitative, sometimes hostile – so that any simple theoretical polarity becomes unworkable. (1993a:5)

It becomes clear in their interview that Attwell’s appropriation of the term postcolonial is informed by a reading of Bhabha – and also, as Attwell himself admits, Spivak’s assertion about the non-essentiality of some-*thing* called postcolonialism. Attwell follows Bhabha in the modest understanding of postcolonialism as the discursive modality of “a certain kind of *pedagogy*” (1993b:104) – that is, the conditions of possibility of the emergence of postcolonial studies. Moreover, when he asserts, “the term has a content”, he accepts Bhabha’s differential conception of postcoloniality in the following:

So my argument is not just that liberalism and humanism, the enlightenment, 'meet their limit' in colonialism, that colonialism somehow reveals some repressed nature, reality or contradiction, but that it is a much more ongoing, problematic, displacing, disseminatory negotiation with the colonial, not just at the political level, but also at the conceptual and psychic level. It is this negotiation that marks the very emergence of modernity. (1993b:105)

Attwell suggests – although he insists that he is only “playing devil’s advocate” (1993b:107) – given the history of the segregationist, exclusionary and discriminatory discourses of apartheid, that the deconstructive thought of difference is unsuitable for the South African case. In a country sundered by a palpably violent history, Attwell speculates on the urgency for national solidarity in the transitory uncertain potentialities of the negotiated settlement of the early 1990s, which called for anything but a violent intransigence: “Historical pressures seem to be moving us towards [the] kind of reflection ... where we are able to look beyond the fixed polarities of some metropolitan versions of postcolonial studies” (1993a:5). Once again, the tendency submerged in this can be seen in Attwell’s suggestion for the appropriation of postcolonial theory in South Africa:

In the case of white South Africa we might say that the emergence of an historical consciousness might be measured not only in terms of differentiation from the metropolis ... but also by the extent to which the claim to authority by various streams of African, self-affirming consciousness is realised within white discourses. Similarly, the emergence of the different forms of black historical consciousness might be described in terms of how, or to what extent, the vision of reconstruction has reckoned with changes already ^{caused} wrought by the colonial presence, changes that have revised the very terms on which collective self-realisation is possible. (1993a:5)

Thus Attwell, in his interview with Bhabha, notes the particular difficulty felt by South African critics faced with the task of “applying a disjunctive reading of nationalism ...

reading
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(with opposite
views)

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 How ego Hom - consistency
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 111

[when] reading the reconstitution of the nation in terms of the national democratic struggle as led by the ANC" (1993a:108).

I would suggest that Attwell's previous suggestion for the appropriation of postcolonial theory in South Africa seems to rely on race and cultural difference, without an analysis of the tensions of ^{structureless} discursive authority wrought by class identifications. That is, his suggestion for the appropriation of postcolonial theory homogenises the emergence of a historical consciousness for both "white South Africa" and "black" subjects. Firstly, there are important class differentiations in the racially identified emergent historical consciousness of "white South Africa" occluded in Attwell's discussion. For instance, this would mean attending to how such formations of historical consciousness would have differed between English and Afrikaans speaking white South Africans, given the imperially legislated economic privilege enjoyed by the former before the first republic of South Africa. Secondly, Attwell's assertions cannot hold that "the claim to authority by various streams of African, self-affirming consciousness is realised within white discourses" is, I would argue, precisely the limited discursive interaction between black elites and their white counterparts.

made to attract
 on the surface

The "claims to authority" glossed by Attwell could thus be seen, to borrow Spivak's phrase, to be the claims to authority by the "native informant". Attwell fails to realise that the seeds for such a "disjunctive" reading of nationalism are already within the counter-discourses of the anti-colonialist nationalist tradition – as I have illustrated in my reading of Fanon's work in connection with Parry's attack on both Spivak and Bhabha (in chapter four). Indeed, Bhabha's response to Attwell acknowledges the political necessity of "nation-building" as "the notion of the nation as the liberatory horizon, which has a national, populist resonance, of a claim to justice ... the claim to a new history" (1993b:108). For Bhabha, what remains important is to also highlight the necessary/ambivalence in that (re)construction of a national culture – to remain aware of the contingency, the fissures and occlusions that occur in any articulation of "unified sovereignty" (1993b:108):

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 (coffee)

an event
 that may
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 obstructing



I have no doubt that in certain documents, at the level of political rallying, political pamphleteering, visionary speeches, this image of a unified nation has to exist. But in actual practice ... in the more practice-bound inscriptions, in the actual working out, or through, or with these ideas, in the contexts in which these ideas are constructed, surely those are contexts where that very notion of the nation is being both propagated and, at the same time, erased and displaced? (Bhabha, 1993b:109)

Attwell's prompting of the statement, "class is one agency among others" (1993b:107) from Bhabha possibly serves to highlight his political positionality. It also foregrounds a particular (mis)take in his exchange with Bhabha. For Bhabha, to question the "sufficiency and priority of class" is not a "refusal of the importance of class as generating a certain structure of the social formation which produces its own agency" (1993b:107). This does not mean, as Attwell seems to understand it, that the postcolonial intellectual should merely elide the analysis of class as an interpretive category, choosing exclusively (if not primarily, in what is a simple reversal of priority) to focus on race and cultural difference. I will later return to the question of this reversal of priority as possibly indicative of the politico-institutional dynamics operating within the South African academy. Contrary to Attwell, Bhabha's affirmation of the statement "class is one agency among others" emerges out of the search for a "deconstructive reading of class, class against the grain":

Class read against the sociological coordinates of European capitalism; a notion of class in which the periodising teleologies of capitalist development were in question, where there was uneven development ... class read in tension with its non-emphasis on questions of gender and race relations, domestic economies, domestic slavery. (1993b:107)

Attwell's hasty appropriation of the "critical-theoretical language" of postcolonial theory clearly (mis)takes the reading of class as an analytic category. A similar tendency is

demonstrated in what I would argue is de Kock's more sophisticated articulation on the reading of class within postcolonial analysis.

De Kock's attempt, in "Sitting for the Civilisation Test", to reorient his appropriation of postcolonial theory to the South African case – through a historical and historiographical investigation – is to be commended³. The problem arises in the consistent lack of attention to the category of class in his essay, or rather the manner in which de Kock reads the relevance of class in his analysis. This is illustrated in both his analyses of the unanimous resolution made at the African Authors Conference of 1936, by some of the most pre-eminent black South African authors of the time, that a "national" literature – as opposed to an aboriginal "tribal" literature – should and can only be expressed in English (2001:393), and the calls for a "civilisation test" "at the All African Convention (AAC) in 1935" (2001:397-98). Here, de Kock affirms the discursive authority and authentic representivity of the resolutions of what is a clearly a black-elite:

On the surface we have an emergent African nationalist discourse framing its ideals in what postcolonial theory would normally regard as the language of complicity. Here is a genuinely representative postcolonizing ethos, *not* driven by self-serving elitist or bourgeois sellouts, that seemingly *asks* to be measured by the standards of imperial 'civilization'. (2001:399-400)

The rather neat box de Kock constructs for postcolonial theory – which is not the same as asserting such a construction is a mere fiction – suggests that postcolonial theory has become a type of orthodoxy whose analytic focus privileges a genealogy that includes the liberation movement in South Africa. I would suggest that such a construction requires rigorous unpacking as it is a consequence of a particular appropriation of postcolonial theory. It is for this reason that I turn to de Kock's earlier postcolonial analytical articulations.

³ De Kock's reorientation in this essay is largely focused on thinking forms of native agency and resistance that would be other than Bhabha's theorisation of 'mimicry' and his notion of 'sly civility'.

In his earlier assertions, at the time of his interview with Spivak, de Kock is concerned to assuage the hostility towards postcolonial theory and colonial discourse analysis within the South African academy given their efficacy for “a country as deeply postcolonial and as discursively-stratified as South Africa” (1992:32). As de Kock affirms in his “Postcolonial Analysis and the Question of Critical Disablement”, for him, “‘Postcolonial’ ... denotes both a temporal relation (modern South Africa, no longer a colony, was constituted within a colonial past), and a causal nexus” (1993:65). In his opening remarks to the interview, de Kock argues that the machinations of reforming apartheid – demonstrated in the unbanning of most of the liberation movements, the increasingly apologetic statements of NP officials, and F. W. de Klerk’s commitment to the idea of a representative government – unsettled the grounds of oppositional discourses:

The governing party (and its slavish television service) had begun freely to appropriate liberal language ... so that even the discourse of liberal humanism, which for so long was the front line of cultural resistance and the preserve of the arts, looked to be in danger of being swallowed up by the former apartheid demons. (1992:30)

It is true that de Kock does not specify his own placement within the counter-discourses “of those who had been banned, proscribed, suppressed, and maimed by apartheid, and [exiles] who were now back home without ever having repented” (1992:29-30) or within the “cultural resistance” of “the discourse of liberal humanism”. However, given his place within the South African literary-cultural establishment, perhaps his political positionality is highlighted by both his endorsement of the oppositional practices of the ‘liberal humanists’ as “the preserve of the arts”, and his claim that the New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa “served as a healing ground”⁴. All of South Africa was symbolically reconstituted under the single nationhood formerly denied” (1992:31).

⁴ The New Nation Writers Conference took place in 1991, as a result of reforms undertaken by the Pretoria regime in the early 1990s. As both de Kock and Attwell also note, the return to South Africa by some of the previously banned political exiles and political parties who opposed *apartheid*, and the end of the academic boycott of the country by international writers, critics, theorists and commentators, opened up the space for re-visioning “the cultural identity of South African people” (De Kock, 1992:30).

He seems to be aware that class identifications have a bearing on the enunciation of discursive authority when he notes that the conference was “fairly middle-class affair, while black South Africans continued to die in large numbers in the political violence all around us” (1992:29). And, although he criticises the conference for being “like a post-revolution conference before the [material political] revolution that would now never really occur” (29), here is de Kock’s approval of the opening preoccupations of the conference:

So, many of the conference themes were perforce conceived in opposition to the perceived dominant tropes of the old apartheid ... The first day was devoted to discussing alternatives to race-talk. The sessions were entitled ‘Race & Ethnicity: Towards Cultural Diversity & Unity’; ‘Race & Ethnicity: Images & Stereotypes in Literature’; ‘Race & Ethnicity: The Problems & Challenges of Racism in Writing’; and ‘Race & Ethnicity: Beyond the Legacy of Victims; South African Writers Speak’. (1992:30-31)

If the session titles of the first day of the conference are taken at their word, then the discussion in the sessions are not so much “an alternative to race-talk”, as de Kock argues, but the reinsertion of race-talk at precisely the moment where it is supposedly transcended. However, such a reading would remain unfair inasmuch as it figures the discussion in the sessions from the preoccupations highlighted by the titles.

The particularity of de Kock’s positionality is once again illustrated in his conception of the task of reconstituting a representative South African national culture as merely achieved through a release of “the stranglehold of ... pompous, Wasp, middle-class control of scholarly discourse” (1992:31). As laudable as that opening up of scholarly discourse is, it should be clear that it is a particular type of opening up – with its own constraints and exclusions. In a country that today has eleven official languages, one such constraint would be the linguistic hegemony of the English language (and Afrikaans) within the South African literary-cultural establishment, and the insufficiency of translation work being done in the country.

pre-empt - to prevent sth to happen
taking precautions to stop it

The difficulty of reading the place of class analysis in de Kock's work – and this is why his articulation is more sophisticated than Attwell's – is that de Kock shows an awareness of, and even uses, class as an analytic category. In the final analysis however, like the tendency I noted in Attwell, the manner of de Kock's attention to class analysis within his appropriation of postcolonial theory does not complicate the promise of what Derrida called "South Africa in memory of apartheid" (discussed in chapter three). This latter assertion necessarily hesitates to say that Attwell and de Kock's appropriation does not complicate the promise of the 'postcolonial', inasmuch as this would pre-empt my discussion of the debate on the applicability of the term for the South African case.

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Another preoccupation of the South African debate about postcolonial theory is a concern for the possibilities of political action that are opened up or closed off by Spivak's notion of subalternity and Bhabha's conceptualisation of cultural difference. De Kock approaches this problematic of critical disablement that is said to cohere to postcolonial theory – the supposed retention of binary oppositionality or "strong othering" – by arguing it is only the result of misrepresenting the postcolonial theoretical thought on otherness in what he says is "a misrepresentation bordering on caricature" (1993:51). Thus his argument attempts to keep open a space for "what a critic of colonialism in South Africa is enabled to say" (1993:48). Instead of a "hard version" of "poststructuralist-based" theory, which as he has said is a crude misrepresentation, de Kock argues for a version that would allow "for an ethical subject who can recognise the tyrannies of identity, but who nevertheless must work from a basis of identity which is politically defined" (1993:60). De Kock clearly expresses his interest in the following:

[If] poststructuralist logic were to teach that, regardless of relative agency or historical, political and ethical considerations, any assertion of subjectivity in identitarian terms was 'logocentric', 'essentialist' and unacceptable because it merely reversed Western binary procedure, then black political mobilisation, or any group mobilisation for that matter, would have to be regarded as inadmissible. (1993:53)

Deconstruction! de Kock implies that he believes he
it is impossible for a text to have ^{one} fixed meaning
and emphasizes the role of a reader in the process
- or in a sense

My discussion in this thesis has shown that deconstructive practices – what de Kock calls “poststructuralist logic” – are always plural, heterogeneous, and never easily accommodated within the rubric of a “logic”. What remains interesting in de Kock’s reading of deconstruction in the above assertion is his attempt to refuse precisely the deconstructive demonstration of the textuality of “agency or the historical, political and ethical considerations”. I have already illustrated (in chapter three) the misreading involved in such a view, in my discussion of McClintock and Nixon’s assertion that Derrida’s appeal in “Racism’s Last Word” is incapable of interrogating historicity of the text of apartheid. De Kock here seems to suggest that the deconstructive thought on alterity finally closes off access to materiality, historiography, quotidian politics and ethics.

Carusi is also anxious that the conceptual problematic of heterogeneity within postcolonial theory “results in a dilemma for the theorising of reconstitutive political action” (1991b:228). What Carusi (and others) take umbrage at is precisely the deployment of deconstructive practices within postcolonial theory. Their reading is thus exemplary for my investigation of the efficacy of deconstruction when brought to postcolonial contexts. Her engagement with the prior question of South Africa’s postcolonial status is in this regard entirely admirable. Carusi, who seeks to examine the relations that South African literary production has to “post-structuralism and post-modernism” and the deployment of the latter in “post-colonialism”, acknowledges that the debates within the country’s literary-cultural establishment have meant that “South Africa’s ‘post-colonial status’ ... is in itself questionable”: “At the crux of this is the question of the applicability or non-applicability of the post-colonial label ... Attitudes towards the label are differentiated according to linguistic and racial position, and more directly, in terms of political standpoint (1991a:95)⁵.

⁵ To illustrate this point Carusi offers the following reading: “If one thinks along the lines of the importance of the consolidation of national language ... and through this of a national culture, including racial, social and religious practices, there is a large part of the (white) population, for whom the label ‘postcolonialism’ is not an issue at all. Post-colonialism, as a desirable state of affairs, has been accomplished, de facto, and in a most successful manner. The South African nation exists because of the success of the construction of Afrikanerdom.” (1991a:95-96).

Consequently, she asserts, “to speak of post-colonialism is pre-emptive” (1991a:96) in a South Africa where the literary-cultural production of blacks is marginalised. She argues for the political usefulness and practicality of the term “post-apartheid”. Thus her critical awareness of the historicity of the idea of South African “colonialism” means that she acknowledges, “[if] colonialism may not be an appropriately descriptive term for the way in which subjugation is carried out in this country, neo-imperialism certainly is” (1991a:96)⁶. However, despite the apparent torsions and tensions in the applicability of the term postcolonial to the South African case, Carusi still asserts the efficacy “of post-colonial discourse for liberation and resistance literature”:

[The] recognition [in postcolonial theory] of the desire of a colonized or subjugated people for an identity and for self-determination ... focuses on the central position of cultural production in the attainment of those goals ... the discourse of colonialism has placed itself in a position to counter, with varying degrees of success, imperialistic strategies be they in the political, economic or cultural sphere. (1991a:96).

For Carusi, “Otherness is a ... problem for theories of postcolonialism; it is also one of the major obstacles to their fulfilling their claim to contributing to emancipatory political intervention” (1991b:229). She acknowledges the contribution made by Spivak and Bhabha’s examination of the power/knowledge dynamics of colonial authority and identification, and the ways in which it constructs the colonised as the colonising Self’s shadow. However, in a manner not unlike Parry’s attack on Spivak and Bhabha’s work (discussed in chapters two and four), Carusi argues that the latter’s interrogations of the elisions of imperialist subject constitution foreclose the colonised’s ability to fashion counter-hegemonic practices. So too does Carusi follow Parry’s trajectory in her assessment that such interrogations are nothing less than a denial of all agency and

⁶ In a different register, David Johnson articulates a similar concern: “To read Said and Young *outside* the metropole without taking into careful account what they might mean in new contexts is therefore to risk imposing their calendar and their politics on a diversity of quite distinct neo-colonial contexts” (1994:81).

resistance to the colonised. For Carusi, the radical difference theorised by Spivak's notion of subalternity implies that the

other is in a structurally identical position as the beyond of transgression, that is, it has only a negative status ... Since there is effectively no place from which the other can signify itself *as other*, the idea of an other to the West reinforces the position of nonfunctionality and powerlessness of the other with respect to the West. Working within such a framework ... it is no wonder that 'the subaltern cannot speak' (1991b:230-231)

I have already illustrated (in chapter two) that such a reading of Spivak's notion of subalternity does not attend to the strictures of the definition Spivak deploys. Carusi's pronouncement also fails to contextualise Spivak's interrogation of subalternity. As such, Carusi's failure approximates my earlier discussion (in chapter three) of McClintock and Nixon's misapprehension of the context of Derrida's text on apartheid. Spivak reiterates this much in her interview with de Kock when she notes how criticism of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has tended to ignore the occasionality or circumstances that inform her essay. That is, the incident and situation informing her contention that "the subaltern cannot speak" is the message Bhuvaneshwari attempts to speak through her suicide.

I agree with Carusi's reading that Bhabha's enunciation of identification in colonial discourse, in "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", operates through the processes of fetishism – that is, through an ambivalent fixation/disavowal of the difference of subjectivity. However, despite her assertion that her essay will not be an assessment of Spivak and Bhabha's "work as a whole", her discussion of "The Other Question" as "exemplary [standpoint] in the theorising of postcolonial otherness, within a poststructuralist framework" (1991b:229) ends up ignoring the intellectual trajectory of Bhabha's work – his later extension of the concepts of "mimicry" and "hybridity" or "the metonymic instance".

Of course Carusi is precisely correct when she notes that the deconstructive thought of heterogeneous difference does not prescribe or found a political programme that is recognisable under the terms of conventional political philosophies: “Purposeful action requires a basis in a positive foundation in that it requires a basis on which decisions and predictions are made” (1991b:236). Purposeful action requires purposeful action seems to be the neat tautology Carusi here asserts – a post-haste misapprehension of the undecidability that cuts through all moments of decision. As I have already illustrated in my discussion (in chapters three) of McClintock and Nixon’s reproach of Derrida’s text on apartheid, and in my discussion (in chapter four) of Bhabha’s response to his detractors in “The Commitment to Theory”, Carusi’s assertion seems to hold an unexamined assumption on the radicality of merely invoking political practice. That is, as Bhabha argues,

Political positions are not simply identifiable as progressive or reactionary, bourgeois or radical, prior to the act of *critique engagee*, or outside the terms and conditions of their discursive address. It is in this sense that the historical moment of political action must be thought of as part of the history of its writing ... [This] is to suggest that the dynamics of writing and textuality require us to rethink the logics of causality and determinacy through which we recognize the ‘political’ as a form of calculation and strategic action dedicated to social transformation. (Bhabha, 1994:22-23)

Once again, as I have already shown in my discussion of Spivak and Bhabha respectively (in chapters two and four), subalternity is a not moment of negativity in some conception of a dialectical progression. For Spivak, subalternity is the catachrestic (or, for Bhabha, the metonymic is the interstitial) occasion for the subversive interruption/irruption of the other that refuses subsumption – so as to refuse a valorisation of the “oppressed as subject”. As Spivak argues, this is does not mean that political action or representation (both *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*) becomes an impossibility or mere contradiction. On the contrary, to highlight the conditions of undecidability of the moment of decision is precisely to demonstrate the necessary urgency of the political decision that would

remain ethical. Nonetheless, I would argue that Carusi's enunciations are recuperable inasmuch as they initiate a critique of the appropriation of metropolitan theory.

At this point I would like to return to Attwell's appropriation of postcolonial theory, where there is a disquieting sense of deference to the arguments of the metropolitan postcolonial intellectual. As I have already shown, this is particularly marked in his interview with Bhabha. I would suggest that such deference is related to both the interpersonal relations entailed by the text of the interview and the dynamics of metropolitan theorisation and peripheral reception. To recall, one of the primary motivations for Attwell's appropriation of postcolonial theory was that an "untheorised" apprehension of postcoloniality by South African critics was "potentially vulnerable ... to sceptical questioning from *international* quarters" (1993a:3, my emphasis). On the whole, Attwell does not pose a significant challenge to Bhabha's project, as is illustrated by the lack of discord in the questions, answers and interjectory remarks in the interview. David Johnson, in "Importing Metropolitan Post-colonials", argues a similar point when he asserts such "cosy interviews" (1994:83) – referring to Attwell and de Kock's respective interviews – entail a "sanguine reading of ... theory and [whose] potential value runs certain risks" (74). I have already shown (particularly in chapter two) how this is related to the question of metropolitan theory – Ato Quayson particularly censuring the use of psychoanalysis (2000:74) – as a 'derivative discourse' without sufficient explanatory potential for the experiences of the colonised.

I have highlighted the particular modalities of postcolonial theory that Carusi, de Kock and Attwell seek to appropriate for the South African academy. Their different views are bound by a preoccupation with the political positionality of the postcolonial intellectual. I would suggest that what emerges from this particular appropriation is a domestication of the politico-theoretical insight that, as argued earlier (in chapter four), was to be gleaned from the debate on Fanon between Bhabha and Parry. The appropriation of postcolonial theory by the critics under discussion – primarily Attwell and de Kock – seeks to install a "particularist version of postcolonial theory" (Sole, 1994a:23) that seeks to foreclose the deconstructive interrogation of alterity. For Sole,

Attwell and de Kock's formulations of postcoloniality largely bypass an examination of "how to periodise South Africa within a 'colonial/post-colonial' framework" (1997:119). However, there are problems with Sole's critique as well.

I would argue that Visser's exposition in "Postcoloniality of a Special Type: Theory and Its Appropriations in South Africa" condenses a rigorous and incisive critique of the problems in the appropriation of postcolonial theory by the critics I have here discussed. It is for this reason that my following discussion will concentrate on Visser's critique. Besides rehearsing the orientation of many of Visser's arguments⁷, Sole's critique in "South Africa Passes the Posts" is too expansive in its attacks for the purposes of my investigation of the critiques of postcolonial theory. I will however have recourse to an analysis of some of Sole's arguments in the latter essay, as well as the debate initiated by his essay, "Democratising Culture". This is because Sole's case illuminates the reasons for what I will argue is a deadlock in the debate in South Africa.

Visser's critique takes as its point of departure the occluded discussion of the applicability of the term postcolonial within South African postcolonial criticism. He hopes to identify in the assertion of South Africa's postcolonial status by South African critics an uncritical endorsement of the assumptions of a theory popularised (though not without debate) by the South African Communist Party in the early 1960s: namely, the theory of South Africa as an instance of "Colonialism of a Special Type" or CST, as it later became known: "Assumptions about shared experience, about the supposed convergence of interests among all who are not white, and about shared racial subjectivity ... have been central features of CST. They are also key features of postcolonial theory in South Africa, and within that theory they carry the same questionable entailments" (1997:81)⁸. As I have illustrated, and as Visser argues, Attwell

⁷ Here is Visser's comment in a tributary note to his essay: "Kelwyn Sole was originally to have co-authored this essay but had to withdraw owing to illness. I have benefited greatly from discussions with him. His views on current theory in South Africa are set out in 'Democratising Culture'" (1997:79). Thus Sole's recourse to some of the arguments in Visser's essay are not so much a rehearsal – given that Visser acknowledges the trace of Sole's non-present signature to the essay. This would also strengthen my case for concentrating on Visser's critique.

⁸ That Attwell endorses and prescribes to CST's model of 'internal colonialism' becomes clear in Spivak's following acknowledgement: "David Attwell ... has pointed out to me the existence of the notion of a

and de Kock's appropriation of postcolonial theory, together with their endorsement of CST's model of 'internal colonialism', privileges an analysis of race over an analysis of class. I have already demonstrated that even when De Kock invokes class as an analytic category, it is finally submerged under an inordinate focus on race or cultural difference. I will return to the questionability and effect of this privileging of race in the South African appropriation of postcolonial theory.

Like Carusi, Visser notes the overshadowing of the term 'post-apartheid' by 'postcolonial'. His specific conclusions on this apparent occlusion are however at variance with hers. Visser argues there is a self-congratulatory tendency in the appropriation of postcoloniality in the South African academy. For him, this results from the misapprehension of "The transition that occurred in South Africa between 1990 and 1994 ... [as] the most convincing occasion for dating the end of colonial rule over South Africa" (1997:83). Such a critique of the temporalising tendencies within the term postcolonial of course repeats the metropolitan debate I have already signalled in my introduction. For both Visser and Sole, this has particular theoretico-political consequences for postcolonial theory in South Africa.

Visser's argument that the term 'postcolonial' overshadows any conception of the term 'post-apartheid' is perhaps more interesting. This is because it would seem to be directly related to my earlier discussion (in chapter three) of Derrida's intervention in "Racism's Last Word". As I have already demonstrated, Derrida asserts the need for a responsibility towards the memory of *apartheid*, so that, among other things, it might not be forgotten. On the one hand, if postcolonial theory in South Africa does not thoroughly engage with the "totality of the text of *apartheid*" (1986:165), then the foreshadowing of the term 'post-apartheid' by 'postcolonial' would constitute irresponsibility towards the memory of apartheid that would risk a misunderstanding of its complex aftermath.

'colonialism of a special type' in South Africa, a colonialism that did not, by and large, export surplus value ... I keep to my much less finetuned point of territorial presence – though even there, the difference between settler colonies ... and territorial imperialisms ... must be kept in mind" (1999:190-91).

On the other hand, one could also read its non-presence within the appropriations of postcolonial theory, as not so much an occlusion, but rather – following Derrida – a demonstration of its “apartitionality” (1985:292). In this regard, I wish to recall Niall Lucy’s assertion (in chapter three) that “the word ‘apartheid’ is so saturated with history, like the word ‘Auschwitz’, that it seems to stand apart from history and to stand in for the ultimate form of its type” (1995:16). However, in analysing the particular absence of the term ‘post-apartheid’ within the appropriation of postcolonial theory in South Africa, such a reading would seem to me not so much germane as it would be potentially nebulous. Indeed, Visser’s observations can be read as seeking to clarify this issue.

NB

In conceding the problematic question of the term postcolonial in South Africa, Visser might also have noted the equivocality of the term ‘post-apartheid’. To consider the ‘totality of the text of *apartheid*’ would then perhaps mean to attend to both its continuities and discontinuities within contemporary South Africa – not always necessarily of practice, but also of affect, within the multitudinous discursive spaces of the country. It should be clear then that these sites of enunciation are not limited to academic discourse but would include, among other things, all manner of political speeches, state policy and the particularities of social relations – whether cultural, economic, racial or sexual difference. There is, of course, the danger that such attention could be seen as counterproductive to attempts to foster a national culture after the violently Manichean and discriminatory practices of the apartheid state. As I have already illustrated, this is also Attwell’s concern when he argues about the difficulties of “applying a disjunctive reading of nationalism ... [when] reading the reconstitution of the nation in terms of the national democratic struggle as led by the ANC” (1993b:108). Minimally, one of the responsibilities of the (postcolonial) intellectual in South Africa, should be an attempt to demystify those difficulties by thinking through them in the most consistent fashion possible.

Although I agree with some of Visser’s specific critiques about the status of postcolonial theory in South Africa, I do not always agree with the manner in which he derives his critique. To be sure, de Kock does acknowledge the debt of his understanding of colonial

relations and the South African debate on CST, in an expansive footnote that shows his critical awareness of the historicity of the idea of colonialism in South Africa, prior to Visser's criticism: "The South African Communist Party, on the one hand, has proposed a theory of 'internal colonialism' or 'colonialism of a special type' which combines 'the worst features of both imperialism and colonialism' ... in which 'Non-white South Africa' is a colony of 'White South Africa'" (1997:65). However, to bury the discussion of the applicability of term postcolonial to the South African case within a footnote could also be seen as a strategic critical silencing of the debate about the term.

As such, I cannot but agree with Visser and Sole's critique that the appropriation of postcolonial theory in the South African literary-cultural establishment seems to be a "liberal-pluralist" (Visser, 1997:90) position or falls back onto the terms of "liberal humanism" (Sole, 1997:124). This is minimally illustrated by the tendency I have argued is submerged in de Kock and Attwell's respective claims for the task of postcolonial criticism in South Africa. For Sole, there is a tendency for Attwell to slip "back into notions of authenticity when dealing with issues of black agency" (1997:116), a move that Sole offers is typical of postcolonial criticism in South Africa. For Visser, the workings of this "entrenched liberal-pluralist orientation" (1997:90) are illustrated "in the relation between current theory and syllabus construction", given the problematic retention of literary works within syllabi that have been critiqued as complicit with the task of "forming students into good liberal pluralists" (1997:90). Consequently, Visser correctly argues against this distinguishing characteristic of the South African appropriation of postcolonial theory, "which domesticates the theory, stripping it of its more interesting and provocative assertions in order to reinstate it as the latest expression of liberal pluralism" (1997:92)⁹.

⁹ "In each case, however, the 'hard' version appears to be that which contains the most provocative, not to say most centrally distinguishing, assumptions and conclusions. De Kock seeks a deconstruction without most of Derrida or de Man, a poststructuralism without most of Foucault or Lacan, a postmodernism without most of Lyotard or Baudrillard; just as he appears to seek a postcolonial theory without most of Spivak or Bhabha. What is unclear is just what remains after such abstractions, and why anyone would want to advocate the remainder" (Visser, 1997:85).

I have shown that there is an overbearing focus on race and cultural difference within the latter appropriation of postcolonial theory. To this extent, I agree with Visser's assessment that "Postcolonial theorists may insist that racial identity is always constructed, but the identity constructed is always somehow racial" (1997:86). Of course the analysis of race and cultural difference in South Africa should not be at the expense of a phenomenal occlusion of class – nor should it occlude other forms of difference: to name but a few, regional (South Africa has nine provinces, differing in degrees of the rural, (sub)urban and informal settlement) gender, embodied physiological and psychological difference. Attwell's striking elision of class analysis and his assertion that postcolonial theory is "post-marxist" (1993a:4) can be understood as deference to the politico-institutional dynamics of the South African literary-cultural establishment. For Visser, Attwell's uncritical pronouncement that postcolonial theory is necessarily "post-marxist"

would appear to suggest some sort of development out of Marxism, an advanced revision of the traditions of Marxist thought or a higher synthesis of its conceptions. What Attwell is actually spelling out, and here he is fully representative of virtually all South African academics who have embraced postcolonial theory, is not post-Marxism but the far more familiar anti-Marxism. (1997:94)¹⁰

The analysis of class identification, alienation or whatever, is not (how could it be?) the exclusive purview or sole proprietary of Marxist analysis. One could remember Derrida's (belated?) enunciations, in *Spectres of Marx*, on the importance of an awareness of the efficacious spectrality of Marxist critique within his thought, especially regarding the contemporary international division of labour, the juridico-economic discourses and consequences of state policies, decisions and actions and, the corporate governance of the modern transnational conglomerate – nothing other than an (for him, now deconstructive) analysis of the contemporary scene of Global Capitalism:

¹⁰ See also, Johnson's praise for Aijaz Ahmad (1992): "Ahmad's work is important because it builds on a long tradition of anti-imperialist Marxist thought ... and further, because it engages in depth with a range of anti-Marxist arguments that have become too-easy critical orthodoxies" (1994:80)

Now, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not the critical idea or the questioning stance ... It is rather a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. And a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain 'spiritual' or 'abstract', but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth. To break with the 'party form' or with some form of State or the International does not mean to give up every form of practical or effective organization. It is exactly the contrary that matters to us here. (2006:111-112)

On the one hand, perhaps this should temper anything like the view that Derrida's work or deconstruction in general should be inherently either *anti-Marxist* or anti-humanist¹¹. On the other, it renders questionable any unexamined assumptions of those who would claim to be post-Marxist. Thus Parry correctly notes that what necessarily haunts Derrida's grammar, in the above articulation, is an understanding that (to a degree I have argued is always already demonstrated in his earliest work) the questions of the politics and ethics are animated by a call for a differential future, for an ethical relation with the other that would be something other than mere subsumption to some prior rule or mere calculation. I have already illustrated that Derrida's reading of apartheid, in his debate with McClintock and Nixon, is precisely such a text of appeal. Such a reading of race and cultural difference together with an analysis of class in the South African case is incisively demonstrated by John Comaroff's comments in his conversation with Bhabha.

¹¹ As I have already illustrated in my discussion (in chapter two) of Derrida's text on *apartheid*, Derrida argues that the discourses of human rights meet their as yet 'unthought limit' when faced with the text of *apartheid*. However, for Derrida on the danger involved in summary dismissals (or even unsparing radical interrogations) of the latter discourses, see "Force of Law: The 'Mystic Foundation of Authority'" (1992:28). For Derrida, the danger lies in the possibility of misconstruing and forgetting the (partial) commonalities these discourses have with the deconstructive thought on politics. I would argue that this is minimally located in the common appeal for a change in the social, political, institutional, juridical order of the contemporary world, that would be other than the systematic exploitation, marginalisation, discrimination and deprivation.

In "Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the Continuous Present: A Conversation", Comaroff argues, "Constitutively and constitutionally, race [in South Africa] has given way to class. But, demographically speaking, emergent class lines still bear a very tight correlation with old patterns of racial division ... [The] vast majority of unemployed, unwaged, and homeless people remain people of color" (2002:33). My own concluding remarks about the contradictions of the South African transition to a government elected by universal suffrage, are partially informed by the development of Comaroff's analysis. Although articulated from an alternate interpretive mode, Michael MacDonald's argument, in *Why Race Matters in South Africa*, is also particularly astute in this regard. MacDonald asserts, "The transition to democracy [with the election of the ANC to government] disentangled citizenship from race, opening citizenship to all South Africans irrespective of race, but it did not disentangle class from race" (2006:126)¹². The stark reality in contemporary South Africa is that class distinctions have become intensified across race lines.

Sole's critique of the appropriations of postcolonial theory in South Africa is valuable for its analysis of the problematics that were largely not thought through in that appropriation. However, as I suggested earlier, his own call for a Marxist analysis of South Africa is not without its problems. Problematically, Sole still argues for an irreducible distinction between the social and the discursive. As I have already argued in my discussion of Parry's attack on Spivak, and my examination of McClintock and Nixon's reading of Derrida's text on apartheid, such a distinction insists on the essentiality of the social and elides a whole history of critique of the social as an interpretive horizon.

Consequently, Sole repeats the misreading of Derrida's reformulation of the notion of text and context when he argues that deconstructive practices are confined only to the "printed page" and are thus merely "a new type of textual radicalism: with a 'subversive'

¹² See the development of this argument in "The Birth of a Nation" section of Comaroff's conversation with Bhabha (Comaroff, 2002:32-38); see especially the final two chapters and "Conclusion" to MacDonald's study (2006:124-186), although it is sometimes difficult to agree with the extent to which his analysis seems to inscribe an essential intentionality to the circumstances in South Africa.

political agenda which remains pertinent only within the confines of the academy” (1994a:17). Here Sole seems to hold, once again as illustrated in the previous debates, a too rigid a distinction between the theoretical and the political or between theory and practice. Also, although Sole argues that an analysis of class identification should not mean that all social relations are constructed as economically determined, the singular weight of the prescriptions and descriptions in his argument finally result in this. Such a tendency is arguably also noticeable in Visser’s assertion that “class relations remain *entirely* unaltered in the ‘new’ South Africa” (1997:93, my emphasis). This is particularly highlighted in Sole’s essay, “Democratising Culture”, where he argues that postcolonial theorists – Spivak being particularly censured for eschewing her “Marxist sympathies” – remain “wilfully blind” to the social domain when they “lose sight of, render obsolete, the powerful socialising and differentiating force of class struggle and formation” (1994a:21). However, as I have already demonstrated (in chapter two), Sole here not only (mis)takes the place of class and the social within Spivak’s thought, I would argue that his reiterated insistence on class as a pre-eminent category for analysing social relations finally essentialises the social within what Spivak called ‘capitalist sociality’. Also, Spivak’s insistence that the postcolonial intellectual should mark her positionality, and assertions that the intellectual must attempt to ‘unlearn privilege’ are already a critique of the intellectual as class-privileged.

As I already mentioned, although Sole’s, “Democratising Culture” is not specifically concerned with postcolonial theory it usefully highlights the context of the debate. That the debate on the appropriation of postcolonial theory within the discourses of the South African literary-cultural establishment has stalled should be clear from my discussion here. This is also illustrated by some of the belligerent responses to Sole’s essay. Although Guy Willoughby, one of the respondents to Sole’s essay, decries the prevalence of “ritualised mutual debunking in local scholarly journals” (1994:39), this is precisely what the debate becomes when most of the responses engage in what are at times critically unnecessary *ad hominem* attacks on Sole’s position¹³. One could also argue that

¹³ Some of the responses to Sole’s “Democratising Culture”, are thoroughly vitriolic. Except Isabel Hofmeyr’s response, as Sole acknowledges in his rejoinder, the respondents seek to attack his gesture by

Sole's critique of postcolonial theory in South Africa has been largely ignored. It should be clear then, as I have already argued here, (and in chapter three), that the texture of such debate does not open onto any further discussion of the terms of the debate and rather signals the adherence to rigid disciplinary and institutional politics.

Sole asserts this much in his rejoinder when he argues that the belligerence of the responses signals the will to power "of official or academic 'consensus'" (1994b:62) that admonishes the views of marginal and discordant critique. This critical divide and (unnecessary) antagonism is illustrated by the genesis of the critiques of the appropriation of postcolonial theory in South Africa. As I have already illustrated, the major critiques of this appropriation – by Sole, Visser and Johnson – emerge from a self-acknowledged (although not homogenous) Marxist criticism. This is also highlighted by Attwell's concession on the displacement of the previously ascendant Marxist criticism within the South African academy: "progressive scholarship in South Africa *has been* predominantly Marxist" (1993b:105, my emphasis). As I have demonstrated, what displaced the latter scholarship is an apparently "liberal-pluralist" literary-cultural criticism that was amenable to the atmosphere of negotiated settlement.

That the critique of postcolonial theory in South Africa has been ignored also becomes clear in Attwell's *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in black South African Literary History* (2005). Attwell nowhere (not once) explicitly registers Visser and Sole's critiques. Without any particular citation, Attwell remarks, in the "Preface" to the aforementioned work, that "By the early 1990s the debate over the place of postcolonial studies in South Africa was firmly under way: should we reject this foreign, homogenising, ahistoricising, 'poststructuralist' import, or should we reinvent it on our own terms" (2005:ix). I would argue that what is rather "homogenising" and "ahistoricising" is precisely Attwell's occlusion of what is an important debate within South African intellectual discussion. Of course Attwell has registered the terms of the debate. This can be seen in the preoccupations and changed order of priorities in his following assertion:

asserting "that [he is] close to nervous breakdown; that [he is]; [and that he is] a neurotic" (Sole, 1994b:61-62); see Willoughby, Lewis Nkosi and Gareth Cornwell's responses, all in the same issue as Sole's essay and rejoinder.

I could speak of the ways in which the country's *celebrated pluralism* masks the racist legacies of the past; of a deepening or a 'normalisation' of class division as the middle class becomes more black than white ... The question for South Africa, then, is how to translate the terms of [a dominant 'liberal capitalism'] in ways that are appropriate to our history and *the country's political, social and cultural priorities* ... the challenge is whether the country will repeat liberal capitalism's manifest failures or whether it will translate its underlying promises appropriately. Such is the game that the *post-apartheid* settlement is playing. (2005:6, my emphasis)

Arguably, Attwell can now be seen to acknowledge Visser and Sole's critiques of a submerged "liberal-pluralist" tendency, as well as their assertion of the need for more attention to class analysis within South African postcolonial criticism. Also, note the affirmation of term 'post-apartheid', together with the implied order of priorities in Attwell's comments.

Finally, I would like to clarify how the title of my project relates to my central thesis: how efficacious are deconstructive practices when brought to the interrogation of postcolonial contexts? This question is necessarily, as I hope I have illustrated, also a question of the particular appropriation of postcoloniality and deconstruction. Thus my bracketing of "post" together with the pluralizing of the term "colonial" in (post)colonialities, is an attempt to highlight some of the protean contexts, histories and articulations of colonial discourse and postcolonial theory. In the debates that I have critically analysed, this has meant minimally to understand the different enunciative contexts that inform (post)colonial theory. So too my pluralizing of "deconstruction". The second part of my title, as illustrated in my discussion of all the previous debates, was an attempt to place the terms of the debate under a type of probative erasure. This was done in order to highlight the text of what I argue has been taken, mistaken or (mis)taken in postcolonial theory, and what has at times placed the intellectual practices of these latter appropriations into double-binds. I have tried to conceive of the trace of

such an erasure as both the undecidability or futurity of the ethico-political promise always already in the enunciations of the debates.

It would be much too easy to end there. It would also be too easy – without easing – to enter into some specie of moralistic diatribe about present material conditions in South Africa. Surely a deconstructive postcolonial criticism (no less than the response) has a responsibility towards that too? Such a question, as I have already demonstrated in my discussion of the “political demand” made of Derrida’s work (in chapter three), is interesting in its interest to read deconstruction in a particularly pejorative manner. To ask the question of the question *means* to question its priority. The responsibility is already *t/here*. However, the question still – in a kind of stasis that should not annul the movement of a deconstruction – *needs* an answer: South Africa is assuredly a country that is in need of urgency. Some perhaps would cry out (and they already do, everyday) a state of emergency. It is, in fact, a country where the National Democratic Revolution – that principle, alliance, and movement for liberation – took place, some might say, without revolution. That is, how quickly it became (necessarily?) married to (others say marred by) democratic-capitalism. Here, we have the socio-economic state policies of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) and Affirmative Action (AA) ‘to address the imbalances of the past’ or ‘level the playing fields’. On the one hand, to the rural and poor these policies mean, among other things, improving sanitation through the elimination of the ‘bucket-system’ – a euphemism that should never elide the quotidian humiliation – within a timeframe that continues to be officially revised as the state strains under the demands for service delivery. Hence the rise of grassroots civic or social movements.

On the other hand, the rise of a black elite, the embourgeoisement, the creation of a black-capitalist class – somehow the term Black Diamond is coined to identify it. (There is a history that inhabits that term, no less than the coining – who is coining it in South Africa, and why? That history calls for reading.) Here, the current practice of AA has led the Black Management Forum to call for the exclusion of white women from the category of “previously disadvantaged”. Here too, on the one hand a chronic lack of human capital

– a “skills shortage” in the official idiom – lived by half the working-age population as an unemployment rate of around 42 percent under the broad definition (or the no less salutary figure of around 31 percent in the official calculation)¹⁴. On the other hand, the exclusivity, the barriers to entry, of tertiary education, whether these are seen as economic, linguistic, institutional culture or whatever, together with skills mobility or a flight of skills from the country, a “brain drain” – some say, among other things, the consequences of the international division of labour or the high incidence of (violent) crime in South Africa. Here too, a grave HIV-AIDS pandemic, where the state president enters an ideological debate about the efficacy and dangers of international (pharmaceutical) prescriptions.

to produce
results

The economy of the text of contemporary South Africa highlighted in the above ruminations is at best, rudimentary. It also deliberately foregrounds the text of the political economy of contemporary South Africa. Perhaps, no less than anywhere else in the world today, South Africa is a country where, to paraphrase Spivak out of context, one cannot not read the material. Although now, the textuality of the material would be posed as question and thus no longer be (and never really was) self-sufficient in a stasis that would merely appeal to its massively present reality. This would also render insufficient the mere appropriation of a postcolonial theoretical lexicon. To follow Spivak’s insistence that intellectuals mark their political positionality is necessitated in South Africa, given the disparate class (and race) inequality that characterises the country. The postcolonial intellectual as an elite member of South African society is implicated within those social relations. The South African case necessitates that postcolonial critics realise, following Bhabha, that the urgency called forth in/by the country is also a question of emergence into an otherwise.

It is for these reasons that I hope to have shown that it is necessary to reread the debates that I have discussed in this thesis. To revisit these debates would require something

¹⁴ See Patrick Bond’s discussion, in *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (2005), of what he calls the South African “governments semantic dance”, in its calculation of the ‘narrow’ definition and refusal of the ‘broad’ definition of unemployment in 2003 (2005:263; 363). For similar figures and assertions about South Africa’s economic indicators, see also MacDonald (2006:150-152).

other than the deadlocked institutional politics that have informed the South African appropriation of (and response to) postcolonial theory. I hold that the task of the South African postcolonial critic is precisely to think through the difficulties that are manifested in contemporary South Africa. I hope to have illustrated that it is precisely a deconstructive postcolonial reading that would be germane to the reading of those difficulties. The slogan of the state's media campaign to foster something like an African-national consciousness, uttered by none other than the current state president, assures us that South Africa is "alive with possibility". To follow Derrida's apprehension of the complexity of the question of apartheid is perhaps to begin to read the heterogeneity of *that* possibility, the striking complexity of the text of contemporary South Africa and the difficulties facing a deconstructive postcolonial analysis to come.

↳ to analyse postcolonial text in order to show that there is no fixed meaning within the text but that meaning is created each time in the act of reading

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