

# IV. Análisis de procesos históricos

# Scandalous Subjects<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This essay explores the problems and possibilities of the postcolonial as word and orientation, as category and entity. It sieves postcolonial expressions through critical filters to make two tasks palpable. On the one hand, faced forthwith are the scandals of the nation and the West as well as the outrage of the postcolonial itself. On the other hand, brought to the front are protocols of probing that do not merely lead to an undoing of “foundations” but point to procedures of critical affirmation embedded within a history without guarantee. Here are to be found dispositions that carefully question and prudently elaborate issues of power and difference, authority and alterity, including through critical considerations of modernity and its philosophical and historical discussions in the West.*

**Key words:** *Postcolonial, nation, East, West, power, difference, modernity, history, anthropology.*

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<sup>1</sup> This piece draws heavily on small parts of two recent writings of mine. Indeed, deeper elaborations of the analytical emphases and theoretical arguments presented here are to be found in these writings, one published and the other a book manuscript on its way toward publication. Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); and Saurabh Dube, *Historias esparcidas* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, forthcoming 2006). See also, Saurabh Dube, *Genealogías del presente: Conversión, colonialismo, cultura*, trans. Ari Bartra and Gilberto Conde (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 2003).

### Resumen

*Este artículo explora los problemas y posibilidades de lo postcolonial en tanto que concepto y orientación, categoría y entidad. Tamiza las expresiones postcoloniales a través de los filtros de la crítica para lograr que dos tareas devengan palpables. Por una parte, a lo primero que nos enfrentamos es a los escándalos de la nación y de Occidente, así como al ultraje de lo postcolonial en sí mismo. Por otra parte, se destacan protocolos de investigación que no conducen simplemente a un menoscabo de los 'fundamentos' sino que apuntan a procedimientos de afirmación crítica enraizados en lo que yo llamo una historia sin garantía. Aquí se encuentran disposiciones que cuestionan de manera juiciosa y elaboran con prudencia asuntos de poder y diferencia, autoridad y alteridad y que incluyen consideraciones críticas de la modernidad y sus discusiones filosóficas e históricas en Occidente.*

**Palabras clave:** *Postcolonial, nación, Oriente, Occidente, poder, diferencia, modernidad, historia, etnología.*

## Introduction

This is not an essay in the strict sense of the term. Rather, it is a patchwork, one that begins by threading together while equally unraveling the problems and possibilities of the postcolonial as word and orientation, as category and entity. To present such patchwork, especially in the pages of this journal, might seem at first to be profoundly perverse. After all, in the Latin American context, postcolonial criticism has served to open fresh questions and new debates in the overlapping domains of literary and cultural studies and anthropology and history. At the same time, it is precisely by sieving postcolonial expressions through critical filters that two tasks become palpable. On the one hand, faced forthwith are the scandals of the nation and the West as well as the outrage of the postcolonial itself. On the other hand, such protocols of probing do not merely lead to an undoing of “foundations”, but point to procedures of critical affirmation embedded within what I call a *history without guarantee*, intimating dispositions that carefully question and prudently elaborate issues of power and difference, authority and alterity.

## Worldly Scandals

The problem with the *postcolonial* as a category is that its endless promises entail enduring postures, its many meanings register unproductive ambiguity, and its revelations and containments shadow each other. Not surprisingly, salient contributions to postcolonial understandings have pointed to the acute limits of the postcolonial-concept, as analytical conceit and historical trajectory. Here the issue does not simply concern how the terms of postcolonial discourse readily intimate a new “minority”, often of privilege, in Western academic arenas and crucially insinuate novel struggles for turf and tenure in scholarly terrain, more broadly –together pointing to processes that underlie the institutionalization of postcolonial scholarship. Significantly, criticisms of the *postcolonial* as a category-entity have highlighted its tendency to homogenize history and sanitize politics by resting on the divide between the colonial and the postcolonial so that one totalized terrain leads to another undif-

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ferentiated arena.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, abiding endeavors articulating postcolonial perspectives have also queried the place of the West as history, modernity, and destiny, unraveled the terms and limits of state and nation, and underscored the salience of critical difference in such distinct yet entangled terrain.<sup>3</sup>

Now, if the unproductive ambiguity and the residual stagism of the postcolonial as word and entity imply that my own thought and writing are not wedded to the notion, the fruitful potential of the category, I feel, warrants staying with it longer. For, even if scholars think hard enough, considering it an analytical nightmare, the postcolonial is unlikely to disappear. Besides, lurid theoretical scares are productive to ponder in any case. Insinuating more than a pure perspective, the view from nowhere that becomes the vista for everywhere, these reflections actually follow from my presence at a center of research and teaching on Asia and Africa located in Latin America.

The rise to prominence of the postcolonial as a novel perspective, a critical stance, in history and anthropology coincided with the final phase of my doctoral work at the University of Cambridge, and my subsequent return to India to teach at the University of

<sup>2</sup> Here let me indicate a few of the important critiques that have influenced my own thought. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), especially pp. 9-16, 391-96; Ella Shohat, "Notes on the Post-Colonial", in Padmini Mongia (ed.) *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 321-334; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 1 and *passim*. See also, Arif Dirlik, "The postcolonial aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism", in Padmini Mongia (ed.) *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 294-320.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; and Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also, Achille Mbembe, "The banality of power and the aesthetics of vulgarity in the postcolony", *Public Culture*, 4, 1992, 1-30; and Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Delhi.<sup>4</sup> In both places, my particular endeavor and wider disposition to combine history and anthropology, theory and narrative raised eyebrows and received encouragement. At the same time, my work also broadly accorded with my interlocutors' inclination to give a short shrift to the postcolonial ballyhoo, although I did not always share their desire to dismiss the category as merely a fashionable phantasm, riding the success of the postmodern as word and orientation.<sup>5</sup> After three years in India, on moving to Mexico in 1995, all this changed—at moments dramatically, at other times little by little.

At the Centro de Estudios de Asia y África of the El Colegio de Mexico, among students and faculty, India—or Iran, or Indonesia—frequently appeared as innately different, all too distant, articulated by pervasive dualities of the Occident and the Orient, the West and the Rest, with Latin America positioned, uneasily yet readily, as part of *el Occidente*. This was true not only of my own research and teaching center, but it was characteristic of scholarly sentiments, quotidian conceptions, academic apprehensions, and their institutional manifestations in the Latin American world, more generally. On the one hand, Asia and Africa embodied marvelous difference from the West, the mark of enchantment, *algo bello*. On the other hand, they concretized contaminated distance from the West, the sign of backwardness, *algo feo*. At the same time, these twin dispositions rested on hierarchical oppositions of a singular modernity, splitting social worlds into enchanted spaces and modern places while holding these together through the exclusive trajec-

<sup>4</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism", *American Historical Review*, 99, 1994, 1475-1494; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37, winter 1992, 1-26; and Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*. See also, Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.) *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Saurabh Dube, "Myths, symbols and community: Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh", in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.) *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 121-156; and Saurabh Dube, "Issues of Christianity in Colonial Chhattisgarh", *Sociological Bulletin*, 41, 1992, pp. 37-63.

tory of universal history. Here were scholarly traces and commonplaces tracks comprising “metageographies” that mark Western contexts and non-Western theatres.

How were such grids to be queried? Asking and addressing the question, my prior critical considerations of analytical binaries—between myth and history, ritual and rationality, the magical and the modern, emotion and reason, East and West, community and state, and tradition and modernity—now assumed a formidable tangibility, a palpable force.<sup>6</sup> Slowly yet acutely, I came to realize that such dualities inhabited the interstices of theoretical blueprints *and* social worlds, spilling over from the one to the other. Aware of the active interchange between academic apprehensions and quotidian conceptions—and all the while registering the restless dynamic between colonialism and modernity—when I considered a possible dialogue between critical perspectives on South Asia and Latin America, the *postcolonial* as a category presented itself as an apposite means towards such conversation.<sup>7</sup>

Now, in Latin American and South Asian worlds, imperatives of empire and fabrications of nation have followed different chronologies, insinuating distinct trajectories. Unsurprisingly, in scholarly schemes and everyday apprehensions, while in Latin America colonial power appears cast as an attribute of a distant past, left behind by two centuries of formal independence, in South Asia the opposition to imperial effects through the means of national affects has

<sup>6</sup> See Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian People, 1780-1950* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, John Kraniuskas and Guillermo Zermeño Padilla (eds.) *Historia y subalternidad*, a special issue of *Historia y grafía*, 12, 1999, 7-176; Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Rosa Barragán (eds.) *Debates postcoloniales: Una introducción a los estudios de la subalternidad* (La Paz: Ediciones Aruwiyiri, 1997); Guillermo Zermeño Padilla, *La cultura moderna de la historia: Una aproximación teórica e historiográfica* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 2002); Saurabh Dube, *Sujetos subalternos: Capítulos de una historia antropológica*, trans. Germán Franco and Ari Bartra (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 2001); John Beverley, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Ileana Rodríguez (ed.) *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

carried greater, proximate immediacy. Yet, in both these contexts the passages from imperial rule to independent states –and their diverse representations– crucially reflect the precepts of the colony upon the work of the nation, variously implicating distinct idioms of social advance under empire, differentially envisioning the nation in the image of Western progress.

In front of such categorical determinations, I found that engaging the postcolonial as a critical perspective called into question the persuasive presence in Latin America and South Asia of an aggrandizing West and its singular representations, binding empire and nation, the colony and the post-colony, history and modernity. At the same time, the very realization of such emphases stood premised on querying the pretensions of the postcolonial as an exclusive viewpoint. It meant casting the postcolonial instead as one among related critical orientations –procedures and perspectives entailing the subaltern and the margin, ethnographic history and historical anthropology. Here postcolonial propositions worked in tandem with these different perspectives, each stance engaging and extending the other disposition.<sup>8</sup>

The implications of this example extend rather wider. The productive labor of the *postcolonial* as a category points toward two sets of scandals, each tied to burdens of colonial pasts, determinations of historical progress, and framings of universal history. The first concerns the scandal of the West – pervasive projections of an imagi-

<sup>8</sup> Saurabh Dube (ed.) *Pasados poscoloniales: Colección de ensayos sobre la nueva historia y etnografía de la India*, trans. Germán Franco (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 1999). Conducted through a wider discussion of the colony and the post-colony, nation and history, modernity and its margins, the burden of this conversation initially rested on presenting to a Latin American readership in Spanish a translation salient work within the subaltern studies project and historical anthropology, critical developments in South Asian scholarship. I also need to admit to the sometimes hazy ways in which I encountered and expressed mutual considerations of South Asia and Latin America, which my account has not been able to capture. For a more recent expression of the terms of this dialogue consider, Saurabh Dube, “Introduction: Colonialism, modernity, colonial modernities”, in Dube, Banerjee Dube, and Lander (eds.) *Critical Conjunctions: Foundations of Colony and Formations of Modernity*, a special issue of *Nepantla: Views from South*, 3, 2, 2002, published by Duke University Press, pp. 197-219.



primary but tangible Europe, of a reified yet palpable West as the primary *habitus* of the modern, the enshrined space of modernity, democracy, reason, and history. The second entails the scandal of the nation – persistent propositions regarding state and nation as harbingers of progress and development, substantial or ephemeral, realized or failed that anxiously elide and shamefully deny the broken promises of freedom and the undemocratic foundations of democracy under regimes of modernity. Each of these scandals finds diverse expressions in the colony, the post-colony, and the modern West. Brushing the category against the grain of its amorphousness and conceit, the possibilities of the *postcolonial*, I would submit, lie in carefully questioning this copula of scandals.

To register the scandals of the West and the nation does not imply their impatient, reckless dismissal. Indeed, it is neither to cast these outrages as obtuse ideological aberrations nor to treat them as endless analytical specters, and then await their inevitable ouster at the hands of pristine understandings. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the scandals have pervasive ontological attributes, lying at the core of social worlds. These scandals, then, call for careful elaboration, especially through efforts aware of their analytical expressions and quotidian configurations that come together and fall apart. To speak of these scandals is to resist the desire to turn the West and the nation, modernity and empire into monolithic manifestations of all-encompassing power, also desisting from the temptation to simply de-provincialize Western history and knowledge, to merely demystify the modern state and nation. Instead, it is to re-encounter the parochialism of the West and the conceit of the nation, attending to the formative heterogeneity that produces *and* probes their exclusive claims, querying *and* affirming concepts and practices in the wake of these twin scandals.<sup>9</sup>

Such tasks require vigilance regarding the vanity of the postcolonial as entity and concept, readily implying a settled stage of history, an

<sup>9</sup> Such emphases are critical to my arguments, and I return to them in different ways. See also, Timothy Mitchell (ed.) *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. viii-xiii.

equipped proviso of progress, an inherently subversive knowledge, a predestined labor of cultural production, or a prefigured form of scholarly criticism. To draw on the resources of the *postcolonial* in order to think through the scandals of the West and the nation is to register the postcolonial as scandal: from its formidable conceit to its lingering complicities with the artifice of the nation-state, and from its bloated amorphousness to its pervasive access to an exclusive universal history. To acknowledge the outrages of the *postcolonial* is to sieve the category through critical filters, recognizing precisely the key containments of incisive postcolonial critiques: from the ways in which their ethical ends can simply point toward the presence of difference and the production of alterity as interrupting power in the colony and the post-colony, without staying longer with the burden of such difference, to their tendentious apprehensions of colonial cultures. At stake in the caution concerning the analytical arrogance of postcolonial propositions are mutual labors of distinct yet overlapping theoretical dispositions.

Against the current of its institutionalization within academe as a discrete knowledge or a novel discipline –as well as casting aside the search for the conceptual purity and the innate distinction of the category– in my writing I approach the postcolonial as a critical rubric. I mean this especially in the sense of the postcolonial as an analytical interpolation, articulated by and itself animating other theoretical orientations.<sup>10</sup> In other words, I see postcolonial propositions as interlocutors in a wider debate rethinking the nation-state and the West as concept and entity, process and destiny, history and modernity. Conceiving of the participants in this discussion as engaging each other in a critical yet constructive spirit, let me indi-

<sup>10</sup> For efforts elaborating wide critical considerations while affirming and questioning postcolonial propositions see, for example, Gaurav Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*; and Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. Consider also, Saurabh Dube (ed.) *Postcolonial Passages: Contemporary History-Writing on India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); and David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

cate four such overlapping orientations and salient sensibilities toward social worlds and analytical categories.<sup>11</sup>

First, for some time now critical scholarship has queried enduring oppositions between tradition and modernity, ritual and rationality, myth and history, and East and West that are formative of influential understandings of pasts and key conceptions of cultures. Such questioning has derived support from critiques of a subject-centered reason, a meaning-legislating rationality, and their hierarchical dualities within Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment traditions. Alternatively, it has expressed acute challenges to analytical binaries of modern disciplines, interrogating enticing renderings of otherness and enduring projections of progress, which are closely tied to the staging and production of modernity “as the West.”<sup>12</sup> Second, in a related move, there have been imaginative explorations of distinct pasts and heterogeneous presents, forged within wider, intermeshed matrices of power. Such emphases have put a question mark on the developmental imperatives of historical thought and the very nature of the academic archive, both bound to the totalizing templates of universal history, each envisioned in the likeness of a reified West.<sup>13</sup> Third, in recent years, questions of moder-

<sup>11</sup> My reference is to dispositions that have been expressed in a variety of ways, constituting an enormous corpus. The works cited provide a few representative examples. Note also that I have my disagreements with specific emphases and particular projections of these different writings, a fact significant for the terms of conversation that I propose and explore. But to spell out these divergences would require a long chapter if not a short book.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity”, in Mitchell (ed.) *Questions of Modernity*, p. 15, emphasis in the original. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992); John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview, 1992); Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); John Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (New York: Routledge, 1995). See also, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Remains of the Self in the Indian Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Nancy Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as*

nity have increasingly often escaped the limits of sociological formalism and exceeded the binds of a priori abstraction, emerging instead as matters of particular pasts, attributes of concrete histories, defined by projects of power and molded by provisions of progress. Here there has been keen recognition not only of the divergent articulations of modernity and contending intimations of the modern, but also of the competing place within all modernities of exclusive images of Western modernity, where the singularity and universalism of the latter are differently engaged by the measures and horizons of the former—these distinct procedures shaping and suturing empire, nation, and globalization. As a result, modernity/modernities have been themselves revealed as contradictory and contingent processes of culture and control, as checkered and contested histories of meaning and mastery—in their formation, sedimentation, and elaboration.<sup>14</sup> Finally, over the past

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*Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Saidiya H. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of the Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Joanne Rappaport, *Cumbe Reborn: An Andean Ethnography of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*; Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers, and Wildness in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Donald Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mitchell (ed.) *Questions of Modernity*; James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution. The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Dilip P. Gaonkar (ed.) *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Saurabh Dube (ed.) *Enduring Enchantments*, a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101, 4, 2002, published by Duke University Press. See also, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University

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two decades, a variety of critical understandings have unraveled the sway and stipulations, the contentions and limits of the modern state and the contemporary nation, especially as bearing powerful yet contending connections with provisos of historical progress, Western modernity, and universal history. Such considerations have ranged from the construal of the nation as an “imagined community” to the quotidian configurations and everyday apprehensions of state and nation, and from the attributes of difference and power articulated by anti-colonial nationalism and the non-Western nation to the dense embedding of nation-states within transnational processes.<sup>15</sup>

It warrants emphasis that such sensibilities and dispositions are not all of a piece. Yet the arguments they announce are indicative of the questioning underway of categories and entities presupposed by typical, scholarly ways of apprehending and acting in the contemporary world.<sup>16</sup> Circulating among such sets of questions, postcolonial propositions do not intimate a privileged purchase upon, a unique access to, seeing and doing in worlds today. Rather, as

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Press, 2000); Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*; Ana Maria Alonso, “The Politics of Space, Time, and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23, 1994, 379- 400; Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stupatát (eds.) *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Press, 1986); Pandey, *Remembering Partition*; Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Brian Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of the Sikh "Diaspora"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). See also, Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, such interrogation intersects with what Stephen White has identified as the “ontological shift” in contemporary political theory, discussed later in this piece. Stephen White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

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critical interlocutors in a larger conversation, they register that the reflections of a singular Western modernity, the representations of an exclusive universal history, and the reifications of modern state and nation are not mere specters from the past, now exorcised by critical epistemologies and subversive knowledges. The postcolonial as critical rubric highlights the acute presence of these resilient mappings and their determinate redrawing, which articulate authoritative strains of contemporary knowledge and animate routine terms of everyday discourse –not only in an imaginary West, but in inexhaustible contexts. But precisely these tasks also imply the recognition that even as theoretical conceit, the West and the nation, empire and modernity simply cannot exhaust each practice and every passion in the worlds of their doing and undoing, the domains they have worked over to be formed and transformed by their very subjects. The productive possibilities of postcolonial emphases, then, inhere in their prudently querying such scandals, through the labor of critical interpolation in a wider debate, acutely open to questioning their own presumptions and predilections, also pointing the way out of the postcolonial field as an academic ghetto.

### Power and Difference

In speaking of the scandals of the West and the nation, I have noted that they constitute palpable vistas at the heart of the modern world. Precisely such recognition calls for critical engagement with projections of colonialism and modernity, state and nation, the West and history as totalized fields of exclusive force, also carefully considering the quotidian configurations of these categories and entities. Rather than simply registering empirical exceptions to theoretical claims, at stake in this discussion are critical questions of power and difference.

Over a decade ago, in his synthetic survey of postmodern thought, the literary critic John McGowan argued that,

Postmodernism begins from the fear ... that we are witnessing the 'apotheosis of capitalism.'... Late capitalism constitutes the totalized terrain of contemporary life; the name of the despised totality is different in other postmodern texts, but the specter of patriarchy,

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or Western metaphysics, or disciplinary power, or some other dominant social form haunts the postmodern imagination. This fear of a dystopic totality is sometimes even embraced, partly in the heroic spirit of Nietzsche's and Freud's determination to face the worst truths without flinching, partly as a weapon to use against the hopes for autonomy found in modernist and avant-garde work, partly as a refutation of the liberal insistence that capitalism is not only compatible with, but actually productive of, pluralism. Thus the theoretical establishment of the monolith's existence is often a necessary step in postmodern work, although the desire to transform that monolith into a truly pluralistic society surfaces everywhere as the primary postmodern goal.<sup>17</sup>

There is much to ponder in this passage, to reconsider in this statement, and to revise in this assessment. But my purpose in recalling it primarily concerns the formulation and fear of the West and colonialism, the nation and history as dystopic totalities, schemes and scares that extend far beyond postmodern projections. Indeed, in influential analyses of colonial writing/culture and modern power/knowledge, colonialism and modernity, the West and the nation can strikingly appear as “totalized terrain” of the past and the present, “another name of the despised totality” that constitutes history and the here and now. This has considerable import for current cultures of scholarship and contemporary politics of cultures.<sup>18</sup>

In the best hands, such orientations lead to the highlighting of the wide-ranging work of colonial knowledge and modern power in distinct and diffuse arenas. This can also emphasize the genealogies of present disciplines in their concatenation within both, authoritative apprehensions shaded by empire and dominant understandings in the shadow of the nation. Similar possibilities underlie ethical engagements of minority positions with overriding schemes of dis-

<sup>17</sup> John McGowan, *Postmodernism and its Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 16 and *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> I am referring to broad dispositions toward the past and present of social worlds, drawing in and reaching beyond scholarly deliberations, explicitly expressed and implicitly endorsed today in various permutations and combinations. To critically consider such orientations is not to dismiss their particular possibilities, a point that I develop through examples in both, Saurabh Dube, “Introduction: Enchantments of Modernity” in Dube (ed.) *Enduring Enchantments*, pp. 741-3 and Dube, “Introduction: Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities”, pp. 203-5.

ciplinary knowledge and institutional power. In place here can be self-critical endeavors, which question the privilege of categorical identities, forge other communities of debate and alter/native solidarities of struggle, and interrogate the majoritarian premises and statist assumptions underlying minority identities and ethnic statuses under the sign of the nation.

Conversely, I also wonder about the possibilities of understandings that attend to the spirit and sensibilities of critical thought which is ever suspicious of totalizing power and legislative reason, yet orientations that do not succumb to the tendency to render the “despised totality” as monolithic. Such dispositions, including my own, question the projection of power as “totalized terrain” and eschew the “celebration of difference wherever it appears”, even as they reject the autonomy and integrity of the singular subject.<sup>19</sup> They position themselves alongside yet apart from both, influential tendencies that reproduce heterogeneity as “unrecuperated particulars”, the antidote to the terms of power, and weighty dispositions that apprehend difference as produced by power but nevertheless instate alterity as an end in itself. Rather, they argue for the constitution of historical subjects within social relationships –subjects and relationships defined by provisions of meaning and shaped within crucibles of power– in order to trace the sustained labor of difference within productions of power and the insistent expressions of power within formations of difference. Instead of submitting to the idea of difference as a priori inclusive intactness, ahead of the

<sup>19</sup> I recognize that there can be distinct quests for *difference*. For instance, Michael Roth has argued: “When deconstruction shows that something or the other escapes the metaphysical attempt to subsume it to the logic of metaphysics, it shows us that there is otherness ... Deconstruction does not champion difference in this move, it merely shows *there is* difference ... Difference. Something that is not metaphysics, that is different from metaphysics and escapes its logic, something that positions itself differently, that differs from metaphysics, that is not dominated or determined or predetermined by metaphysics, that is other to it”. Leaving aside questions of the status and virtue of such a formulation of difference –although I sense that the exclusivity implied by this projection may not be of this world, or at least should not be– my critical comments are directed toward the substantialization and celebration of difference, its traces, as absolute alterity. Michael Roth, *The Poetics of Resistance: Heidegger’s Line* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 12.



work of reason and in front of the productivity of power, or of projecting the presence of alterity within the interstices of authority as an analytical and ethical finale, the terms of heterogeneity and their limits are thus sown into the substance of social subjects, into their constitution, meanings, and practices.

We might consider such stipulations of power and determinations of difference in relation to the terms of modernity. To begin with, modernity is not only an idea, an ideal, an ideology. Modernity is simultaneously the articulation of distinct historical processes over the last few centuries. Through the past five centuries, modernity emerges elaborated within intersecting and disjunctive, authoritative and contested processes of meaning and power. I refer to processes entailing, for example, capital and consumption, industry and empire, nations and colonies, citizens and subjects, public spheres and private spaces, circumscribed religion(s) and disenchanting knowledge(s), resurgent faiths and reified traditions, normalizing states and disciplinary regimes, and enchantments of governance and the magic of the modern. As history, then, modernity is not singular, enacted instead in its plural, modernities. Yet this is not all. For, whether cast as *modernity* or *modernities*, the procedures entailed herein are neither seamless nor homogeneous. They refer rather to decisively checkered, decidedly contingent, and distinctly contradictory processes. Indeed, it is within such contingency and contradiction that modernity's constitutive hierarchies, formative distinctions, and seductive productions appear staged and elaborated. Unsurprisingly, it is also here that there are to be found the abiding enchantments of modernity: from the immaculate image of its origins and ends through to its pervasive oppositions, from the novel mythologies of empire and nation to the dense magic of money and markets. Put differently, the terms of modernity are assiduously articulated, yet they are also basically checkered, even out of joint with themselves.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The arguments of this paragraph and the next one draw upon Dube, "Introduction: Enchantments of modernity".

These processes are not subject-less procedures. Rather, they emerge expressed by subjects of modernity, subjects who have engaged and elaborated the terms, stipulations, and disciplines of modernity, history, modernity-as-history. Here it is patently inadequate to conflate the *subject of modernity* with *the modern subject*. Time after time, subjects of modernity have revealed that there are different ways of being modern, now accessing and now exceeding the determinations of the modern subject, suggesting the need to rethink exclusive apprehensions of the latter entity –as image and as practice. Yet, all too often, subjects of modernity have also betrayed scant regard for the niceties of the modern subject while articulating the enduring terms of modernity: they have registered within their measures and meanings the formative contradictions, contentions, and contingency of modernity/modernities by instating and inflecting power and reiterating and reworking difference. To register the contingency and plurality of modernity is not merely to harp on “alternative modernities”, but to stay with such modalities of power, formations of difference, and their restless interplay. This also means not turning way from but unraveling prudently the singular stipulations of an exclusive modernity as shaping the contentions and concatenations of all modernities, stipulations that are nonetheless set to work in different ways by social subjects to yield expected outcomes and unexpected consequences.

If the constitutive practices of subjects of modernity emerge embedded within and enacted through the density of meaning and the gravity of power, such modalities of meaning and these profiles of power are rarely fully finished, ever subject to difference and displacement. Here it is important trace the impassioned interest, incessant instability, and agonistic ambivalence at the heart of dominant projects of meaning and power, but it is equally significant to recognize that such operations are tied to the contradictory and constitutive actions of social subjects. In practice, spectacular recalcitrance can be conjoined with terms of power and quotidian routines can exceed dominant meanings, both subject to change and reworking, ever marked by possibilities of the intonations of older truths and the inflections of newer verities. Before the con-

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stant clamor for autonomy and agency, it bears pointing out that the very definition(s) of democracy, meaning(s) of modernity, and purpose(s) of pluralism cannot be separated from the inherently different formations of social subjects in inescapably heterogeneous worlds, shaped by the past and emergent in the present. Beyond vanguardist visions and technocratic blueprints, the terms for realizing and/or rejecting the possibilities of modernity, plurality, and democracy rest upon ethics and politics that inhere in practices of social subjects in the here and now – tied to the past, turned to the present, and trafficking in the future.

To emphasize the heterogeneity of empire and modernity, the West and the nation as projects of power, then, involves more than the mere accretion of empirical detail, patiently adding one new fact to another novel find, pure exercises in “academic refinement” of the scholarly picture of the past and the present. Rather, it entails the tasks of “locating the fields of force” within which colonial cultures and modern nations stand conceived and elaborated, including in transnational ways, and “counterhistories appear imagined and made”.<sup>21</sup> And this further suggests the salience of carefully considering the assumptions and entities that shore up our worlds. In other words, critical understandings of the complex fabrication, contradictory elaboration, and contingent character of colony and empire, the West and the nation lie at the heart of the contemporary politics of knowledge and culture.

Two examples should suffice. In the first place, tracking contingency and contradiction at the core of colonialism and culture and empire and modernity, not merely on empirical registers but in theoretical ways, itself foregrounds a host of critical considerations. These issues extend from the salience of revising the received wisdom and pervasive chronologies regarding global flows and hybrid identities through to questioning the dichotomous division of the

<sup>21</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”, in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 6, 29.

colonial and the postcolonial, assumed in place across time and space, which serves to homogenize history and to sanitize politics. Such questions range from the importance of interrogating commonplace assumptions of the uniform efficacy and unbridled efficiency of colonialism (as a stage of history and a modality of power) through to the significance of rethinking the authoritative genealogies of social-scientific and humanist disciplines. These considerations unravel from recognizing the palpable place and spectral presence of the dense profiles and diffuse pasts of empire through to rediscovering the categorical frames and social taxonomies fabricated by the colonial and the modern, which have defined the violent prerogatives of race, empire, and nation, and shaped the aggressive privileges of culture, reason, and civilization.<sup>22</sup> If the multiply-textured histories of colonial subjects militate against their simple predication upon any aggrandizing analytic of empire, so too is it imperative to think through the enmeshments of colonialism and modernity and their mutual labors in the past and common productions in the present, precisely recognizing their heterogeneity as projects of power.

Here is the second example, turning on nation and history. I have noted that in recent years acute analyses of nation, state, and nationalism have questioned familiar understandings of these categories and entities. Such writings stand animated by distinct critical perspectives, yet they also share common anti-essentialist sensibilities. While this scholarship has achieved much by treating nations and nationalisms as cultural artifacts and historical processes, it is also worth asking if it is enough, through the means of combative anti-essentialism, to reiterate simply the constructed nature of nationalisms, to merely demystify nations as projects of power.<sup>23</sup>

Building upon his ethnographic explorations of the nation-state, Michael Herzfeld has pointed to widespread analytical dispositions today that frame nations and essentialisms as “distant, unreachable enemies”.<sup>24</sup> It follows that such orientations refuse the challenge

<sup>22</sup> Dube, “Introduction: Terms that bind”.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, pp.1-2, 165.

of thinking through the pervasive presence of nations and nationalisms –and of essentialist thought and binary thinking– as simultaneously bound to imperatives of power, determinations of difference, and their restless interplay, formative of social worlds. To take up this challenge is to call into question the scandal of the nation. It is to trace the construal of nations as “imagined communities” and to attend to forgings and fabrications of states and nationalisms, but equally to track how these very artifacts become forms of feeling, textures of experience, tangled tissues of people’s lives, and piercing sensibilities of citizens and subjects. It is to query claims of the innate naturalness of nations and nationalisms, while recognizing their ontological traits, constitutive heterogeneities, and dispersed anxieties as projects of power. It is reflected on pathways of anti-colonial and subaltern nationalisms and to consider quotidian configurations and everyday apprehensions of nations, but without reading their distinctions as inherent attributes of insurgent alterity. It is to register rather their entailments of power and expressions of difference, reiterating authority and reworking domination –power and difference coming together yet also pulling apart, along the weaves and at the seams of social worlds. Once more, my plea is for allowing adamant entanglements of power and difference, heterogeneity and singularity, authority and alterity to cross vision and burden sight in critical reflection.

### **History without Guarantee**

Is there one rubric that might describe the different tasks that I have been outlining? The spirit and sensibility of thinking and writing advocated here inhere in their articulation of a history without guarantee. The term bears clarification. In speaking of a history without guarantee, I am neither demarcating a distinct domain (or discourse) of academic enterprise, nor indicating a specific style (or school) of history writing. Rather, history without guarantee refers to particular dispositions toward the past and the present and social worlds and their critical understandings.

Let us begin with the consideration that for a long time now, in scholarly schemes and everyday apprehensions, earnings and ends

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of progress in the past, entitlements and expectations of development in the present –as ways of seeing, methods of imagining, modes of feeling, structures of sentiment, and textures of experience– precisely constitute the guarantee of history under modernity. The terms and conditions of this guarantee inhere in, shoring up, the scandals of the West and the nation, the colony and the post-colony, which were discussed earlier. Engaging a history without guarantee is a possible means of calling into question the guarantees of progress under regimes of modernity, thinking through the projections and presuppositions, scandals and schemes that it produces and sustains.

What are the procedures at stake here? The dispositions of a history without guarantee participate in wider, ongoing critical efforts that intimate a “recent ontological shift” in contemporary theory, “the result of a growing propensity to interrogate more carefully those ‘entities’ presupposed by our typical ways of seeing and doing in the modern world”.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, the conceptions, propositions, and outrages queried by a history without guarantee are neither cast as simple objects of knowledge nor treated as mere ideological aberrations, awaiting their inevitable refinement or irrevocable exorcism at the hands of prescient knowledge(s), whether through the expedient of aggrandizing reason or through the convenience of critiques of ideology. Rather, they are understood as acutely intimating conditions of knowing, entities and co-ordinates that shore up our worlds, demanding critical articulation. On the other hand, precisely such recognition learns yet differs from “anti-

<sup>25</sup> Such a shift, then, implies even more than the “ontological turn” that both considers what “entities are presupposed” by theories and takes on “a commitment to the existence of certain entities” entailed in the affirmation of a theory. White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, pp. 4-5. Also, recall my suggestion that critical work in the social sciences and the socially inflected humanities today can intersect with the kind of questioning that defines the recent ontological shift under discussion. To register this is far from denying the salience of distinctive procedures of interrogation and affirmation in contemporary political theory, but to prudently engage them in order to address related concerns, especially articulating worlds beyond the West. Finally, such terms of discussion reach beyond facile polarities between “realist” and “constructivist” positions, ably disaggregated and unraveled in George Steinmetz, “Critical Realism and Historical Sociology”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40, 1998, pp. 170-186.

foundational” perspectives, primarily concerned with undoing the “foundations” of knowledge/power and deconstructing the “metaphysics” of power/knowledge, whether intimating stout resistance to murky worlds that have come to pass or insinuating heroic resignation before the terrible truths in front today. This is to say that there is a certain shift of “intellectual burden from the preoccupation with what is opposed and deconstructed”, to equally engaging “what must be articulated, cultivated, and affirmed in its wake”.<sup>26</sup>

Taken together, the dispositions of a history without guarantee are intimately tied to the terms of a “weak ontology”, acknowledging at once the contestable, contingent character *and* the unavoidable, necessary nature of “fundamental conceptualizations of self, other, and world”.<sup>27</sup> Here there is no simple railing against the universal, no a priori championing of the particular, but a close attention to their shared entailment and mutual production, their founding exclusions and constitutive contradictions, their pervasive presence and urgent claims.<sup>28</sup> This further implies careful consideration of analytical categories of an academic provenance by bringing them in conjunction with the quotidian configurations of these entities, the demanding terms of everyday worlds, not privileging the one neither the other but vigilantly unfolding both in view of their critical articulation. Through such procedures of prudent interrogation, affirmation in wake of the interrogation, an affirmation yet open to revision, a history without guarantee opens the possibility of holding

<sup>26</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. This further means that my proposal for a history without guarantee, engaging the terms of a weak ontology, learns from but also extends the sensibilities and steps of “postfoundational” criticism (sensitively discussed in Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*, pp. 10-13).

<sup>28</sup> For rather different expressions of such dispositions compare Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* and Stephen White’s emphasis on figurations of “universal constitutives of human being” as premised upon the recognition that the persuasiveness of these existential universals “can never be fully disentangled from an interpretation of present historical circumstances” – so that “gaining access to something universal about human being and world is always also a construction that cannot rid itself of a historical dimension”. White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p. 9. See also, Saurabh Dube, “Presence of Europe: A Cyber-Exchange with Dipesh Chakrabarty”, in Dube (ed.) *Postcolonial Passages*; Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity”; and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492-1945”, in Dube (ed.) *Enduring Enchantments*, 840-57. It seems to me that these distinct considerations equally suggest shared horizons, which are crucial to the interrogation and affirmation at the core of a history without guarantee.

a mirror up to the assumptions, categories, and entities at the basis of social worlds. Indeed, it importantly points to concatenations of distinct, coeval temporalities and overlapping, heterogeneous histories at the heart of the past and the present.

Within such measures, power and practice are configured in particular ways. On the one hand, the protocols of a history without guarantee query pervasive dichotomies between domination and subversion, power and protest, and collaboration and resistance, which rear their restless heads each time they are banished from the scholarly stage. Equally, they further question assertions on behalf of the contradictory and the ambivalent subaltern, who in one instance complies with authority and at another moment challenges power. Such formulations tend to occlude exactly the conditions of power under which meanings are construed, practices constructed, and action elaborated. On the other hand, the dispositions of a history without guarantee are also not in ready compliance with influential positions that hold in place the singular sway of power and its productivity, whether as engendering mimesis or as constitutive of hybridity. Such formulations where the mimetic figure and the hybrid form access authority while scrambling power reveal salient possibilities. Yet they can also elide the burden of difference and distinctions of practice of heterogeneously constituted subjects, often exclusively predicating modalities of discourse and forms of action on the productivity of power.<sup>29</sup> Thus, my advocacy of a history without guarantee constitutes much more than yet another effort to restore to the subaltern/native his/her voice/agency, while also resisting tendencies that cast power as a total-

<sup>29</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Gyan Prakash, "Science between the Lines", in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.) *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 59-82. Yet see also, Christopher Pinney, "Indian magical realism: Notes on Popular Visual Culture", in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (eds.) *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 201-33. In finely-textured historical/ethnographic analyses, concepts such as *hybridity* can work as discursive short-hands, descriptive categories, but I wonder if they are adequate to the richness of the materials they present. See, for instance, Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); and Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999).



ized terrain, a fetishized force, an abstract aesthetic, a dystopic totality. Instead, tracking power and difference as embedded in social relationships, as critically produced within particular processes, and as entailing and shaping historical subjects, a history without guarantee seeks to trace at the same time two inseparable movements. The place of difference within relationships, processes, and strategies of power *and* the presence of power in the enactments, practices, and configurations of difference—in each case, the demand for critique accompanied by the desire to affirm.

All of this said, it would be hasty to consider the terms and protocols of a history without guarantee as an entirely cerebral endeavor, an endlessly analytical affair. Instead, the dispositions and procedures discussed above participate in a wider questioning of what Pierre Bourdieu has called “scholastic reason.” This is the pervasive perspective entailing, “[active or passive] ignorance not only of what happens in the world of practice ... but also of what it is to exist, quite simply, in the world”.<sup>30</sup> Here we do not have to agree with Bourdieu’s implicitly instrumentalist understanding of the limits to reflection in “the lower regions of the social space”, his gratuitously polemical dismissal of philosophy, or his assertion that in each instance the scholastic “view” necessarily “implies more or less triumphant ignorance of [its] ignorance”.<sup>31</sup> Rather, it is important to recognize that Bourdieu put his finger on how these terribly widespread dispositions often bracket their own conditions of possibility. This serves to reveal key characteristics of such orientations. First, they insufficiently probe their own presuppositions. Second, they engage with the social and the political in terms of their own “ought” only to disavow each contentious “is” (in the academy as in the world). Finally, they argue through apparently “ethical” imperatives that continually condemn the “concrete” for its murkiness and everyday-ness, since the contingency, contention, and contradiction of social worlds can only appear as distortion and lack when envisioned against immaculate images. Taken together, such perspectives

<sup>30</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 17, and *passim*.

assiduously insinuate what Johannes Fabian has called the “progressive disembodiment of reason and knowledge” that frequently rests upon an “ascetic withdrawal from the world” as experienced through the senses. This is to say, a “sense-less” science.<sup>32</sup>

Now, a history without guarantee actively engages proposals such as those of Bourdieu and Fabian in its own ways to query persistent projections of the disembodied vision from nowhere that becomes the palpable perspective for everywhere; to ethically articulate the (self-) questioning of premises and propositions of knowledge(s) and worlds(s) in its own practice; and, finally, to weave in the crucially sensuous attributes and the densely embodied aspects of thought and life into the fabrics of narrative and theory. Here hermeneutic impulses are entwined with critical considerations, so that careful questionings of social worlds and their academic apprehensions emerge interlaced with intimate accounts of the diversity and distinction of these terrains. This means that there is neither an evacuation of details by assimilating them to endless analytics of unpicking and unmasking, nor is there a privileging of particulars by presenting them as innate embodiments of alterity and difference. Here critical engagements with the constitutive presumptions of academic apprehensions equally attend to their textures and details; and the rethinking and acknowledgement of categories and worlds of the past is closely bound to the querying and affirmation of concepts and entities in the present. This implies, too, a recognition of the salience of staying with Elizabeth Povinelli’s suggestion to critically reaffirm, “a sociological science of the ought in order to develop an ethnography [or understandings] not simply of exiting states of mood and modality, of propositionality and obligation, and of moral possibility and necessity, but also of the conditions of their emergence and transformation” –registering, especially, that in social worlds “the unimaginable is imagined”.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Out of our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 31. See also, John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2000), particularly pp. 105-39.

### Critical Affirmation

Within the procedures and orientations of a history without guarantee, the rethinking and acknowledgement of categories and worlds of the past emerge bound to the querying and affirmation of concepts and entities in the present. Among other issues, these considerations express the requirements to engage with the terms, stipulations, and horizons of modernity, defining the worlds in which we think and live. I have already pointed to the elaboration of modernity as not only Western idea and ideology but as wider historical practice and process. I have also emphasized the salience of examining the interplay between modernity and empire and the significance of distinguishing between the *modern subject* and the *subject of modernity*. Here the question concerns the necessity to query both, those aggressive imaginings that privilege an imaginary Europe/West as the centerpiece of modernity, history, and democracy *and* the several facile strains of anti-Enlightenment rhetoric that often mirror the representations of a bloated and singular modernity.<sup>34</sup> The urgent and ethical dimensions of the requirements derive from how such cabalistic conceptions characterize multiple terrains, from the first world through the fourth world, which require understanding and not dismissal. I hope that my dispositions toward impatient critiques of modernity, history, and reason are already evi-

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<sup>34</sup> For my earlier formulations and discussions of these questions, see, for example, Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*; and Dube, *Sujetos subalternos*. Now, I like to believe that my more recent writings take these issues rather further, especially by exploring dualist apprehensions not as mere analytical phantasms but rather as bearing profound worldly, everyday attributes. Here I wish to gratefully acknowledge Dipesh Chakrabarty's important insights, including concerning my work, which have helped such changes of disposition. The insights were offered as part of everyday interchanges in academic arenas, and my acknowledgements register this. A few years ago, in wintry, cold Chicago, as we ate grapefruit, Dipesh gently admonished me that instead of attempting to aggressively dismantle oppositions, one is better off thinking through them. A few weeks later, with the first signs of spring lurking on the horizons of the "windy city", in the course of another conversation, this time over tea, Dipesh's careful, critical comments on the paucity of simply demystifying concepts and entities, especially through the means of a combative anti-essentialism, made his prior remarks resonate even more. Of course, instead of appearing as blazing revelations that suddenly, miraculously transformed my thinking, it has taken me a few years to actually digest and critically elaborate Dipesh's quotidian and characteristic suggestions and statements. This is particularly true of my realizing that to think through oppositions is *not only* to think them through.

dent. Therefore, it is to seminal writings that endorse modernity that I now turn. The move is premised on the recognition that such critical engagements are necessary especially since postcolonial and post-foundational discussions today increasingly display an alarming tendency to readily disparage their academic adversaries. Instead, as part of the protocols and dispositions of a history without guarantee, I present readings that critically engage the constitutive presumptions of academic apprehensions while attending to their textures and details.

It is worth beginning with some of the concerns and questions bearing on modernity raised by the work of the remarkable, tireless philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Now, it hardly warrants emphasis that Habermas has played a key role in extending the democratic horizons of the “unfinished” Enlightenment project, especially through his elaborations of reason as “communicative action” and a self-critical modernity.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, in reproducing the ineluctable conjunction of modernity with Europe, Habermas’ writings have played a thoroughly ethnocentric tune— or, if one must, reproduced an entirely Eurocentric refrain—within “classical” thought and “critical” theory.<sup>36</sup> Together, my point concerns the require-

<sup>35</sup> For example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. As is well known, criticisms of the Eurocentric nature of modern knowledge abound in the academy today. Therefore, I only indicate here a few works that explicitly served to point my thinking toward, and have then helped it unfold along, the tracks of considering the ethnocentric attributes of much classical and critical theory—in the case at hand concerning the European privileges of modernity and the concomitant exorcism of empire, but in reality extending far further into the entrails of liberal, conservative, and radical thought involving the nation and history, the state and democracy, and the West and the rest. Such critical studies include: Catherine Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*; Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history; Coronil, *The Magical State*; Mignolo, *Darker Side of the Renaissance*; and Enrique Dussel, “Eurocentrism and modernity”, *Boundary 2*, 20, 1993, 65-76. At the same time, I have apprehended the emphases of such writings in rather particular ways. For example, I take from Enrique Dussel the need to critically question the Eurocentric foundations of the philosophical discourse on modernity and draw from his work as well as that of Walter Mignolo the salience of keeping in view not only the modernity of the Enlightenment (and

ment of staying longer with these twin dimensions, conjoint dispositions, in the thought of Habermas.

Avoiding yet another exegesis of Habermas' writings –recall that both full-blown commentaries and half-hearted discussions of his work abound in the academy– I would like to seize upon a somewhat unusual, personal statement concerning the work of the philosopher by a fellow thinker. Significantly, the critical avowal comes not from an intricately wrought philosophical discussion but from the rough and ready words that form part of an interview given by the social and political theorist, Zygmunt Bauman. Here is what Bauman says regarding the “power of argument” in the world according to Habermas,

I think what attracted me to Habermas, really, was his ideal of a society shaped after the pattern of a sociology seminar; that is, there are only participants and the one thing which matters is the power of argument.... So, I liked this as a utopian *focus imaginarius*, somewhat like the idea of the ideal experiment, which is of course never achieved, but unless you have it, you can't experiment at all. Now, I liked this horizon, this prospect, as the organizing, directing factor in our efforts –where we should aim at”.<sup>37</sup>

### The short statement carries immense import

The salience and shortfalls of the “power of argument” in Habermas's thought concern what they can teach us regarding the limits and

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its critical connections with British and French colonialisms) but also of the modernity of the Renaissance (and its intimate interleaving with the empires spawned by Spain and Portugal). Yet, I also seek to think through these authors' attribution of *a priori* alterity and innate purity to subaltern and non-Western worlds. Similar distinctions mark my submissions regarding the significance of combining the will to carefully question with the impulse to critically affirm concepts and entities in intellectual endeavor. But I recognize, too, that something is similar is afoot, for example, in Dussel's reading of Emmanuel Levinas and in Mignolo's more critical recent takes on non-Western knowledge(s). On the terms of such debate and discussion see, for example, Enrique Dussel, “Sistema-mundo y Transmodernidad”, in Saurabh Dube, Ishita Banerjee Dube, and Walter D. Mignolo (eds.) *Modernidades coloniales: Otros pasados, historias presentes* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 2001), pp. 201-26; and Saurabh Dube, “Introducción: Cuestiones acerca de las modernidades coloniales” in the same volume, pp. 13-48; as well as Walter D. Mignolo, “The Enduring Enchantment (Or the epistemic privilege of modernity and where to go from here)”, in Dube (ed.) *Enduring Enchantments*, pp. 927-54; and Dube, “Introduction: Enchantments of Modernity.”

<sup>37</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 217.

potentialities of thinking about modernity as well as cultures of conversation: but only when such learning and unlearning is predicated on our own efforts to bind the determination to carefully question with the desire to critically affirm in the labor of intellectual understanding. Once more, the issue involves affirming and questioning analytical (and everyday) categories and heterogeneous (yet overlapping) worlds. Two points are pertinent. On one hand, Habermas's emphasis on the power of argument appears crucially connected with the possibilities and containments underlying his positing of reason as "communicative action", at once displacing a merely subject-centered rationality and underscoring the "counter-discourse" of modernity.<sup>38</sup> Together, they announce issues of an inter-subjective rationality as well an obligation to the other in deliberation, but also indicate the manner in which such proposals appear circumscribed by "scholastic reason". On the other hand, it is worth considering if Habermas's precise projections of society along the "patterns of a sociology seminar" are linked, in distinct ways, with his "idealized history" that presents the past in terms of modular temporal schemes, involving attenuated stages of succession.<sup>39</sup> As a corollary to this, there is the issue of facing up to the fact

<sup>38</sup> Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; and Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). See also, Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992); and Thomas McCarthy, "Introduction", in Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, vii-xvii.

<sup>39</sup> Here is Craig Calhoun commenting on Habermas' idealized history concerning the nation. He begins by quoting from the philosopher's text, *The Inclusion of the Other*: "The nation-state owes its historical successes to the fact that it substituted relations of solidarity between the citizens for the disintegrating corporative ties of early modern society. But this republican achievement is endangered when, conversely, the integrative force of the nation of citizen is traced back to the pre-political fact of a quasi-natural people, that is, to something independent of and prior to the political opinion- and will-formation of the citizens themselves." Having quoted from the text, Calhoun, the critical Habermasian, continues, "But pause here and notice the temporal order implied in this passage. *First* there were local communities, guilds, religious bodies, and other 'corporative bonds.' *Then* there was republican citizenship with its emphasis on the civic identity of each citizen. *Then* this was undermined by ethnonationalism. What this misses is the extent to which each of these ways of organizing social life existed simultaneously with the others, sometimes in struggle and sometimes symbiotically. New 'corporative ties' have been created, for example, notably in the labor movement and in religious communities. Conversely, there was no 'pure republican' moment when ideas of nationality did not inform

of what it is to be done when argument fails (even in a situation such as a sociology seminar or academic discussion): the moment when, despite its power and persuasion, argument faces its utter refusal in a resolutely reluctant interlocutor or an apparently incommensurable other. Confronting these questions, I would like to suggest in necessarily broad strokes three particular moves to question and affirm in acts of reading and writing.

First, it is vital to probe Habermas' ethnocentric framing of rationality, which itself rests upon his representations of modernity as an entirely internally self-generated, European phenomenon, occluding any linkages with empire or non-Western worlds. But it is also crucial to take up such endeavor while simultaneously thinking through the philosopher's proposal of the counter-discourse of modernity. This involves especially staying with the manner in which Habermas explores the primary crossroads of this counter-discourse to point toward a "path open but not taken: the construal of reason in terms of a non-coercive intersubjectivity of mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition".<sup>40</sup> Here are formulations that see reason as ineluctably situated, that is to say "as concretized in history, society, body, and language"; view its potential as requiring realization in the "communicative practice of ordinary, everyday life"; and, against totalized critiques of reason, emphasize its capacity to be critical.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, before being carried away by Habermas' own "power of argument", it is worth considering how such propositions not only reduce political power relations to relations of communication, which "surreptitiously throws the political back onto the terrain of ethics", but equally suppress visceral registers of being and difference to a *telos* of language that provides the model for practical, rational discourse, ever tend-

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the image of the republic and the constitution of its boundaries." Craig Calhoun, "The class-consciousness of frequent travelers: Toward a critique of actually existing cosmopolitanism", in Dube (ed.) *Enduring Enchantments*, p. 878, emphasis in the original.

<sup>40</sup> McCarthy, "Introduction", p. xvi.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

ing toward consensus.<sup>42</sup> Now, the reading I am proposing can open up the mostly neatly packaged nature of Habermas' thought to reveal—at the very least on my own, distinct, critical registers—its contending tendencies, which contain limitations and potentialities. This entails departing from the often exclusive, at moments a priori, and unsteadily depoliticizing cast of the philosopher's promulgations on communication and consensus, the inter-subjective and the non-coercive, and language and reason. It also means learning from yet looking beyond strains and sensibilities of anti-foundational thought that primarily posit the other of reason: lessons critically helped by but not entirely succumbing to Habermas' wide-ranging critique of such traditions. Finally, propelled by such protocols, it involves affirming important horizons that Habermas's thought points toward in considering the situated and critical nature of rationality, precisely since his projections of the "power of argument" have now been sieved against their own conceits. Is too much to suggest, then, that these many moves and particular procedures might allow the notion of the counter-discourse of modernity to be brought into productive tensions with different, alternative imaginings of modernity/modernities, politics, and democracy? And can such conjoint tasks be undertaken without substituting the "ought" for the "is", that is, by recognizing the limits and possibilities of such endeavor primarily as academic conversation?

Second, it is salient to query Habermas' a priori elision of modernity with Europe—each appearing as historical fact, theoretical metaphor, and analytical abstraction—especially by tracking not only the way the West is rehearsed as modernity but the manner in which modernity is staged "as the West". At the same time, far from simply pointing fingers toward or merely pigeonholing Habermas' writing as Eurocentric, such efforts equally entail entering the protocols of his thought where not simply an excision of the non-West but a

<sup>42</sup> See here Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); and Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*. The critical quotations derive, respectively, from Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, p. 66 and White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, pp. 36, 138. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).



patterned, attenuated, idealized history of Europe itself shores up a critical theory of modernity. I have already provided an example concerning the philosopher's schematic, stagist statements about the emergence and predicaments of the (Western) nation. The issue is only taken forward by the critical theoretical and historical discussions of Habermas' influential account of the public sphere.<sup>43</sup> Further details are not essential. The point is that by not simply circumscribing critical readings of classical theory to endless assertions and ready rebuttals of the absence in such thought of the non-West and empire, it becomes possible to pose questions concerning the larger subordination of history to theory. This is to say, queries considering how the aggrandizing, authoritative pronouncements of theory/philosophy cannibalize and expropriate the dense, heterogeneous entanglements of the past/history, not just treating the latter as merely illustrative case material but schematically recasting it through modular grids. Far from blaming Habermas for a

<sup>43</sup> An important line of criticism here has focused on how the Habermasian conception of the liberal public sphere presents an idealized history of the liberal bourgeois public spheres. Thus, the philosopher's account refuses to admit to the plural traditions of reasoned exchange that marked eighteenth-century Western Europe and ignores how the bourgeois public appropriated and marginalized such more inclusive notions of public participation and discussion by strategically closing off the range of possible discussants in the arena. See Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992). Consider also Bourdieu's suggestion that "the representation of political life that Habermas proposes on the basis of the description of the emergence of the 'public sphere' ... obscures and represses the question of the economic and social conditions that would have to be fulfilled in order to allow the public deliberation capable of leading to a rational consensus, that is, a debate in which the competing particular interests would receive the same consideration and in which the participants, conforming to an ideal notion of 'communicative action', would seek to understand the points of view of the others and to give them the same weight as their own." Linking this obscuring and repression concerning apprehensions of the past to how scholastic worlds excise the grounding of their own cognitive interests in strategic social interests – and even exorcise the presence of domination in social relations of communication – Bourdieu points to the "epistemocentric illusion which leads Habermas to make the universality of reason and the existence of universalizable interests the basis of rational consensus ..." Bourdieu continues that in Habermasian thought all of this is itself based on, "an unawareness (or repression) of the conditions of access to the political sphere and of the factors of discrimination (such as sex, education or income) which limits the chances of access not only, as is often said, especially with reference to women, to positions in the political field, but, more profoundly, to articulated political opinion ... and consequently to the political field." Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, pp. 65-67 emphasis in the original.

one-off oddity in thought and theory, I am suggesting that a critical appreciation of his work brings such pervasive issues on the horizon of a recuperative reading, registering unequal exchanges between the here-and-now and history. Such exchanges incessantly, assuredly, indolently substitute the “ought” for the “is” in projections of the past and the present, and carry wide implications for academic apprehensions and scholarly commonsense.<sup>44</sup>

Third and finally, turning specifically to issues of intellectual interchange, I consider it essential to engage and extend Habermas’s emphasis on a community of dialogue – including his stress upon the salience of “argument” – within the terms of scholarly debate. Once more, it is possible to register overlapping yet distinct dispositions in the philosopher’s emphases. First, while Habermas clearly endorses how in deliberation the utterance of the other places an obligation on the self, “this is typically overshadowed by the excessively precise normative character of the obligation” he finds the self as incurring, a move that is itself connected to the philosopher’s belief in eventual consensus.<sup>45</sup> Second, Habermas insightfully acknowledges the unpredictable, potentially disruptive attributes of the utterance in everyday life, arguing further for the disclosure of particularity that makes it possible for the (de-centered) subject to “bear witness to the possibility of no-saying” to the identity s/he has projected on the other, despite the subject’s investments in the latter’s identity.<sup>46</sup> Finally, as suggested earlier, Habermas’ wider proposals regarding the other and argument cannot remain untouched by his “underlying claim that an orientation to consensus

<sup>44</sup> Concerning such questions, I have elsewhere discussed the active interchange between the “ought” and the “is”, the “ideal” and the “real”, especially in relation to propositions of the secularization of the world. The point is that instead of considering either as a mere straw-figure, it is the interlacing of these propositional forms that underlie social worlds and their everyday apprehensions and academic understandings. See, for example, Dube, “Introduction: Enchantments of Modernity”.

<sup>45</sup> Consider the following statement of Habermas: “Reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech”. White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p. 36; Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 287; Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 314; Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 311.

<sup>46</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p. 37; Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 321-26; Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 399.

is built into the *telos* of language”.<sup>47</sup> Taken together, I would suggest, it is important to combine the learning and unlearning from the problems and possibilities of Habermas’s propositions with Richard Rorty’s exhortation to work with the “strategy of using narrative (or stories) where argument fails” in the shape of scholarly exchange. Here is Rorty explaining the importance of telling stories,

stories about why we talk as we do and how we might avoid continuing to talk that way. When you find yourself at an argument impasse, baffled by your opponent’s refusal to stop asking questions which you really should not have to answer, you can always shift the ground by raising questions about the vocabulary he or she is using.” [Thus,] historical narratives [make it possible to] show why the issue previously discussed is moot and why it needs to be reformulated in terms which are, alas, not yet available.<sup>48</sup>

The point is not only that otherwise, as it appears to me, conviction ceases and conversation stops.<sup>49</sup> It is also that such conjoint tasks themselves bid us ask: Don’t we need to attend at once to the means of cultivating reasonable conversation and of inculcating tactics before the loss of rational grounds, in order to work through the potential of both in intellectual interchange?

Am I providing a prepared solution to assess and apprehend the work of Habermas? Far from it (and while we are with this question let me readily confess to my larger inability to even adequately summarize his extensive oeuvre, although this does not mean that I

<sup>47</sup> Consider now another statement of Habermas: “...the use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the *original mode* of language use, upon which indirect understanding, giving something to understand or letting something be understood, and the instrumental use of language in general, are parasitic.” White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p. 36; Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 288 emphasis in the original.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Rorty, “Philosophy without Principles”, in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.) *Against Theory: Literary Studies and New Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 135. At the same time, the emphases here possibly need to be brought into conversation with the importance of attending to how in social worlds the “unimaginable” is “imagined”, an issue raised earlier. This registered, none of the above is to ignore the difficulties that can attend Rorty’s wider reduction of the epistemological to the political. See Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>49</sup> Beyond hubris, consider a “class-act” involving students of multiple and distinct academic/political orientations within a graduate seminar.

cannot critically engage his constitutive propositions discussed above). Does my point simply concern the utility of Habermas' writings for the historian? Of course, as we have seen, the work of the philosopher has found diverse, contending uses in historical writing, and the wide horizons and specific insights of Habermas' thought have been imaginatively extended, especially when the historian has sieved these through the grids of critical histories and particular pasts.<sup>50</sup> Yet my efforts entail somewhat distinct considerations. Am I mainly implying that it is important to attend to the truly significant work of scholars while criticizing their evident blind-spots, assertions that can also be made regarding the writings of other intellectuals? Well, not quite.

To reiterate, I am indicating instead procedures of reading/writing as part of dispositions of a history without guarantee that critically, carefully query the constitutive presumptions of intellectual undertakings while cautiously, critically affirming their formative possibilities. This means resisting the temptation to pointedly unmask the core contradictions of a study and/or to readily demystify its attendant ambivalences. Rather, it involves tracking how the contending strains of an essay or a book, of an edited collection or a wider corpus, can comprise the exact conditions of their possibility. This is to say that far from endlessly insinuating analytical errors, the braiding of simultaneous discourses in separate tongues in a work can in fact reveal its key confines and critical promises, each upholding but also upbraiding the other.<sup>51</sup> It is salient to take up the challenge of thinking through such contradictions and contentions.

Let me concretize these proposals by staying just a little longer with another influential discussion of modernity, which articulates distinct apprehensions of the category-entity. I refer to a significant

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, G. Eley, "Nations, Publics and Political Culture: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century", in Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, and Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001). In fact, both these studies register aspects of the critical-affirmative spirit that I have been advocating.

<sup>51</sup> I discuss such issues concretely in relation to the work of subaltern studies project in Dube, *Stitches on Time*.

essay in intellectual history by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.<sup>52</sup> Imaginatively intervening in a semantically and analytically loaded field, the German historian sensitively tracks the “conceptual history” of the word “modern” in Western Europe. Specifically, he unravels intricate articulations of the word and notion of the “modern” with other terms and traditions such as those of the “ancient”, the “classical”, and the “romantic” in European intellectual constellations over the past few centuries. Implicitly, at the very least, these arguments and materials reveal that the break with the past implied by the idea of modernity is exceeded, even undercut, by the contentious expressions of its intimate etymological and conceptual cousin, the “modern”.

Yet it would not do to stop here. For it is equally important to prudently probe the moment of Gumbrecht’s understanding when/where the concept “modern” yields to the category “modernity”. Now it quickly becomes clear that Gumbrecht’s account of the concept of “modernity” remains entirely “internal” to Europe. This need not necessarily be a problem in itself –after all, we are considering the work of a historian of Western Europe– but for the fact that the purely internal nature of the argument also betokens its ineluctably exclusive cast. Thus, Gumbrecht’s history of the category of modernity not only overlooks the multiple hierarchies of this metaphor-entity, which have been variously played out on conceptual as well as historical registers. It also actively participates in the staging of modernity as the West, implicitly endorsing and explicitly expressing the hierarchies, oppositions, and hierarchical oppositions of an exclusive modernity. Unsurprisingly, now an imaginary and distended yet palpable and pervasive Europe/West is reified and hypostatized into history, modernity, and destiny –for

<sup>52</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “A History of the Concept ‘Modern’”, in Gumbrecht, *Making Sense in Life and Literature*, trans. Glen Burns (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). It is perhaps significant that Habermas himself cites Gumbrecht in his opening considerations of modernity’s consciousness of time in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 8.

each society, any culture, and every people.<sup>53</sup> Am I exaggerating? Here is Gumbrecht's tiny, unambiguously alone, concession to the non-Western world. He writes: "From our [European/Euro-American/Western] perspective at least, modernization in the underdeveloped countries is ... taking place *somewhere between decolonization and our own present*".<sup>54</sup>

The statement speaks for itself, acutely announcing its own complications. But my case does not rest (and since we are with this issue let me repeat that it is not guilt or innocence that I am after, in any case). As I have suggested, it would much too simple to endorse Gumbrecht's genealogy of the term "modern" while upbraiding his "stagist" presumptions concerning modernity. The more challenging task—one that I have been trying to indicate in the form of a history guarantee—is to track the formidable interleaving of these contending tendencies that not only shore up the text but define the fact that it was written at all. Such entanglements reveal how a hermeneutic impulse within varieties of "historicism" that challenges schematic projections of the word "modern" crucially crisscrosses with a developmental "historicism" that now presents "modernity" through stagist stipulations. It is not only that staying with the intertwining of the two historicisms can serve to open up the debate on the nature of historicism. This would be to explore in focused ways the hermeneutic impulses, developmental imperatives, analytical implications, and their incessant enmeshments at the core of historicism.<sup>55</sup> It is also that the protocols of approaching the

<sup>53</sup> Clearly, this pervasive, "metageographical" projection has appeared elaborated in several ways, from the evidently aggressive to the seemingly benign, embedded of course in "modernization" theory yet also long lodged within the interstices of Western social and political thought. See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); and Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. The projection also finds contradictory articulations within discrete expressions of "tradition" that question "modernity" by reversing the moral import of its constitutive hierarchies and oppositions. To rigorously reconsider modernity is to think through such oppositions, hierarchies, and elisions.

<sup>54</sup> Gumbrecht, "A History of the Concept 'Modern'", p. 108.

<sup>55</sup> For a wide-ranging discussion of the intertwining of hermeneutics, philosophy, and historicism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

essay need to eschew the desire to tear asunder its seemingly seamlessly stitched together material. Rather, they need to trace the text's unevenly sutured, even tattered, texture, unraveling how its stitches almost split apart at the seams and yet how its weaves somehow hold together in the middle –not unlike the contentious entwining of heterogeneous temporalities in fabrics of modernity. Indeed, to do so would also be to attend to the contradictory and contingent interlacing of social worlds and academic apprehensions, especially under designs of modernity. After all, Gumbrecht's hermeneutical unfolding of the term "modern" rests on an untangling of the "details", where such details not only defy being gathered unto ready schemes of social sciences but also constitute social facts bearing immense import in everyday worlds. Conversely, the stagist presumptions shaping Gumbrecht's understanding of modernity are, at once, attributes of scholarly wisdom, aspects of quotidian commonsense, and their endless interplay.

To readily dismiss interlocutor enemies is easy, in fact terminally addictive. To critically affirm contending arguments entails effort, engendering lively conversations. Far from forming mere platitudes, these considerations underlie my advocacy of a history without guarantee. This advocacy entails careful questioning and critical affirmation in dispositions toward reading and writing and thinking and teaching –but also to conversations and friendships– in academic arenas and social worlds, each entailed in the other.

### Ends and Beginnings

The title of this piece is ambiguous. The scandals it refers to are those of the West, the nation, and the postcolonial. At the same time, my effort is not to dismiss but to unravel these scandals through the procedures and dispositions of a history without guarantee. Yet, to many people my very advocacy of a history without guarantee

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1998). An acute critique of what I am calling developmental historicism with its beginnings in the nineteenth century is contained in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. The point that these powerful arguments regarding the nature of historicism have talked past one another: a study such as that of Gumbrecht, since it braids together distinct historicist impulses, can make possible a dialogue on the different, contending yet overlapping articulations of historicism.

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would itself insinuate a scandal. And so the exact ambiguity of the title might be usefully understood as carrying critical, worldly attributes.

My effort in these pages has been to suggest the salience of tracing the incessant entanglements between power and difference: neither treating power as fetishized force, an abstract aesthetic; nor imagining difference as prior purity, a priori alterity, but thinking through their shared determinations and common denials down to the ground. This means attending to the textures and details of the past and present not only in empirical but also in theoretical ways. Aware of the limits of simply demystifying, pointedly unmasking histories and subjects, beliefs and practices, the careful questioning, ethical articulation, and critical affirmation of social worlds that I have advocated inhere in a history without guarantee. Here are procedures of understanding that unravel principally through their cautiously querying the guarantee of progress, in the past and present, under regimes of modernity. Now, if a history without guarantee brings to mind Stuart Hall's celebrated call for "Marxism without guarantee", it equally intimates its own emphases. These reside in efforts at engaging and extending both, the recent ontological turn in political theory, and the diverse yet connected critical understandings of history and modernity, state and nation, which characterize scholarship across a range of disciplines. Unsurprisingly, here are considerations of the theoretical possibilities of the post-colonial as a critical category *and* recognition of the formidable conceit of this concept-entity, especially when it appears as a settled stage of history and/or a self-contained analytical terrain, or (anti-)disciplinary domain.

Such measures call into question forceful scandals –namely, scandals of the West and the nation– and in the manner they often underlie other category-entities, the outrage of the postcolonial. Yet, the protocols at stake also do not treat such scandals as obtuse ideological aberrations or mere analytical phantasms, here now and gone tomorrow, easily exorcised through prescient knowledge. The procedures recognize rather the dense ontological, worldly attributes

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of such scandals, their presence not only as objects of knowledge but as conditions of knowing. Their stink and shame that are uneasily elided and fretfully forgotten, but their stench and disgrace that are also confronted and questioned, especially as the scandals find heterogeneous articulations among different subjects not least because of their pervasiveness and persuasions. Clearly, all this is neither to approach the notion of the scandal as signifying stark sensation nor treat the existence of scandal as mere deviation from the social order. Instead, it is to register the pervasive presence of a scandal as intimating the familiar state of social orders. The obviously sensational projections of the West and the nation themselves insinuate routine renewals of dominant norms and governmental commands. Put differently, to stay with the scandals that shore up our murky worlds is to trace the intricate interweaving of empire and modernity, the intimate interleaving of nation and history, and the uneasy braiding of colonial textures and postcolonial tangles. There is no dismissing the burden of a history without guarantee.

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