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Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations

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The voices of dissent proliferating in international studies over the past decade are frequently understood by negation, that is, in terms of their criticisms and refusals of positivist/empiricist commitments and political realist perspectives, so long dominant in the discipline. To understand contemporary discourses of dissent in this way, however, is to impose upon them an undue semblance of unity of perspective and purpose—one that mirrors the illusory unities of positivism and realism. It is to fail to acknowledge the *variety* of dissident voices that have called to account the given, axiomatic and taken-for-granted “realities” of prevailing disciplinary discourses. Concentrating upon what might be called the “agenda of dissent” in international studies, this paper celebrates that variety, that difference, among critical voices in international studies. In particular, it locates prominent themes in critical international relations thinking within the wider arc of debates in Western social theory—interdisciplinary, intercontinental debates whose questions include the Enlightenment concepts of history, rationality, and truth; the subject/object and agent/structure oppositions; the relationship between language and social meaning; the relationship between knowledge and power; the character and function of the human sciences; and the prospects for emancipatory politics today. These debates point to no necessary conclusion. They mandate no single position. Instead, they suggest the opening up of “thinking space,” a space of thought that is exploited by a variety of dissident voices who would speak in reply to the dangers and opportunities of political life in the late twentieth century.

Introduction

Over the past decade, International Relations has been subject to the proliferating voices of dissent. Resisting synthesis to a discrete and fixed approach, the creative tensions to be found in these disparate endeavors have led to the celebration of difference. Some scholars have located themselves amidst these patterns of dissent by attempting to explain the nature and “potentially powerful transformational im-

plications” (Lapid, 1989:7) of critical approaches to the “theory question.”¹ Some have identified the dissension in paradigmatic terms as an exemplary global expression of Frankfurt School thinking (Hoffmann, 1987). Others have questioned the appropriateness of this paradigmatic designation, emphasizing instead important contrasts between the Critical Theory influences of, in particular, Habermas and a “radical interpretivism” (Rengger, 1988) derived from a poststructuralist perspective (see also Hoffmann, 1988).² The latter is portrayed as a fundamental and long overdue attack on the metatheoretical heartland of the discipline’s orthodoxy, set upon the foundational unities (subject/object, fact/value, self/other) of post-Enlightenment Western thinking (Der Derian, 1988). Alternatively, from a position most influenced by sociology of science debates, the enhanced theoretical insight of the 1980s has been identified as part of an “acute bout of self doubt and heightened metatheoretical ferment” characteristic of scholarship across the human sciences in the “postpositivist” era (Lapid, 1989:2; see also Campbell, 1988).

This metatheoretical ferment has been integral to a wider search for “thinking space” within contemporary social theory centered on a broad “agenda of dissent” (George, 1989). From this perspective, the contending attitudes and the tensions between them share four major interdisciplinary elements of critical analysis. The first asserts the inadequacy of positivist/empiricist approaches to knowledge and society. The second addresses, in more explicit terms, the actual process of knowledge construction in repudiating external sources of understanding. This involves a rejection of all attempts to secure an independent foundation, or Archimedean point, from which to orient and judge social action. It stresses instead the need to ground all knowledge of social life in human history, culture, and power relations. The third element concentrates on the language debate and stresses the linguistic construction of reality. The fourth involves an extension of these issues to the construction of meaning and identity in all its forms, and places particular emphasis on the question of subjectivity.

We will concentrate upon this agenda of dissent in order to explicate the debate surrounding the new wave of critical thinking in International Relations. We will do so from what Lapid (1989:2–5) has described as a “celebratory” perspective, one which seeks to counter the simple coherence and illusory unity of positivist/empiricist approaches, dominant for so long in International Relations circles, with a critical social theory approach that stresses the need for an open-ended, genuinely pluralistic, and contested approach to knowledge and society.³ We seek, in particular, to

¹ While we acknowledge the controversial nature of the term, in its capitalized form, “International Relations” will refer here to the study of global life as traditionally carried out in Western universities.

² Der Derian (1988:192) has noted that the term poststructuralism has become the “sponge” word for a variety of approaches derived from Continental scholars such as Barthes, Baudrillard, Foucault, and Derrida. As Callinicos (1985) has explained, there are subtle differences between poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives. But, as both writers make clear, there is a shared acknowledgment of the “constitutive nature of language” and an antipathy toward “closed” systems of knowledge “in which analysis and identity are reducible to binary oppositions” (Der Derian, 1988:192). It is on this basis that the term poststructuralism will be used here. The diverse approaches it represents are in this sense part of the broad agenda of dissent in contemporary social theory. The term Critical Theory, in its capitalized form, refers to the work of the Frankfurt School. The concern with critical social theory and international relations in this paper, however, is not the same as that associated with Hoffmann (1987, 1988), which seeks primarily to ‘fit’ Frankfurt School scholarship into the narrow paradigmatic confines of International Relations as outlined by Banks (1985).

³ The notion of a critical social theory employed here is another analytically useful term which incorporates a range of meanings. As Anthony Giddens (1982:5–6) has argued, social theory “is a body of theory shared in common by all the disciplines concerned with the behavior of human beings. It concerns . . . sociology . . . anthropology, economics, politics, human geography, [and] psychology . . . it connects through to literary criticism on the one hand and to the philosophy of the social sciences on the other.” On the positivist/empiricist domination of the discipline in both its predominantly North American scientific realist manifestation and its largely British traditionalist counterpart see Walker (1980), Banks (1985), and Frost (1986).

supplement the critical literature of the “third debate” with a particular kind of analytical attitude which is concerned less with the demands of convention, tradition, and dominance, and more with the voices of the marginalized, the excluded, the dissident.

To fully appreciate the significance of critical social theory and interpretive approaches to International Relations, we acknowledge the influences upon contemporary thought of a variety of dissident voices which, in the present century, have called to account the given, axiomatic, and taken-for-granted “realities” of their dominant disciplinary discourses.⁴ The first section of the paper will introduce some of the more prominent themes to be found in critical International Relations thinking by locating them within an ongoing interdisciplinary debate of Western social theory, which has sought to problematize some of the entrenched legacies of an Enlightenment concept of history, the relation between knowledge and power, and the character of the human sciences (see Bernstein, 1976, 1983; Craib, 1984; Hekman, 1986; Ball, 1987; Giddens and Turner, 1987).

We highlight questions concerning the relationship between language and social meaning, and the issue of an interpretivist theory of understanding. Here we acknowledge the significance of debates surrounding the efforts of Wittgenstein and Winch to go beyond the metatheoretical limits set by logical positivism.⁵ On the broader question of positivist/empiricist thought and its influence upon the Anglo-American intellectual community, we suggest that the debate sparked by Thomas Kuhn, for all its ambiguity, represents an important point of dissension which has provided space for critique and the subsequent transgression of positivist boundaries across the disciplines.

At the forefront of the critical social theory debates has been the concern to ground meaning as unambiguously social, historical, and linguistic in construction, and to connect knowledge to power. As a consequence, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, and the “will to power” perspectives and intertextual insights of poststructuralism, have generated increasing interest. Acknowledging the complexities associated with these approaches and the debate between them, we offer brief summaries of the contribution of Frankfurt School scholarship, particularly that of

⁴ We are not alone in believing that a return to some fundamental issues of earlier metatheoretical debates can be illuminating for International Relations. Kratochwil (1988) returns to the epistemological issues associated with the debate over the possibility and desirability of a social “science” to explain some of the themes to be considered in regime theory.

⁵ This is of course too complex an issue to be covered here. We acknowledge, for example, the contribution to these issues over a number of years of figures such as Austin, Ryle, Strawson, Searle, and others associated with the school of thought known as Analytical Philosophy. There is also no doubt that much of the impetus for critical social theory in International Relations has come from the works of Continental scholars such as Sassure, Derrida, and Barthes. Our claim here, however, is that for Anglo-American scholarship in general it was the dissent of Wittgenstein in the early part of the century that was most influential in opening an effectively closed philosophical debate on language and reality, and in so doing helped create the conceptual space and intellectual atmosphere in which theories of ordinary language and speech acts might flourish and in which serious analysis of Continental scholarship might take place. The same general argument applies to the choice of Kuhn’s contribution to the philosophy of science over someone like Bachelard.

It is also important to note that more continuity is to be found at the intersections of contemporary critical debates than most detractors (and some advocates) care to admit. For all their differences, the post-Wittgensteinian tradition, philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricouer), the Critical Theory of Habermas, and poststructuralism repudiate positivist/empiricist approaches which privilege the mind of an objectified subject. All define social activity as intrinsic to meaning and identity. Engendered historically and culturally, it precedes the intentional activity of speakers and authors, and serves to constitute and interpret (via language games, paradigms, or discourses) the “reality” of the world. One of the implications of this intersection between Anglo-American and Continental scholarship is that it becomes possible to do what many detractors suggest is necessary—to present a work on critical theory and International Relations in a language that can be understood. It follows that having done so, self-respecting critics cannot excuse their neglect of critical literatures by protesting the need for a thorough grounding in Continental philosophy to comprehend the arguments.

Habermas, and poststructuralist approaches to modernity. We then seek to locate these and other narratives of dissent as they have been articulated in the discipline of International Relations in the 1980s. We do so in the hope that in readdressing some of the most important themes in modern, post-Cartesian Western thought—the quest for a scientific philosophy of human society; questions of rationality, objectivity and truth; of agency and structure, subject and object; the prospects for emancipatory politics and the issue of power—we might understand a little better how and why we think and speak as we do about International Relations in the late twentieth century.⁶

From a New Theory of Language to a New Language of Theory

Dissent from Wittgenstein to Foucault

Ludwig Wittgenstein's contribution to contemporary social theory is commonly acknowledged. His later work, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*, represents the textual bridge between logical positivism and the dialectical sociology of the language debate following the "linguistic turn" (Phillips, 1977; Giddens, 1979; Thompson, 1981; Bernstein, 1983).⁷

The logical atomism at the heart of the work of the early Wittgenstein and others, such as Bertrand Russell, provided the positivist orthodoxy of the day its rationality and (social) scientific credibility. At the metatheoretical level this was achieved via a sophisticated empiricist epistemology which allowed for the proposition that language and the "real" world correspond in a logical sense. Wittgenstein's early work, consequently, was characterized by a simple configuration centered on the direct sensory correspondence between elementary propositions and the independent objects of the world, while Russell attempted to explain this essential correspondence as resulting from a mathematical matrix in which the real meaning of an object was derived from its linguistic symbol or name (Thompson, 1981:220; Pears, 1987).

It was with the publication of Wittgenstein's later works, however, that the interpretivist theme in the language debate became the central tenet of counter-positivist dissent. It undermined the logical positivist understanding of language and reality at its metatheoretical core—its empiricist epistemology. More specifically, it

⁶ We are cognizant of criticisms that might be aimed at a project such as this. It might be argued that returning to thinkers and themes once at the center of dissent but now marginalized is somewhat incongruous in the present context. It might also be argued (see Biersteker, 1989) that we don't need "another preface," that it is time "to move beyond introductions . . . to concrete applications . . . [to works on] some concrete issue or subject." Two brief responses are in order. First is that for all the current centrality of the debates sparked off by figures such as Wittgenstein, Winch, and Kuhn, there is little evidence that they have received anything but the scantiest of attention by mainstream International Relations specialists. Indeed, as Frost (1986) has charged, International Relations remains an intellectual backwater of the main currents of Western social theory. Consequently, prominent scholars of the "classical" realist persuasion can speak in the late 1980s of "fact driven theory" (Holsti, 1989), and assert that a crucial test of any new paradigm is whether or not the critical questions it generates have a "reasonable correspondence with the observed facts of international politics" (Holsti, 1985:vii). The second issue, concerning the need for more "concrete" research, is dealt with below. But perhaps for those urging quick-fire concrete application of theoretical approaches, the following is worth pondering. Speaking of the "god's-eye view" of those who want "hard nosed, concrete solutions to particular problems," Walker (1988b:7) argues that it is an "arrogance that is inconsistent with the empirical evidence" of contemporary global life. Such evidence, he suggests, "requires a willingness to face up to the uncertainties of the age, not with the demand for instant solutions . . . [or] concrete policy options . . . but more crucially, for a serious rethinking of the ways in which it is possible for human beings to live together."

⁷ The Wittgensteinian critique was not the only contribution to the dissent against positivist orthodoxy in Anglo-American intellectual circles throughout the late nineteenth century. For a broader view which takes into account, among others, the contributions of phenomenological and hermeneutic scholars, see Bernstein (1976).

undermined the phenomenalist logic of an approach to knowledge which took as given the atomistic nature of the relationship between the objects of “the world” and their meaning as expressed in elementary linguistic propositions. Wittgenstein, concerned to explain the way that such sentences are actually used in social activity, concluded that to understand reality through language was to engage in complex social practices which defied the atomized logic and positivist/empiricist explanations of the empirical moment in understanding. It was necessary, he argued, to concentrate not on the logical independence of things, but on the systemic relationship between them which invests them with social meaning (Wittgenstein, 1968: section 65).⁸

This dissent against the atomized foundation of logical positivism was complemented by Wittgenstein’s critique of essentialism. This argument was just as devastating for positivist thinking because it undermined the perceived correspondence between a synthetic, factually verifiable statement and the “objective” situation it described (Wittgenstein, 1968; see also Austin, 1970). Wittgenstein proposed that a general theory of language which sought to reduce everyday understandings of terms to a singular essentialist meaning missed the point about the multiplicity of meanings to be found in social activity. Accordingly, the meaning of a term/word/symbol could not be assumed to correspond to some essential and externally derived foundation or object, but was dependent upon the particular constitutive role it played in socio-linguistic systems or “language games.”

Wittgenstein’s later position, pregnant with implications for counter-positivist approaches across the disciplines, was centered thus on a set of interlocking propositions which maintained that:

There are no independent or objective sources of support outside of human thought and human action . . . There is no standard or objective reality (always fixed, never changing) against which to compare or measure a universe of discourse . . . nothing exists outside of our language and actions which can be used to justify, for example, a statement’s truth or falsity. The only possible justification lies in the linguistic practices which embody them: how people think and speak, and how they live. (Phillips, 1977:30)

Language conceived this way—not as an exclusively descriptive medium but as a “form of life,” a process intrinsic to human social activity—represents a significant alternative to mainstream social scientific thinking (Giddens, 1979:240–48; Mendelson, 1979:40–55). To understand language in this sense is, in effect, to convert nouns into verbs.⁹ To “speak” in this sense is to “do”: to engage in a speech act is to give meaning to the activities which make up social reality. Language thus no longer describes some essential hidden reality; it is inseparable from the necessarily social construction of that reality. In this context, the starting point for an investigation of reality is the relationship between the rules and conventions of specific “language games” or “forms of life” and their socio-historical and cultural meaning.

The Wittgensteinian dissent against logical positivist orthodoxy thus opened up for critical inquiry much that had been effectively closed off under the intellectual imperialism of the modern, post-Cartesian approach to knowledge and society. His sociology of language perspective represents more than a discourse of words, somehow detached from the nondiscursive realm. Rather, the rules governing the way

⁸ The connection with Saussure here is very clear. See the discussion by Macdonell (1986) on the transference of his *Course in General Linguistics* to a broader readership in the 1960s.

⁹ This theme figures prominently in poststructuralist theory. As Michael Shapiro has put it, the “substitution of a verb for a noun . . . [turns a] fact about the world into something imposed, into the *making* of a world” (Shapiro, 1987:52–53, emphasis added).

speech acts both constitute and limit a specific understanding and organization of social life. Consequently, the study of language (broadly defined) and its rules of grammar become, simultaneously, an investigation of reality in the world.¹⁰ Important too in casting doubt upon the correspondence theory of truth and the relationship between the thinking subject and the external object, analytical attention is focused away from individual cognition and psychological processes, and toward a theory of action for the way in social circumstances people describe and enact their reality. In this context, the proposition that there can be no purely private language has had important critical implications for the hackneyed but powerful liberal axioms concerning the real nature of individuals and the notion of a public/private dichotomy.

The Question of Rationality: Winch and the Search for "Practical Wisdom"

An important dimension was added to the Wittgensteinian legacy by the contributions of Peter Winch (1972) and the debate begun by his work throughout the fields of philosophy, sociology and anthropology (Bechler and Drengson, 1978; Hollis and Lukes, 1982). The "language games" at the center of Winch's argument referred to a complex web of activity connected by an adherence to particular rules of interpretation which, in different cultures, identified and directed "normal" and/or "rational" behavior. It is on this issue of rationality that Winch's work is of most relevance in the present context, for it is here that post-Wittgensteinian thinking and an interpretivist sociology of modernity (derived from the *Verstehen* tradition of Dilthey and Weber) are most potently enjoined as part of a critique of the dominant Anglo-American social science orthodoxy. The point of Winch's dissent was, it seems, lost on many of his critics who concentrated on the frailties of the *Verstehen* approach in order to buttress their faith in hypothetico-deductive analysis. But Winch's appeal for "practical wisdom" (1972:43) was more than a reformulation of the conflict between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. It was concerned less with any logical incompatibility between scientific and social interpretation and more with what MacIntyre (1971:252) has called the "genre" of interpretation or, in contemporary critical terminology, the interpretive strategy used to categorize and classify the way "we" understand the social activities of "they." More specifically, Winch sought to undermine positivist/empiricist approaches to knowledge and society by problematizing the modern Western scientific genre of interpretation as a universally applicable standard of rationality. His focus in this sense was primarily metatheoretical: to question the way that "we" in the process of constructing and defining the "other" close off so much that might allow a more complete understanding of different "realities" in the world.

If the dissension discussed above sowed the seeds of discontent within Anglo-American academic circles on the question of language and the relationship between

¹⁰ In International Relations the work of Kratochwil and Ruggie on regimes invokes a number of these themes. As Ruggie (1982) has argued, regimes are akin to language, known not by a description of their elements but by their generative grammar—the underlying principles of order and meaning that give rise to international arrangements and condition their transformation. They are what Andrews (1979) has called "the language of state action." This gives regimes an ontology of intersubjectivity but produces a conflict with the positivist epistemology of most regime theorists. While starting from a metatheoretical position associated with ordinary language philosophy and found in the work of Friedrich Kratochwil (1982, 1984, 1989), the positivist epistemology then transferred the analytic orientation of regimes to a concern with the inference of intersubjective meaning from actors' behavior (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986:764). For Kratochwil and Ruggie, this meant that the positivist epistemology had to open up to insights from the "interpretive sciences" (1986:771), but the extent of interpretive influence was to be severely constrained. They noted, in terms akin to the "Cartesian anxiety" (discussed below), that their analysis should not be taken as "advocating a coup whereby the reign of positivist explanation is replaced by exploratory anarchy" (1986:768).

the natural and social sciences, Thomas Kuhn's work increased the critical momentum and gave it a more explicit direction.

The Kuhnian Challenge: Towards a Sociology of Science

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970), Kuhn challenged the authority of science and the scientific method with an explanation of the process of knowledge construction that did not emphasize atheoretical experimental techniques or methodological directives. His focus, instead, was on the shared rules of paradigmatic interpretation which provided scientific communities, in different times and places, with an a priori framework of meaning and understanding about the "real" nature of the world that their observations, hypotheses, and testing ostensibly discovered.¹¹

Kuhn's central proposition—that knowledge is constructed by social communities following agreed upon norms, traditions, and rules of reading and interpretation, and not by an atheoretical process of testing theory-impregnated observations—has obvious implications for a critical approach acknowledging the philosophical issues raised by Wittgenstein and Winch. Equally important, though perhaps less obvious, is Kuhn's proposition that paradigms (like Winch's rule-governed linguistic communities) are not connected by some external realm of scientific fact, but have a fundamental incommensurability (Kuhn, 1970:92–111). For the less discerning of Kuhn's (and Winch's) critics, the incommensurability notion represents nothing less than a retreat into meaningless relativism (see Gutting, 1980). But, as in the case against Winch on cultural relativism, it is the charge rather than its intended target that lacks meaning. The distinction between paradigms, as presented by Kuhn, does *not* exclude comparison and critical evaluation any more than does the distinction between societies and cultures as understood by Winch. What *is* excluded in both cases is the possibility of comparison and evaluation in terms of some neutral, atheoretical, or non-normative methodology reflecting an "independent" realm of factual evidence. Kuhn sought to explain that different paradigms explain the world in ways that correspond not to some illusory external realm but to the knowledge rules at its metatheoretical heart. The notion of incommensurability, in this sense, sought to establish the parameters and grounds that enabled comparison across time and space, rather than to declare such comparison impossible (see Kuhn, 1970: 175–210).¹²

The incommensurability theme in Kuhn's work is integral to his discussion of change, which—again, despite its problems—has opened a variety of conceptual doors for critical social theorists. Rejecting the notion of a cumulative and incremental model of progress towards "truth" or ultimate "reality," Kuhn's argument complimented those of Wittgenstein and Winch in emphasizing the importance of language or, more precisely, the conflicts between "different language-culture communities" (Kuhn, 1970:205). Progress in this language-culture context was dependent not on the efforts of "independent" scientists engaged in a process of observation and

¹¹ There is no doubt that much of what Kuhn has said on these issues is ambiguous and controversial (see Masterman, 1970; Suppe, 1977; Gutting, 1980; Ball, 1987). But, keeping the problems in mind, there is much in Kuhn that is of significance for the present discussion, particularly the questions his work opened up for debate. On the question of rationality, for example, his critical attitude is well represented when he suggests (in terms similar to Winch) that "if history or any other empirical discipline leads us to believe that the development of science depends . . . on behavior that we have previously thought to be irrational, then we should conclude, not that science is irrational, but that our notion of rationality needs adjustment" (quoted in Bernstein, 1983:59).

¹² If one substitutes "discourse" for "paradigm" here, then one of the simplest yet most powerful techniques of dismissal used against poststructuralism—that in not privileging one discourse over another it slips into the mire of relativism—is, at least, rendered problematic.

testing, but on the scientific community as a whole acknowledging themselves as members of different language groups faced with “communication breakdown” (Kuhn, 1970:201–203). When this situation was recognized, Kuhn proposed, a wider, more meaningful dialogue might become possible across paradigmatic boundaries. Eventually scholars would learn to “translate” rival theories, and in so doing “describe . . . the world to which [that] theory applies” (Kuhn, 1970:202).¹³

For all their obvious significance, the dissenting voices of Wittgenstein, Winch, and Kuhn have rarely been directly echoed in the contemporary critiques of orthodoxy proliferating in the International Relations literature of the 1980s.¹⁴ Much more evident have been the influences of Critical Theory and poststructuralism. Addressing some of the problems of post-Wittgensteinian scholarship, Thompson (1981) has indicated why this is the case, in terms relevant to International Relations. The point, Thompson argues, is that while post-Wittgensteinian scholarship has opened up much closed modern thinking, particularly by emphasizing the “meaningful and social character of human action,” it has often “disregarded considerations such as power and repression, history and social change” and has failed to emphasize strongly enough the connection between the “problem of understanding” and “considerations of explanation and critique” (Thompson, 1981:4). The problem is that language-based analysis, particularly of Analytical Philosophy, does not always unequivocally ground its theory in the practice and ongoing struggles of society.

The problem with the Kuhnian-inspired sociology of science perspective is similar in that, while it has brought to the forefront of debate the hermeneutical dimension of scientific research and analysis, its understanding of the hermeneutic tradition has generally been rather limited (see Boucher, 1985; Mueller-Vollmer, 1985; Hekman,

¹³ Kuhn was well aware of the problems associated with this process of communication and translation. He stressed, for example, the distinction between being “persuaded” that the process was necessary and being genuinely “converted” to it (1970:203). This latter state, he noted (in terms which have more than a little relevance to the way the International Relations mainstream has reacted to recent critical works), tended to elude those who, through long and uncritical adherence to a particular set of paradigmatic axioms, have “internalized” its rules of interpretation. Progress was more likely to be achieved, maintained Kuhn, among “those just entering the profession, [who] have not yet acquired the special vocabularies and commitments of the dominant paradigm.”

¹⁴ The Kuhnian debate most forcefully enters the domain of International Relations when calls are made for the priority of an “empirical research agenda” (see Keohane, 1988). This is indicative of a ritual forgetting of Kuhn’s insights about natural science. The call rests on an assured understanding that the “received view” of the natural sciences remains both an accurate understanding of scientific practice and a suitable guide for the social sciences. However, an appreciation of the impact of this discussion on social scientists’ beliefs about natural science would force a reorientation of many of these criticisms. Consider, for example, the assessment by Holsti of the relationship between the two branches: “Unlike the natural sciences, knowledge in our field is not like a mine filled with pre-existing, unchanging facts, just waiting to be discovered . . . We cannot throw away paradigms (or what passes for them) like natural scientists do, à la Kuhn, because the anomalies between realities and their theoretical characterization are never so severe in international relations as they are in the natural sciences. None of the thinkers of the past portrayed the world of international (or world) politics *in so distorted a manner* as did the analysts of the physical or astronomical universe prior to the Copernican revolution” (1989:4–5; emphasis added).

There is a great deal to be critical of in this understanding. But what stands out is the (mis)understanding of Aristotelian astronomy as having distorted reality, only to be corrected by Copernicus’s later discovery, presumably by observation, of the way the world really “is.” If anything, the reverse is true. Contrary to the (positivist) view that Copernicus’s theory replaced the “empty speculations” of the Aristotelians with laws derived from observed facts, it was the Aristotelian who “*could quote numerous observational results in their favor*” (Feyerabend, 1968:13n). It was Copernican theory which, not possessing independent observational support (at least for the first hundred years of its acceptance), was inconsistent with recorded observations and entrenched theories. As Feyerabend declares: “*this is how modern physics started; not as an observational enterprise but as an unsupported speculation that was inconsistent with highly confirmed laws*” (1968; see also Kuhn, 1957; Feyerabend, 1964; Lakatos and Zahar, 1975). The point is that one of the most important natural sciences began as an argument validated in ways other than by observation. That being the case, appeals to observational support for realms of social and political inquiry such as international relations are unsustainable.

1986). For much postpositivist analysis (such as the tradition of Dilthey), hermeneutic activity is perceived as the construction of an alternative nonpositivist source of “objective” knowledge appropriate to the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Consequently, while the dichotomized nature of the post-Enlightenment scientific project was significantly problematized in the wake of Kuhn’s attack upon it, the legacy of what Giddens (1982) called the “orthodox consensus” has often remained intact.¹⁵

The continuing one-sidedness of post-Kuhnian analysis and the abstracted nature of much linguistic research led many contributors to the broad social theory debate toward the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricouer.¹⁶ This has been less obviously the case in International Relations where, in the early 1980s in particular, those searching for a genuinely dialectical and sociologically-based alternative to positivist/empiricist thinking turned to a particular kind of dissent within Marxism.

Critical Theory, Habermas, and the Politics of Emancipation

The Critical Theorists of the early Frankfurt School (see Jay, 1973; Held, 1980) confronted Western social science orthodoxy with a holistic perspective, influenced by some elements of Hegelian/Marxism and energized by a sophisticated notion of dialectics (see Horkheimer, 1972; Guess, 1981). Thus, while the tendency in Hegel to reduce contradictions (subject/object, fact/value) to an ultimate identity was noted and its conservative political implications understood, and while the problems of the objectified mind (in hermeneutics and phenomenology), the detached intellectual (in Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge), and the economically determined individual (in orthodox Marxism) were taken into account (Horkheimer, 1972:205–50;), Critical Theory advanced a theory of modern social reality based on the dialectic of knowledge and power.

More explicitly, in repudiating the pseudo-scientific pretensions of modern philosophy, Critical Theory analysis focused on the totalitarian potentialities of a particular form of reason—instrumental reason—which since the Enlightenment has dominated Western thinking with its concern for technical control over nature and its problem-solving capacity. A major task of a Critical Theory approach, in these circumstances, as to liberate modern peoples from their alienation in societies where an

¹⁵ This is not to suggest that all contemporary postpositivist thinking is of this kind. On the contrary, the work of scholars such as Hesse (1980) and Hekman (1983, 1986) represents some of the most sophisticated analysis on this issue currently available. But the tendency is still evident, often in otherwise theoretically sensitive arguments. In an International Relations context, see Lapid’s (1989) proposition that the most radical of recent postpositivist thinking “seriously examines the possibility that, within limits, diversity of viewpoints might be fully compatible with scientific rationality and objectivity.” This might be the case with the structurationist argument because of its debt to scientific realism. Although it stands as an alternative, it might be not so much a resolution of the problems with positivism it recognizes as it is a deferral. The influence of scientific realism upon structurationism gives the latter, despite its calls for a dialectical synthesis, a dichotomized approach that reflects the former’s ontological distinction between the natural and social sciences. As Wendt (1987:360) argues, “structuration theory . . . conceptualizes agents and structures as mutually constitutive yet ontologically distinct entities.” This provides a research program for International Relations that, although combining structural and historical research, seems to depend upon the prior isolation of political and economic structures in the domestic and international spheres (Wendt, 1987:366).

¹⁶ Here the process of de-psychologizing the communication process is taken a significant stage further with Gadamer’s claim that language is not subject-bound, but is always a community phenomenon which “unites the I and the Thou” (Boucher, 1985:37). The purpose of the hermeneutic enterprise is thus radically reformulated. Instead of an objectivist emphasis on formulating the right method in order to retrieve from a text the author’s real meaning, there is a concentration on the historico-social process of understanding. In this sense hermeneutics becomes much more than the attempt to empathize or reexperience the mental processes of another subject. It has a more ambitious aim: to understand the process of understanding in human life.

understanding of their history, culture, and political power had been appropriated by a dominant mode of knowledge (scientific rationality) and the state institutions for which it was utilized and proliferated. Exposing the positivist project at the heart of the ostensibly neutral knowledge process was, in this sense, an emancipatory enterprise with practical political implications similar to those of Wittgenstein's exposure of the social dimensions of language, Winch's insight into the construction of the cultural "they," and Kuhn's propositions on the sociology of scientific practice. This, as Horkheimer explained in a passage that remains integral to a critical social theory perspective, was because "the intervention of reason in the processes whereby knowledge and its object are constituted, or the subordination of these processes to conscious control, does not take place . . . in a purely intellectual world, but coincides with the struggle for certain real ways of life" (Horkheimer, 1972:245).

This principle, which asserts the historical and political nature of all knowledge and which understands theory as inexorably connected to practice, remains at the core of the contributions to critical social theory of Jurgen Habermas.¹⁷ A central feature of Habermas's wide-ranging analysis of contemporary society, accordingly, is the issue of praxis. More precisely, it is the question of how modern peoples might come to understand the deformed and ideological nature of the language, social rules, values, and meanings associated with a dominant mode of understanding—scientific rationalism—which has successfully transformed philosophico-political problems into "technical" and "strategic" ones. Put another way, Habermas's Critical Theory project has, at one level at least, been a continuation by even more eclectic means of the attempt by scholars such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and many others in the Kantian/Hegelian/Marxian tradition to find emancipatory and transformational elements in the theory and practice of modernity.

But the Habermasian project, emerging in the cold war years, developing in the brief and heady days of New Left radicalism, and maturing during an age which has seen something of a flight from Hegelian/Marxism among European scholars, has by necessity differed in important respects from earlier Frankfurt School approaches. Central to Habermas's work, consequently, is an ongoing debate with earlier Critical Theorists and, since the early 1970s, with the "radical interpretivism" (Renger, 1988) of much contemporary European social theory. These debates have become an increasingly influential part of the critical agenda in International Relations during the past decade.

Habermas's critique of the works of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, and his response to the multifaceted critiques of poststructuralism, are similar in concept and theme to the tradition of dissent against scientific modernism discussed here. On the question of emancipation, for example, Habermas has sought to expose the idealist and utopian elements of earlier Hegelian/Marxist thinking which produced both grand universalist theories of revolutionary change and, in the wake of revolutionary failure, a philosophical cul-de-sac of pessimism and despair (see Habermas, 1974: chapter 6). Habermas rejected this latter tendency, epitomized by Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, as a one-sided and negative misinterpretation of the dialectical legacy of Hegelian and Marxist thought which had resulted in an understanding of modernity and the power of its ruling classes that was a "left counterpart to the . . . theory of totalitarian domination" (Habermas, 1979:72).¹⁸ To rekindle the positive

¹⁷ See Habermas (1971, 1976, 1979, 1987). For a broad view of Habermas's works see McCarthy (1978), Thompson (1981), Thompson and Held (1982), and Bernstein (1985).

¹⁸ This is a charge that, according to Habermas, is equally relevant to the poststructuralist approach of Foucault. The claim he makes is that poststructuralism has read out emancipatory potential in favor of a theory of power set upon another form of domination (Habermas, 1987:chapter 10). For readings of poststructuralism that take serious issue with Habermas, see Rajchman (1985), Connolly (1987), Shapiro (1987), Ross (1988), and Richters (1988).

emancipatory element in Critical Theory, while rejecting its universalist totalizing tendencies, Habermas has engaged in a long-term restructuring of Hegelian/Marxist thought in terms of a radical rationalism influenced by post-Wittgensteinian notions of “ordinary language” and the symbolically-mediated interaction between speech communities.

At one level this has been an attempt to read back into modern theories of dialectics and the subject much that has been read out by Critical Theorists and indeed by the later, conservative, Hegel. Of most significance here, for Habermas, is the notion of Spirit in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, which was understood as the product of human social interaction, mediated through language (symbolic representation), labor (control of nature), and the struggle for recognition.¹⁹ This interpretation of Hegel (or more precisely of Hegel’s reading of Kant) problematizes the notion of a unified ego “I” which comes to know its “objective” self through self-reflection, favoring a heterogeneous, historico-social notion of the subject in which knowledge of self and other selves is grounded in the reality of social interaction.²⁰ On this basis, Habermas has sought to resuscitate for radical politics a sociologically grounded rationalism, free of the abstracted idealism of (orthodox) Hegelianism or the “empiricist metaphysics” of positivism (Gellner, 1974:175).²¹

In this quest Habermas has drawn upon a variety of intellectual sources, the result of which in recent years has been the “theory of communicative action” (Habermas, 1984, 1988). Two of the principal influences upon this theory— influences central to the broad agenda of dissent in contemporary social theory—are the post-Heideggerian hermeneutics of figures such as Gadamer and elements of the broad analytical philosophy approach inspired by Wittgenstein (see Thompson, 1981:83–100; Bernstein, 1983:40–49). For all the conflict of the Habermas-Gadamer dispute (see McCarthy, 1978), Habermas integrated into his reformulated Critical Theory the Aristotelian distinction between *techne* and *praxis* which underpinned the refusal of Gadamer to reduce politics to administrative technique, or power to force (Bernstein, 1983:40–48). Moreover, in accepting (albeit with reservations) the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* as the basis for society, Habermas has attempted to establish as the goal of modern social theory and practice a process of understanding based on uncoerced, nonideological discursive reasoning. Drawing upon the insights of post-Wittgensteinian scholarship, Habermas has thus sought to uncover what he regards as the “universal conditions that are presupposed in all communicative action” (Bernstein, 1983:185). This presupposition theme rests upon Habermas’s notion of a “will to reason” within human society which is part of every communicative interaction and which, in the face of his critics, he maintains is the keystone to the radicalism in Critical Theory.²²

¹⁹ Stressing the interpenetration of these elements in the social construction of the subject, Hegel explained that “Spirit is not the fundament underlying the subjectivity of the self in self consciousness but rather the medium *within* which one ‘I’ communicates with another ‘I’, and *from* which, as an absolute mediation, the two mutually form each other into subjects” (quoted in Habermas, 1974:145).

²⁰ For an accessible rearticulation of this theme, see Flax (1981) and the introduction to Wood (1972). This point is important for Habermas’s critique of Marx in which he argues that while Marx was aware of the interpenetration theme in dialectical thought, he tended in his later works to privilege one element—the mediation of labor—over the others. See Habermas (1971).

²¹ It is on this theme that Habermas most clearly rejects Weber or—more precisely—Weber’s attempt to narrow the scope of modern rationality. In this regard Weber’s positivist tendencies cause him to restrict rationality to scientific explanation of the natural world. This excludes from rational calculation normative themes associated with critical reflection (and understanding the process of understanding) which, for Habermas, are vital components of the process of human emancipation.

²² Habermas argues that “while again and again [the will to reason] is silenced . . . in fantasies and deeds it develops a stubbornly transcendental power . . . it is renewed with each act of unconstrained understanding, with each moment of living together in solidarity, of successful individuation, and of saving emancipation” (Habermas, 1982:221).

Habermas's critics have been less than convinced by the Critical Theory project premised upon the "will to reason" and the reformulated notion of an "ideal speech situation." Some of the most stimulating debates of recent times have flowed from the debate between Habermas (and those generally empathetic to his position) and scholars preferring broad poststructuralist views of modernity (see Ryan, 1982; Poster, 1984; Dews, 1987; and Giddens and Turner, 1987).

Theory as Practice: Poststructuralism and the Critique of Modernity

The complexities surrounding the nature of poststructuralist thinking can be only briefly touched upon here.²³ But it is possible to gain a sense of poststructuralism's significance for critical social theory approaches to International Relations by initially posing a question of Habermasian thought implicit in poststructuralist approaches to modernity. The question, simply put, is: What are the implications for post-Cartesian thinking as a whole if the rationality premise in social communication is not privileged? Or, put another way: What if other dimensions of the language issue, effectively excluded from a rationalist-oriented approach, are included? More specifically: What if, instead of privileging a "will to reason," the nature of modern theory and practice is understood as an expression of a "will to power?"

The issues at stake here go beyond any dispute with a single theorist, even one as important as Habermas. They include the larger project in which scholars as diverse as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Lacan are engaged. The project is a search for thinking space within the modern categories of unity, identity, and homogeneity; the search for a broader and more complex understanding of modern society which accounts for that which is left out—the "other," the marginalized, the excluded. The target of this dissent is the foundationalism and essentialism of post-Enlightenment scientific philosophy, its universalist presuppositions about modern rational man, its hidden metaphysics, its metatheoretical commitment to dualized categories of meaning and understanding, its logocentric strategies of identity and hierarchization, its theorized propositions about human nature, its dogmatic faith in method, its philosophies of intention and consciousness, and its tendency toward grand theory and the implications of its imposition.

Thus, poststructuralism echoes much of Critical Theory, post-Wittgensteinian scholarship, and the sociology of science critique. But it wants to make its reaction to the philosophical dogmas of modernism unequivocal and unambiguous. In this regard, as Rajchman (1985:2–5) has indicated, poststructuralism represents the great skepticism (but *not* cynicism) of our time. If, as traditional philosophy maintains, it was Humean skepticism about Cartesian and Lockean dogmas that "awoke Kant from his slumbers," then poststructuralism can be seen as the attempt to "awake" contemporary Western thinking from the slumbers Kant in turn introduced.

The differences of a poststructuralist approach are perhaps best illustrated in relation to the question of theory and practice. Whereas Critical Theory wants to realize in practical political terms what traditional theory only contemplates, poststructuralism assumes that such theory is already practice. To understand society and politics in this sense is to ground theory not *in* practice, but *as* practice. This has important implications for the attitude to criticism and the overall purpose of dissent. Critical Theory seeks to expose the rotten foundations and the ideological function of traditional theory and, via uncoerced communication, to enable people to understand and overcome the power structures that oppress them. A poststructuralist

²³ For overviews and discussions of the issues central to this increasing corpus of work, see Descombes (1980), Culler (1982), Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), Rajchman (1985), and Connolly (1988).

attitude eschews this “hermeneutics of suspicion.” It rejects the very idea of “deep” philosophical interests lying below the surface, which are bound by tradition or restricted by force and simply await to be realized in modern society. It concentrates, therefore, less on attempting to secure emancipation through the unmasking of power, oppression, and ideology, and more—via detailed historical inquiry—on concrete examples of the way power is used in all of society’s sites. It is not that poststructuralism fetishizes the negative elements of power. On the contrary, poststructuralism regards the ever-present nature of power relations, and their consequent role in enabling practice as well as oppressing it, as the source of practical political action. In this sense it takes more seriously than its dissenting counterparts the proposition that knowledge *is* power. It looks for no distinction between “truth” and power, for it expects none. Its perspective on history, society, and politics thus resonates with the voice of Nietzsche.

Poststructuralism, by definition, is an emphatically political perspective. But it is one which refuses to privilege any partisan political line, for it equates such privileging with the grand, universal claims for unity and truth in modern theory, and the dogma of the hermetically sealed tradition. It is in the act of not privileging that it offers emancipation and liberation.

In International Relations this perspective is evident in a subtle but important analytical refocusing, away from traditional concerns with individualized subjects and objects and the epistemological question of how we come to “know,” and toward an explanation based in social and historical processes and the ongoing struggles between discursive practices. Once focused in this manner, debates over central issues in contemporary global life become inexorably bound up with questions of language and interpretation, the knowledge/power nexus, the construction of modern “man,” and the question of how to effectively resist the impositions of power articulated via the privileged “logocentric” discourses of modern scientific rationality.

The discussion to this point of the intersections between the Anglo-American philosophical tradition and European social theory is *not* intended to suggest that these tensions should be resolved into a coherent and consensual position. Such a task might be at least as impossible as it would be undesirable. The point is to exploit creatively the implications of these debates for social and political inquiry. The interdisciplinary debate, however, does have something akin to two “mandatory” consequences for a realm of study like International Relations. First, it is no longer possible to innocently maintain the “objectivity” of one’s scholarship by recourse to the “facts” or the “real world.” Second, a space has been created for the pursuit of research strategies with metatheoretical commitments that might once have been pejoratively labelled “subjectivist” or “idealist.” Within this space many alternatives could be pursued. No single research strategy is mandated as the correct and legitimate course to follow. The articulation of these themes within International Relations in recent years has been testimony to this celebration of difference and evidence of resistance to any narrative of completion.

Challenges to “The Tradition”: International Relations and Critical Social Theory

Those who recently have sought to challenge the orthodox approaches to International Relations are under no illusions as to the magnitude of their task. As Walker (1980:2) has suggested, the new critical approaches involve a fundamental reassessment of “images and assumptions about man and society which [were] crystallized in the European Enlightenment” and which subsequently have become the dominant theoretical axioms of European and North American experience. The stilted nature

of this legacy was obvious during the discipline's "great debate" of the 1960s, which merely served to further isolate International Relations from debates developing elsewhere on broad philosophical issues, particularly the concept of "realism." Proposing that, despite all the pronounced eclecticism of the period, nothing fundamental has changed within the discipline, and acknowledging the crisis faced by realist scholarship as it has struggled to come to grips with what is perceived as a changing power configuration in the world, increasing numbers of scholars have turned to previously alien modes of explanation in order to understand in a more profound way the processes by which the "realities" of contemporary life are made meaningful.²⁴

In the early 1980s, in particular, works of this ilk paid explicit attention to the relationship between that matrix of theoretical tensions brought to the surface in the post-Enlightenment quest for a science of human society and the realist tradition in International Relations. In the works of Robert Cox (1981, 1987) and Richard Ashley (1981, 1984), the realist perspective was presented not as a cohesive, hermetically sealed theoretical tradition, but as the focus of major unresolved tensions in modern western theory (see also Walker, 1987). Primary among these tensions, it was argued, was that between a tendency towards analytical closure and reductionism, derived from Anglo-American positivist/empiricist influences, and a historically sensitive and critical openness derived from broad hermeneutic sources. This was a tension personified in the figures of seminal realists such as Morgenthau (via Weber) and E. H. Carr (via Mannheim), whose "great texts" had received a "privileged" reading in the cold war years and which in the period since had underpinned an orthodoxy at the North American disciplinary center that acknowledged as valid only one form of knowledge (scientific rationalism), one methodology (deductivist empiricism), and one research orientation (problem-solving). The critical task in this circumstance was to "realize" in a Habermasian sense the potential within realism for an understanding of global life "freed from unacknowledged constraints, relations of domination, and [the] conditions of distorted communication . . . that deny humans the capacity to make the future through free will and consciousness" (Ashley, 1984:227).

Ashley's "Political Realism and Human Interests" (1981) is the most explicit attempt to address the metatheoretical contradictions within realism for this emancipatory end. Employing concepts from Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), Ashley sought to expose the inherent limitations of an understanding of the world that privileges one particular interest—an interest in technical knowledge and theoretical endeavour—"as a basis for extending control over objects in the subject's environment" (Ashley, 1981:208). In such circumstances, he proposed, an approach to International Relations is needed which emphasizes critical self-reflection, to counter the privileging of sophisticated forms of technical rationality and instrumen-

²⁴ The key term here is "fundamental," meaning a change to what Lijphart (1974) termed the "traditional" paradigm in International Relations. The most prominent element of this tradition, the realist approach, has undoubtedly taken on many dimensions since its seminal articulation in Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*. In recent years important contributions have been made on behalf of theories of transnationalism, interdependence, regimes, and hegemonic stability, and have been understood by some as representing a supersession of basic realist principles. For overviews, see the debates in Holsti, Siverson, and George (1980), Maghooi and Ramberg (1982), and Krasner (1983). However, others have remained unconvinced that the basic assumptions and representations of the tradition have been altered by all this activity. Vasquez (1983) has undermined much of the postrealist argument for the period to the 1970s. Since that time some of the most severe skepticism has come not from "radicals" but from realists who have had to find novel ways of dealing with what they perceive as anomalies. To this end, the literature dealing with the dilemmas of "cooperation under anarchy" (see Oye, 1986) is instructive. The claim of neorealism to fundamental change has been considered by Ashley (1984). Notwithstanding the ensuing debates (see Keohane, 1986a), there is little evidence that those Ashley portrayed as neorealists have seriously examined the positivist/empiricist metatheoretical framework underlying their perspectives.

tal reason which effectively detach knowledge from other human interests—namely intercommunity understanding and emancipation.

As a preliminary step towards a more adequate understanding of global life, argued Ashley, scholars must reject the notion that the value of theoretical inquiry is limited to the pragmatist criterion of instrumental usefulness, a theme central to the “technical realism” of influential figures such as Waltz (1979). Sketching out a re-formulated approach to theory and practice, he attacked the means-ends logic of orthodox realism and the whole theoretical edifice which “conceives of international politics in terms of some fixed structure of being which channels objective forces and constrains outcomes” (Ashley, 1981:220). To begin to “realize” the potential for a more adequate realist approach, both Ashley and Cox emphasized the need to look critically but empathetically at elements within traditionalist scholarship which sought knowledge, not simply to better control an “objective” environment but to understand how in the modern world of states it is possible to “behave as a worthy member of one’s traditional community with its intersubjective and consensually endorsed norms, rights, meanings, purposes and limitations” (Ashley, 1981:212).

In “The Poverty of Neorealism” (1984), Ashley was concerned to expose further the inadequacies of technical realism by setting his sights on an influential group of North American scholars, who in the attempt to scientifically bolster an ailing realist orthodoxy had betrayed the “rich dialectical content” of traditional realist thought (1984:226). Ashley charged the neorealists with having replaced “subjectivist veils and dark metaphysics” (1984:233) with an “objectivist” variant, set upon a series of flawed assumptions about the nature and purpose of theorizing. The end result was a one-sided, positivist metatheoretical perspective, articulated as an ahistorical rational actor approach, that was unable to question the historical and cultural contingency of its own theory or (except in superficial terms) that of its social actors (sovereign states).

Cox’s dissent was articulated in slightly different terms, inspired as it was by Vico and Gramsci. Proposing that since the cold war realist thinking had largely been synonymous with the narrow “problem-solving” perspective of the North American discipline, Cox (1981:130–34) emphasized the significance of its other, marginalized side, a latent critical theory found in the power politics approach of figures such as E. H. Carr and Ludwig Dehio (Cox, 1981:131). “Problem-solving” realism, he maintained, was characterized by a “fixed order” dogma acknowledging an enduring “real” world racked by endemic and systemic violence. With history objectified in a cold war context, realist thinking had become little more than a “concern for the defence of American power as a bulwark of the maintenance of order” (1981:131), its potential for understanding the complexities of global life restricted to “the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized” (1981:128).

The emancipatory task for Cox was, in the first instance, to remind mainstream scholars of some basic intellectual principles that, in the wake of interdisciplinary debates going on elsewhere, might be considered axiomatic. Primary among these was the proposition that, in not reflecting upon the process by which it understands its “reality,” realist thinking effectively blinds itself to the prospect and nature of change generated by the complex dialectic of theory and practice. A Critical Theory perspective was deemed necessary because it does reflect upon the process of theorizing and, in reconnecting theoretical knowledge to human socio-political interest, it opens up the otherwise foreclosed debate on the construction of “reality.” More explicitly, a Critical Theory perspective would draw attention away from a “continuing present” towards the notion of a “continuing process of historical change.” It would, similarly, not simply accord the status of “fact” or “given” to existing institutions and relations of power, but critically question them by investigating their ori-

gins “and how and whether they might be in the process of change” (Cox, 1981:129). Rather than reducing the relationship between states to a simple power struggle over predetermined ends, it would concentrate on interstate behavior in more comprehensive terms, as a “historical structure” energized by particular configurations of “social forces,” and understood as a complex interpenetration of material capabilities, institutions, and ideas (1981:135).

This final theme is central to Cox’s most recent contribution to the debate, which seeks to develop further the proposition that orthodox International Relations approaches cannot deal adequately with the plurality of state formations now emerging (Cox, 1987). Cox’s aim is to investigate how social forces generated by changing production processes are helping to reshape forms of state and world order. At another more radical level his concern is Habermasian: to enhance the potential for counter-hegemony by identifying the bases of radical support and cohesion that are made possible by changes underway in the worldwide social relations of production (Cox, 1987:393–403).

While Cox and scholars like Andrew Linklater (1982, 1986) have carried their Critical Theory perspectives into the late 1980s, generally—as in the broader debate—critical International Relations thinking has taken on the style, language, and theoretical concerns of poststructuralism.

The title of a recent collection, *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989), quite literally spells out the nature of the challenge the discipline faces from poststructuralist scholarship. The references within the work—to Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes and Baudrillard—are, in more than the obvious ways, “foreign” to a discipline dominated by its Anglo-American center. So too is the treatment of the classical texts. Der Derian, for example, concentrating on mainstream concepts of “international theory” as understood by Wight and Bull, begins where they “left off” in order to “interrogate present knowledge . . . through past practices, to search out the margins of political theory, to listen for the critical voices drowned out by official discourse . . . to undertake a theoretic investigation of the textual interplay behind power politics” (1989:7). This perspective, alien as it must sound to those who have internalized the dominant interpretative genre of the discipline, is perhaps best understood in terms of post-Wittgensteinian theory or, more directly in some cases, as a response to the work of Saussure and its subsequent critique by Derrida (see Descombes, 1980).²⁵

²⁵ The conception of language that informs the work of most of those Keohane (1988) identified as “reflectivists” is more indebted directly to the position of Saussure than it is to Wittgenstein. The distinction between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) at the heart of Saussurian linguistics is a dichotomized perspective that invokes a structural differentiation between depth and surface. Although a position that is something of a step back from the socially constitutive notion of language is in the “Language games” and “forms of life” of Wittgenstein, it has nonetheless given rise to a formalistic strain of discourse analysis that has offered insights into international relations foreclosed by the positivist tendencies of the orthodoxy. Examples of this important albeit limited form of dissent include the uncovering of commitments in the language of participants on all sides of the nuclear debate, particularly the strategic studies community (Hook, 1984; Chilton, 1985; Cohn, 1987). In tones more sensitive to the power and language issue, Alker (1988) has utilized a formal dialogical approach to textual interpretation to consider how a seminal work in the realist tradition—Thucydides’ *Melian Dialogue*—has been appropriated in ways that have severely limited the consideration of political options in the present. Alker and Sylvan (1988) have employed similar techniques to examine the way alternatives were framed in the policy debates surrounding the deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam. The same approach has been used to examine the “window of vulnerability” thesis in strategic debates of the 1960s (see Homer-Dixon and Karapin, 1987). For an impressive invocation of Saussure’s *langue/parole* dichotomy in the context of International Relations, particularly in the understanding of foreign policy, see Andrews (1984). This built on earlier work (Andrews, 1975) that sought to credit state forms with less determinism and homogeneity than Realism had done. Not all of Andrews’s work, however, shies away from the influences of poststructuralism. In a review of world-systems theory, he employs Foucault’s notions of power to argue that the global political economy should be seen as a disciplinary society that gives rise to states as a product of the relations of power (Andrews, 1982). For a work that combines both a formal discourse analysis with a Foucauldian understanding of discursive practices, see Shapiro, Bonham and Heradstveit (1988).

On the question of how knowledge, truth, and meaning are constituted, the focus is on language, understood not as an asset employed by a preexisting subject or as a constraint imposed on the subject, but as a medium through which the social identity of the subject is made possible. This understanding of language underlies the notion of discourse which, for Foucault, involves not simply a group of signs or symbols but the overall social practices that systematically form social subjects and the objects of which they speak (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:62; see Foucault, 1972).

Discourse for those dissenting from the rationalism of realism is not restricted to a concern with the discourse *employed* by the subjects of international relations, be they states, institutions, or transnational actors. Discourse for those who might be considered part of the new dissent is the discourse *of* International Relations, the practices that give rise to the subjects of international relations and constitute the domain to which International Relations theory is purportedly only responding. In this more far-reaching conception neither theorist nor theory escapes attention. For the conception invoked by the rationalists and realists, theory remains a *tool for analysis*, something that might be more sensitively honed but that nonetheless can continue to serve us (the theorists and, of course, the practitioners). For the conception associated with poststructuralism, theory is as much the *object of analysis* as the tool for analysis. The concern, although no less practical in its implications, is how analytic approaches privilege certain understandings of global politics and marginalize or exclude others. It is a reorientation of analysis best illustrated by the move from the Kantian question of “What can I know” to the Foucauldian question of “How have my questions been produced?” (Shapiro, 1988:14–15).

It is in this context that Walker (1989) has investigated the way that many realist questions and answers have been produced via a particular reading of Machiavelli. His conclusion is that the dominant tradition in International Relations has endorsed a caricature, a narrow ahistorical reading, of the “paradigmatic realist,” reduced to instant formulas on the “priority of power over ethics . . . the necessity of violence and intrigue . . . ends justifying means and *raison d'état*” (Walker, 1989:32). The significance of this kind of analysis is underscored by Walker's proposition that mainstream interpretations of Machiavelli are never “innocent” because, over the years, they have “identified the nature of the problem[s] to be addressed and [have] situated [them] within a discursive space that both defines and limits the legitimate response to the problems” (Walker, 1989:40).²⁶

Walker (1988a) has also been concerned with the broader implications of this kind of discursive practice for traditional emphasis on the construction of *the* world. Faced by the dangers and complexities of modern global life, suggests Walker, we must cast off the legacy of uncritical judgement and “isolated privilege” characteristic of Western modernist discourse and listen, seriously, to marginalized voices, to different histories and cultural experiences (Walker, 1988a:22). We must acknowledge *other* worlds. And in an interesting articulation of intellectual themes, Walker's broadly-defined poststructuralist approach is wedded to a concern with “critical social movements” and their “emancipatory potential” (1988a:3).

The recent work of those associated with poststructuralist themes takes many of the classical concerns and problems of international relations and analyzes them in terms of the way dominant discourses discipline the ambiguity and contingency of global life. Locating the theme of anarchy as central to realist thought, Ashley (1987, 1988, 1989) has sought to demonstrate that its status as a given is a matter not of factual observation but of a particular discursive strategy—the notion of logocentrism—which disciplines understanding in the form of dualized hierarchies of meaning. This approach to analysis takes the coherent and uniform appearance of much

²⁶ For a similar reading of the neorealist's appropriation of Thucydides, see Garst (1989).

of “reality” and seeks to show in a variety of ways that what we take to be “real,” timeless, and universal “is the arbitrary imposition of a form of order” (Shapiro, 1987:14). In this context, Der Derian (1987) has historicized the notion of diplomacy to demonstrate how, in the absence of central agency of power in the international system, the power of diplomacy has been constituted and sustained by the discursive practice of the “diplomatic culture,” the mediation of humankind’s alienation from a socially constructed power. Shapiro has taken the fiction of Franz Kafka and Don DeLillo, with their questioning of the meaning of “fear” and “danger,” to illustrate how danger is bureaucratized in the contemporary era to such an extent that there is no longer any correlation between our immediate experience and the representations of experience we consume as citizens of a modern state (Shapiro, 1988). In a piece examining U.S. foreign policy towards Central America, Shapiro (1987:Ch. 3) has shown that foreign policy can be understood as the process of making “strange” the object under consideration in order to differentiate it from “us.” In the case of the construction of the “Central American Other,” the resultant combination of moral and geopolitical codes in U.S. foreign policy discourse works to make U.S. intervention in the region seem necessary, both in terms of American interests and those of the subject state. In this way other discourses are delegitimized or marginalized, thereby limiting the range of political options for policy.

On a related theme, Gusterson has demonstrated how an “Orientalist” discourse is at the heart of debates over nuclear nonproliferation in the Third World. Maligning Third World states as the repository of poverty, irrationality, or instability in the international system, this discourse serves to project everything that the West fears about itself and the nuclear world onto Third World states.²⁷ An argument that is supposedly about weapons and strategy is, thus, a strategy to fix identity (Gusterson, forthcoming). Klein has argued that discursive practices concerning peace and security (1987, 1988b, 1989) should be seen as part of the larger project of modernity which, by restricting the understanding of human community to the level of the state, forecloses consideration of alternatives. In particular, he argues, the “Western alliance” and NATO should be considered as a set of political and discursive practices seeking to defend a whole way of life rather than a spatial entity (Klein, 1988a, forthcoming). The same case has been made for U.S. foreign policy, that it is a series of political practices which locate danger in the external realm—threats of “individuality”, “freedom” and commerce—as a means of constructing the boundary between the domestic and the international, thereby bringing the identity of the United States into existence (Campbell, forthcoming).

These issues are of particular salience in the changing international environment brought on by the alteration to Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev. Joenniemi (forthcoming) has argued that in no longer living up to the strict “otherness” prescribed of it in the Cold War context, the Soviet Union is severely complicating the identity of the West which has for so long depended on an “enemy” to contain potential challenges to its own domestic social relations.²⁸ Changes of this kind are beginning to pose serious problems for contemporary security discourse, which has restricted considerations of security to the spatial exclusion of otherness (Dalby, 1988; Walker, 1988b). Such problems are evident in the debates over European defense strategies and the future of NATO, as Dillon has pointed out (1988a, 1988b, 1989) in demonstrating how specific policy debates occur within shared linguistic

²⁷ For other discussions of the role of discursive strategies in the constitution of the Third World see Escobar (1984) and Manzo (1990).

²⁸ For a detailed consideration of how the cold war text came into being in the United States, see Nathenson (1988).

frameworks that constitute “forms of life” and thereby direct and limit political options. These developments have led to a reconsideration of the role of nuclear weapons which focuses on the textual and interpretative codes that give meaning to otherwise inert objects, as with Luke (1989) employing insights from semiotics and symbolic interactionism to demonstrate how the function of nuclear weapons is as much one of signaling and signifying as preparation for actual war.

The impetus for this new dissent in International Relations scholarships, however, does not rest solely with the metatheoretical developments of the interdisciplinary debates. The tensions of the supposedly unified traditions of International Relations give those traditions an open-endedness that provides space for critical exploration of their constitution. For example, Ashley’s argument concerning the status of anarchy in International Relations discourse is made possible by the attention given in the mainstream of the discipline to nonstate actors in world politics.²⁹ This attention serves to problematize the state as the rational unitary actor. Critiques were developed from within the mainstream (such as Allison, 1971), but they failed to displace the tradition’s faith in the state as the “hard core” of international relations theory and practice. The argument made by Ashley and others (see Walker, 1988b) is not that the state is no longer important as either an actor or a presence in global politics. On the contrary, they have recognized that the state remains central to international relations. Its survival in the face of the internationalization of economic authority (among other global changes) makes it worthy of extensive consideration, but at a level of analysis substantially different but no less practical than that which has gone before. As Ashley argues, “the turn to nonstate actors renders radically unstable any attempt to represent a historical figure—the state or any other—as a pure presence, a sovereign identity that might be a coherent source of meaning and an agency of the power of reason in international history” (1988:234). Any depiction of the state as a sovereign identity in its own right is thus revealed as but one among many possible interpretations, all of which are possible only through “the manifestly political exclusion of others” (Ashley, 1988:251).

It is difficult to overstate the implications of this argument for the understanding of international relations, because it goes to the very heart of how “international relations” are constituted and understood, and how the discipline of International Relations understands its own history and contemporary role. Bull once argued that the theory of international relations was concerned with general propositions that may be advanced about the political relations among states (Bull, 1972). Such a proposition would seem to many to be unobjectionable to the point of banality, but it resolves the process of understanding global life in a particular way, through a division between theory and practice so that theory is outside of the world it purports simply to observe. The interpretive approach, in contrast, sees theory *as* practice: the theory of international relations is an instance in one site of the pervasive cultural practices that serve to discipline ambiguity. Experience has to be arrested, fixed, or disciplined for social life to be possible. The form that emerges through this process is thus both arbitrary and nonarbitrary: arbitrary in that it is one possibility among many, and nonarbitrary in “the sense that one can inquire into the historical conditions within which one way of making the world was dominant so that we now have a world that power has convened” (Shapiro, 1987:93). In this context, international relations theory is constitutive of—though by no means solely responsible for—the understanding of global life in terms of sovereignty and anarchy, inside and outside,

²⁹ Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986:771) recognized in a similar vein that the clash between epistemology and ontology in regime theory was not a product of their particular theoretical proclivities, but a Pandora’s box opened up when “the discipline gravitated toward an intersubjective ontology in the study of international regimes.”

state and world. The “world” we so often take for granted was not given by nature, convened by God, or planned by the intentions of statesmen: it came to be through multiple political practices related as much to the constitution of various subjectivities as to the intentional action of predetermined subjects.

Conclusion

We do not claim here to have addressed all the themes invoked in a discussion of modernism and the International Relations discipline. Many important issues have not been touched on at all, including, for example, works which seek to bring elements of contemporary feminism to the traditional subject matter of International Relations (see Elshtain, 1986; *Millennium*, 1989). We have sought in as comprehensive terms as possible to touch on some of the intersections of thought which recently have energized the theory/practice debates across the Western social sciences, and which are now at the heart of the critical interpretive debate in International Relations. We have indicated that while traditional notions of an alternative grand theory or synthesis are not part of the agenda of dissent (even if it were intellectually possible), there are common themes linking the post-Wittgensteinian tradition, the contributions of Winch and Kuhn, the perspectives of Critical Theory, and post-structuralism. These broad patterns of dissent come together around the issue of praxis, the question of theoretical analysis and global life in which poverty, militarization, and oppression are the norm. It is a dissatisfaction with the way that traditional approaches to International Relations (including Marxist orthodoxy) have confronted this issue that has provided the impetus for the dissent of the present. In the wake of (among other developments) the Vietnam War, a restructuring of the world economy, the rise of religious fundamentalism, the continuing struggle for survival of the great majority of the world’s peoples, and the new dangers and opportunities of the superpower relationship, critically inclined scholars have looked with dismay at orthodox responses that invoke and replicate the caricatured debates and theoretical understanding of the past. It is ironic, then, if not at all surprising, that counter-critiques of the new interpretive International Relations literature should allege a lack of “relevancy” to world politics on the part of the new dissent (see Keohane, 1988; Holsti, 1989).³⁰ One scholar has admonished those he terms the “reflectivists” for leading International Relations study into “purely theoretical debate” which deflects earnest researchers from the “real” issues in favor of a “programmatically diversionary philosophical discussion” (Keohane, 1988:382). Nothing much needs to be said about such a statement, given the arguments above. It simply underlines Frost’s (1986) observations about the “backwardness” of the discipline, and reaffirms the need for a more sophisticated, tolerant, and open-ended approach to questions of how we understand and explain global life.

This is not in any way to denigrate the efforts of those engaged in “concrete” empirical research. It is simply to restate that such research is never separate from the philosophical. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the concrete empirical research of recent dissent in International Relations. These works have been concerned with the practical, relevant issues of everyday global life: wealth and poverty, life and death, the struggle to understand, and the need to change. The new dissent has dealt with the traditional concepts of global politics: the state, war, anarchy,

³⁰ The “relevance” of mainstream International Relations scholarship is much heralded, but its role as a source of reform for the recognized problems of global life is a case waiting to be made. Those who claim relevance as a standard by which new work is to be assessed also invariably insist on a theory/practice divide which automatically limits the impact of any scholarship.

sovereignty, security, and peace. It has also concerned itself with the traditional subjects of global politics: nuclear strategy, superpower foreign policy, diplomacy, the defense issues of NATO, international regimes and the difficulties of interstate cooperation, the debt crisis, and underdevelopment. But it has done so in keeping with many of the insights of the interdisciplinary debates, refusing the universalist conceits that mask the illusory claim of a fit between “theory” and “reality” for an appreciation of the role political and social practices have in making the world.

The new dissent has been concerned with the discourse of international relations, supplementing concern about the subjects of international relations with a focus on the discourse of those subjects that makes them (and not others) historically possible. It has done so in the face of what Bernstein (1983:16–20) has called the “Cartesian anxiety,” the modernist proposition which asserts that either we have some sort of ultimate “foundation” for our knowledge or we are plunged into the void of the relative, the irrational, the arbitrary, the nihilistic.³¹

Faced with this Cartesian anxiety, orthodox scholarship in International Relations will probably continue to forget the silences, omissions, and limitations of the traditional approaches. But the ritual forgetting of the insights of scholars as diverse as Wittgenstein, Winch, Kuhn, Habermas, Foucault, and Derrida—a forgetting that might be characterized as post-Cartesian amnesia—can only increase the anxiety. Only by exorcising the unfounded but seductive idea that social and political life *has to be* organized by recourse to *either* one option *or* another, can we equip ourselves to deal with the enormous issues of praxis that we confront in global life. The dissent of the critical social theory and interpretive approaches in the discipline of International Relations offers a start in this direction.

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³¹ The Cartesian anxiety can be found even in the writing of a scholar who is aware of the importance of the philosophical debates discussed here. Biersteker (1989) has argued that “post-positivist scholarship does not offer us any clear criteria for choosing among the multiple and competing explanations it produces.” Biersteker finds solace in the evaluative procedures of logical positivism even though, as he admits, they are problematic. He then proceeds to call for some explicit discussions of evaluative criteria before he is willing to take the “leap from the problematic terrain of positivism into what could turn out to be a post-positivist void.”

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