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SPECIAL FEATURE
Self in Crisis:
Identity and the
Postmodern Condition

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SPECIAL
FEATURE

Modernity, Postmodernism, and Pragmatist Inquiry: An Introduction

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Postmodernism has been around for decades now, but it was not until the 1980s that social scientists in the United States started paying this intellectual current serious attention. Reasons for such a tardy and decidedly half-hearted reception are several. Postmodernists do not look kindly at the social sciences, accusing the latter of aiding the extant powers and furthering domination in society. They also question the philosophical foundations on which social scientists built their edifice—the very possibility of sound communication, objective reporting, valid generalizations, and theoretical knowledge.

Characteristically, symbolic interactionists were among the first in the social science community to join issue with postmodernism (e.g., Farberman 1980, 1991, 1992; Denzin 1986, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1991, 1992; Clough 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Krug and Laurel 1989; Katovich and MacMurray 1991; Kotarba 1991; Manning 1991, 1993; Fontana and Preston 1990; Fontana 1991; Shalin 1991; Young 1991; Fee 1992). Their somewhat marginal position in academia might have something to do with this. The issues that symbolic interactionism has highlighted since its inception and that assured its maverick status in American sociology bear some uncanny resemblance to the themes championed by postmodernist thinkers. Thus, interactionists have rejected the subject-object dualism, spectator's theory of knowledge, and correspondence theory of truth, opting instead for the subject-object relativity, participant observation, and perspectival approach to truth. The postmodernist critique of formal logic, positivism, and scientism also strikes a responsive cord with interactionist sociologists, as does

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the emphasis on the marginal, local, everyday, heterogenous, and indeterminate. One more point on which interactionist and postmodern perspectives seem to converge is self-identity, seen as socially constructed, emergent, and plural.

Unmistakable though it is, the affinity between interactionism and postmodernism is highly selective. The very pragmatist heritage that accounts for this affinity points to some deep fissures dividing the interactionist and postmodernist projects. All interactionists who address the issue acknowledge this hiatus, but their response to it is far from unanimous. According to Denzin (1990a), the time has come for interactionists to embrace fully postmodernism and jettison that portion of their own heritage which does not square with the radical postmodern stance. Farberman (1990) disagrees with this assessment; he welcomes certain postmodernist insights as a useful corrective to the interactionist research agenda but rejects its general thrust as inimical to pragmatism and its political sensibilities.

The essays gathered here reflect the divergent views found in the interactionist community about the interfaces between interactionism and postmodernism. This special journal feature, which grew out of a panel on the "Self in Crisis" at the 1992 Stone symposium, examines the impact that postmodern conditions have on human identity. The first two articles explore the fate of self in the age of mass media, overloaded communications, and hyperreal signification. Schwalbe acknowledges that the postmodern realities diminish the signifying powers central to the individual's selfhood and threaten to destroy human agency, but he rejects the postmodernist claim that the self is a fiction fostered by social circumstances, a text presupposing no author or agent beneath its culturally coded messages. Schwalbe finds his ammunition against the postmodernist thesis about the unreality of self in Erving Goffman, who saw in self an agency that resists institutional encroachment and strategically manages its appearances in order to evade social control and keep at bay entrenched organizational powers. It is this recalcitrant, biosocial self hiding in structural interstices behind its pious masks that Schwalbe, following Goffman, postulates as an undeniable presence and an authentic self. Creative agency is seriously threatened by the commodified experiences manufactured in late capitalism, Schwalbe concludes, but it is far from extinct, and it needs to be safeguarded and reenforced.

By contrast, Gottschalk supports the postmodernist thesis about the self's imminent demise. His article is based on fieldwork among the "Freaks"—a countercultural group from California whose members' lifestyle and utterings echo postmodernist themes. The Freaks' aversion to any metanarrative bearing on their marginality, their pessimism and attraction to the "dark side," as well as the fragmented views they entertain about themselves, are read by the author as a sign of the emerging postmodern world. Symbolic interactionists must take these changes seriously and overhaul their theory, concludes Gottschalk, or else risk becoming irrelevant.

Lyman and Kon do not stake an explicit position on the (dis)continuity between interactionism and postmodernism, but they furnish some fresh insight into the self,

its socially constructed nature, and the stiff resistance it offers to the historical forces threatening to erase its habitual core. Lyman examines the records pertaining to the U.S. courts' attempts to enforce the now defunct federal law which spelled out qualifications for acquiring American citizenship. The law stipulated that only "free white persons" and individuals of "African descent or nativity" could petition for naturalization as U.S. citizens, leaving it to the judges to decide who fit these designations. Strong evidence gathered by Lyman suggests that this undertaking was mired from the start by strategic ambiguity which left ample room for racial and ethnic biases to play themselves out to the detriment of people with mixed ethnic origins. The judges' routine reliance on ad hoc procedures (codified by Harold Garfinkel in his ethnomethological studies) suggests that the ethnoracial identity presumed by the courts was largely a legal fiction requiring hard interpretive labor to prop it up. Rejecting the hegemonic "text of racial identity" written by the state, Lyman calls for a flexible approach to the emancipated, existential self which constitutes itself within concrete socio-historical circumstances.

Kon's article illuminates a relatively unfamiliar terrain, postcommunist Russia, whose people find their customary identities undermined by the sweeping changes of the last few years. Relying partly on his own experience and partly on data from recent sociological surveys, Kon paints a poignant picture of the self that clings to its habitual core yet is increasingly forced to shed its obsolete facets, as the country moves toward democracy and a market economy. The situation in Russia and other postcommunist countries is exacerbated by the fact that the people there simultaneously face premodern (in some cases feudal) conditions alongside hypermodern realities created by contemporary mediatized systems. Kon's observations highlight the power of inertia rooted in the self and the problems it poses for Russian reformers.

Finally, Simon, Haney, and Buenteo analyze the interconnection between postmodern developments and the way of dying in American society. Few people nowadays die in the community where they were born, in the house they have occupied for a length of time, surrounded by the extended family and friends, comforted by the feeling that they have lived a meaningful life. The uncertainty permeating the modern world extends to the status reserved for a dying person, whose shrinking self-identity and ill-defined public role present awkward choices to dying individuals and those around them. In closing, the authors hint at the possibility of conceptualizing dying as a transition to a roleless existence in the hypermodern space of the future.

It is our hope that the present collection will add to the nascent dialogue between symbolic interactionism and postmodern thought. Since none of the articles addresses directly the philosophical and methodological implications that postmodern analysis has for interactionist research, it seems prudent to spell out these implications for the reader less familiar with the postmodernist project. The following discussion does not pretend to be exhaustive. Nor should it be read as an attempt to express or force a consensus within the interactionist community. The issues in question are vexing

ones and they will no doubt evoke an ambivalent response. My undertaking is prompted by the sense that symbolic interactionism is at a crossroads, that in years to come we might witness deepening divisions within our ranks, and it is grounded in my hope that the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction will be able to learn from other perspectives, accommodate divergent views, and stand its ground where need be.

* * * *

"[The] organ of knowledge must be turned around from the world of becoming," urged Plato ([430-355 B.C.] 1963, pp. 751-752, 753), "until the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being." This celebrated maxim is at the heart of a philosophical tradition which equates true knowledge with the firmest possible grasp the knower could lay on essence or being. Although it would eventually become the mainstream in the Occidental world, this tradition could never silence doubters who spurned all attempts to "draw soul away from the world of becoming to the world of being" (Plato, p. 753) and kept on searching for ways to reckon with things in flux, with eternal becoming. This alternative approach to knowledge drew its inspiration from Heraclitus ([c. 500 B.C.] 1969, pp. 70-71) who taught that "Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed."

The conflict between the two schools has persisted throughout Western history, and it is still very much felt in the modern/postmodern controversy. The question is, how can we capture the world of becoming in the language of being? The postmodernist answer is that we cannot, for our language is geared to track essence, substance, sameness, structure, and law, and it is pathetically inadequate in dealing with the fleeting, the emergent, the chaotic, the indeterminate. As we fix our gaze on some enduring properties, we cannot help glossing over the continuous metamorphoses the world undergoes right before our eyes; we lump together as "the same" things that are heterogenous and unique; we spot "identity" in the dizzying transformations the self undergoes in its daily life; we bill our theories as "true representations" of a reality which keeps on turning into something else just as we endeavor to squeeze it into our theoretical schema.

Why are we doing this? What makes us choose one linguistic artifice over another? Where does this mania for sameness and aversion to difference come from? There must be something in reason that accounts for this primordial fear of uncertainty and relentless drive toward identity. This something, postmodernists conclude along with Nietzsche (1968, p. 330), is the will to power, the unconscious desire that compels the individual to overlook the apparently accidental and fasten onto the fraudulently substantial:

> The world with which we are concerned is false, that is, is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is "in flux," as something in the state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for—there is no "truth." ... To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power.

And again,

> There exists neither "spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use.... Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power" (Nietzsche 1968, p. 266).

The genealogy of knowledge, as Nietzsche conceived his enterprise, is an inquiry into the monumental self-deception that Western reason has succumbed to in its quest for power, the quest that, according to postmodernists, has reached its apex in the modern era. The Age of Reason spawned an elaborate discourse about humanism, emancipation, freedom, and public good, but this narrative profusion merely masks a primordial hunger for power and class hegemony that relies on science in general and the human/social sciences in particular to secure control over the populace. "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge, and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power," wrote Foucault (1980a, p. 52); "there is no point of dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just the way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise." The will to power qua will to know produces varied social technologies designed to keep body and mind under control by infusing the two with programmed desires and selves. Compulsory education, prison reforms, psychiatric wards, general hospitals, military schools, and other social innovations that sprung to life in the Age of Reason all played their role in creating "man"—a thoroughly modern creature brought up to satisfy the needs of mass production in a capitalist society. To be a self, a subject, a universal human being, means to be constituted by social technologies and normalizing discourses in accordance with the system's hegemonic requirements. "Confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as subject—who is 'subjected'—is he who obeys" (Foucault 1980b, p. 85). As to the professed concern for human rights and legality on which modernity prides itself, this should not be taken at face value, for all such declarations are auxiliary tools in the relentless struggle for supremacy:

> We have entered a phase of juridical regression in comparison with the pre-seventeenth-century societies we are acquainted with; we should not be deceived by all the Constitutions framed throughout the world since the French Revolution, the Codes written and revised, a whole continuous and clamorous legislative activity: these were the forms that made an essentially normalizing power acceptable (Foucault 1980b, p. 144).

Derrida takes a different tack in his bid to unmask modernity's hidden agenda, but his writings reflect the familiar postmodernist themes: objectivity, representation, and truth, along with other abstractions endemic to Occidental culture, are fictions masking reason's repressed desires, its perennial longing for presence, for an authentic moment in which being is revealed to the subject in its original purity and logic. So strong is the West's need for presence that its intellectuals readily sacrifice the heterogeneous to the unitary, the inconstant to the stable, the uncertain to the determinate. Yet this one-sided focus on being only defers attention to its other, to the non-being, which betrays itself in the binary categories: subject/object, mind/matter, truth/falsehood, nature/culture, and similar dichotomies inherent in our language. "We could thus take up all the coupled oppositions on which philosophy is constructed, and from which our language lives," explained Derrida (1973, p. 148), "not in order to see opposition vanish but to see the emergence of the other, the other as 'differed' within the systemic ordering of the same (e.g., the intelligible as differing from the sensible, as sensible deferred; the concept as differed-differing intuition, life as differing-differed matter; mind as differed-differing life; culture as differed-differing nature; and [so on]." Derrida's deconstructive method aims at exposing the strategies of deception used by writers to cover up, or endlessly defer coming to grips with, the impossibility of getting through to things themselves and apprehending a genuine presence presupposed by our knowledge. Deconstruction can be seen as dialectics in reverse: whereas the latter seeks a higher synthesis in which the thesis and antithesis unite in a harmonious bliss, the former takes apart a proposition in order to show that it conceals within itself an unresolved contradiction, that it suppresses some unrecognized alterity screaming to get out from under the rhetorical rubble.

In addition to Nietzsche's genealogy, Derrida owes much to Freud's efforts to access the unconscious, conceptualized this time not so much as a psychological phenomenon (although it remains deeply rooted in desire) as a sort of linguistic a priori governed by the logic of the sign. A key insight here comes from Saussure's semiotics with its notion that linguistic sign is binary in nature, comprising the signifier and the signified, its meaning ascertainable only in and through the relationship to other signs. By analyzing which signs are invoked to elucidate a particular point and which ones are absent from the text (or present only as invisible traces and inaudible meanings), the deconstructive reading grasps the unconscious linguistic structure governing the writing, and it does so without recourse to—indeed, in spite of—the author's intentions: "Reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the schemata of the language that he uses" (Derrida 1976, p. 158). A good example is Derrida's reading of Rousseau (Derrida 1976, pp. 95-268), which purports to show how the same structure of desire, manifest in the author's persistent recourse to certain linguistic props, informs Rousseau's writings on language and his confessions about his autoerotic practices. Whatever reason speaks about, it cannot conceal the traces

of unreason buried in its unconscious, waiting to be disclosed through a skillful deconstruction.

Baudrillard pushes postmodernist thinking toward areas more familiar to interactionists. Taking his clue from Thorstein Veblen and amplifying it with his own original insights into the age of mass media, mass production, and mass consumption, Baudrillard (1981, p. 63) reaches this radical conclusion:

> The empirical "object," given in its contingency of form, color, material, function and discourse (or, if it is a cultural object, in its aesthetic finality) is a myth. How often it has been wished away! But the object is *nothing*. It is nothing but the different types of relations and significations that converge, contradict themselves, and twist around it, as such—the hidden logic that not only arranges this bundle of relations, but directs the manifest discourse that overlays and occludes it.[1]

What this means is that the signifier has severed its relationship with the signified and become a substitute for and a simulation of reality. In the medieval world, Baudrillard (1975, p. 83) contends, symbols had an unbroken bond with reality, fashion and counterfeit were unknown, and the individual's identity was brutally and unequivocally stamped by the rigid estate system. Everyone was then exactly what each appeared to be. This stage was superseded first by the age of production, which introduced fashion, counterfeit strategies, and multiple selves, and then by the age of simulation, which has dispensed completely with any similitude between appearance and reality:

> The object-become-sign no longer gathers its meaning in the concrete relationship between two people. It assumes its meaning in its differential relationship to other signs.... [Today] it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.... *The very definition of the real becomes: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction* (Baudrillard 1981, p. 66; 1983, pp. 25, 146).

We live in a hyperreal world where signs have acquired a life of their own, referring to nothing beside themselves and serving no other purpose than that of symbolic exchange. Individuals caught in this exchange are convinced that the objects they consume have an intrinsic use value, that consumers are real selves doing real choosing. A closer analysis reveals that "use value is fundamentally an alibi for sign exchange value" and "the system can only produce and reproduce individuals as elements of the system [which] cannot tolerate exceptions." In other words, individuals are the ones who are continuously reproduced by the symbolic exchange system with all their selves and wants and who amount to something only under "*the total constraint of the code*" (Baudrillard 1981, pp. 55, 86, 66). In its postmodern incarnation, power no longer forces individuals to comply: "power *seduces*," it rules by luring and ceaselessly renewing a "cycle of seduction, challenge and ruse" (Baudrillard 1987, pp. 43, 46). Hypermodern dupes inhabiting a hyperreal world, today's individuals are

busy assuring each other that they crave things they purchase and consume for their use value, when the sole (un)conspicuous object of each consumptive exercise is its sign value or power to certify the user's social worth. Postmodern society is a masquerade whose participants don the masks of success to conceal the fact that they have no faces. The mass media's unmasking zeal contributes to this charade by constantly threatening to expose the reality supposedly hidden under the official and unofficial disguises (Watergate was no "scandal," says Baudrillard). Social scientists also have something to add to the postmodern ruse, "Here sociology is most of the time both a dupe and an accomplice: it takes the ideology of consumption for consumption itself" (Baudrillard 1981, p. 61). In sum, the postmodern age is "the age of simulacrum and simulation," the domain of "a hyperreal sociality, where the real is confused with the model," where "referential reason disappears" (Baudrillard 1983, pp. 12, 53, 102), and where "any liberated form of speech constitutes one more turn in the spiral of power" (Baudrillard 1987, p. 26).

I should mention one more figure central to the postmodern movement, Jean-Francois Lyotard. His slim volume, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, drew attention to the quiet revolution within the so-called hard sciences, which seem to have abandoned the old positivist fables about certainty, causality, determinacy, and other paragons of scientific thought. Today's scholars increasingly occupy themselves with postmodern mindtwisters like "singularities," "discontinuities," "incommensurability," "paralogy," "chaos," "indeterminacy," "fracta," and "catastrophes," and their willingness to thematize these phenomena not as residual but strategic properties marks a break with classical modern science (Lyotard 1984, pp. 58-61). Similar awareness, Lyotard urges, needs to be cultivated among the practitioners of the human and social sciences. Notions like "progress," "emancipation," and "rationality" that abound in these disciplines are no longer tenable, for they are self-referential and unreflexive at the same time. Their users deploy them as theoretical descriptions of facts, yet facts they purport to describe are discernable only if we presuppose a given theory to be true. Behind this practice, one invariably finds some grand narrative legitimizing this circular reasoning but escaping critical scrutiny:

> I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.... I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.... The narrative function loses its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyagers, its great goal (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv).

Just as Foucault, Lyotard detects a vital link between the scientific discourse of truth and the political discourse of power. The two are in many ways interchangeable, and each borrows from the other's language games to legitimize its enterprises. "From

this point of view, the right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just, even if the statements confined to the two authorities differ in nature. The point is that there is strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and politics: they both stem from the same perspective, the same 'choice' if you will—the choice called the Occident" (Lyotard 1984, p. 8). This intermingling of narratives has proven costly, as can be gleaned from the horrors the Age of Reason visited on its victims. "The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience" (Lyotard 1984, pp. 81-82). Disclosing the bond between truth and power and showing how the two feed on each other is a must if we are to put behind the inanities of the modern.

It is easier to say what postmodernists are against—modernity, rationality, positivism, grand narrative, domination—than to fathom what they are for. Statements like "Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name" (Lyotard 1984, p. 82) are not particularly instructive. There is also some dissension among postmodernists about the best strategies for coping with and accounting for the postmodern condition. Still, the postmodern project has some identifiable traits. Its research agenda goes back to Nietzsche's hermeneutics of suspicion and his strenuous desire to look behind the mask, to find a hidden agenda, an unconscious interest working behind the scenes: "Every philosophy also *conceals* philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word also a mask" (Nietzsche [1886] 1966, p. 229). Postmodernist ethics and politics flow from the same wellspring:

> Making men smaller and more governable is desired as 'progress'! ... democratic institutions: they enhance weakness of the will.... Means of *enduring* it: the reevaluation of all values. No longer joy in certainty but in uncertainty; no longer "cause and effect" but the continuously creative; no longer will to preservation but to power (Nietzsche 1968, pp. 79-80, 545).

Just as their illustrious predecessor did, postmodernists show a great interest in reason's hidden agenda, in the irrational, and they favor aesthetically tinged methods for recovering the heterogenous and tracking the logical discontinuity that scientific gaze tends to occlude. The postmodernists' revulsion against power and authority gives their pronouncements a somewhat anarchistic flavor, and their contempt for collective action adds a cynical touch to their ethics.

Derrida's project of grammatology centers on written texts; it lays out ground rules for deciphering the linguistic unconscious, tracking the faint traces of the other suppressed in the explicit textual structures, studying the "world under erasure" which fades away the moment we try to grasp it in definitive terms. The grammatologist forswears any attempt to get to the bottom of things, to unveil the true substance of

unconscious, to pass a moral judgment on the writer or extract a political lesson from the deconstructed text, for the text itself is produced not so much by the author—a term virtually discarded by postmodernists—but by the unthematized linguistic code which, through incessant intertextual borrowing, cross-signification, and metonymy, produces writing and generates text. Deconstruction in this sense "amounts to annulling the ethical qualification and to thinking of writing beyond good and evil" (Derrida 1976, p. 314).

Foucault bills his project as "the history of the Same—of that, which for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities" (1973, p. xxiv). His genealogical approach steers the researcher toward the study of "epistemes," "regimes of truth," "forms of discourse" which generate historically specific technologies for exercising power over mind and body. Of particular interest to Foucault and his followers is modernity and its byproduct—"man"—who has evolved in the last two centuries and is now beginning to show signs of disappearing: "It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (Foucault 1973, p. xxiii). Knowledge in a postmodern key will have no need to invoke author, self, subject, or any other historical fiction of this kind, for "the 'author' is a function of discourse" (Foucault 1980c, p. 124; cf. Barthes 1977, pp. 142-148); rather, it will focus on the anonymous economies of power, technologies of domination, and regimes of truth colonizing the human body and stultifying the mind to fit production requirements. It is possible to glean a certain political agenda in Foucault's writings, even though he assiduously avoids value judgments. Foucault talks about "resistance to power," "confounding domination," "liberating local discourses," and "the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth" (Foucault 1980a, pp. 109-133). The fact that power and truth are inseparable does not mean that their relationship could not be rendered benign: "It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault 1980a, p. 132).

Baudrillard's agenda is largely a negative one. The world of becoming makes chasing after reality a ridiculous undertaking. "You know that my way is to make ideas appear, but as soon as they appear immediately try to make them disappear," Baudrillard (1987, p. 128) confides to an interviewer, "Strictly speaking nothing remains but a sense of dizziness, with which you cannot do anything." And so, he rejects theoretical knowledge completely: "It is impossible to think that theory can be nothing more than fiction. Otherwise no one would bother producing theory any more.... Somewhere there must be a limit that constitutes the real in order for there to be a theory.... theory is simulation" (Baudrillard 1987, pp. 108, 133). Baudrillard particularly

singles out sociology as a fake science that pretends to study society as real while busily partaking in the general mystification. "I am a metaphysician, perhaps a moralist, but certainly not a sociologist," inveighs Baudrillard (1987, p. 84). "The only 'sociological' work I can claim is my effort to put an end to the social." As to his political, or rather "moralistic," agenda, Baudrillard espouses a personal, inchoate, spontaneous revolt in the form of conning the con man and laughing off the powers:

> For in terms of force relations, power always wins, even if it changes hands as revolutions come and go. [One cannot] exorcise power by force. Rather, each person knows deep down that any form of power is a personal challenge, a challenge to the death, and one that can only be answered by a counterchallenge to break the logic of power or, even better to enclose it in a circular logic. Such is the nature of this counterchallenge—nonpolitical, nondialectical, and nonstrategic.... [W]e need a symbolic violence more powerful than any political violence.... This is why *parody*, the reversal of signs or their hyperextension, can touch power more deeply than any force relation (Baudrillard 1987, pp. 58-59).

Lyotard's challenge to modernity is more academic by comparison. He wants to abolish the monopoly that assorted orthodoxies have enjoyed over truth and knowledge production, to release from official control local forms of knowledge, and to liberate knowing and its creative potential. Taking issue with Habermas's theory of communicative action, he opposes any efforts at consensus building and policing rational discourse. "Such consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reenforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard 1984, p. xxv). Spurn the authority, spin a language game of your own, be as daring and creative as you can be, and you will have realized the postmodern blueprint for a sensitive and fulfilling way of life.

* * * *

There are many things about postmodernism that make a dialogue with its proponents difficult and give unsympathetic critics an excuse to dismiss it out of hand. For one thing, there is nothing petite or humble about the postmodernist narrative: it is as grand in its design, sweeping in its conclusions, and intolerant to its opponents as a narrative could be. If every narrative is a self-referential fiction to be met with incredulity, there is no reason to exempt the postmodern philippics from this verdict. Also, it is more than likely that dialogue across theoretical divides will grow stale when all references to reality, evidence, and truth are "verboten" and the very possibility of theoretical knowledge is dismissed as so much nonsense. These are just some of the problems in dealing with radical postmodernism spotted by numerous commentators (Benhabib 1984; Habermas 1987; Baumann 1988, 1990; Featherstone 1988; Heller and Feher

1989; Kellner 1989; Ellis 1989; Wellmer 1990; Agger 1990; Gergen 1991; Rosenau 1992; Dickens and Fontana 1994). Still, there is much in the postmodernist narrative that is valuable, that interactionists could relate to, and that occasionally sounds like old pragmatist wisdom.

About a century ago, pragmatists revolted against the metaphysics of being and threw in their lot with "the philosophies of flux" (Dewey [1929] 1958, p. 50). In their own way, they sought to decenter reason, to show that subjectivity, consciousness, and self are not entities residing in the individual but emergent processes rooted in transactions between organisms. In his classical article "Does Consciousness Exist?", James ([1904] 1970, p. 4) denied that "the word [consciousness] stands for an entity" and represents an "aboriginal staff or quality of being," urging instead that it is "a function in experience which thoughts perform." By the same token, James ([1909] 1967, p. 80; [1909] 1970, pp. 208, 309, 106, 128) gave up "intellectualistic logic, the logic of identity"; rejected the truth theory that presupposes a "world complete in itself, to which thought comes as a passive mirror, adding nothing to fact"; exposed "rationalism's disdain for the particular, the personal, and the unwholesome"; and embraced "a pluralistic and incompletely integrated universe" that "*may exist in distributive form, in the shape not of all but of a set of eaches.*"

Mead and Dewey continued this line of reasoning, arguing against the correspondence theory of truth because it ignores that "what a thing is in nature depends not simply on what it is in itself but also on the observer" (Mead, 1929, p. 428). They opposed the then-common view that "the process of search, investigation, reflection, involved in knowledge ... *must* be outside of what is known" and registered their deep reservation about the nomothetic procedure which "enables things qualitatively unlike and individual to be treated as if they were members of a comprehensive, homogeneous, or nonqualitative system" (Dewey [1929] 1960, pp. 23, 241). It was an article of faith for Dewey that we live in "a universe which is not all closed and settled, which is still in some respects indeterminate and in the making ... an open universe in which uncertainty, choice, hypotheses, novelties and possibilities are naturalized" (Dewey [1927] 1950, p. 52). Mead (n.d., b8, f1) fully concurred with this judgment: "Uncertainty does not belong simply to values, it belongs to the facts as well." Finally, both explored the far-reaching implications of the fact that "communication is a condition of consciousness" (Dewey [1929] 1958, pp. 180-181), that mind "is social to the very core" (Mead 1934, p. 141), that reason is not a substance privileged in its access to being outside itself but a biosocial, semiotic process embedded in nature and distinguished precisely by its capacity to grasp the world perspectivally, in its endless possibilities and permutations.

The similarities end, however, at the point where postmodernists mount their attack on human agency. Postmodernists paint a topsy-turvy universe in which objects possess their owner, languages speak the speaker, texts inscribe their authors, discourses turn participants into their mouthpieces, powers imbue the body with

desires, and epistemes send individuals marching in class formations to replicate the existing order of things. Such is the macabre, Kafkaesque world postmodernists purport to inhabit. Characteristically, it starts with a seminal metaphor: say, the self (subject, consciousness, society) can be analyzed as a text. The stakes are raised when someone claims that everything is the text. And soon we are asked to believe that, "*There is nothing outside the text.*"[2] (Derrida 1976, p. 158, italics in the original). Even at this point, it is important not to lose sight of what is valid in postmodernist ruminations, namely, that reality is chaotic, evolving, elusive, that we cannot grasp it otherwise than in terms supplied by our language, that something is invariably lost and distorted as we try to present our experience to ourselves and to others—but all this is a far cry from saying that reality is a fiction, object is nothing, truth is a pernicious lie, and the self is an adjunct to power.

Derrida (1976, pp. 48-50) sees Peirce as a precursor to his grammatology and quotes him to the effect that each sign must be explicated through other signs in a never-ending chain of successive interpretations. Yet, he reads Peirce selectively, taking from his semiotics only what accords with Saussurian semiology and ignoring the key role that Peirce assigned to action in the signification process. Saussurian linguistics adopted by Derrida are binary: the world exists as the relationship between the signifier and the signified, meaning is predicated on the bond one sign forms to another, and interpretation is compelled by the rules encoded in grammar. By contrast, Peirce distinguishes several qualitatively different types of interpretants: emotions, physiological reaction, conceptual representation, and collective habit. "We must therefore conclude," writes Peirce (1931-1958, p. 7), "that the ultimate meaning of any sign consists either of an idea predominantly of feeling or of acting or being acted on." Which is his way of saying that interpretation does not remain enclosed within the syntactic/semantic field where one intellectual sign begets the other but is broken off for the sake of feeling and action which test conceptual signs, validate their meaning, and correct abstractions that do not mesh with things. The meaning of the red light at the intersection is not exhausted by its relation to the yellow and green lights; rather, it is interpreted, and thereby constituted, by motorists' actions. If drivers come to a standstill when they see the red light, the sign means "stop," "cease moving," "wait for further notice"; if they keep crossing the intersection on red, the sign means something else or nothing at all. The signifying process is not short-circuited on itself; it goads us to conduct ourselves beyond the symbolic domain into the world of material practice, where our thought has a chance to prove itself. Hence, the Peircean ([1877] 1955, p. 29) maxim, "thought is essentially an action" and the Meadian (1938, p. 65) generalization, "the unit of existence is the act."

Does this mean that there is nothing outside action, that reality is a fiction? Unlike postmodernists, pragmatists do not jump to such a conclusion. Reality as a self-enclosed, immobile being independent from us does not interest pragmatists, but objective reality—reality insofar as it becomes an object of our collectively signifying

practices—does. Such a reality has our thought, action, and symbols already embedded in it. It is always already-constituted reality. Its obduracy is due not just to things themselves but to our ingenuity and collective efforts which neutralize some connections, bring to the fore others, and mix things together in a novel way, making them more enduring and predictable than they would be otherwise. Seen from this angle, reality is a lot more than a text; it is comprised of things and events bound together into a semi-ordered/semi-chaotic whole by our emotions, beliefs, and deeds. It is contingent upon transformative action that starts with an "impulse" that sparks "perception" that provokes "manipulation" and is resolved in the "consummation" of a project at hand (Mead 1938, pp. 23-25). The thing as an object does not precede an action, "The physical thing arises in manipulation" (Mead 1938, pp. 197-198). Mead repeated this point again and again: there is no objective reality without tactile, physical, practical manipulation that brings human bodies in contact with other physical bodies and tests our hypothetical constructs. In this testing process—the process that is fundamentally social—the individual acquires subjectivity and the thing becomes an object. Both objectivity and subjectivity evolve through action. The two belong together as poles of the same active continuum. If there is a subject, there must be an object, and vice versa. The two have presence and reality but only in situ and in actu. And both remain perennially problematic, emergent, and contingent on the social process called practice.

The only element from this pragmatic progression that is left in the postmodernist analysis is consummation, understood chiefly as a passive symbolic consumption, requiring little probing and imposed on us by some production or exchange system. An epitome of subjectivity as subjugation, the postmodernist notion of consumption is a vestige of the Cartesian dualism, with its ghost-in-the machine imagery and the subject qua receptacle for divinely inspired codes. Humans appear to be in a permanent state of receivership, never becoming actors who can produce and not merely re-produce the existing codes and conditions. That is *not* what pragmatists have in mind when they talk about human subjectivity. Being a subject or, more broadly, being human is to be a thing among things, to have a body wedged between other bodies, to feel pain like any other sentient creature, to transact with all the actively embodied beings, to duplicate oneself in a linguistic code, and more than that—to forge original codes, criticize old meanings, shed ossified selves, and project new identities into the future. That is, incidentally, how postmodernists perceive themselves. Everybody else is a dupe revelling in fool's gold, a TV freak who "indulges in systematic, nonselective viewing" (Baudrillard 1981, p. 55) and cheerfully swallows whatever nonsense the powerful heap on their captive audience. It is those dupes glued to their TV sets who have forced Baudrillard (1981, pp. 75, 86) to opine that "the individual is non-existent," that "[w]e must abandon the constitutive social structure of the individual, and even his lived perception of himself." Again, we see a sound insight driven to a point where its meaning becomes barely audible.

That self-identity is discontinuous and problematic has been known for some time. Locke, Hume, and Kant drove this message home centuries ago, and interactionists have been busy documenting it for years. Self, for pragmatists, is real and objective, not in the essentialist but the pragmatist sense. It has emotional substance and active presence that could not be wished away or read as a text carrying whatever meaning the reader might want to project on it. Not if you deal with a Bosnian woman ravaged by war and marauding soldiers, a child who learns that mommy and daddy no longer love each other and are going to split, or a worker with a pink slip in hand, wondering how to make the next rent payment. This is not to suggest that self is a unitary, continuous presence. Self is a nonclassically propertied object, a quantum of social reality that can take the role of the other, make a quantum leap, and reveal yet a different face on a moment's notice. Whatever continuity or identity one finds in these emergent transformations is valid only until further notice. If you preach environmentalism but refuse to recycle your garbage, declare support for trade unions but decline to donate them your time, or pronominalize the word "individual" in a gender-inclusive fashion but always expect your spouse to spend the night with a sick child—your identity is bogus, a failed project. If you practice what you preach and follow through on your promises, on the other hand, you have a demonstrable identity. For identity is not something given once and for all but an ongoing accomplishment. Some have more of it than others. Ultimately, it is a moral project you choose to undertake. You will fumble on more than one occasion, break your self into pieces, then try to put them back together, always wondering if you are what you claim, seem, or would like to be, sometimes being disgusted with yourself, sometimes feeling okay.

Have recent electronic advances made pragmatically understood identity obsolete? Should we conclude with Gergen (1991, p. 7) that "selves as possessors of real and identifiable characteristics—such as rationality, emotions, inspiration, and will—are dismantled"? I do not think so. Although the information glut tends to overload our selves, we learn to cope with the intrusive social forces and protect our emotional core. You can slow down, jettison unsustainable commitments, accept the inconsistencies, poke fun at yourself, roll with the punches, or, when all fails, plead temporary insanity. Reason and logic alone are not sufficient tools in putting together the incongruous bits and pieces which go into our self-awareness. We need hard emotional work to manage uncertainty and navigate through the treacherous currents of everyday life without loosing ourselves in the process. Feelings and emotions come handy because they are particularly sensitive to indeterminacy and uncertainty; they are the first to signal the break in our self-production, to weld together the incongruent facets of our self, to alert us to the fact that some repair work is needed to patch the differences between our words and deeds. Emotional intelligence and intelligent emotions are the key to a sane, even if not fully rational, existence in today's chaotic environment.

The massive assault that the media wages on our self-agency is a serious threat, but once again, postmodernists overstate their case. We are not all "wired to the

media," "seduced by power," and turned into "cultural dupes." Liberation might be as close as the switch on your TV set. More importantly, the hypermedia carries within itself the seeds of its undoing: it deconstructs itself. What Denzin (1986, p. 200) takes to be "*the central problematic of the postmodern period; that is who owns the data bank*?", suggests that power in the supermedia age is very much dispersed. For there is a continuous proliferation of databases and their owners competing with each other for waning public attention. Some of the thorniest problems we face today stem from the unprecedented power fragmentation that characterizes contemporary democratic polities and that makes a concerted policy making and execution increasingly impossible. If Baudrillard (1975, p. 145) is right and "power consists in the monopoly of the spoken word," then today's conditions make power more porous, dispersed, and ineffective than ever. There could be no "monopoly of the code" (Baudrillard 1975, p. 127) where everyone is potentially a code-maker, codes breed like crazy and community standards are routinely violated. The media does not speak in one voice: it routinely contradicts itself, fosters cynicism in its audiences, and frequently fails to sway public opinion to its side (sometimes one wishes the media had half the power it is alleged to wield). Not to be ignored, also, are counter-media practices: wacky packages warning kids not to take ads too seriously, public service messages teaching consumers skepticism about products and manufacturers, televised debates where politicians do their damndest to expose each other's hidden agendas. How effective these practices are is hard to say, but they are not irrelevant, and they certainly would not lead a viewer to confuse Disneyland with reality. Yes, I believe that most of us, postmodernists included, know the real thing when we see one, be this cold beer, safe car, honest effort, or genuine affection. And contrary to the postmodernist urgings, we are not about to dump the distinction between truth and falsehood, nor are we as gullible as to belive that power and truth are synonymous.

Having dispensed with things themselves, postmodernists put in their place a new entity—power in itself which, we are told, grows devishly cunning in the modern era. There it is, invading our bodies, provoking our desires, forging our selves, lurking behind cruel social technologies, punishing rebels, and rewarding conformists. As wheels of power keep on turning, new strengths are added to the old ones. Modern medical care and hygienic practices help power establish control over body; the institutionalization of psychiatry allows it to isolate the recalcitrant individuals from the pliable ones; universal education lets power shape its future servants' minds; the abolition of torture and capital punishment spares the body for machine labor; organized philanthropy helps earmark and contain deviance; human rights and legal reforms serve to normalize official discourses and preserve the hegemony, and so on and on. This is a curiously functionalist vision which coaxes us to believe that everything happens for a purpose and serves to maintain the existing order of things. It is reminiscent of Durkheim's ([1915] 1965, p. 244) insistence on "the fact that it is society alone which is the author" and his endless elucidation of functions, which are

ultimately reduced to one: to affirm solidarity and preserve order. Too honest and perceptive an observer, Foucault (1980a, p. 70) notices the problem himself. After reviewing his work done in the 1960s and early 1970s, he concedes: "None of it does more than mark time. Repetitive and disconnected, it advances nowhere. Since indeed it never ceases to say the same thing, it perhaps says nothing." Ever since Foucault (1980a, pp. 82-108) would accentuate "resistance," "local criticism," "*insurrection of subjugated knowledges*," "the efficacy of dispersed and discontinuous offensives," all of which signal the movement away from power as repression to power as management of desire. What Foucault never fully acknowledges, however, is that resistance, rebellion, and opposition are concepts implying a stance-taking and, therefore, some form of subjectivity. Nor does he level with the fact that the drive to know is not identical with the desire to dominate. Contrary to Foucault, power has not always needed truth to get its way and truth made itself felt without recourse to power. There is power as domination and power as empowerment, power as control over others and power as self-mastery. What could be more grounded in hegemony than the relationship between parent and child: heavy surveillance, toilet training, rote learning, moral nudging, and guilt trips. Ample opportunity to squelch whatever independence the poor devil might have had. Yet, more often than not, this domination yields human beings able to act autonomously and raise their own truth claims against the very society that worked overtime to screw them up.

Postmodernists are far too hasty in giving up on truth. Just because truth as correspondence does not hold water and is susceptible to abuse, we should not judge it useless or worse. Not unless you can come to a police officer, ask him to fetch you a beer, and realistically hope to get one. If you can pull this trick, I would be willing to concede that there is no difference between truth and falsehood, denotation and connotation, illusion and reality. Otherwise, it would seem prudent to retain some such distinction. Postmodernists would counter that the example is banal and the judgment entailed is trivial. Sure, as is our capacity to tell apart poisonous snakes from nonpoisonous ones, a safe distance between cars in traffic and an unsafe one, a would-be robber and a stranded motorist, money in your own bank account and in your company's safe—all these judgments are trivial, except for the consequences that would befall those who failed to make the right call in these and a myriad other cases that confront us in everyday life. Granted, such truths have little to do with the practices we encounter in science and politics, where theoretical validity claims carry with them tacit value judgements. A more detailed statement about truth would read something like this: truth is a historically specific, socially sanctified, practically accomplished, radically incomplete, and subject to the ongoing revision of identity between subject and object, knowledge and reality, theory and practice. Among other things, this means that knowing is a practical affair, not just spinning concepts for their own sake. We mold things into objects to make them fit our theoretical constructs just as we adjust our rationalities in light of our practical efforts. This pragmatist

approach goes back to Peirce, who was the first to conceive truth as provisional, grounded in inquiry, and certified by the community of inquirers. Peirce's pragmatist successors moved one step further. They understood that truth is a powerful weapon and that it has often been sacrificed to political expediency, but they did not give up on truth. Certainly, Dewey and Mead would have rejected Foucault's (1980b, p. 64) spurious attempts to forge a link between scientific truth and forced confession, between "the production of truth according to the old juridico-religious model of confession, and the extortion of confidential evidence according to the rules of scientific discourse." The medieval inquisition produced its "truth" in private, by inflicting pain and suffering on its victims and submitting confessions as the ultimate proof that speaks for itself. Scientific truth is rooted in the collective procedures, replicable experiments, debates open to interested parties, and scientific inferences subject to continuous revisions. In both cases, we find power deeply implicated but used to profoundly different effects: holy inquisition claims a monopoly on power, scientific inquiry disperses it widely and manages it democratically. No one can claim a monopoly on terminologies, let alone truth claims, in a scientific community, where we typically find several theories vying for attention and a great premium placed on new theories and linguistic instrumentalities. Any truth claim is potentially open to challenge here, and none relies on self-confessions as ultimate facts. Power and truth, politics and science, are interlocked but not fully interchangeable. If pragmatists went to such a great length to link scientific and democratic procedures, it is because they saw here the best hope for "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural" (Foucault 1980a, p. 132). Warts and all, science is the best available model of democracy in action; it stands for a community whose members take pains to inquire, examine the evidence, confer with each other, debate their positions publicly, dissent from the majority, form shifting coalitions—in short, operate in the democratic regime of truth. To be sure, the reality of normal science is never as benign, but it is far from the caricature that postmodernists paint when they talk about the rigid, hegemonic, positivistic scientific establishment. Science and democracy share common grounds; when the two part company, both pay a heavy price. The pragmatist focus on democracy, therefore, has a profound ethical and philosophical basis. Democracy is a historically specific mode of managing uncertainty that breaks the (state, party, class) monopoly on the means of production of reality as objective and meaningful, limits experts' control over terminological frames through which indeterminacy can be legitimately terminated, expands the circle of people who could raise truth claims, and maximizes opportunities for everybody to participate in public discourse (Shalin 1986b, 1992a).

It is a lame "promise that truth can be spoken to power, as if truth is outside power," (Clough 1992a, p. 360) asserts one interactionist who endorsed postmodernism. "We, like the Chicago sociologists of old, have contributed to an opiate of the masses; the opiate that says sociological knowledge will protect this democratic society from itself,"

says another interactionist come postmodernist (Denzin 1992, p. 144). Sociology might not save democracy from itself, but the two stand to help each other. The Chicago sociologists' commitment to democracy and its institutions should not be trivialized. Jane Addams gathered the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed and tried to help them in Hull House. John Dewey spent his free time working in an experimental grade school, honing a curriculum for progressive education. George Mead surveyed the immigrants' homes in Chicago and helped hammer out agreements between garment union strikers and their employers. William Thomas marched with demonstrators demanding suffrage for women. Were our precursors dupes who willingly or unwillingly did the power's bidding? I beg to differ (see Shalin 1989). The old-guard pragmatist intellectuals did not hesitate to challenge power. Workmen's compensation, minimum wages, child labor prohibition, food and drug laws, antitrust measures, women's suffrage, electoral reforms, and many other legislative initiatives from this era owe their passage to progressive pragmatists like Dewey and Mead. I do not think these reforms were victories for the powerful. Some of the progressives' hopes for a humane society might seem naive today, but this is no reason to deny them the courage of their convictions or dismiss them as capitalist stooges brewing opium for the people. These were fighters who believed in radical democracy where "actual and concrete liberty of opportunity and action is dependent upon equalization of the political and economic conditions under which individuals are alone free *in fact, not in some abstract metaphysical way*" (Dewey 1946, p. 116) and who, unlike some interactionists claiming their legacy, were willing to put their own time and resources into politics. Judged from their experience, it is possible to challenge power on behalf of truth—not an absolute truth that is free from value judgment but a heartfelt, painful truth that is rooted in alternative theories and facts and is carried out by committed communities of inquirers whose subversive criticism democracies have to tolerate if not encourage. The best way to challenge power is to protect democratic institutions and let public inquiry, with its internal safeguards, dissensions, and revisions, run its course. This approach suggests a different political and ethical agenda than the one we find in Nietzsche and the postmodernists.

Those among the postmodernists who model their stance on Nietzsche's like to repeat after him that the good/evil, moral/immoral, innocent/guilty distinctions are obsolete. "We wish to attack an institution at the point where it culminates and reveals itself in a simple and basic ideology, in the notions of good and evil, innocence and guilt," says Foucault (1980c, p. 228). Baudrillard (1987, p. 71) expresses a similar sentiment, "We cannot avoid going a long way with negativity, with nihilism and all. But then don't you think a more exciting order opens up? Not a more reassuring world, but certainly more thrilling, a world where the name of the game remains secret. A world ruled by reversibility and indetermination." Derrida (1976, p. 314) assures us that deconstruction "amounts to annulling the ethical qualification and to thinking of writing beyond good and evil." Listening to these recitations, I could not help wondering

what a radical postmodernist unaided by moral labels tells a child who tortures a pet, uses a racial slur, or throws a tantrum? How does he manage to explain that this is not an altogether commendable conduct without committing a moral judgment? Things get still more confused when we grapple with actions considered criminal. If text writes itself out and an author is but a vehicle for a linguistic code, then crime commits itself and no responsibility should be pinned on the perpetrator. All notions of justice, fairness, and plain decency are pointless unless there are moral subjects ready to answer for their deeds.

It behooves us to remember how power and desire were fused in Nazi Germany. We might also ponder the Dionysian rage in Bosnia, Somali, and Nagorno-Karabakh, where state power is now radically decentered, rules of the game are secret, moral judgments are swept aside, and "objective chance" and "pure events" (Baudrillard 1987, pp. 88-89) reign supreme. Is this what life beyond good and evil is like? Nietzsche (1968, pp. 206, 516) should not have been troubled by this turn of events: "*I do not account the evil and painful character of existence a reproach to it [power], but hope it will one day be more evil and painful then hitherto.* We new philosophers ... desire precisely the opposite of an assimilation, an equalization: we teach estrangement in every sense, we open up gulfs such as never existed before, we desire that man should become more evil than he has ever been before." But if knowledge is a power trip propelled by desire, as postmodernists like to remind us, it is prudent to ask them to unveil their own desires and tell us how they plan to use their hard-won, tough-edged postmodern knowledge. Heidegger and Paul De Man, two admirers of Nietzsche and key figures in the development of the postmodern movement, were involved with fascism. Did their political engagement have anything to do with their philosophical stance? Not necessarily, as I have argued elsewhere (Shalin 1992b): neither existentialism nor postmodernism spells fascism. But there seem to be very few safeguards in the postmodernist corpus to preclude such affiliations. Perhaps, because their past encounters with politics proved so messy, postmodernists now prefer to shun it altogether. Having dismissed constructive political engagement, radical postmodernists embraced diatribe as a handy tool for a genuinely *de*constructive engagement. In the process, they have nearly obliterated the line between playfulness and self-indulgence, irreverence and rudeness, iconoclasm and desecration, skepticism and obscurantism. Their hypercritical stance turns into a hypocritical one, insofar as they choose to do nothing about the society they profess to despise. All that talk about texts, differance, meaningful absences, and forgetfulness of being at some point begins to look like a pretext to cover up one's tracks, forget about your own responsibility, defer personal commitment, and indefinitely avoid practical action. Aside from Michael Foucault, who was earlier in his career involved with the prisoners' self-help and later with the gay rights movements, postmodernists loath to take a stance. It seems that some deconstructionists would rather go on an endless scavenger hunt tracking the vanishing traces of being and ranting about

modernity's incurable ills than do anything to help people in distress. Is this stoic courage or moral turpitude?

Speaking about modernity, postmodernists do paint the era in the exceedingly dark colors. They decry the Age of Reason for its totalitarian proclivities, in its zeal to rationalize the world and perfect the weapons of mass destruction, which left more dead than all of premodern history. Late modernity, variously referred to as hypermodernity or postmodernity, has sprung new indignities on its victims with its stultifying megamedia, jarring electronic communications, proliferating virtual realities, sign exchange systems, unbridled consumerism, and so forth. There is an apocalyptic feeling in the air about "this terrifying postmodern world that threatens to destroy all of us at any moment" (Denzin 1990a, p. 146). Such statements should not be taken lightly. They speak volumes about the feelings of those who live them through. And they appear to be born out, at least in part, by the horrors of the two world wars, the Holocaust, the Gulags, the Khmer Rouge massacres, the Somali debacle, and other grim legacies of our time. And yet, such judgments should not go unchallenged.

Postmodernists' relentless attack on modernity would make one think that oppression has been expanding exponentially since the modern age came into being. The assumption is that low-tech power binges pale in comparison with the high-tech domination exercised over our bodies and minds via social organizations and electronic teleprompters. I find this judgment dubious. It is a bit like saying that a boss sexually harassing a subordinate in a corporate boardroom is a more sinister creature than a feudal lord who claims the right to bed every bride in his principality on her wedding night. At least today's victims have some legal recourse and can appeal to the law that postmodernists single out for their scorn. In fact, modern legal instrumentalities spare the dissidents' lives and protect alternative life-styles which were buried in the bygone era's closets and dungeons. It is doubtful that the lifeworlds were less susceptible to colonization before reason was enthroned as the supreme judge in the modern and hypermodern times. We know exactly who owned the databank or whatever passed for knowledge in medieval Europe: the bishop, the lord, and the padre familia, and their reign was hardly less brutal than what we see today. Let us also remember that scientists, who have contributed heavily to weapon developments and share some responsibility for the war destruction, have saved countless lives through medical research, brought relief from disastrous famines, and helped improve the quality of life for everyone.

The postmodern optic makes a caricature of historical modernity. As sharp and perceptive as this caricature is, it is too spiteful to be very useful as an analytical tool, for it vastly underestimates modernity's capacity for self-criticism and self-renewal. You would never know by reading Foucault that Jeremy Bentham, whose proposal for a panoptical prison served Foucault as a blueprint for modernity, roused public opinion against the harsh penalty for people stealing food, fought to keep children out of jail, demanded lighter sentences for sex offenders, opposed the judges' arbitrary

exercise of power, and worked to curtail corruption in the legal profession. Nor are we told that Rousseau, this man of reason par excellance, rejected the notion that progress is a historical universal, blamed science for the increase in deprivation, cut reason down to size for its excessive reliance on dry reflection, and propagated emotional, intuitive knowing as indispensable for a genuine reformer. The postmodernist exegesis tells us a lot about Condorcet, Diderot, Helvetius, Bentham, Saint-Simon, Comte, Marx and other Enlightenment figures, but not nearly enough about Hume, Blake, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Stirner, Dostoyevsky, to mention just a few names whose counter-enlightenment is at the heart of the historical modernity.

Long before postmodernists, Blake ([c. 1790] 1957, pp. 459, 451) took on the *philosophes*: "What is General Nature? is There Such a Thing? What is General Knowledge? is There Such a Thing. Strictly Speaking All Knowledge is Particular.... To Generalize is to be an Idiot." It was Schleiermacher ([1805-1810] 1977, p. 64) who insisted on "understanding an author better than he understands himself"; Goethe ([1826] 1940, p. 72) who declared, "The highest wisdom is to realize that every fact is already a theory"; and Stirner ([1845] 1971, p. 219) who called for "insurrection [which] leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions.'" The most radical challenge to truth as correspondence came from Kierkegaard ([1846] 1941, p. 182), who defied the rationalists with his existentialist conviction that, "*An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth*, the highest truth attainable for an *existing* individual." David Hume, one of the early heroes of the Age of Reason, compared the self to a republic which constantly changes its laws, so that "the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity" ([1739] 1978, p. 261). Ludwig Tieck ([1797] 1978, pp. 14, 87) celebrated irony as the indispensable weapon for those who wish "to overthrow the boundaries which rightfully surround us in everyday life" and delighted theatre audiences with a dizzying sense of multiple realities: "Look—here we sit watching a show; in this show more people sit watching a show, and in this third show, the third actors are watching still another show...." And here is a pre-postmodern insight into simulation, masquerade, and the vanishing self that was revealed anonymously (in an appropriately postmodern fashion) in the year 1805:[3]

> It is all role, the role itself and the play actor who is behind it, and in him in turn his thoughts and plans and enthusiasms and buffoneries—all belongs to the moment and swiftly flees, like the word on the comedian's lips..... Does no I stand in the mirror, when I step before it—am I only the thought of a thought, the dream of a dream—can you not help me to find my body... ? It is indeed terribly lonely in the ego, when I clasp you tight, you masks, and I try to look at myself—everything echoing sound without the disappeared note—nowhere substance, and yet I see—that must be

> nothing that I see! Away, away from the I—only dance on, you masks! (Anonymous [1805] 1971, pp. 209, 169).

Enough already.... I think it is fair to say that historical modernity signs in every style and leaves ample room for countercultural expressions. It is comprised (see Gouldner 1973; Shalin 1986a) by the Enlightenment and the counter-Enlightenment (Romanticism). The former has been overplayed and the latter consistently downplayed by the postmodernists, which is why Nietzsche emerged in their genealogy as a genius-freak who single-handedly broke the modern tide and moved philosophical discourse beyond rationalism. For the same reason, postmodernists tend to overlook movements like pragmatism which eschewed both hyperrationalism and irrationalism and sought to combine the Enlightenment's commitment to rational inquiry with the Romanticism's critique of rationalism and capitalist modernity.[4] A blueprint for a better life found in these pragmatic currents (we can call them "enlightened romanticism") diverged sharply from Nietzsche's (1968, p. 331) premonition that "humanity ... is on the point of changing suddenly into nihilism—into the belief in absolute *worth*lessness, that is, *meaning*lessness." Neither stoic resignation, nor cynical sophistry, nor Dionysian violence can bring sanity to this world and give it meaning worth living for.

We should note here that postmodernists did not invent skepticism and cynicism. Around 500 B.C., Heraclitus taught that you could not enter the same river twice. Cratylus corrected him that you could not do it once either. Ever since, sophists like Gorgias and Pyrrho downplayed rational discourse; some succumbed to cynicism, whose major contribution to the republic of letters was in the genre of diatribe, which cynics pioneered. When the medieval order began to break down, skeptical thinking came into prominence once again, forming an influential current during the Renaissance (Estienne, Erasmus). Skeptical arguments were recycled with the onset of the Age of Reason (Gassendi, Bayle, Hume), and now that modernity begins to show further signs of its discontent, postmodernists have rediscovered the old skeptical and cynical themes. Nietzsche (1968, p. 80) already makes no effort to conceal his nihilism, the fact that he is "contemptuous of every culture." Baudrillard only follows in these tracks when he tells us, "I don't want culture, I spit on it" (Baudrillard 1987, p. 81). The rejection of ethics and morality is becoming a serious option among radical postmodernists. From the hermeneutics of suspicion, they moved on to deconstruction by innuendo and, with Diogenes, ended up in the private politics of insult. There may be more to their political agenda than meets the eye, but as long as postmodernists remain exclusively deconstructive in their goals and rely on the inverted *Aufhebung* as their principal means, they are bound to remain on the margins of whatever may pass as social reconstruction in our time.

But if history is any guide, postmodernists are unlikely to sway the public to their side. Pascal ([1670] 1941, p. 143) put it most succinctly, "I lay it down as a fact that

there never has been a real complete sceptic. Nature sustains out feeble reason, and prevents it raving to this extent." We have to follow suit and question the radical postmodernists' willingness and ability to follow their skeptical convictions to the bitter end. Even though our world might be lacking in logos, we should not turn our backs on reason. In fact, we might need it all the more now that we know that ours is a damaged universe. With Pascal, Kant, Kierkegaard, James, Shestov, and Sartre, we might conclude that precisely because the world we inhabit is chaotic and indeterminate, what we desire is not the "will to power" but "will to believe" (James [1897] 1956, pp. 1-31). We might never be able to bring this teaming chaos to heel, let alone make it fully rational, but with irony, good faith, and a little help from our friends, we can find the courage to live and bring some sanity into this world. This is the pragmatist text for our time, as I read it.

* * * *

It would be unfortunate if the reader concludes from the above that what is right about postmodernism is old-hat and what is new is wrong-headed. Postmodernism is a seminal, even if somewhat nutty, intellectual movement from which interactionists stand to learn a good deal. I agree with Manning (1993, p. 88) that the "task of creating an orderly integration of the seminal and central ideas of postmodernists and powerful feminist critiques of androcentric social science knowledge with symbolic interaction remains before us." Just one qualification: postmodernists and feminists stand to learn from pragmatism a thing or two. Meanwhile, a few final words might be useful on the areas where the cross-fertilization between interactionism and postmodernism is likely to be especially productive.

The mass media analysis is one research area where interactionists could learn from postmodernists. Instant communications and replays (an air pilot who could watch on his monitor just as his disabled plane hits the ground), the media reporting helping to shape the covered events (the 1991 Russian Revolution), multiple and virtual realities (a White House official impersonating himself on a TV show), staged realities (a TV network simulating a car crush), radically self-referential realities (the media reporting about the media reporting about the media)—these are rather startling developments that should add some new wrinkles to the interactionist notion of multiple realities and pluralistic universe. How do people find their way in this postmodern maze? Does this electronic proliferation affect their sense of what is real? What are the ways in which the powerful exploit this situation? How do people respond to the fact that their perception is being manipulated and how do they fight back?

It seems that the interactionist distinction between the generalized other, the significant other, and the self is becoming increasingly blurred in the hypermodern world. How does one respond to the growing dislocation in space and time, to the lost root and the diminished sense of community? How generalized is the generalized other? What are the sources from which one borrows beliefs? Is there such a thing

as "convictions" in today's world and what role do they play in identity management? Has the term "morality" lost its meaning? Are people more likely to take moral holidays today than in the past? How strong is the pull that postmodern individuals feel toward nihilism and the dark side?

Postmodern self-identity calls for fresh thinking. We need to know how the postmodern individual grapples with the inevitable breaks in self-production, muddles through conflicting obligations, and repairs his sense of identity. Do people still claim to have an identity; do they care about having one? Has the difference between "to be" and "to seem" lost its meaning? Is there an existential crisis facing postmodern individuals? Do they feel the loss of agency? Which are the ways in which emotions help manage self-identity in the overloaded postmodern conditions? What are the strategies that help one sustain a sense of identity in today's chaotic environment (ironic detachment, bracketing, compartmentalization, and so forth)?

Power and politics require more attention than interactionists were willing to give these concepts in the past. The interactionist approach to power that is sensitive to the postmodern condition could start with the premise that face is a means of production of social reality as objective and meaningful. That is to say, we lend our faces to dramatize official realities, to structure appearance into a publicly certified being. Our facework is routinely turned into face labor that generates surplus meaning appropriated by those who have control over our emotional facework. The questions that we need to ponder are, Who or what wields power over facework? Does the postmodern condition promote the concentration or dispersion of power, or perhaps both? Is it true that sign value renders the use and exchange value irrelevant? How does power affect desire? Is the drive for power furrowing whatever desires one might feel? How can affect and desire be converted into power, and vice versa? What does it mean "to liberate the discourse of desire"? How do we carry it out? Is it a predominantly a theoretical discourse? What are the counter-strategies that enable individuals to resist the domination? Can ironic detachment punch holes in official appearances and help us reclaim control over our facework? Is a constructive, public, and collective engagement in a postmodernist key possible? Is there a middle ground between pathos and irony that the postmodern individual could stand on? How can we challenge power in the name of truth without succumbing to the truth as correspondence claims?

Of particular interest to me is the problem of chaos and indeterminacy. In the Nietzschean and many postmodern readings, chaos appears as a negative reference frame, something to surmount or bow to, rather than as a valuable resource, a wellspring from which order grows and on which it thrives. Precisely because reality's natural state is that of indeterminacy and a quantum of action is needed to bring into being a determinate state, we can, to an extent, shape this world according to our value-laden terminologies. How do we terminate indeterminacy and indeterminate the reified determinacy? What are the constructive forms that chaos can take and what

are the destructive ones? How is the breakdown in the familiar structures of (in)determinacy related to the prospects for structural change (think about Russia and Bosnia)? Can we identify patterns of indeterminacy and structures of uncertainty? Is there any logic (fuzzy logic, informal logic, discursive logic) that can do justice to a society understood as a semi-ordered chaos?

Methodological problems will have to move to the centerstage in interactionist theory if it is to answer the postmodernist challenge. What role does "lived experience" play in the postmodern analysis? How does deconstructive inquiry square with participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork with narrative research? Deconstructive work generally begins when the text is finished, but the interactionist studies the text in the making—how does the starting point affect inquiry? Can we distinguish individual voice behind discourse and discourse within individual voice? Is there such a thing as a forced and repressive reading? Can text talk back to the interpreter and the authorial voice resist being muffled? How can grammatologists overcome the power asymmetry endemic in deconstruction (analyst/patient dichotomy)? Does a deconstructive reading tell us something about the reader's structure of desire and do we need to know it in order to grasp a given interpretation?Why does the subject's voice, placed in quotation marks, so often resemble—in both substance and style—the narrator's diction? How does the participant-observer level with the fact that the narrative emerging from ethnographic study is inevitably a collaborative product? Can it be considered co-authored? What does the interactionist do about the silent narratives that remain outside a given fieldwork encounter? Is mutual disclosure between the ethnographer and the respondent possible and/or desirable? If participant observers learn something about themselves in the course of an ethnographic encounter, should this count as a discovery and be entered in the final report?

These are just some of the problems we are bound to face when the postmodern world under erasure meets the interactionist world in the making. Let us hope this meeting will prove auspicious and transformative for both sides.

NOTES

1. All italics in quoted material are in the originals.
2. Derrida has pointed out that this is a mistranslation of his words, that what he meant was that the text has no outside ("there is no outside of the text"). I do not find this explanation entirely convincing. Deconstructive procedures enjoin us to treat every thing, feeling, or event as just another text and forbid references to anything outside the text, except for other texts. Thus, texts are the only reality given to us, and whatever else there might be in the world has no expression in deconstructive philosophy. While trivially true, this perspective fails to recognize the vital role that qualitatively different interpretants play in our interpretative pratices.
3. These historical realities make certain statements by postmodernists look anachronistic. Thus, Gergen (1991, p. 7) singles out among the features distinguishing the postmodern self "the emergence of ironic self-reflection," while Denzin (1986, p.

194) observes, "Since Foucault, correspondence theories of truth have been seriously challenged." Nor can I fully comprehend this statement: "[T]he individualism of the Chicago School will hopefully expire" (Fee 1992, p. 37).

4. Richard Rorty is the most notable exception to this rule. He did a great deal to highlight the affinities between pragmatism and postmodernism. Yet, his reading tends to downplay the social and political agenda germane to historical pragmatism.

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