The Phenomenology of Utopia: Reimagining the Political

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Keywords

Abstract

This thesis argues that the end of Soviet Marxism and a bipolar global political imaginary at the dissolution of the short Twentieth Century poses an obstacle for anti-systemic political action. Such a blockage of alternate political imaginaries can be discerned by reading the work of Francis Fukuyama and "Endism" as performative invocations of the closure of political alternatives, and thus as an ideological proclamation which enables and constrains forms of social action. It is contended that the search through dialectical thought for a competing universal to posit against "liberal democracy" is a fruitless one, because it reinscribes the terms of teleological theories of history which work to effect closure.

Rather, constructing a phenomenological analytic of the political conjuncture, the thesis suggests that the figure of messianism without a Messiah is central to a deconstructive reframing of the possibilities of political action - a reframing attentive to the rhetorical tone of texts. The project of recovering the political is viewed through a phenomenological lens. An agonistic political distinction must be made so as to memorialise the remainders and ghosts of progress, and thus to gesture towards an indeconstructible justice which would serve as a horizon for the articulation of an empty universal.

This project is furthered by a return to a certain phenomenology inspired by Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ernesto Laclau. The thesis provides a reading of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin as thinkers of a minor universalism, a non-prescriptive utopia, and places their work in the context of new understandings of religion and the political as quasi-transcendentals which can be utilised to think through the aporias of political time in order to grasp shards of meaning. Derrida and Chantal Mouffe's deconstructive critique and supplement to Carl Schmitt's concept of the political is read as suggestive of a reframing of political thought which would leave the political question open and thus enable the articulation of social imaginary significations able to inscribe meaning in the field of political action. Thus, the thesis gestures towards a form of thought which enables rather than constrains action under the sign of justice.

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Statement of original authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Mark Bahnisch
5 January 2009

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Tantae molis erat Romanam gentem!
Virgil, *Aeneid* I

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Chapter One: Introduction

Exergue

The purpose of this thesis is to suggest the necessity of articulating a new analytics of politics appropriate to the contemporary global political. This requires justification both in terms of the aim and the scope of the task. Agreeing with Melissa Gregg (2006) that affect is too often absent from academic work, I feel obliged to note that the inspiration for this work springs from a deep dissatisfaction – both academic and political – with the ways in which the current political conjuncture has been understood, and the disjunction between analysis and the possibilities of action. A deep conviction informing this thesis is the truth that with the eclipse of the imaginary of a bipolar politics corresponding to the Cold War political architecture, the scope for any politics other than that authorised by a certain neo-liberalism is radically circumscribed. Nor, I believe, is there much hope of an anti-systemic politics positing an alternative (and mirrored) universal to that of liberal capitalism, a fact recognised by Perry Anderson.

But it is nevertheless the case that political desires can only do justice to true liberty through being articulated multiply and severally – albeit in conjuncture – and it is the corresponding multiplicity and specificity of a contingent utopian messianism as the horizon of a political imaginary which can foster alternative modes and possibilities of social action for which this thesis seeks to clear theoretical space. This argument, with Laclau (2000), recognises that the place of the universal – while empty – is nevertheless a necessary condition of possibility for the political as such, even as it is subjected to contingent and particularistic movements towards an elusive and impossible totality. While it is not my intention either to engage in disciplinary navel gazing (an often futile

endeavour) or comprehensively to assess and review the state of a voluminous literature in the domain of political theory, my intention is to contend that the way we think about the political matters, and that there is a deep correspondence between the work of reimagining the political and the emergence of another possible politics which would be more oriented towards a just order.

Ends of history

This thesis examines Francis Fukuyama's claim in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) that history is at an end and that the only viable political regime remaining is liberal or "capitalist" democracy. I argue that this claim exemplifies the relation of the ostensibly analytical and the performative. Such a work of performative enunciation under the guise of diagnosis and analysis characterises so much of the discourse surrounding the political; a discourse which both constrains and enables possible forms of social action.

Fukuyama's celebrated claim – first articulated in an article written in 1989 – stimulated a debate which I will argue is more of a symptom than a response to its merits. Surprisingly, perhaps, for a hypothesis that is on its surface an absurd one, Anderson (1992) contends that Fukuyama's proclamation proved difficult to refute. This difficulty arises from the terms in which it is posited, terms which may not accurately reflect properly Hegelian endings or closures, but which are certainly characteristic of a system, and indeed an era, where the dialectic could be imagined as working its way through a dichotomised field structured by East and West. It was part of this imaginary to binarise and historicise the putative movement of power from East to West (something whose

ubiquity in the structures of a certain Western thought can be seen through its reinscription in Michael Mann's adoption of a Hegelian motif of a movement of reason, however reworked). Such an imaginary is bounded in time through the suggestion of a necessary foreclosure – an "end" which would have been inherent in the logic of history from the beginning.

I would argue that Fukuyama's Endism does real work in the world, erecting figures of a certain globalisation which act to close the political imaginary and thus radically foreclose the possibilities for political action. In other words, the approach taken to Fukuyama's proclamation is exemplary of the approach of the thesis itself. On one hand, his arguments are reviewed in their academic context. On the other hand, attention is paid to the polemical content and intention of the argument – and its self-reification into a performative invocation. That is to say, what Fukuyama hoped to do, and what to some degree he achieved, was to circumscribe and fix the borders of the ways in which the political can be conceived. That circumscription then becomes a social fact constraining some forms of action and enabling others. Fukuyama thus becomes something of a placeholder or a carrier for a broader ideological moment of which he is the apostle, as it were. Whether or not Fukuyama's work is error ridden, or a flimsy text as considered by the standards of the academy, is not necessarily related to its performative power.

The thesis seeks to perform two tasks – first, to show how such totalised social imaginaries as that of the liberal end of history can be exceeded at their limits, and secondly to demonstrate the strategic utility of a phenomenological analytic of the political for such a task – the urgent task of diagnosing the current conjuncture outside its

imaginary figuration in order to facilitate creative political action. Because the thesis is premised on the belief that the ways in which sense is made of the world structure action in the world, the over-riding aim of the thesis is to demonstrate at least the possibility of an analytic which would have the potential to disrupt the current closure of the political imaginary which the thesis diagnoses.

No doubt this is an ambitious aim, and it may be that the most that can be achieved in a work of this scope is to pave the ground for further research, and to demonstrate in so doing that the fields it seeks to cultivate are fruitful ones. Further research will demonstrate this claim through the phenomenological work that this analytic can do. The thesis is critical, and strongly critical, of currently orthodox understandings – of the Fukuyaman neo-liberal genre - of the global political, arguing that they are more ideologemes than concepts. In making this point, the thesis gestures towards a sociology of knowledge underpinned by the contention that academic or quasi-academic thematisations are all too often contaminated by a limited politics. But this is not to argue for some sort of Archimedean point from which social science can view the world as it is, clearly and without illusion, nor to adopt an approach to ideology akin to Althusser's structural Marxism. So, how, then do we think the political adequately in a complex conjuncture?

Towards a phenomenology of political concepts

I argue in this thesis that it is important to inject a phenomenological dimension into political thought, something absent from the sorts of work cited above by gesturing to Michael Mann. Jacques Derrida [2003] (2005), in his late work, *Rogues: Two Essays on*

Reason, rightly questions – in the context of further thematising his own quasi-concept of democracy to come – whether we take political concepts far too much for granted. In a real sense, the globalisation theory morass which will be discussed below signals this failure to reflect – in that it calls into question the adequacy of the very concept of the state itself, but usually fails to reflect on the tectonic shifts taking place except to displace them into the figure of globalisation – as if it were an actor or a cause rather than an effect.

In phenomenalising the political, this thesis wishes to underline two core facts. The first is that political theory has not sought often enough to theorise or describe the connection between the discursive field of the political and the possibilities of social action. Perhaps this is because of a distaste for employing the Marxist notion of consciousness, but a philosophical anthropology appears lacking in recent political thought. It is not necessary to follow György Lukács [1968] (1971) down all the paths of his analyses of reification and consciousness to appreciate the force of the argument that perceptions of the world – the infamous "ruling ideas of the epoch" if you like – structure action, or rather enable and constrain certain possibilities for agency. This point is one that Fredric Jameson grasps, and perhaps Perry Anderson (1998) is justified in describing him as the last of the Western Marxists for this reason.

But this insight needs thinking outside its Marxist lineages, and the concept of the social imaginary as articulated by Cornelius Castoriadis has its work to do in this thesis in suggesting how the contingency of the moment can be unveiled, and action enabled, without recourse to some phantasm of a world-historical dialectic or a "true"

consciousness. We are not talking here of necessary laws of history but rather of certain quasi-transcendental structures which both found the social and allow for its indetermination, and thus the possibility of events, the possibility of the *novum*. The thesis seek to argue that the structures of knowledge characteristic of Western modernity work against redemptive political action, through tracking the paths of a systemic differentiation which seeks to contain, enclose and privatise the sacred or the religious. The relegation of the religious or the sacred to a limit and a boundary of the political is at least as important in this context as its normative privatisation by the logics of the modern liberal state. It will also be argued that a perception of intersubjectivity as the necessary basis for an anthropology of the human, an anthropology not distorted by a certain modern individualism, has a crucial role in enabling action, if only at the level at which such action becomes a possibility in a new or emergent imaginary. This line of thought is the substance of the gesture towards utopia which the thesis will perform.

Secondly, while the thought of Derrida is usually understood otherwise, the circular nature of his deconstruction in its late incarnation begins to reveal a debt – unthought though it may be by his epigones and critics alike – to both structuralism and phenomenology. It is not in the nature of deconstruction that such traditions are either sublated or surpassed, but rather they remain, albeit pushed beyond their limits, and continue to haunt and supplement the work of inscription. We need to spend some energy in understanding the misreading of deconstruction in order to highlight this truth. However, we also need to follow the spirit of a certain Derrida [1992] (1995) – and to recognise that his thinking of the gift (among other structures of thought) owes as much to Marcel Mauss as to Martin Heidegger. Derrida's work – more obviously in his late

works but throughout his texts – seeks to unveil certain structures of experience. Along with Carl Schmitt, whom I will be taking seriously as a disciple of Weber and a sociologist of the concept, some of the trajectories of Derrida's thinking serve to reveal the constitutive structures of the political which are hidden in our current conjuncture, with all its tendencies towards what Schmitt [1929] (1998) called "neutralisations" and what Derrida (1994, 1999) calls "depoliticisations". Among these structures are those of the messianic – the relation without relation which is hidden beneath the veil of the religious – and which, it will be argued, is key to a political imaginary which does the work of redemption and memory and which can do justice, and thus an emergent or latent political imaginary which can retrieve the indeterminacy of history. This, then, is what this thesis means by a phenonemology of the global political. It is accepted that all social formations come to an end, but as Immanuel Wallerstein (2003) warns, a reification or naturalisation of those formations empowers the powerful at the expense of the multitude. We need to see clearly in order to act.

Vicissitudes of the political in the third millennium: some indications

How then to conceptualise this political enunciation of the end of the political, whether in the form of liberal or Hegelian discourses? It is necessary first to proceed with further diagnosis of the exact nature of the phenomenon. It is commonplace to observe that liberalism is an ideology that attempts to erase politics – whether one takes the Weberian view of politics becoming effaced by modern bureaucratic and legal rationalities, or whether one adopts the Schmittian view that liberalism aims pre-eminently to reduce political questions to questions of the economic or the ethical. Such observations may do violence to the complexity and richness of the theoretical inheritance and

governmentalities of liberalism, but they never less have force – if conceived of as an ideal type used for analytical purposes.

What needs however to be understood in its specificity is the particular manifestation of this gesture in an epoch of globalising neo-liberalism. Without foreclosing the complexity of this question, it is sufficient to remark that the financialisation and globalisation of capital is accompanied (and facilitated by) public discourses which announce the end of politics as a function of the transition to "new times" – a late modern world where the state withers away, and citizens are increasingly individualised consumers disengaged from public life (Bauman 1997). In Gamble (2000)'s terms, two dimensions of the political – the political as contestation and the political as the agonistic definition of the public interest – are relatively displaced by the ethical and the economic (both conceived within the global) while politics as "court politics" (the struggle for power, position and favour) continues apace or with the evacuation of the public interest, even gathers momentum. As a result, a vicious cycle is initiated whereby public disengagement and cynicism feeds the professionalisation and marketisation of political life, which then further fuels disenchantment.

One could argue from a reading of the work of Von Hayek (1976) as Bosanquet (1983) does, that this is in fact a characteristic strategy of liberal governance – the depoliticisation of various domains of the life-word in order to displace political conflict with market mechanisms. In addition, from a sociological point of view, this phenomenon could be interpreted as an instance of the classical differentiation proper to modernity. At the same time, the dynamics of late or postmodern capitalism (Harvey

1989, Jameson 1991) are reflected in (and facilitated by) a rhetoric which claims that the "new" economy is paralleled by a "new" politics which transcends the Left and Right distinction (Giddens 1994, Walsh & Bahnisch 2000) and which does not rest on class cleavages. The "Third Way" discourse so popular in Transatlantic political circles in the late 1990s (Callinicos 2000) is a symptom of this dis-ease of political differentiation in late modernity.

A number of propositions could be made, as a starting point, to enlighten the path of a new analytic. First, it is clear that with the dissolution of the Cold War imaginary, discourses of triumphalism, as well as being performative, in their constative dimension gesture towards the exhaustion of the socialist project (Wallerstein 2003) and seek to enact as well as describe a re-orienting of the field of political play towards the right, which is intertwined with the emptying out of the civic practices (Lefort 2000) as well as the forms of parliamentary and representative democracy (Wolin 2007). The sovereign subject of liberalism's dissolution into a field of individualism and an excess of affect and desires mirror the vicissitudes of sovereignty itself, which is neither captured by the concept of an emergent law bound cosmopolitanism (Anderson 2005) nor by the figure of globalisation. In fact, as I have previously argued (Bahnisch 2002), globalisation itself is a surface reflection of the constant disordering and re-ordering of the global political, rather than an analytic category. It reflects not just a process but also an autonomisation – in Castoriadis' terms – of the social significations of law and the economy, and a failure to exert closure over the social, an excess drowning out its remainder. That these forces, and constantly shifting configurations of force cannot be contained within the political

field of the nation state, is a datum to which lip service is paid while remaining within the concepts proper to a modern politics which are rapidly becoming obsolete.

As I have previously argued (Bahnisch 2002), the concept of "globalisation" as such lacks utility – the concept is too contaminated by its ideological origins and its continued ideational force to be an adequate social-scientific concept. Processes are confused with normative prescriptions, and such conflations are characteristic of the ideologemes which have come to prominence after Fukuyama's proclamation of the end of history (Wallerstein 1999). These sort of concerns are one of the inspirations for the further work I aim to do in this thesis.

To some degree, the problem arises from the nature of the level of analysis. Sweeping vistas on the long term nature and movement of power such as Michael Mann's project are invaluable for comparative historical sociology, and for refining and rethinking the sorts of questions Max Weber asked. But when a writer like Mann (2003) himself seeks to come to grips with what one might call a historical sociology of the present, there is huge tension between the theoretical frame and the contingencies of the moment. This is not necessarily to cast aspersions on Mann, and he is open in characterising *Incoherent Empire* as something of a polemic arising from his own political commitments. But it does point to a more structural problem, which can be observed in works such as Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000). The world-historical, as it were, may not actually be that, and in any case it appears to be a structural limit to thought, rather than a failing of individual authors, which renders such analyses often rapidly dateable. Certainly there is scope for employment of some of the distinctions and concepts of the sociology of

empires – themselves rather undertheorised according to Herfried Muenkler [2005] (2007) in conceptualising the contemporary global political outside categories contaminated by its own dynamics. But – in practice – the necessary distance appears lacking. Social facts – such as the employment of "globalisation" as a lever to privilege neo-liberal policy and to disable alternatives (or for that matter, "Empire" as a figure) – are understood far too unproblematically, or are subjected to a minute and Byzantine work of theoretical elaboration and exegesis. In fact, they need to be analysed in their performative as well as their constative dimensions.

Such academic discourses are constituted by rhetorical practices and theoretical aporias that are productive of partial insight while at the same time being constitutive of a certain blindness to the distinctive nature of the political. It is precisely this blindness which this thesis aims to enlighten, and the first step in so doing will be to examine the tortured pathways of Endism, remembering that it is its symptomatology as much as its analytic or academic worth that we are interested in. However, first it is necessary to set out the methodological and thematic approach the thesis will take.

Chapter Two: Methodology, structure and contribution of the thesis

Like the work of Gayatri Spivak, the spirit of this work will be articulated through "propriations that are, at best, partial, temporary, and only provisionally identificatory" (Rappaport 2001: 65). The thesis will not suggest a method in the singular as such, but rather, following Spivak, seek to propose "an array of differently configured theoretical units, or systems, so that the whole critical enterprise never rests on one line of argumentation but is positioned in multiple sites along a borderline of argumentative contestation" (Rapaport 2001: 62).

Spivak (1994: 520) writes:

> No rigorous definition of anything is ultimately possible, so that if one wants to, one could go deconstructing the opposition between man or woman [for instance], and finally show that it is a binary opposition that displaces itself. Therefore, "as a deconstructivist", I cannot recommend that kind of dichotomy at all, yet, I feel that definitions are necessary in order to keep us going, to allow us to take a stand.

Just as De Man in his *The Resistance to Theory* (1986) recognised the metaphoricity of any theoretical move, and the abysm-al nature of deconstruction as process, and Derrida argues in his "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" (1982: 252) that "all the concepts which have operated in the definition of metaphor always have an origin and an efficacy that are themselves "metaphorical" and that the tropes of theory are "as much defining as defined", so does Spivak recognise the implication of any epistemology or method in language and discourse. However, this thesis will prefer the approach of Spivak or Irigaray (1985) in her *Speculum of the Other Woman* where a range of theoretical discourses are placed in tension with each other but nevertheless a strategic

decision is made to impose a partial fixity on some concepts in order to construct (provisionally and strategically) an argument about the political (in this case). Derrida (1976)'s technique of writing under "erasure" is in fact a recognition of the lack of outside to the concepts by which Western thought proceeds, and the complicity with "theory" which marks any theoretical position however "postmodern", despite many misunderstandings of his thought by "vulgar deconstructionism" which would seek merely to overturn binary and hierarchised oppositions (Gasché 1994).

Strategies of reading

So, then, in a certain spirit (of the many spirits) of deconstruction will this thesis proceed. The thesis will in fact propose that a procedure akin to the phenomenological reduction (while recognising its philosophical and epistemological impossibility) is in fact of great utility and thus forms part of the conditions of possibility of an analytic which will deconstruct the current reconfigurations and depoliticisations of the political through situated readings of various genres of text. These texts are never monadic; they are always already inscribed within contexts and moments within the passage of time, and this thesis will seek to interpret them using a hermeneutic which simultaneously views them as works of theory and as sociological signs of the times. The procedure the thesis employs is not dissimilar to Walter Benjamin's own approach of forcing shards of truth together as constellations in order to see what they might reveal about history and the political.

Disciplinary commitments

The argument of the thesis is informed by the proposition that the structures of knowledge characteristic of Western modernity obscure as much as they reveal – and this argument will be made particularly with regard to the boundaries erected between the religious and the political. I also argue strongly that the theory/practice distinction urgently needs deconstructing, and from a perspective within the sociology of knowledge which grasps the interweaving of performative invocations of the political conjuncture and the possibilities of social action through the concept of the political imaginary. Consequent on this approach, it is necessary that the work of the thesis proceed in a certain interdisciplinary spirit. While the disciplinary "origins" of the the thesis are sociological, and much of its intellectual orientation derives from sociology, it is nevertheless also the case that the thesis seeks to cross the borders of political philosophy and political theory. Disciplinary territories will be traversed strategically according to the direction and tactics of the argument as it unfolds. Phenomenology – an approach which cannot be confined to philosophy alone – is a *leitmotif* of this thesis throughout precisely because the thesis seeks both to understand the hegemonic work of the dominant political imaginary and to disclose a path which leads beyond it.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1960] (1964: 3) captures something of the spirit of this approach to thought when he writes:

> It is as if some cunning mechanism whisked events away at just the moment they appeared on the scene. Or as if history censored the dramas it is made up of and, preferring to conceal itself, gave us a glimpse of truth only in brief moments of confusion, the rest of the time taxing its ingenuity to repress all out "surpassing" deeds, re-establish the roles and formulas of its repertoire, and persuade us in short that nothing is "coming to pass"… Whenever we reach the point of asking a

question, whenever scattered anguishes and angers have ended up taking on an identifiable form in human space, we imagine that nothing thereafter can ever be as it was before. Questions can indeed be total; but answers, in their positive significance, cannot.

It is a matter, then, of respecting the partiality of thought while nevertheless attempting to push it towards its limit, of respecting the contingency and chaos of the conjuncture while nevertheless trying to grasp its possibilities. In another register, perhaps the inspiration for the way in which this thesis attempts to perform its own work would be Michel de Montaigne. In a sense, this thesis is an attempt to *assay* or essay, or test certain approaches to truths, a project which does not seek artificially to contain the social as if it were a graspable artefact, but rather, with Georg Simmel, to recognise that the multiplicity and miasma that is late modernity requires something of a humanist approach to the social, the experimental application of a variety of lenses in order to see more clearly. As Simmel understood, typification, or the method of constructing Weberian ideal-types is not the final word in writing the text of a history of the present, but rather a matter of a heuristic.

It seems to me, and this perception is the inspiration for this thesis, that existing approaches need reframing in order to be adequate to the very complex political field of this millennium. In a way, this is a call with Pierre Bourdieu (1993) for a more engaged social science and political theory, and therefore the theorist must overcome some of the legacies of the scientism that are inheritances from the post-Enlightenment and modern constellation of knowledge (Wallerstein 2004). This perception is a reflection of a desire for a form of social and political thought that repoliticises, and historicises without historicity (Adorno [1993] 2000) rather than freezing the social synchronically as an

object. By necessity, such a goal also requires, as well as an interdisciplinary approach *also* an acute sense of the work that disciplinary borders do.

Selection of theorists and texts

A number of authors whose work engages with the contemporary global political and its vicissitude could have been included in the thesis, but have not been. For instance, the recent work of Alain Badiou (Badiou 2003, Feltham 2008) – both in terms of his focus on the religious and in his thinking of the event – has some obvious resonances with the approach I am taking. However, for reasons of economy of space and for reasons of coherence of theme, the thesis prefers to restrict its major focus to the work of Walter Benjamin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (and some of his epigones such as Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis) and Jacques Derrida. These theorists enable the project of articulating a sociology of political concepts and constructing a phenomenological analytic of the political to be done. In line with both its philosophical commitments and its orientation to the sociology of knowledge, the thesis disrupts some of the genealogies and filiations of the trajectory of thought which have become ossified within particular disciplinary contexts and unveils hidden connections in the philosophical tradition which – it is argued – demonstrate the value of *minor traditions*. It is these traditions which counterpose the particular universal and the temporality of the political to the Hegelian determinate universal and its closure of history, and the resources and movements of the texts of the authors examined enable this theme to be highlighted.

The structure of the argument

After the first step of a literature review on the reception of Fukuyama's theses in Chapter Three, Chapter Four is a *prolegomena* to the thesis, setting out to perform three tasks. First, by distinguishing between a phenomenology of the social and of the political following the work of Claude Lefort, the chapter establishes the basic theoretical presuppositions of the argument which will be pursued throughout the thesis, and also introduces Cornelius Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary, which informs the argument regarding the closure of the modern political imaginary which it is the task of the political, the thesis argues, to break open. Lefort's work is also used to introduce the theme of temporality, which is central to any possible phenomenology of utopia, and thus of social action in the field of the political imaginary. The second task of the Chapter is to sketch a sociology of utopia – organised around a critique of Fredric Jameson's recent theses on utopics – in order to put a further theoretical building block in place to allow the argument of the thesis to take flight. The Chapter closes by arguing that Castoriadis' thought provides a more fruitful direction for thinking about the role of utopia as a horizon and a social signification in the imaginary.

Chapter Five moves the argument forward in preparation for considering structures of experience which are, it will be argued, both constitutive of political action oriented to *justice* and structured by an eschatology and a messianism without a Messiah which would enable and facilitate the partial escape from the prism of what remains a Christian temporality, no matter how "secularised" in Hegelianism and other forms of thought which seek to effect closure on history and meaning. This portion of the argument

requires a reconsideration of both secularisation and religion, understood as an instituting structure based around the experiences of faith and the promise.

First, the Chapter considers the dead ends of controversies within sociology around secularisation, and then considers whether the recent and seminal work of Charles Taylor is an adequate supplement, and concludes that while extremely suggestive, it is not. Taylor's debt to the work of Marcel Gauchet provides a hermeneutic key to another approach, which returns us to the work of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, who both have something to say about the originary theologico-political.

Chapter Six examines the thought of Jacques Derrida in order to establish the meaningfulness of discussing history and the social in terms of non-originary origins and a phenomenology of the social, which leads into a consideration of both Jacques Derrida and Carl Schmitt, and a thinking of religion outside the bounds of religion and the political as homologous with the religious. Derrida's overturning of the dialectics of Hegel is also an important methodological reference point for later arguments, as is an understanding of deconstruction, *difference*, iterability and other "non-substitutable substitutes" and substantiates the refutation of the proposition that history is closed. The imbrication of the religious (and thus the political) with violence and "radical evil" which is a feature of Derrida's analysis also provides an important datum for the extended discussion of Schmitt's concept of the political in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Seven takes up the task of constructing a phenomenology of utopia in earnest, beginning with a consideration of Russell Jacoby's contention that Jewish utopia avoids

some of the purportedly evil consequences of "eschatological utopianism". However, Jacoby's argument, while interesting and worthy of consideration, is found to be insufficient. Once again, temporality needs to enter the discussion, and Hegel and his epigones need to be historicised and relativised and sundered from the false universals they inhabit. To that end, Jewish and Christian conceptions of time and indeed onto-theology are contrasted, and it is suggested that Walter Benjamin's work is better understood as inspired by an appropriation and reworking of Jewish traditions (particularly that of the Kabbalah) than in its Marxist contexts, though things are, of course, a little more complex than this.

Benjamin also needs situating in the "Jew/Greek" opposition employed by Martin Heidegger, Leo Strauss and others, particularly in its radical reworking by Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas will have contrasted totalisation and universalism, and informed the work of Jacques Derrida, whose texts on messianism, the promise and faith are revealed as both indebted to Benjamin more than they purport to be. Examining in particular Derrida's citation of and indebtedness to Yosef Yerushalmi and his remarks on Freud in *Archive Fever*, it will be suggested that there is an esoteric as well as an exoteric Derrida, and that his love for the secret and his hints about Marranos are hardly accidental. Key texts on hauntology, including *Spectres of Marx,* will be mentioned and cited in order to discern what might be at stake in a necessary passage of messianicity which would be simultaneously veiled and unveiled within history and what this might imply for avoiding and resisting closure in the name of justice.

If all forms of Endism and closure of history are understood as neutralisations of the political, it is necessary to consider the phenomenology and the sociology of the political itself. So Chapter Eight stages a confrontation between Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida for this purpose, mediated through the thought of Chantal Mouffe on the distinction between antagonism and agonism. The Chapter first considers objections to the utilisation of Schmitt's thought, and concludes that these objections are unjustified. It then moves on to a close reading of Jacques Derrida's deconstructive reading of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* in *Politics of Friendship*. Derrida assists me in conceiving of Schmitt as something of a sociologist of concepts, and also points to the tensions inherent in the limits Schmitt in wishes to enclose the political. But we can also see that Schmitt's distinction is a contentless one, an empty signifier, and thus avoids any essentialisation of the political and enables repoliticisations. The forms these repoliticisations might take in late modernity and how they interact with discourses of Endism are outlined, and the Chapter concludes by underlining the utility of such a distinction – as modified through Mouffe's work – for understanding the role of rhetoric in the intersubjective constitution of another political imaginary.

Derrida has been criticised for a perspective that elides intersubjectivity, and while this criticism is to a degree unfair, a necessary supplement to a consideration of how we might think the horizons of the political imaginary differently is an examination of the conditions of possibility for social action. Hence Chapter Nine is organised around the work of Merleau-Ponty, who has already been present in the thesis, in a major key. Merleau-Ponty's political philosophy, poised between Marxism and an incomplete

commitment to liberalism, also contributes to an understanding of the options that are possible for politics outside the closure of the political imaginary. The Chapter traces Merleau-Ponty's thought through its phenomenological beginnings – and the deconstruction of Cartesian rationality to unveil the corporeality of the intersubjective is a necessary condition for articulating a retrieval of the political and a re-politicisation of the social which would highlight, if not escape, the ghosts of the unicity of the Western tradition which is utilised to narrow the political imaginary. The Chapter then goes on to a discussion of the degree to which Merleau-Ponty has been accurately understood as a representative of 'Western Marxism', arguing that this is to mischaracterise his thought. The close relationship of his phenomenology and philosophical anthropology to his political theory and his thinking on the social is explicated, and the Chapter closes by underlining the significance of Merleau-Ponty's own escape from Marxism for the broader project of rethinking and reimagining the political. In particular, his theorisation of creative political action demonstrates how the political imaginary can be thought otherwise.

Chapter Ten concludes with a summation of the argument and indicates some directions for future research.

Original contribution of the thesis

The thesis makes several original contributions. The first of these is bringing together a disparate body of literature in order to rethink the conditions of political action – the phenomenology of the political field – beyond the impasses of post-Hegelian theory. In so doing, the thesis reads theoretical discourse in a new way – as symptomatic of

blindnesses in the double movement of performativity and discursive power which characterise contemporary attempts to close the political field. Rather than engaging – on their own level – with discourses such as those of Fukuyama, and other attempts to specify the nature of politics as the millennium turns, the approach in this thesis will seek to unveil their symptomatology – and the work that they do in structuring understandings of the world and thus constraining and enabling forms of social action and political strategies. In effect, a phenomenology of the hauntology of the political is what this thesis seeks to construct – an analytic which seeks to reveal, and thus re-open the closures and totalisations of the contemporary political imaginary. Triumphal conjurations of the end are viewed in the light of the work they perform, not as constative statements about the world but rather as efforts to over-write the global political. Seeking to position deconstruction and the work of Jacques Derrida's thought within its phenomenological contexts (and to understand how it works at the limit of those contexts in order to expand those limits) represents an approach which has yet to be undertaken in other work, because it brings together a range of analytics and strategies of reading and thinking normally disciplined narrowly.

The thesis also seeks to build upon the work of Derrida and a select band of his epigones and collaborators in phenomenalising "universal structures of experience" which do not provide Kantian conditions of possibility for action but which enable and disable action and thought *at the same time*. In passing, the thesis reads Derrida largely outside the disciplinary and ideological frames through which his *oeuvre* has been interpreted, by going back to the texts themselves and observing – in the midst of such texts – the movements and lines of thought they trace. Surprisingly, this is a more radical move than

might be thought, as deconstruction has all too readily been subjected to various reductions and enclosures, rather than played out as a work that is both textual and always already there in the modes of thought which underpin social action. Aside from the merit of such a play of constellations itself, the thesis has the potential to intervene – through the re-inscription of quasi-transcendentals themselves even at the moment at which they face ruin – in misreadings which are prevalent in most appropriations of Derrida's phenomenology. (Incidentally, by expropriating Derrida from his disciplinary appropriations, it is also possible to make a more fruitful contribution to the debates unified under the phrases "Derrida and politics" and "Derrida and religion" than is currently available.) This in turn opens up new perspectives, possibilities and analytics for a phenomenological social and political theory.

At the heart of this endeavour is an insistence that we have lost something significant in terms of social and political analysis when we follow the grain of culture and the forms of scholarship characteristic of the modernist division of labour and relegate "religion" to a discrete or differentiated category. Rather than writing as if the (secular) field of politics had in some way been contaminated by one or several returns of the religious, we need to understand that modernity as such can never escape its theological ghosts and hauntings, and that speaking to those ghosts as scholars (Derrida 1994) enables a rich re-conception of what is most at stake in the world today. Although the work that these insights do is of broader significance for the thesis' project as a whole, it is also the case that an unveiling of the universal structures of experience which shape thought and action has the potential to go beyond recent interventions in the sociology and philosophy of religion and recast the whole debate about secularisation, and its many political and global implications, in a

new light. Here the thesis makes a contribution to the urgent task of rethinking the political shape and futures of the world from a perspective which pushes the configurations and concepts of the modern structures of knowledge to their limits.

In a similar way, the unthought of the tradition denominated "Western metaphysics" and its complicity with the political is the failure to unpack in a serious way the putative Greek/Jew opposition referred to by thinkers such as Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger. This thesis will suggest – in the context of a temporalised phenomenality of both the political and the messianic or utopian – that the Jewish tradition has been radically occluded. Not only does it need unveiling, but the political potentiality of such an unveiling needs to be foregrounded. A significant contribution here is the drawing together of the hints and traces of Derrida as a Marrano, and a suggestion – read against the grain of his own texts in some of their moments – that deconstruction might be (an)other Jewish science. If the universal is what is at stake in conceptualising the political – and its foundation of the social – then a simultaneous awareness that this universal is an artefact of a particular tradition and that its empty centre can be subjected to multiple articulations assists in better grasping the truths of late modernity and in suggesting potentialities for an open future.

It is worth repeating these specific contributions need contextualisation within the broad project of the thesis – which is to assay or sketch an analytic which could capture the structure – and attempts to structure – of the contemporary global political field/s. As this is an ambitious undertaking, the thesis seeks not to provide a definitive portrait of the current political conjuncture, which indeed would run counter to the spirit of allowing the

indeterminacy and contingency of history to be thought, but rather to gesture towards what such a project might do. So, the thesis is in many ways preliminary to further research which is most urgently required.

Chapter Three: Literature Review - Genealogies of Endism

In his recent short treatise on Endism, Gregory Elliott (2008: x) captures the stakes of the discourse on the "end of history" well, in previewing the arguments of the ending of his own text:

> Necessarily schematic, even dogmatic, it largely upholds the sense of an ending articulated, in their different ways, by Hobsbawm and Anderson; and therewith ratifies the sense of a beginning implicit in it – that is, of a historical epoch in which, for the first time in more than a century and a half, capitalism has not been haunted by its shadow: the spectre of socialism. This in no way grants eternal life to the complacent, globally unbound Prometheus of the new millennium (after all, as Hobsbawm maintains, capitalism may be in the process of devouring itself). Nor does it entail the enduring triumph of its US variant – only one of the possibilities envisioned by Fukuyama. But it does imply the implausibility, in any *forseeable* future, of the kind of systemic alternative to capitalism long represented by what, following Norberto Bobbio, must now be referred to as historical socialism.

This somewhat begs the question of whether the dichotomy represented by "liberal capitalism" and "historical socialism" exhausts the political field. The fundamental presupposition of the Fukuyama thesis, and too many of its critics, is that it does, and that the only third term possible is a sort of postmodern resigned irony. It is, of course, the task of this thesis to contest this narrative of the disappearance of the political, but this is an important point worth signalling at this stage. Elliott, does, however, clarify the terms of the debate – whether a totalising alternative to the present dispensation must somehow either be inherent in the possibilities of capitalism (as Marxists of almost all stripes would contend) or whether Endism represents a blockage in the political imaginary, and thus an almost overpowering constraint on social action which is meaningfully directed to the creation of *other* meanings, but one which can be overcome by thinking history *otherwise*. The latter position will be the wager and the argument of this thesis, but the

task of the present discussion is to elucidate the ways in which Fukuyama's thesis –
incoherent as it is in many respects – is quite difficult to refute without making visible
and foregrounding the *blindness* which blocks resistances to such totalisations in the first
place. In other words, Endism should be viewed – sociologically – as far more of a
symptom and an exercise of discursive power than as a theory which seeks to adequate
itself to the world as it is. It is, rather, a performative invocation which seeks to over-
write the world and its power is inherent in this invocation rather than in its elegance as a
theoretical construction (though the latter, it must be said, should not be underestimated).

A dualism under the guise of the dialectic

As Elliott goes on to argue, Perry Anderson (2002: 280) remains somewhat trapped
within the binary terms of this imaginary, even as he is the best exemplar and exponent of
the force of Fukuyama's thesis for the forces of historical socialism. It is worth quoting a
passage from the overture to his essay "The Ends of History" at some length, where he
parses Lutz Niethammer's seminal 1989 work *Posthistoire*:

> It was then that an uncanny skein of thinkers started to suggest that history was
> nearing its terminus. In a brilliant feat of intellectual detection, Niethammer
> brings to light the hidden links or affinities – cultural or political – within a group
> of otherwise very contrasted theorists of the period: Henri de Man, Arnold
> Gehlen, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Carl Schmitt, Alexandre Kojève, Ernst Junger,
> Henri Lefebvre, even in their way Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno.
> *Posthistoire*, a French term that only exists in German, adopted in the fifties by
> Gehlen from a reading of de Man, signifies for Niethammer less a theoretical
> system than a structure of feeling, the precipitate of a certain common historical
> experience. These were thinkers, Niethammer argues, who shared early hopes of a
> radical overthrow of the established social order in Europe, as activists or
> sympathisers with the major 'parties of movement' of the inter-war period –
> socialist, fascist, or communist; and then disappointments which crystallised into
> a deep skepticism about the possibility of further historical change as such. The
> result was something like a collective vision – glimpsed from many different

angles – of a stalled, exhausted world, dominated by recursive mechanisms of bureaucracy and ubiquitous circuits of commodities, relieved only by the extravagances of a phantasmatic imaginary without limit, because without power. In a post-historical society, 'the rulers have ceased to rule, but the slaves have remained slaves.' For Niethammer, this diagnosis of the time is not without persuasive force: it corresponds to many particular experiences of daily life and local observations of social science. But they who speak of the end of history do not escape it. The pathos of *Posthistoire* is the intelligible product of a political conjuncture interpreted within a political tradition.

These figures, these watchers of a world exhausted at the end of time, are of course reacting to the very same conjuncture which brought forth the re-inscription of specifically Jewish motifs of messianism to counter the secularised Christianity of apocalyptic urgency so central to this thesis. Anderson observes that Niethammer's work was published almost simultaneously with Fukuyama's original 1989 article, and that neither could have been aware that the other was writing. Though Niethammer's text was not "an arcane philosophical wisdom which [became] an exoteric image of the age, as Fukuyama's arguments spread around the media of the globe" (Anderson 2002: 281), the constellation or mosaic (to adopt, as Anderson appositely does, Benjamin's terms) of these two works of thought must be significant. If the cultural pessimism of the mid war years Niethammer pointed to was an inversion of the modernist narrative of progress, as Anderson says, then its return at the end of an era suggests not some sort of sublation arising from the ruins of progress-ivism, but rather a reinscription, a citation, a repetition, which speaks of not just the temper of the times and their out-of-joint-ness but also of a failure of the dialectic to resolve itself, a blockage in a species of thought whose reflections in the shards of the real may have been adequate for a certain epoch, but whose exhaustion at the end of the millennium was itself symptomatic of an age without an adequate *mythos*.

Gamble (2000: 33-34) is quite correct, therefore, to argue that Fukuyama himself (1989, 1992) fails to adequately render his argument in dialectical terms – and Callinicos (1995) too is right that Fukuyama's "Hegel-Kojève" has had a Straussian Aristotle grafted onto him and proceeds by way of constructing an unstable dualism rather than a dialectic *per se*. But the key insight is Gamble's – that Fukuyama's text works to proclaim not an end to history, but to ideology, and thus to politics. This erasure of the political is hardly new, and nor is cultural pessimism (which – as McCarney 1992, 1993 aptly perceives is the esoteric context or content of *The End of History and the Last Man*). Indeed, as Bobbio (1994) argues, the desire to efface the political is a standard trope of any temporarily hegemonic ideology – left or right.

Spectres of Hegel

However, this is an argument, an argument about closure of the political imaginary, which – while forming one of the presuppositions to the work of this thesis, and which will be sketched in this section – needs articulation through an engagement with the concrete work of the thinkers who will be considered later. It is the task of this section of the Chapter to set out the terms of the problem posed by Endism in its most recent incarnation. This will not be done by a direct engagement with or a close reading of Fukuyama's texts – because my argument is that his writing should be considered in the context of the work it does in articulating and disseminating a certain political imaginary. This discussion and mode of proceeding is necessarily schematic. For instance, there is disagreement within the literature (Anderson 1992: 286, Callinicos 1995, Sinnerbrink 2007) about the degree to which Hegel – whose spectre, of course, haunts all these

debates – can accurately be understood as having argued for a teleological *end* of history, and the degree to which this is a later overlay stemming in part from the work of Kojève and its many traces, and in part from the spirit(s) of Marx (one of whose names will have been Engels). While I think that it is correct to point to the necessity of understanding the full movement of the category of the bad infinite across disparate parts of Hegel's opus, and therefore of arguing that Hegel's system seeks a degree of closure surpassing Kant's narrative of progress, this is somewhat moot – because Hegel has been taken as arguing for a *telos*, and the resulting narrative has had *political* effects over recent centuries which endure regardless of their faithfulness or otherwise to the Hegelian text.

As Derrida ([1993] 1994, 1999: 229-230) argues, Fukuyama's moves, though not without some internal cohesion and merit – though perhaps better read as a sociological datum rather than as a work of political philosophy as such – are a "triumphant conjuration of the end" (1994: 52-53), a discourse which endlessly repeats and cites itself, a narrative of apocalyptic urgency which seeks to banish the spectres it conjures:

> We had this bread of apocalypse in our mouths naturally, already, just as naturally as that which I nicknamed after the fact, in 1980, as the "apocalyptic tone in philosophy".(Derrida 1994: 14-15)

Its literary form, Derrida contends, and indeed its work as a text, is as a gospel, an *evangelion* rather than a philosopheme or a thesis to be posited and tested against the times. It is a joining up, or an attempt to do so, of a time that is always disjointed, a search and an invocation of conjuncture where perhaps ruins persist.

Interpreting the Short Twentieth Century

If Anderson, one of the (post?)Marxist theorists of "conjuncture", one who remains proprietorial over Marx(isms) (Derrida 1999: 229), cannot quite see this, it is not for want of trying. But, as I suggested earlier, and as Callinicos (1995: 18) also argues, it is because Anderson accepts the terms in which Fukuyama interprets the history of the "short Twentieth century" (Hobsbawm 1994) – as a struggle between ideological blocs for hegemony. Nevertheless, Anderson (1992: 336) poses a genuine problem, even if we will need to go on to complicate it, when he writes:

> No reply to Fukuyama is of any avail … if it contents itself with pointing out problems that remain in the world he predicts. An effective critique must be able to show that there are powerful systemic alternatives that he has discounted.

And Callinicos' quibbling about whether or not the Soviet Union constituted "historical socialism" ignores both the ideological effects of its demise – at the level of the political imaginary – and the viability of "historical socialism" – which as Derrida (1999) rightly says, had in fact not been "viable" for a very long time prior to 1989 or 1991. In another register, Wallerstein (2003) argues that the "revolution of 1968" brought into consciousness an awareness that the vehicles of transformation proper to the world system of the last century – third world nationalism and social democratic reformism – had failed, if not in their welfarist efforts, in the promise of democratisation they held out, and that there was thus very little remaining of an "anti-systemic alternative" left on offer from the global left(s). In his very recent discussion of Endism, *Ends in Sight*, one of Callinicos' targets (as an example of apparent Fukuyama sympathisers "on the left"), Gregory Elliott updates Anderson's trajectory when he writes (2008: 110-111):

Even today, the resilient 'movement of movements' against neo-liberalism, surviving concerted efforts to tar it with the brush of fundamentalism and terrorism, is a long way short of achieving the social weight and focus, let alone institutional representation, required to table a systemic alternative to capitalism, of the sort once embodied in the mass organisations, political and trade union, of the Second and Third Internationals, which mobilised big battalions against the 'artillery of commodities'. The cruces of an alternative – agency, organisation, strategy, goal – that could command the loyalties and energies of the requisite untold millions await anything approaching resolution. If it seems difficult to gainsay the thrust of Anderson's overview from – and for – the left, then it represented not a transcription of political pessimism, still less a gesture of intellectual suicide, but a historical realism reflecting the current supremacy of capitalism and its culture on a world scale, while canvassing, in its own distinctive fashion, resistance to it.

Once again, a return to Derrida (1994: 3) is salutary, a necessary citation and re-iteration:

Maintaining now the spectres of Marx. (But *maintaining now* [maintenant] without conjuncture. A disjointed or disadjusted now, "out of joint," a disajointed now that always risks maintaining nothing together in the assured conjunction of some context whose border would still be determinable.)

Remaining within the terms of Anderson's (or Hegel's? or Marx') dialectic, the key to

the very constitution of the alternatives and the *desire* for a *systemic* alternative may lie in

a citation Anderson (1992: 322) makes from Kojève himself, writing in 1946:

'If there was from the beginning a Hegelian Left and a Hegelian Right, that is also *all* there has been since Hegel.' History had unfolded within the categorical framework the German philosopher had conceived, even if its exact outcome was still uncertain. 'It cannot be said that history has refuted Hegelianism. At most one can say that it has still not arbitrated between "left" and "right" interpretations of Hegel's philosophy'.

Let us add one other citation from Anderson (1992: 375), his closing passage in "The

Ends of History", to the constellation these passages form:

Historical analogies are never more than suggestive. But there are occasions where they may be more fruitful than predictions. It would be surprising if the fate of socialism reproduced any one of these paradigms in all fidelity. But the set of possible futures now before it falls within a range such as this. Oblivion,

transvaluation, mutation, redemption: each, according to their intuition, will make their own guess as to which is more probable. Jesuit, Leveller, Jacobin, Liberal – these are the figures in the mirror.

But what if the task of redemption is not the transvaluation of a certain socialism but a task of the redemption of those who have suffered, "*even the dead* [who] will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And that enemy has not ceased to be victorious" ? (Benjamin [1940] 1968: 255)

At issue in the discourse on the end of history is the fact that meanings and teleologies are interpreted – according to the prevalent political imaginary – as necessarily or tendentially having led to the best of all possible worlds, even if that world still partakes of the fallen state. Maurice Merleau-Ponty displays an affinity with the thought of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* when he writes:

> Like a passion that one day just ceases, destoyed by its own duration, a question burns out and is replaced by an unquestioned state of affairs. A country which lay bleeding from a war or revolution stands suddenly intact and whole. The dead are implicated in this abatement: only by living could they recreate the very lack and need of them which is being blotted out… History takes still more from those who have lost everything, and gives yet more to those who have taken everything. For its sweeping judgements acquit the unjust and dismiss the please of their victims. History never *confesses*.

What we can derive from the debate about Fukuyama's theses is the insight that the dichotomy which sought to posit "capitalist democracy" against "actually existing socialism" has a profound resonance in the modern political imaginary. With the eclipse of one side of the binary, the polemic is one of victory – of the final vanquishment of the enemy. Options which had seemed open are now closed, and a series of geo-strategic and

ideological contests have their complexity reduced to an inscription of the foredestined end, which does the work of constraining alternatives.

The interest taken in Fukuyama's theses by authors and theorists on the left demonstrates the ubiquity of the narrative of progress among the apparently contending parties of Western late modernity. The spectre of the universal is so ubiquitous that the negation of a contending universal seems to leave no space for any resistances to "capitalist democracy", or indeed much tactical space to navigate within its interstices. The mirroring of the claim that the universal of neo-liberal hegemony can only be contested by a competing universal on both sides of the putative divide lays out the problem starkly – what we are enclosed in is a determinist imaginary – whether viewed in a Marxist or a liberal lens. The force of the dominant imaginary can be discerned through the degree to which ideologies of the left are pulled towards an acceptance of a "post-partisan" positioning which reinscribes the significations proper to the hegemonic liberal order, and it becomes impossible to think outside the limits of its social significations and structures of thought. It will be the task of this thesis to suggest that other figurations of the political can enable this blindness to be dispelled.

Chapter Four: The political imaginary and the utopian imaginary

Following on from the conclusions drawn from the review of the literature on the "end of history", this Chapter is a *prolegomena* to the thesis, setting out to perform two tasks. First, by distinguishing between a phenomenology of the social and of the political following the work of Claude Lefort, the Chapter establishes the basic theoretical presuppositions of the argument which will be pursued throughout the thesis, and also introduces Cornelius Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary, which informs the argument regarding the closure of the modern political imaginary which it is the task of the political, the thesis argues, to break open. Lefort's work is also used to introduce the theme of temporality, which is central to any possible phenomenology of utopia, and thus of social action in and on the field of the political imaginary. The second part of the Chapter considers the concept of utopia – organised around a critique of Fredric Jameson's recent theses on utopics – in order to put a further theoretical building block in place to allow the argument of the thesis to take flight. The Chapter closes by arguing that Castoriadis' thought provides a more fruitful direction for thinking about the role of utopia as a horizon and a social signification in the imaginary.

Thinking the Political Imaginary

This thesis argues that discourses of depoliticisation associated with Endism attain their force from both the exhaustion of the Cold War political imaginary and from related attempts to close political discourse such that the forms of rule associated with the ideology which articulates "capitalist democracy" as the *telos* of history represent a universal against which it is not possible to posit more than a particular resistance, if anti-

systemic action is understood in the dialectical terms whereby a totalisation leads to the emergence of a sublated and supplementary universal. It is, of course, the contention of this work that this perspective represents a blockage just as much as the performative and hegemonic enunciation of Endism does, because it also works to circumscribe possibilities through action on the imaginary plane. Therefore, in order to substantiate the argument posited in this dissertation, it is necessary to specify the nature of the concept of the political imaginary.

The concept of the imaginary is most often associated with the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, and then with the social theory of Cornelius Castoriadis. It would be a mistake, despite a common filiation from Freud, to see Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary as if it were the social or political application of Lacanian theory. Castoriadis (1997: 190-191) speaks in an interview collected in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* with immense clarity of the "sociological and political blindness of the psychoanalysts" and says of Lacan:

> Heteronomous and traditional societies are not individuating. They are uniforming, collectivising. As for the sociological blindness of the psychoanalysts, I believe I have spoken about that in relation to Lacan. They take the all and sundry of the given institution of society to be partaking of "reality" and, at the same time, of "the Law"; they make of it something infrangible, immutable, untransformable, whereas these are in fact social institutions.

Castoriadis also warns of the "psychoanalytic blindness of the sociologists and the philosophers". The utility of the concept of the political imaginary is precisely to reveal the symbolic dimensions of sociality and political life which must be taken into account by a renewed and revisioned phenomenological analytic of the political.

Before, however, turning to Castoriadis' formulations, Lefort's phenomenological distinction between the institution of the social and the political as a moment whereby the social is instituted will be considered (Lefort 1986, Howard 1988). Lefort's position is useful for the thesis in that his position is influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy of the political, which forms one of the key theoretical positions utilised. Consideration of Lefort's theses will begin to illustrate the degree to which the political is an indeterminate and open category in creative tension with lived experience in the process of becoming historical. A distinct contribution is made in this section of the thesis by relating Derrida's insistence on the iterative nature of identity over time to Lefort's thematisation of the post-Revolutionary modern political as constitutive of the self-representation of the social. Lefort theorises the consequences of the universalisation of the space of sovereignty whose *ancien règime* fixity was through the representation of the body of the Sovereign. I would argue that the question for the constitution of a properly democratic political imaginary is the *temporality* of the empty locus of political representation, which derives its content *iteratively* through the constitution of antagonistically shaped identifications. This temporalisation of the political, I argue, can be analysed phenomenologically. The meaning of Derrida's *la démocratie à venir* (Derrida 1994) is found in the impossibility of spatialising the time of the promise, and through the iterative moments of antagonistic contestation in the impossible space of a messianism without a Messiah.

Thus, Lefort's phenomenology in the Derridean time of the promise can be read together with Castoriadis' social theory in order to sharpen the category of the political imaginary which will be a key concept in the broader project of articulating a phenomenological

analytic of the possibility of the political. Castoriadis has a somewhat more rigorous conceptualisation of the social imaginary, but Lefort's theorisation of the historicity and politics of the social imaginary is of enormous value for our conceptualisation of the political imaginary. Before illustrating the application of the concept of the political imaginary to the concerns of this thesis, a brief excursus is also necessary by way of Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* to distinguish their 'deconstructionist' political theory, which in a certain Marxist spirit evacuates the fixity of the content of the political signifier from a phenomenological (yet deconstructionist) conception which remains open to the possibilities of creative political action. In this way, the Chapter also contributes to the broader aim of the thesis in demonstrating the exhaustion of the modern political imaginary and the failure to mark out the steps of a path beyond the aporias mis-named 'globalisation'.

Lefort and the political institution of the social

Just as Sartre's essentialisation of the working class into a philosophy sundered from the lived experience of class was a target for Merleau-Ponty in *The Adventures of the Dialectic*, so too does Lefort oppose the reduction of the political to a metaphysical schema of necessity divorced from the contingencies of chance, history and human agency (Howard 1988: 190). Lefort is combating what Howard (1989: 37) calls the "philosophical rationalisation of political choice". Lefort's social and political theory reacts against both Marxist and liberal totalisations, insisting that we are always already within the social and that Marx' key contribution was the stripping away of the veils of ideological illusion which prevent the perception of liberal theory as the self-representation of bourgeois interest masquerading as a totalisation of the social from a

universal extra-social position. Lefort, however, goes beyond this Marxist insight to launch a broader critique of representation. For Lefort, Marx falls victim to his own critique.

Problematising Marx

In his essay 'Marx: From One Vision of History to Another', Lefort (1986) argues that *The Communist Manifesto* is akin to a self-rendering of the phantasmatic representations of bourgeois thought. Yet who speaks in *The Communist Manifesto*? It would seem that it is the Spectre of Communism itself which writes – almost a form of ghost-writing or automatic auto-inscription. Returning to Castoriadis' argument against psychoanalysis, the same point could be turned against much of social and political theory more generally to the degree that it reifies and freezes the social at a point at which it can be represented; as if the whole could be grasped. The totalisations of Marxist theory, then, sin against a cardinal law of the Marxist analysis of ideology – through becoming ideological, the political engagement with events is occluded (and thus, necessarily, Marxist theory becomes anti-dialectical). Rather events in time are frozen in the space occupied by the knowing class subject. Just as Lukács [1968] (1971: 141) seeks to reconstitute the "unity of the subject" by travelling through the realm of "disintegration and fragmentation" and dissolving reifying representations into a "true relation with a grasped totality", or the dialectic, so too does Marx mistake the "phantom-like entity" of the posited significations of the social (Lefort 1986: 180) for the chaos and magma of the lifeworld.

Marx, in a sense, fetishises an idealised post-historical (and thus impossible) sociality by naturalising it outside any possible institution of the social. The positivistic Marx of the

Manifesto, the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, then, transgresses against his own eleventh thesis on Feuerbach – which could be rephrased as the demand that "all that exists" be grasped only through *praxis*. The point to be understood is the degree to which the social is compounded of imaginary significations which relate the particular to the universal. But the universal is not the lifeworld, but a mediation. The universal is a *socially-instituted* mediation which makes sense of the fragmentations of the social – a *representation* or an imaginary signification. Marx knows the spectrality of the bourgeois universal, but his insight is blind to the return of the spectre as *representation* of communist society. No dialectic, then, which posits a necessary attainment of a non-political social end through the agency of a universal subject of history is adequate either to the indeterminacy of history or the nature of the political.

The relation of the political and the social

In his text 'The Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies', Lefort (1986: 195-6) writes:

> The limits of Marx's thought are this most clearly revealed by the attempt to conceive of the social from within the boundaries of the social, history from within the boundaries of history, human beings in terms of, and with a view to, human beings. Hence Marx fails to address, not the relation between human beings and 'nature' (for he speaks of this constantly in order to assure himself of an objective determination of human beings within a naturalist perspective), but rather the relation of human beings, the social and history to what is in principle beyond their reach, on the basis of which this relation is produced and which remains implicit in it.

The question, then, for Lefort is to relate the political to the institution of the social without the representational nature of the political slipping from the grasp of the theorist. It is here that phenomenology – a radicalisation of Merleau-Ponty's method – is of use in

Lefort's schema. In his insistence that the Marxist text situate itself *textually* within a con-text of an engagement with the stuff of experience, Lefort approaches a deconstructionist position. Derrida [1971] (1981: 62-63, 74) says in *Positions*, in dialogue with Houdebine and Scarpetta:

> To impose this prudence on oneself is to take seriously the difficulty, and also the heterogeneity, of the Marxist text, the decisive importance of its historical stakes... Now we cannot consider Marx', Engels' or Lenin's texts as completely finished elaborations that are simply to be 'applied' to the current situation... I do not believe there is any "fact" which permits us to say: in *the* marxist text, contradiction *itself*, dialectics *itself* escapes from *the* dominance of metaphysics.

Lefort, too, is alive to the multiplicity of Marx' thought, recognising the disjunction between the progressive history of the *Manifesto* and the *Grundrisse* and the history of repetition in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, which – in contradiction with itself – demonstrates the importance of past and future in constituting competing political imaginaries in modern societies (without transcendental narratives) and thus founding political rule. Recognising that "the question of interpretation already implies the question of the political" (Lefort 1975: 12), Lefort adopts a phenomenological approach to theorising the political's manifestations within a contingent history in which sense must be actively created and pro-jected, rather than shown from the viewpoint of a hypothesised universal subject of knowledge:

> Lefort begins from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, attempting to lay bare the structure of the *experience* of theory, sociality and politics. The very style of the analyses recalls the manner of presentation adopted by Merleau-Ponty: rejecting the transcendental, non-situated or constitutive subject, moving from one argument, showing its seeming necessity, only to drive it to the limit where it inverts and opens a new path. This *experience*, the *work* of interpretation, *is* in

fact the object being analysed. Truth is not adequation of thought and thing, but the process which includes the situated thinker/actor.

For Lefort, as for Merleau-Ponty, the work of the dialectic is a work of description of the contingent political possibilities open to particular social actors at a historical moment, and his thinking of the political follows this path. The political as such does not surpass itself through its transcendence of and dissolution into a non-political social which has overcome history through the fulfilment of history's logic. Though Marx opposes this philosophisation of thought as *Geist* in Hegel, his reification of a self-identical subject/object of history represents a regression to a misperception of history as determined by a teleological rationalism which leaves no space for autonomous political action, subsuming the political in the false dream of a return of 'natural' pre-political sociality in a Communism which would put an end to antagonisms. As Howard (1988: 204) shows, Lefort follows Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of the dialectic such that truth must confront historicity rather than postulating a "*place* in history which would be the incarnation of [Marx'] theory" – as if one could totalise history's meaning from the auto-critique of capitalism whose social bearer is a subject itself formed by the social relation to labour (Lefort 1986). Lefort (1962: 67) states:

> Society cannot become an object of representation, or a matter which we would have to transform, because we are rooted in it; we discover in the particular form of our 'sociality' the sense of our projects and tasks.

This is a question, then, of the politics of theory, as well as of epistemology. Critical theory, which reveals the partiality of liberal theory's claim to universal truth, becomes

ideology when it "falls back into the myth of possessing the entirety of the phenomenon" (Howard 1988: 208). Thus, the distortions of Marxism which sought to mould reality to a revolutionary overcoming of the subject/object (as with Lukács) or substitute the knowledge, organisation and will of the Party (as in Lenin's thought), through their enfolding of theory into a postulated end which never quite arrives as announced, are revelatory of a fissure at the heart of Marxism – a structural aporia inscribed into every attempt to fix the signification of the political place spatially rather than temporally. Lefort wrote in an unpublished paper[1]:

> Can thought ever postulate that there is an empirical place where history and society uncover themselves in their totality where all equivocation is dissipated, where the institutions, collective behaviours and symbols become transparent, where all the significations of the event are recuperated in the same truth? (Howard 1988: 207)

It is false, then, to assume that a universal subject can perceive history as a totality and that this necessary perception can be revealed by the theorist. Rather, it is possible to discern phenomenologically through the flux and fragmentations of history a certain logic of the political but "it will be the logic of a unity in difference whose differentiations are not *aufgehoben* but remain open to the contingencies of historical creation" (Howard 1988: 213). It is a matter of maintaining the political as an empty signifier which tendentially unifies the field of the social, whose content is derivative of a phenomenological analysis rather than a normative specification.

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[1] As with a previous unpublished paper by Lefort, citations and references to these works are drawn from Howard's chapter and his translation of Lefort's work. Howard's footnotes make it clear that these papers are untranslated into English and difficult to access in French. I acknowledge a debt, therefore, to Howard's reading and interpretation of Lefort.

The temporal logic of the political

Social theory should be revelatory of the signs of potentiality of the times, should open "up a new *experience* of the world, a new conception of society and truth" (Howard 1988: 208). This surely, was the revolutionary nature of Marxism – to draw from the times a new truth which would do work in the world, and it is this spectre which we should conjure again today in a time that is out of joint (Derrida [1993] 1994: 4). It is a matter, I would argue, of temporalising the political rather than spatialising it, of understanding history as 'repetitive' – or perhaps more properly, *iterative* (Derrida 1988), rather than as progressive or teleological, and tending towards an end inherent from the beginning. It is through this logic of the political that Lefort formulates his specification of the relation between the political and the institution of the social through the imaginary.

The logic of the political and the time of the promise

The particular importance for this thesis of Lefort's thematisation of the logic of the political lies in its phenomenological insistence on the importance of contextualised history, of the *time* or the moment of the political. For Lefort (1960: 119) the phenomenology of the political resists any fixity of representationalism, and dialectically confronts theory with historical experience – not in the sense of a series of delimited events in time, or in the sense of an overarching cunning of Reason, but rather in the situated possibilities open *at any particular time* for making political choices which situate social subjects "as depending on the same public thing" (*res publica*). Indetermination and contingency as principles constitutive of any history require an

understanding of the constitution of social and communal identity through the political institution as responsive to temporal symbolisations and formations.

The logic of the political institution of the social emerges from Lefort's anthropological thematisation of the origins of the social and the difference between societies without history and historical society. Lefort (1986), as briefly indicated above, later contrasts two thematisations of history in Marx in his 'Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies' – the "repetitive" and the evolutionary or rationalistic, and in this paper he draws out Marx' theorisation of the differentiation of the political and the social through reading the section in the *Grundrisse* on "forms which precede capitalist production" (Marx [1939] 1973: 471-479). Lefort, in his later writings on the modern democratic imaginary, thematises the displacement of sovereignty through the institution of democratic forms of political life. Through retracing the course of Lefort's thought, the logic of the political can be unveiled, and its temporality as opposed to spatiality thematised using Derrida's thought of the promise and the iterative nature of subjectivity.

In his chapter on Claude Lefort in *The Marxian Legacy*, Dick Howard (1988) draws on early papers by Lefort in order to systematise the development of his thought. Of particular importance for the problematic of the differentiation of the social and the political are Lefort's 1951 response to Levi-Strauss' introduction to Mauss' *Essai Sur Le Don* [1950] (2002), 'L'échange et la lutte des hommes' and a paper written in 1952, 'Sociétés san histoire et Historicité'. Against Levi-Strauss' "rationalism which dissolves the specificity of the particular in the universal" (Howard 1988: 192), Lefort draws on Mauss' anthropological and ethnological work to contend that societies are not unified by

a collective consciousness or the mediation of the unconscious between the subject and its Other but rather by a social relation, which taking the form of the gift, institutes social significations of identity and difference which are themselves tendentially subsumed through the reciprocity involved in the return of the gift. The social, argues Howard (1988: 194) construing Lefort, "is more than the sum of individual actions, and less than the self-transparence of a pure subject".

The political and rationalist philosophies of history

Lefort does not attempt to solve the riddle of the originary instantiation of a historical consciousness, but does highlight the problem posed for rationalist theories of history by societies without the phenomenon of reflecting on the historicity of social relations and thus the possibility of social change (Howard 1988: 195-192). The formation of a historical consciousness implies the possibility of reflecting on the self-organisation of society both in terms of past and future. By contrast, the society without history through its entirely *social* constitution folds the past and future into the present. The externalisation of past and future, or in other words the instauration of *temporality* through historical consciousness is the originary differentiation of the political. *The political is the dimension which arises when the social relation is problematised and through which it is problematised.* The political is the reflexive *moment* of the temporal problematisation of the social. The political, in turn, moves towards the institution of "a form of *sociality*".

In his critique of Marx' rationalist history in 'Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies', Lefort (1986) demonstrates that Marx is aware of the transformation of the social

imaginary (what Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1983) call in their discussion of representation and territorialisations, no doubt here following Marx, the *socius*) through successive shifts in the "all-absorbing and all-predominant communal property... posited as a particular *ager publicus*" (Marx [1939] 1973: 470). However, Marx' failure in the *Grundrisse* to account for the apparent stasis in the "Asiatic mode of production" because he imposes a determinate schema which sublates the political into economic and social forces understood as causative. The ideologisation of Marx' thought discussed above is here revealed in its starkest form – through the sublation of the political, history loses its openness and the dialectic of nature, labour and necessity is substituted for the dialectic of truth and experience.

Howard (1988: 198) illustrates this movement in Lefort's thought towards the specification of the differentiation of the political from the social through historical consciousness and reflexivity with reference to the debate over the emergence of capitalism (and implicitly, in critique of Marx' rationalist history which reads the categories of capitalism into 'pre-capitalist' social formations through an illicit identification of capitalism as a social form transparent to the lifeworldl):

> While one can point to 'capitalist' behaviour and institutions as early as the thirteenth century, and while at least the Jesuits attempted to adapt Catholicism to the new conditions, Lefort's point is, on the one hand, that neither the economy nor ideology alone can be univocally said to determine anything, and on the other hand, and more importantly, that the Reformation has a revolutionary signification precisely insofar as, in introducing a new attitude to the world, it marks a rupture with the established mode of representations. A 'capitalist' in the world of universal Catholicism could not affirm capitalism as such; only through the opening of a new signification could the capitalist come to know himself as a self-conscious subject.

The differentiation of the political at the level of the symbolic or the imaginary is not a differentiation in the same sense that the aesthetic could be said to be differentiated from the economic in modernity. Lefort argues that the political is "co-institutional with the social" – it is an imaginary or symbolic representation open to contestation (Howard 1988: 213). The logic of the political then, Howard (1988: 212) writes, "is not the traditional onto-logic: it is historical and social". For Lefort (nd: 12):

> It is from that general division, where the power takes form, that it is necessary to begin in deciphering the political and knowing how a power is effectively circumscribed, how it is represented, how it represents itself to others – how the collective representation invests it in the social body and what simultaneously happens to the determination of nature and the gods; how it separates itself, is perceived as *Other*, at a distance and 'above' society; how the position of the separated power is modified and, to examine all the consequences which come into being in the forms of representation and the effectiveness of socialisation.

Howard (1988: 213-4) moves on to illustrate this logic of the political through a discussion of Lefort's writing on the Athenian *polis*.

The political imaginary and the invention of new forms of sociality

The advent of democracy is – similar perhaps to the originary historical consciousness – perhaps inexplicable through a rational historical schema. Yet, writes Howard (1988: 213) "with democracy came new forms of sociality" as "the space and time of life within the city took on a different sense" and "the relation to nature and other humans was modified". For Lefort, the enduring significance of the Athenian political imaginary was the fact that "politics and power moved into the centre of the city, not as a form of

domination, but rather as the *interrogation of society and its own goals*". Democracy, ancient or modern, is the exemplar *par excellence* of the co-institution of the political and social as the "law of its own origin, its own institution" is inscribed within the social imaginary rather than "the transcendent justification heretofore typical" (Howard 1988: 213). The society which is the *polis*, then, for Lefort (nd: 2), attempts a self-transparent political imaginary;

> ...an attempt which culminates or roots itself in the idea of a power which is *de jure* inoccupiable, inappropriable, at an equal distance from all those who are bound to it; no one's power, *neutral*, and as such, *instituting* the social; at once the instigator and the guarantor of the Law under which each finds his name, his place, and his limit.

To reiterate, the political then becomes a temporal moment of reflexivity within the social.

Picking up the thread of the difference between the democratic political imaginary, and the social imaginary of sovereignty, Lefort's discussion of Machiavelli's analysis of the tension between the representation of the social whole and the political distance from the social which is the place the Prince must uneasily occupy is of great interest. In his book *Machiavel: le travail de l'oeuvre*, Lefort (1973) analyses the tension the Prince faces. On one hand, he must incarnate the social as its representation, fulfilling the symbolic place of Sovereign and of the Law. However, as an incarnation of the self-representation of the social, the social is left as a delimited space without reference to an Other outside the communal space. But if the Prince attempts to exteriorise the political in order to rule the social from a point outside, then he risks identification with the Other, and thus delegitimisation and rebellion. This problematic of the collapse of the political into the

social imaginary and the re-socialisation of the political is emblematic of the problem of sovereignty *tout court*, and also emblematic of the effacement of the political by an imaginary which posits a market or natural forces in the place of the Sovereign

It could be argued that this tension underlies the obsession with consent, the social contract, and the separation of civil society and the state in liberal theory. Machiavelli, according to Lefort, does not thematise this distinction, but rather advises the Prince to navigate the shoals of sovereignty and rule according to *fortuna*, and it in this sense that Machiavelli trumps any hypostasised theory – whether Marxian or liberal – as a political theorist who engages phenomenologically with the stuff of contingency and historicity. If one were to regard the dialectical moment in which the early modern Sovereign is caught as a shorthand thematisation of the dilemmas of absolutist rule and its overthrow by the people as sovereign in the French Revolution, one could then also see the tension between the empty space of sovereignty and attempts to fix its content through liberalism and Marxist theory and the time of the political as democratic antagonism where the people attain sovereignty.

While the problem of sovereignty forms a background rather than a central theme of this thesis, what this picture paints is a certain inevitability to the manner in which attempts to fix the political imaginary revolve around an absent figure or figures. This becomes an important datum – as it were – when the thesis later seeks to deconstruct the limits of the contemporary political, and will resurface in the concluding Chapter when the threads of the argument are woven together. Having made that point, this Chapter now turns to Cornelius Castoriadis' insights into the social imaginary.

Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary

Castoriadis' concepts of action, the social imaginary and the institution of society have clear implications for a retheorisation of the possibility of the repoliticisation of the social imaginary. Leledakis (1999: 96) writes:

> Rejecting both the determinant role of the economic and the privileged position of the working class, Castoriadis sought to provide a theory of history as intrinsically open and non-determinable coupled with a theory of the subject that could support the potential for individual autonomy while recognizing that each individual is inescapably a social construct.

Castoriadis' social theory developed in reaction to his own previous Marxist political and theoretical position. Against Marx, he argued that Marx' social theory was inevitably circular. For example, the economy could not be theorised as a closed or determinant system when the law of value is – as Marx recognised – clearly a construct of culture and of particular social and historical conditions (Joas 1989: 1186). This determinist theory could not account for creative social action, according to Castoriadis (1998: 87), which is better conceived in terms of the Greek concept of *poeisis* rather than as *tekhne*. Castoriadis' theory of social action emphasises its openness and creative potential rather than its determination by structure. Social action is indeed moulded by historical contingency, but the possibility of a novel response to changing constellations of contingency must be left open. Castoriadis, according to Joas (1989: 1188) regarded intentional action planned according to substantive rationality and a calculation of contingency as only a technical moment in the process of social action, which is more accurately referred to the dynamic between the social imaginary and the socially

embedded individual or organisation. It is very clear that he is quite close to Weber here both in terms of level of analysis and with regard to the role of fate and the social and cultural carriers of shifting ethics and rationalities.

Where Castoriadis arguably transcends Weber's theorisation, though, is his concept of the social imaginary. This key concept is something of a hinge to his thought - it is also an element of his theory of the subject, and of his ontological project of unveiling the subjectivity of the social. Castoriadis' argument against functionalist theories of all kinds (and he would include Marxism under this rubric) is that they inevitably ignore contests over the cultural meanings invested in the functional and system imperatives of social institutions (Joas 1989: 1189). Castoriadis' (1998: 108) concept of the 'institution of society' is an attempt to theorise society as both the product of historical creations of symbolic meaning and a 'truth' which constrains socially possible shifts in meaning. So society is both socially instituted and institutes the social field of possible action and interpretation:

> The institution produces, in conformity with its norms, individuals that by construction are not only able but bound to reproduce the institution. The "law" produces the "elements" in such a way that their very functioning embodies, reproduces and perpetuates the "law" (Castoriadis 1997: 7).

However, this theorisation is not equivalent to a structural determinism. The problem of social order for Castoriadis (1997: 7) is best reframed in terms of the ubiquity of social rules rather than the possibilities of social disorder:

> Even in situations of crisis, in the most violent state of internal strife and internal war, a society is still *this one* society; if it were not, there would not and could not

be struggle over the same, or common, objects. There is thus a *unity* of the total institution of society; and, upon further examination, we find that this unity is in the last resort the unity and internal cohesion of the immensely complex web of meanings that permeate, orient, and direct the whole life of the society considered, as well as the concrete individuals that bodily constitute society. This web of meanings is what I call the "magma" of *social imaginary significations* that are carried by and embodied in the institution of the given society and that, so to speak, animate it.

So then, Castoriadis argues that 'social imaginary significations' underlie both social practice and modes of representation. His use of the term 'magma' alludes to the chaotic nature of the social, which is nevertheless organised or made sense of through human imagination and narrativisation. So while there are parallels between Castoriadis' social imaginary and Durkheim's (1970) *conscience collective*, Castoriadis' concept is able to account for social contestation and social change in a way that Durkheim, or more properly structural functionalisms which claim descent from Durkheim's thought, cannot do satisfactorily.

It is not surprising, then, that Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary has been expanded to the analysis of the political imaginary in recent social theory. Castoriadis' social theory is complementary with a neo-Weberian analytic in the sense that it refuses to reductively privilege one causal factor or social group over others, but yet avoids a naïve empiricism or the relativism of some varieties of postmodern theory. The concept of the political imaginary is able satisfactorily to account both for social unity and structure and contestation over the symbolic meanings of institutions while also maintaining a theory of social action which takes into account both constrained agency and creative action. Leledakis (1999: 97) sums up Castoriadis' contribution:

Castoriadis provides, thus, a theory both of the social/historical as open and of the individual as potentially autonomous. In this way he synthesizes two theoretical currents. On the one hand is the theoretical approach advocating an openness and indeterminacy – the principal modern representative of which is Derrida; and on the other the Enlightenment's (and critical Marxism's) quest for the possibility of autonomy and rational determination of the self and society. The daring synthesis avoids the pitfalls of either current: the relativism usually associated with post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories as well as the aprioristic foundations which underlie some versions of critical theory such as Habermas's.

Towards a phenomenology of the utopian imaginary

The sociology of utopia, and Utopian Studies, are both emerging fields of research, gaining ground and prominence over the last few decades. It is not the intention of this thesis to intervene in any of the debates prevalent in these transdisciplinary discussions, except in passing, or indeed to seek to review recent or seminal work carried out in the academic vineyards of Utopia, eutopia and dystopia (but see, in particular Moylan 2000 and Jameson 2007). Rather the task of this thesis is to phenomenalise utopia – to suggest, demonstrate and indeed show the necessary interweaving of utopia and the imaginary which sets in motion and renders possible social action which seeks to open and unfix the imaginary.

This thesis argues there is a link between the utopian imaginary and the efficacy or indeed the possibility of anti-systemic political action. The existing literature on politics and utopia appears to be suggestive in two ways. First, it is reasonably clear that a background assumption of the articulation of politics and utopia is that utopian imaginings are closely related to the articulation of ideological goals which are capable of

being transmuted into a political strategy. Goodwin & Taylor (1982: 9), for instance, write:

> …utopianism as a tendency is a key ingredient of the whole process of modern politics, from theoretical conception to fruition in political practice. The utopian impulse makes the link between political theory and practice quite explicit and public, unlike some forms of political thought and activity which operate by camouflage and intrigue.

Leaving aside the rather arcane reference here to "camouflage and intrigue", the more relevant point in terms of the "link between… theory and practice" is one from the sociology of knowledge, and from one of its progenitors, Karl Marx. Surely the disconnection between the academic arts of political philosophising and theorising – whether dubbed "normative political theory" or some other quasi-disciplinary moniker – and political practice is one that obscures rather than illuminates. Similarly, the blindness of "empirical political science" (adopting here the dichotomy articulated by Gunnell 1993) to any potential dialectical relation between the political imaginary and (anti-systemic) praxis is at work in the failure of the implicit interrelationship between utopia and political practice to be articulated as an explicit object of study. It may also be that writers on politics are discouraged by the abuse heaped on the notion of utopia by Karl Popper and his epigones, and there is certainly a disciplinary demarcation at work in that utopia has often been treated as a purely literary or textual category (Moylan 2000).

The most recent contribution to the literature on utopia, with which a reckoning is surely due, is Fredric Jameson's *Archeologies of the Future.* Jameson's affinities with the Western Marxist tradition have been noted earlier. Although it is premature to assess his methodological approach in the absence of his forthcoming work on the dialectic, it is

reasonable to suggest that his work – considered as a whole – partakes in the defects as well as the merits of much of the work in cultural studies inspired by the tradition of Western Marxism (which – of course, is not a reflection on cultural studies as a whole, but of one discrete manner of practising such researches). No doubt in part because of his origins and continuing work as a literary scholar, it is difficult for Jameson (2006) to specify exactly what is entailed in his procedure of "cognitive mapping", though it must be conceded that the actual praxis of such mapping is capable of producing illuminating and significant insights.

In a way, Jameson can also be read – rhetorically and substantively – as a performative writer, who enacts the mode of postmodernism at the same time as he seeks to diagnose it as a "cultural dominant" (Jameson 1991). But while this is undoubtedly so, he nevertheless displays many of the intellectual commitments of his predecessors – including an attachment to a problematic where cultural patterns constrain the space for anti-systemic or revolutionary action, even if he has discarded the analytical language of base and superstructure (Jameson 2006). His version of cultural pessimism implies a certain liberation of desire – or perhaps of libidinal flows – as a characteristic or an epiphenomenon of the temporal accentuation of the cycle of valorisation, and in effect, if not in theory, a quasi-theological privilege is still accorded to the economy as determining cause in the last instance. Although there is a deep sedimentation of theoretical elaboration obscuring it, there is still lurking in the depths of his approach a claim that capitalism produces false needs, or deforms drives and desires. Perhaps this accounts for both his attachment to utopia as a fantasy of unleashed desire, and his scepticism about the ability to think utopia in late modernity.

Jameson (2007: 19-20), adopting something of the spatial approach to utopian hopes characteristic of Harvey (2000), sees utopia as an "enclave" within the differentiation proper to modernity, existing within its interstices. The implication here is something much closer to utopian socialism and the intentional communities it inspired, rather than to classic Marxism, and perhaps there is a clue here to an untheorised concept of social action whereby a decision to enact and perform – to "live as if" – is crucial to the instantiation of a utopian imaginary rather than a teleological horizon of expectation and all that implies. It implies a resistance to the flattening out of projective time under capitalism, where the determination of ordinary time is in fact constitutive of the calculation necessary to set the cycle of valorisation in motion (Jameson 2007: 228-229). There is a crucial insight here which has a close affinity with the temporalisation of the political – it would be necessary, proceeding from an imaginary space, to make time more fungible and less flat, in order to set in motion a utopian imaginary and to re-imagine the social otherwise.

This cannot be as simple, though, as constructing an alternative narrative – Jameson's view – again unsurprisingly for a literary scholar – being that the resolution of competing claims from historical sociology on causality and the origins of capitalism is a matter of viewing modernity as a menu of alternative narratives. But nevertheless there is a crucial insight in his work – that there is a necessity to ending history or proclaiming its end because historical time, and a time horizon devoted to the fulfilment of desires other than those which are reified and mediated through the circuit of capital, is inimical to the rationalisation and calculative flattening of time capitalism "needs". Jameson, in

referring to the fantasy of evading or abolishing money present in utopian texts from More onwards, is convinced that the utopian impulse surfaces precisely at moments of transition – arguing that More was responding to a shift in the economy towards monetisation in early modernity.

But can "aesthetic relief" or intentional enclaves substitute for a political strategy and obviate the question of agency and social change? It is doubtful, and perhaps ruled out in Jameson's own formulation by the apparent paradox between the liberation of desire through the possibilities of consumption and its containment and fixity within the capitalist imaginary. Ultimately, Jameson himself has constructed a hermeneutic circle which he cannot dialectise his way out of, which he would argue enacts and reflects our "condition" but which is in fact a failure to think beyond capitalism in any meaningful way other than to repeat and re-iterate the need to totalise, even as he doubts that the flux of late modernity can be totalised otherwise, raising of course the question of how capital comes to do so. The impasse Jameson finds himself in is a result of the failure to liberate himself from the categories of Western Marxism itself. While Jameson might be intrigued by fantasy and desire, he is unable, somewhat after the manner of Marcuse, to see a way for such desire to exceed its colonisation by the logic of capitalism.

I argue that Lefort and Castoriadis provide an indicative escape route from the containment of the social within the capitalist late modern political, with all its neutralisations and depoliticisations. It is precisely Castoriadis' attention to the articulation between subjectivity and the social, and thus the pattern of the shaping of desires by imaginary significations that enables many of the aporia in Jameson's

philosophy to be set aside, if not sublated or transcended. Castoriadis' concept of the imaginary has the virtue of articulating the individual psyche with the social, building on a psychoanalytic schema inspired by Freud, but rejecting Freud's own rather thin concept of the social. For Castoriadis, there is a key distinction between private fantasy and a social imaginary signification – while the first will necessarily be conditioned by socialisation, it remains a product of the individual unconscious, and only under certain exceptional conditions will fantasy transcend its subjectivity and give rise to a re-institution of society. The examples given here are of the founders of religions, and Castoriadis notes that most religious movements – prior and during their institutionalisation – are created in tension with and on the ruins of existing significations and symbols. There is an important insight here for thinking utopia. While to some degree textual utopias may be fantastic, their political force arises only if they partake in what he calls the "radical imagination" – that is to say, if the imaginary signification attains a degree of autonomy from any referent.

As Castoriadis writes (1987: 132), the institution can be defined as:

> …a socially sanctioned symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions or relations.

Here, it is important to underline what exactly Castoriadis means by autonomy. Every social imaginary is arbitrary and contingent to some degree, he argues, and has a tendency to push its lines of thought further than any logic or rationality that might be contained within the formation. Understandably, given his heritage both as a translator of Weber and a noted critic of the authoritarian apparatus of the Soviet Union, he gestures towards the irrationality of bureaucratic rationality taken to its extreme. If the ruling idea

of a particular society is rationalisation, this certainly does not exclude a constitutive irrationality. The autonomy of imagination, Castoriadis argues, is actually the precondition of creativity in that it allows representations to capture what is not real, and thus a projective signification which can be instantiated within the social – at least potentially.

Hence the role of instituting social significations (Castoriadis 1987: 125-126). The fundamental role such significations play is one of instituting a fixity – and temporalising time – such that the social coincides with itself, is folded into itself, and appears co-terminous with the natural. However and here the work of Gauchet, to be considered subsequently, is important as well as that of Castoriadis and Lefort, this self-coincidence is impossible in modern societies, remembering that for Castoriadis, classical Greece and Rome are also in this sense modern societies. Pre-modern societies, whether "societies without history" (Lefort 2000) or in Lefort's formulation, European society prior to the displacement of royal sovereignty symbolised by the French revolution, fix the social by referring its organising symbols to an order outside itself – what Lefort calls the "theologico-sociological moment" (Flynn 2005). In stateless societies, this is the unchanging order of religion, while in European pre-modernity, the doubled body of the King occupied the place of sovereignty which fixes the social within a political order. What is characteristic of the Greek and modern political imaginaries, Castoriadis (1997) argues is the relative non-coincidence of society with the political, an autonomisation of both, the phenomenon Lefort refers to as *le politique* or the political as such as opposed to court politics of one kind or other.

The empty place of the political enables the necessary division within the social to appear as such, and thus to be negotiated and contested, and for fantasy and the mediation of desire to gain at least a foothold on the social imaginary. This autonomous nature of the social enables, according to Castoriadis, at least the possibility of a politics of freedom and autonomy. Thus we are able to understand social formations phenomenologically as coherent symbolic projects, and to do so from a viewpoint which relativises their own symbolisation – for instance the dominance of globalisation and anti-politics as signifiers. It also enables utopia as desire to be linked to the role of the remainders or excesses of rationality which haunt both individual subjectivities and social quasi-subjectivity, and to understand the utopian impulse as a social imaginary signification.

If it is the case that – as Castoriadis suggested at an earlier conjuncture with regard to the Weberian bureaucratic and rationalising impulse – what we confront today is a similar excess of a capitalist impulse masking itself behind the guise of freedom, then it is also possible – at least at the level of theoretical insight – to understand phenomenologically how such significations do their work in the world. And it is possible to unveil the structures of experience which can be imagined otherwise in order to escape the flattening of time characteristic of late capitalism and its signifiers. After all, both Castoriadis and Lefort insist that what is distinctive about modernity – and what is distinctive precisely because the political becomes autonomous and is signified by an empty place – is the creativity of political forms.

However, what we are witnessing is the effective collapse of existing political forms such as those of the state and a sovereignty which cannot – even as it tries to – coincide with a society escaping delimited borders. The instantiation of new significations – new

concepts – is a necessary step to unleashing Castoriadis' "radical imaginary", and prior to this, we must understand phenomenologically what barriers exist in the current figuration – appropriate to the structures of knowledge called in to being by modern liberalism, to be sure – to the liberation the autonomous desires inherent even in late modernity. This has the potential to be a much more fruitful line of thought than a continued nostalgia for the subject of history which haunts Jameson and whose ghosts continue to structure and constrain anti-systemic thought and action.

Taken together, Castoriadis' and Lefort's theses on the concept of the political imaginary are a vital theoretical building block for the work of this thesis. This conceptualisation enables an understanding of how signification and representation are key to the political instantiation of the social, and thus to the creation of an imaginary which renders certain action intelligible and licit and which concomitantly constrains other possibilities for action. In particular, Lefort's demonstration that particular political concepts give rise to new forms of sociality is vital for understanding how the work of reimagination can open up alternatives to the neoliberal imaginary, as is his emphasis on the political as *temporalised* – as a moment. It is the argument of this thesis that the differentiation of the modern imaginary into particular spheres – and the consequent structuring of knowledge – provides one obstacle to creative re-imagination. It has been suggested in this Chapter that Lefort and Castoriadis enable us to see that the religious – or what occupies the place of the religious in a sociology of political concepts – is key. The next Chapter turns to a more explicit consideration of that theme, taking the religious and the political as something of a case study – in the sense that it demonstrates the argument regarding epistemology. The Chapter provides a lever for the consideration of universal

structures of thought which can be viewed more clearly through the lens of a minor tradition, and whose weak utopian force is vital for the project of understanding and retrieving the political in the current conjuncture.

Chapter Five: The religious and the political as categories of modern knowledge

This Chapter moves the argument forward in preparation for considering structures of experience which are, it will be argued, both constitutive of political action oriented to *justice* and structured by an eschatology and a messianism without a Messiah which would enable and facilitate the partial escape from the prism of what remains a Christian temporality, no matter how "secularised" in Hegelianism and other forms of thought which seek to effect closure on history and meaning. This portion of the argument requires a reconsideration of both secularisation and religion, understood as an instituting structure based around the experiences of faith and the promise.

First, the chapter considers the dead ends of controversies within sociology around secularisation, and then considers whether the recent and seminal work of Charles Taylor is an adequate supplement, and concludes it is not. His debt to the work of Marcel Gauchet provides a hermeneutic key to another approach, which returns us to the work of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, who both have something to say about the originary theologico-political. A detour is then taken through the work of Jacques Derrida in order to establish the meaningfulness of discussing history and the social in terms of non-originary origins and a phenomenology of the social, which leads into a consideration of both Jacques Derrida and Carl Schmitt, and a thinking of religion outside the bounds of religion and the political as homologous with the religious. Derrida's overturning of the dialectics of Hegel is also an important methodological reference point for later arguments, as is an understanding of deconstruction, *différance*, iterability and other "non-substitutable substitutes" and substantiates the refutation of the proposition

that history is closed. The imbrication of the religious (and thus the political) with violence and "radical evil" which is a feature of Derrida's analysis also provides an important datum for later consideration of a cosmopolitics that might be "pre-political" and indeed for the extended discussion of Schmitt's concept of the political in Chapter Eight.

The inadequacy of secularisation theory

Swatos & Christiano (1999: 209) quite correctly observe that the secularisation theory, and more recently empirical and conceptual debates about its birth, death and possible resurrection have been at the heart of theorising and debates within the sociology of religion. Much of this debate revolves around two key issues. First, there is contention as to whether secularisation can be an appropriate social-theoretical concept if it is accepted that it is inevitably contaminated by the normative investments surrounding its invention. Secondly, on a more prosaic but not unrelated level, it is argued that in any case secularisation fails as theory due to a putative return or resurgence of the religious in late modernity. This thesis seeks to argue that secularisation and its other, desecularisation, are themselves embedded in and inescapably marked by theological metaphors of teleology. This is in part because of the stakes involved in the emergence of differentiation in modernity (driven initially by a normative secularisation between the political and the theological). This tale of origins cannot escape the simultaneous invention of the polar concepts of the religious and the secular in early modernity. It is necessary to review aspects of the genealogy of secularisation paying particular attention to the theological ghosts which continue to haunt sociology's emancipatory self conception as a scientific discipline. Because this thesis will be suggesting the figure of

the religious and the sacred haunts the political, and works towards its (en)closure in the evangelistic enunciation of a teleological end, it is vital to examine precisely why sociology has failed in many respects adequately to think through the place of the religious in modernity.

Turner (1992: 102) suggests, "the theme of secularisation haunts… sociology", noting that:

> Nineteenth-century social theorists as far removed as Friedrich Engels and Ferdinand Tönnies shared a common perspective in which it was confidently assumed that the development of capitalism would necessarily undermine the social and cultural bases of traditional religion.

While the secularisation thesis – succinctly defined by Wilson (1966: 14) as "the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance" – is associated (as is sociology) with the late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century and the names of Weber, Troeltsch and Durkheim, its roots in fact go back to early modernity. The theses of classical sociologists on religion have been well summarised by authors such as Turner (1992) and Stark & Finke (2000) and need not be reviewed here. Rather what is at stake in the current debates over secularisation, desecularisation and late modernity can better be understood through a genealogy of secularisation as an exemplary sociological figure.

The genesis of secularisation theory

Historically, the genesis of the secularisation thesis could be further traced to a proximate origin in the conciliarist debates of the High Middle Ages. The conciliarist controversies developed from the reintroduction of categories of public and private through the rediscovery of Roman Law (both secular Law in German jurisprudence and the Canon Law movement of the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries). It is worth noting at this point, as this will become important for the argument later, that the basis of the secularisation thesis – the differentiation of social life and the emancipation of particular domains from the theological – is in itself representative of the universalist, historicist and utopian tendencies of Western Christian thought (Martin 1969).

The increasing normative differentiation of the theological and the political, and the subsequent invention of the territorialised state as sovereign both derive from competing normative, universalist and utopian claims of dominion by both Emperor and Pope in the conciliarist controversies. This early debate, ostensibly a contest between two universalisms, in fact lays the basis for differentiation of secular and religious realms. Conciliarism in turn in can be interpreted as laying the foundations for the twin events of the Renaissance and the Reformation, both of which were also borne out of rapid social change, and both of which in turn gave rise to further social differentiation and mark the beginnings of modernity. The articulation of the sovereignty of the state by theorists such as Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes and Niccolo Machiavelli anticipates the consummation of state formation in the Westphalian settlement of 1648. Liberalism has its nascence with the emancipation of the political from the theological. This can be

illustrated in the English context with reference to the relationship between John Locke's Second Treatise on Civil Government and the settlement of the Glorious Revolution which reproduces Westphalia's abegnation of the rule of cui regno, cui religioso in the particular context of a non-organicist state Protestant church which increasingly comes to terms with religious dissent. Locke is also significant through the introduction of the contractarian theory of legitimacy which refers sovereignty and the political to the citizen subject below rather than to God or the Church above. At the same time, controversies surrounding Renaissance humanism point to the parallel desire to reject revelation as the hegemonic foundation of any possible epistemology.

Sociology, as is well known, originates with Auguste Comte as a project which seeks to supplant both theology and philosophy as the master science of the human world. The origins of sociology contain the tension which still underpins its disciplinarity and approach to knowledge – the positivist and universalist epistemology drawing on the desire to elaborate a science of human sociality and historicity and the contradictory desire to be a humanist a-theology of liberation and emancipation. Such contradictions are normalised but not resolved in Weber's *Science as a Vocation* (Gerth & Mills 1948) and continue to shape the disciplinary tension between "value-free statements" and critical and political interventions. It is clear then that secularisation is a metonym or cipher for sociology writ small. The secular, as Martin (1969: 10-11) among others argue, has no meaning aside from its content as the excluded other of the dominant term of religion in a classic binary opposition. This insight can be reinforced by noting that the sense of religion as a system of beliefs and practices related to the sacral or the

transcendental and discrete from the profane everyday world in itself arises in early modernity as a result of differentiation (Saler 2000) and as Cantwell Smith (1963) cogently argues, is a concept that originates in Protestant polemic.

Secularisation as a narrative of the modern emancipation of reason

Similarly, sociology as an emancipatory knowledge by necessity had to oppose the universalism of Counter-Reformation Thomism with its own universalism – a subset of the wider epistemological claims of science to have discovered an extra-mundane point from which to view the world. Sociology restages the Reformation drama in one sense in its embodying of a protest against the pretensions of (Catholic) theology and in another sense where styles of theorisation such as Weber's emphasis on the irony of history or the "sociology of fate" (Turner 1996) draws heavily on his Calvinist intellectual tradition while Durkheim's organicism, reification of society and concern with anomie reflects integrist French Catholic thought of his age. In a different way, Marx' oeuvre is imbued with German idealist philosophy of religion through his dependence on and opposition to Hegel, Stirner and Feuerbach among others that could be cited. The strong opposition between a (mistaken) conception of Catholicism as a teleological narrative of progress towards salvation and its universalist epistemology and between the faith in science and the progress of reason is mirrored in sociology's birth as polar opposition to theology. But for classical sociology at least, theology remains the "Queen of the Sciences" in the sense of having produced its demonic other in rationalist emancipatory social science. These theological ghosts, as this Chapter will go on to show, haunt the political narratives of modernity and push them towards Endism.

At a less abstract level of generalisation, and crucially for the argument about the temporalisation of the political made in this thesis, Martin (1969) has also argued in his essay 'Some utopian aspects of the concept of secularisation' that the secularisation thesis is heavily dependent even in its more recent articulations on a teleological view of history that is not far from Comte's theory of the three stages. Similarly, he suggests that secularisation represents a utopian yearning in the same way that religion can be characterised as the instantiation of utopian desires. He further claims that sociologists of religion reverse both Catholic and Protestant narratives of history:

> Secularisation has been conceived as based on certain presuppositions of Judaism and Christianity from which important reservations and qualifications have been removed. Thus the attributes of God, such as unity and harmony, are given a mundane reference, and partial meanings in history replaced by total meanings (Martin 1969: 31).

The genealogy presented in this section along with Martin's insights suggest that secularisation itself is primarily a normative construction closely reflecting its historical genesis in the originary differentiation of state and religion that stands at the heart of liberalism's emergence as a distinct and hegemonic mode of governmentality in the European West. A psychoanalytical social theorist might argue that the wish for the disappearance of religion embodied in the origins of the secularisation thesis is a hysterical defence. However, it is sufficient for the purposes of this argument to claim that secularisation and sociology more generally are both constituted through the mirroring of the universalist epistemological claims of Theology and that this historical origin continues to haunt theory and the forms of thought characteristic of modernity, with all their political effects. It should also be clear that the comparative relegation of

the sociology of religion to a position of subservience to social theory (Martin 1969, Stark & Finke 2000) is itself illustrative of a need to deny the tensions between a scientist epistemology and a quasi-salvific critical mission as both of these tendencies originate in the twinfold process of inventing a humanistic knowledge to replace and consummate theology's mission and self representation.

Contesting the validity of the secularisation thesis

As stated earlier, at least two main attacks have been made on the validity of the secularisation thesis. First, it is (correctly) held to be largely a normative rather than an empirical theory, though this objection is not usually stated in these terms. Secondly, it is argued that the theory is either contradicted by evidence adding up to a return of the religious, or that it was never true and recent trends have made its empirical falsity even more starkly evident. A variety of empirical evidence is presented against the thesis – for instance its unwarranted generalisation from Northern European countries and inapplicability to the United States or the persistence of basic Christian beliefs in survey research among populations in the West. Another line of refutation, equally valid is its historical and cultural specificity. Indeed, attempts to link secularisation with modernisation theory were particularly inopportune when applied to Islamic Arabia and North Africa where the social bases for secularist ideologies were weak indeed (Kepel 1994).

There are however a number of problems with the evidence adduced in support of the second argument against the validity of secularisation. First, the exceptionalism of America and the differences in patterns of secularisation count only against the most

broad brush theories of secularisation – Martin's 1978 study A General Theory of Secularisation is a nuanced and plausible argument which explains such variations. Secondly, surveys which report on the incidence of belief in (for instance) life after death necessarily reveal very little about the degree of importance placed on such beliefs (or often whether they are strongly held or specifically Christian) and it is difficult to see how the persistence of the cultural and symbolic significance of religion per se counts against secularisation when it is a theory of differentiation in modernity and of a resultant decline in the social significance of religion. In addition, there are explanations for such survivals (particular in regard to rites of passage rituals and the historic origins of institutions such as marriage) in Martin's theory which are rarely adequately refuted.

A related objection is the pro-religious spirit which imbues the arguments of anti-secularisationists such as Stark & Finke (2000) despite or because of their arguments for a truly value free sociology of religion instead of the normatively agnostic or rationalist orientation characteristic of theorising of the style of the secularisationists. The next section will outline Turner's objections to the theory. Among these is its illicit conflation of several distinguishable elements. Swatos & Christiano (1999: 214) write:

> There is no question that in most of the Western world there has been at least sufficient separation of church and state, the primary locus of differentiation, that people are capable both of living their lives apart from direct "interference" on the part of religion and that people may choose among various religions without suffering civil disabilities. If this is what is meant by secularisation, then there is no debate over "the secularisation thesis".

This is assuredly the most conceptually elegant version of the secularisation thesis, but that the thesis remains a normative as much as a scientific thematisation, and that debate over the many local instances of dedifferentiation and desecularisation in the late modern West (and the globalising World) should indeed take place. Such a debate could usefully pay regard to the secularisation thesis if it were understood as a normative separation between the religious and the political fundamental to liberal governmentalities. This would be a much more productive line of research than the confusion inherent in the adducing of statistics of belief by American sociologists such as Stark & Finke who are representative of what they claim to be a paradigm shift in (largely US) sociology of religion. To conflate incidences of religious beliefs in various Western nations and the growth of some conservative evangelical denominations in several parts of the world with desecularisation more generally is invalid. This is so not least for the reason that the equation of the religious with beliefs that can be articulated is a product of the reconceptualisation of religion in early modernity – both from the Protestant rubric of sola scriptura and from the Counter-reformation dogmatism and de-Catholicisation of the Council of Trent, the Society of Jesus and the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Inquisition. In other words, many of the 'empirical' arguments against secularisation fall prey to both conceptual confusion and to a reliance on unexamined premises grounded in phenomena which are themselves the result of modern differentiation and the creation of an opposition between the sacred and the profane. What is missed in this style of sociology is the political significance of religion's enduring potential as a cultural resource for identity formation and of the many associated cultural and political dedifferentiations and desecularisations raging around the globe in what Kepel (1994)

aptly dubs 'the Revenge of God'. It is the containment of sociological theory within the logics of modernity which also effaces and elides the stakes of the oppositions clustering around sacred/profane.

At a level more concerned with broader issues of social theory and historical sociology in the Weberian vein, Turner (1992: 103-105) has argued that the secularisation thesis conflates faith, religion and Christianity and elides the distinction between sacral cultural practices at a popular level and religion as an institutionalised and intellectualised preserve of certain strata and as a social form of domination. Turner also highlights what is now becoming broadly accepted among historians of popular religion in the European Middle Ages – that large aspects of sacral practice and religious belief were intertwined with pagan survivals, magical rituals and that intellectual atheism and for that matter, complete indifference to Christianity were not phenomena that had no existence before the Enlightenment (Thomas 1997, Stark & Finke 2000). This is another instance of Martin's argument relating to the willingness of sociologists of religion to accept and transform or invert certain Catholic narratives (however unconsciously) – in this case of a "golden age of faith". Turner also comments that the economic aspects of the decline of religion's hegemonic position are often allowed to elide the political dynamics, an argument supported in a different way by this thesis. Issue could be taken with the emphases of aspects of Turner's arguments, but its thrust is surely correct. However, in the context of the argument regarding the style of theorisation now characteristic of American sociologists of religion, Turner can perhaps better be pressed into service to aid

a call for a more historically, theoretically and culturally reflexive version of the secularisation thesis as a normative element of liberalism and modernity.

Theorists such as Heelas (1998), Bauman (1998), Fenn (2001) and Lyon (1999) all have noted particular mutations of the religious and the social in late modernity – which can profitably be analyzed using categories of dedifferentiation and desecularisation. Kepel (1994) has intriguingly argued based on comprehensive historical studies of Jewish, Islamic, Protestant and Catholic retraditionalising movements that their emergence can be precisely dated to events around the late 1960s and early 1970s: the very time when studies of political economy and globalisation would suggest the financialisation of late capitalism began, and the commodity reached new levels of social penetration. Similarly, in terms of cultural developments such as the increased reflexivity of identity and embodiment, theorisation and research have pinpointed this era as variously late modern or postmodern (Giddens 1991). The list of features of the modern social which have approached their hyperbolic limits in late modernity could be extended indefinitely, but perhaps it is simpler to twist Jameson (1991) somewhat and assert that postmodernity is the social dominant of late capitalism.

It is not being argued that diverse aspects of the manifestation of the religious in late modernity – commodification, the individualisation of identity work, the emergence of retraditionalising projects seeking to reconfigure social relations of gender, sex and sexuality, the sacrality of the body – are causally linked to financial globalisation in some unproblematised way or are mere epiphenomena of recent economic or political

reconfigurations. Rather, in the spirit of Weber, what is needed is a style of sociological theorising that is interpretive, broad in scope and in search of 'elective affinities'. With Lyon (1996), such thematisations should treat the religious as a category with its own specificity in social theory rather than as derivative of other concepts, and attend to the place of the distinction in the formation of styles of thought – which tendentially disavow their own relation to Christian eschatology – which structure Western theory and practice at the level of the imaginary.

Earlier, it was argued that the secularisation thesis should be conceived as a normative differentiation in liberal modernity between the political and the religious. To this degree the secularisation thesis partakes in the universalism common to predominant styles of sociological theorising and is also a verse in the utopian gospel of liberalism. Sociology can never be an exact science, and it would probably be of benefit for it to renounce its more universalist aspirations, if not perhaps all its utopian ones. What is crucial is that it be understood that secularisation is only a tendency (as is desecularisation) and it is a tendency with strong affinities to liberal governmentality. Thus secularisation does not just 'happen' but rather is a way of constructing the world that constantly needs reinforcement and reinscription by social and political subjects in the work of maintaining a particular political imaginary. It is precisely this construction which elides the borders between the theological and the political which it is among the tasks of this thesis to reinscribe.

The contribution of Charles Taylor: beyond narrow secularisation theory?

If, as has been argued, debates about secularisation and secularisation theory have fallen into a narrow groove where positions are stereotyped and understanding short on the ground, and the two contending paradigms of secularisation and religious economies are destined to pass in the night, never quite meeting (Martin 2005), it is the great merit of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2007) to have reframed the argument in what has justly been described as a magisterial contribution to the literature – his recent *A Secular Age*. Taylor observes that the definition of religion has long been plagued with imprecision and conceptual creep in a variety of disciplines, a point made well by anthropologist Benson Saler (1993) in *Conceptualising Religion.* While strategically restricting himself to one of the possible conceptualisations of religion – a transcendence beyond the "immanent frame", Taylor also makes an argument that has not previously been made – that the meaning of secularity itself is often confused and elided in the literature, and that these confusions and elisions matter. For the purposes of this Chapter, Taylor's definition of religion (which could of course be critiqued on other grounds – including its possible inapplicability outside the Abrahamic faiths of which he is aware) will be accepted *concesso non dato*, as complicating and troubling it will be important to the argument later.

Taylor distinguishes between three senses of secularity – the first being the one that has been most prominent in sociological writing, secularisation which is a normative prohibition of the religious "in terms of public spaces" (2007: 2). The familiar story of differentiation and the autonomisation of particular spheres of the social and the articulation of particular rationalities proper to each, told authoritatively by Luhmann

(1984) in *Social Systems* is Taylor's "Secularity 1". Particular attention has focused on the separation out of religious logics from State reason, but the broader picture is the putative emancipation of a variety of differentiated realms of knowledge and practice from the reach of the sacred. Unsurprisingly, this is the sense of secularity which has had most political investment and affect, and the sense which sets the stage for many of the frenzied debates about a putative "return of the religious" (Kepel 1994) referred to earlier.

Secularity 2 is the more narrowly empirical measurement of the decline of religious practice (and more problematically, as noted, faith). Taylor (2007: 3) correctly argues, following though not citing Giddens (1991) and Turner, that detraditionalisation and the sundering of individual belief from an authoritative social context is a more important indicator than those measures derived from survey research. It is this insight which grounds his concept of Secularity 3 – the dimension in which "belief in God is no longer axiomatic". He writes:

> Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience takes place. By 'context of understanding' here, I mean both matters that will probably have been explicitly formulated by just about everyone, such as the plurality of options, and some which form the implicit, largely unfocused background of this experience and search, its "pre-ontology", to use a Heideggerian term.

At issue for Taylor is the narrative of how such a social imaginary – where meaning can be found, or otherwise, from among a range of options – developed. He rightly argues that the conditions of possibility for a secular age in these terms are poorly or insufficiently explained by his characterisation of the overwhelming consensus of

secularisation and modernisation theories – the disenchantment of the world through a "subtraction" of the divine (2007: 28-29). What he characterises as "exclusive humanism" had to be invented. It is this invention – a transformation of the "social imaginary" which has taken half a millennium to work its way through – whose conditions of possibility and genealogy Taylor wishes to trace. Taylor's rather thin concept of the "social imaginary" is also arguably adequate for his purposes, but somewhat undertheorised when compared to that of Cornelius Castoriadis [1975] (1987), which has been described earlier in the theisis as one of the guiding lights and presuppositions of the arguments this dissertation will advance. In effect, Taylor's task is to establish the dimensions of the trajectory which led to a "post-Durkheimian" world – where the meaning of the Good has been collapsed into a liberal universe of competing goods among which we choose – and perhaps the capitalist allusion here is not accidental.

There are obvious overtones of historical sociology of the Weberian type in Taylor's thought. Indeed, although he makes no express reference to grand narratives after the manner of Michael Mann (1976, 1983) or Charles Tilly (1993) and other neo-Weberians, Taylor is also concerned to narrativise a universal history of sorts. Intriguingly, despite having provided a preface for Marcel Gauchet's "very suggestive work" (2007: 348), Taylor only puts his thought to work in a critique of Descartes' "cosmic imaginary", and eschews a broader engagement with the French scholar's *The Disenchantment of the World* [1985] (1997). This selective appropriation is significant precisely because Gauchet's thematisation of the originary scission which founds the social and the political has the potential both to expand the importance of Taylor's insights regarding religion's

excarnation and to paint his *magnum opus* as something of a provincial story limited to the antecedents of *Western* modernity.

Nevertheless, for Taylor, the West is at least a tendential figure of the world to come, and perhaps even a *telos*. His interest is in how we arrive at a position where "warring gods" contend for our affections and commitments, and how – in a late modern world – these choices become akin to what the atheist theologian Don Cupitt (1987) described as the ultimate diffusion and emptying out of meaning through a rationality which can hardly be described any more as calculative. But unlike Cupitt (1987: 107), for whom "the world of meaning is nothing but a dance of difference in the Void", Taylor (2007: 17) does not choose to dance ecstatically on the surface of the sea of the *Nihil* (Cowdell 1988: 47) but to prepare the ground for the re-imagination of a deeper sense of "human flourishing". It is not that Taylor accepts the usual misreading of Derridean *jouissance* and the play of signs but rather that he – in effect – agrees with Fredric Jameson (1991) that we are living them in the postmodern condition.

Although he brackets his own Catholic commitments, after the phenomenological manner, and seeks to refuse the temptation to theologise, for Taylor (2007: 17) the stakes are clear, and enormous. There is, he argues, an "unbridgeable gulf between Greek and Christian philosophy", and what he wishes to recover is:

> … a mode of healing wounds and "repairing the world" (I am here borrowing the Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam*).

(The allusion to the *Kabbalah* is significant, and particularly in the context of the phenomenology of utopia, as we will discuss later. Despite his formal disavowal of theological intent, Taylor is undoubtedly writing a theodicy, and perhaps a theodicy with a certain Benjaminian intent.)

So the stakes for Taylor are very high. In many ways, *A Secular Age* is a continuation of his project in *Sources of the Self* (1989). But where in the earlier work he traces the origins and descent of the disembedded self in modernity, his more recent writing aims to understand the consequences of disembedding and disenchantment. So, while *Sources* (for instance) detailed the turn to the "affirmation of ordinary life" in the Protestant tradition, before its dissolution into first Deism and then secularity, in *A Secular Age* he is as much concerned with the political and ethical importance of the end point of the process – the impossibility of articulating any bases for an intersubjective meaning-endowing project which would work its way through the world and transcend the *unheimlich* and fractured subjectivity of what is left of the modern autonomous individual self. There are correspondences and affinities at work in Taylor's philosophy with the exhaustion of the late modern political imaginary – history ceases to function as a source of meaning, and partial fixity and closure is sought through the enunciation of a "democratic capitalist" end to history.

Taylor's method is close to that of his previous work – an inquiry into the historical constitution and conditions of possibility of the self, although the self is now cast free from its enchanted moorings and its porousness in pre-modernity and viewed through the lens of a social imaginary which itself enables a radical individualisation. Whether or not

his end point – the "modern buffered, bounded self" (2007: 39) – is an adequate description of selfhood and the question of meaning in a late modern age which perhaps does not escape enchantment in quite the way he thinks, or more accurately, is conjured by a certain hauntology of enchantment – is another question which will be set aside for the moment as his story is told, and simultaneously called into question. And that story relates to the gradual eclipse of both a self that is porous, and a world capable of signifying meanings that are multiple and fluid. Taylor gives the example of the medieval theory of correspondences, where "causal links [are] mediated by meaning" (2007: 39). The world, basically, was inseparable from the domain of human activity, and the non-human or the cosmic mediated between human activity and sources of meaning. There is no doubt that Taylor makes an important point here, one captured by scholarship on the imaginary of Renaissance humanism which is not reducible to a putative sundering of the Divine and the world by the Enlightenment, whatever the latter term may mean.

As noted, what is significant about Taylor's tale is the reversal of the "subtraction" narrative of secularisation, and his detailed description of the positive creation of the possibility of an "exclusive humanism" and its ramifications for the evolving social imaginary of the modern West. In doing so, he traverses with great acuity an immense field of modern intellectual, political and social history. Although the minutiae of the transformation Taylor terms "disenchantment" (again following Weber) are outside the scope of this thesis, what is important is his claim that the social bond and the sacred were self-identical prior to modernity – something inherent and disclosed by the original meaning of the Latin *religare*, and that there was no distinction imaginable between social action and cosmic action – whether on a world-historical or individual scale. The

crucial etymologies of *religare* are traced by Derrida [1996] (1998) in *Faith and Knowledge*, along with his figuration of "globalisation" as a process of "*mondialatinisation*", a concept which is illuminating .So the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, for instance, believed both that his empire had an eternal essence – secured by Biblical prophecy – and that to act on the cosmos through alchemy and hermetic magic was also to act on the world.

While certainly the preconditions of a calculative political rationality can be traced back to the Renaissance (and the obligatory gesture to Machiavelli is warranted here), what is key is that any political action seeking to found a utopian society had to be oriented in time towards repetition and the re-instantiation of a fallen age, or to a breaking through of an eternal time into the quotidian, rather than be understood as some form of eschatological or temporal end or progress towards a consummation of time. The seeds of Joachim of Fiore's prophecy, in other words, had yet to fall on fertile ground. Here Taylor can be read as tying together a number of threads left hanging in the weave of polemic about the possibility of the political before the nation state.

An enormous literature on state formation (which cannot be summarised here) presupposes a basic insight of Karl Marx' – that it is inadmissable to view past societies through the lens of the present – a formulation which as Castoriadis (1987: 35) observed, Marx himself failed to supersede. So while political sociology keeps one eye on the autonomisation of fields such as the political and the economic (from the undifferentiated material basis of the fields of medieval peasants), another eye has to be cast on the meaning of political action *as such* and its mutations over the very *longue durée*. The

basic problematic here is arguably a legacy of the Marxian base/superstructure distinction – because the accumulation of a surplus was "political", then there was no possibility of a sphere of the economy being conceptualised which the state could govern. Perry Anderson (1974) provides a good introduction to the essential concepts of what, as suggested, is an enormous literature, which overlaps with the broader question of the emergence of modernity. Debates about the recovery of Roman concepts of sovereignty from the reception of Roman law onwards, and through the jurists of natural law in the 15th and 16th centuries overlap with this literature. What is being suggested here is that whether or not "politics" existed in the ancient world and then resurfaced with the coming of modernity are in a sense irrelevant to the question of the motivation of political action. The fact that Roman rule, and Roman politics of both the Republic and the Principiate, was inseparable from Roman "religion" is the key insight here. It is in this context that what is in a sense a phenomenology of the social imaginary has its fundamental significance. What Taylor can assist us in doing is in thinking the possibility of imagining the possibility of social transformation. It must be underlined that this possibility – constitutive of any utopian project, and thus, as we are arguing of any political action oriented towards an indeterminate an open horizon – is both of recent emergence and of long historical lineage. And religion and the breaking of the sacred bond is utterly central to that lineage, and that emergence.

I wish to argue that this secular (in both senses) movement of "disembedding" which Taylor (2007: 157) takes as his theme has failed to efface, but only reconfigured quasi-transcendental structures which a post-Kantian phenomenology can unveil, and that their

persistence, or their disseminations through the traces of the iterative mark are precisely what is at issue in the stakes of political action and its utopian imaginaries.

Here, though, Taylor himself, despite the restricted time frame of his genealogy (and that, it is suggested, is the probably inevitable source of the blindnesses inscribed in his text), can be of assistance. While it does some considerable violence to the richness of his text to assert that what he is tracing is a local instance of a phenomenon of great antiquity and duration, and even that its ubiquity is effaced by his focus on Europe and North America, it is strategically useful to read his work in this way for our purposes. In short, it will be necessary to provincialise Taylor's Europe and to read him in concert with Gauchet.

Taylor's argument is that the Reformation was not a fracture or break in Christianity so much as a working out of logics which a post-Augustinian Christianity had always already embodied. Much of the interest of his work lies in the detailed tracing of a logic of reform inherent in Christianity through its morphing into technologies of governance of the social, a process of appropriation and re-appropriation, as the consequences of the Calvinist Reformation diffused and transformed into a renewed will to govern. A certain re-ordering immanentises, and thus provokes more re-ordering, which in turn further effaces the transcendental frame, according to Taylor (2007: 85).

Viewed as the diffusion of a certain logic of Christianity, incarnation becomes ex-carnation, and the Death of God is revisioned as the withdrawal of a *Deus Absconditus* as the resurrection is both endlessly re-enacted and deferred. The temporalisation of ordinary time, as the Vulgate incantantion of "*in illa tempore*" chanted in the liturgy – the

temporal "continuation" of an eternally re-presented present and the sense of the inbreaking of the eternal into the quotidian recedes, leads to a diffusion of salvific logics – a move which in some ways intriguingly parallels the Kabbalistic shards of the divine emanation which were to be so important, in a hermetic sense, to Walter Benjamin. There are parallels too with much Catholic and Protestant German eschatological theology– particularly that of Juergen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz (Peters & Urban 2004). Here Taylor traces a complex double movement in which the precepts of a Christianity where eschatology becomes a horizon rather than a present possibility are disseminated and re-marked through the body of the social over time. We are a long way from secularisation understood as a simple progression towards a differentiated modernity. The process, if process be the right word, is better pictured as the mutation of a trace through iteration, or *différance* (Derrida [1972] 1982).

Taylor's own genealogy traces this structure of disembedding back to Karl Jaspers' Axial Age (2007: 152-153). But Marcel Gauchet's work, although he does not work within the language or problematic of Castoriadis' work, suggests that disembedding might be better understood as a tendential de-totalisation of the imaginary which arises with a structural scission which founds the social – again a phenomenal structure which is endlessly iterated rather than the beginning of a linear process. Nevertheless, there is a story of origins to be told. Social structures, as such, have an origin, and that origin rests with the shift from transhumance to agriculture and the accumulation of a surplus some ten millennia ago. It is this originary scission – a first differentiation not of labour but of power and a foundation of hierarchy – which sets in motion the movement of disembedding which is wrongly named "secularisation" and which has such fundamental

and crucial implications for any political action whatever. It is to a very schematised and all too brief retelling of this story that the chapter now turns.

Embedding and disembedding

According to Taylor (2007: 151), there are three aspects of "embedding" – social order, cosmos, human good – and thus a "triple embeddeness":

> The point I am trying to make here is that in early societies this inability to imagine the self outside of a particular context extended to membership of our society in its essential order. That this is no longer so with us, that many of those "what would it be like if I were…?" questions are not only conceivable but arise as burning practical questions (should I emigrate? should I convert to another religion/no religion?), is the measure of our disembedding. And another fruit of this is our ability to entertain the abstract question, even when we cannot make it imaginatively real. (Taylor 2007: 149)

In gesturing to Descartes, Taylor's argument here is that a progressive disembedding takes place from the Axial age onwards (2007: 153-4) – where religion as such separates itself out from social ritual to individual practice progressively - with an acceleration in early modernity. To adapt Taylor's conception of Durkheim's comparison of the social with the divine (and whether Taylor's reading of Durkheim is an adequate one can be left to one side for the purposes of this argument) – the sacred is the social bond but there is no folding.

Gauchet (2007: 153-4) puts this in a different and arguably more powerful way when he argues that "the greater the gods are, the freer humans are". Gauchet (1997: 9) sees the differentiation (if that is a sufficiently precise concept) of the political and the religious (both in tension with the social because what is occurring is a fracturing of bonds) as the key event – and process - in human history:

…the emergence of the State clearly appears as the main event in human history. It is not simply a stage in the progressive differentiation of social functions and the stratification of status. Nor does it represent an inexplicable phenomenon that suddenly appeared and unfortunately destroyed a more natural and just order. It corresponds to a massive revision of the articulation of the human situation, to a transformation in the strict sense of the word – all the elements in the earlier arrangement will be found in the later one, but differently connected and distributed. This logical redistribution had enormous practical consequences. Though the systems on both sides of the "cataclysmic" rift may be formally equivalent, their embodiments in the real world have nothing in common. This major shift resulted in an upheaval that brought turmoil into the new world at both the material and spiritual level. This is where our five thousand years of "history-as-growth" really began, a period that was ridiculously brief and amazingly swift compared to the unimaginably *longue durée* from which it arose.

There is a clear parallel here with the theorisation of the sundering of the unity and indeed the unicity of the social as theorised in a complementary way by Lefort and Castoriadis which could be traced further, and which has already been discussed in the previous Chapter, but which nevertheless needs signalling at this moment of the argument.

As soon as we enter the sphere of institutionalised domination, we are inside a universe where religion's original radical core comes under attack by being exposed to the action of mechanisms that alter the prospects for life, thought, and action and whose impetus will continue to shake and loosen its hold. The so-called "major religions" or "universal religions," far from being the quintessential embodiment of religion, are in fact just so many stages of its abasement and disintegration. The greatest and most original of them, our own, the rational religion of one god, is precisely the one that allows a departure from religion. (Gauchet 1997: 9)

The departure from religion or its constitution as such in effect gets history moving – showing a constitutive and originary tension inherent in time, or better, in *temporalisation*.

What is different here is not that there is inexorable change, despite attempts to safeguard and perpetuate identity. It is rather that where those neutralising mechanisms aimed at sheltering the social from the dynamics of group relations are at work, the advent of political domination acts contrariwise by objectively setting up, at the heart of the collective process, a debate about the meaning and legitimacy of the whole. So political domination not only produces or generates greater instability and more effective transformations, it also reshapes both intra- and inter-social relations in such a way that the interplay of their most substantial forces tends to loosen the previously unchallengeable human bonds (Gauchet 1999: 35).

It is the argument of this Chapter that the most powerful thematisation of those bonds, and their continued necessary haunting of any forms of action and thought lies within the thought of Jacques Derrida, and because certain aspects – methodological as well as substantive (clumsy though that distinction may be in the contexts of his texts) – of that thought are inseparable from the positing and articulation of any hypotheses proper to the work of that thought, that what is only apparently a detour through broader aspects of Derrida's remains or remainders now becomes a necessary task.

Chapter Six: Jacques Derrida, deconstruction's contexts and the political

This chapter contextualises the thought of Jacques Derrida within the contexts of the legacies of phenomenology and of Marxism, and troubles the disciplinary narratives which normally act to circumscribe the work and force of deconstruction. This is a necessary task for two reasons. First, Derrida's work has been dismissed because it is impossible to derive a politics unproblematically from deconstruction. I would argue this is to fundamentally misinterpret both the role of philosophy and the theory/praxis nexus. Derrida's thought has political force not because he seeks to propound a social analysis or a political theory as such but rather from the way in which deconstruction unveils certain quasi-transcendental structures which shape thought and action. The political significance of this unveiling cannot be overstated in that it enables the limits of the modern imaginary to be viewed, and clears the path – substantively and methodologically – for an invocation of minor traditions which are effaced through equation with the particular and the religious even as the dominant imaginary disguises its own trajectories from Christian thought and culture. The second part of this Chapter traces this argument, and thus builds further on the discussion in the last Chapter.

Derrida's legacies

Jacques Derrida died in 2004. If the controversy that surrounded his life and work needed an epitaph, it may be sought in the notorious New York Times obituary, or perhaps in the recollection of the "affair" surrounding the award by Cambridge University of an honorary doctorate to the French philosopher in 1992 (Derrida [1992] 1995). "Deconstruction", the term which has become something of a metonym for the

corpus of his work as a whole, has been disseminated in contexts far removed from its origins (Bowlby 2008) and he – insofar as he and his work are assimilated to a certain postmodernism – remains a spectre to conjure with in the interminable "culture wars".

Yet, surprisingly for a thinker who is both damned and celebrated, there is little agreement except in schematising and pedagogical texts not just on the evaluation of his *oeuvre*, but also on its interpretation by either his detractors or his disciples. Perhaps he is ill served by both. It is clear that his name is something of a *shibboleth* for some, and he was accused during his lifetime of an apparently unbounded nihilism (Habermas 1987, Derrida 1988: 156-157) which, like a monstrous revenant, appeared to reveal all that was threatened in the heritage of modernity. Almost four years after his death, work on his legacies and on their complex filiations has yet to begin in earnest, and his own words in the last interview he gave may prove prophetic:

> I live my death in writing. It's the ultimate test: one expropriates oneself without knowing exactly who is being entrusted with what is left behind. Who is going to inherit, and how? Will there even be any heirs? … At my age, I am prepared to entertain the most contradictory hypotheses in this regard: I have simultaneously – I ask you to believe me on this – the *double feeling* that, on one hand, to put it playfully and with a certain immodesty, one has not yet begun to read me, that even though there are, to be sure, many very good readers (a few dozen in the world perhaps, people who are also writers-thinkers, poets), in the end it is later on that all this has a chance of appearing, but also, on the other hand, and thus simultaneously, I have the feeling that two weeks or a month after my death *there will be nothing left*. Nothing except what has been copyrighted and deposited in libraries. I swear to you, I believe sincerely and simultaneously in these two hypotheses. (Derrida [2005] 2007: 33-34)

Questions of the archive, of the remainder, or survival, of memory and of forgetting - and of death, mourning and legacies were and are central to Derrida's work, to the work that "deconstruction" *does*.

Perhaps what can be observed in the academic conversation about his legacy is twofold. On one hand, it is old news, archived and forgotten. Outside a small circle associated with the *College Internationale de Philosophie* in France itself, Derrida's "generation" – those whom he dubbed as incarnating a certain ethos (Derrida 2007: 27) were "provisionally" forgotten long before their *differends*, their disputes, were subsumed and sublated by the "idiotic phrase 68 thought" (Derrida 2007: 29).. Perhaps this forgetting began as early as the rise - or the mediated spectacle of the rise - of the *nouveaux philosophes* in 1977. On the other hand, in the worlds and fields of English speaking scholarship, where Derrida has had an influence, that influence has been curiously bifurcated. In his own terms, his reception has been subject to a double inscription, but perhaps a false bond, and one not without its own violence.

Some look for a key, a master hermeneutic, a thread to tie up and weave together a narrative that was interminable, to terminate the work of analysis with the unveiling of a secret – that Derrida, for instance – every word he wrote, every message or *envoi* he sent or posted – was a thinker of memory and mourning, a (post)modern day Freud (Dooley & Kavanagh 2007). Others proceed with the work of canonisation, the neutralisation and depoliticisation Derrida [1994] (1995) himself gestured to with regard to the legacies of Marx – the unification and the unicity of a corpus or a corpse (Derrida 1999) – as if to write, "now that he's dead and no longer dangerous, we can begin to read him as a philosopher, to return his work to the tradition it inhabited" (Glendinning 2008). Friends, from across the divide that purportedly separates continental from analytical philosophy, seek to translate him into a philosopher of language, to reinscribe him into the venerable surroundings of a comfortable Cambridge college (Wheeler 2000), or to appropriate him

for their own end(s) of philosophy (Rorty 1996). One can perhaps picture the *contretemps* of this encounter – its disjointedness (Derrida 1994), its meetings that do not really take place (Derrida 1988) – as if a plurality of voices were joining in addressing the apostrophe of which he wrote (Derrida [1994] 1997: 1) – "O my friends, there is no friend!" to his spectres, to make them One, to in-corporate the Others, (Derrida 1991), to demarcate ghosts (Sprinker 1999), to conjure away the multiplicity of the events that will be his hauntings. All this requires further analysis. Is there an exoteric and an esoteric Derrida? How should all these spectres be disciplined?

Disciplining Derrida

If one were to write a sociology of Derrida's reception in the English speaking academy along the lines of Bourdieu (1999), it would be necessary to trace the consequences of the translation history of his texts – fortunately a task already undertaken by Rapaport (2001). The assimilation of his work has primarily taken place in America and the United Kingdom, and contrary to what is sometimes asserted, he has not been received as a key thinker in Australian literary and cultural studies. Similarly, while debates heavily inflected by Althusserian Marxism and its epigones continued to dominate British sociology and cultural studies in the 1970s, it was the reception of Derrida in American modern languages departments – particularly the formation of the so-called "Yale deconstructionist school" (Naas 2008) and the internecine disputes which this reception sparked – which were foundational for the later reappropriation of his work by those working in the continental philosophy tradition in England (cf Critchley 1999; Laclau 1996), and to a lesser degree, by the practitioners of post-colonial theory.

Derrida's appropriation in literary theory

It is no surprise, and it is no criticism to point out, that textualists among literary scholars would have always already primarily read Derrida as a writer and a critic – and that this holds true whether Derrida was read in a more ludic register (Hartman 1981) or lauded for providing a philosophical rigour which would enhance and enliven and inspirit the arts and practices of reading (De Man 1983). While a myth developed that Derrida was some sort of idealist (which is not to say that he was not *some* sort of idealist) who denied that any context existed outside a text, it was this interpretation – heavily shaped by a dispatch from Paris from Fredric Jameson (1972) (long before "French theory" was to be inscribed within a meta-narrative of postmodernism) – which engendered Derrida derision from within the self-same literary academy, that decision did not mean that any agreed protocols for reading Derrida and putting his texts *to work* emerged.

Some authors saw "deconstruction" as a practice of double inscription – whereby two narratives, one more rigorously argumentative and one at the margins co-existed within one text – no doubt encouraged in such an interpretation by the textual practice of *Glas*, while others defanged Derrida by inscribing deconstruction into a rhetorical overturning whereby one side of a "binary opposition" could be re-privileged, which (misreading) happily lent itself to the furthering of certain political projects related to the literary canon. This bifurcation, itself, would no doubt not exhaust the field of the possible dissemination of a literary and cultural Derrida within the North American academy, and here it is sufficient to name the translator of *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak and the subaltern studies associated originally with her name. But what is important to

understand here is that the readers and rhetoricians of modern languages did not have Derrida to themselves to have and to hold.

In a rather witty review essay, one of Derrida's most faithful readers (a position which is not an unalloyedly good thing by any means), Geoffrey Bennington [1988] (1994) considered "Deconstruction and the Philosophers – the Very Idea", beginning his ruminations with the lament that:

> *We knew it wouldn't last forever. We 'literary critics' or even 'theorists' had to move quickly while the going was good, make the most of our chances, rush on excitedly, trying not to take too much notice of the slow, heavy, inexorable tread of the law somewhere behind. The philosophers were back there somewhere, tortoise to our hare. In 1986 their books came out.*

Bennington paints a picture of a new generation of harried literary theorists, keeping up with the hitherto esoteric hermeneutics of suspicion embodied in the hitherto exotic names of Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl, between teaching "freshman composition" and publishing madly in order not to perish. There is probably some truth in this painting, and it is worthwhile once again underlining the influence of the speed of thinking and writing, the creation of a performativity of academic celebrity, and the machinations of a marketised publishing industry which Derrida (2007) himself warns will transform the archive and which Bourdieu [1997] (2000) once cautioned would destroy the conditions of thinking – by precluding taking the time to think, the once and future role of the scholar.

Targeting Rodolphe Gasché in particular (himself a resident of a Department of Comparative Literature), Bennington objects to the work of straightening and fixing performed on the texts of Derrida by the philosophers, and it is an objection with some force. Gasché is also one of Derrida's most scrupulous readers (in both senses of the world), and while it is probably unarguable that his work throws most light on what exactly Derrida was doing – by his own philosophical lights – in setting in motion the work of deconstruction, it is also surely incontestable that his own monograph on Derrida, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, does considerable violence to Derrida's thought by relating it back to a putative Kantian ground in the "criticism of reflexivity" – a violence which unveils itself through the complete collapse that Gasché's argument suffers at its margins precisely at the point at which it seeks to hinge Derrida to a fixed tradition (Gasché 1986: 80-81). Gasché (1994) does somewhat better in articulating what work deconstruction actually does in a later collection, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*, and his tracing of such quasi-transcendentals as the trace in *Tain* has great value, despite the odd systematising and renaming of non-concepts as "infrastructures" is most worthwhile (and more of both later).

Derrida and the spirits of Marx

But it remains the case that either a Dionysian *jouissance* of textual play or a rewriting of the work of thought into the strictures of structures are both far too disciplined, and disciplinary, ways of reading and keeping faith with a legacy that remains so veiled precisely because the strategy of deconstruction is to inhabit the canonical texts of which

it writes, to haunt them, if you like, with the remainders of their own inscription. In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida (1994: 13) remarks on the intellectual courage of Karl Marx, a thinker prepared to call in advance for the "transformation to come of his own theses". This should not be surprising as it is precisely one of the reasons why deconstruction, for Derrida, is impossible without a certain spirit of Marx, and a remaining with that spirit and doing justice to its spectres, because the work of deconstruction is precisely this. This point can be demonstrated with regard to Derrida's engagement with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. In what remains as one of his most rigorous and significant essays, "Violence and Metaphysics", Derrida subjected Levinas to questions which are then later displaced into a new receptivity for a reinscription of a differing/deferred Levinasian text in work such as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* [1997] (1999b).

While the question of the unity as opposed to the temporal trajectory of Derrida's work can be held in suspense, what needs to be understood is that the double movement of deconstruction and its moment of reinscription often takes place along a pathway or a passage that can be traced through successive texts, a demanding requirement for readers because of its implication that a familiarity with all of the corpus is a necessary pre-condition for the interpretation or the explication of any of its parts.

The spirit of the question

The reductionism which has already been referenced – reading Derrida as if he were solely a philosopher of language, or a philosopher of memory, or some other specialist in the academic division of labour – is precisely at issue here. The disciplinary

appropriations of Derrida are imbued with irony, because what is usually missed, and usually missed precisely in the reading (or anthologising or citation perhaps) of the essay which marked his insertion into the American scene in 1966 – "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (Derrida [1967] 1978) – is the degree to which *his* post-structuralism, at any rate (to utilise a term which is an unfortunate thematisation because of the way in which it delimits the movement of thought) is in part about the eclipse or the ends of philosophy and its dissolution into questions posed and answered within the human sciences. Such questions, Derrida has continued to insist, are ones which efface and elide the philosophical presuppositions which remain as their unthought and unsaid grounds.

Although his work and interventions in support of the teaching of philosophy in France is one relevant pointer, one could also cite many instances of his own expression of the desire to remain a philosopher (Derrida 1996). Here, a reception of his work in its entirety (while resisting its systematisation) is key. It is key because his inhabiting of texts from the tradition (Naas 2003) both references that tradition as a whole and demonstrates that its naming as a tradition *as such* effaces its complexities. Already, in "Violence and Metaphysics" we can observe an insistence, repeated or perhaps better re-iterated in *Adieu* and in many other writings, that separating out "Christian" and "Greek" elements of the philosophical pathways, or the Enlightenment to which he has also pledged his faith (Derrida 1988), is a perhaps analytically useful but fundamentally misleading move. It is this insistence that coheres closely to the argument of this thesis.

Metaphysics at its margins

We cannot escape metaphysics, he argues again and again, but we can inhabit and trouble its margins. Thought can be moved onwards into a future, or an openness to a future to come, precisely through an understanding that any systematisation begins to confront the impossibility of totalising an infinity at the limits of its thought, and in a non-teleological way. Writing at the limits continues to question the promise of totality and its inseparable finitude. Without entering into any of the issues surrounding the principle of non-contradiction (but see Wheeler 2000), Derrida's much noticed anti-Hegelianism is not just a resistance to a Hegelian closure and totalisation of thought (which is why he provides an important motif for this thesis) but also an unveiling of logics other than those inscribed in Hegel's logic – not a dialectic but something more akin to a constellation in Walter Benjamin's terms. Here it is important to underline why Derrida's debt to Benjamin is also an important theme in this thesis.

Performing the dialectic otherwise

That is to say, in order to announce itself as such, any thought must also perform a double movement – a simultaneity as well as an ipseity – where veiling or revealing and unveiling or concealing happen *together*. While it is possible – though it is also a circumscription – to slow the pace of thought down and to parse its moments, what we need to understand is that the unthought and the thought are thinkable outside the logic(s) of identity and difference. Far from some abstruse academic speculation, Derrida is here very close to Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenology of thought articulated in *Signs*. In other words, we do not need to posit, though perhaps we cannot escape positing, a

movement of sublation. Rather, we need to see the proximity of different ideas or of ideation itself at its limits. Derrida's writing will have been a performative enactment and embodiment of these constellations from the start, of the possibility as well as the impossibility of thought. The refusal to effect closure, the holding of theses together at their limit such that they fold into one another, the dis-unity of the book, the resistance to totalisation – all these aspects of his writing both explain how the cinders of thought can be misread as a nihilist scepticism - which he has denied in the most emphatic terms – and his mis-characterisation as an advocate or theorist of indeterminacy or indetermination:

> I do not believe I have ever spoken of "indeterminacy", whether in regard to "meaning" or anything else. Undecideability is something else again… I want to recall that undecideability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive – syntactical or rhetorical, but also political, ethical, etc.) They are pragmatically determined. The analyses that I have devoted to undecideability concern just these determinations and these definitions, not some vague "indeterminacy". I say "undecideability" rather than "indeterminacy" because I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given situations to be stabilised through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to that word, which also includes political action and experience in general). There would be no indecision or *double bind* were it not between *determined* (semantical, ethical, political) poles, which are upon occasion terribly necessary and always irreducibly singular. Which is to say that from the point of view of semantics, but also of ethics and politics, "deconstruction" should never lead either to relativism or to any sort of indeterminism. To be sure, in order for structures of undecideability to be possible (and hence structures of decisions and of responsibilities as well), there must be a certain play, *différance*, nonidentity. Not of indetermination, but of difference or nonidentity with oneself in the very process of determination. *Différance* is not indeterminacy. It renders determinacy both possible and necessary. (Derrida 1988: 148-149)

So, therefore, the protocols originally outlined in 'Signature Event Context' [1972] (1982) and explicated in Derrida's reply to the analytical philosopher of language, John

Searle, in *Limited Inc.* (1988) are not just theses about the necessary decay of meaning and signification in any context of communication whatever, though they are that. These protocols – going beyond the terminology of "use" and "mention" cited by J. L. Austin – are revelatory of the movement of thought itself, and have the same status and function as Hegel's dialectic or Kant's distinctions, though the way they do the work of analysis is prior to and opposed to any systematisation of the imposition of any structure – quasi-concepts or non-concepts rather than a logic as such or a regulative ideal.

Derrida and phenomenology

Every citation is an iteration, and every iteration is a "violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event" (1982: 18). This is the same, though different, figure – the same quasi-transcendental figure - as that of *différance*. And it is the same, though different, as the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence in *Speech and Phenomenon*. And what we have come very close to is the figure of Derrida as a phenomenologist, which understanding is the necessary basis for what is to come, though it is also a strategic reduction of the infinity of possible trajectories, legacies, or filiations on which he draws, if what he inhabits is philosophy as such. None of this is to accord a privilege to philosophy as a discipline, but rather to invoke the spirit of the question, of a community of the question, which Derrida has conjured on many occasions.

If Derrida has often been read as indebted to Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, it is the middle term of this triad which functions as a sort of excluded third between anti-Hegelianism and post-Heideggerianism. Outside the domain of phenomenological

scholarship or the even more restricted domain of "Husserl studies" (Lawlor 2002), Derrida's indebtedness to Husserl has largely been obscured or forgotten, even though he worked closely on Husserl from 1953 to 1967. No doubt this is a result of the sorts of appropriations described above – Derrida appeared as if from nowhere into an English-speaking literary scholarship in North America without his antecedents, except those which were more properly grammatical, literary or linguistic (for instance, Saussure or Hjelmslev), being read. Bennington's "Derridabase" (1993), a sort of attempt to enclose Derrida in an encyclopedia or glossary, for instance, betrays no knowledge of Husserl beyond what one might glean from reading Derrida himself in the entry with that name. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the "post-structuralist" aspect of Derrida's work came to be emphasised because the prevalent mode of doing radical sociology in the 1970s was Althusserian structuralism. Phenomenology as such was little known (Schmidt 1985).

The significance of Derrida as phenomenologist of the religious

Attention to these contexts is important because, while it is important to respect the caveat entered above about the desire to circumscribe or delimit Derrida's corpus, it is nevertheless strategically apposite for the purposes of this thesis to highlight and unveil the debts Derrida owes to phenomenology – and particularly for this Chapter as it seeks to understand what Derrida and others might mean by viewing "religion" or even "religion without religion" and the structure of the promise as quasi-transcendental structures of thought and action. While it is no doubt true, as De Vries (1999), Naas (2008) and others have written, that some of the most interesting work being done on Derrida's legacies is now being written by scholars whose disciplinary home is theology

or religious studies, it is also no doubt true that a disciplinary taming of his thought under the auspices of religion is also prone to the same pitfalls as others we have examined (Sherwood & Hart 2005). It is in the necessary and originary relation between the promise and faith that we will find the code to read Derrida's "messianism without a Messiah" and thus to further one of the projects of this dissertation in describing and deciphering the differences between "Jewish" and "Christian" messianisms and eschatologies. I am arguing this difference is crucial for opening fields of political action outside its current narrow circumscriptions within hegemonic social imaginaries. What would, after all, a phenomenology of utopia be without a number of phenomenologists between the covers of its bound text?

Derrida and Merleau-Ponty

Within the French context too, Derrida's work on Husserl has not had its due. Reynolds (2004) is right to note that Derrida engaged little with the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and both Descombes [1979] and Gutting (2001) make it clear that the thought of Merleau-Ponty and particularly Jean-Paul Sartre loomed large over the French intellectual scene until the early 1960s, when it went into a sudden eclipse. Derrida (2002) has explained that at the time of his early intellectual formation, it seemed natural to try to escape the bounds of existential phenomenology, which appeared as orthodoxy and as stultifying. His statements in *Negotiations* are highly valuable because they reinsert his work into its original contexts – for instance, the reserve he maintained with regard to Marxism for reasons of both political strategy and because of its dominance

within his own intellectual milieu, even if – as is obvious in this context – the intention of the author is hardly the only yardstick by which the context of a text should be judged.

Tilottama Rajan (2002: 122) has made the intriguing suggestion that it is precisely Derrida's closeness to Merleau-Ponty in some respects which accounts for this disavowal, arguing (*inter alia*) that:

> It seems clear, then, that deconstruction at this stage [the stage of the three books released in 1967, including *Speech and Phenomena*] is less an overturning of phenomenology than an analytic of finitude produced by the mutually supplementary relationship among various kinds of phenomenology.

I will return to this point later in the thesis when discussing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, because Reynolds (2004) makes an important (though arguably slightly erroneous) argument regarding the ways in which Derrida's thought could be supplemented by Merleau-Ponty's thematisation of embodiment and intersubjectivity. A common criticism of Levinas' ethics – and indeed of his apparent (possibly only apparent) dismissal of the political - is the degree to which there is a solipsism inherent in the relation of face to wholly Other (and consequently the adequacy of the Third as a place or place holder for the figure of justice or the practices of the political). This criticism is also made of Derrida's work. It may well be that deconstruction as such does not provide a ground for a particular politics, but if that be the case, it is not necessarily a corollary that deconstruction lacks the capacity to think the social as well as the limits of the social. Here it is important to emphasise and to underline the different temporalities of the quasi-transcendental undeconstructable figures such as justice from those which prevail in eschatological utopias of Joachite derivation, and the relation between Derrida and

Augustine. In other words, what deconstruction will not have been doing is proposing "democracy to come" as some sort of horizon or ideal type or even regulatory ideal – contrary to what Rapaport (2001) calls "social studies" appropriations of the positionality of subjects whose identity is defined by difference. Rather the actual radicality of the ensemble of quasi-concepts exemplified by a "messianism without a Messiah" lies in their possible and impossible instantiation in a "now time" which renders the present also non-present in a way that Benjamin foreshadowed.

So while it would be useful to uncover his exact relation to existential phenomenology in greater detail, what we are nevertheless looking at is a series or a field of a broader thought, and Derrida (1996) himself has noted the influence of Levinas as a reader of Husserl and Heidegger together – as early as 1930 – and as a key context for his own work. If transcendental phenomenology and all that is unified under the sign or the signature of Husserl suffers or undergoes a latter displacement and dissemination in Derrida's work subsequent to *Speech and Phenomena*, it may be that its traces and its remainders nevertheless continue to enfold his thought, a point made by both Lawlor (2002) and Rajan (2002). Again the recognition of these traces would be consistent with the reading strategy already advocated, and that is what this Chapter will now do – in short form – because a full restaging of Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl would be outside its scope and purposes (but see Lawlor 2002) . It is essential, however, to realise that while arguments about the "metaphysics of presence" may be extended to the whole of the philosophical tradition, they owe their proximate origin to a very close engagement with the texts of Husserl, whose other legacies include a similar concern over the

displacement of the philosophical question itself by the human sciences. But, as Rajan (2002: 99) is quick to emphasise, Derrida is not reading Husserl outside the context of his own lineages and filiations as the "master" of phenomenology:

> He sees phenomenology as generated by a series of such "unbalanc[ings] (WD: 157). Indeed, up to 1967 Derrida's work could be described as a deconstruction of transcendental phenomenology that draws on existential phenomenology so as to work towards "a thought of the trace" that is irreducible to phenomenology but is still part of it (Ogr: 62).

Moran (2000: 436) makes a parallel point:

> In these essays [Derrida's writings on Husserl], Derrida sought to expose the hidden metaphysical presuppositions of traditional Husserlian phenomenology, which, in his view, far from being a presuppositionless science, actually belonged to the history of metaphysics. Indeed, Husserlian phenomenology, with its commitment to self-identical ideal truths, remains for Derrida, trapped in the "metaphysics of presence in the form of ideality". Derrida's critique, however, does not constitute a complete abandonment of the phenomenological mode of enquiry, rather he wants to liberate phenomenology from its attachment from the very metaphysical standpoint it claims to have overcome, seeking to get beyond phenomenology's addiction to the intuition of presence.

In emphasising the lineages of phenomenology present in deconstruction (and in the deconstructions of phenomenology – not just Husserl's but also Levinas'), Rajan (2002: 128) makes the claim "that this deconstruction is itself a phenomenology is obvious". That may appear bold, and it would be necessary to reconstruct her entire argument in *Deconstruction and the Remainders of Phenomenology* to fully support it, but it suffices to cite her on the way in which the constellation of Levinas and the voices inhabiting the text are folded together in "Violence and Metaphysics":

> By emphasising Levinas' debts, Derrida locates his thought within the community of phenomenology as the most radical outcome of that process by which phenomenology is "work[ed] ceaselessly" by the "themes of non-presence" that it both introduces and resists (WD: 121). From this perspective "Violence and

Metaphysics" is also an autoreflection on the way Derrida's own deconstruction emerges inside a phenomenology always already open to the thought of its outside.

Similarly, in *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida in effect reduces the phenomenological reduction in a double movement characteristic of deconstruction. Deconstruction therefore is the radicalisation of a certain phenomenology, even if it remains sceptical of the phenomenological method as prescribed by Husserl.

Quasi-transcendental structures of experience: tracing the Trace

Lawlor's *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (2002) has already been cited. Although it would be unwise to agree with him (for the reasons adduced above) that things are as simple as "genesis" being the "basic problem" of deconstruction, there is much that is extremely valuable in the light shone by Lawlor's schematic overview on Derrida's corpus as a whole. So we shall follow his argument for a while. Lawlor (2002: 2) argues that Derrida's project is to deconstruct and thus reinscribe Heidegger's ontology – particularly Heidegger's ontology of the question. Importantly, he sees something to which many commentators in their exegesis of Derrida's texts are blind – that to call into question the foundational nature of presence is not to deny that there is such a phenomenon as presence but rather to point out that it is always already deferred and displaced – the work that *différance* does. He writes (2002: 2-3):

> Yet, for Derrida, there is a non-foundation below it, what we could call, following what Derrida says in "Violence and Metaphysics", the "non-Greek" non-foundation. The metaphysics of presence, however, has decided that the meaning of being is presence either as subject or object or as their unity. Thus it does not re-open the question of being; it remains above in the secuirty of the foundation. It remains Greek.

The spatialisation in Lawlor's language perhaps contributes to the clarity of his exposition, but it does have the disadvantage of obscuring the simultaneity – the constellation – of presence and non-presence. But it does have some warrant in Derrida's text because what he is writing about in "Violence and Metaphysics" is an *arkhe* – a non-originary origin or a negativity always within the positing of an origin. Lawlor writes:

> … Derrida's critique of metaphysics, and therefore his critique of phenomenology as metaphysics, contains two aspects. On the one hand, deconstruction engages in a classical phenomenological critique in which claims are limited with evidence, with presence; in this aspect, deconstruction relies on what Husserl of course called "the principle of principles". In fact, as we shall see, Derrida turns "the principle of principles" against any lapses in phenomenological vigilance; he turns it against any dogmatism that may remain in Husserl's philosophy. On the other hand, deconstruction engages in what we are going to call a "super-phenomenological critique", in which deconstruction limits metaphysical claims (or ethico-political claims) with the very experience of the *non-Greek non-foundation*, with the very experience that in fact *Husserl himself* points us toward when he describes time and alterity: the experience of non-presence. The experience that functions as this undeconstructable measure is the test of the sign. It seems to me that it is impossible to dissociate deconstruction, Derrida's thought as a whole, from the experience or test of language. As we shall see, this test of language is an *aporia*.

Lawlor goes on to correctly identify the stakes of *différance* – iterability and alterity are inseparable and we are always already non-present to ourselves. As Derrida (1988: 129) has also written:

> What in this context I call iterability is at once that which tends to attain plenitude and that which bars access to it. Through the possibility of repeating every mark as the same it makes way for an idealisation that seems to deliver the full presence of ideal objects (not present in the mode of sense perception and beyond all immediate deictics), but this repeatability itself ensures that the full presence of a singularity thus repeated comports in itself the reference to something else, thus rending the full presence that it nevertheless announces. That is why iteration is not simply repetition.

Alterity, therefore, is always already there as a structural possibility – in fact, if we want to be Kantian, it is a condition of possibility for any meaning and any experience whatsoever. The other is finite, but alterity is always potentially infinite (Lawlor 2002: 215) even within the finitude that death imposes. Iterability is one of the "non-substitutable substitutes" (the "double affirmative" rather than the determinate negative) which are *originary*, constitutive:

> Each time it is originary *iterability* that is at play. Iterability is the very condition of a pledge, of responsibility, of promising. Iterability can only open the door to these forms of affirmation at the same time as opening the door to the threat of this affirmation failing. (Derrida 2002: 248)

The unthought question, then, is not the question of being, but rather the "un-heard of question" at the end of *Speech and Phenomena*, which is in fact not a question at all but a promise that can only be redeemed by a coincident faith, a faith which itself is always structured by the possibilities of violence on one hand, and the endlessly deferred arrival of the Other on the other hand. At least it is haunted by that trace.

Here, Lawlor's great and new insight is that while Derrida's concerns remain substantially similar throughout his *oeuvre*, the deconstruction that moves through his texts shifts the question towards the *promise*. As we shall now see, it is through the tracing of the trace that we can being to unveil what Derrida (1999: 248) has not been ashamed to call "structures of experience" – quasi-concepts which represent his most radical and perhaps least noticed contribution *as a type of phenomenology*. "Religion without religion" will be such a structure of experience.

On the "without"

Significant confusion remains around Derrida's characterisation of a number of what he dubs "universal structures of experience" through a double movement of joining and sundering – at issue here with reference to "religion without religion" and in the next Chapter, and centrally for the argument of this thesis, with reference to "messianism without a Messiah". As already argued, and as can be seen from Derrida's explicit rejection of the Hegelian dialectic which moves between (at its logical limits) a "good" and a "bad" infinite rather than in terms employed by Kant, among many others, of universals and particulars, what is happening in this work of thought is the staging or figuration of a constellation – a joining which is always disjointed – but which is expressive – and not just metonymically – of the way in which thought moves. There is a close parallel – and the parallel with messianic discourse is a most important one – between Derrida's employment of the "without" and what Agamben [2000] (2005: 24-25) sees as the cardinal hinge of Jewish messianism in his fascinating seminar on Paul's letters – the *as not*:

> The Pauline *hos me* seems to be a special type of tensor, for it does not push a concept's semantic field towards that of another concept. Instead, it sets it against itself in the form of the *as not*: weeping as not weeping. The messianic tension thus does not tend toward an elsewhere, nor does it exhaust itself in the indifference between one thing and its opposite. The apostle does not say: "weeping *as* rejoicing" nor "weeping as [meaning =] not weeping," but "weeping *as not* weeping". According to the principle of messianic *klesis*, one determinate factical condition is set in relation to itself – the weeping is pushed toward the weeping, the rejoicing toward the rejoicing. In this manner, it revokes the factical condition and undermines it without altering its form… In pushing each thing towards itself through the *as not*, the messianic does not simply cancel out this figure, but it makes it pass, it prepares its end. This is not another figure or another world: it is the passing of the figure of this world.

Agamben – or Paul in his epistles – could be writing of deconstruction, and here it suffices to gesture also towards Ernst Bloch's concept (or quasi-concept if its ontological force is evacuated) of the *Not Yet* (Geoghegan 1996: 35). What Derrida is also doing, after the messianic manner, is performing a conceptual compression which is also a temporalisation at the same time as it escapes temporality. There is a "work of the negative" going on here, in other words, but no sublation, nor synthesis. Undoubtedly such a movement of thought is violent, but its purpose is to provide a blinding insight (and all these apparent antonyms are being chosen carefully – because what is at issue – and at work here – is undoubtedly *aporia*.)

If this seems rather abstract, perhaps it can be explicated through a consideration of one of Derrida's own discussions of the function of the "without" – one which takes place in a reply to other papers, and thus is at a more schematic and thematised level than what I would contend is a performative showing or unveiling in and through other texts. It is notable that Derrida (1999: 251) is explicitly discussing his formulation of "messianicity without messianism" in this context, and the best method of explication is to let him speak for himself at some length:

> Here, be it said in passing, everything comes down to the interpretation and the 'logic' of this little word 'without'. I have treated this question elsewhere at length, in connection with Blanchot, and in his wake. It is well known that Blanchot makes apparently paradoxical use of the preposition 'without', sometimes placing it between two homonyms that are virtually synonymous, between two homonyms whose synonymy is broken up at the very heart of the analogy which fuses their meanings (*la mort* sans *mort*, *le rapport* sans *rapport*, etc.). 'Without' does not necessarily designate negativity; even less does it designate annihilation. If this preposition effects a certain abstraction, it also accounts for the necessary effects of abstraction in so doing – of the abstraction of the 'there is', of the abstraction *that* 'there is'.

Religion without religion

As argued, the "universal structures of experience" which are unveiled in Derrida's later

work (though themselves doing the work of deconstruction throughout his *oeuvre* from

its phenomenological beginnings) are – among other things – key to a reconceptualisation

of our present times – outside the confines of the modernist structures of knowing which

themselves – and here both Hegel and Fukuyama are reference points – to the

constitution of a tendentially closed political imaginary itself.   Most stress in the

argument will be laid on the figure of the messianic, or more properly of messianicity

without messianism, which, it will be argued again and again without ceasing, provides

the lever with which the limits of the apocalypse which envelops our times can be broken

open, which does the work of *tikkun*. So the point to underline at the conclusion of this

chapter is this:

> Retracing Derrida's engagement with the religious and theological makes it
> possible to view the uneasy relationship between philosophy and religion in a
> radically different way, one that is not anticipated or exhausted by any of the
> better-known classical or modern interpretations of their entanglement or
> antithesis… I attempt to provide arguments for a philosophical reassessment of
> his work in light of its ever more prominent citation and rearticulation of religious
> and theological idioms. Derrida's writings exhibit the paradox of a non-
> theological, and it would seem, even non-religious, concern with religion, a type
> of philosophical reflection that does not simply coincide with itself or let itself be
> "doubled", as he would put it, by religion. Only as religion's double can such
> philosophical reflection be said in turn to "haunt" all (positive or historical)
> religion. *This exposure of the philosophical to the religious, and, more indirectly,
> to the theological may provide us with the best, as well as both the most
> responsible and the most risky, access to the question of ethics and politics in the
> current historical constellation – and who knows, perhaps beyond*.

The emphasis is mine, but the citation is from the Dutch scholar Hent De Vries in his

magisterial *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (1999: ix-x). And the citation almost

exhausts the project and the argument of this thesis, but there is a need to pause and

recapitulate at this point, in order to move that argument on. And perhaps this is insufficient without at least a brief consideration of Derrida's most singular text on religion – "Faith and Violence" [1995] (2002: 70-71) – where – among many other things, he provisionally distinguishes between the structure of the promise and thus of faith and fidelity of any kind whatsoever and the "experience of the unscathed, of *sacredness* or of *holiness*", and where he expands the singularity of the religious to encompass the social bond as such, disseminated throughout the globe by the diffusion that might be named "*mondialatinisation*". Or, perhaps, Derrida can again be allowed to speak for himself:

> Of a discourse to come – on the to-come and repetition. Axiom: no to-come without heritage and the possibility of *repeating*. No to-come without some sort of *iterability*, at least in the form of a covenant with oneself and of a *confirmation* of the originary *yes*. No to-come without some sort of messianic memory and promise, of a messianicity older than all religion, more originary than all messianism. No discourse or address of the other without the possibility of an elementary promise. Perjury and broken promises require the *same* possibility. No promise, therefore, without the promise of a confirmation of the *yes*. This *yes* will have implied and will always imply the trustworthiness and fidelity of a faith. No faith, therefore, nor future without everything technical, automatic, machinal supposed by iterability. In this sense, the technical is the possibility of faith, indeed, its very chance. A chance that entails the greater risk, even the menace of **radical evil**. Otherwise, that of which it is the chance would not be faith but rather program or proof, predicability or providence, pure knowledge and pure know-how, which is to say: annulment of the future. Instead of being opposed, as is almost always done, the machinal and faith ought to be thought *together*, as *one and the same possibility*. (Derrida [1995] 1999: 326)

"Religion without religion", then, might be a shorthand way of writing a story that both agrees with Schmitt that all political concepts are secularised theological concepts, but simultaneously disagrees with him that secularisation is, if you like, the devil, which is undoubtedly the esoteric message of his two treatises (if there are only two) thereon.

Rather, we can observe a parallelism, or a constellation, between processes which have an enormously ancient pedigree – of disembedding – and a particular Christianisation of the world – or in Derrida's phrase – a Latinisation – which evacuates the sacred of its content. This conjuncture would be one that shows, but is not limited to showing, the close imbrication of knowledge and faith, even if the structures of knowledge disavow an overt faith – on faith. It is a matter of unveiling what is hidden; and of waiting for the shards to enlighten us. It is a matter of groping one's way towards an eschatology, or a utopic structure, then, which will never be consummated but will open and re-open vistas of meaning in the name of justice. Derrida enables us to rethink the containment and elision of the political through its differentiation into the sphere of rationality, and the effacement of the sacred – that is to say, the expulsion of desire and affect from the bounded political. In addition, the Christianisation of the world he diagnoses disseminates the narratives of teleology, which need disruption through another conception of time. These narratives, and this minor tradition of temporalisation and memorialisation, are the topic of the next Chapter.

Chapter Seven: A minor utopics and a weak messianism

This Chapter takes up the task of the phenomenology of utopia in earnest; beginning with a consideration of Russell Jacoby's contention that Jewish utopia avoids some of the purportedly evil consequences of "eschatological utopianism". However, Jacoby's argument, while interesting and worthy of consideration, is found to be insufficient. Once again, temporality needs to enter the discussion, and Hegel and his epigones need to be historicised and relativised and sundered from the false universals they inhabit. To that end, Jewish and Christian conceptions of time and indeed onto-theology are contrasted, and it is suggested that Walter Benjamin's work is better understood as inspired by an appropriation and reworking of Jewish traditions (particularly that of the *Kabbalah*) than in its Marxist contexts.

Benjamin also needs situating in the "Jew/Greek" opposition employed by Martin Heidegger, Leo Strauss and others, particularly in its radical reworking by Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas will have contrasted totalisation and universalism, and informed the work of Jacques Derrida, whose texts on messianism, the promise and faith are revealed as both indebted to Benjamin more than they purport to be. Examining in particular Derrida's citation of and indebtedness to Yosef Yerushalmi and his remarks on Freud in *Archive Fever*, it will be suggested that there is an esoteric as well as an exoteric Derrida, and that his love for the secret and his hints about Marranos are hardly accidental. Key texts on hauntology, including *Spectres of Marx,* will be mentioned and cited in order to discern what might be at stake in a necessary passage of messianicity which would be

simultaneously veiled and unveiled within history and what this might imply for avoiding

and resisting the closure of the political imaginary in the name of justice.

The Twentieth Century dialectic of sense-making

Michael Morgan (2001: 1-3), in *Interim Judaism*, places the enormous fruitfulness of the

German Judaic culture of the early twentieth century in its historical and sociological

context – relating it to both to the urban upheavals which saw sociology in the German

academy emerge out of philosophy and also to "the problem of objectivity before and

after Auschwitz". He traces a dialectic of "loss and redemption" throughout the history

of the century, and understands sense-making projects as addressing the tension between

mourning for lost certainties and traditions and a necessary re-orientation towards the

future:

> One finds this "language of redemption" as readily in the work of Georg Lukács
> and Max Weber as one does in that of Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig. Musil
> himself saw the need for such redemptive action and associated it, in his essays
> and in his famous novel, with the achievement of a spiritual condition, akin to art,
> love, and mysticism, which he came to call "the other condition" (*der andere
> Zustand*). At virtually the same historical moment, T. S. Eliot completed *The
> Wasteland* and Rainer Maria Rilker his "Duino Elegies", in both of which we find
> a similar aspiration to unity, wholeness, and transcendence in a world destitute
> and deracinated. (Morgan 2001: 3)

Importantly, and here his work surpasses many of the epistemological impasses of the

modernism/postmodernism debate, Morgan (2001: 3-4) recognises that doubts about

objectivity and the self-presentation of representation are not an ineluctable reaction to

some purported certainties of modernity (Berman 1987), but rather an intrinsic moment

of a complex dialectic central to modernity's temporal sense and therefore sense-making:

> Redemption of this kind is a matter of orientation, the goal of a life that has some
> directedness. Such orientation, by its very nature, must be objective. If it were not,

that which gives our lives direction and meaning would change and thus the direction would change; thereby condemningit to instability; or the ground of orientation would depend on varying and diverse conditions, which would make it insecure and unreliable; or the ground of orientation would be different for different individuals or groups and thus would involve competing claims to direction. Orientation of this deep and fundamental kind, then, must be objective, and thus must be permanent and absolute. The twentieth century was a century in search of such objectivity, of an unconditional, universal and timeless ground for what gives our lives meaning and purpose.

Tracing this search for meaning – and its unstable Others and thus conditions of impossibility – back to Dilthey (among others), Morgan (2001: 5) sees it as directly continued – albeit in different intellectual clothes – in the hermeneutic controversies of postmodernism and multiculturalism. That is a provocative but convincing claim, and it is important, I would argue, to read it together with Morgan's other related claim – that this dialectic of meaning and meaningless is not and was not "a parochial worry but rather a widespread crisis". Intriguingly, from the point of view of this dissertation, he sees it as profoundly reflected and indeed exemplified in Jewish intellectual life, and the history of Judaism in its century of horrors - a century of "catastrophes" (Hobsbawm [1999] 2000: 163), whose ghosts scoff at the meta-narratives of progress just as they haunt in advance any attempt to close off the historical ledger by dialectical sleight-of-hand.

Thus a certain exemplarity of Jewish experience and its echoes and reflections in twentieth century Jewish thought, messianic or otherwise, has the potential to provide a much more robust explanation of the particular character of Jewish utopianism than that provided by Russell Jacoby's somewhat essentialist adoption (2005: 118) of Lionel Kochan's thesis about the enduring cultural significance of the prohibition on "graven

images" (Kochan 1997). There are also significant implications in Morgan's work for the argument of this thesis regarding the grounds of political action, its temporal orientation, and the imbrication of a utopian sensibility and the ability to articulate social goals to an(other) political imaginary. It will now be necessary to relate this introductory discussion more explicitly to the question of time – and of political time.

Time and the deferral and iteration of the *eschaton*

We have seen earlier in this thesis that the question of secularisation is wrongly framed. Whether one accepts Taylor's perspective, or draws on alternative approaches to viewing the complex interactions and dynamics between the religious, the political and the social over the *longue durée*, it is impossible not to conclude that the manner of posing the secularisation thesis in terms of a local modernity is unsustainable. Drawing on Weber's work, Walter Benjamin [1921] (1996) argued that capitalism is not just an economic and social formation having elective affinities with religion, but rather that it is in effect a religion itself – having supplanted Christianity, and become the rhizome or assemblage of certain lines of flight, in this case, among others, the flight of the *Deus Absconditus*. In particular, the secularisation of the rhythm of time and its denaturing and rationalisation into bourgeois time reflects a reification which Lukács also diagnosed (Harootunian 1996: 81).

What is essential here, though, is to recognise that it is Christianity in question. All the secularised soteriological narratives which constitute various philosophies of history from Hegel onwards partake in two key contexts – the assumption that the religion of the Jews is somehow not universal and has been sublated (Bouretz 2007: 175), and the equation of

a utopic state with a progressive movement – whether inspired by the cunning of reason or of *Geist* or by a universal class – towards a final consummation. Political messianism, then, in the forms in which it has had both social and political embodiment (through, for instance, the process of social revolution) and as a signification within the figuration of hegemonic political imaginaries, is still a Christian messianism – the Messiah has already arrived, and time is an empty line awaiting its fulfilment in the consummation of its plenitude of meaning at the *eschaton*.

There is a complex political and theological dialectic at work in the excarnation of Christian messianism. While Augustinianism, with its distinction between the secular and the profane justified the secularising force already present among the Fathers and the Roman Church which acted to demonise millenial expectation as heresy and to extend infinitely the gap between the resurrection and the *Parousia* (Pelikan 1971), represents one pole of this discursive formation, its repressed always has a tendency to return. The "three ages" doctrine of Joachim of Fiore is another stream leading into the river of secularised eschatological experience and the modern political narrativisation of time.

So we see an oscillation between a quietist doctrine and chiliast activism, a tendency already discerned by Weber in his sociological theodicy. Such an unstable dichotomy in both the imaginary and in the social field is in fact much older than Christianity, having origins coinciding with the Axial Transformation (Cohn 1994). In Gauchet's terms this dichotomy also corresponds to an originary fissure proper to the political instantiation of the social as such. We have already taken under notice the constitutive and originary tension between the "always already there" and the "yet to be realised" which founds

time and historical awareness at the moment at which the social is sundered from a prior all encompassing imaginary and lived totality. As Gauchet (1997: 11) suggests, this oscillation is also constitutive of the bifurcation and oscillation proper to the political. This political figuration of social and historical time is always unstable, then, poised between an "always already" with an infinite deferral and its displacement into the restoration of a fallen paradisical state – hence the powerful imaginary role of "primitive communism" for Marx and Engels. The figure of revolution partakes in a repetition and a return, as Marx wittingly or unwittingly shows in the *Brumaire*, and the stream of time has a circularity to it which subsists along with its teleological straightness. As social imaginary significations there need be no contradiction to these figures, and perhaps Hegel's logic implies (among other things) an attempt to think the simultaneity of A and not A through describing and tracing the disseminations of these significations.

The choice of terms in this analysis is not innocent. It should be clear that deconstruction is (among other things) precisely an inscription of these figures of the Christian – and therefore "universally" modern – imaginary. So, as we shall see later in this chapter, Derrida's taste for the secret (Derrida & Ferraris 2001) and his ghosting of himself within the deconstructive text as a Jew by another name – a *Marrano* – reflects a fundamental fissure in the imaginary of Europe and the modern West. The *Marrano* is also the name of a ghost and a figure which returns constantly to haunt and to constitute the universalism which is another name for Christendom and all its filiations. The Hegelian dialectic itself, although obviously it has a multiplicity of filiations and its genealogy

includes the Greek dialectic, is also contaminated from within by the unicity of the

Christian narrativisation of time and history. As Derrida (2001: 32-33) argues:

> The non-dialectical does not oppose the dialectical, and is a figure that recurs continually. I have constantly attempted to single out that element which would not allow itself to be integrated into a series or a group, in order to show that *there* is a non-oppositional difference that transcends the dialectic, which is itself always oppositional. There is a supplement, or a *pharmakon* – I could give many more examples – that does not let itself be dialecticized. Precisely that which, not being dialectical, makes dialectic impossible, is necessarily retaken by the dialectic that it relaunches. At this point, we have to remark that the dialectic consists precisely in dialectizing the non-dialectizable. What we have, then, is a concept of dialectic that is no longer the conventional one of synthesis, conciliation, reconciliation, totalization, identification with itself; now, on the contary, we have a negative or an infinte dialecic that is the movement of synthesizing without synthesis.

The heterogeneity within the narrative of modernity becomes perceptible at its limits, and

the discourse of progress and reason is only constituted through its limits, which work to

suture difference and identity through the liminality of the border between the social field

and the shifting state of exception. Derrida, in a more formal and conceptual language, is

gesturing in this passage – and throughout his work – to some of the same insights

inscribed in a different register by Benjamin. The Hegelian attempt to contain and

delimit history's movement – or rather its cultural and imaginary residue or remainder - is

an obstacle to anti-systemic action directed to a re-imagination of the political, as this

thesis argues.

The figure of the constellation, for which the quasi-transcendental of the supplement is

yet another name, has determinate echoes of the Kabbalah, of which Benjamin was

certainly aware, and which it will be argued later on Derrida also knows all too well,

despite certain disavowals. The eschatology – if that is indeed the correct name in this

context – of Kabbalistic theology differs substantially from that of the apocalypticists, and this difference is vital. Luke Vieceli (2006: 169-170) explains:

> Whereas [the apocalypticists] claim that the apocalypse will take place at the End of Days, the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria conceives of the apocalypse as inherent in creation, thus at the very inception of days. The Kabbalists assert that God limits himself from boundless infinity to concentrated infinity in order to allow for creation, or the revealing of the world. In so doing, he has exiled himself from boundlessness. It is this concept of exile that is the driving force and the central concern of the Lurianic Kabbalah. In the act of creation, God formed vessels for his various potencies so that different aspects of his being could have their own manifestations. Upon filling the vessels with divine light, it proved that the vessels were not strong enough and they shattered, thus consigning creation to exile: 'nothing remains in its proper place… since that primordial act, all being has been a being in exile, in neeed of being led back and redeemed.' [Quoting Scholem] The fragments of the shattered vessels, still infused with divine light, entered into creation. At this juncture, the act of redemption was entrusted to man, in the first instance Adam. In light of his failure to restore the shards to their proper place, Adam ensured that 'everything was thrown into worse confusion than before'. Thus, for the Kabbalist, the entire history of mankind has been that of dealing with the catastrophe of creation, of striving for the reassembly of the vessels. In this sense of the permanence of the apocalypse can be entertained, as man is condemned to endure the cataclysm that resonates throughout existence until the shards have been reassembled and redemption is achieved.

For the thinkers of Jewish modernity, modernity itself was a realm of shards, stripped of meaning, the emptying out of meaning that in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin [1963] (2003) traced to the originary cataclysm of German modernity – the Thirty Years War, and the consequent secularisation of the state (Pensky 1993: 92-96). The apocalypse, or unveiling of the melancholy of loss (Pensky 1993, Steinberg 1996) – *acedia* – is particularly acute for those who are sundered from their own tradition, a theme we now turn to examine.

Contextualising Jewish utopics

So then, to move the argument forward, the Jewish utopics of an empty place, a utopianism of the "not yet" (Bloch [1923] 2000) has to be understood within the contexts both of the contestation over the universal where the Jew is the figure of the particular within universal modernity and of the apocalyptic tone of the imagination of the history of the present around the time of catastrophe that was the Great War. It also needs contextualising within the unstable dialectical constellation of social action at a time when the straight arrow of progress had hit the wrong target with excessive violence, a constellation where – and this is the central problematic of Western Marxism (Merquior 1984) – the putatively universal subject of history could no longer bear the weight of its world-historical task. At this conjuncture, the dissonance within Talmudic texts between the human and the Divine in terms of the conditions of possibility for the unveiling of the messianic is an allegorical reflection of a bifurcation in the options for social action. Political strategies for social change repeat and cite a blocked or frozen dialectic between Divine inbreaking and human co-operation in order to hasten the entry of the Messiah from timeless time into an interruption or an explosion into the quotidian. This sundering is also present in Christian modernity, but is most starkly illustrated through Jewish thought on the Messiah – whose appearance is "not yet" rather than "always already" according to Christian perceptions of sacralised time. (Hence also the desacralisation and routinisation of time in the excarnation that is Christian history).

The Talmudic tract *Sanhedrin* (98a) says:

> The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked.

In a way, Rabbi Jochanan is here trying to reconcile (probably ironically) the disagreement within the Midrash among Rabbis, which Scholem (1976: 284) has argued gave birth to two types of Jewish utopianism – the restorative and the utopian. But it might be better to eschew Scholem's formulation – which is not without its own imbrication in his relatively conservative Zionism – and attend more closely to the dichotomy posed but not resolved in the text of the Oral Torah. Moshe Idel (1998: 42-44) has traced back these tendencies – between waiting in prayer and the repetition of ritual and observation of the Law and suffering through the ruins of the world's radical evil to the royal ideology and the Sinaitic ideology respectively within the Biblical text itself. It is a disjuncture, Idel writes between "the unknown grounded within the divine" and "a stable order". Within the Kabbalistic tradition, these tendencies are not so much sublated but held in constant tension with one another through the deployment of the concept of *Tikkun* or the repair of the world. It is perhaps the secularised instantation of this thought which provides an escape from the dichotomy of despair and hope which haunts anti-systemic social action, through the recognition of "an infinite hope, but not for us" (Benjamin 1968: 144).

While it would be interesting and productive to relate the fracturing of the social fabric in the first decades of Hobsbawm's Short Twentieth Century to the turbulence in contested political imaginaries, for the purposes of this thesis it suffices to trace the manner in which – at the overdetermined conjuncture between German and Jewish thought (which as Derrida indicates in *Questioning Judaism* in conversation with Elizabeth Weber [1994] (2004) has also entered the field of French "post-structuralism" through the work of

Benjamin in particular) – the philosophy of history was over-written by a return of the theological (Kittsteiner 1996: 57-58):

> By the nineteenth century's midpoint at the latest, the idealistic veneer begins to peel away from the process, which reveals itself for what it is. Faith in progress, which continues to operate, becomes hollow… This deconstruction of the nineteenth century becomes despairing at the shock of the collapse of culture in the First World War. Under the experience of this elemental catastrophe of the twentieth century – and the actual turn of the century – the warding off of fear, which the link between allegory and the philosophy of history had provided, failed conclusively, with consequences for the theory of history. The once so self-assured perceptible world is again in need of redemption. The philosophy of history reverts to the theology of history. If the philosophy of history has secularized theology by coming to terms with and dynamizing the problem of theodicy – the former evil would now have to act for the good despite itself – the new theology of history removes this sanctification again and posits redemption perpendicular to temporal events.

Karl Marx himself, in his *On the Jewish Question* [1843] (1978), matching wits with Bruno Bauer, had correctly perceived that the liberal state – Hegel's ideal or the embodiment of the Kantian regulative ideal – was ineluctably a *Christian* state – unable to recognise the Jew in her singularity and difference and unable to think together political or civic rights in the tension that undermines and haunts the identity of the civic sphere with differences relegated to the private. And there is no doubt that Marx in this work reflected on a real historical and sociological question. Baruch Spinoza's work – as Taylor (2007) argues, a key moment in the excarnation of religion and its dissolution into the secular – was a political intervention – a rationalisation of Judaism and at the same time an emptying out of the ontological force of religion itself.

An entire generation of Jewish philosophers sought to follow in these footsteps – and those of Immanuel Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* – by arguing that

Judaism was a religion ordered in accordance with reason and the natural law (Scholem 1971, Samuelson 1989, Yerushalmi 1989). Englhard Weigl (2006: 21) writes:

> In Jewish theology… the importance of the Messiah vanishes under the influence of theodicy. In his book *Golgotha und Schleblimini* (1784), the Christian thinker Georg Hamann reproaches Moses Mendelsohn, the foremost Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment, for not having anything to say about the Messiah. In 1822 the Kant scholar, Lazarus Bendavid, went one step further in the first edition of *Zeitschrift fur die Wissenfacht des Judentums* (Journal for the Study of Judaism), when he wrote, 'the expectation of a Messiah does not constitute an essential article of the Jewish faith.'

The strong pressures for recognition and assimilation – for the effective relegation of Jews in the modern European nineteenth century state to civic *Marranos* – paralleled these philosophical manoeuvres in the space of the social, and were not unrelated to the desire to make distinctions with *Ashkenazi* immigrants in both England and Central Europe. So many of the generation whose work was to mark a return of the messianic to philosophy, literature and politics in Germany and the Hapsburg lands – Siegfried Krackauer, Gerhard Scholem, Walter Benjamin, Franz Kafka, Martin Buber – were both marked by Judaism and bereft of Jewish culture, while others such as Franz Rozenweig hesitated on the boundary of Christianity crossed so often in the preceding century.

Collins (1999: 153) points to the importance of German thought and culture for European modernism:

> …Germany, far from being anti-modern in the cultural sphere, has been on the forefront of modernist movements. Marxism was the most radically future-oriented movement of the past 150 years, explicitly antitraditionalist and progressive; the reversal that unmasks Marxism as a backward-looking movement is at odds with its surface content. German cultural modernists include Nietzsche, the most radical atheist, and Freud, the most famous sexual liberationist. Virtually

all the radical wings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy were pioneered by German thinkers: the logical positivists from Ernst Mach to the Vienna Circle; the existentialism of Martin Heidegger and in religion of Martin Buber and Paul Tillich; in theology, the creation of higher criticism and liberal theology; of neo-orthodoxy by Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann, and of worldly Christianity by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Musical modernism was spearheaded by Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, and Arnold Schoenberg. In painting, French impressionism of the 1860s was the first modernist movement, but in the following generation the dual centres of abstract art were France and Germany, where abstract expressionism developed around 1905. The self-consciously modernist movement in architecture was led by the Bauhaus school and its expressionist predecessors ca. 1910-1930, and in the cinema by the German film industry of the 1920s.

Bouretz (2007: 171) has written – in the context of the encounter of philosophy and Jewish thought – of the "particular historical situation of German Judaism" – poised between the Republican desires of French Judaism and "Eastern Judaism, which was still confined within 'the magical circle of tradition'". The tensions between liberalism and the political – the "theologico-political predicament" – and for that matter those of the disenchantment of the world – were arguably lived most acutely in Germany, and accentuated with the collapse of the shaky value consensus which had underpinned post 1870 state formation after the War. Thought continued, as it were in a field of ruins, and trampled on Hegel's ghost. While the intense apocalypticism of Jewish German thought has its parallels elsewhere (and also, certainly, in the literary field), the eschatological Christology associated with Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann collapsed quickly into the rationalism and quietism it had sought to supplant in rejecting the nineteenth century "Quest for the Historical Jesus" (Cowdell 1996). Arguably – through continuing the liberal evisceration of the Jewish Bible – it also contributed to the climate of thought which made Nazism possible (Jenson 2006). But German Jewish thought sought different lines of flight from rationalism and historicism – sometimes towards Zionism,

sometimes towards anarchism or Communism, but always imbued with Messianism however secularised and transposed.

The overdetermination, then, of German Jewish thought by a multiplicity of causes and significations sought an outlet in creative action and intellectual and literary labour which was oriented very much to a certain utopia – whether the putatively empty space of Zion or in a Romantic reaction to modernity and its crises, and with the Great War, catastrophes. Such thought was also powerfully oriented to Messianism and redemption, to an indeterminable negative utopics of the fleeting and of struggle. It would be intriguing to trace its trajectories more fully, but for the purposes of this thesis, we can allow these reflections to stand in as a prolegomena in the historical sociology of knowledge to a consideration of the thought of Walter Benjamin.

Walter Benjamin's time/s and his reception history

Richard Wolin (2006: 8) observes of Walter Benjamin that:

> Via Adorno's influence, he played a profound, subterranean role in the development of Critical Theory. For example, the change in focus to a "negative" philosophy of history from a progressive, Enlightenment-oriented model may be traced back to Benjamin's historico-philosophical speculations.

He goes on to suggest (2006: 9):

> Despite their very real intellectual differences (on the value of mass culture, for example), no one was more faithful to Benjamin's legacy than his ally and interlocutor Adorno.

The scare quotes are no doubt significant, but this passage begs the question of whether the philosophy of history – or what stands in for it – a reading of history as suffused with meaning and significance for human action – can be so easily reduced to such a binary.

Rather than residing on the negative pole, Benjamin can be read as pushing the concept of history to its limits – through his invention of a *historiosophy* (Leslie 2007), which as Löwy [2001] (2005) observes, is more than the sum of its component parts. It is necessary to address the question of the genealogy of Benjamin's thought. But it is also vital to understand, with Löwy, that his thought has its own specificity which exceeds the remainders of Marx, *Lebensphilosopie* and Kabbalah – traditions through which many interpreters seek to reduce it back to its constituting traces.

In the history of "Western Marxism", Walter Benjamin's thought was always something of an afterthought, if one takes texts published at its zenith as indicative. The epigones of critical theory seemed not quite to know what to do with him, at least at the stage when English Marxists were still earnestly attempting to derive a "class strategy" from the arcana of the Frankfurt School (Anderson 1976). Benjamin, it was thought, was a superstructuralist theorist, something of a romantic *après la lettre*, wending his way as a *flaneur* through the arcades of Baudelaire's Paris or pondering Brecht, Kafka, or the theory of drama. His politics were dismissed or patronised as something of an affectation, a "culture communism" copied from Lukács. The less Marxisant of his commentators, observing anyway that the Frankfurt School were Marxists without a communism (Merquior 1984), happily wrote Benjamin into the history of cultural studies or aesthetic theory. It is not surprising, then, that Benjamin's aphoristic text, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* [1940] (1968), generated relatively little secondary literature or commentary until recently, compared to say, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

The intention of this chapter is not to perform a complete reading of the *Theses*, a task that has been undertaken admirably by Michael Löwy in *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'* [2001] (2005), but rather to highlight aspects of Benjamin's thought which are particularly pertinent to the argument of this thesis. It is important to make the point, though, that Benjamin's work has only a contingent relation to the thought of Marx, and to refuse to enter the lists on behalf of either the Marxisant or theological reading. Benjamin's Marxism was more a matter of a *decision* about the balance of political forces at a time of catastrophe than an insertion into either a political or a philosophical tradition. Mertens (2006: 64) puts it elegantly when he writes:

> ...Benjamin's brushes with Marxism came only relatively late in his life, and even then he appears to have garnered most of his knowledge from reading Karl Korsch. It is also a fundamental truth that Benjamin's work can only properly be understood in theological categories, as much as it is often not written in theological terms. Yet it is equally true that Benjamin was never a theologian *pur sang*. Although we have no direct evidence either way, the throne of God was most probably empty to him, and whereas he was convinced that history could not be understood in a-theological terms, he also insisted on the necessity of secularising this theology by constructing his philosophy of history around the very profane category of human happiness. 'The existence of God is not a problem', writes Scholem, and this is perhaps the perfect legend to Benjamin's philosophy. His main concern is not to prove the veracity of a religious belief or an ideological system – there are far more pressing problems in his time – but to show that until the Messiah comes, we have only been given hope 'for the sake of the hopeless'.

Mertens unnecessarily downplays the influence of Lukács, but then that influence preceded Benjamin's encounter with *History and Class Consciousness* (Handelman 1992). While the shifts in Benjamin's thinking can be underplayed as well as overplayed, Pensky (1993: 43) is absolutely right to note the continuity of his thought on time and Messianism from his very early writings. Consider this passage from 'Das Leben der Studenten' cited by Pensky:

> There is a conception of human history which, proceeding on the faith in the endlessness of time, bothers only to distinguish the tempo at which men and epochs roll down the highway of progress. To this view properly belongs the incoherence, the lack of precision and the force of the claims which this view is capable of presenting to the present. The following reflections, on the contrary, are based on a peculiar state in which all of history is collected into one focal point, as in the historical image of the utopian thinkers. The elements of the end of time do not lie evident as formless tendencies towards historical progress, but rather, they are embedded deep in the present, as its most endangered, ridiculed and scorned creations and thoughts. To render the immanent state of perfection in its absolute purity; to direct it visibly and powerfully into the heart of the present: this is the historical task.

In this lapidary aphoristic paragraph is contained the entirety of the Theses composed twenty five years later. Even the lack of reference to "historical materialism" is not important. So powerful has been the lineage of this concept that readers as otherwise astute as Fritsch have made too much of the distinction between Benjamin's concept and some sort of pure or essential Marx to whom one must return without the baggage of the orthodox Social Democratic interpretation in train. Benjamin's diachronic conception of history in a minor key stands quite analytically separate from the Marx who is nevertheless a progenitor, but more for his sense of justice and his injunction to do justice than for his linear and deterministic dialectics, which are rejected by Benjamin.

Gasché (1999: 62) summarises the question of Benjamin's reception:

> The history of the criticism to which Walter Benjamin's writings have given rise is the story of many friendships. Whether he has been linked up with Hegelian thought, coupled to the theology of the Jewish religion of revelation, tied to romantic linguistic philosophy, paired off with historical materialism, or even related to Lutheran theology, the critics have primarily sought to appropriate Benjamin's thought for their own philosophical viewpoint. Yet Benjamin, as is well known, did not fraternize easily.

As we shall see later, I argue that Benjamin is in fact thinking a particular universal, and it is the importance of this thought – in contrast with a Hegelian determinate universal, which precisely constitutes the political stakes of his philosophy.

Benjamin, Messianism and time

The crucial nature of this move cannot be understated. The modern political imaginary is shaped overwhelmingly by the need to fill the absent centre or place of sovereignty with a determinate content, as discussed earlier in this thesis. As Lefort (1987) and Laclau (1994), among others on whose work this thesis draws, have shown, the contestation over the empty signifier is stabilised through its articulation to a certain rationality of modernity. Progress, temporality and teleology are key to the conditions of possibility of modernity's narrative. Benjamin is often conceived by his interpreters as either a precursor of the postmodern decentring of meta-narrative, or as some sort of premodern spectre haunting and contaminating the modern. In fact, as Steinberg (1996) and Löwy (2005) rightly contend, Benjamin is a modern critic of modernity – through his recuperation of modernity's Romantic moment and his articulation of a Kabbalistic image of the real – the real lying in shards – to the catastrophes which modernity brings in its wake.

If the problematic of Western Marxism was overwhelmingly shaped by the question of why revolution did not occur in the bastions of industrial capitalism and modernity, as Merquior (1984) among many other writers demonstrates, then Benjamin has to be understood as having given one of both the most illuminating and profoundly under-

recognised answers to this question from all those within the tradition of Critical Theory. His thought is as relevant today – at a time at which the closure of the political imaginary constrains anti-systemic action – as when it was worked through under the pressure of what appeared understandably to be a world-historical darkness at noon in the twentieth century

Benjamin wants to trouble the politics of progress – not as some sort of unorthodox or naïve Marxist (though his appropriation of both Korsch and Lukács is key to how he understands Marxism) – but rather as a conjurer of the ghosts who have been elided – violently – by its march. His Jewish politics of remembrance unsettles the unicity of the universal and allows us to understand that while, as the later Laclau insists, while a politics which would attend to the imperative of justice cannot do without a universal, there is more than one. Vital to the task of constructing such a universal is a rethinking of temporality, a reinsertion of the political into time. As Andrew Benjamin (2004: 105) puts it, for Benjamin history is a philosophy of time, rather than time being a straight arrow which hits the target specified by a philosophy of history.

There is a theologico-philosophical dimension to Benjamin's thinking of temporality, as well as the obvious political gestures to Sorel and Luxemburg. "Now-time" has a broader elective affinity with an entire tradition, a somewhat subterranean tradition and one that is itself in shards with the rationalising of Jewish identity in European modernity which so poignantly surfaces in Benjamin's readings of Kafka. The referent is not just to political tactics, and cannot be seen as merely some form of ultra-leftist intervention in

internal Marxist discourses of the time. Crucial is this aphorism from the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1968: 264):

> For every second of time was the straight gate through which the Messiah might enter.

Benjamin urgently wants to restore diachrony to time.

This is the political significance of his reading of Proust, and incidentally one of the reasons why his thought often loses its fullness in partial appropriations or interpretations inspired by the modern division of academic knowledge. Proust's urgent need to memorialise and to fuse the passing of the moment with the panoply of memory is something of an allegory for Benjamin of the time sense of modernity. The reference to calendar time – understood not as instrumental time but as the recurrent time of memorialisation – in the *Theses* is important in this context as well. Here the liturgical and communal rhythm of premodern time seeks to break back into, to interrupt, the tempo of instrumentalised time which modernity instantiates.

Gibbs (2005) has written insightfully about this aspect of Benjamin's time sense, and Fritsch (2006), in his recent interesting study *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin and Derrida* has also related it to Marx' comments in the *Brumiere* regarding the repetition of figures in revolution, correctly perceiving that this is the key to Benjamin's refusal of Marx' deterministic containment of time. Gibbs (2005: 197) observes:

> The messianic, however, is a name for a not-yet, a future that exceeds the present and our expectations for a future. If we were able to draw time as a line or as a circle, the messianic would break it apart. It is not the end of a line, a distant, far-off moment, thousands of years hence, but rather, an interruption now, or almost now. In the next moment. Today…

Simay (2005: 153) captures Benjamin's thought on time well:

> The dialectical image forms a constellation where the past and the present find, in a dialectic movement, their historical correspondence without the necessity of going through the mediation of the temporal continuity.

Although this Chapter focusses on Benjamin's *Theses*, I would observe that throughout his work, whether it was published or written under the auspices of criticism or of philosophy, there is an intense awareness of the relation of language and naming to a translation which is not a mediation, because Benjamin's dialectic does not unfold in teleological time. Here, the time consciousness of the shattered tradition which he looks back to, and whose shards he seeks to translate into a late modern consciousness, where the salience of memorable events re-presents them in an eternal time that breaks in and interrupts, as Yerushalmi (1989) has shown with regard to medieval practices in Jewish communities of memorialisation and mourning.

And so too, Benjamin's twist on "cultural history" is not a literary sideshow to his staging of a political theatrics – but rather his perception that the past survives only in material fragments – and that this fragmentation is constitutive of the modern experience of the present as well (as Simmel and Baudelaire would no doubt agree) – inscribes quite a different historical materialism on the pages of modernity than the teleological scientism which caught Marx in its iron grip.

Steinberg (1996: 8-9) writes:

> At stake is not a Foucaultian genealogy of the present but a pattern of returns, repetitions, and responses within the political dialectic and fragmentation. The present, in turn, maximizes self-awareness by recognizing patterns of recognition… In this way historical reasoning becomes allegorical reasoning. Benjamin's revalorization of allegory, against the higher status that a century of German criticism had accorded its favored sibling, the symbol, is based in allegory's historicity and specificity.

Zakhor! - Remember!, is the commandment of the God of the Jews (Yerushalmi 1989), and Benjamin's "now-time" is an articulation of the promise of justice and redemption to the act of memorialisation, an act which must be endlessly repeated, cited and iterated through each second of time. And this act of memorialisation is a showing forth, an unveiling and an insertion into present time of those whom time has banished. The recollection, the recreation of a Jewish being in the world sundered by the sociality of European modernity, explains Benjamin's affinity with Kafka (1968: 143):

> There is no doctrine that one could absorb, no knowledge that one could preserve. The things that want to be caught as they rush by are not meant for anyone's ears. This implies a state of affairs which negatively characterises Kafka's works with great precision. (Here a negative characterisation probably is altogether more fruitful than a positive one.) Kafka's work presents a sickness of tradition. Wisdom has sometimes been defined as the epic side of truth. Such a definition stamps wisdom as inherent in tradition; it is truth in its haggadic consistency. It is this consistency of truth that has been lost.

For Benjamin, the angel of history is mourning not just the catastrophe which surrounds him, but also his muteness – the "transmissability" of tradition, its ability to speak, has been ruined. It is this exemplarity of the Jewish identity in modernity that gives force to Benjamin's particular suturing of a tradition in ruins to a universal imperative for justice.

Additionally, there are resonances with the debates over history in 19th century German scholarship in Benjamin's thinking which are rarely explored – hence both the privileging of the category of experience which Gadamer (1989) has also highlighted – *Erlebnis*, and also *Erfahrung*, or the broadening of horizons through an iterative dialogue with tradition. This is the subterranean current of Benjamin's conception of history. (Just as there is a distinctly sociological thematics to Benjamin's understanding of modernity which draws on Lukács and Simmel which is very rarely noticed.) One should not be misled by the references to dialectics which recur in his work (although rarely – and importantly – is the dialectic not subsumed into the category of the "dialectical image"). His entire project can be understood as being able to be put to work to counter Hegelian – and Marxist – closures or endings of history.

Susan Handelman (1990: 117) captures this elegantly when she writes:

> Benjamin… has a different notion of "dialectic" than Scholem, who employed "dialectic" in a more organic Hegelian-theological way. Benjamin, unlike Hegel, did not grant to history any "totality." In 1918, he wrote to Scholem that what he had read of Hegel repelled him, and he called Hegel's "mental physiognomy… that of an intellectual brute, a mystic of violence, the worst kind that there is, but a mystic for all that." Benjamin's "dialectic" avoided any mediation whereby opposing forces could be related to each other, or synthesized in any integral narrative. Allegory preserved the gap, the disparity, the difference between this world and redemption. History was the site of ruin, and only out of an "unfaithful leap" or moment of reversal comes redemption.

Just as with Schmitt, and there are many conscious parallels between the two authors as well as a rejection of Schmittian politics, Benjamin believes that there is a *Katechon* restraining the apocalyptic consummation of history, but for Benjamin this is a desire and an imperative not to totalise through the operation of reason but to seize through

perception the remainders of unity in a shattered reality, where the Kabbalistic sense of the universe (with all its overtones of Neoplatonism) is articulated to a recovery of a suppressed tradition of the victims of history. As Löwy (2005: 9) suggests:

> Benjamin does not conceive revolution as the 'natural' or the 'inevitable' outcome of economic and technical progress (or of the 'contradiction between the forces and relations of production'), but as the interruption of a process of historical evolution leading to a catastrophe.

Benjamin's discussion of historiography, then, is also in some senses a phenomenology with its reference to experience and its affinities with Husserl's geopolitical concerns (albeit in a very different register) but principally it is a performative injunction, a commandment, a conjuration, and an imperative. Benjamin seeks to illuminate the night of modernity through the flashes of light which will dispel its darkness – hence the figure of the "constellation". His constellations are the figures whose filiation will be Derrida's quasi-transcendental figures – relations without relation. Benjamin's is a dialectic quite otherwise to the Hegelian-Marxist logics because its temporality is inscribed in a different mode.

The Kabbalistic context

Once again, the Kabbalistic context is central. Wolin (2006: 40-41) quotes Convolute "N" of *The Arcades*:

> Modest methodological proposal for the cultural-historical dialectic. It is very easy to establish oppositions… within the various "fields" of any epoch, such that on the one side lies the "productive", "forward-looking", "lively", "positive" part of the epoch, and on the other side the abortive, retrograde and obsolescent… It is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be applied to the initially excluded, negative component so that, by a displacement of the angle of vision… a positive element emerges anew in it too – something different from that

previously signified. And so on, ad infinitum, *until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical apocatastasis.*

Wolin explains:

> "Apocatastasis" is a term that derives from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. It designates the restoration of an original paradaisacal state catalyzed by the coming of the Messiah. Thus restored, things would resume their proper relation to each other. The distortions caused by the "dream condition of the world" – the world's "falseness" – would be effaced.

Wolin is not quite correct here. Löwy traces apocatastasis to the Church Father Origen, for whom it was "the salvation of all souls without exception". The redemption Benjamin anticipates in Thesis III is a secularised apocatastasis, as he points out. But it also has a Jewish equivalent – "the *restitutio ad integram* or *restitutio omnium* Benjamin was already writing of in his 'Theological-Political Fragment' of 1921." This equivalent is *Tikkun* – the restoration or return of all creation to its primal unity. *Tikkun*, it should be underlined, is also a work, often in traditional Jewish thought, the work of studying the *Torah*.

Wolin goes on to cite Scholem on Benjamin's project of translating or transmitting the dialectic between apocalypse and redemption into "the secular realm of history". Benjamin's appropriation of surrealist themes also reflects the ambitions of his method and the performativity of his project. Benjamin's is an eschatology of the every day. Translated into the terms which concern this thesis, his evocation of dreaming as a mode of modern experience gestures powerfully towards the injunction to sunder the closed gates of the late modern hegemony of a singular political imaginary.

Jacques Rancière (1996: 34-35) grasps the threads of this web:

> What Benjamin does is to bring out the radical feature of the modern overturning of the old Heraticlean formula that said: Awake people have only one world, which is common to them all; but he who sleeps returns to *his* particular world. The logic of the dreaming cogito is just the opposite: that the only common world is the dreamworld, the anticipation of the community that will be the awakening from the dream… Only the dreamer experiences the coincidence of history and prehistory which is the true *time* of the community.

The allusions to Freud should speak for themselves.

For Benjamin, then, if apocalypse is an unveiling and a revealing (a revelation in the strictest of senses) (Derrida 1993: 118-121), then the eschaton is present in every moment just at the time of its absence. Its remainders open themselves up if time is grasped in its proper repetition, rather than viewed as a progressive coming to know or coming to be. Although he is often viewed outside the context of Jewish utopics, and as a misreader of Benjamin because of his theoretical critique of the *Passagenwerk*, Theodor Adorno grasped this well when he wrote:

> Good is what wrenches itself free, finds a language, opens it eyes. In its condition of wrestling free, it is interwoven in history that, without being organized unequivocally toward reconciliation, in the course of its movement allows the possibility of redemption to flash up.

David Kaufmann (2006: 47), commenting on this passage from Adorno's 'Progress' (1998), is worth quoting at some length:

> History does not necessarily lead to redemption. It allows goodness, which is constituted by a constant, vigilant resistance to eviel, to appear for however short a time. Redemption is therefore the product of a series of struggles, of a constant waking up and of a continuous stepping out. These struggles do not line up to form a neat and easy narrative, but they do entail fighting against all illegitimate domination… Adorno invokes redemption as a corrective to the idolatry of linear time. He is thus able to reassert both the need for and the risk of moral action. Real progress, he argues, does not want to be an end in itself, but seeks to 'cut short the triumph of radical evil'. But in the end, there will be no final victory

over such evil, because 'we live in the perpetual danger of relapse.' Redemption, which has yet to happen for the first time, will not be limited to that first time. It will have to be won over and over again… Redemption… staqnds in constant tension with immance. It serves as the goal and the content of all transcendence. The secularised version of redemption is of course utopia – theology cleansed by reason and returned to the spatio-temporal world. Adorno will not accept utopia in this way because it does not go far enough. He preserves the theological term precisely because its scandal is salutory. It provokes thought and it refuses to give up anything of hope.

Benjamin's utopics are similarly well summed up by Michael Löwy (2005: 111):

Contrary to what the reassuring discourse of the present *doxa* claims, Benjamin's fire alarm retains its currency to a striking extent: catastrophe is possible – if not, indeed, probable – *unless...* Though formulated in the style of the Biblical prophets, Benjamin's pessimistic predictions are conditional: there is a danger of this happening, *if...* And this means that the worst is not unavoidable. History remains open; it has other – revolutionary, emancipatory and/or utopian possibilities to it. Benjamin helps us to give utopia back its negative force by the break with any teleological determinism and any ideal mode of society that maintains the illusion of an end to conflict and hence to history. The conception of utopia suggested by the 1940 'Theses' has the advantage of being formulated predominantly in the negative: a class*less* society *without* domination, in the strong sense of *Herrschaft*: a heteronomous power that imposes its rules and is beyond any democratic control. This revolutionary aspiration is directed not only against the authoritarian wielding of power through the cunning and violence of the governing classes, oligarchies or elites, but also against the impersonal, abstract and reified ('fetishistic') domination of capital, commodities and bureaucratic apparatus.

Benjamin, the political and intersubjectivity

Benjamin's political, then, is one of memory and repetition, of an attendant waiting for the moment when the "weak messianic power" can be exercised – a phenomenology and a hermeneutics of the synchronic horizon. But what of social action? Benjamin himself, and here I return to the citation from Gasché about his friends, with his aspirations to an academic career blocked, and political and material conditions leaving him an exile, was at the same time subject to influences from friends such as Adorno, Brecht and Scholem, and lovers such as Anja Lacis (who may have introduced him to Lukács' *History and*

Class Consciousness). But importantly he was also an author who was singular in his style but resolutely concerned to efface modern subjectivity (Handelman 1992, Lepsky 1993). His was an intensely personal politics of the *decision* (and here again one must gesture to his affinities as well as his disagreements with Carl Schmitt), and his traditions – both Jewish and secular – gave him no real *Heimat*. Not for him the "council Communism" of Korsch or the organisational injunction of Lukács.

Benjamin's politics were lived as a poetics, intervening in the realm of the imaginary from an unsteady standpoint among the ruins of modernity. At a time when the rulers were seemingly ever more victorious, he had to await a new generation to exercise its "weak messianic power", and to allow his own texts – composed by a solitary exile performing the work of *Tikkun* as best he could - to take their singular lines of flight, awaiting a reassemblage. Benjamin's *oeuvre* was a constellation or a montage composed in a performativity of hope for a future that needed grasping above all in a disparate present. And so here, we must examine the filiation that extends from Walter Benjamin to Jacques Derrida. But before doing so, let me relate this discussion to the thesis' consideration of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

While Maurice Merlau-Ponty confronted quite a different political conjuncture, and had a different political trajectory from Catholicism to a position sympathetic to Marxism, his final end point resembled Benjamin's in that he had to adjust his thought to an era when neither ideological or geopolitical pole appeared to offer hope. Merleau-Ponty's "radical waiting" was much more intersubjective in nature, and along with the articulation of

minority traditions to the universal which the thesis will consider in the concluding Chapter, offers a clue to the interim resolution of some of the social and political dilemmas this work grapples with at this moment.

Derrida the "last Jew"

So what to make, then, of Jacques Derrida's claim – made originally in *Circomfessions* (1993) and re-iterated on a number of significant occasions thereafter (Weber 2004, Bergo, Cohen & Zagory-Orly 2007) that he is "the last Jew"? To any attentive reader, it requires little explication. The gesture is on one hand towards Nietzsche (and even Fukuyama's Hegel and Kojève) and on the other towards his own filiation and membership in the series which will have always included Benjamin. But its contexts are surely multiple. Among other things, what Derrida is saying in this non-serious and ironic register is deeply serious – he is making his own point about the Jew/Greek opposition posited in different but simultaneously identical ways by a host of ghostly theorists – including but not limited to Martin Heidegger, Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas (who wrestled with it perhaps most sensitively). Unsurprisingly for the thinker of deconstruction, Derrida is unveiling a truth – this opposition cannot contain what it seeks to enclose within borders – and methodologically, reading the "Western tradition" both faithfully and at its margins – and the figure of the Jew appears as a figure of liminality but Jewish thought also has its place at the non-originary *Arkhe*. And the attempts to expel it from the canon – some of which have been briefly noted earlier in this Chapter – demonstrate the paradoxical centrality of what is Other but enclosed within.

Here we can hold together a number of thematics, in a constellation, as it were – Kafka and Benjamin's *Haggadah* without the Law, Benjamin's tradition without tradition and his recollection or *anamnesis* of the defeated and Derrida's own quasi-transcendental figures – discussed at length earlier – particularly religion without religion. Among these multiple contexts for Derrida's text is surely his own secret writing, his ownership or taking ownership of the Platonic legacy which descends from Maimonides through Strauss (and such filiations are always of great interest to Derrida, as he shows in *Spectres of Marx* and in many other places). If, as he explains at length, he has a taste for the secret (Derrida & Ferraris 2003), surely one such secret – openly proclaimed as it were – is his identification with the figure of the *Marrano* – and his desire to see if others are not hiding the same secret – Marx among them (Derrida 1998). This auto-identification is secreted and unveiled simultaneously in many texts, most notably *Monolinguism of the Other* [1996] (1998), 'Marx and Sons' (1999), and *Archive Fever* [1994] (1996). It pertains to the constellation which includes the name and the signature, and for that matter the gift, and the discussion of genealogies, generations and filiation which is one of the themes of *Spectres of Marx*. But these autobiographical reflections (and I have chosen not to speak of Derrida's own history) are not private - if that has any meaning as one pole of a private/public distinction Derrida (1996) refused to accept in dialogue with Richard Rorty. As I have already implied, the Jewish strand is constitutive of the nature of the tradition, even as it is over-written. Like Kafka's work, Derrida's significance – for us in this thesis – is the fashion in which he reveals what is hidden and effaced, a minority tradition within the body of Western thought, to adopt or adapt a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari [1975] (1986). The traces – the shards, even – of such

a tradition will be and are disseminated and reinscribed throughout its texts and indeed the imaginary. In terms of the implications of such a minority tradition (remembering always that it in fact constitutes the major tradition despite all disavowals) for this thesis, this Chapter has had as one of its themes the confrontation which can be staged between a normatively Christian understanding and lived experience of time and a minor Kabbalistic conception of time, which has political force. The Chapter is also contending that a negative utopics – exemplified by Benjamin – avoids the pitfalls and shoals and indeed horrors to which "eschatological utopianism" in its majoritarian incarnation falls prey.

So, if the secret is an open one, why is it not seen? The literature on Derrida and the Jewish tradition is not extensive, and to a large degree unsatisfactory. Much concentrates on tracing affiliations between thinkers – often contained within the same disciplinary boundaries which we have previously seen obscure the importance of the process of the excarnation of the religious into the political. Derrida is variously read as related to a "linguistic turn" in philosophy which has parallels with Talmudic reading (Batnitzky 2007), forced to speak too fleetingly about Jerusalem and the Palestinians (Ben Naftali 2007), mined for the purposes of scriptural interpretation (Sherwood 2004), or parsed for any mention in any of his texts of Jewish themes (Ofrat 2001). No doubt this list could be extended, but the series might be a rather truncated one. Only a few thinkers – Idel (2007) is one – have descried the Kabbalistic heart of the text and the significance of the Divine Name, and Derrida's own questioning of Yerushalmi's questioning of Freud's ghost in *Archive Fever* has not been read as a parable or an iteration of claims that

deconstruction itself might be a "Jewish science", despite the obvious allusion to Habermas' critique. Susan Handelman (1992), in her *Fragments of Redemption*, has best adumbrated the deep debt owed by Derrida to Benjamin, but its omnipresence throughout many texts – and the presence of Kabbalistic motifs - has apparently eluded "deconstructionists", blinded perhaps by a singular practice of reading where only texts such as 'Force of Law' which overtly read others – Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' – are apparently in play. More broadly, there is a blindness Derrida (1993) himself analyses in his reading of Immanuel Kant together with the Apocalypse of John – the secret is unveiled but only those with eyes to see, see. There are, of course, other resistances (De Man 1983, 1986).

Messianism without a Messiah

It is not my intention in this Chapter to provide a detailed reading of *Spectres of Marx*. There are many exemplary readings of this text – including Wendy Brown's in *Politics Without History* (1999) – and the key themes of the debate surrounding Derrida's intervention are archived in Michael Sprinker's 1999 collection *Ghostly Demarcations*. Many of the themes important for this thesis have already been drawn out. Rather I want to recapitulate and underline a number of themes – the irreducibility and undeconstructability of messianism and justice, the insertion of "Marx" within what Derrida (1999: 255) calls a *dispositif* of European and Judeo-Christian thought with all the quasi-transcendentals that shape and limit thought, and thus the imbrication of Marx with soteriological temporalities. All these themes have been discussed, and the crucial element is the necessity of thinking about the political and religion otherwise. While

Derrida has differences with Benjamin, these are outweighed by his debt and his homage, and the insight that interventions in the political must include a memorialisation and a decision, and that political action is a matter of iteration not citation or the summoning into being of an impossible future. What is also crucial is the insistence that the future remain open (against Fukuyama and others who pronounce the *evangelion* of "the end of history"), and the summoning of friends forming a "New International" which would not take the form of a party, but of a virtual articulation of forces and significations in the realm of the imaginary. Derrida's anti-humanist deconstruction of the subject limits the degree to which social action can be thematised, and while there is a resonance with Benjamin's anti-Cartesianism, we will need to consider Maurice Merleau-Ponty's political phenomenology in order to think more rigorously about the articulation of political thought and anti-systemic action. But first it is necessary to examine what Derrida's deconstruction of Carl Schmitt's sociology of secularised theological concepts can reveal about the time of the political.

Chapter Eight: The concept of the political

If all forms of Endism and the discursive and social closure of the historical imaginary and the possibility of imagining otherwise are understood as neutralisations of the political, it is necessary to consider the phenomenology and the sociology of the political itself. So this Chapter examines the confrontation between Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida for this purpose, mediated through Chantal Mouffe's thought on the distinction between antagonism and agonism, and how this normatively inflects Schmitt's concept of the political. The Chapter first considers objections to the utilisation of Schmitt's thought, and concludes that these objections are unjustified. It then moves on to a close reading of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* in *Politics of Friendship*. Derrida assists me in conceiving of Schmitt as something of a sociologist of concepts, and also points to the tensions inherent in the limits Schmitt in wishes to enclose the political. But we can also see that Schmitt's distinction is a contentless one, an empty signifier, and thus avoids any essentialisation of the political and enables repoliticisations. The forms these repoliticisations might take in late modernity and how they interact with discourses of Endism are outlined by way of suggestion and gesture, and the Chapter concludes by underlining the utility of such a concept – as modified through Mouffe's work – for understanding the role of agonistic distinctions in the intersubjective constitution of another political imaginary.

Blindnesses of political thought

Tracy Strong (1996) reiterates the narrowing of the political field of debate which this thesis argues is a consequence of the dominant late modern political imaginary in his introduction to the English translation of Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* and argues that it is not unrelated to the perceived lessons of what was read in retrospect (uncannily given Schmitt's own thought) as the ideological anarchy of the interwar years. The ideological offensive which has been mounted over recent years to sustain the claim that Marxism and socialism are "dead" (Geras 1990, Carver 1999) through the invocation of discourses of the end of history and the triumph of liberal capitalism only compounds this narrowing of the field of political theorisation to debates within liberalism . Indeed, Meiksins Wood (1998) is no doubt correct to relate the significance of the "post-Marxism" of the recent work of authors such as Hall (2002) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), many of whose concepts will be strategically employed in this chapter, to this eclipse of any "alternatives" to liberalism which clearly has political, cultural, narrative, and economic as well as theoretical dimensions, and which it is the task of this thesis to trouble.

The contemporary relevance of Schmitt

It remains then to address the timely question of whether a different analysis, a phenomenological analysis, of the properly political dimensions of current political culture in its local and global manifestations and its relation with the fracturing of the social can be constructed – and it is the argument of this thesis that it can. In order to do this, it will be useful first to engage with Carl Schmitt's claims regarding *The Concept of*

the Political [1932] (1996). Chantal Mouffe (1999: 1), in introducing a collection of essays on Schmitt, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, asks the pertinent questions:

> Why should we read Schmitt today? Does his friend-enemy conception of politics retain some pertinence in our 'post-political' age? Do liberal democrats have something to learn from his critique of liberalism? Is his theory of sovereignty still relevant in a globalised world?

The first of Mouffe's questions is directed – in the context of the revival of scholarship of and interest in Schmitt marked by her volume and also noted by Strong (1996) – perhaps in part to Schmitt's notorious prewar political affiliations. However, she is also correct in her insight that "those who object to his growing recognition" are prompted by motives other than purely academic ones (Mouffe 1999: 2). As she writes, an engagement with Schmitt's concept of the political should:

> ... shatter the illusions of all those who believe that the blurring of the frontiers between Left and Right, and the steady moralisation of political discourse, constitute progress in the enlightened march of humanity towards a new world order and a cosmopolitan democracy. Indeed, humanitarian rhetoric has today displaced political stakes and, with the collapse of communism, Western liberals imagine that antagonisms have been eradicated. Having reached the stage of 'reflexive modernity', ethics can now replace politics. We are told that with the development of 'post-conventional identities', the archaic forms of friend-and-enemy politics are on the wane. The conditions are claimed to be ripe for 'deliberative' or 'dialogic' forms of democracy to be implemented internationally. Alas, Schmitt's insistence on the ineradicable dimension of conflictuality inherent in 'the political', and on the political 'exterior' of law, reveal all this to be wishful thinking (Mouffe 1999: 2).

Mouffe is arguing here that some of the rhetoric of the anti-political discourses of the 1990s and 2000s – of the obsolescence of the Left-Right distinction, the occlusion of

class based identities, and a politics of administration and consensus and rationality (in short, the putative end of history) is directly challenged by Schmitt's thought.

Mouffe's argument is also directed against the phenomena of the restriction of the domain of political thought to liberal premises and the parallel arguments about the need for "a stronger form of consensus, a moral one" sought by communitarians and theorists of deliberative democracy and communicative reason. Mouffe (1999: 3) again rightly observes that such arguments reviewed above [erase] "the antagonistic dimension which precludes any form of rational resolution through deliberation". For these reasons alone, it is clear that Schmitt's *decisionism* has something to contribute to the arguments and analyses of this thesis.

The political as a moment

It may indeed be that it is constitutive of the political to represent an undecideable moment outside the canons of legal rationality – a moment indeed necessary to the constitution of law through extra-legal decision. While there has been much focus on the foundational violence of regimes' origins (and in terms of authors treated in this thesis, the reference to Merleau-Ponty and Benjamin is an obvious one), I would argue that the political is best conceived of as a moment, a tendency that is embodied in an intersubjective decision for engagement, as an always constant horizon, within the cultural lifeworld of the everyday as much as in revolutionary or bellicose events. Zizek (1999: 30) contends that this act of decision can only appear to proponents of post-politics, those who seek to foreclose the political, as an excessive return of the irrational. But what if it were in fact the extra-rational and political condition of possibility for

establishing social rationalities and for the (re)constitution of the social imaginary? It is this question that Schmitt enables us to contend with. The significance of this question is that it should enable this thesis to do the work preliminary to the construction a phenomenological analytic of the political in order to analyse both the structure of social antagonisms and their role as "constitutive outside" or remainder to the political today (Laclau 1990: 17).

Schmitt's thematisation of the Political

Schmitt (1996: 20) begins *The Concept of the Political* by distinguishing what he argues is its nature from circular definitions that would refer it to the state (as opposed to "civil society") and very interestingly, critiques the work of the early British pluralists such as Laski and Cole (1996: 40). The nature of his challenge to the liberal and rationalist paradigm of political theory and empirical political science should thus be eminently clear. Schmitt (1996: 21-22) claims that both what he characterises as the liberal state of the 19th century and the total state of the 20th century (whose characteristics are reminiscent of Weber's legal-rational and bureaucratic state) are at one in seeking to differentiate the social in modernity through a series of *depoliticisations*: the establishment of various social spheres (religious, cultural, economic, legal and scientific domains) as constitutive of civil society and as antithesis of the political state. By contrast to this movement of depoliticisation characteristic of modernity Schmitt (1996: 26) argues that the political requires the making of distinctions – all of which are reducible to his famous properly political distinction of friend and enemy. It is significant that this distinction in itself seems to partake in modernity (no doubt as a

consequence of the secularisation of political concepts Schmitt elsewhere analyses) as it differentiates itself from other distinctions and social spheres. This is in the sense that the political distinction of friend/enemy has no "substantial content". It is neither an "exhaustive definition" nor one "derived from other criteria" – in effect it is a contentless antagonism (or to do violence to Schmitt's language, an empty signifier) which is the excess of other "relatively independent criteria". The specificity of the political lies in the fact that its distinctiveness is its transcendence of other antagonisms (religious, moral, aesthetic, economic, etc.):

> In contrast to the relatively independent endeavours of human thought and action, particularly the moral, aesthetic, and economic, the political has its own criteria which express themselves in a characteristic way. The political must therefore rest on its own ultimate distinctions, to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced... The nature of such a political distinction is surely different from that of those others. It is independent of them and as such can speak clearly for itself.

Although Schmitt (1996: 37) is primarily concerned with analysing the political as a matter of sovereignty (understood as the sovereignty of nation states), it is also the case that antagonisms within a particular society can be politicised, and here there is something of a Hobbesian rationality at work:

> Every religious, moral, economic, ethical or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy... A religious community which wages wars against members of other religious communities or engages in other wars is already more than a religious community[a]; it is a political entity.

The political, then, is a contentless distinction which acquires substantive content through

a *decision* to create an antagonistic distinction. It is this dimension of antagonism which

creates the (relative) autonomy of the political from the social:

> The political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavours, from the religious, economic, moral and other antitheses. It does not describe its own substance, but only the intensity of an association or dissociation of human beings whose motives can be religious, national (in the ethnic or cultural sense), economic or of another kind and can effect at different times different coalitions and separations. The real friend-enemy grouping is existentially so strong and decisive that the nonpolitical antithesis, at precisely the moment at which it becomes political, pushes aside and subordinates its hitherto purely religious, purely economic, purely cultural criteria and motives to the conditions and conclusions of the political situation at hand (Schmitt 1996: 38).

It is important to note that this intensification of distinctions – their becoming-political –

takes place through language, through *polemos*:

> ... all political concepts, images and terms have a polemical meaning. They are focussed on a specific conflict and are bound to a concrete situation; the result... is a friend-enemy grouping, and they turn into empty and ghostlike abstractions when this situation disappears. Words such as state, republic, society, class, as well as sovereignty, constitutional state, absolutism, dictatorship, economic planning, neutral or total state, and so on, are incomprehensible if one does not know who is to be affected, combated, refuted or negated by such a term. Above all the polemical character determines the use of the word political regardless of whether the adversary is designated as nonpolitical (in the sense of harmless), or vice versa if one wants to disqualify or denounce him as political in order to portray oneself as nonpolitical (in the sense of purely scientific, purely moral, purely juristic, purely aesthetic, purely economic, or on the basis of similar purities) and thereby superior.

Schmitt, known as the theorist of the exception, here appears in the guise of a thinker of

différance *avant la lettre*. Just as Viroli (1998) argues that Machiavelli was a thinker of

politics as *rhetoric* rather than politics as science or philosophy, Schmitt's insight is that politics is a matter of the construction of antagonisms (and identities) through rhetorical action – an important dimension of politics usually entirely neglected, and one that has a key importance for the argument and analyses of this thesis. Similarly, according to Lentricchia (1983: 12-13), a political philosophy is not one that makes "truth claims" but rather a rhetorical practice of persuasion, subjectification and identification which attempts to construct perceptions of the social a "knowledge precisely at the point at which knowledge becomes power, or is on the way to power". Following Laclau (1994), it can well be argued that political concepts (and the concept of the political itself) are empty signifiers which become politicised as hegemonic blocs struggle to articulate their particular content to serve their ideological end. Political rhetoric is, in the spirit of Spivak's writing, a *moment* of strategic (and never successful because undecideable) stabilisation of fluid and floating concepts. Repoliticisation, then, is a matter of bringing the conceptual field and its dialogic articulation through an intersubjective re-imagining, as suggested earlier in this thesis through the work of Castoriadis, Lefort and Merleau-Ponty.

The distinctiveness of modern administration and the modern state, according to Schmitt, is the way in which it tends to foreclose the particularly political nature of social antagonisms, in order to render them governable by reason. This, of course, is perfectly understandable given the Enlightenment dream of an end to conflict and dissensus attainable through technologies of rationality. The questions of sovereignty and political right enter into the analysis here in the sense that the view of the state either as an association among others (as in pluralism) or as a classical liberal guardian of economic

freedom and preserver of legal order (as with neo-liberalism) renders unanswerable given its voluntarist and individualist premises the question of "why human beings should have to form a governmental association in addition to the religious, cultural, economic and other associations, and what would be its specific meaning" (Schmitt 1996: 44). Sovereignty is necessarily linked to the right of decision – the "*jus vitae ac necis*" (Schmitt 1996: 47). This is not to say that the state in its political character or the decision of the exception that creates properly political distinctions elide all social antagonisms. Rather, "within the community... subordinate groupings of a secondary political nature could exist with their own... rights" (Schmitt 1996: 47-48). What fundamentally threatens the political is its negation as a "decisive entity" – a kind of transcendental (albeit empty) signifier – in the sense that modern anti-politics "has no centre... totally resolves in a liberal individualism. The result is nothing else than a revocable service for individuals and their free associations" (Schmitt 1996: 45).

Derrida reading Schmitt in the *Politics of Friendship*

Theorists such as Mouffe (1993, 1999), Laclau (1990, 1994), Gamble (2000) and Hirst (1999) have correctly read Schmitt's decisionism as posing a fundamental challenge to the praxis and rhetoric of the post-political and of Endism. In order, however, to use Schmitt as part of the basis of a phenomenological theory and analytics of the political in these "new" times, it is necessary to refine his theory such that it recognises that antagonism and agonism are in fact separable concepts each with its own proper moment and praxis. Before drawing of the work of Mouffe (and other theorists) to suggest how this could be done, it is necessary to review Derrida's reading of Schmitt in the *Politics of*

Friendship (1997). This is a more urgent task particularly as Derrida's own theory of the specificity of the political as an undecideability inherent in the moment of just decision has many resonances with Schmitt's decisionism. For instance, Derrida's claim that "deconstruction is justice" but that justice, as a quasi-transcendental, is "not deconstructible" demonstrates the key importance to his thought of the moment of undecideability that is the decision (Derrida 1992: 15). This Chapter will suggest that Derrida's deconstruction of the friend-enemy distinction – which is accompanied by a critique of the phenomenological reduction which must be addressed – does not invalidate its use. Indeed, it could legitimately be argued that Derrida is not saying this, given what we have already seen of his awareness that concepts deconstruct themselves and texts auto-deconstruct. This deconstruction, as I have emphasised, then, is not a methodological tool which will be harnessed in a critique that seeks to demonstrate the inutility or "untruth" of a concept – but rather an analysis of the concept's identity to and difference from itself which is always already there.

In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida (1997: 306) constructs an elaborate meditation on the figure of friendship and its relationship with democracy (understood as a "non-presentable concept") and the political, organised around the citation and iteration of an apocryphal apostrophe of Aristotle quoted by Montaigne: "O my friends, there is no friend!". In large part an interrogation of the figure of the brother and the phallogocentrism which seems to pervade the democratic trope of fraternity, Derrida devotes much of his text to a deconstruction of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction. Reading William Blake's "To H", the first lines of which are: "Thy friendship oft has made my heart to ake/Do be my Enemy for Friendships Sake", Derrida (1997: 72) argues

that to invoke a distinction between friendship and enmity is to partake in an inexorable haunting: "hence, every time, a concept bears the phantom of the other, The enemy the friend, the friend the enemy". Derrida (1997: 68) elaborates on the theme of haunting by suggesting that Schmitt's decisionism seems to presume "an instance of the subject, a classic free and wilful subject" while he would want to claim, in a Levinasian fashion, that a decision is always made in the name of the other, "of the absolute other in me the other as the absolute that decides on me in me".

The political, the subject and the limits of subjectification

For Derrida, "a theory of the subject is incapable of accounting for the slightest decision". Accepting this analysis, and that "the adequation between the concept, the name, and the event [can] never be assured" (Derrida 1997: 66), it can nevertheless be suggested that Schmitt is already aware of this hauntology. To the extent (as argued above) that Schmitt's concept of the political relies on its non-essential (yet relatively autonomous) character, its dependence on the becoming-political of other social relations and distinctions, and that this becoming-political proceeds through a rhetorical process of *polemos*, it would appear that for Schmitt (at least by logical inference), subjectification and the event of the decision are inseparable. Nevertheless, Derrida's reading has the immense virtue of relating the construction of political distinctions to the process of subjectification, a process I would suggest is a political as well as a social interpellation through the political instantiation of the social. Here we can also adopt some of the insights Merleau-Ponty developed which will be further articulated in the next Chapter. Merleau-Ponty would agree with Derrida that the rational sovereign subject of liberalism

and modernity is an ideological fiction, and that the moment of the political – the moment at which a project is decided upon – is irreducible to the subject. Rather, an intersubjective decision breaches or tests the limits of subjectification. The political, then, can be conceived as what escapes subjectification, as a tendency ever present whose leap of faith, whose wager, is not irrational but cannot be contained within the limits of modern rationality.

Derrida is also quite correct to suggest that the making of the friend/enemy distinction is constitutively one where the two poles of the binary necessarily contaminate one another. His addition of Levinasian responsibility to the Other enables an analysis of the responsibility or irresponsibility of political decisions and identifications. To a large degree, irresponsibility lies here in the refusal to decide, the depoliticisation of the refusal to politicise distinctions of antagonism:

> And today, how many examples could be given of this disorientation of the political field, where the principal enemy now appears unindentifiable! The invention of the enemy is where the urgency and the anguish are; this invention is what would have to be brought off, in sum, to repoliticise, to put an end to depoliticisation. Where the principal enemy, the 'structuring' enemy, seems nowhere to be found, where it ceases to be identifiable and thus reliable – that is, where the same *phobia* projects a mobile multiplicity of potential, interchangeable, metonymic enemies, in secret alliance with one another: conjuration (Derrida 1997: 84).

Derrida (1997: 84) goes on to question the degree to which Schmitt's "determined opposition" rests on the public/private distinction. Ever attentive to precise distinctions, Derrida (1997: 87) notes that Schmitt makes a separation between private enmity and public hostility – the first not being properly political. Thus, political conflict is not related to love, or to affect, or to feeling – the distinction is one that is properly public.

Inscribed in the making of the political distinction is the decision to engage "in at least a

virtual struggle, that is, one that is effectively possible" (Schmitt, cited in Derrida 1997:

86). Political conflict is thus a matter of enunciation, of decision –

> as soon as it is characterised as *eventual* (that is, announced as a non-excluded
> event in a sort of contingent future). And it is *eventual* as soon as it is *possible*.
> Schmitt does not wish to dissociate the quasi-transcendental modality of the
> possible and the historico-factual modaility of the eventual. He names now the
> eventuality (*weningstens eventuell*), now the possibility (*Moeglichkeit*), without
> thematising the distinction... The concept of the enemy is thereby deduced or
> constructed a priori, both analytically and synthetically – in synthetic a priori
> fashion, if you like, as a political concept, or better yet, as the very concept of the
> political.

The phenomenology of the political

This analysis precedes and justifies a key move in Derrida's argument: the implication of

the political distinction (which is said to be autonomous from other distinctions and to

represent merely the intensification of other oppositions) in the elision of the private in

particular:

> ...it is important that the concept be purified of all other dimensions – especially
> of everything opposed to the political or the public, beginning with the private:
> anything that stems from the individual or even the psychological, from the
> subjective in general. In fact, this conceptual prudence and rigour are bound to
> imply, as is always the case, some sort of phenomenological procedure. Following
> what resembles at least an eidetic reduction, all facts and all regions that do not
> announce themselves as political must be put in parentheses (Derrida 1997: 88).

The stakes of this reduction are twofold. Derrida (1997: 89-106) firstly wishes to

understand how Schmitt understands the difference between diaphoric and polemical

dissensus, seeking through a lengthy unveiling of Schmitt's misreading of Plato to

understand the way in which Schmitt's articulation of politics and war to the question of *ethnos* may well be marked by his own (and Europe's) situation and politics. This excursus will not be taken up in this thesis as what is at stake in my analysis is largely questions of political antagonism not organised around contestation between states as such. Accordingly, the next step in the argument is to come to grips with Derrida's second concern – which is unfortunately developed much more briefly in his text – the degree to which an eidetic reduction is impossible and therefore the concept of the political is constitutively impure. This is, for this thesis, firstly a question of method. It is also a question of the substantive content of an analysis of politics in a late modern age where as Derrida (1997: 88) himself recognises, differentiation between the public and the private (speaking sociologically now) is to a greater degree both porous and problematised: "we thus designate so many possibilities that 'our time' is accentuating and accelerating in countless ways".

It is in the "possibility of semantic slippage and inversion: the friend (*amicus*) can be an enemy (*hostis*)" and the possibility of "in privacy [loving] my enemy" that Derrida (1997: 88) astutely realises the dependence of the political distinction on other distinctions. According to Derrida, Schmitt's distinction collapses at every sign of the porous border between public and private:

> It is against the threat of this ruin that his discourse takes form. It defends itself, walls itself up, reconstructs itself unendingly against what is to come; it struggles against the future with a prophetic and pathetic energy... This reactive and unscrupulous dread is often presented in the rigour of the concept, a vigilant, meticulous, implacable rigour inherited from the tradition.

Derrida's point is no doubt well taken, particularly insofar as his insight that Schmitt "is able to see coming, better than so many others, the force of the future in this threatening figure" is undoubtedly correct when as Lentricchia (1983) does, one perceives the politics of theory as inseparable from its political context. This is an insight which Derrida would indubitably be happy to sign. Derrida (1988)'s work on the signature also suggests that every text is situated – and cannot escape the moment of its composition. However, it may nevertheless be true that even with the impurities that Derrida so insightfully deconstructs, Schmitt's concept of the political can still be pressed into service – even to do more useful work, if it is understood to be a reflection of the instability of the public/private opposition. In this sense as well, Derrida's insight that Schmitt is trying to stabilise tradition against flux reflects Schmitt's complex sociological engagement with modernity and differentiation (noting Schmitt's debt to Weber) and therefore it is likely that Schmitt's failures will themselves be productive for an analysis of late modern politics. Agreeing with Derrida that we must always remain within metaphysical thought (finding our point of critique in this very insight), a leaf can nonetheless be taken from Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 8):

> Although concepts are dated, signed, and baptised, they have their own way of not dying while remaining subject to constraints of renewal, replacement, and mutation that give philosophy a history as well as a turbulent geography, each moment of which is preserved (but in time) and that passes (but outside time).

For Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 21):

> The concept is therefore both absolute and relative: it is relative to its own components, to other concepts, to the plane on which it is defined, and to the problems it is supposed to resolve; but it is absolute through the condensation it

carries out, the site it occupies on the plane, and the conditions it assigns to the problem.

It remains then to consider whether the reductiveness of Schmitt's distinction poses an obstacle to its use.

An existential phenomenology of the political

Derrida (1997: 114) argues that:

> The purity of the polemos or the enemy, whereby Schmitt would define the political, remains unattainable. The concept of the political undoubtedly corresponds, as concept, to what the ideal discourse can *want* to state most rigorously on the ideality of the political. But no politics has ever been adequate to its concept. No political event can be correctly described defined with reference to these concepts. And this inadequation is not accidental, since politics is essentially a *praxis*, as Schmitt himself always implies in his ever-so-insistent reliance on the concept of *real, present possibility* or *eventuality* in his analyses of the formal structures of the political.

"As Schmitt himself always implies". Derrida has correctly identified the tensions in Schmitt's own writing. On one hand, as argued above, Schmitt suggests that political language is contentless, and that the political is a distinction which can never be stabilised – an outside to other oppositions which in turn takes its substantive content from them. Derrida's insight that there is a contradiction between the making of a "concrete determination" when Schmitt's own concepts are performative or polemical in character (1997: 115-6). Yet Derrida (1997: 116) continues to worry that Schmitt conceives of the "*proper and pure impurity* of the concept or the meaning of the political" as some sort of "Platonic dream" of a Form awaiting its instantiation, or that by

a process of phenomenological reduction, Schmitt has achieved knowledge of the *eidos* or essence of the political.

As we have seen previously in the thesis, Derrida (1973)'s early thought proceeds from a critique of the notion of pure presence in Husserl's phenomenology. Derrida (1973: 31) is rightly suspicious of the privileging of some sort of pre-discursive, pre-linguistic, "natural" and self-present sense experience. To the extent that Schmitt's procedure is an eidetic reduction, Derrida is no doubt correct to point to its impossibility. Yet this does not rule out, this Chapter would suggest, any use for a reduction in conceptualisation – of the political, for instance. If one were to adopt less positivist forms of phenomenology, recognising with Gadamer (1989: 450) "being that can be understood is language", a phenomenological reduction that recognises the impossibility of fully bracketing other concepts or reaching an essence might properly be seen as a very useful analytic. Merleau-Ponty (1962: xi) expressed scepticism that the phenomenological reduction could properly be seen as "the return to a transcendental consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely transparent". Merleau-Ponty (1962: xiv) contests the notion that to employ a phenomenological reduction is to succumb to idealism, suggesting that the reduction is in fact "impossible".

None of this is to contradict Derrida's valid claim that one can never be fully present to one's thoughts, or that knowledge comes from the reductive apperception of sense-data. Nor that Derrida's deconstruction unveils the contradictions and aporias of Schmitt's theorisation. But all theories, and all texts, are multiple. Therefore this thesis contends that while no concept can in fact be adequate to its object, one side of Schmitt also

expertly revealed by Derrida's exegesis is in fact a useful strategic analytic for political analysis. To the degree that Schmitt theorises the political as a performative realm of praxis, as a distinction that is never quite fixed, a distinction which achieves its relative substance through its processual, rhetorical and polemical nature and dependence on other antagonisms, and that these antagonisms and the moment of decision are productive of subjects and identities as well as further antagonisms, then Derrida has added to our understanding of the insights as well as the blindnesses of Schmitt's concept of the political.

Derrida (1997: 117) raises the question of what remains after the making of the political distinction, of its revenant or remainder, its haunting by spectres of what cannot be distinguished by its logic of exclusion and inclusion. The spectres created by both politicisations and depoliticisations are also relevant to the analysis of the "post-political" world, as are several other aspects of Derrida's own decisionism. The Chapter will now expand on the agonistic analytic of the political as performative praxis.

What remains of the political in late modernity

It has already been argued that an analytic which overcomes liberalism's blindness towards antagonism is essential for both conceptualising and escaping the politics of Endism. Chantal Mouffe (1999) has a useful contribution to make, distinguishing between the antagonism Schmitt discusses and agonism – the rhetorical process of constructing political identities and subjects. This distinction would correspond to Derrida's distinction between diaphoric and polemical conflict (following Plato) in *The Politics of Friendship*. Mouffe's point is to deny that the discourse of Endism, with its

proclamation of the end of class antagonisms, or the end of conflict between capitalism and its others, is wholly true and that this in fact negates the existence of multiple social antagonisms (tendentiously capable of politicisation) in the late modern fractured social. It is not necessary for the purposes of this thesis to address whether the critique of Marxism Laclau and Mouffe (1985) make in *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy* is "valid"[5], adopting Bauman (1997)'s distinction between the postmodern as theory and the sociology of postmodernity, or as I would prefer, late modernity. One does not wish to be complicit in the announcement of the end of Marxism either, recognising with Derrida (1999) that notions of filiation and propriety haunt this debate on Marx' inheritances that does not properly take place. What is certain is that the conditions for the enunciation of discourses of the end of politics include a greater degree of fluidity in the social, and a relative eclipsing of the cleavages (and themes) around which modernist politics was structured. Therefore it would seem opportune to explore the utility of a post-structuralist political analytic that engages with a multiplicity of political antagonisms structured and constructed agonistically through rhetoric.

Elizabeth Grosz (1995) aptly encapsulates the contribution that a deconstructive political analytic can make. Grosz (1995: 62) works in a similar methodological spirit to that of this thesis, arguing that it is not necessary to find a point "outside" of discourse from which to mount a critique. Rather, theorists are always within – even when constructing a discourse of opposition – "one's struggles are inherently *impure*, bound up with what one struggles against... one reaffirms its power even as one struggles". Grosz here is not positing an opposition between theory and practice. It is implicit in her argument that there are no essential and uncontaminated political subject positions – whether based on

class, sex, or other bifurcations. In a similar way, the potential in understanding the process of the impure constitution of political subjectivities reflects the contribution a phenomenological and post-structuralist theory can make. Referring to Derrida's rethinking of the political, Grosz (1995: 78-79) rightly argues that the desire to close off politics through referring it to a grounding or foundational epistemology is in itself an anti-political gesture, amounting "in effect and fundamentally, to a wish to end politics, to stop contestation, to have an answer which admits of no complications and ramifications. To know, to be right." In terms of the politics of theory, then, Critchley (1999: 276) similarly argues:

> For Derrida, politics cannot be founded because such a foundation would limit the freedom of the decision. In politics there are no guarantees. Politics must be open to the dimension of the 'perhaps' or the 'maybe', which is the constant refrain of the early and central chapters of *Politiques de l'amitie*.

In short, what is needed is a resistance to depoliticisations, or indeed a repoliticisation.

If "theory" is more related to vision than to an unproblematised truth, and if its processes mirror the technics of the constitution of political subjects through agonism, what is the nature of this subjectification? Mouffe (1999: 5) argues that antagonism must be transformed into agonism – a negotiation of the "tension between the democratic logic of popular sovereignty and the liberal logic of individual rights". In other words, given that identities are increasingly multiple, and political communities more heterogeneous, what is necessary is a dynamics of the constitution of political subjectivities that does not either reduce antagonism to competition or debate nor efface the value consensus which

accords dissensus legitimacy while preserving the political association. An agonistic politics, then, is both liberal and democratic but unlike classical and neo-liberalism, recognises the desirability of dissensus – among friends. In short Mouffe (1996: 247) is arguing for a truly *political liberalism* which would take pluralism as axiological to democracy which does not efface the properly political nature of subjectivities:

> It is because every object has inscribed in its very being something other than itself and that as a result, everything is constructed as *différance*, that is being cannot be conceived as pure "presence" or "objectivity". Since the constitutive outside is present within the inside as its always real possibility, every identity becomes purely contingent. This implies that we should conceptualise power not as an *external* relation taking place between two preconstituted identities but rather as constituting the identities themselves.

Identity, then, is something of a power-effect as well as a truth-effect, not fixed in relation to a pre-existent essential centre but contestable and constructed and reconstructed through the agonistic rhetoric of politics. Political concepts, as argued above, are empty signifiers and sites of contestation for the rhetorical mobilisations of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic blocs (Laclau 1994). Social antagonisms, according to Ziarek (2001: 85), in fact have their necessity from the nature of language, from its relational nature "where signs acquire meaning through their differentiation from other signs and from the unavoidable suppression of this relation". Hegemonic articulations which seek to establish "contingent relations and connections" among these floating signifiers always succeed only in part, always remaining "unstable and subject to further contestations". It is for this reason that:

> politicisation never ceases because undecideability continues to inhabit the decision. Every consensus appears as a stabilisation of something essentially unstable and chaotic. Chaos and instability are irreducible, but as Derrida

indicates, this is at once a risk and a chance, since continual stability would mean the end of politics... (Mouffe 1996: 9).

The undecideability of political concepts as empty signifiers

Political concepts, as well as being (and because of being) empty signifiers, are marked by constitutive undecideability (Laclau 1996: 49-51). A political concept such as "toleration" cannot be circumscribed, grounded in itself or delimited absolutely as it itself refers to what cannot be tolerated. What therefore comes into play is hegemonic struggle to define (provisionally) the limits of moral consensus and dissensus. Any concept "has to exclude what constitutes its other" but can never fully do so as its other is constitutively included in its self-identity. Nor can political identifications ever be decided or determined: the positioning of a subject is a consequence of an undecideable structure, yet the act of subjectification through a political decision is also an effect of identifications which can never quite fix the subject. Thus, subjectification is also necessarily unstable, opening up a split between the new identity of the subject and the always absent fullness of the Subject as such (Laclau 1996: 57). To put this another way with Smith (1998: 68):

> Identities are centred on lack. Social agents constantly come up against the limits that are posed by the material affects of their structural positionings, and they are constantly searching for political discourses that provide explanations or legitimations for their experiences of these limit-effects. We will never arrive at a final identity, an ensemble of subject positions that would offer an interpretive framework that would serve as a perfect explanatory discourse. The limiting material effects of our structural positionings will always exceed the explanatory frame provided by our identities. As such, every subject remains somewhat alienated and restless, for she can never be "at home"...

It is in this context that a Derridean thematics of the undecideability at the heart of the political decision, and what always exceeds the moment of decision, can be fruitful for a political analytic. This becomes clear from Derrida (1992: 186)'s formulation:

> The undecideable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions, it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged – it is of obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecideable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process.

Far from seeking to erase the traces of conflict through techniques of reason in order to constitute a post-political society, democracy requires a recognition of the "irreducible alterity" of identities subjectively constituted through undecideable political decision, always leaving a remainder which returns to haunt the fixity of the Subject. Difference, then, "becomes the condition of possibility of constituting unity and totality at the same time that it provides their essential limits" (Mouffe 1996: 254). Any irreducible right or good opposes itself to alterity and responsibility to the other. Agonism, then, is never ending, and never should end lest the social be fixed as the totalised good of one identity.

The conjuncture of late modernity requires an analytic, then, that recognises with Lyotard (1988: 140):

> The nature of the social... is immediately differed. For, since it is given along with the universe of a phrase, since the finality... of this universe depends upon the phrase by which one links onto the preceding one, and since this linking is a matter of differends... the social is the referent of a judgement to be always done over again.

Despite the fact that antagonistic collective identities (those of woman or worker, for instance) are partially consolidated hegemonically, "they remain a referent of an indeterminate judgement" (Ziarek 2001: 88). The fact that the social is at its point of attempted totalisation a necessarily indeterminate field displays the contingent character of political subjectification "but also opens a horizon of justice as the incessant necessity of judging without fixed criteria or law, where the outcome of this judgement provokes further contestation". Ziarek argues persuasively that such an analytic enables an insightful diagnosis (as well as prescribes a cure) both for the depoliticisations of late modern Endism as well as their contingent reflection in theory. She argues that "what endangers democracy... is not only the elimination of antagonism for the sake of justice but also the erasure of justice for the sake of antagonism or efficiency". Ziarek's thesis aptly illustrates both the (anti)politics of contemporary theory and the ability of a political theory adequate to late modernity and to the aporias of language and identity to repoliticise the social through the use of an analytic for which politics matters. Such a work of repoliticisation, however, must be an intersubjective one, and the thesis now turns to a discussion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty both demonstrates in his own political trajectory some of the aporias of political affect and desire which haunt the modern political and opens a path to an overcoming of the constraints the imaginary places on political thought and desires.

Chapter Nine: Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of the political

Derrida has been criticised for a perspective that elides intersubjectivity (Reynolds 2004), and while this criticism is to a degree unfair, a necessary supplement to a consideration of how we might think the horizons of the political imaginary differently is an examination of the conditions of possibility for intersubjective and therefore social action. So this Chapter introduces the work of Merleau-Ponty, who has already been present in the thesis, in a major key.

Merleau-Ponty's political philosophy, poised between Marxism and an incomplete commitment to liberalism, also contributes to an understanding of the possible options for a reinscription of the political outside the closure of the political imaginary. The Chapter traces Merleau-Ponty's thought through its phenomenological beginnings. Merleau-Ponty's political thought and his philosophical phenomenology stand in an intimate if not unproblematic relation. Therefore his deconstruction of Cartesian rationality to unveil the embeddedness of the subject in an intersubjective world is a necessary condition for articulating a retrieval of the political and a re-politicisation of the social which would highlight, if not escape, the ghosts of the unicity of the Western tradition which is utilised to narrow the political imaginary. The Chapter then goes on to discuss the degree to which Merleau-Ponty has been accurately understood as a representative of 'Western Marxism', arguing that this is to mischaracterise the core of his thought. The close relationship of his phenomenology and philosophical anthropology to his political theory and his thinking on the social is explicated, and the Chapter closes by underlining the significance of Merleau-Ponty's own escape from Marxism for the broader project of

rethinking the political. In particular, his theorisation of creative political action will be a crucial step in understanding how the political imaginary can be thought otherwise.

Merleau-Ponty as social and political theorist

Merleau-Ponty's social and political thought is important for this thesis for two reasons. First, a key contention of this dissertation is that new analytics and approaches are needed to enable a political thought which escapes the aporias of conventional analysis confronted by discourses of the end of politics and anti-politics characteristic of the era of 'globalisation'. To this end, it has been argued that Derrida and Schmitt can be read together to construct a phenomenological analytic of the political. In order to achieve this aim, it will be necessary to position the reading preferred here within a phenomenological position attentive to the intersubjective nature of the social and the contingency of history and political action, and thus the indeterminacy of the political decision or the decision to *politicise*.

As the literature on Merleau-Ponty is voluminous, some reference will be made to key texts, but the reading advanced in this Chapter will largely be an original reading deriving from interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's primary texts. However, the Chapter will distinguish the approach adopted in this dissertation from the existing literature on Merleau-Ponty and politics, and his political theory.

Although Derrida's debt to Husserl – discussed earlier in this thesis - might provide a more obvious starting point for revealing the intricate implication of deconstruction and phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's social theory is more promising for our present purposes by virtue of its attentiveness to *political* rather than strictly philosophical

concerns. This leads to the second reason why the thesis argues Merleau-Ponty is significant for rethinking the possibility of the political.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological social thought is firmly based in, and then moves away from, an endeavour to interpret the movement of history grounded in an interpretation of Hegel's dialectic as reflective of the nature of the social. Tracing the "adventures of the dialectic", and acknowledging a debt to Weber, Merleau-Ponty [1955] (1973) demonstrates that political action is determinate but at the same time creative – a reflection of the intersubjective perceptions and interpretations of particular moments embedded within a sedimented yet dynamic political imaginary. It has been argued earlier in this thesis that the neo-liberal elision of the political reflect a shrinking of the domain of political imagination and are symptomatic of a secular re-envisioning of the political imaginary The impasses which the later Merleau-Ponty confronted in the opposition between a theory of humanist creative political action and the realities of the organisational possibilities of political action mired in the abyss of a post-war Thermidor strikingly parallel the pessimistic mood of contemporary political analysis and observation. But rather than retreat into a sublation of the left-right continuum at the theoretical level as Giddens (1994) does when seeking to come to grips with the landscape of late modernity and reflexive modernisation (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994), Merleau-Ponty [1955] (1973) develops what is in effect a social theory of *hope*. Merleau-Ponty's post-Marxist thought, it will be suggested, is capable of preserving the potentiality of creative political action within the attentuated liberal political, which is the temporality of the current conjuncture and thus the basis for the reconstruction of an anti-systemic political imaginary, however initially particularistic. To this degree, his social

theory can be usefully contrasted with the project of post-Marxist radical democracy (Laclau & Mouffe 1985) in highlighting the specificity of a creative political agency despite similar geneses of these thematisations in the revelation of the absence of the master political subject of modernity. While this line of argument will not be central to this thesis, it is perhaps interesting to observe at this juncture that Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of contingent intersubjective action and his politics of hope are also capable of being utilised together with the later Foucault's reflections on technologies of the self as generative of an analytic of the possibilities of the creative politicisation of subjects and identities in an era in which we are governed through our freedom (Brown 1995, Rose 1999).

This Chapter, then, contributes another essay to the *prolegomena* which is the project of the thesis proper – the invention of an analytic adequate to the object of contemporary anti-politics in late modern times, and adequate also to the object of rethinking the possibilities of *creative* political action.

Before addressing the substantive themes of intersubjective freedom, and historically contingent but creative political action grounded in a politics of hope though, it is necessary first to understand the influences which shaped Merleau-Ponty's social and political theory and also the nature of his general philosophical project. Like Cooper (1979: 1) and Schmidt (1985: 10), my aim here is not to present a systematic overview or interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy, a task performed very well in numerous studies (for instance recently in Matthews 2002, Priest 2003 and Carman 2008). Rather, this Chapter seeks at the outset to elucidate such of his

philosophical anthropology and epistemology as is necessary for an understanding of his social and political theory. I underline at this point the argument made at the outset of the thesis that a philosophical anthropology is a constitutive necessity for setting a phenomenological sociology of the political to work.

Merleau-Ponty's Existential Phenomenology: Beyond Husserl and towards engagement

Matthews (2002: 42), in common with many commentators on Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Husserlian thought, observes that Merleau-Ponty utilised previous phenomenological texts more as inspiration for his own particular insights rather than as a rigorous reader or interpreter of Husserl's writings. Merleau-Ponty [1945] (1962: viii) himself makes this perfectly clear:

> ... the opinion of the responsible philosopher must be that *phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving as a complete awareness of itself as a philosophy.* It has long been on the way, and its adherents have discovered it every quarter, certainly in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but equally in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. A purely linguistic examination of the texts in question would yield no proof; we find in texts only what we put into them, and if ever any kind of history has suggested the interpretation which should be put on it, it is the history of philosophy. We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determing and expressing in concrete form this *phenomenology for ourselves* which has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognising what they had been waiting for.

Merleau-Ponty's formulation of phenomenology and the phenomenological method has as much to do with his reaction against the individualist celebration of freedom and

universalism in academic French philosophy subsequent to the Third Republic (Gutting 2001), his understanding of Kojève's Hegelian Marxism, and his search for an existential philosophy that spoke to the concerns of the lifeworld as to his study of Husserl's texts.

In "The War has Taken Place", Merleau-Ponty [1945] (1964: 144) contended that the unfreedom and struggle for recognition resulting from the concrete experience of war and symbolic and real violence implied that philosophy had to understand the degree to which freedom was intersubjective and contingent – "Until that time, the life of society will remain a dialogue and a battle between phantoms – in which real tears and real blood suddenly start to flow". Rejecting both the Cartesian and Kantian idealisms of pre-War French philosophy (Schmidt 1985: 19) and the Thomistic rationalism of Catholic orthodoxy (Cooper 1979: 10-15), Merleau-Ponty [1945] (1962: 371) sought an escape route from the reign of the disembodied human subject of reason:

> All thought of something is at the same time self-consciousness, failing which it could have no object. At the root of all our experiences and all our reflections, we find, then, a being which immediately recognises itself, because it is its knowledge both of itself and all things, and which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence. Self-consciousness is the very being of mind in action.

Merleau-Ponty's discovery that a subject cannot perceive outside of a consciousness of its existence in the world is both a refutation of the Cartesian *Cogito* and an illustration of the use to which he put Husserl's thought – the thematisation of an engaged phenomenology of the embodied subject in the world. Gutting (2001: 186) argues that Merleau-Ponty perceived an antinomy in Husserl's philosophy between the return to the "things themselves" and a transcendental method which led to "an idealistic science of

essences". Similarly, Husserlian phenomenology sought simultaneously to provide an account of lived experience and to construct a rigorous philosophical science. According to Gutting, Merleau-Ponty refused to acknowledge a contradiction between these dimensions of Husserl's theorising, but acknowledged the need to subordinate Husserl's "opposing emphases" in order to reconcile the descriptive and theoretical aspects of phenomenology. As opposed to the Husserl of the *Cartesian Meditations*, Merleau-Ponty lauded the Husserl for whom the embodied subject and the world it is within are an "interwoven tapestry" – the Husserl of *Verflechtung* or the interweaving of the self and the world (Moran 2000: 404). Merleau-Ponty's creative appropriation and reinscription of Husserlian phenomenology is vividly evoked in the famous 'Preface' to the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy can be characterised as a turn to ontology and metaphysics. For two reasons it is not necessary to include an explication *in toto* of this aspect of his work in this thesis. First, texts such as *The Visible and Invisible* remained unfinished at his death and were reconstructed partly from working notes by Claude Lefort. It would be reasonable to assert that although it is clear that Merleau-Ponty saw the need to supplement or revise his earlier understanding of phenomenology with an ontology, the unfinished nature of this project makes it highly speculative to discuss his ontological thought in a schematising way. Secondly, it is Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy articulated in his *Phenomenology of Perception* that provides the basis for his philosophy of history and therefore his political and social theory which is of prime importance for the argument of this thesis. Rather than rely on summations of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology from the secondary

literature, the best method of understanding the significance of his epistemology for his social and political theory is to proceed to a close reading of the 'Preface'.

Reading the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*

In the 'Preface', Merleau-Ponty [1945] (1962: vii), in search of the thought of an always already there world and an "account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them", details his interpretation of key phenomenological concepts or a systematic consideration of "the celebrated phenomenological themes as they have grown spontaneously together in life" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962: viii). First, he argues phenomenology is a descriptive rather than an explanatory or analytical method, a "foreswearing of science" which regards the scientific view of the human and the social as itself a social product, a posited epistemology. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes phenomenology both from the "second-order expression" of a scientific gaze always already embedded within the social and within particular knowledges and also from a naturalisation or biologisation of the human condition (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962: viii-ix). Yet, this foreswearing is not identical with Cartesian and Kantian returns to (a transcendental) consciousness. It is worth noting, with Schmidt (1985: 16) that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Cartesian and Kantian idealism was heavily influenced by his understanding of, and reaction against, the Brunschvicgian orthodoxy of his early philosophical education. It is not a matter of a process of analytical reflection which "starts from our experience of the world and goes back to the subject as to a condition of possibility distinct from that experience"(1962: ix-x). For this is to abstract and idealise the reflecting subject from its necessary implication within the world – the world which is "there before any possible analysis of mine" (1962: x). For Merleau-Ponty, perception is the given field of a

consciousness formed by active and creative processes of engagement rather than abstraction:

> Moreover my reflection cannot be unaware of itself as an event, and so it appears to itself in the light of a truly creative act, of a changed structure of consciousness... My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately 'place' in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams. Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things which are not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of my imaginary... The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and my explicit perceptions. Truth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science, I find, not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to the world (1962: x-xi).

So it is not epistemologically licit, according to Merleau-Ponty, to adopt a transcendental position outside the world in order to analyse it as a totality because this presupposes a transcendental ideal pre-personal subjectivity who objectifies an exteriorised world . It is through his non-dualistic understanding of subjectivity and objectivity as the second-order representations derivative of our existence in the world that we can understand the meaning for Merleau-Ponty of the phenomenological reduction.

Here again, Merleau-Ponty positions the phenomenological reduction against both transcendental idealism and scientific empiricism, building on the argument that the *Cogito* which thinks only of a putative 'inner truth' must be supplanted with a *Cogitatio* which is always a thought of some*thing* even if only of the always already there world (1962: xiii). Thus two dualisms are dissolved – that of subject and object and that of

conscious subject (or *Ego*) and an(Other) object/subject (or *Alter Ego*) – and revealed as the constituent poles of pseudo-problems such as 'the problem of other minds' or the mind/body distinction conjured by the replacement of the pre-modern Divine within as ground of consciousness by the inward truth of the Cartesian *Cogito*. Neither Descartes' '*Cogito ergo sum*' nor Augustine's '*In te redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas*' is adequate to the conceptualisation of consciousness which is as a "*Sinnbegung* or active meaning-giving operation... so that the world is nothing but 'world-as-meaning'" (1962: xi). A very important point is being made by Merleau-Ponty – any awareness we have is always already intersubjective in that it is by necessity unthinkable outside a particular situation – a particular and *contingent* "historical situation" (1962: xiii). This apprehension of consciousness for Merleau-Ponty (1962: xi) is revelatory of his reinscription of the *phenomenological reduction* – a becoming-aware or making-aware of the fact that "we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world" (1962: xiii). The reduction, for Merleau-Ponty (1962: xiii) is:

> reflection which does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical.

The reduction then, is not a method akin to a Hegelian dialectical sublation but rather a making-strange of what is – "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (1962: xv). The phenomenological reduction does not provide a transcendental standpoint for the discernment of an abstract philosophical truth. We are so implicated in the world such that the world cannot be

wholly objectified either by the disembodied subject of reason or by the subject of a totally autonomous method of science. The reduction is, however, a method by which our occluded perception which results from common-sense understandings and scientific abstraction can be overcome through a return to our positioning within the already existent world. To the degree that an eidetic reduction (a description of the world in terms of essential structures) is a necessary part of the phenomenological method, this is for Merleau-Ponty if not for Husserl, more of a moment in the process of making reflective our situatedness on which we do not often reflect. Essences or concepts formed through the eidetic reduction are not to be equated with Platonic forms or Kantian categories, but rather are merely a method of thematising the world with which we always already engaged. Something always escapes perception, the world always eludes a firm grasp, even the notion of essence ought to be read as revelatory of the unthought of the world:

> The self-evidence of perception is not adequate thought or apodeictic self-evidence. The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. 'There is a world' or rather; 'There is the world'; I can never completely account for this ever-reiterated assertion in my life. This facticity of the world is what constitutes the *Weltlichkeit der Welt*, what causes the world to be the world; just as the facticity of the *cogito* is not an imperfection in itself, but rather what assures me of my existence. (1962: xvi-xvii)

It should be clear from what has previously been said about Derrida's relation to phenomenology that I believe Merleau-Ponty's characterisation of the phenomenological reduction is not open to a deconstructive critique of the theme of self-presence in Husserl such as that of Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena* (1973) .

It is in this context that Merleau-Ponty (1962: vii) argues that Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* is a gloss on Husserl's *Lebenswelt* which constitutes the "central theme of phenomenology". If the *Lebenswelt* is, as Merleau-Ponty would agree with Heidegger, the inescapable context of our consciousness, then Husserl's phenomenological *epoché* cannot be a bracketing of the lifeworld or its idealisation into conceptual essences, but rather must be a bracketing of the 'truths' of science, metaphysics or common-sense insofar as they prevent us perceiving the interweaving of self and world.

Our truths reveal the unveiling of an indeterminate within a determinate lifeworld, rather than there being a truth able to be inferred from "processes linked by causal relationships" or from the ordering of the world-that-is-there through concepts which are the perceptions of an ideal consciousness (1962: xiii). Intentionality too is explicable only through the reduction, because it is not a "Kantian relation to a possible object" but the already-there facticity of the world before its "being posited by knowledge in a specific act of identification" (1962: xvii). There is no atemporal or asocial essence of consciousness. Consciousness is rather oriented towards the world as a *project* because "categorial activity" is conditioned by the "hidden art of the imagination" (1962: xvii). Intentionality is not just the relation of consciousness to the world, but beyond this, an appreciation of possible relations and ways of relating to the world – that is to say, the realm of the imaginary which is presupposed by Merleau-Ponty's philosophical anthropology. Intentionality is not just a property of cognising the world, but also a function of our action in the world and imagination of the world – our being-in the-world as historically, socially and culturally situated subjects is an inescapable dimension of human consciousness as "a project in the world" rather than as Cartesian detachment. It

is with this in mind that Merleau-Ponty (1962: xviii) equates the phenomenological act of understanding with "finding the idea in the Hegelian sense". Just as there is no abstract subject of consciousness, nor is there an essential human experience *as such* about which we can philosophise separable from our cultural and historical intersubjective position within the social. The goal of the phenomenological reduction is the revelation of the unity or possible unities of meaning in contingency, the meaning revealed in and given by the multiplicity of contingent circumstances which together pattern the world and *events* in the world (1962: xviii-xix): "Because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meaning*, and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history" (1962: xix). The task of phenomenology is the revelation of this "mystery of the world and of reason", the disclosure of meaning in the world (1962: xvi).

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical anthropology

It should now be clear that for Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is the art of disclosing meanings in the world, and the theme of contingency and the creativity of the imaginary intentionality will be further discussed when the next section considers his philosophy of history and the social and political theory that is consequent upon it. However, it is necessary first to understand in more detail the characteristics of embodied subjectivity, because this intersubjective dimension of action and sense-making is key to a reimagination of the political. It is important in this context to note that although the starting point for Merleau-Ponty's reflections in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is a phenomenological analysis of perception (against empiricist and idealist accounts), his theorisation of the nature of being-in-the-world with respect to embodiment, temporality

and freedom constitute what is in effect a philosophical anthropology in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas' terms. This thesis adopts the position of Honneth and Joas (1988) that any account of social action and thus the sketch of a theory of creative political action that is the goal of the dissertation necessitates a prior account of what it is to be a social subject. It is part of the critique this thesis proceeds from to observe that many prevalent schools of political theory are either unreflective about the philosophical anthropology on which their theory of agency implicitly defends, or that their theory of agency is vitiated by a philosophical anthropology which falls prey easily to reification. This section lays the basis for the claim that a phenomenological sociology of political action is not subject to such critiques.

It has already been argued that Merleau-Ponty refuses the Cartesian mind/body distinction and that the perceptual subject in the world is an embodied subject. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of perception reveals that the subject is a 'body-subject'. In effect, this concept denotes the conclusions Merleau-Ponty reached regarding the fact that the human subject is not an object in the world or a mind-subject regarding the world of objects, but rather always already implicated in the world through perception and action and a habitual relation to the world. In the terms of classical modern philosophy, Merleau-Ponty counters both the disembodied Cartesian subject and also a mechanistic understanding of the body as material object (the basis of empiricist psychology and biology). For Merleau-Ponty, our relation to the objective world is not a cognitive relationship (Matthews 2002: 48) –

> ..."the world", for us, is more than simply the spatial container of our existence. It is the sphere of our lives as active, purposive beings: beings who have thoughts

about it, who respond to it emotionally and imaginatively, who act on it (sometimes deliberately, sometimes unthinkingly), who are acted on by it and capable of being conscious of its actions on us, and so on. In all these ways, the world is, as was said earlier, the place that we "inhabit", rather than simply a set of objects that we represent to ourselves in a purely detached way.

Merleau-Ponty does not refer to Heidegger explicitly as the source of the concept of 'being-in-the-world'. However, there is no doubt that he had read *Sein und Zeit* deeply (Moran 2000) and it may be helpful in this context to review Heidegger's remarks on being-in-the-world. Heidegger [1927] (1996: 49) claims that being-in-the-world, while it "cannot be broken up into components that may be pieced together" nevertheless has "several constitutive structural factors". For Heidegger [1927] (1996: 50), these factors are "in the world", "the being which always is in the way of being-in-the-world" and "*being in* as such". The first factor, the *Weltlichkeit der Welt,* is very close to Merleau-Ponty's 'world' of given meanings while the second is in effect what Heidegger terms *Da-Sein*. Heidegger [1927] (1996: 50-51) describes "being-in" as an existential, by which he means one of the ontologically *a priori* categories proper to being as such (on analogy with Kant's categorials). While being-in-the-world is spatial, this is an ontic characteristic which cannot clarify an ontological existential (Heidegger [1927] 1996: 52). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty wants to argue that spatiality is only one surface aspect of our embodied existence. Utilising negative determinations of the essence of the concept, Heidegger [1927] (1962: 53-54) claims:

> ... being-in is not a "quality" which Da-sein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, *without* which it could *be* just as it could with it. It is not the case that human being "is", and then on top of that has a relation of being to the "world" which it sometimes takes upon itself. Da-sein is never "initially" a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in the mood to take up a

"relation" to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is possible only *because*, as being-in-the-world, Da-sein is as it is. This constitution of being is not first derived from the fact that besides the being which has the character of Da-sein there are other beings which are objectively present and meet up with it. These other beings can only "meet up" with Da-sein because they are able to show themselves of their own accord within a *world*

In a strikingly similar movement of thought to Heidegger's, Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the world of objects and the fact our inability to objectify ourselves because our perception and our perceiving-body are inseparable demonstrates that the body-subject is always already within the world and that the two are interwoven. Matthews (2002: 57) puts this nicely:

> The world as experienced by a particular subject cannot be a mere collection of independent and merely externally related objects, but must be conceived of as unified by its relations to that subject and his or her objects in it; as a system of meanings. That is the sense in which, for each of us, the world is "my world". Thus, the subject can be conceived of only in relation to a world, and the world can be conceived of only in relation to a subject. The subject must be "in the world" both in the way that objects are and in a way that transcends the mode of being of objects.

There is no such thing as the opposite of action in the world, then, and all our action is embodied and contingent upon a temporally specific relation to the world which is itself a *habitus*.

The fact that the subject's way of being-in-the-world is embodied and bounded by time and culture may lead to a suspicion that Merleau-Ponty's anthropology of subjectivity may partake in the solipsism to which Matthews (2002: 97) argues Cartesianism has an "inherent tendency", despite Merleau-Ponty's overcoming of the antinomies of the

Cogito. Matthews (2002: 97) argues that the being-in-the-world of the body-subject is shaped by an intentionality which "is an opening on to a *shared* world, a cultural world, in which objects have meanings I share with other subjects". Merleau-Ponty's philosophical anthropology in fact necessitates this intersubjective dimension of the given-ness of meanings. Language, as a cultural object, plays a "crucial role in the perception of other people" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962: 354). It is of course possible to objectify another, and it may be appropriate to so do up to a point – for example in the treatment of a patient by a doctor (Matthews 2002: 97). But intersubjectivity is prior even to the recognition of the other as subject. In "Other Selves and the Human World", Merleau-Ponty argues that the objects in the world into which "I am thrown" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962: 346) bear in and of themselves the traces of human intersubjectivity. Past patterns of behaviour are instantiated in the sedimentation of a "cultural world":

> Not only do I have a physical world, not only do I live in the midst of earth, air and water, I have around me roads, plantations, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, a spoon, a pipe. Each of these objects is moulded to the human action which it serves. Each one spreads around it an atmosphere of humanity which may be determinate in a low degree, in the case of a few footmarks in the sand, or on the other hand highly determinate, if I go into every room from top to bottom of a house recently evacuated (1962: 347-348).

The project of assigning an intentional meaning to the world in which the subject exists preserves a balance between the relative indeterminacy or determinacy of willed or sedimented personal meanings and the determinacy of the cultural field in which these potential meanings arise. In other words, Merleau-Ponty is deconstructing the structure/agency nexus in the work of this thought. Contra those like Westphal (1990) who argue there is only a slight or tendentious relation between Merleau-Ponty's

philosophy and political thought, I would argue that we can see here the close nexus between his thought and its application (which itself is something of a misconception). Merleau-Ponty claims that "freedom" cannot be understood as an abstract principle, but an ungrounded decision – nevertheless formed within a determinate but fluid and dynamic context – can open the door to another "project" and thus to a reshaping of the world. The intersubjective dimension to such decisions is of key importance, because we are not positing either a rational sovereign and individual subject here, or a political subject which embodies the motor of history. Rather, the political decision arises from within but nevertheless has the capacity to reshape the lifeworld. The importance of this mode of thought cannot be overemphasised for the argument of this thesis.

However, returning to critiques of Merleau-Ponty's thinking of intersubjectivity, there are aspects of truth to the 'problem' of solipsism. I do not agree with Gutting's hyperbolisation of this problem or his argument that invocation of the inescapable social dimension of experience is a "deus ex machina" (2002: 197). To adopt this formulation is to begin from individualist premises which cannot accept the social except as problem. On the other hand, other writers such as Schmidt (1985) and Matthews (2002) do not accord the degree to which intersubjectivity does pose a problem enough weight. Again, this is the reason why a close reading of *Merleau-Ponty*'s solution is preferred in this thesis rather than an explication of secondary literature. The degree to which each subject has a being-in-the-world which is the subject's world (or in Heidegger's terms "the being of this being is always mine" [1927] 1996: 39) raises the question of the necessity of recognition, particularly as it is possible to objectify the other. That is not to say that the problem of 'other minds' is a real one – we should avoid thinking in

Cartesian terms. The truth of the problem of intersubjectivity is the question of the relation between the individual embodied subject and the social field on one hand, and to other body-subjects on the other. As Merleau-Ponty (1962: 348) puts it:

> But this is precisely the question: how can the word 'I' be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the *I* be formed, how can I speak of an *I* other than my own, how can I know that there are other *I*'s, how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self-knowledge, is in the mode of the *I*, be grasped in the mode of Thou, and through this, in the world of the 'One'?

Intersubjectivity and the modern imaginary and lifeworld

The answer Merleau-Ponty makes to these questions he poses is vital for the argument of this thesis. Conceptions of action which derive their philosophical imaginary from Cartesian dualism or Hobbesian methodological individualism are *blind* to the role of the intersubjective imaginary in human action as both field and determinate of creative action. Such conceptions cannot explain creative political action except through recourse to a tautological functionalism or to individual will (a "great man theory of history"). Even the Marxian problem of the coming to consciousness of the collective subject of history remains mired in oscillation within the opposition between a certain solipsistic voluntarism and a determinism which occludes subjectivity altogether. Merleau-Ponty (1962: 348-34) once again poses the problem admirably:

> The very first of all cultural objects, and the one by which all the rest exist, is the body of the other person as the vehicle of a form of behaviour. Whether it be a question of vestiges or the body of another person, we need to know how an object in space can become the eloquent relic of an existence; how, conversely, an intention, a thought or a project can detach themselves from the personal subject and become visible outside him in the shape of his body, and in the environment he builds for himself. The constitution of the other person does not fully elucidate

that of society, which is not an existence involving two or even three prople, but co-existence involving an indefinite number of consciousnesses. Yet the analysis of the perception of others runs up against a difficulty in principle raised by the cultural world, since it is called upon to solve the paradox of a consciousness seen from the outside, of a thought which has its abode in the external world, and which, therefore, is already subjectless and anonymous compared with mine.

So, then, Merleau-Ponty identifies here a constraining of the imaginary – and the political imaginary – which is particular to modernity, and whose supercession is impossible if the categories given through it are not pushed to their limits. Such a process of approaching a limit horizon to the modern lifeworld must be an intersubjective project. Intersubjectivity, for Merleau-Ponty (1962) has both an interpersonal and a social dimension. The two are not strictly incompatible or opposed, as an open intentionality towards the Other is a property of the body-subject even when s/he is turned away from the Other, and similarly the social provides an ever present field that shapes the specificity of the body-subject's being-in-the-world.

Language is crucial for interpersonal intersubjectivity (1962: 354). Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the dialogue to demonstrate that interaction with the Other brings forth thoughts that are not strictly speaking one's own but rather are produced by the encounter *itself*. "It is only retrospectively, when I have withdrawn from the dialogue and am recalling it", he claims, that the subject appropriates the intersubjectively produced thoughts into her/his private narrative. This retrospectivity also applies to the decision, and conditions the freedom of political choice (1962: 442). Merleau-Ponty (1962: 355) supplements this thinking of the intersubjective encounter by using Piaget's studies of child development to make the point that a privatised subjectivity is something *produced* through socialisation – something that must be developed and which is not given

naturally. The "point of view" as a particular individual intentionality, a relation to a singular world, is not part of a young child's experience. We can supplement his argument here by observing that the production of individual intentionality is constitutive of the modern imaginary, and its place in the social imaginary is one of the factors which blocks a collective project of re-imagination.

Having made these arguments, Merleau-Ponty (1962: 355-356) is confronted by the consequences of this developmental individuation or privatisation of subjectivity and relation-to-the-world. If one perceives the Other's behaviour as illustrating grief and anger, for instance, this is a displaying rather than a lived experience for the self. Merleau-Ponty might add, but does not, that the reaction to the Other's grief and anger creates an intersubjective field but that this still does not abrogate from the feelings produced in the interaction being lived through by the *I* not by the *Alter Ego*. Merleau-Ponty (1962: 356) does express something akin to this problem through a consideration of acting-with-others:

> If, moreover, we undertake some project in common, this common project is not one single project, it does not appear in the selfsame light to both of us, we are not both equally enthusiastic about it, or at any rate not in quite the same way, simply because Paul is Paul and I am myself. Although his consciousness and mine, working through our respective situations, may contrive to produce a common situation in which they can communicate, it is nevertheless from the subjectivity of each of us that each one projects this 'one and only' world.

Merleau-Ponty is here expressing one of the fundamental dilemmas of the theory of collective human action at a microsociological level. It is because the 'interworld' of interactive intersubjectivity is nevertheless a project of each constitutive subject that there

is some truth in the *Cogito*. As I have been arguing, the partial resolution or better, the deconstruction, of this ontological dilemma leads Merleau-Ponty to a thematics of freedom and recognition which provides an appropriate point at which his social theory can be considered. However, Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of recognition and freedom in their intersubjective modes is anterior to an understanding of "how it has been possible for me to posit the other" (1962: 357). Merleau-Ponty's answer to this question in *The Phenomenology of Perception* remains within a problematic influenced by Sartre and within a phenomenology still close in some respects to that of Husserl, and it is for this reason that the spectre of solipsism and Cartesian dualism haunts his text. I disagree with Gutting's individualist premise that to invoke the social is in some sense non-philosophical. However, I do agree with Gutting (2001: 195) that Merleau-Ponty's corporeal theory of subjectivity – and in particular, the linguistic aspects of the interworld – ought logically to result in the conclusion I drew earlier in this Chapter that the problem of solipsism is a non-problem. Accordingly, it is appropriate to invoke his discussion of intersubjectivity in his later essay 'The Philosopher and His Shadow' (Merleau-Ponty [1960] 1964).

Merleau-Ponty (1964), commenting directly in this text on Husserl, thematises intersubjectivity in its temporal as well as its social aspect of being-in-the-world. There are echoes in 'The Philosopher and His Shadow' of Heidegger's formulation of Da-sein's temporality as "*stretching along*" (1996: 344). As Crossley (1994: 27) points out in a different context, the difficulty in Husserl's retention of the modernist picture of a private subjectivity lay in the tendency of solutions to the problem of solipsism (for example, through analogy) resulting in contradictory or absurd conclusions such as the

"community of solipsists". Yet again, Merleau-Ponty's creative reading of Husserl denies that such is the case, or could be the case if one takes as a fundamental premise embodied being-in-the-world. Citing a remark of Husserl, "nature, the body, and also, interwoven with the body, the soul are constituted all together in a reciprocal relationship with one another", Merleau-Ponty (1964: 175), argues that although "we die alone", it is impossible to understand intersubjective *life* as ever entailing a solitude apart from the world of others. There is an individuation proper to the child's becoming-adult, but only because the dimensions of modernity mask the fundamental intersubjectivity of the interworld. So too, death, I would argue, as an experience of primordial solitude, is only such because the modern sundering of the *Ego* from others and from the world prefigured in the *Cogito* is a cultural rather than a natural or essential disposition. The virtue of phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty understands it is precisely that it enables the distinct configurations of subjectivity proper to modernity to be bracketed, and thus unveiled as historical rather than constitutive for subjectivity *as such*. This unveiling is both prior to, and contemperaneous with the (possible) moment of political re-imagination.

Merleau-Ponty (1964: 152) in his essay 'Everywhere and Nowhere' contends forcefully that subjectivity is invented rather than discovered by Descartes. So viewed through the lens of the phenomenological reduction, one can see that just as the body and the consciousness form a "compresence", so too are the self and the other are also co-present:

> ... the "I am able to" and the "the other person exists" belong here and now to the same world... the body proper is a premonition of the other person, the *Einfühlung* an echo of my incarnation, and... a flash of meaning makes them substitutable in the absolute presence of origins.

Contingency, Intersubjective Historicity and Freedom

What Gutting fails to understand, and the key aspect of the argument to which other writers on Merleau-Ponty have been inattentive, is that the *Cogito* for Merleau-Ponty is concretised in a social situation. While for Descartes it is a thought experiment, for Merleau-Ponty the *Cogito* and its attendant illusion of *solus ipse* reflect the manner in which the *modern* self-positing of the individualised subject lead the subject to misrecognise itself as most properly itself in moments of private reflection. All the consequences for the political imaginary flow from this mode of thought and perception, and drawing those consequences in order to provide for an escape from them is never far from Merleau-Ponty's mind. Yet, as argued above, these moments are never outside the world in which the embodied subject has its being. *Contra* Gutting then, it is not a matter of Sartre's thematisation of intersubjectivity as having arisen from a violent negation of the Other that is a more compelling phenomenological description. Sartre's thematisation has a direct genealogy, in my argument, from the Hobbesian originary violence and the resultant 'problem' of social order which is only a problem because the social is conceived of as a supplement rather than as the constitutive ground of being-in-the-world. It is true that the subject having been invented, violent non-recognition of the Other is always a present possibility. It is untrue, and this is the great virtue of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for political thought, that the recognition of the Other, *necessarily* diminishes the subjectivity or the subjective freedom of the *Ego*. Prior to the violence of non-recognition is a social process of reification and a particular instantiation of freedom in the solipsistic subject of modernity.

Merleau-Ponty recognises two dimensions of freedom. Arguing against Sartre's voluntarism in *Being and Nothingness* [1945] (1989) he argues that conceiving of oneself as only constrained by one's being for-others is to abolish the category of freedom. For Merleau-Ponty free choice constrains and restricts the scope of further free decision. Our decisions are *sedimented* – the subject is temporal and historical, and thus the remainders of past choices become habituated. We cannot "negate" our past as Sartre would have it. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty [1945] (1962) preserves the possibility of decision, indeterminate within the determinacy of social, historical and subjective contexts. The second and intersubjective dimension of freedom is logically consequent on the first. It is precisely because our decisions take place within *history*, argues Merleau-Ponty, that they are given meaning within a "chain of interconnections", and that history itself can be imbued with meaning (Gutting 2001: 206). This is the philosophical basis of the political critique of Sartre in *Adventures of the Dialectic* [1955] (1973). Gutting (2001: 205) correctly observes that Merleau-Ponty's "field theory of freedom gives us an alternative to the standard objectivist and idealist views of individuals' relation to their social and historical context". Because any category which allegedly impinges on freedom – such as class consciousness – is only ever an abstraction from a broader being-in-the-world, there can be no determination in the last instance. But at the same time, the first dimension of freedom is really another abstraction as there is no atomistic choosing individual outside the body-subject's being-in-the-world. Thus we can understand how particular social imaginaries, sedimented in history and embodied in institutions, can powerfully negate our freedom through either self-objectification or objectification by others, even if such imaginaries rest on the exhaltation of the rational sovereign subject.

The paradigmatic case of such unfreedom in modernity, Merleau-Ponty argues powerfully in *Humanism and Terror* [1947] (1969) is liberalism whose philosophical premises grant the individuated subject of modernity a false freedom concealing both the inevitable violence of political choice (1969: 109) and the violent occlusion of subjectivity through the objectification inherent in the construction of the universal subject of liberalism. Of course, later in his work, when he begins to see that his wager on Soviet Marxism has failed, and this enables a much more pessimistic diagnosis of the Cold War political imaginary on one hand, and a much more genuinely open horizon of the possible on the other. It could, of course, also be argued – and argued cogently – that the discussion of ends and means in *Humanism and Terror* suggests strongly that Marxism – as another totalising and transcendental mode of thought – can fall prey to occluding freedom and a genuinely intersubjective lifeworld in the name of an idealist principle.

What the phenomenological reduction reveals, therefore, is the ways in which social and political imaginaries can either create intersubjective freedom or *pari passu* intersubjective unfreedom, and as a necessary corollary, destroys the illusion that the social is constituted through a contract between pre-social subjects. Rather the act of "positing" is revealed as itself a *political* act through which a decision is made:

> He who "posits" the other man is a perceiving subject, the other person's body is a perceived thing, and the other person himself is "posited" as "perceiving". [But] it is never a matter of anything but co-perception. I see that this man over there sees, as I tough my left hand while it is touching my right.

The necessity for politics, and for the political decision, arises precisely because the unfreedom embedded in particular social imaginaries constitutes the Other as object:

> Political problems come from the fact that we are all subjects and yet we look upon other people and treat them as objects. Coexistence among men seems therefore doomed to failure. For either some men exercise their absolute right as subjects in which case the others submit to their will and are not recognised as subjects. Or else the whole social body is devoted to some providential destiny, some philosophical mission, but then this case reverts to the first; objective politics becomes subjective politics since it is really necessary that only a few be the incumbents of this destiny or mission. Or finally it is agreed that all men have the same rights and there is no truth in the state. But this equality of principle remains nominal; at decisive moments the government continues to be violent and the majority of men remain objects of history. (Merleau-Ponty [1947] 1969: 110-111)

Merleau-Ponty, in my reading, rejects the Hegelian and Marxist overcoming of the problem of recognition through the sublation of subjectivity-objectivity as theorised by Lukács [1967] (1971). Neither "an ungraspable World Spirit" nor a teleological end to history is the answer (Merleau-Ponty [1947] 1969: 111). Nor is there a third term which overcomes the opposition subject-object – for the reasons adduced above concerning the partial truth of the *Cogito* in its insight of an irreducible individuality even in the social subject. For Merleau-Ponty, recognition of the Other as subject is a political *decision* always contingent on the constellation of social forces at any given moment. Merleau-Ponty's 'humanism' is not far from Derrida's understanding of justice as undeconstructable but as against Levinasian ethics, for instance, Merleau-Ponty underlines the *politics* of the regard for the face of the Other, and the sociality of the decision for the Other.

It is clear, then, that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology resists a closure of the specificity of the political while at the same time embedding the political in time and culture, rather than treating it as an essence. Heidegger's phenomenology, on the other hand, constitutes an *ontology* from which one could draw political inferences. Merleau-Ponty's application of the phenomenological reduction to Cartesian subjectivity and its remainders by contrast enables an understanding of the degree to which ontological premises are in fact reflective of a social and temporal constitution. For Merleau-Ponty [1947] (1969: 115-116), the reduction is a process of abstraction which nevertheless cannot ever abstract completely from lived experience because of the embodied, social and contingent nature of subjectivity:

> In reflection every man can *conceive* of himself as simply a man and rejoin the others. But that is through an abstraction: he has to forget his peculiar circumstances, and, once he has gone back from thought to living, he again conducts himself as a Frenchman, a doctor, a bourgeois, etc. Universality is only conceived, not lived.

And further:

> It is a law of human action that the present encroaches upon the future, the self upon other people. This intrusion is not only a fact of political life – it also happens in private life. Just as in love, in affection, or in friendship we don not encounter face to face "consciousnesses" whose absolute individuality we could respect at every moment, but beings qualifies as "my son", "my wife", "my friend" whom we carry along with us into common projects where they receive (like ourselves) a definite role, with specific rights and duties, so in collective history the spiritual atoms train after them their historical role and are tied to one another by the threads of their actions; what is more, they are blended with the totality of actions, whether or not deliberate, which they exert upon others and the world so that there exists not a plurality of subjects, but an intersubjectivity...

Thus it can be seen that there is a clear and intentional contrast with both Descartes and Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* in Merleau-Ponty's thought. If the Cartesian *Cogito* represents the foundational moment of the subject of modernity, it is at the same time, as Descartes [1637] (1968: 100-101) himself realised, an always unstable abstraction, an "arduous" battle against the "shadows". Stephen Toulmin (1990) argues powerfully that Descartes should be read in his own historical context, as part of a broader reaction against the humanism of the Sixteenth Century exemplified by Montaigne, and precipitated by the exhaustion of theological truth in incommensurable anathemas and a failing of optimism engendered by the Thirty Years War and the general crisis of the Seventeenth Century. The foundational abreaction of the subject of modernity is always a *forgetting*, then, a turning *away*, a refusal to engage with social and historical contingencies which appear bleak beyond belief, and a phantasmatic dream of reason. It is the great virtue of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, as Laclau & Mouffe (1985: 146) argue, to reinscribe the subject within its contingency and sociality, to embed the subject in time and history, even if as Derrida [1967] (1978) makes clear, one can never quite lay the ghost of Descartes to rest.

Historicity, subjectivity and contingency

Contingency enters Merleau-Ponty's thought in two registers. The bodily subject is itself contingent on its being-in-the-world and its temporality and historicity. At the same time, the philosophical or theoretical understandings of consciousness which deeply inflect the lived experience of the subject of modernity and at the same time, which are constituted through a particular re-imagination of the world in history, are themselves

both contingent. This contingency goes to the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of history. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of how freedom can be secured through political agency is a social conception. Matthews (2002: 100) misreads Merleau-Ponty when he argues that "the relation of one self to other selves is ultimately what we mean by society". Rather, interpersonal subjectivity is *always already* socially intersubjective. The reinscription of the problematic of self and relatedness is a dimension of unfreedom which is *contingent* to a particular way of being-in-the-world but not *necessary* for being-in-the-world. Understanding this contingency through the *epoché* enables a phenomenology of the political.

Merleau-Ponty's political theory and its reception

Previous sections addressed the literature on Merleau-Ponty's social thought selectively in order to perform an original reading of his ontology and philosophical anthropology, while nevertheless not losing sight of the political dimensions of his more properly philosophical work and their profound ramifications for the argument of this thesis. However, it is necessary to preface an interpretation of his phenomenological thought of the political with some reference to the somewhat scanty previous literature on Merleau-Ponty's political theory in order to justify the distinctiveness and originality of the argument made in this thesis. Diprose (2008) has recently observed that Merleau-Ponty's contribution to social and political theory is undergoing something of a revival, and this thesis seeks to add to such a project of rethinking through its original reading of Merleau-Ponty inscribed within a broader set of concerns and problematics, but it is nevertheless

prudent to consider some misunderstandings and misappropriations of his work which still haunt consideration of the political significance of his philosophy.

While general texts such as Gutting's *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (2001) and Matthews' *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (2002) discuss Merleau-Ponty's political writings (in the former primarily as a counterpoint to Sartre and in the latter without extracting too much theoretical substance from Merleau-Ponty's occasional interventions), there are to my knowledge only two monographs on Merleau-Ponty's political theory, both originating in Doctoral theses. Kruks' *The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (1981) is too dismissive of Merleau-Ponty's later thought and also inconsistent in (correctly) characterising Merleau-Ponty's intention as reading Marxism phenomenologically while (paradoxically) critiquing Merleau-Ponty for departing from orthodox Marxist thought. Cooper's monograph *Merleau-Ponty and Marxism: From Terror to Reform* is excellent but somewhat dated through its insertion in a post-Althusserian problematic of 'Western Marxism'. Crossley's *The Politics of Subjectivity* (1994) engages at some length with Merleau-Ponty's political theory but selectively so as to facilitate his broader project of reading Foucault towards the construction of a phenomenology of power. As I have already suggested, one possible trap in addressing Merleau-Ponty's political theory is to see it as a series of texts intervening in particular disputes or moments – such as the articles published originally in *Le Temps Modernes* and collected in *Sense and Non-Sense* [1948] (1964) – and existing in relative isolation from his broader philosophy and social theory.

This would be a grave mistake. Just as I would argue that Derrida's interventions on particular issues collected in *Negotiations* (2002) partake in his broader theoretical concerns (and indeed given Derrida's insistence on the iterability of the signature and of the context of the text, one would expect nothing less), so too is the occasional character of Merleau-Ponty's political texts a consequence of his theoretical premises regarding the contingency and situatedness of the political decision, and his thematics of openness and hope. For Merleau-Ponty, as for this thesis, political knowledge is the knowledge of *phronesis* rather than some metaphysical isolation of essences. Therefore, I would disagree with Matthew's characterisation of a separation between a "general political theory" which can be applied to "particular practical issues" so as to fill "out our understanding of the theory itself" (2002: 111). Rather, the whole argument of this thesis is in agreement with Nicos Poulantzas' argument that there can be no totalising or general 'theory of politics' or reification of 'the political' as if it were a Platonic Idea (1978: 18-19). It is not feasible both for reasons of space and for the economy of the argument of this thesis to paint a complete portrait of Merleau-Ponty's political thought – a task which would be an interminable byway owing to the scope and number of his contributions over some decades, and also the way in which his political thought resists totalisation or systematisation [see the Preface to *Adventures of the Dialectic*]. Before substantively assessing the degree to which Merleau-Ponty's political theory is useful for the project of this thesis in constructing a phenomenological analytic of the political, it is first necessary (given the broader argument about the obsolescence of a *certain* Marxism) to address the issue raised by the secondary literature of the degree to which Merleau-Ponty's political

texts can be read as embedded within a Marxist problematic. It is this task to which the Chapter now turns.

Merleau-Ponty and Marxism/s

This section argues that Merleau-Ponty is incorrectly characterised as solely within the tradition of Western Marxism That he has been understood in such terms is a fact which admits of no doubt. I would argue that this misconception (held to greater or lesser degrees by different authors) is dominant within the literature - Merquior (1984) and others inscribe Merleau-Ponty within the tradition of 'Western Marxism'. This (mis)characterisation, which is in part a function of his discussion of Lukács in *Adventures of the Dialectic*, is no doubt one reason why recent literature on Merleau-Ponty's politics is so scant, though as McNeill (1974: vii) noted three decades ago, English-speaking scholarship had overwhelmingly and surprisingly ignored Merleau-Ponty as a political philosopher. The other reason is probably that Merleau-Ponty is not a systematising political philosopher or theorist in the English and American traditions, and thus his political theory is (wrongly) seen as being secondary and parasitical on his philosophy proper. Clearly, the fact that Merleau-Ponty [1955] (1974: 3) believes that "we would be unduly rigorous if we were to wait for perfectly elaborated principles before speaking philosophically of politics" and the related thread running through his work of the momentary and contingent nature of the political decision are virtues according to the argument of this thesis.

Kruks (1981: xiii) contends that Merleau-Ponty was able to make a contribution to Western Marxism until the publication of *Adventures of the Dialectic* and speaks of his "abandonment of Marxism" (1981: xiv). Confusingly, she presents Merleau-Ponty as if he were in the Hegelian tradition of Western Marxism (albeit with a phenomenological twist) up until his alleged 'break' with Marxism, after which he is berated for not sufficiently justifying departures from 'orthodox' Marxism. These conceptual and political confusions are typical of the misreadings and lack of contextualisation attendant upon attempts to write Merleau-Ponty into Marxism. Crossley (1994: 41) makes a very similar move to Kruks when he claims that Merleau-Ponty "specifically advocated" a "Marxist paradigm of theorising" before entering a "Post-Marxist" phase. Such readings are indebted to a narrative about French theory which sees Sartre and Althusser as theoretical giants and Marxism as a problematic which dominated French social and philosophical thought until swept away by Structuralism in the 1960s, its embers being laid to rest by the *Nouveaux Philosophes* in the mid-1970s (see Descombes [1979] 1980, Gutting 2001). As Judt (1992: 332) remarks, Merleau-Ponty also seems fated to be occluded by Sartre or assimilated to him as an 'existentialist' despite "the more rigorous quality of [his] work". Such understandings require correction and this section suggests that Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marx must be understood accurately in its social, cultural and historical contexts and as a phenomenological *engagement* rather than as a *commitment*. What should not be in play is the sense in which, as Derrida (1998: 222) thematises it in 'Marx and Sons', one is obliged to respond to *proprietorial* appropriations of Marx' legacy which circumscribe and delimit the spectures of Marx

who are always *plus d'un* in the name of claiming his proper inheritance through a singular filiation.

The historical context of Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marxism/s

Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marxism must first be understood in its social, political and historical contexts. As Gutting (2001) notes, the historical role of French intellectuals was very much conditioned by the continuing divisions in France associated with the dichotomies of revolution and reaction, republicanism and monarchism. Contests over legitimacy at the heart of the nation-state were overwritten with the thematics of Catholicism (Martin 1978). The association of anti-clericalism with *topoi* of Enlightenment and republicanism creates the sense in which the French intellectual can peculiarly be understood, in Benda's terms as a secularised clerisy. At the same time, the processes of modernity both undermine the cultural and political role of intellectuals as a social formation and reinforce a sense in which their conversation and discourse is both open to events and a self-referential *intertext*. The particular academic and social positionings and formation of intellectuals narrated by Bourdieu [1984] (1988) are also central to understanding the milieu in which Merleau-Ponty lived and worked.

Tony Judt (1992) captures well the particular post-war sense in which political events became central to the self-understanding and to the public conversation of intellectuals and writers, tracing a trajectory from the disappointments of both republican politics and the Popular Front of the 1930s to a post-war shift from a desire to remake society outside the antinomies of East and West to a retreat from an open political imaginary as the Cold War took hold. Judt's (1992), *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956* is very

perceptive on the social and political contexts of French marxisant intellectuals, though marred by an inability to think outside liberalism and a moralising censorious tone. Perhaps the best and most enjoyable way to venture into Merleau-Ponty's world is through Simone de Beauvoir's fiction and autobiographical texts – a voyage that can be made through reading *Les Mandarins* [1954] (1960) even more pleasurably than through *La Force des Choses* [1963]. Shifts in Merleau-Ponty's political thought can be fairly and precisely traced along this axis, as indeed Judt does. Merleau-Ponty's own texts such as 'The War Has Taken Place' and 'Faith and Good Faith' along with others collected in *Sense and Non-Sense* [1948] (1964) contextualise the trajectory of his thought along a path leading from a principled rejection of Catholicism - correctly understood by Cooper (1979) as important in terms of the French political field as sketched above - through an understanding of experience as historical and collective situated powerfully stimulated by the War and the Resistance to the Pascalian wager on the meaningfulness of history and political violence represented by *Humanisme et Terreur*. Merleau-Ponty's writing for *Les Tempes Modernes* inscribes his engagement with Marxism firmly within the current state of international and French politics and the dream of a Europe not beholden to either Russia or America. It also reveals the social and political pressures to *decide* once it became clear that a 'Third Way' was not possible.

Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marxism, then, is in a sense overdetermined, certainly by the symbolic and political power of the PCF and the desire of intellectuals to avoid Americanism but not least by the sense of possibility in his 1944 milieu which Robert Dubreilh evokes in de Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins*:

... the political situation at the present time is extremely stimulating; I hope you realise that. This is the first time the left has ever held its fate in its own hands, the first chance to try to organise a group independent of the Communists without running the risk of serving the cause of the right. I'm not going to let this opportunity slip by! I've been waiting for it my whole life. (De Beauvoir [1957] 1984: 50).

To read Merleau-Ponty as solely a Western Marxist, as both Crossley and Kruks do in different ways, is unsustainably wrong. It is to read him in the style of the Anglo-American liberal tradition of political theory, which as Judt (1992) argues is foreign to French sensibilities and political traditions, and it is also to read him ahistorically, unsociologically and outside of a determinate social context in the manner of a hypostasing analytical political philosophy. In a similar way, Kruks' characterisation of a rightward shift after a 'rejection' of Marxism is nonsense and it will be clear why when the Chapter proceeds to the distinctive reading of Merleau-Ponty's late political writing undertaken here.

Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marxism/s

So how then can Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Marxism be characterised? To begin by adopting Judt's summary of the phenomenological themes drawn out earlier:

In Merleau-Ponty, situation was everything. The body is situated in the world just as people are situated in their history. This described for him not only the given condition of humanity but also the terms of human serlf-perception – we can only perceive ourselves as situated, in our body and in a physical and historical context. It follows from this that we are always relative, to something and someone. This intersubjectivity – the duality of subject-object that is Merleau-Ponty's abstracted version of the master-slave dialectic – is thus the essence of our situated condition, the source not only of conflict but also of whatever knowledge and understanding we possess. But because this is a condition common to all persons, the mutual conflict and perception in fact create a

common bond and thus open up at least the possibility of community and harmony. History is not a war of each against all. (Judt 1992: 78-79).

Judt is correct to argue that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of history and politics is in tension with a certain Marxist privileging of a universal dialectic of history, but wrong to suggest that Merleau-Ponty is not aware of this tension. I have already argued that Merleau-Ponty must be understood within the particular contexts of French politics and the social field of the intellectual. In this sense, Matthews (2002: 115) correctly characterises Merleau-Ponty as "on the non-Communist, but not anti-Communist Left" while despite Judt's critique of decisionism (1992: 49-54) he appears unable to understand this distinction as (at least provisionally) a meaningful *tertium non datur*. Judt (1992: 77-79) correctly inscribes Merleau-Ponty within the tradition of Kojevian readings of Hegel, and I have noted above that Merleau-Ponty's early philosophy as well as his phenomenology of the political are indebted to Kojève. Similarly, the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, as revealed in *Les Aventures de la Dialectique*, is an important reference point for Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's interest in Marxism lies in its possibilities for the creation of "an effective morality":

> The dominant idea of Marxism is not, in the last analysis, the sacrifice of values to facts, of morality to realism. It is the idea of replacing the verbal morality which preceded the revolution with an effective morality, creating a society in which morality is truly moral, and destroying the morality that exists, dreamlike, outside the world, by realising it in effective human relationships. (Merleau-Ponty [1948] 1964: 162)

Merleau-Ponty's conception of Marxism, then, is both shaped by his phenomenological humanism, and in his conception of the openness and contingency of history, engages

much more closely with Hegelian and Kojèvian Marxisms than the 'orthodoxy' which haunts so many writers on his political thought.

Escaping Marxism

However, Merleau-Ponty's departure from his engagement with Marxism is of great interest. His earlier political thought – and it is necessary to observe once again that it has its specificity outside inscriptions within various reconstructions of the filiations and legacies of Marx – is not a free floating discourse but always attuned to what can be revealed in the history of the present conjuncture. It is highly significant, therefore, that he cast aside the "eschatological utopianism" characteristic of certain orthodox readings of Marx and Marxist praxes and forms of rule at the time when it became unsustainable to match a schematic and progressivist reading of history with a catalogue of undeniable horrors. His departure from a certain Marxism was announced in *Adventures of the Dialectic* and reiterated and refined in the essays collected in *Signs* [1960] (1964). Weber comes to the fore of Merleau-Ponty's political thought, and as Crossley (1994: 75-76) emphasises, Merleau-Ponty analysed Weber's own unmarked transcendence of his neo-Kantian postulates. Merleau-Ponty's post-Marxist thought – indebted to the injunction of democracy as an unfinished project and conscious still of the violences constitutive of liberalism, escapes the closure of the field of the historical which the dominant political imaginary and the traditions of modern political thought both instantiated. Crossley (1994: 90) writes:

> In his early, totalising, work, Merleau-Ponty had maintained that the social and history can be interpreted in different ways but he had urged that a synthesis be found to link these 'partial' views into a more complete (although always

incomplete) interpretation. Now he simply affirms that it is many faceted and is open to many interpretations. He rejects the possibility of a totalising view. For these reasons, contra Jay (1984), I contend that Merleau-Ponty has abandoned the attempt to totalise the social. The social, in Merleau-Ponty's later work, is a subtle, various and multifarious ensemble, whose inter and intra institutional organisation is open to more than one interpretation.

In large part, Merleau-Ponty's late political thought was the outgrowth of seeds planted in his early political theory and in particular in his phenomenology of corporeality and intersubjectivity. While it must have been painful to repudiate the solidarity of earlier political commitments (and no doubt to write the lengthy chapter on Sartre's "Ultra Bolshevism" in *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty was nevertheless faithful to his own concepts of the political decision appropriate to the conjuncture and to a certain ethics of engagement. For Merleau-Ponty, an engagement with history and the present still demanded an intersubjective and grounded extraction of meaning. Parsing Weber, he wrote (1974: 16):

> History has meaning, but there is no pure development of ideas. Its meaning arises in contact with contingency, at the moment when human initiative founds a system of life by taking up anew scattered givens. And the historical understanding which reveals an interior to history still leaves us in the presence of empirical history, with its density and its haphazardness, and does not subordinate it to any hidden reason.

For Merleau-Ponty, then, truths emerged intersubjectively through a confrontation with multiple interpretations and possibilities inherent in the process of extracting and divining meaning. Later, and in a move which no doubt prefigured the analyses of his student Claude Lefort, whose work this thesis has already discussed and drawn on, he was to laud

Machiavelli not as a practitioner of immorality but rather as one who understood the nature of the political and its truths.

The contemporary significance of Merleau-Ponty's thought

Merleau-Ponty anticipated Derrida's undecideable decisionism, and his thought has deep affinities – perhaps to some degree explained by his Weberian filiations and legacies – with Walter Benjamin's search through the ruins for the constellations which would recover meaning from apparent catastrophe. Merleau-Ponty is something of a deconstructionist *avant la* lettre, arguing for an epistemology which is always perspectival and indeterminate, and showing that there is both an affinity with the decentred knowledges of modernity with liberalism and a tension with the continuing anti-political desire to totalise to which it is always already prone (Carman 2008: 162-3)..Merleau-Ponty's later political thought sits within the totality of his philosophy, foregrounding contingency and seeking to dissolve dualisms and undermine the sovereignty of totalising rationalisms (Coole 2008: 85). But nevertheless, meaning is retrievable in his thought – through the tendential universalisation of "local histories" (Daeunhauer 2000: 245) and through finding "logic within contingencies" through the articulation of a phenomenology of political practice and the political conjuncture (Kruks 2008: 71).

In many ways, Merleau-Ponty also prefigured Laclau and Mouffe's insights into the necessity of a project of articulating tendentially hegemonic forces into a partial fixity of the social – another way of describing and performing the political, which the thesis has discussed in elaborating the confrontation of Derrida and Schmitt mediated through their

thought. But what is essential to take from Merleau-Ponty's thought as a whole is his elaboration of a phenomenology of the social which enables creative action to be theorised on the basis of a philosophical anthropology which is able to respect the desires of the Other/s.

I argue that Merleau-Ponty;'s thought can be read so as to gesture towards the fact that the work of reimagining and resignifying the social in the field of the imaginary is necessarily an intersubjective project, and therefore, I would argue, a project which must proceed from the times in which each generation finds itself endowed with a weak messianic power. He understands that narratives of meaning in history – teleological and secularised soteriological narratives – are constructions with a political purpose, and that we would do better to attend to the "now time", to adopt Benjamin's formulation, and scrutinise the signs of the times phenomenologically for the possibilities within a particular conjuncture and the new horizons that can be imagined, rather than remain enclosed within a linear temporalisation of the imaginary whose horizon in effect becomes a horizon of impossibility.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

Summation

This thesis has argued that the end of Soviet Marxism and a bipolar global political imaginary at the dissolution of the short Twentieth Century poses an obstacle for anti-systemic political action. Such a blockage of alternate political imaginaries can be discerned by reading the work of Francis Fukuyama and "Endism" as performative invocations of the closure of political alternatives, and thus as an ideological proclamation which enables and constrains forms of social action. It has been contended that the search through dialectical thought for a competing universal to posit against "liberal democracy" is a fruitless one, because it reinscribes the terms of teleological theories of history which work to effect closure. Rather, constructing a phenomenological analytic of the political conjuncture, the thesis has suggested that the figure of messianism without a Messiah is central to a deconstructive reframing of the possibilities of political action - a reframing attentive to the rhetorical tone of texts. The project of recovering the political is viewed through a phenomenological lens. An agonistic political distinction, it has been argued, must be made so as to memorialise the remainders and ghosts of progress, and thus to gesture towards an indeconstructible justice which would serve as a horizon for the articulation of an empty universal.

This project has been furthered by a return to a certain phenomenology inspired by Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ernesto Laclau. The thesis has provided a reading of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin as thinkers of a minor universalism, a non-prescriptive utopia, and placed their work in the context of

new understandings of religion and the political as quasi-transcendentals which can be utilised to think through the aporias of political time in order to grasp shards of meaning. Derrida and Chantal Mouffe's deconstructive critique and supplement to Carl Schmitt's concept of the political has been read as suggestive of a reframing of political thought which would leave the political question open and thus enable the articulation of social imaginary significations able to inscribe meaning in the field of political action. Thus, the thesis has argued for a form of thought which enables rather than constrains action under the sign of justice.The overarching aim of this thesis has been to perform a work of thought whose role is to remain open, and to point to an indeterminate but nevertheless utopic future ruled by the Messianic sign of justice, an always incomplete and empty sign, but one that can do work in the world nevertherless.

Too much of political thought, it has been argued, is either unknowingly complicit in the discourses which shape the way the world's possibilities are constrained, or mired within an attempt eternally to fix and contain the spectres of disappeared universal subjects of history. The latter – but for that matter the former – poses a temptation which haunts the desires of intellectuals – to speak from a universal position and/or to imagine oneself as an organic intellectual, whispering in the ear of the subjects of history. These temptations must be refused, as a matter of social scientific value and as an ethical (non) decision. However, Chantal Mouffe (2006) is surely right to say that political theorising matters, and it is explicit in the argument of this thesis that it does. It can be a partner in depoliticisation, or it can seek to open up – as a gesture to Others – an ethically intersubjective gesture to readers who may consitute its imagining of a community – a

way of thinking otherwise, of multiplying the differences but articulating them towards a tendential universalisation which would seek to hegemonise the empty place of the political. The task is not to totalise, but to articulate and negotiate (Derrida 2002).

Towards a phenomenality of the political

The basic problematic this thesis addresses is summed up well by Stuart Hall (2002: 22):

> The discourse of democracy is, to use the language of spectrality, haunted by the ghost of its ideal. The problem is that the gap between any actually existing system of democracy and its status as a universal regulative idea is read teleologically. So that each manifestly inadequate historical example is seen as another stage in the inevitable onward march towards its full realization - a moment of Hegelian reconciliation between democray's "real" and democracy's "reason". To the contrary, I want to argue that this "lack" is not contingent but constitutive of the democratic idea, which can only function as what Ernesto Laclau calls a "horizon" – without specific, transhistorical content: a necessarily empty signifier.

While democracy as such has not been a thematic highlighted in this thesis (but it has had an honoured place in a deconstructive sense in the interstices and the margins of the text throughout), Hall is deftly capturing the animating idea of the thesis – one that draws on the work of Lefort, Castoriadis, Laclau, Mouffe and others of a certain filiation to suggest that contestation over the imaginary significations of the social – which can never be fully fixed – is at the heart of the political. The converse idea is also represented well in Hall's 'Democracy, Globalization, Difference' (2002: 23-24):

> And here my argument is that in recent years, the balance in what we may call the relations of democratic forces has decisively swung against the democratic tide. The gap I referred to earlier between the stuttering incompleteness of its forms of empirical realization and its onward march as transhistorical ideal has been hegemonized. The ideas circulating within democracy's wider frame have been condensed into "liberal democracy" and liberal democracy reduced to the system that now prevails in the Western developed "democratic capitalist" world. This form of democracy is said to have reached such a close approximation to its ideal

that it is, for all practical purposes, complete. It may require tinkering here and there, and the sort of regular motor maintenance check to make sure the engine is running smoothly. But generally, in its sublating movement of supersession, the system is close to the complete "exhaustion" of its potential through its "realization"; bringing us, as Francis Fukuyama has argued, at last, face to face with "The End of History", in the sense that there are no great political conceptions of freedom and equality to come, no profound ideological work remaining to be done, no new political goals that are not already within our empirical grasp. Liberal democratic Man is The Last (natural) Man. This is the quasi-Hegelian conflation that underpins Fukuyama's vision of liberal democracy as "the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe".

Hall goes on:

> Fukuyama explicitly connects this completion of the liberal democratic dream within the West to its new, global mission… In short, as Derrida notes acerbically, "The alliance of liberal democracy and the free market" – their absolute and ultimate interdependence – "is the good news of this later quarter century". It is this couplet that has made liberal democracy the advance guard of the tremendous avalanche of neoliberal orthodoxy now sweeping the post-Cold War world with evangelical zeal. Fukuyama does not altogether deny liberal democracy's "dark side", nor that, here and there, the system might need a little light renovation. But these are assigned to the side of the contingent – "the empirical flow of events"… Their accumulation in no way refutes, qualifies or undermines the ideal, which remains "perfect" – the only coherent global aspiration to freedom. What Derrida calls "the telos of a progress that [has] the form of an ideal finality.

As I alluded to above, the usual response of those who are proprietorial about Marxism but who recognise the vanquishing of its posited universal subject is to suggest that somehow, sometime, it must be possible to oppose this universalising articulation of a particular formation of modernity and of the social formation that goes under the name of neo-liberalism a contrary discourse which would through its sublation take the place of a universal. The question of subjectivity is left somewhat obscure. Resistances, may, just add up to something, or the limits of the formation may just call into being their transformation.

But this thesis has been concerned to *show* that there is no hope in this universalism, which is always already caught up within the same necessary teleological movement founded on a "science" which recites, reinscribes and re-iterates particularly Christian narrativisations of the total.

With Derrida (1999: 219) the thesis has insisted, rather, that it is vital that attention be paid to what comes out of time, not through the articulation of a teleological utopia, but rather through the work of the negative that nevertheless scours the present for signs of a hope which may not be one for us, but which is one that seeks to do justice to the weak messianic power which a politics of generation and memory (and mourning) endows those who understand the force of the injunction which interrupts time. This temporalisation of the political shows that there is an illumination which could bring a prospective as well as retrospective justice to history, but one which is never coincident with itself, which is not a work in progress, but an exhortation which needs fulfilment and recitation throughout the ages. This retrieval of meaning requires a phenomenality of the political, a repoliticisation through phenomenologisation, and can only gain force through the articulation or the joining intersubjectively at the margins of lived experience. Submerged or minor traditions – such as those which the thesis has argued are exemplified by the figure of the *Marrano* and the revival of a certain Jewish messianism – are retrievable – at least in potential – through a politics that would combine awareness of the necessity of the undecideable decision with the inbreaking into time of a contingent Other. Correctly, this has been shown to be a quasi-transcendental universal structure. It has also been shown to be an endeavour which requires an

articulation of the theoretical with the intersubjective project of imagining otherwise, even if the content of an empty utopia needs to remain the field of legitimate and agonistic contestation.

At the level of theoretical imagination, this injunction requires articulation to a perspective which understands that contingency can be grasped in freedom, freedom however constrained or circumscribed or inscribed with its conditions of possibility, but freedom to begin – now – and urgently to reimagine how the social could be instantiated otherwise. A certain dissolution of the barriers erected in modernity – between mind and body and between the profane and the sacred – is among its conditions of possibility, the conditions of possibility for an ability to unveil the mystifications and reifications which create blindess to the *eschaton* that always haunts the political.

Directions for future research

Let me underline in closing what would be a necessary move in any further research which attempts to build on the insights of this thesis – that is a question of method. I have argued that schematic forms of political thought which do not pay attention to adequation to their objects and fail to discard and continue to be haunted by concepts which are no longer performing the task of interrogating the contemporary conjuncture ought to be reoriented. Explicit in this argument is a call for a return to phenomenology. It has been argued –with some force – in this thesis that it is wrong to counterpoise a teleological narrative which is a secularisation of a certain eschatology with its negative, in a quasi-Hegelian manner. Rather, it is suggested – as a political or an ethical

imperative or injunction as well as a methodological or heuristic device – that a return to phenomenology, but a certain deconstructive phenomenology, provides a more constructive and indeed necessary direction for the work of political thought

If the wager is correct and there are – contra those who would continue to argue for a totalisation in the absence of a universal subject of history – both retrievals of minor traditions available and constellations which can illuminate potentially visible shards in the history of the present, then an endless vista of possibility for operationalising, as it were, the phenomenological task proposed in this thesis opens up. This would be a direction for research, the thesis insists, that not only has the potential to revive a political theory which is far too readily haunted by its filiations in forms of thought which are perspectively coincident with majoritarian modernities, but also one which has the potential to shed light, to unveil, to map and trace fragments of action and creativity which have already emerged, but which are currently hiding their light under a bushel.

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