Intellectual Interchange and Social Practice

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The editorial for this final issue of *Arena* points to some of the directions in which two new *Arena* publications are likely to move.[1] It concentrates on how and why the concerns of the current journal have led to these proposals and restricts itself to general comments only upon the dramatic transformations of the whole context which *Arena* has sought to address. While it emphasizes that the heightened significance of intellectual practices is at the centre of these changes, it does not follow through to the end the implications of this argument.

The purpose of this article is to continue that project. It seeks to develop implications of the argument that elevating intellectually related practices to a central place in the life of contemporary society requires a radical revision of the way in which we seek to understand it. This is a theme which has surfaced repeatedly in the pages of *Arena* in recent years. Once we pinpoint the intellectually related practices, this immediately leads on to a changed perception of the forces at work during the whole period of modern capitalism and, since our perceptions of the communist and socialist movements are tied to that framework, it also affects the ways in which we interpret them.

Our first and underlying argument will be that no amount of emphasis on the core role of intellectual practices can be effective unless we can first make progress in establishing a qualitative break in the way 'forces for change' are seen to operate: that is, a break with established conceptions of technologically or economically determined social change, with the way in which class conflict is both conceived and is believed to produce effects, and a

radical shift as well in the way in which human agency is seen to be involved in social process.

Apart from their enhanced significance, the key point concerning intellectual practices is that they work within their own distinctive social medium. Their effects cannot be theorized in any adequate way when this medium goes unrecognized. By the same token, when it is brought into view, some reworking of the whole range of theoretical positions which have overlooked it is unavoidable. If, for instance, the practices associated with it generate effects, produce their own 'forces at work' so as to modify our conception of the actual interplay between the classes of classical capitalism or, for that matter, in another theoretical trajectory, with the status groups attached to some centre of meaning and action, this would be of basic importance. We would be grounding new perceptions of the limitations of these theoretical positions in the recognition of a process of interchange which had been hidden within or behind both idealist and materialist traditions; a process which, when lifted into the field of attention, may be seen to frame both traditions as it highlights their hidden assumptions concerning the intrinsic nature of intellectual practices. A moment's reflection will confirm that none of the classical social theorists offered us an account of intellectual interchange. In seeking to discuss it now we are faced with quite ancient practices which usually have been taken for granted but which demand attention because, under new conditions, their role has assumed crucial significance.

Yet there is a central difficulty. Before we can begin to grasp the metamorphosis to which intellectually related practices so greatly contribute, we first have to find a way of *seeing* something which from any conventional point of view is scarcely visible. That is to say, the distinctive social modality of intellectual practice and the way in which it is associated with a particular perception of the formation of the intellectual type within a social medium.

The overall structure of the argument to be developed in this article is not particularly complicated in the sense of the relations between its stages. But it cannot begin to move at all without a relatively long introduction dedicated to bringing the specific modality of intellectual interchange more fully into view. It will become clear that the practices grounded in this form of interchange should not be conceived as simply *continuing* the familiar practices of the classes in relation to the state, the productive system or the market. On the contrary, they envelop and significantly reconstitute these terms and hence the relations between

1. *Arena Magazine* and *Arena Journal.*

them. To a major degree the framework of cultural meanings, including the high culture and its institutions as well, either are drawn directly into the market or at least tied to the reproduction of the cash nexus which defines it. The class and status arrangements of classical capitalism also begin to break up; as the prospects for manual labour diminish, the intellectually trained, as the carriers of human capital, assume a key role within the workforce while their own now often redundant forbears within the old occupational structure drift towards an underclass. Under these conditions it becomes increasingly difficult to speak of the life of society within the perspectives associated with the classical traditions: an effect which is enhanced by the search for new directions to which the newer movements of political activism testify. Taken together, these changes cut deep into a cultural sense of being, as the formation of the self as social actor contributes to the comprehensive changes in the overall process of society.

To raise these matters is to indicate that before we can orient ourselves within contemporary society, a process of theoretical reconstitution is inescapable. While a focus on intellectual interchange is the point of departure for that project, it is also central for our primary purpose here, which is more practically oriented. It is not possible to act within a world which theory addresses and helps to 'bring to presence' if the contours of that social world are obscured by misrecognitions with which theory itself is complicit. What we are concerned with here, then, will be presented in a somewhat more general register than a critique of specific concepts of received theory. Our concern is with the way in which the manner of a theory's construction affects its orientation to practical life and *vice versa*. By working within that level of generality, we propose to work towards some similarly general remarks on how we might see the present in the immediate aftermath of the break-up of the bi-polar world. That is, a world in which the one pillar that remains will be seen to be set upon the same shifting foundation as that which has already collapsed.

The Basic Form of Intellectual Interchange

If the first task is to discuss the problem of 'seeing', this is less a digression than a preparation, a pause in which to take on board the concepts which can allow one to see what cannot be seen with the naked eye. Already the reader may ask: Why all the circumlocution? After all, is it not a fact that the social relations of intellectual practice are as obviously visible as are those of plumbing? One can watch a chemist working on formulae, measuring chemicals or reading gauges. What then is invisible about these material tasks or, for that matter, about the social relations of the

laboratory within which they are performed? Consistent with this query, two contemporary theorists, Latour and Woolgar, produced an influential book which compares laboratory life with the everyday practices of a tribe.[2] In their view, the world of the working scientist can be tackled by a field-worker using conventional methods. It is novel only in that the ethnographer selects a tribe on his doorstep and so foregoes a trip to a more distant other.

What is being suggested here is that these visible and obvious social relations associated with equally visible social contexts and practices are not the basic relations of intellectual practice at all. Rather, they are part of the manifest surface of a far less visible basic mode of intellectual interchange. It is the more basic form of interchange which should be the first focus of attention if we are to gain the sort of understanding of intellectual practice which can then allow us to specify its significance within the social whole.

We will argue that the primary characteristic of intellectual practice is how it is carried on by way of extended interchange: historically, first by writing, then by print, and in more recent times by way of the vast expansion of the whole computer-related system of information and telecommunications. In each of these variations, technological mediation is the constant factor which marks the break with face-to-face relations. It is this factor which permits absence from the actual presence of the other, by reason of the fact that his or her words are stored for access, whether by the duplication of books or by way of the terminals to computerized storage systems. These same two features, absence and storage, by detaching words from their authors, mean that words are no longer addressed to particular persons but rather to an anonymous and merely potential set of readers.

This in turn means that the basic framework of intellectual interchange carries an extraordinary interrelationship of self and other: a relationship which technically is not an inter-relationship at all. Taken by itself, it is a mode of interchange which requires an author to choose those other writers relevant to his or her own project. He or she must then synthesize a distinctive contribution which, when printed, becomes 'absent' from its author in the sense of it now standing as a potential resource for others who are not primarily interested in that particular or personal author but in the 'nameless' words. In principle, then, the other which stands over against each author is a vast sea of potential sources for the project in hand.

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2. See B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts*, Beverley Hills, California and London, Sage Publications, 1979.

If conceived from the point of view of the multiplicity of authors, the whole framework of interchange is like a manifold of overlapping networks of persons reaching out to the stored words of others and they, because their absence may be marked out both in space and in time, constitute something approximating to a universal medium. For each one, the relation to the other/others is an indispensable condition of an act of writing/becoming; it in turn, in being printed/published, loses the intense identity-conferring role which goes with authorship. As it declares its absence, it stands forth as simply a potential (re)source for other acts of synthesis/writing.

Clearly this whole system of interchange by absence, by storing and by 'bringing to presence' can carry a distinctive set of abstracted ethical imperatives,[3] and from the point of view of any particular participant can be experienced as a membership of an intellectual community which is both luminous and personal. But then turned around and seen as a system of sources it has another reality; it stands over against each one with the massive presence of the others[4] who, in their absent but nevertheless diffusely known existence, powerfully define the whole horizon of possibility. In principle, then, we are suggesting that by analytically segregating the basic form of intellectual interchange, we can begin to note the way in which it gives rise to an intensely autonomous practice as one indispensable term of a process of interchange for which, in the last resort, the key conditions are carried in the other — impersonally.[5]

Of course in real life there is no direct counterpart to this analytically segregated statement of the basic conditions of intellectual practice. For present purposes, it is stated in the manner of a parallel to the idealized interchange of buyers and sellers in a supposedly 'pure market'. As such, it is simply the basis for returning to that range of persons engaged in the immediately

3. For a directly related discussion see G. Sharp, 'Intellectuals in Transition', *Arena*, no. 65, 1983, pp. 84-95.

4. of that set of interconnected others who form THE OTHER.

5. It will be noted that looked at within an overall perspective, which is to say a perspective tied to a standpoint which while it takes in intellectual interchange is also partly set within other forms of social interconnection, intellectual interchange can appear highly ambiguous. In one sense it can appear as a system of interchange without any particular centre or, which is to say the same thing, with as many centres as it has active participants; this is the sense apprehended in the emphasis on any textual (re)source lending itself to a multiplicity of readings. In another sense it is also apprehended in contemporary linguistic theory as a massive otherness which stands over against any

visible activities which we associate with the intellectually grounded practices.

To return to the case of the chemist in the laboratory, it may already be clearer why he cannot, in any sense of a basic parallel, be compared with a member of a tribe. The hallmark of his practice, both with respect to its medium of social interchange as just outlined, and *also* in its relation to its material object world, is that it is technologically mediated. The chemist does not engage with that object world directly but by way of an apparatus — thermometers, microscopes, autoclaves, *et cetera* — which is brought to bear on materials which are broken down, refined or extracted from the way in which they exist in nature. This very process of the production of the materials for chemical and scientific practice is an abstractive one. Take for instance water: does the chemist make use of water, or does he use H_2O? The whole range of his or her activity depends on the availability of materials which only incidentally exist in nature[6] in the exact

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particular author of a text and by in effect speaking 'his' or 'her' text, signals the death of the author.

In outlining here a universal system of technologically mediated but nonetheless practical interchange, it will be clear that we are indicating certain parallels, and likewise intersections, with the voice and with language as a universal system of interchange. In both cases technique and message collapse into each other: there is a sense in which 'the medium is the message'; in each case, too, the universality of the medium means that in principle, even if in the face of experience, it can be rendered as decentred or even as centred upon the *particular* actor.

The point of stressing this parallel is that whereas language and linguistically modelled methods have an enormous influence in contemporary intellectual life, recognition of the specific modality of intellectual interchange has not. This parallel allows features of contemporary methods of interpretation, which could plausibly be argued to be limited or conditioned by the modality of intellectual interchange, to be projected onto the linguistic model. When there is no widely understood model available of intellectual interchange, along with its consequences for modes of awareness and personal formation, it could scarcely be otherwise. Moreover, this same projection onto language, as conceived generally, has a series of consequences:

1. it is a basic mechanism for the misrecognition of:
   a. the character of and specifically restricted nature of the medium of intellectual interchange,
   b. the character of all the other practices too;
2. this is because by claiming to be a single universal key it obscures the fact that there are a number of modes of interchange of which intellectual interchange is only one.

6. 'In nature', that is to say, in the way they are first drawn into the cultural practice of the society concerned.

form required for chemical practice. Without a technological mediation which takes hold of natural raw materials in terms which state their properties and potentialities for transformation (the periodic table, laws of thermodynamics, *et cetera*) in a qualitatively distinct way, there can be no chemical practice. Of course it will be evident that in everyday life we constantly 'state', which is to say that we take as given, the natural properties and potentialities for the transformation of things (for example coal for use in a fire as distinct from the production of carbon) which we take to be passing into direct use. Abstract, which is to say technologically mediated schemes of representation, however, re-categorize given, naturally occurring things in terms of more inclusive categories (for example, H2O re-categorizing water). These are schemes of representation which cut across the boundaries unreflectively experienced as directly given, even if often they are themselves dependent on an intervening technology for their formulation; they are indispensable for a wide range of scientific practices.[7] Finally, mediating, which is to say boundary crossing, which is to say abstracted/abstracting technologies and likewise second order things, are integral with the basic form of interchange of intellectual practice.

What we are discussing here, in its analytical separation for purposes of exposition, is *a distinguishable form of life,* a form which in some respects is quite an ancient one but which, only now in the twentieth century, has radically permeated the whole body of society, leading more or less rapidly to the transformation of its co-existing forms of social life within the social whole. As noted at the outset, it is this larger process which we are still preparing to discuss by way of these preliminary considerations of intellectual practice.

These must in fact be doubly preliminary: first of all in the sense of preparing a point of departure for later discussion; secondly, because these considerations do not push far into the

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7. It will be evident that in many instances a change in the mode of conceptualizing the interrelationships of natural objects is sufficient to serve as the point of departure for a scientific practice. The reconceptualization of the interrelations of the heart, the blood and the liver, once the heart is reconceived as a pump, is an example. In this process the heart loses some of its qualitative identity, it is assimilated to the more general class of pumps as a pre-condition for reconceptualizing its relation to the liver which is itself reconceptualized as an instance within the more general class of filters or clean-up stations. In practice of course a whole set of scientifically conceived practices intermesh: for instance chemical and microbiological practices, with a reconceived human physiology in the practice of heart surgery.

reconstruction of intellectual interchange as such. For the purposes of this introduction we will restrict ourselves to attempting to lift that form of interchange into view and to emphasize the significance of its role having shifted within the social whole so that it is directly engaged in the production and circulation of commodities and the reconstruction of social relations more generally. This will be to leave relatively unexamined the proliferation of computer-related and electronic media. It leaves unexamined too, at least until some brief remarks in the closing sections of this article, the question of whether the radical autonomy of the intellectual subject within a form of *social* interchange is not now affected by the qualitative modification wherein techno-interchange encompasses autonomous human subjects who are also post-human; which is to say cyborgs.[8]

While largely bracketing this fuller elaboration of techno-intellectual practices, we may say that before the scope of the changes being wrought by the changed role of intellectual practices can be understood in its full generality, the example of the chemist chosen earlier for purposes of illustration would have to be generalized, and qualified. It would be necessary to at least indicate how the whole sphere of production is coming to depend upon a diversified and comprehensive set of practices, the basic principle of which has the technologically mediated absence of the other as one of its faces, and the storing of his or her words as the other. This crucial mediation, it must be remembered, is at the same time the condition for bringing to presence selected members of the other for incorporation in any particular synthetic act. Within personal awareness, the overall effect is that in the last resort the intellectual person *experiences* an openness which places no limit on his or her capacity to do *their* own thing, to make their own world, within the terms of the given form of life. Yet, paradoxically, an analysis restricted by the horizon of intellectual interchange alone may represent that same person as totally 'spoken' by the medium of interchange in which they are engaged.

Any analytical segregation of a form of life grounded in intellectual practice must, of course, recognize that however much such forms of practice and interchange lift the participants out of a direct experience of tangibility and presence, this remains only a matter of a relative abstraction. That is to say this abstraction, not in the mind but in the techno-substantiality of the 'interchange' among persons both living and dead, can stand alone as a process

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8. See especially an article in this issue of *Arena*: Alison Caddick, 'Feminist and Postmodern: Donna Haraway's Cyborg', pp. 112-128.

of interchange which depends on no particular person. But this is by no means the case for the particular person who is engaged in abstract interchange. Just because each living person is inseparable from his or her own body, they are 'within themselves' tied to tangibility: it is inconceivable that they should be wholly abstracted whether in space or in time. Yet this by no means prevents the action back on the tangible body, or upon face-to-face relations, of the person's engagement in technologically mediated practices, whether by way of reading, watching television, standing by a computer-controlled machine or speaking on the telephone. In discussing these issues it is essential to recognize an analytical distinction between the system or process which depends on no particular person and the individual person's engagement in it.

In fact the ongoing life of a human society is inconceivable without intersections of more and less abstractly constituted practices. At the level of social relations or social interchange, it is certainly possible for some people to spend long periods of time exclusively within a technologically mediated setting of interchange; it is easy to understand too how, in some cultures, many people might have restricted experience of abstracted forms of practice which almost fully engage some of their contemporaries. But, by and large, within the terms of social relations or interchanges as distinct from the life of an individual person, the normal situation is for the intersection of forms of life constituted at different levels of abstraction to itself be institutionalized.

This is a complex field of possibilities and actualities, so much so that one could write a sociology of the intersection of forms of life, but a further development of the single example of the chemist will have to suffice here. In the case of the basic process of mediated interchange which is the primary condition of possibility for the case of chemical practice touched upon above, it is clear that this mode of interchange will intersect with another form, that of face-to-face social interaction, in the laboratory. A balance, an interpenetration of the two forms, is established in a way which will be somewhat differently accented depending upon whether we take the chemical practice concerned to be within a research laboratory or directly related to the work carried on in an industrial complex. In the latter case it will be framed the more clearly by another abstract relation — the law of contract as it relates to professional employment. Overall, however, it is clear that what we have here is not 'social relationships' which simply vary in their content. They vary too in the ways in which they are constituted as modalities of the social. Some involve direct interaction, others do not, so that technically the very concept of the social

may be seen as sometimes entailing direct interaction while at other times involving merely interchange in the sense of the appropriation of the words of someone who is not there for incorporation in a creative result to be printed for others — who may or may not collect it. This example suggests the way in which for a given person two differently constituted forms of life are likely to be drawn into intersection with the one typically enveloping, steering and using the other. But the far more significant process, even for the formation of persons, is the way in which forms of life intersect within the social process as a whole.

The main purpose of this introductory discussion of the less than readily visible forms of interchange, which operate within and behind the manifest expressions of the intellectually related practices, has been to prepare the way for this step. But before actually taking it, it may be useful to pause to re-emphasize that to discuss intellectual interchange with a too exclusive emphasis is to run the risk of suggesting that it is primarily concerned with objectifying or object-related practices. Given the current concern with the high-tech reconstruction of production and the re-orientation of even the core institutions of the intellectual culture towards that end, it can readily be seen that a pressure comes to bear upon the humanities. Interpretive study itself is trimmed to fit within an object-oriented preoccupation so that a shift in the polarity of the whole field of intellectual concerns becomes complete. Of course, this has not been the norm historically; more often what we are referring to here as object-oriented practices have been framed by interpretive concerns.

A common feature of the two branches of intellectual practice is the way in which they work with cross-contextual concepts, even if the way these concepts are appropriated differs markedly. While object-oriented examples such as water in relation to H_2O need not be repeated, cross-contextual concepts in the field of social interpretation come into focus less readily. By contrast with their counterparts in the sciences, intellectuals concerned with social interpretation are less active in generating cross-contextual concepts. Instead they are more likely to disengage already existing cross-contextual concepts from their settings of emergence or actual use in everyday life. Take for instance the concepts of class and market. Both have the effect of lifting people out of any prior involvement in a reciprocal form of interchange. To that extent they bridge, they cross contextualize, the specific locations of a person's prior engagement in a social form structured by kinship ties.

In this sense a person engaged in a class action *qua* class, or

whose identity is shaped by a class category, is in a practical and lived sense 'classed' more abstractly. In fact he or she enters into a substantively more *abstract* mode of engagement with the social world than does the person embedded in tribal ties of kinship. Yet while he or she may live the relations between more abstracted social categories, this person is engaged primarily in the world of common sense and experiences only tangentially the theories and interpretations associated with the more abstracted forms of intellectual interchange. Of course we are speaking schematically here and intellectual interchange is not a world closed in upon itself. But in principle what the interpretive intellectual does is to pick up the concepts emergent or in use in everyday life and explicitly recognize them as potential elements within a process of interpretation. He or she is especially concerned with understanding/interpreting[9] the interrelationships of these now explicitly conceptual categories, with reconceiving them and with elaborating new insights concerning those interrelationships. Of course theory is not a one-way street; a theory, it was once asserted within marxism, becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Translated into the approach adopted here, once printed, a theory is already a 'material' force, but only within a restricted field of interchange. When that field intersects with the practices of everyday life then, under given circumstances, intellectual ways of understanding are adopted either to recede into a restructured common sense or to lend everyday life some of the volatility of intellectual practice.

The importance of this emphasis upon social interpretation is that apart from balancing a certain necessary preoccupation with work and object-oriented intellectual practices, it can highlight too the transformation in social understanding required if the social metamorphosis of the present day is not to be misrecognized. Just because this metamorphosis entails an epochal shift in the way in which society is constituted, it also requires a radical shift in the way in which it is to be understood.

At this point, then, our introduction is complete. We will first set out in general terms the paradoxical way in which 'a break' entailing the interpenetration of two distinct forms of life operates.

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9. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to take up the issue of social understanding as a natural over against human scientific understanding.

The work of the chemist can serve as a convenient point of departure. Earlier we did not specify whether we were speaking of him or her as research worker or as professional and intellectually trained employee in industry. It is the latter possibility which will now be more relevant, with the particular case of the chemist being generalized to include a wider range of activities: chemistry, physics, micro-biology. The list could run on through a whole spectrum of practices reaching across the now devolving distinction between pure and applied sciences and the professional occupations which are in their various ways associated with the more widespread and workaday context of industry. Beyond that, we are in effect talking about a whole institutional framework which relates to production, to education, to the media, and to the mode of formation of the person. Intellectual interchange is taken to be an underlying form which shapes this whole sphere of social life. While for purposes of raising its visibility it has been useful to discuss it in relative isolation, the whole point of that exercise is to emphasize that the intellectually related practices are the carriers of an emergent world of their own. Yet, this said, intellectual interchange still carries within itself a certain requirement for coexistence with other forms of life which it now regulates as one of the conditions of its own existence.

In contemporary everyday life then, we are saying that this emergent world, along with its own potential divisions, is standing over against the world of modernity and at the same time is the dominant term within the process of its socio-material abstraction from that context. To put the matter this way is in no way to suggest that a process of socio-material abstraction is occurring *de novo* in some originary sense. Just because intellectual practices have their being in and through what is (at least in its general principle) a quite ancient form of interchange, they form part of the society from which they are being abstracted. The key point is that they are moving away from the particular way in which they were integral with a whole form of life.[10] That is, a whole form of life within which traditionally they were held in an ambiguous[11] yet, in the end, subordinate role. Today, they emerge as the

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10. I am using the phrase 'whole form of life' and sometimes later cultural 'form of life' to denote the whole complex society within which a particular form of life (reciprocity, commodity exchange) fulfils a central or dominant role.

11. Ambiguous because of the inherent tendency of intellectual cultures to

carriers of a potential for the comprehensive reconstitution of all of the social relations.

We propose to argue that while, in an empirical sense, we experience a pervasive sense of change, we do not achieve any adequate understanding of this process. Still held, on the one side, within the modes of understanding which classical social theory offered, we have no theory of intellectual interchange; the result is that in public life we still seek to construe novel effects with which intellectual interchange is associated within the analyses of the manifest social relations which have preoccupied the classical traditions. On the other side, there are the new perceptions made accessible by the post-classical methods arising out of the linguistic turn; but these, as we have already suggested, may also be complicit with obscuring the distinctive character and significance of the practices associated with the intellectual form of interchange.

In turning now, therefore, to focus on the assimilation of the world of modernity to that arguably post-modern setting within which the intellectual practices have assumed a central role, we cannot steer by any familiar methodological guideline. Instead we will adopt a hybrid method of approach: one which, while it draws upon both classical and post-structuralist points of departure, can best be described as an extension of classical 'representational' theory by reason of its basis being the invisible forms of interchange already touched upon.[12]

As a point of departure it is convenient to continue to concentrate to a degree upon the world of work and upon the objectifying methods of inquiry which, when taken up in the instrumental mode, lend themselves to the remaking of things. It is reconstitutive processes of this order which transform production and which have set the social locations of classes, strata and persons in motion. Again it is this same object-oriented approach which has made possible the proliferation of mediating technologies of social interchange: hence the mediated social forms and practices (the press, radio, television, *et cetera*) which allow institutional and personal locations to be reintegrated, even though those once again joined together are also absent. We are speaking here of a process

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break out of the 'whole forms of life' within which they have typically been held subordinate.

12. This is to refer to the sense of autonomous selfhood and the distinctive values associated with the 'invisible' form of intellectual interchange. As long as it is recognized as no more than one among a variety of modes of interchange, which may be universal within a given setting (cf. markets, reciprocal exchange), it lends itself to elaboration by way of comparisons which the linguistic methods can prompt.

of the larger social world being made over as if in a modified image of intellectual interchange as such. Yet this is not to suggest that we are simply speaking of a social world in which the practices associated with intellectual interchange exist alone and by themselves. If they are in the process of constituting a certain dominance, this is to speak of coexistence with and regulation of other forms of the social. In its internal aspect we have already illustrated this process of coexistence by reference to the chemist's laboratory. In its external aspect, which is to say in relation to that now arguably residual social whole which we speak of as modernity, the process of abstraction works through and alongside the forms it is displacing: the parish priest deploys the forms of rock opera in addressing his congregation while a peripatetic Pope is packaged as a media event; the hammer rests alongside the programme-controlled machine and the skilled tradesman stands alongside the metallurgist.

In speaking of this process of displacement it can readily appear as if the intellectually related practices act by themselves in accomplishing that result. No such implication is intended here. In fact we wish to argue that while the internal development of the intellectually related practices is significant, the actual directions in which they move are powerfully influenced by the ongoing logic of the production and circulation of commodities as set within modernity. Yet to simply stress progress, or the upgrading of skills, or a linear expansion of productivity is to miss the point. What is at stake is not the enhancement of the productivity of the institutions of work but their radical transformation, even displacement. The emergence into a dominant role of the form of interchange within and through which the intellectually related practices have their being is the key issue. Any institution, class or state as set within the terms of modernity which sponsors intellectual practices in the hope of 'more of the same but better' is likely to find that it has helped to give rise to unintended consequences. In pursuing this theme we will first touch upon the way in which the manner of social engagement of intellectually trained persons is linked to a specific sense of self along with a distinctive sense of values and a characteristic mode of social awareness. These are not issues which can be adequately handled within received theories of modernity. In the absence of an account of the basic process of intellectual interchange, these approaches in fact contribute to the unintended consequences we have already foreshadowed.

The basic argument, then, is about the way in which the practices associated with a post-modern social form, which is to say a form grounded in intellectual interchange, including its derivative

elaborations achieved by and through recently developed mediating technologies, can contribute to misrecognition: depicting a social process in a way which can be shown to entail a basic misunderstanding.

We have noted already that the social form of intellectual interchange is more abstracted than is the social whole of which it is both a part and which, at the same time, it addresses. Formally speaking, this is like asserting that two analytically distinguishable modes of engagement in the social are *constituted* at, that is lived within or actually existent at, two different levels of abstraction.[13] According to the argument being developed here, this enhanced level of abstraction always holds for the ideal typical case of intellectual interchange, but in the movement from modernity to postmodernity we are faced with something else as well. The intellectually related practices move from a supportive, even if also indispensable role within the structure of the social whole, to begin to assume the key role of reconstituting all other social practices. It is this historically new condition, wherein two potentially comprehensive forms of interchange and practice stand in an analytically specifiable relation to each other, which provides the context for the types of misrecognition which we wish to comment upon here.

It is clear that these types of misrecognition could not, in any clear or familiar sense, be regarded as class phenomena. At least as the situation presents itself, it would be more accurate to refer to them as being concerned with the way in which engagement in one cultural form tends to promote a demonstrably false account both of *that* engagement, and of engagement in a coexisting cultural form as well. And since in actuality, as distinct from implications drawn from the analytical models of engagement deployed here, the *same* person is likely to be subject to the pull of both modes of engagement at the one time, any full analysis is certain to be a matter of some complexity.

For the present, however, we will take the standpoint of a person whose dominant framework of representation is still set within the terms of modernity and who is seeking to interpret the pull of the emergent form of social life from that standpoint. This

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13. Herein this term is always answering yes to Sohn Rethels's question: 'Can there be abstraction other than by thought?' This substantive emphasis, the move from abstracted idea to constitutively abstracted practice, is established in the first part of this article but see also: G. Sharp, 'Constitutive Abstraction and Social Practice', *Arena*, no. 70, 1985, pp. 48-82.

inevitably takes the form of seeking to interpret effects traceable to the emergent social form within the terms of modes of understanding which are either well established, or can be readily deployed within the framework of modernity. Moreover, efforts at explanation are likely to focus on changes within particular institutions rather than upon any general transformation of the whole. It will be relatively obvious that it is a necessary condition of seeking to explain phenomena within an established framework that it should not be open to serious question as a general framework.

From a standpoint within modernity, radical changes which abstract people, which is to say have the potential to lift them out of established settings and to re-engage them in different modes of life, can be noted in every particular setting: in the move to high-tech work practices, in the multiplicity of media which reintegrate persons across the boundaries of more parochial settings of life, in the reconstruction of conception so that the simultaneous presence of both a man and a woman is no longer required, or by the introduction of nuclear weapons which have the potential to lift the place and the consequences of armed engagement out of any setting which could still be described as a battlefield. All of these instances have been discussed in previous issues of *Arena*. In everyday discussion what they have in common is the claim that the changes linked to the technologies concerned are no more than extensions of the normal processes whereby means are mobilized to achieve recognized ends within the framework of modernity. It is being asserted here, however, that in each case a misrecognition is involved, indeed must occur, as long as there is no clear understanding that in each of these cases the qualitatively distinct powers carried by the intellectual mode of interchange are involved. The consequence is that what is taken to be an extension of modernity in the sense of the further consummation of cultural goals set within a society constituted within one particular level of abstraction, is in fact a step towards the dissolution of that particular society. In some general sense, one might wish to look forward to that result, but to do so with confidence it is necessary to have insight into the actual process of transformation. It is the absence of that measure of understanding which is being noted here.

A general understanding of the way in which misrecognition produces an effect is a quite essential aspect of the discussion of the intellectually related practices as a form of life. A more formal statement can contribute to that end. In all of the illustrations just noted we are speaking of a public consciousness which engages with a new intersection: that of the form of life of intellectual practice as it establishes a new and radically transformative footing

within pre-existing settings of life. The above illustrations all arise within a society which carries within it distinctive cultural goals. These are associated with typical means by which people seek to achieve them, given the sets of relatively complex socio-material conditions under which the action takes place. Moreover goals, means and conditions are all relative to a particular cultural form. Hence, if under tribal conditions a person wishes to parent a child, this goal will be sought under the conditions of some version of a familial relationship set within the framework of a larger kinship unit; the means will inescapably include a direct union in the flesh of a woman and a man. Yet under contemporary circumstances, where the practices associated with an intellectually grounded form of life have begun to transform the reproductive practices of society at large, the means have changed; the cultural conditions have shifted markedly and even the goal can be conceived as being more in the nature of the project of a particular individual than was previously the case.

If we turn now to consider the way in which this shift in the role of intellectual practices within the social whole is publicly represented, the failure to appreciate the shift in terms of a change in the relation of forms of life is clear. Reference is constantly made to the anguish of parents who cannot produce children and are therefore deprived of the joys of raising them. By a change of means, the resort to *in vitro* fertilization, the suggestion is put that a mere extension of the means can restore normality within the existing form of life — even improve it.[14] Of course, for any particular set of parents this may well be the case, but how does one establish or maintain a limit if there is no clear recognition that the potential for a radical change of cultural form has been introduced?

In this particular case, then, we are asserting that, within the existing form of life, means have been introduced which have the potential to engulf the end or goal (couples having children) which they allegedly serve. From the point of view of the argument being developed here, the characteristic emphasis on personal aspirations contributes to the process of misrecognition. Seen from the angle of cultural process, as distinct from particular parental concerns, a wedge is being set in place which opens up the prospects of the original end being bypassed to give space for a new

14. This example has appeared in the pages of *Arena* previously. For instance, see Doug White, 'In Vitro: Towards the Industrialization of Birth', *Arena*, no. 58, 1981, pp. 23-29; also Alison Caddick, 'Surrogacy and Motherlore', *Arena*, no. 85, pp. 13-22.

end: one consistent with a form of life in which individuals independently want children and secure them by high-tech means. Seen from the angle of a given person's hopes within that cultural process, any suggestion of the displacement of goals of the form of life of modernity will seem preposterous. It will appear as a questioning of sacrosanct private rights in which people individually experience themselves as confirming a normal situation rather than contributing to its undermining. And it is exactly the aggregate of these private misrecognitions which drives the cultural process of transformation along; the demand for a normal private life serves as the deepest resource of the potential reconstruction of the existing situation by a different and more abstract form of being and interchange.

Much the same argument can be developed for a whole range of processes relating to the body — transplants and the developing trade in body parts being among the most obvious examples. It will be clear that this line of argument does not require us to take an unqualified stand for or against such developments which in any case are not absolutely novel.[15] The essential point is that one should see through the powerfully binding processes of misrecognition involved, processes which, as noted before, are not ideological in any narrow or particular sense of the way in which such representations arise within a class context (liberalism, socialism). Instead they relate to particular instances of interaction between whole forms of life. In that sense they are meta-ideological; a term which can suggest that a misrecognition function may be found both in particular class situations and in the interrelations of forms of life as well.

At a certain point in the development of intersections of the type being considered, the unintended consequence, in the sense of a feedback effect into the existing situation, becomes self-evident. The pursuit of what are believed to be the ends of conventionally conceived warfare by way of nuclear weapons is an obvious case of the means made available by a more abstracted form of life engulfing the end they supposedly serve. Yet even when this occurs there is no obvious move to theorize the way in which such seemingly insanely self-defeating practices are generated and manage to persist. At most there is an empirical recognition that in *the particular case* of nuclear weapons a means-end impasse exists. This is an observation which falls far short of a general recogni-

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15. Take for instance the special case of transfers of blood which is odd in the sense that because, like bone marrow or skin, the individual may give it away without the sense of loss of, say, a leg or an arm.

tion: that at different stages of development and in every institutional setting similar impasses exist. Given that each one is symptomatic of an underlying interaction wherein two forms of life constituted at different levels of abstraction have begun to interpenetrate, a general question arises. Under what conditions might it be possible for this process of abstraction to be steered reflexively? Under the aegis of interpretive rationality, the process of constitutive abstraction of the life form might still go forward, but with a difference. Instead of moving within misrecognition and replete with unintended consequences, the process of abstraction might be monitored from a standpoint not wholly set within the more radically abstracted forms of social life.

Intellectual Practice and the Question of Visibility

While the arguments just set out concerning the means/end impasse may carry a degree of plausibility, they certainly do not readily spring to mind as arguments in any full or systematic way for those engaged in the processes of change to which we have referred. One inference from this might be that since the theoretical framework from which these arguments derive is misguided, this result could have been anticipated. Another is that resistances to any full insight are so deep-set that even if the arguments are sound — that in due course a means/end impasse will become apparent — any confirmation through events is bound to be slow in coming.

So· far as any such impasse is already apparent, one might expect to find the first signs among those social movements which carry a critique of the present, especially those which relate to situations which affect everyone simultaneously as, for instance, the environmental crisis does or the issues of nuclear war and nuclear power have in the past. Among such movements one can also immediately point to the vigorous support of those who are immediately confronted by the issues to which a particular movement relates (nuclear scientists, women) or, more generally, whose social locations lie within the humanistic and interpretative branches of the intellectually related groupings. Furthermore, the modes of internal organization and the public style of the people involved in these movements typically express the autonomous accents characteristic of the intellectually related groupings. But, however informative a comparative analysis of responses among the social movements might be, we will defer it for the present and concentrate on the deep resistances to any full understanding

which mark the social setting within which the social movements have emerged.

We have emphasized throughout that the intellectually related groupings cannot have any adequate sense of either their own social engagement or of its now key role in social transformation if they have no grasp of the basic form of intellectual interchange. If this understanding is not present they are very much open to that critically important form of misrecognition which emphasizes continuity, rather than discontinuity, in the movement from modernity to postmodernity. Hence, before passing to a concluding section on the relevance of different methods of inquiry, we will first pause to suggest something of the depth of the entrenchment within the overall culture of modernity of orientations which preclude any ready recognition of the emergence of a different cultural form of interchange.

At the grassroots any such recognition is contrary to common sense, while theory itself, even as it seems to stand apart, is still restricted within the terms of what is manifest.[16] Theory therefore overdetermines the hold of the commonsensical while simultaneously the circumstances of modern history press in the same direction.

Within the field of common sense there has long been a perception that intellectual workers do not really work at all. Manifest work, quintessentially manual work, occupies the centre of the cultural perception of 'real' work;[17] more marginally, mental work may be recognized too, at least in those cases where the person can be 'seen to be actually doing something'. Teaching can serve as an illustration. When the teacher is actually teaching that counts as work, but then 'they don't start until 9 am, they stop at 3.30 pm, and during the year they have holidays which go on for months'. The hours during which the teacher may be engaged in the invisible work of preparation or 'just reading books' are the suspect periods. Every teacher experiences something of this reaction. Even the relatively experienced students of university teachers who are themselves familiar with the invisible intellectual

16. Including approaches, such as those of Durkheim and Marx, which draw upon manifest relations to offer an account of 'approaches to the construction of the "invisible"', which is in this case to say, other-worldly relations. In this context Weber can be overlooked since his interest in other-worldly presences was not grounded in theory but in assumption.

17. While those engaged in intellectually related work might immediately contest this account, their difficulty is that they cannot offer an alternative account along the lines suggested here.

practices of preparing essays are half inclined to believe that when their lecturers stand on the platform their words bubble out more or less spontaneously.

The argument being advanced here is that the classical distinction between people who work and people who are 'gifted' depends upon that between invisible work — which just because it depends on the mediated (re)sources of absent others can become doubly invisible by being conducted in private — and manifest work. Of course this sort of distinction has all sorts of accretions. In its general form, along with its alignment with hegemonic powers within the social structure, it is as old as class society; within intellectual traditions it reaches back to the ideal and otherworldly connections of the invisible.[18] Clearly these connections have endowed intellectual work with a degree of prestige which ties in with economic privilege and with influence and power generally. Overall, it serves then as one term of a dichotomy, that of intellectual over against manual work, wherein core elements of the intellectually related groupings contribute indispensable 'framing', in the sense of producing cultural interpretations within which class divisions appear to move. Given this profoundly overdetermined obscurity which envelops the actual process of cultural framing, it becomes easier to understand why it is hard to achieve the conceptual grasp[19] which an understanding of the social form of intellectual interchange demands. This is doubly difficult when intellectual practices are drawn into an existing framework of the production and circulation of commodities built upon the labour of the hand and its manifest operations in relation to machines.

If the changed role of the intellectually related practices is to be grasped, it requires that radical reorganization of an established way of understanding often spoken of as a paradigmatic shift. The first step along this path is to put aside the notion that these practices stand apart in some major degree and, in their interpretive role, frame the social structure and the institutions of production and exchange at work within it. This must be followed by a second step which recognizes that, in the process of their

18. Although here critique of the intellectual essence has leant towards its interpretative expression (calling, inspiration, gifted), this now coexists with an objectifying account (general intelligence, IQ, *et cetera*) which leaves that greater space for social formation which later modernity requires.

19. This understanding cannot be conceptual, in an explicitly volitional sense, simply because the absences which pervade the intellectual form of interchange exclude concepts associated with the presences which the more-or-less tangible varieties of face-to-face relationships offer.

displacing the hand, the practices associated with the intellectual form of interchange as such have become integral with production and exchange. Within this changed mode of engagement, intellectual practice rapidly loses that seeming aloofness or detachment whereby it could remain outside or above society. In its objectifying phase it becomes central to production, while in its interpretive aspect it is joined to an affirmation of the shifting meanings through which, on the one hand, commodities circulate and, on the other, modern/postmodern persons are formed and integrated with the social whole.

It is this point of intersection with modernity through the institutions of work and commodity circulation, along with the 'payoffs' of its first phase through the sixties and the seventies in relatively full employment and higher wages, which contributes most of all to that sense of modernity continuing, or even being enhanced. Moreover the sense of autonomy, and detachment too, which is so persistently thrust into the awareness of participants in the process of intellectual interchange, especially in its objectifying phase, readily connects to the individualist ideology of liberalism. It appears to extend it, in the sense of amplifying the individual freedoms which that ideology offered, while at the same time universalizing it. As the high culture of modernity, along with its class structure and its once sacrosanct divisions between private and public life are drawn into the circuit of the production and circulation of commodities, a compelling sense of consummation is generated. It carries a special force for the intellectually related groupings.

Just because the circuit of the production and exchange of commodities on the one hand, and the form of intellectual interchange on the other, are drawn into such a significant degree of fusion, a universal process can appear to encompass objectifying and interpretive rationality as the two inseparable sides of the making of meaningful things. This can carry the appeal of a world in which the divisions of social structure, inequalities between genders and even the distinction of subject and object as such, are collapsed into the circuit of the production of meaning.

We have argued that the commonsense perceptions of manifest work, which exclude any adequate recognition of the invisible form of intellectual interchange, are as old as class society. Common sense continues to play this role while the social disciplines which might be expected to offer some account of intellectual practice as such fail to do so; they fall into line with common sense. One need do no more than raise the issue for it to be evident that nothing of the sort occurs within the classical social theoretical traditions. Both at the general level of the theory of society

and in the special field of the sociology of work, the major figures in the field of theory maintain a respectful silence. A cynical response might be inclined to note that this serves to maintain a certain advantageous mystique and exclusivity. But while the force of common sense seems to offer a more rewarding account, by itself it does not take in the overdetermining role of the social sciences in maintaining a state of unenlightenment.

While remaining basically deficient, marxism, as has often been noted in *Arena* in the past, does at least offer an external account; that is, an account grounded in the social structure of the determining conditions of intellectual practices. Moreover, even if only at a descriptive level, it offers too an account of the feedback of intellectually elaborated representations into the ongoing practices of society. But in terms of the internal forms of interchange which, it has been argued here, are the essential conditions for intellectual practice as such, marxism has nothing to offer. When intellectual practices move to the centre of social transformation, when they clearly envelop what, in the marxist account, have been taken to be the externally grounded conditions of possibility of intellectual practices, a theoretical impasse arises.

By comparison with marxism Weber's standpoint, with its emphasis on charisma, can only be regarded as retrogressive. Its intensely individual emphasis tends to diminish the external conditions which marxism accents, while at the same time it all but excludes the preoccupation with an internal form of interchange and with abstraction as introduced in the present discussion. An underlying problem with both these traditions is that they approach social analysis with too strong an emphasis on structure. This has the effect of de-emphasizing the relatively general form of interchange, the dominance of which in a particular society is integral with its structure. The effect is to exclude the possibility of viewing a society as a manifold of interpenetrating forms of interchange, constituted at different levels of abstraction, each one carrying its own distinctive structure.[20]

Such a conception of society entails a basic reservation concerning any attempt to develop a theory of society at a single level of abstraction; which is a characteristic, even if not quite consistently maintained,[21] feature of the classical traditions. Its implication when applied to a central theme such as the division of labour must be to see it as inadequately conceptualized in its received

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20. For instance reciprocity, as expressed residually now in family structure in interrelationship with commodity exchange.

21. Cf Marx on the commodity abstraction.

form. The division of labour is a clear example of a single-level conception, in the sense that the division to which it refers is all on the one horizontal plane, as if the activities being divided were constituted in the same mode: manifest activities all constituted at the one level of abstraction.

It also follows that, for a sociology of work, a two-dimensional conception of the division of labour is a basic requirement.[22] Unless vertical differentiation is recognized, unless it is understood that some forms of interchange are actually constituted more abstractly than others, analysis must fail. That branch of sociological inquiry which might be expected to point up the distinctive form of interchange which marks off the intellectually related practices will fail to contribute to understanding. Overall, both at the general level of the theory of society and in the specific sphere of the sociology of work, one is drawn to the conclusion that the classical traditions are locked within, and feedback to reinforce, common sense. The effect is that the character of the metamorphosis affecting contemporary society goes unrecognized.

The processes that we are discussing have gone forward in a particular historical conjuncture. Half a century ago when the struggle we speak of as the Cold War took shape it was universally taken to be a conflict between two ways of understanding and acting which emerged under the conditions of classical capitalism. One effect of the Cold War was to freeze the terms of historical understanding; that is, to stamp in with redoubled force that clash of modes of interpretation which had first taken definite shape within classical capitalism, three-quarters of a century before the revolution of 1917 pointed forward to the clash of world systems. Under the conditions of the Cold War there was little chance of serious consideration of a view that held that what was at stake was not simply a structural clash of liberalism and socialism, of class ideologies entrenched as ruling principles for opposed super-powers.

Before the emphasis upon intellectual interchange set out here could have been seriously advanced or entertained, the protagonists in the world struggle would have had to have left their set positions and recognized that a deeper movement was involved. Instead, socialist and liberal democratic frames of understanding, which in retrospect may appear to have already been outmoded at the beginning of the Cold War, were fixed in place, whether by the sense of a final holocaust which that struggle projected or by

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22. This notion arises from critical analysis of Durkheim's writings undertaken in conjunction with Nonie Sharp.

the sense that only two options were available, as the reversible slogan 'better red than dead' so effectively conveyed. Rather than public understanding beginning to move towards a grasp of changes which went to the roots of our sense of being, these changes were corralled within, and appeared to lend a super-charged power to the views of reality conveyed by the established frameworks of left and right ideology. Nuclear power, the computer, DNA, even the linguistic turn were not taken to be express-ive of the reconstruction of social life in terms of a radical break; their significance was to offer or to provide an account of the consumption of more of the same.

If common sense, along with theory and the historical conjunc-ture all contribute to an unawareness of the nature of transition to postmodernity, this last concept itself has certainly gained momen-tum with remarkable speed as the Cold War has wound down. Following its inception in relatively esoteric intellectual circles, it is now beginning to establish itself in wider circles of interpretation and to make its presence felt in discussion of everyday politics. Here we will begin to draw the discussion to a close by noting how theoretical developments which are taken to 'represent' post-modernity in fact contribute to the difficulty of placing it historically.

A Preliminary Reflection on Method

It was noted earlier that the critical standpoint adopted in this article could be described as an extension of classical representa-tion theory (see p. 198). While accurate in its general emphasis, this designation could mislead unless it is also added that such an extension is proposed so as to account for what can only be des-cribed as *post*-representational realities. We mean post-representa-tional in the sense that 'images', which one takes to indicate the content of a situation and to which any conventional representa-tion theory must refer, are unimportant, at least in relative terms. McLuhan's remark, that the medium is the message, can still serve to convey the point. Linguistic models are well suited to portraying the active processes of meaning construction in which the contemporary media and information systems are involved. While television, for instance, does determine which content is available, any particular content is less significant than our en-gagements in that form of interchange.

To propose a more general theory which emphasizes form is also to comment indirectly on what we perceive to be deficiencies in the post-structuralist methods associated with the linguistic turn. We noted earlier (see footnote 5, p. 192) that these methods could be seen to stand in a certain parallelism with what we have

presented as the basic form of intellectual interchange:[23] both purport to be concerned with structurally unmediated forms of universal interchange.

Our contention is that the parallel arises from the fact that once universal interchange becomes central to the reconstitution of society generally, it breaks up the structures of modernity which classical methods assumed could be discursively appropriated by words like representation, reflection or resemblance. Intellectual practice, including its post-structuralist expressions, has this effect because its distinctive mode of appropriating/constructing a world is cross-contextual. This is nowhere more apparent than in the setting of the media. Brought into being by intellectual practice, the media forms of social engagement are conspicuously concerned with the production of meanings. However, the practices of signification, along with discursive construction generally, do not hold those involved in place by contributing to the formation of fixed settings, settings which achieve a degree of permanence which turns them into objects for *representation*. This whole process of the formation of fixed settings is integral with condensed meanings and the ritual forms which sustain them. The media, however, constitute meanings in and through flux. They transgress, they live off the deconstruction of fixed meaning. Their practice of cross-contextual fluidity entails constant circulation through a form which, like intellectual interchange itself, has its being only in and through a process of circulation.

In taking this position we do not need to reject the proposition, popularized in post-structuralist method, that everything knowable is known in and through language. Rather, we need to ask whether this is not too general a proposition to allow the flexibility which social understanding requires. In this article the emphasis upon cross-contextual representations provides the point of departure for grappling with this issue. For illustration we may return to the concepts of class and market as cross-contextual in character. The tribal contexts which are so clearly removed from concepts such as these must be redivided by cross-contextualizing groupings and practices (classes, exploitation, private property, contract) as a condition for at least a vocabulary of key instances drawn from this second range of representations to arise. While these new categories are taken to resemble their substantive objects of reference, they are also held to be in interrelationship so that explicitly,

23. Intellectual interchange as discussed in this article is an elaboration of a formulation in G. Sharp, 'A Revolutionary Culture', *Arena*, no. 16, 1968. The emphasis on 'absence' offers both a parallel and a contrast with positions developed by Derrida. See, for example his 'Signature, Event, Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

in the case of the theorist, an attempt may be made to identify patterns, or causal relations which, for others who are not concerned with theory, might remain below the threshold of awareness.

This type of approach to social understanding fixes upon a limited body of key representations and it is these condensed and relatively stable elements and not the infinite productivity of generally conceived significations which is relevant for purposes of understanding and framing interpretations; this remains the case even when clear changes are occurring within the given context. As indicated at the start of this section, however, the very notion of representation as referring to *content* may break down. Then, in so far as the concept retains relevance, it is as a reference to *form*. This shift is such a radical one that in everyday life it is a good deal easier for most people to respond to it by way of the sensibilities rather than by the conceptual articulation which is the stock-in-trade of intellectual interpreters. The crucial case of representation as form for present purposes is the representation of the form of intellectual interchange. As noted earlier (see footnote 5, p. 192) we are proposing that in the absence of a theory of intellectual interchange, those engaged in its processes can recognize themselves in and through the parallel, even if not quite congruent, form of language. The mismatch arises by reason of a specific and significant variation. Whereas language is a universal form, in the full sense of being a medium in and through which all other forms of interchange give or find the most general expression of their being, intellectual interchange, however important it may become, remains only one component within a whole social form and the key sets of 'language' variants it contains.

The distinction has two important consequences. In so far as intellectual interchange as one particular form recognizes itself in another fully general form, which is to say in language, a quite basic misrecognition is involved. The consequence is that its intellectual participants experience themselves as potentially or actually the whole of society. Moreover, they may also experience themselves as decentred when they are in fact subject to a mode of regulation which the sense of universality and openness conceals.

From the point of view of that branch of universalizing intellectual interchange which is object-oriented, the notion of its being decentred *qua* this form of interchange is in no way novel. After all, the contemporary claim that science is a discourse without a subject is just a different way of dressing up the familiar notion that scientific verification is independent of the particular person performing it. But the notion of decentring takes on an entirely

different significance if, as we are proposing, object-oriented inter-change has expanded or is expanding to become the sole form of interchange. Under these conditions the very concept of language can only relate to the interchange of coded information by way of artificially intelligent technological mediation. To speak in these terms is to pass beyond the technological mediation of print which formed the basis for the model of intellectual interchange set out in an early part of this article. There we spoke of the powers of any particular participant in the complex interplay of intellectual subjects being 'extended'. To speak of artificially intelligent inter-change is to speak of 'absence' in another mode. It entails replace-ment of a human agent (for instance decisions to launch nuclear weapons) in settings of systemic interchange, and potentially of techno-biological symbiosis (the cyborg) in terms of the person. In short even if a universal, inclusive and objectified system of interchange were to be approximated it would have assumed a new centre: an artificially intelligent rather than a human one.[24]

For any approximation to universal interchange in the inter-pretive mode the prospective situation is distinctly different; it is inconceivable without the category of the subject even if for a particular individual the role of the interlinked others constituting the Other may at times be represented as 'speaking' that particular subject. Alternatively, as we indicated above, when this same universal circuit of signification is approached from the point of view of the subject, then it may seem that any given situation may lend itself to an infinitely diverse set of constructions of meaning. We are arguing that the post-structuralist approaches which accent the model of language and stress both its universality and rele-vance for all situations are engaged in a projection of intellectual interchange. Intellectual subjects, in and by projecting their own universal but at the same restricted mode of interchange onto language, open up two options in misrecognition. The first, being 'spoken' by the Other feeds into compliance with the reifications inherent in the objectifying practices associated with intellectual interchange. The second celebrates the multiplicity of radically autonomous subjects who must nevertheless imply at least a residual outside to intellectual interchange, projected and mis-recognized as universal signification. Unless such an outside is at least implicitly recognized there is no reference point for the

24. The radical expansion of modes of social interchange is discussed along lines compatible with this article in John Hinkson, 'Post Lyotard: A Critique of the Information Society', *Arena*, no. 80, 1987, pp. 123-155.

cross-contextual,[25] which is also to say transgressive, practice which is integral with interpretive interchange.

The previous discussion of the means/end impasse suggests that interpretation has at least the potential to recognize the dilemmas it entails. To that degree is tends to require the regeneration of a less abstracted outside to intellectual interchange as a necessary and at least minimally stable ontological grounding. This in turn is to suggest that whatever the scope for speaking/spoken subjects within intellectual interchange, the basic location of such a subject will be both inside and outside intellectual interchange as such. Paradoxically then and by reason of a reflexive practice which partakes of two contexts as a condition of its being, the interpretive subject establishes a firm centre. A centre which, in an interpretive sense, is inside language. Yet it is not locked into the intellectual mode of interchange alone, as any misrecognition of this form in an overgeneralized conception of the role of language in the actual practice of life might seem to imply.

This final section has assumed the form of a miniature working paper which begins to elaborate the methodological perspectives which arise from the effort to extend representation theory. Its basic message is to point back to practice and this, in the present metamorphosis of social life, is to direct a question with a special force to the person. The reconstitutive practice, which must be part of any serious engagement in contemporary life, can no longer move within the one-sided emphasis on the social question which dominated the movements of revolution and reform within modernity. This must be balanced by an equal preoccupation with the ontological question.[26] The relative omission of that concern in this article certainly calls for a complementary exploration of the changing ground of the self.

25. Cross-contextuality is discussed in relation to intellectual practice in G. Konrad and I. Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, Brighton UK, Harvester Press, 1979, pp. 307-21.

26. This is a distinction which Guy Rundle has accented in the course of his writing and discussion.