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# THE NOSTALGIA FOR LAW AND ORDER AND THE POLICING OF KNOWLEDGE

## *The Politics of Contemporary Literary Theory\**

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I

TWO DECADES AFTER THE PUBLICATION of Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, at a time when its impact has been institutionalized in the academy and contemporary theory has situated itself on new boundaries, it is embarrassing to encounter a text that regards deconstruction as "the latest form of literary criticism."<sup>1</sup> Such a misrecognition of deconstruction's place in the history of postmodern theory is all the more embarrassing in a text that appeals so eagerly to history as the most genuine mode of knowing and puts forth empiricism and a positivist use of evidence as the condition of possibility of knowledge. Here is a text, then, that rejects deconstruction because it is based on "gross historical falsehoods" (p. 11), but is itself caught in a false history: this rift in its discourses points up the aporia that besets its entire narrative, a narrative which employs, in order to construct its fantasy of a threatening philosophical mode, such historicist simplicities as the notion that deconstruction is a manifestation of "the spirit of the times."

"Yuppies"'s ignorance of the intricacies of the postmodern situation and its complete unfamiliarity with the most basic discourses of deconstruction surface in its opening pages where it takes its tutor text, Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice*, to be an instance of deconstructive literary criticism, a characterization that is the product of still further confusion, and a very significant one, since the whole argument of "Yuppies" is founded on this assumption. Although it offers itself as an investigation of contemporary critical theory and its social and cultural conditions, "Yuppies" is nothing more than a simplistic book review, one which masquerades as an interpretive essay, but its analytical sophistication is consistently below the level of the "cultural" commentaries of newsweeklies where the "average American voter" (to use "Yuppies"'s phrase) gets his ideas. As a cultural commentary, "Yuppies" is a tissue of banal observations, trite remarks, populist and anti-intellectual platitudes, and reactionary slogans put forth in sweeping claims that are represented as "argument."

The reviewed book, *Critical Practice*, is part of the "New Accents" series that Methuen publishes for sixth formers (students in the last year of high school in Great Britain) and beginning undergraduates. Far from being inventive contributions to contemporary critical theory, these books are nothing more than popularizations of various critical concepts. They are, in short, summaries written by academics who have discovered that by commodifying new critical theories they can advance their professional careers: another

*\*Parts One and Two of this essay are written jointly by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton. Parts Three, Four, and Five are by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh.*

mark that what “Yuppies” regards as the “latest” in contemporary theory is already the domain of academic entrepreneurs.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that Belsey’s book is without its uses: it does indeed fill a gap (hence the success in its marketing), but only as a pedagogical *exercise book*. It is by no means an exemplary text of postmodern critical theory and it does not present itself as such. We would have thought it reasonable to expect an essay proposing a serious examination of deconstruction not to engage a book of summaries written for novices, but to address the writings of (at least) Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man and other thinkers and theorists who have developed the problematics of deconstruction.

“Yuppies”’s understanding of its tutor text and of deconstruction is philosophically highly problematic, since it naively declares that Belsey “clearly presents” (p. 12) deconstructive thought. It is rudimentary that deconstruction contests the very possibility not only of “summary,” but also of “clarity,” and “representation,” arguing that by maintaining the illusion of “clear representation,” Western logocentrism has set up hierarchies which enable it to regard language as a transparent medium for communication between sovereign subjects who are assumed to have access to some transdiscursive knowledge—presence. “Yuppies” in fact offers no sustained thinking about deconstruction as a theory/philosophy. If at the beginning of the essay the reader is promised an exposition and examination of the “internal flaws” of deconstruction, the promise is never fulfilled. Rather than “providing” arguments (the established mode of conducting philosophical debate in the humanistic tradition to which it is committed), “Yuppies” merely “refers” to other “authorities” who have supposedly made the arguments, thus acquiring its own authority by simply appealing to authorities. These “authoritative” texts themselves turn out to be not sustained philosophical inquiries, but mere journalistic discussions and book reviews. Even when “Yuppies” is not referring to such sources, it is “thinking” journalistically: its major terms (Yuppies, weight lifting, computers) are all used with the same conceptual shallowness one finds in *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *Village Voice*, where the central issues of the day are presented as a set of amusing and frivolous notions. Instead of presenting “logical argument” (the lack of which it bemoans in deconstructive discourses), “Yuppies” constantly covers up its inability to think rigorously by substituting for detailed counterargument clichés like these: “is simply wrong” (p. 13), “entirely bogus” (p. 13), and “the counterevidence. . . is mounting up” (p. 22). The reader is never shown why something is “wrong,” what is “bogus” about the argument, or the kind of counterevidence that is “mounting up.” In other words, trite expressions replace “logic,” “evidence,” and “argument.”

Looking, at another level, into what “Yuppies” regards as “definitive” critiques of deconstruction, one finds no awareness that these critiques have themselves been subjected to critique. For instance, Thompson’s “reading” of Althusser (who is no deconstructionist) has been critiqued by Perry Anderson,<sup>3</sup> whose reading helps explain why Thompson is not mentioned in contemporary theoretical discourses: for if his work is “little known in English departments” (p. 12), it is because—as Anderson shows—it is difficult to take him seriously as a theorist. Thompson’s theory cannot explain the historical process: his view of history (and his subsequent critique of Althusser) privileges “experience” (and the adjacent discourses of empiricism), thus allowing him to postulate the individual and her will as the agent of history. Although he proposes that the historical process is the outcome of clashes of class interests and forces, he sees class itself as nothing more than the collection of individual men and women. Ultimately for him “class formation is a process of self-making.”<sup>4</sup> He goes even further and quite explicitly states that “agency lies, not in class but in men.”<sup>5</sup> Such a view of history, giving priority to the individual and regarding the historical process as the resultant clashes of the individual wills and desires collected in social classes, cannot explain why, as Anderson puts it, “the intersection of rival collective wills [should] not produce the random chaos of an arbitrary, destructured logjam.”<sup>6</sup> Thompson thus fails to account for the ordered nature of the historical process, how—in Sartre’s words—history can be made an intelligible “totalization without a totalizer.”<sup>7</sup> Althusser’s theory of history aims at answering this question by considering history a process without a subject. More on this later; however, it is important to note now that Althusser problematizes the individual and his role in history by questioning the idea of experience as the luminous moment of reality, its reification (in empiricism) being for him the domain of error, the site of ideology. Instead of following the traditional scholarly practice of informing the reader of the complexities of the contemporary debates on such issues, “Yuppies” in fact attempts to suppress such knowledge.

Faced with its meager scholarship, its disregard for evidence, its ignorance of the basic issues involved in contemporary critical theory, its inability to argue, its unfamiliarity with the history of postmodern philosophy, and its conceptual and analytical naiveté, one must ask several urgent questions: Has the “Yuppies” essay been refereed, as is customary in literary, scholarly, and general university journals? Are there actually three “readers” who are informed about deconstruction (and do not merely have an “opinion” about it), contemporary philosophy, and literary theory, and have still recommended its publication? How does such a trivial essay suit a university publication that advertises itself as “an Interdisciplinary Journal of *Ideas*” (emphasis added)? If the essays published in the journal are not refereed, how can the university justify subsidizing it as a journal of ideas?

The next question, of course, is why bother to engage such a trivial text? Why intervene? Because to ignore a trivial text such as “Yuppies” on the grounds that it is intellectually and philosophically empty is to confuse it with its ideological “uses.” The emptiness of the trivial text is not a matter of editorial or authorial neglect: “Yuppies”’s philosophical naiveté, its misrecognition of history, and its sheer intellectual vacuousness are as much historically constructed as are the theoretical sophistication and historical understanding of “serious” texts of culture. This, by the way, is why what is embarrassing on one level of discourse is illuminating on another: the embarrassing moment involves the sudden, unexpected, and rather violent removal of the rehearsed response, and it is in this unprotected moment that the embarrassing discourse is seen in its situationality in the economy of cultural signification. The naiveté of the trivial text is constructed by the historical vectors of signification since it is in the spaces of the trivial that the dominant ideology reproduces the reigning ideas and repairs the damage that the discourse of common sense has suffered in its conflicts and clashes with antihegemonic discourses. Ideology proposes a way of seeing: the author/editor/producer of the trivial text is ideologically situated at a position of intelligibility from which only that which is necessary for reproducing the existing social relations is seen. The trivial text, in other words, is unable to see what in fact it encounters, and it is in this ideological blindness that its historical significance lies. The trivial text opens up a textual/political space for the recycling of those discourses required to legitimate the practices that enable the existing set of representations to endure. In the cultural spaces articulated by the trivial text, the dominant ideology reproduces itself, constructs and maintains those subjectivities needed for the perpetuation of the status quo. Through such texts the dominant ideology offers the reader a position of intelligibility from which he can make sense of himself as a continuous subject in spite of the changing discourses of culture.

At times of crisis, like the present, when the continuity of the subject is threatened by the intervention of oppositional discourses, the trivial text acquires immense significance. By reproducing the traditional positions of intelligibility, a text like “Yuppies” helps secure the old subject-positions needed for prevailing social arrangements. This is why the trivial text cannot be ignored; its political uses in culture indicate the operations of larger frames of intelligibility and their connection within the dominant power/knowledge relations. To transform these relations, it is necessary to intervene in the circulation of the trivial text since it is only through such an intervention that the specular relation<sup>8</sup> of people with the world may be changed and the continuation of the hegemonic representation interrupted. It is necessary, we maintain, to combat the dominant ideology because it foreshortens the horizon of historical possibilities by constructing the world in terms that legitimate the interests of one class by subjugating others.

Only a sustained ideology critique of the trivial text (which we undertake in Part Two below) can disclose the political function of its naiveté and conceptual innocence. Like all modes of knowing, “Yuppies”’s naiveté is, finally, an ideological position. The ahistoricity with which it posits deconstruction, for instance, as the “latest” mode of literary theory rather than as an intellectual problematic of the 1960s,<sup>9</sup> allows “Yuppies” to empty theoretical practices of their material specificity and reduce critical theory to a set of disembodied, free-floating “ideas.” By declaring deconstruction the “latest” mode of criticism, “Yuppies” renders nonexistent the more powerful and politically dangerous forms of postdeconstructive critical theory: deconstruction becomes the “generic” avant-garde theory, a marker beyond which one need not go. In other words, the “naive” ahistorical space of “Yuppies” operates as a containing space, one in which the dematerialized discourses of theory are moved around to fit a narrative of *apocalypsis*, a tale of ideology



that, like all such narratives, acquires its closure by a political logocentrism that posits the oppositions of history as the binaries of nature itself. The foreclosure of history thus obscures the larger frames of understanding—in which today's struggles are understood as contestations of power/knowledge—and regionalizes the issues within a simple, local frame—in which the political struggle over meaning in culture becomes a frivolous “battle engaging the thirty-five-year-old set” (p. 11) in various Anglo-American English departments.

A historical understanding of the contestation, however, will reveal that what “Yuppies” presents as a merely regional issue is indeed a global problem: the struggle over “meaningfulness” (the status of knowledge in culture) involves much more than English departments. At this moment in the history of the West, there is underway an interrogation of the practices in the production and dissemination of knowledge in “Cultural Studies” (traditionally called “the Humanities”—a label still used by guardians of the dominant regime who attempt to preserve the old forms of knowledge under the guise of various “Programs in the Humanities”). From anthropology and ethnography<sup>10</sup> to law and zoosemiotics,<sup>11</sup> existing modes of knowing are currently being questioned. It might be helpful to mention the configuration of issues and their institutional context in one such case, a case in which the outcome will have deep and direct consequences for the relationship between knowledge and material daily practice.

One of the most significant challenges to established forms of inquiry in the field of law has been launched by what is known as “Critical Legal Studies,” a mode of inquiry that questions dominant legal discourses and regards existing legal practices and legal institutions as instruments of social control.<sup>12</sup> This development has affected both pedagogical and research practices in almost all major law schools, but we will instance here the case of the Harvard Law School, which has “the world's largest and best collection” of practitioners of Critical Legal Studies.<sup>13</sup> Putting under erasure liberal legalism, which conceives of law as a set of neutral principles derived from justice, Critical Legal Studies contests the dominant view that when these principles are applied in daily practice to various cases, they produce a consistent result. Instead it holds that the result varies because of the highly complex effects of power produced by acts of interpretation, by textual indeterminacy, by semantic incoherence, and by ideological control. In this view, law is seen as a state apparatus whose purpose is to preserve the dominant social order by reproducing and maintaining the subjectivities necessary for perpetuating the prevailing order. In short, the “rule of law” is a fiction required for the operation of liberal capitalism. At Harvard this new mode of inquiry has exposed deep divisions among the faculty, forced the postponement of some tenure decisions, and raised questions about the school's ability to attract faculty, a situation akin to the one “Yuppies” is horrified to see affecting English departments.<sup>14</sup> But the horror of humanists and their allies in university central administrations—who speak as if the termination of their particular mode of domination is the end of civilization itself—is not the horror of finding tensions among faculty (this is merely a thin naturalization), but the horror of discovering that the myths of neutral knowledge and disinterested inquiry upon which the liberal academy is founded are collapsing upon themselves under the weight of the contradictions in the capitalist regime of truth.

The trivial text must therefore be addressed, and it must be addressed in a manner that can account for its ideological uses in culture. It is part of the ideological operation of the “Yuppies” text that it “regionalizes” the “global” contestation over signification in contemporary knowledges as a squabble among various factions in the English departments of Anglo-American universities. By undertaking such an operation, “Yuppies” diverts attention from the politics of cognition and from the ideological struggles over the “real” in culture to provincial debates, petty personalizations, and gossip—all cultural devices for trivializing the discourses of society and thus rendering them safe for the status quo. We are addressing the trivial text of “Yuppies” because we are committed to the political contestation of the “real”—to the struggle over the constitution of “meaning” in postmodern culture—and because we believe that the “meaning of meaning” in society is the outcome of such political contestations that are carried out, among other places, in social texts such as “Yuppies” and our own. This means that we are not writing as impartial subjects, but are rather articulating the crisis of signification in postmodern discourses from a given historical post of intelligibility. This is another way of saying that we are not writing to reveal the Truth and then use that

Truth to expose the Untruth of “Yuppies.” We find such a pursuit of Truth philosophically and politically uninteresting, historically obsolete, and more of an amusement for liberal humanists than a serious endeavor for committed intellectuals. Liberal humanists, who believe that they have access to Truth (or at least can discover it) engage in “debates” whose function is not merely to reveal the Truth, but also to indicate who owns it, an activity that reproduces the relations of private property. The “Yuppies” text, far from being the embodiment of Untruth, is in fact a representation of (Absolute) Truth for many of its readers, especially certain kinds of contemporary academics. These readers find the subject-position and systems of intelligibility offered in “Yuppies” quite illuminating of their own class positions and of the imaginary relations to the world that such a position produces. “Yuppies” becomes “Truth” for those academics because it offers them a discourse that ideologically justifies their pedagogical practices in support of their (social) class position and their political views. Denouncing deconstruction, “Yuppies” legitimates the dominant interpretive and reading strategies through which these academics situate texts in culture and assign meanings to them.

Instead of addressing the traditional question—What is truth?—we have focused on why a set of statements is regarded as “true” by a circle of readers. This procedure requires that we not simply (as in the traditional manner) offer counterarguments to dislodge the statements made by “Yuppies” (a strategy that would presuppose that we have access to an absolute transdiscursive “truth”), but that we show how “Yuppies”’s statements acquire “truthfulness” among certain readers with particular class affiliations. In order to follow the trajectory of “Yuppies”’s statements to the moment when they become intelligible as “true,” we have had to situate them in the archives of contemporary knowledges so that we could point up the discourses that are involved in their construction. It did not make sense to us simply to “argue” against “Yuppies”’s position on computers in postmodern culture, for instance; we thought it more important to indicate why “Yuppies”’s position on computers is attractive (“truthful”) and to indicate, when a reader nods in agreement with “Yuppies”’s position, what ideological series lies behind that nod.

## II

**B**Y PRODUCING A SET OF CULTURAL “OBVIOUSNESSES,” ideology assures the continuation of the dominant representations of the real in a culture, without the requirement of “proof.” For example, that “experience” is the ultimate test of “truth” or that all phenomena in the world are made intelligible by the logic of “cause and effect” are among such ideological “obviousnesses.” By establishing uncontestable (because obvious) truths, ideology postulates a world that has always already been there and will always already be there, a world of unalterable truths and unchangeable verities to which the individual must consent since these truths and verities are the effects of “laws of nature.” To show how “Yuppies” postulates these “laws of nature” and how it operates significantly as an ideological text, we need to articulate the system of assumptions that enables its “readability.” The “unsaid” of the “Yuppies” text can be textualized by an inquiry into its presuppositions about history, science, textuality, meaningfulness, subjectivity, and politics.

The idea that history has an “inner essence” expressed in different eras through various outer phenomena is, of course, the hallmark of a mode of historiography that postulates history as a teleological movement of events through diverse “periods” towards the unfolding of a transcendental (political, logical, theological) plan. “Yuppies” sees various contemporary events (the emergence of deconstruction, computers, Yuppies, body building) as manifestations of such a hidden *Zeitgeist*. This theory of history, which controlled historiography in the nineteenth century and has found in various forms a place of privilege among conservative historians in the twentieth century, has become popular again recently (in the mid-1970s to the 1980s) as the political climate in Western Europe and North America has taken on a decidedly conservative cast.<sup>15</sup>

This theory of history (based on a notion of causality usually designated as “expressive causality”) appeals to the conservative mind because it constructs history as a closed narrative, thus becoming a stable and stabilizing force amid the chaos of diverse and confusing events. Though its philosophical underpin-

nings are in Leibnitz's notion of "expression," it was of course most powerfully elaborated by Hegel.<sup>16</sup> Hegel postulated the stages of the progress of what he called Spirit (Idea as unfolding in Time) as "periods" in history, each with its own unique *Geist* so that human history not only "expresses" the grand design in its totality, but also is a manifestation of that "purpose" in its smaller moves.<sup>17</sup> The concept of "period" as a monolithic space within which different and apparently various events can all be seen as manifestations of one single purposive force has indeed been a most useful tool for popular historiography. Through the notion of "period," a form of historical thought which Althusser calls "historicism" represents history as a set of relations between men and thus suppresses the relations of production in order to postulate a history in which a telos and a subject are privileged in the linear organization of periods.<sup>18</sup>

By appealing to the idea of "period" and allied suppositions (such as that history is rational, coherent, and teleological, as Hegel himself saw it), "Yuppies" can read recent developments as an "odd assortment of phenomena" (p. 20) that together express the spirit of our time, a time when things are "not in good shape" (p. 22). "Yuppies"'s linear history is marked by periods that are sharply different from one another (it refers, for instance, to the "crisis of the present, which is very different from the . . . crises of the past," p. 20). Condemning one contemporary phenomenon as an expression of unreason, "Yuppies" states that the "capitalist mode of production' . . . is not a static entity" (that is to say, has good phases and bad ones) and that the irrational phenomenon in question "belongs to the capitalism of the last few years" (presumably bad) and not to "that of nineteenth-century England" (p. 20) (presumably good, otherwise there would be no point in comparing the two). That the selfsameness here attributed to each period is—as in all modes of historiography based on the idea of expressive causality—more of an ideological than a "rational" order can be easily demonstrated. The period "Yuppies" regards here as good, the mid-nineteenth century, is equally (and still rationally) seen in reverse as bad: "Most mid-nineteenth-century Englishmen wanted to be imperialists and despised people weak enough to be conquered" (p. 17). Unless we assume that "Yuppies" itself supports imperialism and therefore regards mid-nineteenth-century imperialist England as good, we have no choice but to read the period represented as both good and bad, which is to say *not* as a unified, selfsame, and seamless moment in history which manifests a particular, identifiable *Zeitgeist*, but as a moment traversed by difference.

"Yuppies," however, attempts to suppress alterity and excludes the different by an implied appeal to the notion of rationality. Hegel's concept of Reason as the "law of the world" vaguely lies behind "Yuppies"'s account of history and makes it possible to equate "reason" with the Real and thus to designate the oppositional reality which is politically and ideologically threatening as "un-reason"<sup>19</sup> and to place it on the fringes of history as the "un-real" of culture. Since the unreal is the absence of reason, it has a mere existence (not reality) and as such it is a "contingent" (not "necessary") part of history which will soon perish. By understanding history as purely rational, by removing from the scene of history as unreal all that is opposed to the dominant order, such a historiography produces a history of exclusions.

It is in promise of a coming period of joy and generosity that theories of "expressive causality" in Hegelian historiography, as well as in their contemporary adaptations, rejoin the more popular religious and millenarianist narratives of redemption and thus reveal their teleology to be a mere variation of their underlying theology. In Hegel the end of the journey of history is self-consciousness—Freedom of the Spirit. He represents this Freedom as an absolute, logical, and universal category that has nothing to do with historical and cultural coordinates. History's destination, for "Yuppies," is a freedom also represented as universal and transcultural—a mode of moral freedom. The agent of redemption in teleological historiographies varies from historian to historian. In "Yuppies" it is the higher authority of "science." The science which is represented in the text, however, is a peculiar synthesis which is hardly recognizable in the light of contemporary scientific discourses. "Yuppies"'s science, like that of the nineteenth century, is highly positivistic, relying heavily on empirical evidence, a no-nonsense enterprise that gets things done, like the low technology "Yuppies" also admires. At the same time, this science has somehow lost the harshness of nineteenth-century positivism to become a compassionate science, situated somehow adjacent to the discourses of "Native Americans" and associated with "mystery," "reverence," and "faith" (pp. 19, 22). "Yuppies"'s scientist then is more like a guru or the pastor of the neighborhood church. What is this image of the



hard but compassionate figure except the ultimate (and ultimately desirable) patriarch? More important, this is a science which has nothing to do with technology (pp. 17, 22).

"Yuppies"'s narrative privileges a world of low technology ("typewriters," for instance, p. 18), and of work involving the use of human muscles and leading to the production of real things, not "paper and services," a world which, although celebrating actions of the body, regards body building as an act of self-indulgence, indeed a form of narcissism (p. 20). That this is also a world of patriotism and xenophobia is clear from the text's ambiguous attitude towards the Third World (p. 19). In this world, the primary text of literature is privileged over the confusing text of criticism (p. 17), and straightforward, commonsensical interpretation is preferred to esoteric modes of reading. The authentic (not phony) response to literature and the other arts, "Yuppies" declares, is physical and emotional: reading a poem should make you feel that the top of your head is coming off (p. 18). Finally, it is a world of honest work and real people who assert their humanity primarily by their "feelings" (p. 18) and not a world of fraudulent human beings (Yuppies). In short, this is the world of "back-to-basics," the restoration and maintenance of which is "Yuppies"'s political agenda, an agenda—to repeat—which is represented as moral rather than economic/political.

At present this honest, moral, and generous world is besieged by foreign, destabilizing ideas and threatening behaviors which run the gamut from deconstruction to the use of cocaine. Although offered as standing beyond the coordinates of culture as an absolute norm for being, "Yuppies"'s world is very much (like Hegel's concept of "Freedom" of the Spirit) a historically specific construct. Represented as logical and universal, Hegel's Freedom is instead a formulation of the political ambitions and desires of the bourgeoisie of his time, who were betrayed by Frederick William III who reneged on his promise for a constitution. Hegel's free state resembles uncannily the political agenda of the liberal bourgeois of his time and the notion that a constitutional monarch would indeed change the situation of oppression in Prussia after the Napoleonic Wars.

"Yuppies"'s absolute moral norms are also historical and political: its narrative is that of a powerless class suffering from lack of access to intellectual strategies (deconstruction), working skills (computers and high tech), leisure activities (body building), and the privileges associated with the executive class (Yuppies). This is the plight of the contemporary petty-bourgeoisie, which needs a comforting narrative that ideologizes its *lack* as a higher mode of *non-lack*. Not knowing how to use a computer or read deconstructively, the petty-bourgeois is offered in "Yuppies" a moral superiority: economic and political powerlessness is "imagined" as moral powerfulness by the use of a cultural encyclopedia that facilitates this form of naturalizing the world. "Yuppies"'s narrative (the history of a period in which moral confusion, that is, economic "lack," dominates the world through such alien apparatuses as computers, deconstruction, and the oppressive practices of body-building Yuppies) is a political and ideological narrative: it aims to secure the world for its audience. The goal of the discourses of ideology has always been to provide what Hodge calls, "categorical security."<sup>20</sup> By condemning deconstruction and supposedly allied ideas and practices, "Yuppies" provides categorical security for the petty-bourgeois by placing him/her in a position of intelligibility from which the world makes easy sense in terms of the straightforward interpretation of texts and all that is associated with such a mode of (common)sense-making. Unlike the bourgeoisie which was Hegel's disguised audience, the petty-bourgeoisie "Yuppies" addresses neither has nor dreams of having political power and is thus reduced to moralizing the world. Only within such an ideological frame does the value of "Yuppies"'s science become clear: science is the only mode of knowing with sufficient authority (for the petty-bourgeois intimidated by its social prestige) to dislodge the moral confusion of "pseudoscience" (deconstruction). "Yuppies"'s science is "hard," but compassionate and comforting. Part of the low-tech world, it is, on the one hand, unlike technology (which merely adds to the confusion of the petty-bourgeois's simple world) and, on the other, similar to religion. It is above all a close reflection of common sense, the only "knowledge" with which the petty-bourgeois feels at home.

"Yuppies" then is the text of a political ideology passing itself off as nonpolitical, moral truth beyond all the coordinates of history. Trivial as it is, "Yuppies" serves a necessary ideological purpose: it opens up a politico-textual space in which the traditional practices of the petty-bourgeoisie are relegitimized and given



new life. “Yuppies” is ideologically located in a space which renders impossible the very modes of economic and political analysis that can inquire into the powerlessness of the petty-bourgeoisie and thus offer ways to empower that class. This moralization of the plight of the petty-bourgeoisie and its permanent economic and political subjugation is necessary for the reproduction of the dominant relations of production. At the present time, the interests of the hegemonic economic powers are in fact represented in the United States and Western Europe by the conservative ideologies that have found their political power through the administrations of Ronald Reagan, Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher, and Jacques Chirac. These conservatives will not last in power without the support of the petty-bourgeoisie, whose votes they need. To get those votes, conservative ideologues will have to represent the traditional ideologies and views of the petty-bourgeois as eternal moral truths and offer the conservative administration as the only legitimate moral force available at the present time.<sup>21</sup>

The political function of texts like “Yuppies” is to make sure that the vote of the petty-bourgeoisie is delivered and that conservative administrations remain in power to protect the economic interests of the ruling classes. The vote will not be available without the creation and maintenance of a permanent petty-bourgeois underclass. “Yuppies” aids that permanent subjugation. By taking a neo-Luddite, anticomputer approach, for example, rather than encouraging petty-bourgeois youth to learn the necessary skills, “Yuppies” provides them with the categorical security through which they can renounce computers as signs of moral evil and thus withdraw from (post)modernity. Such a withdrawal will do nothing but widen the gap between the two classes and thus keep the petty-bourgeoisie always a powerless class with strong moral views—views which are exploited by ideological texts like “Yuppies” in order to perpetuate the hegemony of the dominant social relations. It is by privileging the moral in social practices that the status quo is enabled to reproduce itself by, for example, substituting moral measures for economic sanctions against South Africa (witness the slogan, “Using Morals, Not Money, on Pretoria,” in the *New York Times*, 3 August 1986).

This moral approach to life is given official approval in the academy through what is called the “humanism” of the traditional practices of the humanities. Humanism, in its contemporary manifestation, is, in the last analysis, an ideological discourse the purpose of which is to reify petty-bourgeois values and attitudes in the guise of timeless truths.<sup>22</sup> As a mode of aggressive reading, deconstruction is rejected by “Yuppies” as simply a manifestation of contemporary inhumanity and violence; but much more than this is at stake in such a dismissal. Used as a reading strategy by the petty-bourgeoisie, deconstruction will dismantle the moral explanations given of the plight of that class and will detect the violent hierarchies and elaborate textual schemes at work to represent the ideological interests of political conservatism as the moral ideals of the petty-bourgeoisie.

The humanist narrative of security, however, is easily reversed into a narrative of confusion by simply pointing out that the coherent period by virtue of which “Yuppies” represents an indivisible essence that underlies the manifestations of deconstruction, Yuppies, computers, etc., at the same moment in history is not coherent at all, and that the purported essence of the time is really a set of accidents. One rather quick way to demonstrate the nonessentiality of this supposed essence of the times is to construct, within the same historical period, counternarratives that undermine the dominant one proposed by “Yuppies.” One such counternarrative will relate deconstruction to feminism (which, like deconstruction, is based on dismantling the patriarchal hierarchies of society), to the emergence of the Green party in Germany (which aims at rendering the contestation of the superpowers for global domination through nuclear superiority as an ideological binarism that should not be imposed, through the narrative of freedom, upon the rest of the world), and to the opposition of the African National Congress to apartheid (from the late 1960s to the present) in order to delegitimize the official narrative of sameness (racial purity) in South Africa and the prevailing inscription of difference (white, black, colored, Indian, and so on) in that country’s political system. Both the “Yuppies” narrative and the counternarrative are “coherent,” but both are also “ideological,” their enabling conditions being an essentialized history that allows closure. History, nevertheless, is actually the effect of struggles between these and many other contesting narratives and cannot be contained in any one of them. It gives the humanist nightmares to realize that there is no empirically available history, that history is always already textualized and narrativized, and that the attempt to move beyond

the textualization in order to get to history's core is also one of the texts that cultures write about themselves, one of the discourses of ideology. History—and here is the fear of the conservative mind that “Yuppies” embodies—is not a “solid” thing, but a contestation of diverse textualizations. To recognize that history is not an empirical thing, but the set of contrasting narratives, is to recognize that that narrative which gets installed as history does so not because it is an embodiment of Truth in some general and abstract sense, but because its “political” truth legitimizes the existing power structures. It is, in other words, not the selfsame and self-evident Truth of eternal verities that informs history, but the truth of the contradictions of the material forces and the relations of production. These truths cannot be turned into a linear progression of periods towards some moment of transparency as the goal of history. If one has to think about history in terms of causality, then causality has to be reunderstood and theorized in terms of what Althusser has designated as an absent cause: contrary to the view of the “Yuppies” narrative, history is a process without a telos or a subject.

Such a reunderstanding of cause-effect is ideologically impossible for the “Yuppies” text, since in such a reformulation of these laws of intelligibility, the text would lose its grip upon a reality that it needs to understand as “solid” (p. 13) and out there. A theory of history based on expressive causality makes it possible for the text to postulate an essence that is always behind phenomena and that as such always anchors random events in the lawfulness of order.



“Yuppies”’s representation of the world as a lawful, rule-governed, and authoritative check on our conception of “reality” is reinforced by the theory of knowledge to which it adheres: empiricism as the mode of knowing the world.<sup>23</sup> In the name of empiricism, “Yuppies” rejects the postmodern view that data is always already an interpretation situated in ideology, for fear that such a view destabilizes “knowledge” and threatens not only its authority but Authority itself. Hardly a purely scientific or philosophical issue concerning the reliability of knowledge, empiricism is also implicated in political and ideological questions. Jerome Bruner points to the involvement of politics in the development of empiricism as a theory of knowledge when he remarks that “[t]o be sure Locke did not *invent* empiricism: it had flourished before him in Hobbes and grew afterwards in the writings of Bishop Berkeley and David Hume. Note that all four of them lived in a period of rising mercantilism when prospering merchants were seeking an equal footing with king and church, or at least freedom from exploitation.”<sup>24</sup> Empiricism, in other words, is the scientific and philosophical ideology of a rising class—a class that is attempting to dislodge the “authority” of Divine Rights and Divine Revelation by postulating Nature itself as the source of knowledge and that furthermore theorizes that access to Nature is direct, free, and open to all. Having by our own time succeeded in obtaining power, however, the bourgeoisie is attempting to maintain that power by transferring “authority” from Divine Right to Nature so that Nature in itself becomes the source of uncontested knowledge, indeed replacing Divine Revelation. Freedom for one class then becomes suppression of others, and it is this suppressive, authoritarian aspect of empiricism that is institutionalized in various forms of modern positivism. “Yuppies” puts forth this view of knowledge as the only “scientific” form of knowing and in doing so offers a theory of science which is, as we have argued before, suitable for the petty-bourgeoisie today and highly useful to the conservative agenda.

Because of the very “success” in our day of what is popularly understood as the “scientific” (that is, the “empirical”) view of things, it seems at first implausible to link empiricism to idealism and theology. Althusser, however, has persuasively emphasized this connection: for him, empiricism is a secular transcription of a religious mode of knowing. In theological theories of knowledge, true knowledge is obtained at the moment that the opacity of the material world is transformed into an epiphanic transparency by means of an “expressive reading,” that is to say, “an open and bare-faced reading of the essence of existence.”<sup>25</sup> This “expressive reading” regards “meaning” to be not the effect of the act of reading which is historically situated in the discursive practices of culture, but the inherent quality of the texts of the world which is “revealed” in them by a direct reference of the text to the master code of the logos. Underneath

all their variety, empiricist theories of knowledge also postulate a similar untroubled passage of “meaning” from the “object” to the consciousness of the “subject.” They are based on the notion of “knowledge” as an unmediated moment of lucidity and plenitude that transcends the processes that in fact engender it. Empiricism is an idealistic mode of knowing that dematerializes and depoliticizes knowledge. This idealism is inscribed in the specific procedures and assumptions about reality that are supposed to be involved in the emergence of knowledge. Knowledge, it is assumed, is the outcome of an abstraction of the true essence of the “object” by the “subject,” which means knowledge is primarily regarded to be part of the “object” itself regardless of the situation of the subject and the knowledge processes involved. Empiricism conceives of the object (data/fact) as originary and immutable. It is originary in the sense that it embodies knowledge in itself; and this knowledge being self-evident, no interpretation is necessary to attain it since the object yields its essence (knowledge) to the senses of the perceiving subject directly through experience. This knowledge, transferred immediately from the object to the subject is also beyond the reach of history and thus always “true.” It is in fact its changelessness that makes knowledge acquired in this manner appealing (reliable) since if objects and data change with time there will be no unvarying origin for knowledge—no fixed point of reference against which the accuracy of knowledge can directly and certainly be measured without culturally conditioned interpretations. “Change” creates an epistemological anarchy because without the security of uncontested facts, one has to accept the relativism of interpretations, accept the historical determination of discursive practices in culture. The politics of empiricism becomes clearer if one follows the implications of such a view of knowledge.

If the object is meaningful in itself, independent of the subject and the cultural practices that produce significance, then by extension the reality “out there” in its entirety is also a free-standing reality whose meaning is in itself—its inner essence. Such an essentializing closure which anchors meaning (knowledge) in the object politically postulates the world “as it is” as the world “as it ought to be” and thus obstructs the reconstitution of the real by any intervention.

Empiricism accepts the world in its present form (the status quo) as the only natural and thus inevitable form of organization of the real and thus unchangeable; hence its deep appeal to the conservative mind. By proposing nature as the authority on reality, the empiricist theory of knowledge fulfills its ideological function, which is the naturalization of authority. For empiricists reality resides outside the signficatory activities of culture in the world of physical objects and relationships, in “things” rather than “words.” (Since “words” are used conventionally and convention can change, thus destabilizing meaning; things, it is assumed, belong to nature and are thus outside the interventions of conventions and thus are stable forever.) It is the ideological program of empiricism to establish a reality whose meaning is self-evident and does not lie in the conventions of intelligibility of a culture, but derives directly from properties of nature. Yet intelligibility, which is culture’s way of knowing reality, is not the effect of nature (as it is understood in empiricist problematics) but the outcome of the political, economic, and theoretical practices of a society. By rejecting the cultural, empiricism locates truth in what it regards to be the bedrock of reality—nature.

By assuming that knowledge is the effect of an abstraction of the essence of the object by a subject, empiricism posits a self-identical and self-present subject: in fact, knowledge is from its perspective a correspondence between the object and the subject. Such a view of the subject, as the place in which knowledge is created, has close affinity with another idealistic theory of knowledge which is dominant in contemporary critical theory: “cognitivism.” If in empiricism the object is the locus of knowledge, in “cognitivism” it is in the “mind.” In fact cognitivism is a form of empiricism of the subject. Both mind and object in these two theories are reified as the ultimate grounds of knowing, and both are conceived to be beyond the interpretive practices of a culture.<sup>26</sup>

Both cognitivism and empiricism fulfill the demand of the bourgeois epistemologies that require knowing the world as an act that takes place in isolation from political and social practices; both, in other words, segregate knowledge from the discursive activities of culture. Knowledge, however, is neither the effect of cognitive processes alone nor the outcome of unchanging objects/facts. Contrary to these two views of knowledge and modes of explanation that dominate contemporary theories, neither mind nor the object is a free-standing entity anterior to knowledge processes. To be more specific, knowledge is not simply



abstracted from the object (that is, it is not already there) as empiricist theories propose, but is produced (that is, brought to the world), and this production, like all productive acts, is historically determined in the sense that it depends on the economic, political, ideological, legal, as well as theoretical and scientific-philosophical practices and systems of signification available at a given moment in culture.<sup>27</sup> In fact the perception of an object as an object is a function of these systems (“facts” are, in other words, always already interpreted and are therefore part of the conceptual schemes of a society). A culture that has a vast inventory of abstract concepts and advanced theoretical practices understands an object quite differently from the one in which what Lévi-Strauss has called the “science of the concrete” dominates. In Althusser’s words, “There is a great difference between the raw material (i.e., the object) on which Aristotle worked and the raw material on which Galileo, Newton, Einstein worked.” But no matter how “concrete” the systems of signification through which an object is conceived in a culture, it is never a pure instance of sensuousness—a moment of unmediated intuition and epiphanic cognition. The object is always already “represented” (that is to say, constructed through the signifying activities of culture) and as such a complex and impure entity.

The world/reality that emerges from the empiricist and cognitivist theories of knowledge exists outside the discourses of culture in a pure state of objecthood and cognition. The “there-ness” that empiricism attributes to the world and the “here-ness” that cognitivism inscribes in the world are both, in the last analysis, a reification of the status quo and consequently a view of understanding that depends on the notion that the world is always already constituted (in the mind or in the equally closural space of the interior of objects) and as such are beyond intervention and negotiation: all that one can do, it is assumed in these modes of understanding, is to adjust oneself to this preexisting world.

Empiricism, then, regards the world of experience as the uncontestable site of knowledge and furthermore assumes that the materials upon which experience is founded are in a pure state, that they form an ensemble of uninterpreted phenomena (facts and objects). It is not a world which is always already processed and ideologized by the very process of knowing, by the frames of intelligibility that are used in order to make sense of it. To make sure that knowledge is always tied to experience and sense data, empiricism requires that all theories and statements about the world produce evidence of their truth and thus be tested. In the empiricist research program, theory is verified (confirmed or justified in the phase of acceptance) by designing research projects that provide evidence and thus make sure that the theory “fits the facts,” that it corresponds with “reality.” The theory, in other words, is tested against a set of incorrigible data acquired from immediate (and thus noninterpreted) experience so that knowledge is built upon a core of certainty. The aporia of the empiricist program of verification is that although it postulates the principle of verification as the condition of truth, this principle itself is not empirically verifiable. It is a mark of “Yuppies”’s philosophical and theoretical naiveté that it asks for a test of theory without realizing that any test of theory is, at the same time, a theory of testing and thus in need of a test which will be subject to the same condition of theoreticity: that is to say, there is no end to the chain.

The search for certainty is represented as an effort to discover the uncontaminated truth, but in fact it has an ideological function in the empiricist problematic: it attempts to place knowledge and theories of knowledge beyond the reach of social and political frames of intelligibility and to claim a universal truth for them, a claim that severs knowledge’s ties from the practices of the community which in fact make knowledge knowledge, which make it a body of significant (meaningful) statements. In requiring rather positivistic evidence, proof, and testability (as part of its search for an idealistic and thus apolitical certainty provided by facts beyond change) empiricism joins its ostensible opponent, cognitivism, the theory of science which holds that reason rather than experience is the source of knowledge. Both empiricism and cognitivism, on this level, search for an uncontestable certainty through protocols that, by designing formal procedures, ensure the internal coherence of theory and thus postulate it as a self-sustaining system whose truth is not in danger of being destabilized by external factors. These criteria of verifiability are summed up in a rather clear and precise form by one of the most influential contemporary cognitivists, Karl Popper. In his *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Popper argues for what he calls a scientifically respectable belief. Such a belief is rationally grounded and thus scientifically acceptable if and only if it has been subjected to a “crucial



experiment” designed to falsify it. Taking a different route from those verification procedures that attempt to test the theory in a direct and “positive” manner by evaluating its predictive power, Popper’s method uses the test of falsifiability. If a theory fails this test, it is declared unscientific and marked as unintelligible, as non-sense.

This positivistic testing of theory that promises “certainty” about an uncontestable truth was eagerly embraced by traditional scholars in cultural studies (the humanities and the social sciences) because by instituting such tests they could guarantee that the only work in cultural studies which would be recognized as knowledge would be their own dominant and ongoing piecemeal empirical research. The same desire to place this mode of inquiry at the center of the academy and thus to acquire power for its practitioners accounts for “Yuppies”’s enthusiastic support for a research program based on evidence, experiment, and other forms of empirical proof.

Such enthusiasm, however, is blind to the fact that the use and function of theory in cultural studies are very different from their use and function in the sciences. In cultural studies, theory is constructed not to predict the behavior of cultural phenomena, but to produce a “comprehension effect.” Theory in cultural studies provides a grid of intelligibility constituted of analytical schemes, a set of assumptions and protocols of interpretation through which the cultural studies critic makes sense of texts of culture (films, fictions, conflicts, family arrangements, child-rearing patterns, and so on). One can say that while theory in science attempts to explain the Actual (that is, the physical world), theory in cultural studies aims to account for the Real (that is, the Actual as it is rendered intelligible in a given culture). The domain of cultural studies is, for the most part, the inquiry into the production and maintenance of subjectivities: how desiring subjects are produced by ideologies in the ongoing contestations involving sex, class, and race. One of the irreconcilable paradoxes of “Yuppies” is that on the one hand it supports the empiricist research program and thus, inevitably, requires that theories in the humanities be treated in the same manner as they are in science, while on the other it condemns the result of such a view of theory in “the humanities.” To explain: if we treat theories in “the humanities” as scientific theory and require that they should pass the test of verifiability, then humanities theories, like scientific ones, will be accepted or rejected on the basis of their power to predict, which is the main purpose of verifying a theory. Now what is the predictive power of a theory in “the humanities” but its ability to produce uniform results under specific conditions, that is to say, to be able to generate uniform and similar interpretations? “Yuppies” and all the humanists whose views it echoes will recoil in horror from such a view of theory, since it will seem to rob the critic of her most valued attribute: her uniqueness as an interpreter of cultural texts. To summarize: the role of theory in science is prediction and in cultural studies, the development of an ensemble of shared assumptions.<sup>28</sup>

The more recent views of theory in science in fact move towards the kind of understanding of theory that prevails in cultural studies. In his work, Thomas Kuhn has demonstrated that the positivistic theories of philosophers like Popper are indeed unable to account for the most characteristic aspect of the production of knowledge in science: the existence of a culture of science—a community of agreements, assumptions, presuppositions, procedures, and protocols that come together under a paradigm.<sup>29</sup> Kuhn’s work is of great significance in other respects, two of which are important to our own argument: his critique of the notion of fact as used in the empiricist research program and his questioning of the idea of the scientist as a rational and unitary subject in cognitive theories of science.

Kuhn’s basic contention is that the reason why the sciences do not and cannot emulate a Popperian account of their practice is that our access to the facts in the light of which we test our beliefs is always filtered by our existing “paradigms” or frameworks of understanding. He therefore not only critiques the rationalist models used in evaluating the “truth” of scientific theories but also puts in question the foundation of empiricism, which is—as we have seen—the notion of the fact that embodies knowledge and is accessible to the senses without any interpretation. To put the point more clearly: according to Kuhn, there are no facts independent of our theories; far from being free-standing, self-evident entities, “facts” are produced by paradigms of knowledge; the facthood of a “fact” is established by the means through which it is recognized as a fact. One other implication of Kuhn’s ideas for theory in cultural studies is that

he questions the notion of the “rational person” (the individual scientist) as the originator and determiner of scientific knowledge. In Kuhn’s theory of knowledge, in other words, the “subject” is problematized and this interrogation of the subject brings the domains of scientific theory and cultural theory closer to each other by situating the scientist in the daily ideological contestations of culture.

The problematization of “theory,” “fact,” and “subject” in the writings of Kuhn and other contemporary philosophers of science who have argued against the dominant empiricist and cognitivist view is to a very large extent in line with research in the new physics itself. If we insist on the idea of verification, evidence, and testing in the traditional empiricist manner, we are forced to rule out as “nonscientific” the most important and scientifically significant part of postmodern physics: the “superstring” theory of current physics. What “Yuppies” refers to as a “recent” discovery in physics (that matter is constituted of subatomic particles) is again (like its view of “deconstruction”) a historical misrecognition: its “recent” is already the “standard model” in physics. Once more, “Yuppies”’s reading of physics, like its understanding of critical theory, is based on an ideological misrecognition: what it wants to see as “recent” is not that which is historically “recent.” The world, according to superstring theory, is not, at its simplest level, made of subatomic particles, but of tiny, one-dimensional elongations of energy called “superstrings.” The superstring theory has created a theoretical crisis in postmodern physics because superstrings are so tiny<sup>30</sup> that they are not accessible to any experimental, verifying procedure that contemporary physics can design. To “test” the theory, experimental physics will have to build an accelerator more than a billion times as powerful as anything that can be conceived with modern technology. There is, in other words, no way to “verify” the theory in a traditional empirical sense. This lack of verification has not only been no bar to the development of the theory, but in fact the theory has become so powerful and scientifically interesting that, it is said, the most promising graduate students at major universities are focusing on this new area of understanding (much as the most rigorous thinkers in the field of literary studies are gravitating towards critical theory—see, among other sources, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 July 1986, pp. 1, 8, 9). Innumerable consequences of the superstring theory are already threatening the normal—“empirical”—view of the world. According to it, for instance, the world comprises ten, not four, dimensions, and it furthermore contains what is called “shadow matter” composed of invisible particles of all the elementary particles that make up matter and force in the universe. Theory, in short, has put in question the empiricist research program and posed new questions about the very status of theory, verifiability, and proof in postmodern physics.

The superstring theory is, of course, controversial: there are many physicists who are doubtful about its validity. Their doubts, however, have not prevented the increasing appeal and growing scientific sophistication of the theory. It is interesting that at a time when physics is itself encountering a crisis in its very notion of experiment, evidence, and verification, some humanities scholars are attempting for ideological reasons to impose an inadequate notion of theory on cultural studies. For them, the appeal of empiricism—as we have argued—is the promise that through it the world will be established as uncontestedly “out there” in pure phenomena and this “out-there-ness” can then be used as the anchoring point for what will be, in “Yuppies”’s word, a “solid” authority, an authority that legitimizes law and order as the condition of possibility of reality and thus of life itself. The ideology of empiricism does indeed help to resecure the life-world of the petty-bourgeoisie, but there is a cost: conservative politicians exploit the petty-bourgeois fear of “chaos” and “anarchy” in order to keep themselves in power.



Along with its assumptions about history, the theory of knowledge, and science, “Yuppies” also adheres to an implicit theory of language: language is a transparent medium through which the already determined world of history and science is reflected. Language, in other words, is a means of transferring meaning from one sovereign subject (independent and separate individual) to another; and since meaning is prior to language and signifying activities (p. 12), then one is only obliged to make sure that one handles language as clearly, precisely, and unobtrusively as possible (p. 15). This is an instrumental view of language, and its ideological necessity derives from the cultural position of intelligibility offered to the petty-bourgeoisie, a class whose cultural formation leads them—as is clear from “Yuppies”—to trust “things” rather than “words,”

*inexpressible* and unspoken emotions rather than articulated ideas. The petty-bourgeois in fact takes inarticulateness to be the mark of the authenticity, simplicity, and the depth of one's feelings (p. 18). Language, by contrast, is associated with fraudulence, clever articulateness, and the seeming ease and intelligence that is attributed to the deconstructionists, the upper classes, and professionals, the latter represented synecdochically by Yuppies (pp. 18–19). This position of understanding requires that the petty-bourgeois mistrust any communication that moves beyond the norm of referentiality—beyond simple parallels between language and “reality”—and condemn it as an indication of decadence. “Yuppies”’s impatience with any prose that does not yield its meaning in a first, cursory reading is a manifestation of this notion of language as instrument of referential communication. “Yuppies” calls Althusser’s prose, which though self-conscious hardly tests the outer limits of self-reflexiveness, “obscure” (p. 13), and also exhibits considerable anxiety when encountering unfamiliar, specialized, or even slightly out-of-the-way words, rejecting them as code words (p. 15), as signs of a barbaric “alterity” that must be suppressed in the name of a humanizing civilization.

The referential view of language draws upon a theory of representation that has dominated Western thinking about language, reality, and the subject for many centuries, a view only problematized for the first time in a “strong” way by postmodern critical theory. The far-reaching implications of this challenge are partially manifested in the contestation over the constitution of knowledge itself now taking place between postmodern critical theory and institutionalized philosophy. One of the outcomes of this interrogation is the placing under erasure of the very possibility of “philosophy” as anything other than a generalized mode of textuality or, in Richard Rorty’s words, “a form of writing.”<sup>31</sup> The signs of this institutional battle are visible in the daily discussions of institutions in which, for example, the philosophy department rejects the most exciting and provocative theoretical activities of the English department as nonknowledge, a bracketing enabled by a curiously contradictory “argument” in which the theoretical undertakings in the English department are seen as the effect of adopting language theories that are both “merely fashionable” (that is, do not have real intellectual merit and thus are deprived of that most-envied placed in academia—the place of the “permanent”) and at the same time “superseded” (no longer valid because their time has come and gone). This confused rejection of postmodern theory because it is supposedly simultaneously over-up-to-date and not-quite-up-to-date points up not so much an inability on the part of philosophers to offer a clear argument as the existence of a historical misrecognition which is a sign of crisis in the institutional organization of knowledge. In the last analysis, this crisis is nothing other than a struggle over “representation,” over the relation between discursive practices and truth, over the unsaid of these discursive practices, and over who (which segment of the academy) speaks on truth’s behalf.

Broadly speaking, the contestation over representation evolves around two theories of meaning: meaning as *reference* and meaning as the effect of *difference*. The referential theories, of course, have had many different articulations in the long history of philosophy, linguistics, and textuality; but their basic tenet can be summed up in Foucault’s words: “discourse. . . is but a slight addition which adds an almost impalpable fringe to things and to the mind; a surplus which *goes without saying, since it does nothing else except to say what is said.*”<sup>32</sup> Although the theory of representation based on a referential view of language has received various emphases, one can see very early its basic paradigm when in the *Phaedo* Socrates announces: “I decided to take refuge in language, and study the truth of things by means of it.” Here language is regarded to be a reliable substitute for reality, a more or less faithful reflection of the world. This essentially referential view of language has dominated Western thought from Plato through Locke and Kant to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* to the present time. In Kant the theory is given an epistemological twist that reveals its underlying master concepts, for he regards language to be not so much a reflection of reality (because he believes reality is not accessible to human beings) as it is a reflection of our thoughts about reality. Kant thus foregrounds two major issues in referential theories: first, that the source of meaning in language is outside it; and second, that the relation between language and that which is outside it is secured by the subject. The assumption here is that the world is reflected in the mind of the subject (in ideas) who then organizes the words in a fashion to guarantee their correct reference to ideas. In other words, ideas in the mind of the subject reflect the world; and by the agency of the subject, words reflect those ideas. Commu-



nication, then, is an exchange of meaning (produced in the consciousness of the subject nondiscursively) through language (that is controlled by the subject) between two sovereign subjects. The twentieth-century version of the referential theory of language has been widely disseminated through analytical philosophy, which is a form of empiricism that acquires “certainty” by obtaining knowledge from a mode of referentialism often called the “picture theory of language” and is associated with Russell and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. Although analytical philosophy and its theory of language are no longer “dominant,” both still form a kind of general common sense in the philosophy departments of Anglo-American universities.

The referential theories of representation are problematized in the writings of Saussure. Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* is itself a mixed set of discourses which contains very conservative views (for instance, the psychologizing of the substance of meaning),<sup>33</sup> quite conventional ideas (such as his theory of the sign which is nothing more than a repetition of the medieval notion of the sign as *aliquid stat pro aliquo*,<sup>34</sup> and quite innovative theories. His most important contribution to the theory of meaning is his postulating the concepts of “value” and “significance”<sup>35</sup> and his demonstration that significance is the effect of value: meaning in language is engendered by the differential relationships that signs acquire by virtue of their membership in a system, in short, “differences carry signification.”<sup>36</sup> In a famous passage, Saussure states that “[I]n language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system.”<sup>37</sup> His radical conclusions from such a view are that, contrary to the referential theories of language, meaning in language is not caused by entities outside (empirical reality), but by the operation of the system of the language itself: language does not reflect or refer to empirical reality as such. It also means that meaning is the effect of a systematic relationship (no individual entity is inherently meaningful) and that *difference* is the enabling condition of meaningfulness. Saussure’s revolutionary view of meaning also decenters the Cartesian *subject*, who in the referential theories is the agency securing the relationship between reality and language.

This radicalization of antirepresentationalism finds its most powerful articulation in the texts of Jacques Derrida, who criticized Saussure for his residual logocentrism<sup>38</sup> and who in his “Sending: On Representation” argues that the traditional program of representation should be given up.<sup>39</sup> In Derrida’s theories, the text is seen as unable to refer to anything outside itself, to represent an idea, a message, or any other form of “reality.” Rather than a point of “reference,” texts have—in G. Frege’s word—a “sense”:<sup>40</sup> they acquire their “meaning” by pointing to the processes of signification in other texts. If all that language can do is represent the processes of signification, then what has seemed to be “truth” outside language and represented by it is, in the last instance, merely a textual mirage, since truth is nothing other than the effect of intertextuality: texts acquire meaning through their “reference” to the processes of signification (other texts). The contestation of philosophers with literary theorists is partly in the space of this theory of representation, since if language cannot refer to a truth outside itself, then the traditional claim that philosophy is the guardian of (the discourse) of truth breaks down, and philosophy becomes a form of textuality, a narrative of “truth” that competes with other fictions engendered by other textualities. For philosophy to preserve its institutional power as owner of the discourses of truth, some form of referential theory of language must be rescued; such a rescue is exactly what current academic philosophy is undertaking in its attacks on literary theory.

Although, as we have mentioned, traditional analytical philosophy, which has as its main focus linguistic analysis, is still the common sense of institutional philosophy in the Anglo-American world,<sup>41</sup> analytical philosophy in its traditional mode has collapsed upon itself. In order to return to some form of referentiality, it has become necessary then to move (along with the new form of pragmatism put forth by Rorty or the view of representation put forth by Cavell) towards a “postanalytical philosophy” or adopt other modes of referentiality by drawing upon the writings of Austin (and through him on Wittgenstein’s ideas on “rule”) and Searle (who through “speech acts” attempts to point language towards “reality” by offering a grammar of conventions of reference) in what might be called a form of “neoanalytic philosophy.” The new referentialism of the post-/neoanalytical philosophy has had, as might be expected, a great influence on recent philosophical writings and on literary theory itself. We are not thinking of those who have championed philosophers like Searle in order to offer some “defense” of the humanities against deconstruction,