Postal Networks

Shane Moran

In South African English literary-theoretical discourse post-modernist and post-structuralist theories have been invoked to support the demotion of Marxian analysis. A spectral Marxism is often equated with an economistic and reductionist model of class. This is then taken to justify a 'post-Marxism' in a post-colonial context attuned to the category of race. In effect a simplification of the category of class is projected onto Marxism—and in particular onto South African Marxist historiography—which is then marginalised because of this reductionism. I will argue that the attempt to establish a 'post-Marxist' critical consensus in South Africa combines a misrepresentation of Marxian theory with a decontextualisation of post-structuralism[1].

This essay has three parts: a sketch of the general features of South African 'posts' theory, some notes on the work of one South African Marxist historiographer, and suggestions for alternative readings of post-structuralist theory.

Posts (SA)

In the early eighties post-structuralist theory was seen by some South African English literary academics as an ally in the task of dismantling the hegemonic structures of oppressive ideologies, including liberal-humanism. This was a period in which progressive literary critics were generally more concerned with the empowering potential of literary representation and cultural activism than with the post-structuralist questioning of representation. Still, for some the claims of post-structuralists like Lyotard and Derrida to rethink the nature of the political held out the prospect of finding a middle way, or a new way altogether, out of the cycle of political violence. An introduction to literary theory saw in 'the eyes of the true post-structuralist' a 'radical alternative': 'to question the rule governed approach itself' (Ryan & Van Zyl 1982:14). An important element of this early importation seems to be not so much the desire to transcend politics, but rather to break through the impasse of political deadlock via a

[1] Although post-structuralism, post-modernism, and deconstruction have different genealogies, I treat post-modernism and deconstruction as elements in a more general 'post-structuralism' that interrogates the project of modernity and attempts to acknowledge the contradictory nature of critique.

post-structuralism resistant to self-totalisation and institutionalisation. Rory Ryan (1982a:93) saw in deconstruction a timely awareness of the futility of 'naive radicalism' and the necessity of acknowledging a strategic complicity when one inhabits the system and tradition one aims to criticise. However, perhaps with the American fate of deconstruction in mind, Ryan (1982a:111) worried that the most likely 'misrepresentation of deconstruction appears to be its institutionalisation'; this radical potential may be compromised by 'the easy assimilation of a castrated deconstructionism into the academic mainstream' via the unexamined concepts constitutive of liberalism that shelter in the academy[2]. It seems that this concern was well founded. Ryan (1985; 1987) continued his critique of the literary studies and the institutionalisation of theory, and by the late 1980s had moved to class Marxism as yet another deluded hegemony transfixed by the attainability of transcendental 'truth'; now he placed his faith in 'iconoclastic intellectual behaviour' (Ryan 1990:17).

The South African reception of post-structuralism that I want to focus on is the second wave of the late eighties and early nineties, a period both fraught with uncertainty and a 'moment when liberation seems to be around the corner' (Ndebele 1994:3)[3]. This was a context marked by a willingness to rethink the strategy of cultural activism, and is epitomised by Albie Sach's (1990) call to ban the slogan 'culture as a weapon of struggle' for five years on the grounds that the prospect of freedom called for a change in the subservience of aesthetic production to politics. In a historical situation characterised by an uneasy movement towards a negotiated political settlement and general political representation, claims were made for theory's capacity to fulfil the hopes of its early advocates and to productively contribute to a reanimated sense of South African intellectual political engagement. The institutional ascendancy of 'posts' theory within English literature departments occurred despite the objections raised against the attraction of a quietistic theoreticism by writers whose understanding of the issues ranged from informed and principled scepticism to uncomprehending

[2] Rory Ryan (1982a:95) went on to claim that 'Derrida's contribution to the philosophy of language is paradoxically to distance himself from all previous philosophers of language, who do not recognise that language exists as a self-enclosed system'. Derrida, of course, maintains the opposite: there is never a self-enclosed system.

[3] Ndebele's optimism was expressed in March 1990 at the 'Literature in Another South Africa' conference. See also Dennis Brutus (1993). Others drew reassurance from a bland interpretation of international events: 'It is fascinating to reflect that, at the very moment that the Soviet Union is re-entering international philosophic and cultural debates, Marxism in the West is a waning force; Russian *glasnost* (openness) promises to be a rich, a seminal contributor to the new pluralism that is abroad' (Willoughby 1989:96).

and convenient parochialism[4].

The philosopher Johan Degenaar (1990:172) saw the post-modern posture of superseding Marxism as merging in South Africa with faith in a '[d]econstruction that helps us to hold off all gods and tyrants'. Post-structuralist deconstruction was seen to encourage an ethics of personal responsibility against Marxism's 'totalisation in the practice of thinking or totalitarianism in the practice of politics' (Degenaar 1990:169). In the name of liberal pluralism Degenaar (1990:172) criticised 'the Marxist search for a foundation which is assumed to be prior to interpretation and which can therefore act as a basis for interpretation', and favoured deconstruction which 'assumes that interpretation is the only ball game in town'[5]. Some theorists were content to advocate a discursive pluralism that left unquestioned the material, institutional forces that clear this utopian space for the free-play of competing interpretations. The danger of this approach becomes apparent when claims for 'ethics' take precedence over historical analysis.

David Attwell's (1990:96) defence of the necessary co-implication of post-modernism and post-colonialism rested on the claim that it is 'possible to see the resources of post-modernism as enabling, rather than undermining, an historical engagement'. He located 'the problem of deconstruction in an historically charged situation like South Africa', an 'academic discursive context' in which agents address contexts of racial oppression from within 'literary-historical and literary-critical cul-

[4] See Liebenberg (1987), De Jong (1989), Chapman (1989; 1990), Visser (1990), Sole (1990), Carusi (1991). These debates pro and contra theory have come into sharp focus around the work of J.M. Coetzee: see the 1989 special issue of *Journal of Literary Studies* (5,2), particularly Michael Vaughan's 'Should Theory be Accountable?'. The role of theory is defended in J.M.Coetzee and David Attwell (ed), *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992). For assessments of the states of theory in the broader African context see the special edition on critical theory and African literature, *Research in African Literatures* 21,1 (1990). See also Johnson (1994) on the dangers of importing metropolitan theory.

[5] The *SAVAL* papers collected in 1989, in which Degenaar's essay appeared, signal a general sidelining of Marxism in favour of post-structuralist theory. Contributors range from conceding Marxism's limited usefulness for conscientising and mobilising (Carusi), to demoting Marxism on the grounds of its utopian teleology (MacCallum), its crude understanding of ideology (Tait), its underestimation of the transcendent potential of aesthetic production (Green), and its overestimation of the potential of political action before the intransigence of the commodity form (de la Porte): see *South African Society for General Literary Studies IX* (Potchefstroom). This is a marked shift away from the *SAVAL* papers of 1988, particularly those by Wilhelm Liebenberg and Reingard Nethersole, which evidence a more cautious welcome to post-structuralism, and register concern about its usefulness in the politicised context of South Africa. But traces of the eager demotion of Marxism in favour of Derrida's undermining of totalising discourses can already be glimpsed in Bert Olivier's paper.

ture' (Attwell 1990:108,119,118). The exigencies of a South Africa where 'interest lies in the way contexts overdetermine conceptual allegiances' (Attwell 1990:129) appear to have sensitised eclectic theorists to the contextual constraints imposed upon academic production. But Attwell (1990:102) cautioned that these constraints can amount to 'an internal, Stalinist policing' of literary-critical culture that must be resisted. Without analysis of the history of historiography literary studies are 'always going to play the role of handmaiden to the more powerful, more coherently marshalled, more politically cogent discourses of history' (Attwell 1990a:84)[6].

Attwell (1993:97) aimed to 'project a posthumanist, reconstructed ethics' via a reading of Coetzee's post-modernism that foregrounded his post-coloniality and addressed the 'discursive conditions obtaining in South African—what I call its state of 'colonial postcolonialism'; 'this ethically and politically fraught arena of South Africa' (1993:6). Bodies of theory are imported into the 'colonial postcolonialism' of a South African academic discursive context shaped by the 'liberal view [that] apartheid was irrational, and the dynamics of growth in a free market system were bound to undermine steadily the ability of the state to enforce it', and the 'revisionist viewpoint [that] apartheid was intrinsic to the logic of capitalist accumulation because it provided, among other things, for cheap labour' (Attwell 1993:30). In this historical context theories intersect with a politics of agency determined by race:

> Although class factors are, of course, in evidence within black intellectual circles as well, race is a crucial determinant, perhaps the final determinant, of the social composition of intellectual life .... The national situation, in other words, in which intellectuals and literary artists work imposes on them a politics of agency (Attwell 1993:24).

Attwell divides 'a politics of agency' into a notion of agency rooted in Marxist hermeneutics that is primarily concerned with revolutionary discipline, and an agency that

> has to do with the concept of nationhood ... that is, with questions of inclusion and exclusion, of finding or not finding a place for one's own particular story within the framework of the broader, national narrative .... Coetzee's narrative of colonialism has dramatized this situation implicitly in terms of rivalling nationalisms; in this respect, he has not shared the view of more strictly Marxist revisionists, for whom *class struggle* in the context of the industrial transformation of South Africa has been more significant than questions of *race and nationhood* have been (Attwell 1993:24f; e.a.).

[6] Other theorists invoked post-structuralism to indict a logocentric South African Marxist historiography bedevilled by an economic reductionism and historical determinism that has underestimated the fluidity of identity: see Deacon (1991), Robinson (1991), and Greenstein (1993). A more pugilistic writer even entertained fantasies of a post-structuralism limbering up in a new South Africa where 'the Gullivers of Marxism and modernity will have to be brought down to size' (Devenney 1994:164).

Rather than accepting 'the class-based notion of nation-in-the-making' analysis of Marxists historians, Attwell (1993:99) proposed that the South African context of colonialist postcolonialism is best understood via 'early Derridean deconstruction'[7]. The 'dramatic confluence of post-modern ideas and the history making exigencies of a society in turmoil' (Attwell 1993:125) necessitates a more sophisticated theoretical model than class. There is also a need to go beyond the Marxist's 'strong emphasis on national history and historiography' (Attwell 1993a:105). Clearly, either way, whether emphasising class struggle or emphasising national history, the Marxists are always on the losing side of this analytic dichotomy before a victorious post-Marxist and post-nationalist post-colonial theory. It appears that '[p]ostcoloniality has become a privileged site, for instance, for theorising and examining tensions and links between post-structuralism and historical discourses' (Attwell 1993b:4) in a way that conveniently vindicates claims for 'post-Marxism'.

Leon de Kock's (1993:44) survey of the various states of South African literary theory concluded that a post-structuralist post-colonial theory has the potential to form

> a deliberate, politically-motivated focus on a past conceived as 'colonial', in order to contribute to the undoing of a present in which the traces of colonial conditioning are perceived still to survive.

But in the light of confident utopian claims for 'a meeting-place here between post-Marxian and post-structuralist discourses of textuality' (Willoughby 1994:43), De Kock qualified his optimism regarding South African 'posts' theory:

> A new class of depoliticised aesthetes have perhaps discovered that the often Baroque terminology of post-structuralism, post-modernism, or postcolonialism offers a revitalised haven of textuality in the shallow sense: a place of refuge from political and contextual constraints in criticism (De Kock 1995:67-8).

But still a perceived affinity between the 'posts' that centres on the notion of difference and concern with discourses of oppression leads De Kock (1995:69) to advocate a pragmatic borrowing or *bricolage* of 'post-' theories and the redeployment of them 'in a decidedly *political* context of counter-narrative'. More recently De Kock (1996:27) has claimed that the 'greater discursive reflexivity' afforded by theory gives the contemporary theorist 'the (unfair) advantage of metacritical awareness'. The new approach proceeds on the basis of 'a relationship between the "textual" and the "material" facets of history which recognises the discursive basis of historical depiction' (De Kock 1996:25). Taking discourse seriously represents an advance over an 'earlier emphasis on capital, class, and official politics' that stressed binary oppositions, and is

[7] Attwell's Derrida is here drawn exclusively from an unreliable secondary source: Gayatri Spivak's 'Translator's Preface' to *Of Grammatology*. See Moran (1996).

thought to be of more use than 'monolithic models such as a theory of class struggle' (De Kock 1996:3,13)[8].

One step towards assessing these post-mortems of Marxism is to recall some of the arguments of those superseded South African Marxist historiographers. A reconsideration of the 'post-Marxist' credentials of Lyotardian post-modernism and Derridean deconstruction might also be timely.

Revisions (SA)

The revisionists sought to challenge a South African liberal historiography that constructed a narrative of competing homogeneous ethnic and national groupings, and to analyse how racism was not simply forged on the frontier but was part of the systemic nature of capitalism. Although the revisionists were not one monolithic school, and ferocious divisions arose between structuralists and social historians[9], one area of agreement was the necessity of viewing political power through the lens of, but not reduced to, economic power. I will look briefly at the work of Martin Legassick, a major figure

[8] See Johnson (1996) and Moran (1996) for criticisms of De Kock's approach. Others have found class analysis useful when interpreting the pre-election period: 'De Klerk wants to negotiate to maximise the probability of preserving the existing class structure and to minimise the probability that improvements in the welfare of blacks would come at the expense of those in the nationalist coalition' (MacDonald & James 1993:397). It is worth noting that theorists working outside, but still preoccupied with, the South African context have generally been more reluctant to relinquish Marxist analysis, and have foreseen problems combining post-structuralism and post-colonial studies. Benita Parry (1987; 1994), Graham Pechey (1986; 1987), Anne McClintock (1992), Neil Lazarus (1993) and Laura Chrisman (1993; 1995) have all stressed the importance of socio-economic factors when addressing the South African context, and post- and neo-colonial contexts in general. On the other hand, for Derek Attridge (1994) an ethics of tolerant pluralism takes precedence over divisive socio-political imperatives.

[9] Dan O'Meara's *Volkapitalisme* (1983) drew on Nicos Poulantzas's *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1975) to stress the role of the State and the mobility of class relations. The structuralist Marxists were criticised by the Thompsonian revisionist social historians associated with the Wits History Workshop. The social historians levelled the charge of structuralist functionalism against the revisionists, and in turn the structuralists charged the social historians with idealising the experiential data of those from 'below' at the cost of locating such experiences in the broader systemic picture: see Bundy (1986), Morris (1987), Keegan (1989; 1989a), Murray (1988; 1989). Bozzoli and Delius (1990) provide an overview, Freund (1996) reviews economic history in South Africa, and O'Meara (1996) responds to Posel's (1991) critique of his Poulantzian approach. Perry Anderson's *Arguments Within English Marxism* (1980) presents a useful counterpoint to these debates.

in the revisionist school, to assess the argument of the 'post-Marxists' that the revisionists neglected nation and race, and that they were transfixed by binary oppositions and economic reductionism to the extent that they ignored the subtleties of discourse.

In 'The Dynamics of Modernisation in South Africa' Legassick (1974:288; 1972) saw his revisionist historiography as part of the attempt 'to develop constructively a discussion of the strategies of national liberation and socialist transformation in South Africa'. National struggle and nationhood are seen to be shaped by the peculiar historical circumstances obtaining in South Africa, a determinate structure of power against which determinant forms of struggle may be possible. In 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence' Legassick (1974:282) critiqued the economic reductionism of the SACP and the programme of achieving a classless socialist society via the stage of a populist 'national' social democracy:

> such a nationalist ideology, devoid of explicit class analysis, could become the instrument of different classes among the African population.

Legassick's 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography' offered a nuanced discussion of the interrelationship of race and class. Legassick (1980:48) questioned the prospect of national liberation leading to non-racial national democracy within the confines of capitalism, and acknowledged that '[r]acist attitudes became a racist ideology': racism is not reduced to class but rather racist attitudes preceded class stratification, and racism is not merely functional to capital but an independent variable. 'Race' is conceptualised as an overdetermination by different interactions and causations among the different levels in the social formation (economic, political, ideological) in a historic context where 'race' is elaborated in terms of material and discursive contradictions that can serve to blur racial distinctions[10].

One reason that the revisionists treated the promise of a unifying nationhood with caution might be that it has often been accompanied by the liberal idea that the

[10] In the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' (1875) Marx dissasociated himself from 'Marxists' who oversimplified class antagonisms within the national context of class struggle. Marx saw the racism of the English working class towards the Irish as the source of their impotence and the secret which enabled the capitalist class to maintain its power. The national emancipation of Ireland was seen as the first condition for the emancipation of the English working class. Legassick's Doctoral Thesis, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840' (University of California, 1969) focuses on the entanglement of material and discursive elements in colonialism, and is a part of the critical Marxist tradition that eschews monolithic models such as a theory of class struggle. Legassick foregrounds the dichotomous discourse of the missionaries that the colonised subjects had to negotiate. For more on race and class see Greenberg (1980:385) and Bozzoli (1980; 1981).

forces of economic growth would in and of themselves break down apartheid, 'a view which accords well with those who call for increased overseas investment in South Africa' (Marks 1986:169)[11]. Revisionists have not taken the saga of rivalling nationalisms and the poetics of nationhood at face value because

> the struggle for national liberation (in the sense of struggle against the structures of racial domination) may become part of the programme of sections of capital attempting to shed racism in the interests of guaranteeing the continuation of capitalism (Wolpe 1988:60).

'Post-Marxists' (RSVP)

What aspects of post-structuralist theories can help South African academics facing the imperative of critical engagement in a historically specific context scarred by racialised capitalism? Without underestimating the confusion of the so-called debate around post-modernism and post-structuralism, or the amenability of these theories to an intellectualist depoliticisation, some responses to the appeal of 'post-Marxism' can be read.

The post-modern disenchantment with Marxism's goal of the disalienation of humanity is perhaps best explained by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1989:28), the diagnostician of the 'post-modern condition':

> Marx detects the hidden functioning of capitalism. At the heart of the process of emancipation and the coming to consciousness he places the disalienation of labour-power. In this way he believes he has identified and denounced the original crime from which is born the unhappiness of modernity: the exploitation of the workers. And like a detective, he imagines that by revealing 'reality'—i.e. liberal society and economics—as a fraud, he is allowing humanity to escape its great plague. Today we know that the October Revolution only succeeded, under the aegis of Marxism, and that any revolution only does and will succeed, in opening the same wound again. The localization and the diagnosis may change, but the same illness re-emerges in this rewriting. Marxists believed that they worked to disalienate humanity, but the alienation of man has been repeated in a barely displaced form.

[11] The issue of 'constructive engagement' with capitalism was the subject of an acrimonious exchange between Lipton (1976), and Legassick and Innes (1977). For background to this dispute see Hughes (1977), Lipton (1979), Johnstone (1982), Giliomee (1983), Posel (1983), Minkley (1986), and Natrass (1991). See also the argument of Giliomee & Schlemmer (1989:241) for a 'transcendent South African Nation' that would unify Afrikaner and African nationalism. Freund (1986), Morris (1987), and Hirson (1993) articulate reservations regarding nationalist discourses.

Lyotard's verdict shows signs of a disillusionment with the utopian promise inherent in Marx coupled with an impatience with institutionalised Marxist theory (see his irreverent *Economie libidinale*, and *Instructions paiennes*). But such claims need to be seen in the light of Lyotard's long and continuing engagement with the thought of Marx. Even the more recent concentration on Kant, particularly the third *Critique*, can be seen as part of an effort to rethink the notions of production and culture. Lyotard (1993:10, 276) has always worked within Marxian analytic categories, attending to the 'logic of *Capital*, the aspect of Marxism that remains alive', even if by 1982 he has grown more sceptical of the 'revolutionary project' he advocated at the time of the Algerian anti-colonial struggle. Still, in 1983 he could write that '[c]apitalism, which has no philosophy of history, disguises its "realism" under the Idea of an emancipation from poverty' (Lyotard 1988:155). The bourgeois discourse of emancipation is firmly located within systemic capitalism:

> The economic genre's hegemony over the others can certainly put on the garb of an emancipatory philosophy of history. More wealth, more security, more adventure, etc. (Lyotard 1988:178).

In 1990 Lyotard (1993:115) argued that 'Marxist criticism has something obsolete, even tedious, about it' because the metaphysical force or subject of the narrative of Marxism, the proletariat, has now 'dissipated into local institutions'; there is no longer any universal subject of history, the

> bourgeois discourse of emancipation and communal organization connected with it, that is, liberal 'late' capitalism, now look like the only survivors and winners after two centuries of struggle.

While this certainly undermines the practical and theoretical critical power of Marxism, what is retained is the Marxian perception that '[c]apital gives political hegemony to the economic genre' (Lyotard 1988:141). Like Marx, Lyotard (1993:115) wishes to contest this hegemony and the 'mechanistic economy, whose principle is the search for an optimal relation between expenditure and production':

> 'economic' society is a machine and ought to obey the rule of the best possible cost/benefit ratio, for all types of results and investments.

What Lyotard (1993:115) questions is the ability of Marxist criticism to provide a way out when 'the ghost has now vanished, dragging the last critical grand narrative with it off the historical stage'. Perhaps Lyotard (1993:60,114) remains within 'the impasse

between "militant" delirium and skepticism', but he accepts the Marxian *description* of material forces even if he has lost faith in the *prescriptive* solution of collective action enacted by a narrative subject, the proletariat.

Lyotard has been smoothly appropriated to a triumphalist, imperialistic, pragmatist, American cultural politics that, in the absence of any legitimating narrative, declares that what is right is what works. Richard Rorty (1982, 1991) popularised a post-modernist bourgeois liberal Lyotard resigned to the *laissez faire* of competing interpretations of the world, and appropriated post-structuralism to American pragmatism with the claim that liberalism stands on the pragmatic tolerance of difference. Stanley Fish (1985) saw a pragmatist Lyotard who is not only anti-foundational but also comfortably communitarian. These texts reflect the intersection of libertarian free marketeers and neo-conservative American thinkers characteristic of Reaganism[12].

The performative criteria of functional efficiency and normative legitimation are, of course, precisely what Lyotard criticises as the hegemonic technological criterion of capitalism. Rather than sharing the American free-market euphoria or indulging outright defeatism before the globalisation of capitalism, Lyotard (1988:180) registers a 'disillusioned feeling (*ressentiment?*)' produced by 'a reformism [that] cannot make anybody happy':

> Reformism accepts the stakes of the economic genre (capitalism) even while priding itself on redistributing the result of the exchange more equitably .... But just as the hope surrounding its birth was not vigorous, so the disillusionment linked to its decline is not a sublime feeling either. Sulking, we go back to exchange[13].

For Lyotard it is reformist accommodationism that must be resisted. It is simply wrong to attribute to Lyotard the claim that the modernist grand narrative of emancipation

[12] See Geras (1987), and Bernstein's (1991) powerful critique of Rorty's liberal utopianism. For a debate between Rorty and Derrida on the relationship between deconstruction and pragmatism see Chantal Mouffe (ed), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (1996).

[13] According to Lyotard's (1988) translator, what is doomed to failure is the 'liberalist gesture of introducing reforms *within* a system in an attempt to assuage the threat or necessity of full-scale revolution'. But for Lyotard (1988:181) nationalist revolution that tries to 'stand in the way of capital's hegemony' is also 'a mistake' because 'this resistance fosters this hegemony as much as it counters it .... Proud struggles for independence end in young, reactionary States'. Perhaps Lyotard is too pessimistic. In *The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850* Marx notes the virtues of failure: the reactionary elements both outside and inside the liberation movement reveal themselves as they manoeuvre to contain transformations of the status quo. Political transformation without social transformation entails a lack of criticism of the component parts of civil life.

associated with Marx has been superseded by a post-modernist, 'late capitalist', bourgeois emancipatory pluralism that negates class analysis. Furthermore, the identification of post-modernism and 'post-industrial society' is, as *The Post-modern Condition* (Lyotard 1979) puts it, a 'working hypothesis'. Lyotard complicates any linear, teleological reading of the 'post-' in post-modernism, and appears to want to draw out a sense of the post-modern as an affirmative rather than a nostalgic modality of the modern. As he remarks, referring to the 'responsibility to thought' that his own work affirms: '[t]his is the way in which Marxism has not come to an end' (Lyotard 1988:171).

The post-structuralist deconstruction associated with the work of Jacques Derrida also bears a complex and sustained relationship to the Marxian corpus. One can read an appeal for an 'open' Marxism in the 1971 interviews collected in *Positions*, not to mention the reference to Marx on commodity fetishism and on Stirner's confusion of propriety and property in the 1971 'White Mythology' (in *Margins of Philosophy*), as well as the sustained examination of the notion of *exappropriation* as a Derridean transformation of Heidegger's *Ereignis* that foregrounds property and appropriation. Marx haunts the discussion of Hegel and Bataille in the 1967 'From a Restricted to a General Economy' (in *Writing and Difference*), and these texts make nonsense of the claim that deconstruction is a response by the French left to the failure of May '68. Indeed, post-1968 (or more precisely post-1972 according to Michael Ryan 1982:45) Derrida has stressed his relationship to Marx with greater frequency. Derrida's (1980:14) account of this shift throws light on the notion of strategy in deconstruction:

> I insist upon the *open* marxism. As you probably know, the situation has changed completely in France since *Positions*. At that time, as marxism was the dominant ideology among French intellectuals I was anxious to mark the distance between marxism and what I was interested in so as to maintain the specificity of my own work. In the space of four or five years, however, marxism has ceased to be the dominant ideology. I don't want to exaggerate but I would say that marxists are now almost ashamed to call themselves marxists. Though I am not and have never been an orthodox marxist, I am very disturbed by the antimarxism dominant now in France so that, as a reaction, through political reaction and personal preference, I am inclined to consider myself more marxist than I would have done at a time when Marxism was a sort of fortress[14].

[14] In the spirit of open Marxism, Jameson (1991:406) has pointed to 'the distinctions that have to be respected between an examination of historical events, an evocation of larger class and ideological conflicts and traditions, and an attention to impersonal socioeconomic patterning systems (of which the well-known thematics of reification and commodification are examples). The question of agency ... has to be mapped across these levels'. For discussions of Marx's treatment of cross-class identification see Spivak (1988), Amuta's (1989:71-75) discussion of the 'crisis of Marxism', and Jameson (1990). In chapter 5 of *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) Spivak argues that Derrida's commitment to an open Marxism is accompanied by an insufficient knowledge of the Marxian project.

It is only, as Derrida (1982:329) remarked in 1971, on

> this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also the field of nondiscursive forces.

In 'Onto-Theology of National-Humanism' Derrida (1992:7,10,7) asks 'what is the history of the concept or of national identity as such', 'the structure of national consciousness', and draws attention to the international academic marketplace, the institutional phenomena and 'all the political stakes that meet up here'. Derrida (1992:18) focuses on the differences between philosophical discourses within geopolitical and national borders, 'among other things the place today of the Anglo-American idiom in the socially and economically most powerful legitimating discourse'. Even within the same linguistic milieu different contexts reshape theoretico-philosophical speculation to serve specific ends. For Derrida (1992:17) *The German Ideology* shows that 'Marx was no doubt one of the first, perhaps *the* first, to suspect lucidly' the connection between nationalism and philosophy.

In 'Spectres of Marx' Derrida (1994:58) defends the emancipatory spirit of Marxism against the neo-liberal euphoria of the market economy. The worldwide market that 'holds a mass of humanity under its yoke ... in a new form of slavery

> ... will not be treated without at least the spirit of the Marxist critique, the critique of the market, of the multiple logics of capital, and of that which links the state and international law to this market.

Derrida (1994:58) points out that the sense of 'post-Marxism' felt by his generation was a reaction to the events of the 1950s and before, roughly the Moscow trials and the repression in Hungary, that these factors undoubtedly influenced the development of deconstruction, but this was not 'out of conservative or reactionary motivations' or any affinity with those 'who find the means to puff out their chests with the good conscience of capitalism, liberalism, and the virtues of parliamentary democracy'. Against the 'gospel of politico-economic liberalism', '[t]his neo-liberal rhetoric, both jubilant and worried, manic and bereaved, often obscene in its euphoria', Derrida (1994:45,50,56) recalls that

> [d]econstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say *in the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a certain *spirit*

of Marxism[15].

Deconstruction certainly seeks to question the hegemony of the 'political' as a determinant, transcendental referent, usually in the form of history, that must contain all enquiry. But the deconstruction of history should not be confused with its dematerialisation. Like Lyotardian post-modernism, deconstruction also acknowledges a responsibility and obligation to the political which takes the form of a local, strategic intervention, an intervention attuned to historical changes within specific generative contexts. The revaluation of Marxism by French theorists occurred in a specific institutional and political context in which they sought to challenge what they saw as an entrenched Marxist orthodoxy. But in the wake of the events of 1989, the collapse of communism and the decline of the left in its principal variations, Derrida warns against a complacent neo-liberal jubilation, a new dogmatism that is setting in today. The ideal remains to go beyond the paraphrastic distribution of the old social roles.

Conclusion

Marxism has never been the dominant ideology in South African English literature departments, and the situation has changed dramatically since the Marxist revisionist hey-day of the 1970s and early 1980s. Contemporary arguments for 'post-Marxism' have presented themselves as reactions to a hegemonic revisionist left historiographical discourse intent on political supervision of literary-critical culture. But these arguments appear reactive in a way that discloses ideological affinities with other self-serving readings of the signs of the times. Although there are problems with Marxist historiography and with post-modernism and deconstruction that I have not explored here, their misrepresentation by South African literary theorists reveals more than dubious scholarship. I believe that the use of post-structuralist theory to further marginalise rather than critically engage with Marxian analysis serves only to ensure that a more circumspect version of a revindicated and opportunistic liberal-humanism remains the resilient ethos. Gestures to historical positionality by South African liter-

[15] Samuel Weber (1983) has warned against the universalisation of post-structuralism in the U.S. that ignores the strategic elements in the work of imported theorists, and Giles Gunn (1987:57) has remarked on the need for 'a sharp reminder of what in America we have too quickly forgotten, if ever we learned it at all ... namely, that post-structuralism developed in Europe out of a political and not just an epistemological and metaphysical critique of Western culture'. See *Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspectives* (1995), edited by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg: in this companion volume to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* contributors discuss the relevance of Marxism without any examination of Africa.

ary theorists need to be scrutinised to determine what version of history, and what possible future, is being endorsed.

Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

References

Amuta, Chidi 1989. *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism.* London: Zed books.

Attwell, David 1990. The Problem of History in the Fiction of JM Coetzee. In Trump, Martin (ed): *Rendering Things Visible.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Attwell, David 1990a. Political Supervision: The Case of the 1990 Wits History Workshop. *Pretexts* 2,1:78-85.

Attwell, David 1993. *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Attwell, David 1993a. Interview: Homi K. Bhabha. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 5,2:100-113.

Attwell, David 1993b. Introduction. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 5,2:1-6. (Special issue on post-colonial theory.)

Attridge, Derek 1994. Trusting the Other: Ethics and Politics in J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron. South Atlantic Quarterly* 93,1:59-82.

Bernstein, Richard J 1991. *The New Constellation.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bozzoli, Belinda 1981. *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa 1890-1933.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Bozzoli, Belinda & Peter Delius 1990. Radical History and South African Society. *Radical History Review* 46/47:13-45.

Brutus, Dennis 1993. Literature and Change in South Africa. *Research in African Literatures* 24,3:101-104.

Bundy, Colin 1986. *Re-making the Past: New Perspectives in South African Historiography.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Carusi, Annamaria 1991. The Postcolonial Other as a Problem for Political Action. *Journal of Literary Studies* 7,3/4:228-238.

Chapman, Michael 1985. Literary Studies in South Africa: Contexts of Value and Belief. *English Academy Review* 3:145-162.

Chapman, Michael 1989. The Critic in a State of Emergency: Towards a Theory of Reconstruction. *Theoria* 74:13-30.

Chapman, Michael 1990. Intervention and Change: The Teaching of Literature in South Africa. In Wright, Laurence (ed): *Teaching English Literature in South Africa.* Grahamstown: ISEA.

Chrisman, Laura 1995. Inventing Post-Colonial Theory: Polemical Observations. *Pretexts* 5,1/2:205-212.

Deacon, Roger 1991. Hegemony, Essentialism and Radical History in South Africa. *South African Historical Journal* 24:166-184.

Degenaar, Johan 1990. Marxism and Deconstruction. *Journal of Literary Studies* 6,3: 164-172.
De Jong, Marianne 1989. Moving into Other Worlds but not into Action—Gayatri Spivak's Deconstructivist Marxist Feminist Readings. *Journal of Literary Studies* 5,3/4:361-378.
De Kock, Leon 1993. Postcolonial Analysis and the Question of Critical Disablement. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 5,2:44-69.
De Kock, Leon 1995. Reading History as Cultural Text. *Alternation* 2,1:65-78.
De Kock, Leon 1996. *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
Derrida, Jacques 1980. Interview with James Kearns and Ken Newton. *Literary Review* 14: 21-22. Reprinted in Easthope, Antony 1988. *British Post-Structuralism since 1968.* London: Routledge.
Derrida, Jacques 1982. *Margins of Philosophy.* Bass, Alan (trans). Brighton: The Harvester Press.
Derrida, Jacques 1992. Onto-Theology of National-Humanism (Prolegomena to a Hypothesis). *The Oxford Literary Review* 14,1/2:3-24.
Derrida, Jacques 1994. Spectres of Marx. *New Left Review* 204:31-58.
Devenney, Mark 1994. In the Absence of Certainty: Between Gulliver and Necklaces. *Theoria* 83,4:153-165.
Fish, Stanley 1985. Consequences. In Mitchell, WJT (ed): *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Freund, WM 1986. Some Unasked Questions on Politics: South African Slogans and Debates. *Transformation* 1:118-129.
Freund, WM 1996. Economic History in South Africa: An Introductory Overview. *South African Historical Journal* 34:127-150.
Geras, Norman 1987. Post-Marxism? *New Left Review* 163:40-82.
Giliomee, Hermann 1983. Eighteenth Century Cape Society and its Historiography: Culture, Race, and Class. *Social Dynamics* 9,1:18-29.
Giliomee, Hermann & Lawrence Schlemmer 1989. *From Apartheid to Nation-Building.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
Greenberg, Stanley B 1980. *Race and State in Capitalist Development: South Africa in Comparative Development.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press in association with Yale University Press.
Greenstein, Ran 1993. Racial Formation: Towards a Comparative Study of Collective Identities in South Africa and the United States. *Social Dynamics* 19,2:1-29.
Gunn, Giles 1987. *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hirson, Baruch 1993. The Talks That Descend Into Hell. *Searchlight South Africa* 3,2:2-7.
Hughes, KR 1977. Challenges from the Past: Reflections on Liberalism and Radicalism in the Writing of Southern African History. *Social Dynamics* 3,1:45-62.
Jameson, Fredrick 1990. *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic.* London: Verso.
Jameson, Fredric 1991. *Post-modernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* London: Verso.
Johnson, David 1994. Importing Metropolitan Post-colonials. *Current Writing: Text and Recep-*

tion in Southern Africa 6,1:73-85.
Johnson, David 1996. Review of Leon de Kock's *Civilising Barbarians. Transformation* 31:101-4.
Johnstone, Frederick 1982. 'Most Painful to Our Hearts': South Africa Through the Eyes of The New School. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16,1:5-26.
Keegan, Tim 1989. The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: A Reply. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15,4:666-684.
Keegan, Tim 1989a. Mike Morris and the Social Historians: A Response and a Critique. *Africa Perspective* 1,7/8:1-14.
Lazarus, Neil 1993. Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Problematic of Representation in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse. *Research in African Literatures* 24,4:69-98.
Legassick, Martin 1972. The Dynamics of Modernisation in South Africa. *Journal of African History* 13,1:145-150.
Legassick, Martin 1974. South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence. *Economy and Society* 253-291.
Legassick, Martin & Duncan Innes 1977. Capital Restructuring and Apartheid: A Critique of Constructive Engagement. *African Affairs* 76:437-82.
Legassick, Martin 1980. The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography. In Marks, Shula & Anthony Atmore (eds): *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa.* London: Longman.
Liebenberg, Wilhelm 1987. Derivean Reading—a Critique of Deconstruction. *South African Journal of Literary Studies* 3,1:11-20.
Lipton, Merle 1976. British Engagement in South Africa: Is Constructive Engagement Possible? *South African Labour Bulletin* 3,3:1-48.
Lipton, Merle 1979. The Debate about South Africa: Neo-Marxists and Neo-Liberals. *African Affairs* 78:57-80.
Lyotard, Jean-Francois [1983]1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute.* Van Den Abbeele, Georges (trans). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1989. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time.* Bennington, Geoffrey & Rachael Bowlby (trans). Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell Publishers.
Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1993. *Political Writings.* Readings, Bill & Kevin Paul Geiman (trans). London: University College London.
MacDonald, Michael & Wilmot James 1993. The Hand on the Tiller: The Politics of State and Class in South Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 31,3:387-405.
McClintock, Anne 1992. The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Postcolonialism'. *Social Text* 31/32:84-98.
Minkley, Gary 1986. Re-Examining Experience: The New South African Historiography. *History in Africa* 13:269-281.
Moran, Shane 1996. Prefacing Spivak. *Alternation* 3,2:83-101.
Moran, Shane 1996. Caution: Disciplinary Intersection. *Alternation* 3,2:208-217.
Morris, Mike 1987. Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside. *Africa Perspective* 1,5/6:7-24.

Murray, Martin J 1988. The Triumph of the Marxist Approaches in South African Social and Labour History. *Journal of African and Asian* Studies 23,1/2:79-101.

Murray, Martin J 1989. The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: A Critique of the 'Social History' Perspective. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15,4:645-665.

Natrass, Nicoli 1991. Controversies About Capitalism and Apartheid in South Africa: An Economic Perspective. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17,4:654-677.

Ndebele, Njabulo 1994. Liberation and the Crisis of Culture. In Boehmer, Elleke, Laura Chrisman & Kenneth Parker (eds): *Altered State? Writing and South Africa.* Sydney: Dangaroo Press.

O'Meara, Dan 1996. Politics in the Apartheid State: Analysing the Materiality of the Political. *Social Dynamics* 22,2:37-73.

Parry, Benita 1987. Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse. *The Oxford Literary Review* 7,1/2:27-58.

Parry, Benita 1994. Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture. Third Text* 28/9:5-24.

Pechey, Graham 1986. Bakhtin, Marxism and Post-Structuralism. In Barker, Francis, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen, & Diana Loxley (eds): *Literature, Politics and Theory.* London: Methuen.

Pechey, Graham 1987. On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogization, Decolonization. *The Oxford Literary Review* 9,1/2:59-85.

Posel, Deborah 1983. Rethinking the 'Race-Class Debate' in South African Historiography. *Social Dynamics* 9,1:50-66.

Posel, Deborah 1991. *The Making of Apartheid 1948-61.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Robinson, Jennifer 1991. Post-Marxism with Apologies? *Theoria* 78:159-171.

Rorty, Richard 1991. Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation: A Response to Jean-Francois Lyotard. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ryan, Michael 1982. *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Ryan, Rory & Susan van Zyl (eds) 1982. *An Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory.* Johannesburg: AD Donker.

Ryan, Rory 1982a. Post-Structuralism: Deconstructing Derrida. In Ryan, Rory & Susan van Zyl (eds). *An Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory.* Johannesburg: AD Donker.

Ryan, Rory 1985. Pathologies of Epistemology in Literary Studies. *Journal of Literary Studies* 1:3-42.

Ryan, Rory 1987. Post-modernist Objects of Knowledge?: Or, 'How Legitimate is your "How Legitimate is this"?'. *Journal of Literary Studies* 3,1:33-46.

Ryan, Rory 1990. Literary-Intellectual Behaviour in South Africa. Trump, Martin (ed): *Rendering Things Visible: Essays on South African Literary Culture.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Sachs, Albie 1990. Preparing Ourselves for Freedom. In De Kock, Ingrid & Karen Press (eds): *Spring is Rebellious.* Cape Town: Buchu Books.

Sole, Kelwyn 1990. Real Toads in Imaginary Gardens: A Response to David Attwell. *Pretexts* 2,1:86-93.

Spivak, Gayatri 1988. Can the Subaltern Speak? In Nelson, Cary & Lawrence Grossberg (eds): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* London: Macmillan Education Ltd.

Weber, Samuel 1983. Capitalising History: Notes on *The Political Unconscious*. In: Barker, F, P Hulme, M Iversen & D Loxley (eds): *The Politics of Theory*. Colchester: University of Essex.

Williams, Patrick & Laura Chrisman 1993. Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction. *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Willoughby, Guy 1989. Aesthetic Today: A Report on the XIth International Congress of Aesthetics, Nottingham University. *The English Academy Review* 6:92-97.

Willoughby, Guy 1994. A Meeting of Soles: Overhearing Democratising Culture and Literature. *Current Writing; Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 6,2:38-48.

Wolpe, Harold 1988. Race and Class in the National Struggle in South Africa. In Van Diepen, Maria (ed): *The National Question in South Africa*. London: Zed Books.