

Couze Venn



The Postcolonial Challenge

Towards Alternative Worlds

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First published 2006

Published in association with Theory, Culture & Society,
Nottingham Trent University

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SAGE Publications Ltd
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Thousand Oaks, California 91320

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B-42, Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 0 7619 7161 0
0 7619 7162 9

Library of Congress control number available

Typeset by C&M Digital (P) Ltd., Chennai, India
Printed in India by Gopsons Papers Ltd, Noida

For Hari Ashurst-Venn

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Acknowledgements

I have been lucky to have known so many interesting colleagues and students over the years, generous with their time and ideas, with whom I have been able to discuss and develop much of what appears in this book. These exchanges have ranged across disciplinary boundaries so that they have somehow become fused in a mixture of theory and friendships that has shaped my writing. The following people have read and commented on the whole or parts of early drafts or engaged in exchanges that have provided insights and arguments without which this book would be more inadequate than it is: Pal Ahluwalia, Roy Boyne, Neal Curtis, Mike Featherstone, Julian Henriques, Matt Merefield, Scott Lash, Tina Papoulias, Bobby Sayyid, Scarlett Thomas Patrick Williams. Particular thanks are due to Matt, Scarlett and Neal who surveyed the work as it progressed and whose keen eye for lame arguments and insipid prose has saved me from some pitfalls. A constant source of inspiration has been the research seminars held at the Nottingham Trent University that I organized for the Theory, Culture & Society Centre. Through their ideas and their work the participants have enriched my understanding of the wider issues that are addressed in the book, and I have the following to thank: Roger Bromley, Steve Brown, Elizabeth Burrell, Sokho Choe, Neal Curtis, Mike Featherstone, Anders Hog Hansen, Richard Johnson, Kenichi Kawasaki, Gulshan Khan, Joost van Loon, Kevin Love, Sonia Melo, Matt Merefield, John Phillips, Inga Scharf, Tomoko Tamari, John Tomlinson, Neil Turnbull, Sally Waddingham, Patrick Williams, Andreas Wittel. They of course bear no responsibility for any inadequacy that may remain in the book. I must thank also a number of anonymous readers whose critical comments have encouraged some much needed rewriting. My editors at Sage, Chris Rojek, Kay Bridger and Mila Steele have been amazingly patient and supportive, often making suggestions that have made my task easier. I am indebted to my family, Francesca, Scarlett, Sam, Hari, who inspire me to write and have given constant support and encouragement.

Rethinking the Scope of the Postcolonial

Postcoloniality and the 'new world order'

This book begins with the recognition that new forms of colonization are at work in transforming the world today, more insidious and totalizing than previous forms. It intervenes in this moment of danger at the theoretical and methodological levels, interrogating the present conjuncture through a reconceptualization of problems ranging from issues of modernization and identity to the problem of establishing a political economy of **postmodern** times that could open up new grounds for imagining alternative worlds. In doing so, it develops a critical **postcolonial** standpoint that extends the focus and terrain of postcolonial theory, drawing still on the discursive formations with which it has been in solidarity, such as feminism, race studies, cultural and development studies, but equally on positions in the social studies of science and technology and in critical phenomenology in order to interrogate the material cultures and the complex character of the apparatuses that constitute the plural lifeworlds of today. The re-orientation in approach is, of course, sustained by the vocabulary and lessons that postcolonial studies has already established in its critical engagement with European colonization and its legacy at the material and discursive levels, for example, the conviction that the relationships between the present and the past, the local and the global, the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, the postcolonial and the postmodern are much more intertwined and of longer duration than appears in many accounts in the social sciences. In challenging established boundaries, disciplinary or otherwise, and in seeking to overcome the limitations posed by the dualities of north–south, developed–developing, modern–traditional, centre–periphery, it is concerned not so much with showing their interrelatedness and mutual dependencies, something already accomplished in postcolonial work, but with the underlying problem of opening critical spaces for new narratives of becoming and emancipation. The orientation of this questioning is transmodern, that is, properly postcolonial and post-occidental.

The intervention which this book makes is shadowed by the global 'war on terrorism', 'regime change' in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere and homicidal fundamentalism that clearly illuminate what is at stake in the new world order which is being put into place. We can now see more starkly the

alignment of forces in establishing or resisting the new machineries of what Hardt and Negri (2000) have called Empire. But it does not follow that one therefore knows what is to be done, for it is not a matter of a simple option between existing parties, for instance, between the kind of globalization from above advocated by the Davos World Economic Forum and its tributary organizations, and countervailing fundamentalisms founded in revisionist religious doctrines. We are now living in a time of the clash of fundamentalisms – religious, ethnic, neo-liberal – and the simultaneous archaic and postmodern terrors they inflict. Aligned against such forces, one finds the broad church of the ‘globalization from below’ as evidenced in the great gathering of oppositional movements at Porto Alegre in 2001 and 2002, and Mumbai in 2004 under the banner of the World Social Forum (WSF). The latter has brought together an uneven and disparate combination of a variety of counter-hegemonic social movements committed to resist or challenge in one way or another the ravages and disposessions produced by existing forms of exploitation based upon gender, capital or race (Fisher and Ponniah, 2003).

Foremost among the forces of subjugating power, one would single out neo-liberalism and its project of establishing the sovereignty, if not **hegemony** of a postmodern totalizing form of capitalism. Mentioned *ad nauseam* in every debate, it must nevertheless, like capitalism, be kept in sight in any analysis of postcoloniality. As Fisher and Ponniah put it:

Neoliberal globalization is not simply economic domination of the world but also the imposition of a monolithic thought that consolidates vertical forms of difference and prohibits the public from imagining diversity in egalitarian, horizontal terms. Capitalism, imperialism, monoculturalism, patriarchy, white supremacism, and the domination of biodiversity have coalesced under the current form of globalization. (2003: 10)

There is a lot to unpack here, and to examine critically, as I shall do in Chapter 4, but the thrust of the argument is to highlight the emergence of a new form of colonization, totalizing in its scope, since it invests every sphere of life, including temporalities of the lived, and leaves no space for alternatives.¹ Hardt and Negri (2003) see in the WSF the expression of an anti-capitalist transnationalism in search of ‘a new democratic cosmopolitanism’, being established through linkages and networks that are concerned with ‘finding what is common in our differences and expanding that commonality while our differences proliferate’ (ibid.: xvii).

As Young (2001, 2003) shows, these differences and commonalities have a history that encompasses colonial struggles of liberation and socialist struggles, as well as the divergences regarding the particularities of locality. These are echoed in differences at the level of theory addressing the wider problems of the analysis of globalization and problems to do with what is to be done politically. One important aspect of these differences appears in the underlying tensions between universalism and particularism that runs through the issues that have surfaced time and again in the history of emancipatory struggles. Mbembe (2001), addressing the problem from the point

of view of postcolonial theory, highlights the inadequacy of two kinds of lexicons, generated by the tension between universalist theory and particularist contentions, that have emerged to make sense of Africa as a project of development of the nation. One lexicon is located in the discourse of social theory elaborated within the conceptual framework of Western modernity that tried to understand Africa 'solely through conceptual structures and fictional representations used precisely to deny African societies any historical depth and to define them as radically *other*, as all that the West is not' (ibid.: 11; original emphasis). The other approach can be detected in the discourses that challenge the colonial denigration of the African subject and that seek to validate the memory of a misunderstood Africa and rediscover the assumed 'essence' or distinctive genius of the black 'race', as, for instance, in the Negritude movement and the more recent black essentialist position. Echoing du Bois' ([1903] 1989) analysis of double consciousness and Fanon's (1967) explorations of the splittings of identity arising from the othering of the colonized, Mbembe argues that the scene upon which was played out the tension between universalism and particularism, emancipation and assimilation, has ended in an 'inner twoness' or doubleness for colonial subjectivity, and 'an endless interrogation of the possibility, for the African subject, of achieving a balance between his/her total identification with "traditional" (in the philosophies of authenticity) African life, and his/her merging with, and subsequent loss in, modernity (in the discourse of alienation)' (2001: 12). The recognition of the historical dimension in these struggles and their theorizations, and the recognition of the co-existing 'multiple temporalities' – the linear, fast time of modernity and the slower recurrent time of 'tradition', and the home or the domus – in which real subjects find themselves in concrete situations everywhere is a lesson that postcolonial theory must keep on its agenda. The point, however, is that if postcolonial critique is about redrawing the diagrams of possible worlds, one must now abandon these spatial and temporal dichotomies and the political divisions they support and move towards a view of the commonalities that offer the possibility of properly dismantling **colonialism** in its various forms.

This means that it must break with the narratives of 'development' and 'modernization' that support the idea of Western modernity, or rather occidentalism (Venn, 2000), as the model of social advancement. Postcolonial critique therefore continues and seeks to complete the work of decolonization. It develops an oppositional analytical standpoint that targets the conditions, the narratives, the relations of power that, in their combined effects, support the iniquitous forms of sociality and the varieties of pauperizations that characterize the current world order. These forms include 'traditional' and customary socialities that inscribe gender and communalist ethnic oppressions. Postcolonial interrogation takes for granted the argument that the forces that established the Western form of colonialism and imperialism continue to operate, often in altered forms, through mutations in local circumstances, and through different apparatuses, to constitute what Mbembe

(2001) has called the postcolony. The latter concept, though applying more strikingly to Africa in Mbembe's argument, is marked, first, by the co-existence in the concrete postcolonial world of displacements and entwine-ments arising from the multiple temporalities 'made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an entanglement' (ibid.: 14), and, second, by the mutation of the form of governance and sovereignty that operated in colonial conditions into a form of commandment that now rules on the basis largely of the violent production of insecurity and scarcity. It is crucial to point out, in relation to this history, the fact that the process of decoloniza-tion has been distorted by the intervention of the cold war, or Third World War, which enlisted countries of the '**Third World**' on one side or the other and derailed their own alternative projects of development.

It follows that the prefix in postcoloniality is not meant to signal the end of the previous period but to stand for the sign of an emancipatory project, that is, it announces a goal yet to be realized: that of dismantling the economic, political and social structures and values, the attitudes and ideas that appeared with European colonialism and its complex combination with capitalism and Western modernity, and it is important to add, with pre-existing forms of exploitation. Postcolonial critique is thus a counter-occidentalism as well as an emancipatory task. A longer and complex history underlies this standpoint about postcolonialism, aligning it with the history of anti-colonial struggles, itself already

a diasporic production, a revolutionary mixture of the indigenous and the cos-mopolitan, a complex constellation of situated local knowledges combined with radical, universal political principles ... and widespread political contacts between different revolutionary organizations that generated common practi-cal information and material support as well as spreading radical political and intellectual ideas. (Young, 2001: 2)

This view adds to the understanding of anti-colonial struggles as the activities that subvert, disrupt and contest the strategies towards the homogenization and privileging of a centre or an origin or a sovereignty or a world-view which is at the heart of every form of colonization or subjugation, past and existing. In this book colonialism is understood in terms of forms of dispossession sup-ported by these forms of homogenization, often acting in combination. It will be clear also that the point of view of diaspora that I am elaborating under-mines the grounds of the discourse of colonialism.

This is the wider theoretical and political frame and the broader spatio-temporal space, or *longue durée*, that circumscribe the arguments in the book. Yet we know too that when we divert attention from the 'big picture', we have to recognize the enormous differences that exist if we were to contrast the everyday lives of people in a village, say, in the Sind province of Pakistan with what happens in a village in England, or in a town in the Midwest of the USA or in Brazil. Indeed, the difference between the same Pakistani village and Karachi is just as striking at the level of technology, customs, laws, the spatial disposition of the material world and the temporal

flow of daily life. However, in postcolonial times, all have come under the scrutiny of the new surveillance, intensifying the gaze of the multitude of organizations – governments, NGOs, transnational corporations, experts and researchers – that have for some time taken these places to be the object of their interest. In the ‘informational turn’ of regulatory bodies like the International Monetary Fund, they figure in reports about economic development, health, demographic composition, education, technology, crime, poverty, natural resources, and so on that are used in the strategic calculations of disciplinary forces. In these circumstances one may well ask: where and what is the postcolonial? Once, in the days of the ‘cold war’, and after the Bandung Conference in 1955 of ‘non-aligned’, ‘tri-continental’ nations’ (i.e. from Asia, Africa, Latin America), it was possible to imagine what was called the ‘Third World’ as a space in which the post-independence countries could detach themselves from the legacy of imperialism and the territorial and ideological investment to which the world was being subjected, and thus determine their own destiny. The wars fought across the territories of the ex-colonies in the name of the cold war, together with the strategic interventions of globalizing organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, UN bodies and trade associations have dispelled the illusion of independence or autonomy. Furthermore, differences at the local level have become open to transnational and transregional processes and systems that delimit what is possible at the practical level of social action.

These processes, clearly, relate to globalization; they direct attention to the flows and turbulences and networks in the circulation of goods, peoples, cultures, technologies, and ideas that have come to characterize the global. These flows and networks establish mobile and complex relationships between what Appadurai calls ‘scapes’, that is, the flow of people, communication forms and practices, technology, money, ideologies that can be thought of in terms of ethnoscaples, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes – to which one should add an infoscape, though it is implied in all these categories. They constitute the ‘building blocks’ for ‘imagined worlds’; they are ‘the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the world’ affecting everything from clothing styles to the working of capital (Appadurai, 1993: 328, 329). I would emphasize the processual co-articulation between these scapes, as I establish in the rest of the book, and particularly in Chapter 4. This heightened sense that the inter-connectedness between the local and the global at these different levels establishes a complex and mobile organism is one element that has led me to look for ways of establishing at the analytical level clearer or more explicit links between postcolonial studies and cognate fields such as cultural studies, political economy, gender studies, the social studies of the technosciences and the theorization of subjectivity. They overlap on the terrain of cultural theory, itself an eclectic bundle of concepts and theories from semiotics, literary studies, philosophy, ethnography, sociology, history, psychoanalysis assembled in opposition

to conventional or authoritative protocols for describing the socio-cultural world. This theoretical apparatus is sketched in the methodological section below, and put to work in the postcolonial analysis of modernity, identity and political economy that I go on to develop.

The standpoint it constructs has been directed in this book into an interrogation of modernity and modernization from the point of view of its **genealogy** and its constitutive relation with capitalism and colonialism (Chapter 2), a complex I have called *occidentalism* (Venn, 2000, see below), and the analysis of postcolonial identity from the point of view of the **imaginary** institution of the social world (Castoriadis, 1987), conscious of the fractured or disjointed temporalities and signifying practices that make up the experiential reality of that world (see Chapter 3). Colonialism, of course, attempts to subsume the different temporalities, thus literally the different lifeworlds, within the timeframe of the subjugating power. The chapter on modernity attempts to make visible the peculiarities of modernity as a period, arguing that a genealogy shows that postcolonial thought must be attentive to both the taken-for-granted aspects of modernity buried in the minds of people everywhere – as in the positive evaluations, say, about science and technology – inscribed in the concept and in the process of modernization, as well as the unexamined features of modernity that continue to have effects precisely because they are invisible, for instance, the basis for individualism in the presupposition of the unitary, rational, self-centred, autonomous character of the modern subject. This resilient relay concept is still central in law and in the social sciences; we find it in psychological accounts of every aspect of human behaviour; in judgements about rights and responsibilities and culpabilities take it for granted; it can be detected in interpretations of new technology and research in cybernetics in relation to the human and to artificial intelligence; it is posited as a given in the technologies of new (increasingly neo-liberal) governance that takes the individual to be the primary focus of all its regulatory and disciplinary machinery; it reappears in the form of the ego-centric ideology sustaining consumer culture; it lives on in the efforts to redraw the map of equitable redistribution and capabilities that some radical liberal thinkers like Nussbaum and Sen have been making (see Chapter 4) and, it goes without saying, it has become essentialized in the foundation of neo-liberalism.

There is no doubt that the task of making sense of this complex set of interrelated problems is a difficult one. The comprehensive scope of the book comes up against the hazards inherent in any project that attempts to combine in a coherent way apparently quite disparate areas and interests. The solution proposed here has been to organize the material in terms of key themes that have surfaced both in the literature on postcoloniality and in the 'globalization from below' movement exemplified in the concerns of the World Social Forum. This organization of the material is clarified in what follows.

A methodological assemblage for postcolonial critique

I must emphasize that the critical ambitions of the book would not have been possible without the many fine Introductions² to 'postcolonialism' and postcolonial theory that already clarify the conceptual ground upon which postcolonial critique has been established so far. They provide the detailed accounts of the key texts and authors, and explanations of the main disciplinary approaches, sufficient to enable the reader to tackle the complex theoretical apparatuses, such as poststructuralism and Marxism, that are deployed in the field; they help to make sense of the debates and disputes that have enlivened postcolonial studies, for instance, regarding issues to do with the when, what, where, which and whose of postcoloniality (see Childs and Williams, 1997; Stuart Hall, 1996); they point to the political and theoretical stakes fought out through these debates. They make it unnecessary for me to repeat these arguments, except where they enable me to try and relocate critique in the wake of the kinds of developments that I have indicated and that have conjoined to determine the context in which the postcolonial as a field of study needs now to be reconsidered. This context is marked, as I noted at the beginning, by the profound changes that are reshaping the world at the level of culture and knowledge, and by the increase in the scale and intensity of exploitation and violence across the world, exceeding even that experienced in the period of the European colonial enterprise of subjugation. The two periods are clearly not unconnected; indeed, the continuities as well as discontinuities emerge as soon as one examines the conditions for the current conflicts in any particular region, from the Congo to the Philippines to Israel/Palestine.

In this book, the linkages are constructed through analytical threads that run through the different chapters and are relayed in terms of several reconstituted problematics common to them, regarding respectively modernity, subjectivity and agency, political economy. Among the analytical threads, I will highlight the following: (1) occidentalism; (2) **genealogy** and critical phenomenology; (3) subjectivity, **diaspora** and **creolization**; and (4) disciplinary societies and militarism. They are combined on the basis of a methodological **assemblage** that I elaborate below.

Occidentalism

The centrality of modernity, as a period and as a discourse (or rather a matrix of discourses) for the analysis of postcoloniality can be understood by reference to what I have called occidentalism (Venn, 1993, 2000). I propose this term to designate the correlation of a conceptual space, a global, world-transforming project and a world order. It is the result of the co-articulation of these three developments that together have instituted the world as it exists today, namely, the emergence of a technocratic modernity as dominant at the level of thought and practice, rational capitalism and its global

implantation, and the Western form of colonialism. It is also the conceptual and historical space of the becoming-West of Europe and the becoming-modern of the world. Critical postcolonial studies targets that conceptual and imaginative space, rethinking in the process the fundamental principles that legitimate and ground it. That is why it must address modernity as a period: its foundational narratives, the functioning of colonialism and capitalism in its emergence and development; equally, it involves dealing with issues of universality, difference, plurality, emancipatory narratives, and in the background the underlying ethical question of what it means 'to live well with and for others in just institutions' (Ricoeur, 1992: 330).

The conceptual framework of occidentalism is circumscribed by the following propositions. First, the idea that the distinguishing feature of modernity is that it understands itself in the form of a project, that is, as an idea to be realized. The idea of project inscribes a drive for constant change towards desired ends, that is, it advocates linear historical progress through the renewed rejection of the past in favour of a better future achieved through human action. This linear temporal dimension is aligned with a narrative of the becoming of the subject, and with the goal of the transformation of society towards an ideal of sociality to be realized, guided by master narratives that function as the ultimate foundation legitimating the project (Lyotard, [1976] 1984). It is important to point out that other projects and master narratives have existed in all cultures, mostly by reference to religious doctrines that define the ideal community and seek its realization. In order to locate the specificity of modernity I will start with the claim that every period and every major culture have been framed by the specific answers that each provides to some basic questions about human existence, questions that one can group by reference to concepts of truth, the good, beauty, and, I should add, the way human temporality is understood and lived. Religious discourses ground such concepts in a theology, while philosophies establish their foundation in the discourses of epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. The conceptual framework or, rather, **episteme**, of every major period determines the relationship between them. The significant aspect that I want to highlight is that notions of truth and so on have to be grounded in principles and ideas that function as foundation for them. Until modernity, that foundation was sought in a religious or quasi-religious discourse, and therefore by reference to a sacred dimension, usually by reference to an idea of God, and an after-life, that is, on the basis of a transcendent Being or a transcendent domain or state (Heaven, Nirvana) which is placed outside any doubt and outside of human-time. Typically, this religious and/or theological or philosophical foundational discourse addresses very general issues that inscribe universal principles, with implications or lessons for how every subject is to judge his or her own actions, that is to say, it is made to relate to an ethos and to a way of life by being applied to every individual, instructing each one as to his or her conduct; one finds it in its most elaborate form in monotheisms and in varieties of Buddhism. So, correlated to every foundational discourse, whether it is religious or secular (as in the

discourse of modernity), we find a **problematic** about the subject, or rather about being, inscribing the narratives and concepts that give a content and meaning to ideas of truth, beauty, the good, a content that can be attested to at the level of the culture and of individual lives. This is not surprising, given that religious and foundational discourses in the last instance arise from existential experiences and realities, specifically, the recognition of finitude and death, the experience of suffering, loss, and fragility, the recognition of a liminal or spiritual dimension to the experiential that exceeds representation (for example, the experience of the sublime), and, crucially, the recognition of temporality itself (see Chapter 2).

One of the characteristics of modernity as a period, then, is that it imagined it would bring into existence a particular concept of the subject, namely, the subject as (ideally) the unitary, rational, autonomous, self-sufficient, masculine, and European agent of the history of humanity. This notion of the subject, sometimes referred to as the logocentric subject, is located in the discourse of modernity as at once a project, that is, something to be realized, and the agency of that project; it is correlated to the idea of the advancement or progress of 'humanity', that is, the idea of the linear development in time – as History and its teleological thrust – both of civilizations and of the subject. Part of my approach in understanding postcoloniality is that the discourse of modernity, as well as the process of the institution of modernity throughout the world, through colonialism and in the form of modernization, has introduced this narrative of the subject that appears to have become hegemonic in the social and human sciences and in technologies of formation of subjects, though it usually competes with religious and 'traditional' narratives when it comes to the reality of how people actually live their lives. The development of such a view of subjective becoming alongside colonialism has meant that its dominant form as Eurocentric and masculine has been over-determined. As I shall establish in the next chapter, the whole of Western metaphysics, classical ontology and modern epistemology find their expression and relay in that conceptualization of the subject. The latter is the distinguishing mark of the difference from non-Western, non-modern forms of the subject; the dominant form has been positioned as the privileged model against which, in the discourse of Western modernity, other forms are declared defective and underdeveloped, or even arrested in time at some primordial primitive stage, lagging behind. The notion of civilization itself, and therefore of differences in civilization, can be rethought in terms of the particular and different narratives of the subject that are proposed as desirable or ideal and appropriate in different foundational discourses for determining the worthwhile life. The implication is that the postcolonial as much as the postmodern is concerned with visions of the future that implicate the transfiguration of this subject of modernity.

The peculiarity of the philosophical or theoretical discourse of modernity that I am highlighting is precisely the fact that it is grounded in secular principles and that it invents the idea of temporality as linear progression towards an anticipated future. By contrast, religious or theological discourses propose

an ordained established order in the world present in the everyday and in an explicit metaphysics that vests that order in a transcendent realm known to God alone. In this way, the cosmological and the experiential are thought to reflect each other – for instance, in the idea of a homologous or symmetrical relation between the microcosm and the macrocosm – while the human being is assigned a determined but relatively insignificant place as an element of the system. One finds this world-view in religious doctrine, say, Christianity, just before the emergence of modernity from the sixteenth century when it had established a conceptual system for understanding both the universe as a whole and the human being: it functioned as the basis for the production and distribution of wealth; it determined the principles regulating government and the exercise of power; it was the basis for law, while knowledge was produced within its epistemological framework; and it incited the production of every kind of artistic work. Within its conceptual framework it was impossible to think of human subjects as autonomous agents of history. The difference is striking when we consider that the liberal version of the project of modernity claims that the history of ‘humanity’ is a process of advancement directed by the agency of the rational, self-sufficient, autonomous subject and the instrumentality of the rational sciences. This radical difference in foundation marks out modernity from all other narratives that address the key or ‘big’ questions about the meaning of human existence. I should point out here that the force of religious or spiritual narratives of being have not significantly declined, despite (sociology’s) claims that associate modernization with the secularization of beliefs, claims that now appear wishful. Indeed, in the context of the post-modern loss of faith in the project of modernity – bound up with the failures of democracy and the epistemological, ontological and ethical violences associated with occidental modernization – these narratives have acquired renewed force in guiding people regarding their conduct, or in functioning as ideology authorizing ways of being or in shaping social policy, for example, about abortion. Religious and ‘spiritual’ master narratives have become more, rather than less, important.

For reasons that I shall explain in Chapter 2, the instrumental and technocratic dimension of the project of modernity gradually came to dominate the process of modernization and the criteria used to determine and legitimate its course of action (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Habermas, 1983; Lyotard, [1976] 1984). The ethical and emancipatory goals and values of social development were gradually replaced or converted into those of efficiency and economic growth, though they survived in the radical discourses that also emerged with modernity; the ideal of the good society became identified with the goal of prosperity and orderliness. Indeed, in postmodern times, the distinction between what is just and what is true has been dissolved in the criterion of good performativity, that is, the maximization of input–output ratios in practices that allocate lives to the growth of power, the legitimization of which ‘is based on its optimising the system’s

performance – efficiency’ (Lyotard, [1976] 1984: xxiv). This privilege of the instrumental-bureaucratic dimension and the value of efficiency is what I call positivist or technocratic modernity.

The hegemony of technocratic rationality can be related conceptually to the second proposition regarding occidentalism, namely, the claim that rational capitalism, as a mode of production, operates on the basis of concepts and practices that fundamentally dehumanize the human being and are indifferent to human suffering. Its logic motivates a tendency to colonize modes of thinking and lifeworlds, converting everything into commodities, from human beings and objects of consumption to the arts and knowledge, to be bought and sold as abstract entities made equivalent through money as the prime determinant and measure of value. This tendency of capitalism is congruent with a totalizing and universalizing impulse.

The third aspect of occidentalism is the idea that the European model of colonialism is distinct from other models in that its form of appropriation-as-dispossession is overlaid with a discourse that locates the colonized as ‘Other’, not just the stranger or the different, but as fundamentally and ontologically inferior beings to be brought under either the tutelage or the ban of the West (itself constituted within the logic of the West and its ‘other’). The violence characteristic of this form of colonialism combines physical violence (common to all colonizations) with epistemic violence, that is, the denial of the authority and validity of the knowledge of the colonized; ontological violence, namely, the refusal to recognize the (non-assimilated) colonized subject as a fellow human being; and symbolic and psychic violence, the silencing of the voice of the colonized, the denial of the latter’s ability to tell his or her story. This form of colonialism, particularly its denial of the humanity and agency of the colonized, is congruent with the dehumanizing spirit of capitalism and the technocratic reason of positivist modernity. The co-emergence and co-articulation of these three aspects of occidentalism have meant that they have shaped each other in the course of the history of modernity and its implantation or its translation in other cultures. The genealogy (see below) of these effects passes through the reconstruction of the world-view framed by occidentalism and the reconstruction of the apparatuses that were pragmatically put into place to constitute the material world of modernity and modern forms of sociality. A central part of the postcolonial standpoint I am proposing is the claim that the effects of these developments abide, albeit unevenly, at all levels of thought and of the material world globally (but see the case of Japan in the next chapter). Furthermore, an important element of the analytical framework shaping the book is the view that the situation noted at the beginning of this chapter is a development in keeping with the logic of occidentalism, perhaps even its completion. It follows that the postcolonial as post-occidental critique aims to make visible the mechanisms at work in the making of this reality, including the task of showing the interrelations at the level of theory between postcolonial studies and that reality.

Genealogy and critical phenomenology

The concept of genealogy is used in this book to indicate the recognition of the historicity of the present, that is, the sense that the present inscribes and is conditioned by the historical past in the very material reality of the everyday world and in the accretion of meanings attaching to its every aspect. The constitutive presence of the past in the present, and the indeterminate, contingent mobility of its effects are a reality that postcolonial studies cannot ignore. In his work, Foucault (1975, 1976) applied the concept of genealogy more specifically to the history of concepts, for instance, the concept of discipline or that of sexuality, when he retraced the conditions of possibility that in the course of the development of the particular concept determined its mutations and its material effects. Genealogy is used in Foucault to counter the idea of continuities in history that are supposed to be stable and to follow logical paths of development from some clear origin, as in the conventional history of the sciences. Foucault here relies on the work of Canguilhem and Bachelard who elaborated approaches critical to conventional histories of science in their development of an epistemological history and an historical epistemology respectively; these approaches reject the idea that there are logical lines of progression from an early state or stage of knowledge to the later state, a progress that a 'history of ideas' was meant to trace through the search for precursors in specific discipline. This work emphasizes instead the positivity of scientific activity, the constructed, 'materially normed' character of concepts, the constant interrogation of knowledge, the historicity of concepts and discontinuities in the history of the sciences (Bachelard, 1949, 1951, [1938] 1972; Canguilhem, 1966, 1975; see Venn, 1982, for an elaboration). Located against this polemical background, genealogy shows that these neat lines of progression appear so only retrospectively, and is thus a simple reiteration of the internalist **paradigm** operating in the history of ideas. Instead it draws attention to contingency and disruption in history (whether of the concept or of practice), to conditions of possibility that include cultural and historical factors outside particular disciplines, and so to the constructed character of concepts. The approach I am signalling assumes that the writing of history proceeds in terms of an archaeological search for the hidden and for what every narration erases in its telling, including, symptomatically, a history of errors. Equally, the secret life of the concept reveals the unexpected and the often invisible but ever present effects of power. It is possible to reconstruct different genealogies, since the decision on conditions of possibility depends not only on attention to a broad canvas but also to the interests that guide the judgement of effects, for example, in a genealogy of the World Bank or Bollywood that would differ according to, say, a feminist instead of a liberal economic standpoint. Genealogies are not neutral: as histories of the present, they construct a specific gaze, thus offering a specific orientation on the past and the future. The application of genealogy to the emergence of modernity in Chapter 2 enables one to reconstruct the complex effects of the colonization

of the New World on the self-representation of Europe, on the recasting of discourses about nature and culture, on the disruption of the foundations that supported the hegemony of Christian doctrine and Greek science, on the central role allocated to the modern subject in the discourse of modernity. Thus, the history of European colonialism and European encounters with the rest of the world is revealed to have been a constitutive factor in capitalism and modernity (Goonatilake 1984; Nandy, 1990), both at the level of historical development and change as well as at the level of the discourses and knowledges that emerged and have come to be seen as the mark of modernity; there are serious implications for how one is to envisage the transmodern/transcolonial world to come.

My extension of the idea of genealogy supplements it with approaches developed within the social studies of the technosciences and their application to the analysis of practices of constitution of the social. The main components are: in addition to the epistemological history/historical epistemology that I have indicated earlier, the approaches in the social studies of science and technology that reject internalist explanations of their emergence and development in favour of situated and culturally embedded knowledges and the idea of a compossible relation between technology, or technics, and culture (Canguilhem, 1975; Haraway, 1991; Knorr-Cetina, 1981, 2002; Latour, 1993, 1997, 1999; Needham, 1969; Stengers, 1997; Venn, 1982, from a long list); postcolonial critiques of Eurocentric narratives of civilization and the development of Western sciences and technology that show the non-European provenance of key concepts and findings and make visible the borrowings and the dynamic transcultural interactions that have determined their development (Goonatilake, 1984; Harding, 1998); alternative approaches in the social sciences and humanities that emphasize complexity, co-articulation, heterogeneity, reciprocal conditioning among socio-cultural and economic factors (indicatively: Tarde, Castoriadis, de Certeau, Hall); philosophical reflections that elaborate the implications for the critique of occidentalism of alternative ontologies and epistemologies that break with Cartesianism and logocentrism that I began to develop in Venn (2000) (see also Heidegger, 1962; Ricoeur, 1992; Arendt, 1959; Derrida, 1982; Levinas, 1969). These diverse departures often ignore each other; in this book their combination is analytically organized in terms of a critical phenomenology that puts emphasis on two inter-related features: the technically and conceptually normed character of the world we encounter, and the constructed and historical character of that world from the standpoint of the existential, durable and meaning-constituting space in which subjects live. The following are examples of the cumulative, pragmatic, deliberative, polyglot, inter-subjective, structured-structurizing (if indeterminate) action and interchanges between human and material actors and actants: social structures such as the family, the state of knowledge at any particular point in time and its form of authorization, as in the idea of science, practices of production of material life and the discourses that have been invented to describe and regulate them,

the inventive and renewed institution of communities or socialities through acting in common, in pursuing common goals, and institutions of all kinds that have gradually been put into place, as assemblages, as part of the conditions of existence of specific communities.

An example from Bachelard (1951) will allow me to clarify the relationship between genealogy and this critical phenomenology. Talking about the technical, and technically normed, apparatus that makes a world available for us to know, he stresses the fact that, for instance, the biologist sees what the microscope sees. Clearly, it is also the case that the microscope sees nothing, since it has neither a conceptual apparatus nor the sense of a questioning to direct its gaze. Besides, the biologist sees according to the coordination of the technical apparatus – the microscope – together with a conceptual apparatus and an orientation to the world inscribed in a paradigm (say, about the biochemistry of enzymes). Such coordination is achieved through an apprenticeship, that is, through a formation as biologist, with implications for cognitive and subjective location. Thus, when one looks at the technical means that one has at one's disposal, one must recognize that they have been developed over years under specific conditions, and are the product of previous knowledges and techniques and ways of acting upon the world; they function as extensors and prosthetic devices that amplify, but equally, structure what we are able to know about that world. In any case it is not a raw world, but one always-already worked upon and categorized by previous theoretical and technical knowledges and action. Furthermore, extending the scope of the example, one could argue that these extensors, props, artifices, prosthetic tools – works, in Arendt's (1959) sense, or equipment in the Heideggerian (1977) sense, or generative mechanisms as I would call them – are the scaffolding and the assemblages that insert the human into a world, so that one knows according to them. Assemblages are ordered, organized combinations of tools, knowledges, operating rules, techniques put into place in the form of interconnecting networks, ready to be set into motion to achieve goals specified by a practice (see also Deleuze and Guattari, 1988); thus, the stock exchange, the car, and the body can be considered as different kinds of assemblages.³ The human cognitive process relies upon their framing and mediating function and has developed in a dynamic relation with them; they function not only as generative devices, but equally as threshold and as a tissue that connects the human and the natural (see also Haraway, 1991), and as memory devices that encode and archive the enduring history of human accomplishment.

One implication is that technologies and knowledges are profoundly social and cultural, to be understood within the scope of the historicity of lifeworlds and the intentionality of actors. If one bears in mind Foucault's insistence on examining the conditions of possibility of practices and discourses as part of constructing genealogies, then one must recognize that knowledges and technologies limit and circumscribe as much as they produce and reveal a world. Power is inscribed in the way they are operationalized, for instance, today in the functioning of what Derrida (2002) describes as the