Unrealized promises: the subject of postcolonial discourse and the new international division of labor

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**Introduction**

In this study I bring together two enormous and apparently distant topics: the subject, on the one hand, and the international division of labor, on the other. I hold that a historically responsive and epistemologically productive discussion of subjectivity cannot be exempted from a consideration of the international division of labor. This claim becomes acute when such inquiries into subjectivity are specifically concerned with differentiated historical experience across the globe, as is the case with postcolonial discourse.¹

Hence, I am not concerned with the subject in general, but with the subject of postcolonial discourse, that is to say, with the subject positions created, presupposed and/or legitimated in texts of postcolonial theory. Such discourses are my objects of study. I employ the methodology of cultural analysis as developed by Dutch theorist and critic at the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), Mieke Bal (2002), in order to approach those texts not only as theory, but also as expressions of geo-economically and institutionally situated cultures of knowing.² I sustain that to analyze the literary, historical and ideological dimensions of these discourses is to confront them with the limits that determine their epistemic horizons and, thus, to open up not only the political but also the dialogic intellectual possibilities that they potentially enable as well as withhold.

In these ways, I approach academic texts as cultural objects. Hence, I am not concerned with phenomenological subjects per se, but with the way these interact with and shape the subject positions that are deployed in texts. In this interaction, subjects are differentially legitimated as possible sites of circulation and accumulation of cultural capital. The author figure, or what I will designate as the universal subject position, emerges at the convergence between a historical subject and the articulating principle of a text.³ Since the reliance on this extra-textual agency is cultural capital’s ultimate source of legitimacy, the universal subject position is the most privileged of

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¹ With “postcolonial discourse,” I refer to the written production of the academic field best known as “postcolonial theory,” “postcolonial criticism” or simply “postcolonialism.” Until further clarification, I use these terms indistinguishably.

² In this study, I introduce contemporary authors – usually only if and when they will reappear – by pointing to their disciplinary and national backgrounds, as well as to their present academic affiliations. The aim is to give readers from different fields an idea of where the author in question is speaking from. It is critical to add that national (and disciplinary) identities today may scarcely give an accurate account of the actual geo-historical experience and cultural legacy of individuals. Nonetheless, some telling general patterns emerged in researching this information, such as the fact that the nationalities of “Western” contemporary authors are rarely, if ever, made available, while the national identities of “non-Western” authors are widely publicized. My first mention of non-contemporary authors includes their life-span dates; my first reference to academic institutions clarifies their location. These introductions apply for the study as a whole, not for each chapter.

³ On this understanding of authorship, see Foucault 1977: 124-127.
textual subject positions. As a treasured site of cultural capital, access to the universal subject position is unequally distributed across the international division of labor.

The international division of labor is a generally underestimated analytical category in the humanities. This may be gleaned, for example, from the work of Simon Critchley (2007), working at the NSSR. That underestimation is problematic in the work of this well-known British philosopher insofar as it contradicts his stated alliances. Since postcolonial criticism is particularly concerned with the unequal legitimation of culture at a global scale, such an underestimation perhaps becomes even more problematic when it is practiced by postcolonial theorists. In what follows, I explore that possibility.

In the section below, I explore the history and ideological interests surrounding the notion of the postcolonial, while clarifying my own usage of the term. In the subsequent section, I situate my work in the context of previous critiques in the field to establish its particular relevance. Discussing the different sites of enunciation from which previous critique has been made, I reflect on another central concept in this study: the subject of discourse. The section that follows that discussion is a situated investigation of the other major operative concept I employ: the new international division of labor. The final section explains what I mean by “Unrealized Promises” and offers a tour of the chapters.

“Postcolonial” as a Floating Signifier

In approaching the term “postcolonial” as an object of analysis, I benefit from Mieke Bal’s *Traveling Concepts* (2002). The book has been extensively consulted as a methodology for interdisciplinary research in the humanities. I profit from the possibility it offers to observe, rather than bring about, the traveling of concepts across time, place, and cultures of knowing. The observation of concepts is productive, because “while concepts are products of philosophy and tools

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4 Bourdieu locates the actual subject as the ultimate source of legitimacy of socially valued artistic products: “Most properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, Bildung, presupposes a process of em-bodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor.” (1986: 224)

5 NSSR stands for the New School for Social Research; it is located in New York, U.S.A. Since the underestimation of the international division of labor as an analytical category within the humanities is a generalized fact and not an exception, I could have named as examples practically any philosopher or literary critic, whether renowned or not, whether working in First or Third World academic circles. Yet, I have chosen to exemplify this condition by means of Simon Critchley’s *Infinitely Demanding* (2007), for reasons that will become clear in my discussion of it in Chapter Five.
of analysis, they are also embodiments of the cultural practices we seek to understand through them” (Bal 2002: 21). Because my observation of the concept requires that I use it as a tool as well, and this inevitably from my historical standpoint, I imagine my own practice as a participant observation of the term “postcolonial.”6 As I research, record and analyze some histories of the concept’s travels, while simultaneously making use of it, I intend to let that object “speak back,” thriving on the contradictions that it presents, rather than shying away from them (Bal 2003: 39-40).

The term “postcolonial” has been carefully defined by an array of authors, including Ella Shohat (1992), Anne McClintock (1992), Ania Loomba (1998a), and Achille Mbembe (2001).7 As the numerous and elaborate attempts at defining the concept testify, “postcolonial” is a term that strongly resists definition. Even though these authors all engage in meticulous explorations of the term, my list of examples is, in a sense, rather arbitrary, for practically any book or article bearing the term (or some modification thereof) offers a particular definition. This bears out the fact that the adjective encompasses so much that it tends to shed meaning. As Peter Hitchcock, a British cultural theorist at the City University of New York, has pointed out, the “biggest drawback in postcolonialism and therefore in the identity of postcoloniality is the almost exponential growth of meanings attributable to it” (2003: 306).

Here, I will not attempt to define the concept myself, nor even to unscramble problematic conflations such as the term’s double affiliation as a marker of time and place, on the one hand, and as designating a symbolic condition, on the other. Rather, benefiting from an epistemological strategy designed by U.S.A. queer performativity theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950-2009), that is, her understanding of “unknowing” as a “privilege,” I explore where, how and why the term resists definition, and to what effect (1994). This approach is particularly pertinent for a term like “postcolonial,” which has been attributed such a multiplicity of meaning. As Ernesto Laclau has

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6 I have brought to bear the concept of “participant observation” on my discourse. At least since the publication of Time and the Other (1983) by cultural anthropologist at the University of Amsterdam, Johannes Fabian, the concept has proven to be problematic. Still, I have decided to foreground it, rather than push it away. Hence, it could be said that I critically engage with ethnography as a specific methodology within the anthropological discipline. Yet, the procedures of anthropology and cultural analysis differ. While in anthropology “you have to choose a field, apply a method, and construct an object,” in cultural analysis the field “is not delimited,” “by selecting an object you question a field” and methods become “part of the observation” (Bal 2002: 4). In the inter-disciplinary travel of “participant observation,” a more specific change also takes place. In its context of departure (that of ethnography), “participant observation” relates to the otherness of subjects, while here the otherness of objects (concepts) is at stake. Below, I inquire into the dialectical tension between the two.

7 Shohat is an Israeli cultural analyst working at New York University; McClintock is a British-Zimbabwean gender studies scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; while Indian postcolonial theorist, Ania Loomba, also works in the U.S.A., at the University of Pennsylvania. Finally, Cameroonian political scientist, Achille Mbembe, is based at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, in Johannesburg, South Africa.
pointed out, the battle for ideological hegemony may often be traced in the history of concepts that in time become floating or empty signifiers (1997). Hence, more than in defining “postcolonial,” I am interested in exploring how the instabilities, contradictions, and ambiguities that prompt the concept to escape definition articulate wider discursive and extra-textual configurations of power.

As I have suggested, one of the most problematic aspects of the term is its double usage as descriptive of a geographical space in a determinate historical period, on the one hand, and as descriptive of an abstract condition of being and knowing, on the other. The suffix –ism is sometimes employed to substantivize the adjective and refer to the academic field that addresses both. Yet “postcolonialism,” just like “postcolonial,” may refer both to a specific historical period and to formerly colonized space, on the one hand, or to an abstract symbolic condition, only vaguely associated with that geo-historical location, on the other. The respective entries in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) expose this duality. The term “post-colonial” is defined as “[o]ccurring or existing after the end of colonial rule; of or relating to a former colony. In later use also: of or relating to the cultural condition of a former colony, esp. regarding its relationship with the former colonial power.” This double meaning is echoed in the OED entry for “post-colonialism,” which reads, “[t]he fact or state of having formerly been a colony; the cultural condition of (a) post-colonial society.”

The most recent meaning of both forms of the term came into use when the field of postcolonial studies itself came into existence. Insofar as postcolonial theorists addressed the abstract condition, naming it for the first time and constituting it as an object of study, it may be said that postcolonial theory preposterously constituted – in the sense that it named and made legitimate – the postcolonial condition. Hence, the postcolonial, as an abstract condition of being and knowing, is inextricably linked to postcolonialism as an academic field. As will be discussed below, this proximity has crucial implications for the centrality of the subject in postcolonial theory and, particularly, for where that subject is situated in a geo-economic totality. For the time being,

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8 Despite later variations, in 1997 Laclau maintains that floating and empty signifiers are, for all practical purposes, the same: “In the case of a floating signifier we would apparently have an overflowing of meaning while an empty signifier, on the contrary, would ultimately be a signifier without a signified. But if we analyze the matter more carefully, we realize that the floating character of a signifier is the only phenomenic form of its emptiness” (1997: 306). Laclau is an Argentinean-born political theorist working at the University of Essex, U.K.

9 The adjective may also be placed after the article “the” for the same purposes. Here I deal with the terms “postcolonialism” and “postcolonial”; the significance of converting “postcolonial” into “the postcolonial” will be addressed later.

10 Although such a condition preexisted the act of naming, the fact that the condition is in itself symbolic gives this explanation grounds beyond a mere nominalism. Here I profit from Spivak’s (1993a) approach to nominalism. Here and below, I profit from Bal’s (1999) concept of “preposterous history.”
allow me to call attention to the fact that the double meaning of “postcolonialism” as a cultural condition and as an academic field is rarely problematized. This is strange, given the frequent distinctions made between the usage of the term as a time/place marker and as referring to a cultural condition (see, for example, Desai 2001: 11-13 and Mbembe 2001: 102-103).

As it is presently my interest to trace the history of the term in its actual usage, let me suspend other factors and push further into a sort of nominalism. If there has been no actual distinction between the postcolonial as a condition of being and knowing on the one hand, and the postcolonial as an academic field on the other, then there is no actual distinction between the two. Hence, I may rephrase the conflation I signaled before as that taking place between “postcolonial” as a time and place marker, on the one hand, and “postcolonial” as describing an academic field (i.e. a culture of knowing) on the other.

To address that conflation, I expand on each of the two referents involved. As descriptive of an academic field, “postcolonial” (as in “postcolonial theory,” “postcolonial criticism” or “postcolonial studies”) refers to an inter-disciplinary intellectual endeavor in the humanities that deals with the cultural legacies of colonialism. Although, in principle, postcolonialism may extend outside the humanities, the contribution of social scientists to the field – such as that of U.S. anthropologist at the NSSR, Ann Laura Stoler (2004) – is relatively scarce. Likewise, the work produced by the Subaltern Studies group of Indian historiographers, while an inspiration for mayor postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak, lies outside the field. Ramón Grosfoguel observes that it is partially due to this background in the humanities that postcolonial criticism has tended to prioritize culture over economy and agency over structure in its analyses (2003:13). As Young summarizes, the terrain that such analyses cover centrally includes questions of colonialism and neo-colonialism, ethnicity, gender and the nation-state (2001: 11).11

Although postcolonial theorists claim precedence in earlier organic intellectuals such as Martiniquean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) or Tanzanian political theorist Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), this appropriation is contested by those working outside the field (see Young 2001: 68, 274-292; cf. Parry 2004: 13). Edward Said’s Orientalism (2003), first published in 1978, is considered the founding work of postcolonial criticism. Like Said, a Palestinian-born, United States-based academic, postcolonial theorists are traditionally (expected to be) of “non-Western origin,” while most of them work in First-World – particularly U.S.A. – universities; the latter being

11 Both Ramón Grosfoguel and Robert Young are based in the U.S.A. Grosfoguel is a Puerto Rican sociologist affiliated to the University of California, Berkeley. Young, a U.S.-born postcolonial theorist, is currently working at New York University.
the place where the field emerged and was consolidated. As Young suggests, the term initially referred to “non-Western” scholars in “Western” institutions exclusively (2001: 61; 2008). As Arif Dirlik claims, only in the mid eighties did the term begin to be used to refer to a corpus of criticism and “to describe academic intellectuals of Third World origin” (1994: 330).  

As a geo-historical marker – as in “the postcolonial era,” or “postcolonial countries” – the term came into use as a result of the formal end of colonialism in numerous countries of Africa, the Asian subcontinent, South East Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean. Most of these decolonization processes took place between 1922 and 1975, especially after World War II, and reached their apex during the 1960s. As Dirlik notes, the term came to substitute “Third World” (1994: 332). “Third World” was employed to refer to non-aligned “developing” countries during the Cold War era (Ahmad 1992: 292-97). The term covered approximately the same geographical area as “postcolonial,” but was discarded, among other things, for its teleological implications (Pletsch 1981, Young 2001: 4-5). I connect the decline of that category to its origin in the world order prior to the fall of the Berlin wall and to contemporary skepticism with regard to both generalized abstractions and economic narratives. Dirlik attributes the fading use of the term to its untenability in the context of global capitalism, since in it “the nation-state [is] taken for granted as the global unit of political organization” (1994: 330).

Aijaz Ahmad accounts for the central role played by nationalism in every one of the competing (Soviet, Nehruvian and Maoist) versions of the “Three Worlds Theory” (1992: 308). Ahmad considers that even today “the already existing structures of the nation-state are a fundamental reality” and hence “the struggle for even the prospect of … transition presumes a national basis” (318, emphasis in text). Yet, as in the case of Dirlik, Ahmad’s emphasis is on the fact that today “the nation-state has ceased to be the discrete site for the reproduction of advanced capital” (313, emphasis in text). But the changing role of the nation-state must be distinguished from the possibility of a continued pertinence of the Third World category. As Ahmad’s account of

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12 Dirlik is a Turkish historiographer specialized in Chinese history; he taught in the U.S.A, at Duke University and the University of Oregon; though still active, he is now retired.  
13 I use the term “Third World” as “a matter simply of common parlance,” a usage “which makes no theoretical pretence and applies the nomenclature ‘Third World’ simply to the so-called developing countries” (Ahmad 1992: 307). Nonetheless, as the political analyst and literary theorist at the Centre of Contemporary Studies in New Delhi, India, Aijaz Ahmad also explains, “this term, ‘Third World’, does not come to us as a mere descriptive category, to designate a geographical location or a specific relation with imperialism alone. It carries within it contradictory layers of meaning and political purpose” (307). For a full length analysis and historization of the term as a theoretical category see Ahmad 1992: 287-318.  
14 See also Ahmad 1992: 287-318, esp. 304-311.
the political and academic history of the term exposes, the *global scale* of the world economy was a (if not *the*) major factor in the emergence of the “Three Worlds Theory.”

Although “Third World,” as a term referring to poor, non-aligned countries does characterize a geo-political zone as “backward” on an evolutionary scale, the term reflects not only a teleological framework, but also the realities of a historical project that was cut short by the advent of neo-liberalism. I am referring to the project often described as akin to the Keynesian socio-political model and known as Third-World developmentalism. Naomi Klein describes this project as it was brought about in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil during the Post War period:

> During this dizzying period of expansion, the Southern Cone began to look more like Europe and North America than the rest of Latin America or other parts of the Third World. The workers in the new factories formed powerful unions that negotiated middle-class salaries and their children were sent off to study at newly built public universities … By the 1950s Argentina had the largest middle class on the continent, and next-door Uruguay had a literacy rate of 95 percent and offered free health care for all its citizens. Developmentalism was so staggeringly successful for a time that the Southern Cone of Latin America became a potent symbol for poor countries around the world: here was proof that with smart, practical policies, aggressively implemented, the class divide between the First and Third World could actually be closed. (2007: 67)

Yet, it was not. As Klein argues, the international division of labor persisted and was aggravated by the demolition of the developmentalist project and the advent of neo-liberalism, both promoted by the Chicago School of Economics on the basis of Milton Friedman’s theories.

Klein affirms that “in 1953 and 1954, the CIA staged its first two coups d’état, both against Third-World governments that identified far more with Keynes than with Stalin” (71). Fully fledged

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15 As I have suggested, Ahmad exposes but does not explicitly emphasize the economic dimension of the category. That emphasis is mine and partly due to the fact that Ahmad points to the strictly economic significance of the term when employed as a *descriptive* category, a usage of the term to which I restrict myself (see fn. 13). Furthermore, Ahmad points to the articulation between national Third-World economic interest and those of imperialist powers as a central factor in the constitution of the Three Worlds ideological formation. Also, as Ahmad signals, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund played crucial roles in its development. On a correlated issue, the author is critical of the “Three Worlds Theory” because, in its ideological ambiguity, it has tended to be used by those unwilling to commit politically (1992: 292).

16 British economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) argued that leaving decisions up to the private sector alone would lead to inefficiency at the macro-economic level. Hence, he advocated (moderate) government intervention. Keynes’ theory accounted for the U.S.A.’s Great Depression. Roosevelt’s New Deal is informed by Keynes’ theory. In the Post World War II era, Keynesian policies were widespread in Anglo-America and Western Europe. Up until the 1970s, these capitalist social democracies had low unemployment rates and modest inflation (Colander and Landreth 1996, Davidson 2008).

17 U.S.A. economist Milton Friedman (1912-2006) taught at the department of economics of the University of Chicago in the U.S., giving rise to the neo-liberalist school of thought. The school actively participated in the imposition of Friedman’s economic model in Third-World countries.
As the Canadian journalist goes on to argue, 1973 was the genesis of the contemporary economic order insofar as the U.S.A. financed coup in Chile put an end to developmentalism and forced the country to serve as a laboratory for Friedman’s economic model of unrestricted capitalism (72-80). The experiment would be extended to a global scale; more vigorously so after the fall of the Berlin Wall because, as Klein indicates, capitalism no longer needed to compete against “more appealing ideolog[ies]” (66).

Displacing the term “Third World” as a form of reference to so-called developing countries, “the postcolonial” has become predominant in Anglophone academic circles in the humanities today. This change takes the emphasis away from economic factors. As a temporal marker, “the postcolonial” covers precisely that era that Klein defines as the one in which the free-market model emerged and was consolidated.\(^\text{18}\) Partially explaining this is the changing role of the nation-state. Ramón Grosfoguel describes the place of the state in dependency theory, the analytical counterpart of the developmentalist project.\(^\text{19}\)

Dependentistas [dependency theorists] reproduced the illusion that rational organization and development can be achieved from the control of the nation-state. This contradicted their position that development and underdevelopment are the result of structural relations within the capitalist world-system. Although dependentistas defined capitalism as a global system … they still believed it was possible to delink or break with the world system at the national level. This implied that a socialist revolutionary process at the national level could insulate the country from the global system. However, as we know today … [n]o “rational” control of the nation-state would alter the location of a country in the international division of labor. (2003: 16-17)

It is evident from Grosfoguel’s account that the state was a foundational building block of the project. This may be explained by the fact that contemporary nation-states in Latin America have existed for a relatively long period. Over time, the nation-state form has become locally appropriated. National frontiers reflect a more solid historical experience, and are less likely to be perceived as artificial, imposed constructs, as is the case in recently decolonized spaces.

In Africa, the continent in which the colonizers most blatantly ignored pre-existing ethnic and geo-cultural demarcations, European powers drew borders that responded exclusively to their

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\(^{18}\) As I have suggested, as a historical marker the “postcolonial” came into use to refer to the formal end of colonialism in numerous countries of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. These decolonization processes took place between 1922 and 1975, but the bulk of them occurred during the 1960s and shortly thereafter.

\(^{19}\) The dependency school of political economy in Latin America may be regarded as the analytical counterpart of the developmentalist project because, socio-institutionally and geo-historically, it coexisted with the latter and had ideological affinity with it.
own interests, particularly in relation to the power struggles leading up to World War I and the negotiations thereafter. However, even in Africa, nationalist developmentalism was a locally adopted project. Nyerere’s “African Socialism” in Tanzania during the sixties and seventies is the classic example.

Postcolonial theory, emerging in association with recent decolonization processes, addresses the state as a site of power. But its critique of the nation-state is not always balanced by a parallel (strategic and de facto) belief in it, as was the case with dependency theory. In postcolonial criticism, the emphasis is instead on deconstructing the nation-state and on exposing its arbitrariness. However, a number of postcolonial theorists do criticize the assumption that Third-World nation-states are simply reproducing Western models. In this regard, postcolonial theory is informed by the work of the Subaltern Studies group, particularly by texts such as Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993). Nonetheless, even in those cases, postcolonial criticism tends to leave aside, as Grosfoguel indicates, the nation-state’s entanglement with the global market as well as the role of economics in the exertion of power (2003: 11-21).

Timothy Brennan, based in the University of Minnesota, points to some of the implications of those dismissals in analyses of the contemporary world order. In a section of his book *Wars of Position* (2006), which is entitled “Statelessness: that is, the American State,” the U.S.A cultural critic points to the persistence of the state today, despite its alleged caducity. Brennan argues that the U.S. increasingly functions as a single global state. Since its power is economic rather than politico-institutional, it is less visible and hence more pervasive (228-232). This view is echoed by Naomi Klein, who describes the last thirty-five years in world history as the period in which the corporatist state emerged and was consolidated. Klein defines the contemporary phenomenon of the “corporatist state” as an increasingly hollow structure at the service of trans-national economic interests. Brennan proposes that criticism of the nation-state should distinguish between states created by imperialist expansion and those created by the people resisting that expansion (2006: 231). Likewise, he advocates a consideration of the state not only as the legitimized monopoly of violence, but also as potentially holding the possibility of protecting the weak and functioning as their refuge (230).

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20 For a full discussion of the repartition of Africa see Digre 1990.
21 See Klein 2007: 241, 291, 372-80, 449-455, 502. The corporatist state is a mechanism at the juncture of private economic interest and public institutional politics.
22 I am paraphrasing from the definition of the state put forward by German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) in “Politics as Vocation” (2004).
In Grosfoguel’s analysis quoted above, he would appear to take into account Brennan’s recommendations. Grosfoguel exposes not only the contradictions of dependency theory but also, from the vantage point of historical retrospection, the external geo-economic conditions that determined them. In this way, he signals the international division of labor as the de facto blind spot in national revolutionary movements in Latin America during the Post World War II era. One of the two terms that concern me here, “Third World,” contains that contradiction, for it points to the decisive condition created by the international division of labor; yet, it does so in the language of First-World supremacy.23

But the term “postcolonial” that came to replace it does not resolve that tension. It erases the international division of labor as an analytical category and introduces as its central referent colonial power.24 With respect to the temporal question, it does not move away from teleology, but modifies it by converting with its prefix the aspirations implied by “Third World” into things of the past.25 It is therefore no surprise that the greatest attention in discussions of the term has been given to the fact that the “post-” prefix relegates “colonialism” to the past tense and, in this way, obscures the persistence of present day economic imperialism or neo-colonialism.26

Having pointed to the temporal haziness of the “postcolonial,” let me deal with the ambiguities regarding its geographical coverage. In their Introduction to Postcolonial Theory, Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, respectively working at the University of Gloucestershire and Nottingham Trent in the U.K., point to the great elasticity of the term in that regard. As these British literary scholars argue, while for some the term is limited to the countries decolonized from European powers during the 20th Century, for others it may be expanded to include areas that do not fall under that category, and that are at great variance with each other in terms of their colonization histories and present status concerning world power. Examples range from China, Ireland and all of the Latin American nations, to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and even the U.S.A. (1997: 10-12).

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23 This may be read as what Gayatri Spivak terms “a critique of what one cannot not want,” whereby the subaltern has no choice but to phrase her demands in the dominant ideology or language, through a “citing of the enlightened episteme.” (1993a: 46)

24 As I have written above, the OED defines the term as: “[o]ccurring or existing after the end of colonial rule; of or relating to a former colony. In later use also: of or relating to the cultural condition of a former colony, esp. regarding its relationship with the former colonial power.”

25 The temporal formulation of the “postcolonial” thus echoes the declaration of U.S. political economist Francis Fukuyama, that we have reached the end of history. As Klein indicates, Fukuyama’s statement was first pronounced during a lecture that took place at the University of Chicago in 1989, funded by Milton Friedman’s associate John Olin (2007). Fukuyama’s statement has and may continue to provoke meaningful reflection. Yet, to forget its site of enunciation is also to forget the role of our own forgetfulness in our present understanding of history.

Because of that ambiguity, “the postcolonial” cannot adequately substitute the “Third World,” for it may include a number of First-World nations as well. But even if taken in its strict historical emergence, “the postcolonial,” as referring to what Indian postcolonial theorist at Columbia University (U.S.A.), Gayatri Spivak calls “recently decolonized space” cannot cover the same geographical area as the “Third World,” for it leaves out the whole of Latin America, to name a major example (1993a: 47-48). This spatial indeterminacy points to the fact that “the postcolonial” is always-already a relative category, depending on the place from which it is enunciated. In consequence, a given space’s “otherness” to the “West” is privileged as the criterion for defining it as “postcolonial,” more so than anything intrinsic to the territory.

Therefore, the movement from “Third World” to “the postcolonial” involves a movement away from the global economy as defining factor and towards an implicit Western “self” as the pivot in relation to which the geo-cultural “other” is defined. This has led Rey Chow, a Hong Kong cultural critic at Brown University in the U.S., to denounce the postmodernist tendency to confuse an abstract “otherness” with a concrete geo-cultural other. Chow considers that in substituting the latter with the former, First-World scholars in the humanities may give the appearance of an emancipatory politics while accomplishing a conservative, self-interested aim (1998: xvi-xxi).

Chow’s analysis takes me back to the double meaning of “postcolonial” (as a time/place marker and as an abstract condition) that opened up this discussion. I now conclude that the double meaning of “the postcolonial” is significant of an actual conflation between the two entities. As Chow claims, “the postcolonial,” as an academic field, tends to stand in for – and thus block from view – “the postcolonial” as a geographically distant other. At stake is the struggle for hegemony between the universal and particular forms of “otherness.”

Anthony Appiah reveals the implications of reducing the postcolonial to an abstract function while simultaneously converting it into a mark of particular difference. This British-Ghanaian philosopher accounts for “the postcolonial” in terms of its dependence on “the postmodern.” The chapter of his 1992 book in which he discusses the issue is entitled “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern.” There, Appiah does not explore what “postcolonial,” “postcolonialism” or “postcolony” mean. Yet, he gives a thorough, nine page-long discussion of what “postmodern” “postmodernism” and “postmodernity” are (226-35). This analysis is then briefly extended to its implications when considering the term “postcoloniality” (240, 250). The term “postcolonial” appears scarcely; its use is limited to that of a time and place marker (238-41, 247, 249, 251, 253).
The substantivized form of the term, “the postcolonial,” does not appear once. But the title of the chapter, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” begs the question: What is “the postcolonial”? As suggested by my description of Appiah’s chapter, “postcoloniality” and “the postcolonial” are reliant on “postmodernity” and “the postmodern” to achieve theoretical articulation. The postcolonial appears to have no conceptual autonomy, but only to name a variation of the postmodern, determined by geo-historical particularity. Not only is the term postcolonial limited to an indication of time and space, but also the fact that the conceptual discussion of the chapter is monopolized by the postmodern automatically aligns the other concept in Appiah’s title with the case-specific analyses that constitute the rest of his chapter.

In exposing the term’s lack of independent conceptual authority, Appiah reveals the centrality of geo-politics for its configuration. Its role as a universal being foreclosed, the postcolonial is always already reduced to a particular. This does not mean that the postcolonial can be defined in terms of specific historical, geographical or cultural conditions, for it is not an actual geo-historical space as much as a sign of the particular: a function of the postmodern. The postcolonial, as postmodernism’s subset corresponding to the geo-cultural other, does not designate fixed space, but is a movable category responding to the changing requirements of specific postmodernist discourses. From Appiah’s approach, it would appear that the postcolonial is postmodernism’s a posteriori construction of concrete – though indeterminate – geo-cultural space as “other.”

Appiah’s analytical procedure stages the term postcolonial as inherently vacuous. As Morin argues, the lesser the amount of external dependencies, the lesser the autonomy (2005). By its single reliance on the postmodern, the postcolonial is staged by Appiah as devoid of conceptual autonomy and hence susceptible to co-optation. In this way, Appiah points to “the postcolonial” as especially prone to hegemonic appropriation. In other words, Appiah exposes how “the postcolonial” functions as a floating signifier.

A parallel process takes place in Childs and Williams’s An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory (IPT; 1997). In that book, however, the exposure of “the postcolonial” as a floating signifier does not take place in the foreground. The cases differ in a further sense. In the case of

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27 Edgar Morin is a French philosopher and sociologist. According to Montuori, Edgar Morin is “widely recognized as one of the most important French and indeed European thinkers to emerge in the 20th century.” But while “France and Latin America” are “two of the places where his work is most popular,” Morin’s work has had a considerable lesser impact on the English-speaking world (2004: 349, 355). The way in which the Anglophone bias of much postcolonial theory has delimited the field’s intellectual discussions is touched upon in Chapter Three.

28 Following Laclau, I contend that floating and empty signifiers are, for all practical purposes, the same; see fn. 8.
IPT, the term seems to become meaningless due to the saturation of widely varying significations demanded of the concept. This over-signification turns into its opposite, vacuity. Hence, in the uses of “postcolonial” in IPT, we observe “destruction of meaning through its very proliferation,” which, Laclau suggests, is the regular process by means of which a signifier becomes a floating or empty one (Laclau 1997: 305). Appiah’s chapter does not exhibit this customary process. Instead, Appiah implicitly characterizes the term’s multiple commitments as a mere effect of its structural reliance on the postmodern. In this way, he short-circuits the regular process and directly stages the term’s lack of meaning. The reliance of the postcolonial on the postmodern that Appiah exposes informs my understanding of the concept throughout this study.

Let me now turn to how, why and to what effect the term postcolonial is emptied of meaning in IPT. Childs and Williams’s first chapter is entitled “Introduction: Points of Departure.” It is subdivided into five sections: “When is the post-colonial?,” “Where is the post-colonial?,” “Who is the post-colonial?,” “What is the post-colonial?” and “Conclusions?.”29 Rather than offering an upfront definition of the term, Childs and Williams present a history of the different answers that have been given to these questions. Their introductory chapter serves to establish the difficulty of pinpointing any clear answer. Moreover, the interrogatory mode of the subtitles – particularly the last one – stresses the difficulty of arriving at a solid definition of the term that would remain stable across different cultures of knowing.

Three questions have to be addressed – when, where, and who – before the reader can get to the what of postcolonial theory. The first three questions are deployed as prerequisites to the later. This would hardly have been the case if the adjective in the volume’s title had been almost any other. One can hardly conceive of An Introduction to Literary Theory or, to make up another example, An Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory, expanding on a fifteen page discussion of the when, the where and the who to get to a five page discussion of the what. Although a historical grounding of the theory’s origin and development could be appropriate in those cases, the difference would be that those subsidiary questions would hardly be taken as that which defines the theory as a theory.

Theory, by definition, strives towards the universal, particularly if we understand it as the rooting of a practice “in a system of some conceptual generality” (de Man 1996: 201). Postcolonial theory is committed to that tendency, on the one hand, and to the historical particularity that shapes

29 When directly discussing Childs and Williams’s formulations, here and below, I keep to their spelling of “post-colonial,” with a dash. However, elsewhere in this Introduction I use the standardized “postcolonial” as in the other chapters of this study.
it, on the other. The political and ideological struggle between the universal and the particular within the field is one more reason why the debate surrounding the term postcolonial has concentrated on the implications of the post- prefix. In other words, the *when* of the postcolonial – rather than the *what* – has taken center stage. The *how* of postcolonial theory is significantly absent from Childs and Williams’s list. Being a field, and not a discipline, postcolonialism (like feminism, for example) is conceived as a unity in terms of its object rather than its method of study. Nonetheless, I contend that an analysis of the *how* of postcolonial theory is crucial for an understanding of its political, ideological and epistemological limits and possibilities. This question will be addressed below.

In the meantime, let me point out that it is my intention to address the two other subsidiary questions that shape the *what* of postcolonial theory: “Where is the post-colonial?” and “Who is the post-colonial?” In exploring how the *where* and the *who* partially constitute the *what*, I address what I have identified as one of the major under-explored ambiguities of the term: its conflation of specific geographies and historical agents, on the one hand, with an abstract way of constituting and relating to knowledge on the other.

As Walter Mignolo, an Argentinean semiotician at Duke, has pointed out, while it is important to distinguish the geo-economic location from which a scholar in the field speaks, that speaker’s “locus of enunciation” is to be defined “not so much in terms of national identities” but in terms of “who is writing about what where and why?” (1993: 122). Thus, my interest is not in the *where* in itself, but in terms of how that *where* partially constitutes the *who*. I will not explore the two questions separately but focus on their juncture: how the postcolonial *who* is shaped in terms of its *where* (and vice versa). To ask “where?” requires an understanding of a spatial totality in and through which specific localities may be defined. While postcolonialism usually defines that totality in terms of the West vs. Other dichotomy, here I define that totality in terms of the divide by which another opposition – that of the First vs. Third World – is structured: the international division of labor.

I do not aim at a generalized overview of the *who* and the *where* of “the postcolonial” nor at an exploration of how these questions may be answered across time and place at large. My project is a situated analytical endeavor. I focus on how the *who* and the *where* of the postcolonial are mobilized and realized in a number of specific texts in postcolonial theory. Next to my inclusion of texts by major postcolonial theorists active in the field today, such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Robert Young, I have strategically chosen texts by authors that are ambiguously
categorized as postcolonial theorists, such as Anthony Appiah, and discourses by others who are clearly not postcolonial theorists, such as Néstor García Canclini, Julius Kamberage Nyerere, Salvador Allende and Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos.

Hence, my exploration is situated at the confines of what may and what may not be conventionally considered the who and the where of postcolonial criticism. In this way, my objects probe the limits of that corpus and will allow me to reflect on its mechanisms of legitimation. The specific ways in which these authors meet and/or exceed not only the historical sites of enunciation, but also the research interests, the discursive modes and the foundational methodological groundings traditionally associated with postcolonial theory, will be considered throughout the chapters. In other words, the how will play a key role in demarcating the limits of the postcolonial corpus.

My focus on the how of postcolonialism is partly inspired by Hitchcock’s proposition to take postcoloniality as a genre (2003). He traces the underlying logic of genre and class as forms of categorization across different spheres, the one literary, the other political. Hitchcock also traces the intersections of politics and genre. He considers it surprising that the question of genre has been largely ignored in the field since “so much of what postcolonial studies is recognized for is based on literary analysis.” Hence, the situation arises where “generic definitions are simply drawn from Western theory and then applied in a suspiciously general fashion all over the globe” (317). In this way, the author claims, “the African novel, for instance, is celebrated precisely for its ‘local color’” (323). In Hitchcock’s example, form is aligned to the West and content to Africa. In view of this common association, Hitchcock proposes to approach postcoloniality as a genre as a way in which “to wrest the discourse of genre from a place where postcolonial expressivity is merely the primitivist’s dream” (323).

When Hitchcock proposes to understand postcolonialism as a genre he is referring to fiction, not criticism. Yet, his formulations are sufficiently ambivalent to allow the reader to imagine the possibilities of taking postcolonial theory as a genre in its own right. This is specially so when we take into account Todorov’s definition of genre, which Hitchcock cites: “a genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than the codification of discursive properties” (321). Taking this definition into account, my first four chapters may be read as an approach to postcolonial criticism as a genre. Although in my fifth chapter I exceptionally approach a postcolonial literary rather than theoretical text, it too can be read in that light. This is because, as Hitchcock observes, again with reference to
Todorov, “a discourse on genre can be coterminous with the genre (that is, the notion of genre is not simply metadiscursive)” (321).  

Before elaborating further, I return to the vacuity that characterizes the term postcolonial. In contrast to the work of Appiah, and to that of Childs and Williams, both of which expose the external determinations conditioning the (in)significance of the term, Arif Dirlik, in his 1994 essay, takes the analysis of external determinations further in order to shed light on what the condition of interiority of the postcolonial is. He sets out to “review the term postcolonial, and the various intellectual and cultural positions associated with it, in the context of contemporary transformations in global relationships” (329, emphasis in text). Dirlik distinguishes different usages of the term:

(a) as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents, as in postcolonial societies or postcolonial intellectuals; (b) as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is somewhat more abstract and less concrete in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term Third World, for which it is intended as a substitute; and (c) as a description of a discourse on the above-named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions. (1994: 332, emphasis in text) 

The author approaches the concept as a historical entity and points out three conflated senses. He establishes that postcolonial can refer to a specific person or group of persons; to a (vaguely defined) contemporary global situation; or to a discourse, which both addresses that situation and is produced by it. Hence, Dirlik distinguishes on the basis of the different ontological registers encompassed by the term. His clause (a) describes concrete socio-historical agents, (b) points to an abstract condition, and (c) refers to discourse. The ontological status of “postcolonial” as a type of “discourse” is less substantial than its acception as “intellectuals” or “societies,” but more substantial than its acception as a generalized “condition.” Dirlik implicitly proposes the last register as a mediator between the former two (i.e. discourse as at once conditioned by, and conditioning of, extra-discursive realities). Because of his approach to the concept as a historical

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30 Hitchcock’s references are to Genres in Discourse by Bulgarian literary theorist at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research), Paris (France), Tzvetan Todorov.

31 Dirlik clarifies that “[e]ven at its most concrete, the significance of postcolonial is not transparent because each of its meanings is overdetermined by the others” (1994: 332). Although Dirlik doesn’t spell out his methodology, an introductory footnote does clarify his purpose to concentrate on “the reception of the term postcolonial” (328). I consider Dirlik’s findings to be largely a result of his focus on the relationship between the “ambiguity imbedded in the term postcolonial” and “the condition of its emergence, that is, … global capitalism.” (330, 331; emphases in text)
entity, I take Dirlik’s quote as the starting point for my own situated analysis of the concept’s varying usage.

However, it is still necessary to address a further conflation that is not discussed in Dirlik’s quote. Notice that he does not distinguish qualitative differences when the term is applied to different entities within the same ontological register. Thus, for example, he includes both postcolonial intellectuals and postcolonial societies under the same clause (a). The crucial element not distinguished here is the contrast in structural positions comprehended under the same category. The tension and convergence between these two positions will be a focal point throughout this study. As I inquire into the role of place (i.e. “Where is the post-colonial?”) in subject constitution (i.e. “Who is the post-colonial?”), I analyze conflations between the postcolonial-as-academic and the postcolonial-as-subaltern.

Before specifying my usage of these terms, allow me to return one last time to Childs and Williams (1997). While they entitle their book *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, their introductory chapter significantly represses the noun described by “Post-Colonial” (“Theory”), and converts the adjective into a noun by introducing the pronoun “the” (i.e. “Who is the post-colonial?,” “Where is the post-colonial?”). To employ Dirlik’s terminology, I would say that Childs and Williams’s definition of “the post-colonial” is “overdetermined” by their employment of it as an adjective descriptive of a particular kind of *theory* in their book title (Dirlik 1994: 332).

This conversion of the adjective into a noun, a customary usage, adds more complications to the threefold referential ambiguity of the term established by Dirlik. In the usage I am presently discussing, the noun substantive that is supposed to follow the adjective is obliterated. Hence, it begs the question of the subject. The phrase “the postcolonial” may be predicated as a subject in both senses of the term: either a who (a person) or a what (a theme).

By taking the grammatical place of a noun, “the postcolonial” potentializes the overdetermination already operating in the adjective. It involves not only an indeterminacy of different ontological levels of reference and, when referring to concrete individuals and societies,

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32 Dirlik does, however, strongly insist on this distinction elsewhere. Actually, ignorance of “the differences of power that go with different locations” is perhaps his strongest critique of postcolonial criticism throughout the article (1994: 343).

33 Although sometimes the contrast could be best defined (as it is largely done by Spivak, 1993a) as that between “the postcolonial-as-intellectual” and “the postcolonial-as-subaltern,” I use the term “academic” as I am referring to the institutionalized nature of cultural capital, rather than to an intrinsic condition; to what Bourdieu terms institutional as opposed to embodied forms of cultural capital (1986).

34 Emphases added. This strategy of elusion is significant of the problematic conflations posed by a term that makes it very difficult to distinguish between object and subject of study, as it designates both instances simultaneously or alternately on an arbitrary, circumstantial basis.
not only an indeterminacy of the geo-historical and socio-economic specificity of those subjects, but also an indeterminacy between an attribute and a noun, between a description of the thing and the thing itself. Of course, in this case, quality and entity are equally insubstantial in the sense that they are both linguistic signs. However, this does not mean that the transposition of one and the other is inconsequential. On the contrary, the introduction of this qualitatively different level at which the ambiguity is played out is significant in a field in which language – as well as its (lack of) access to historical realities – is a central issue.\(^\text{35}\)

With the conversion of the adjective “postcolonial” into a noun the instability of the term is augmented. “The postcolonial” is ambiguous with regard both to its positive content and its grammatical place of inscription. It is this indeterminacy and its implications that I want to address. Hence, in this study I do not repeat Childs and Williams’s question, “Who is the postcolonial?” but ask instead “Who (or what) is the subject of postcolonial discourse?” My formulation is responsive to Gayatri Spivak’s paradigmatic understanding of subject constitution within postcolonial theory, in which discourse plays a central part (1994). My inquiry into the subject as a function of discourse places my exploration at the juncture between stated and implied agencies, the place where the conflation between the discourse’s author and its narrated subjects usually takes place.\(^\text{36}\)

Having addressed the ambiguities inherent in the term postcolonial, as well as the angle from which I will approach it throughout this study, let me draw this discussion to a close by defining my own usage of it in a pragmatic way. With “postcolonial theory” and “postcolonial criticism” I refer to written and orally delivered texts in the academy that are institutionally and authorially categorized as “postcolonial” theory or criticism. I often use the terms “theory” and “criticism” not as exact synonyms, but as proximate, as is customarily done when referring to contemporary Anglo-American philosophical endeavors.\(^\text{37}\) When I wish to distinguish my own view of these texts from their conventionalized status as either theory or criticism, I refer to them as postcolonial “discourses.” Hence, the term “postcolonial discourse” refers to the quality of these texts as cultural and literary objects, political and ideological acts. With the term, I do not mean to imply that their value as theory or as criticism is exclusively extrinsic, but simply to suspend the

\(^{35}\) The relationship between language and subject constitution in the context of postcolonial theory will be discussed in the following section. For the moment, suffice it to say that the centrality of representation to postcolonial theory may be appreciated in the founding work of the field, Said’s *Orientalism* (2003 [1978]), while Spivak’s classic “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994 [1985]), exposes the intricacy between language and subjectivity.

\(^{36}\) I understand “author” as the organizing principle of a text conflated with an extra-discursive agency (see fn. 3).

\(^{37}\) See Chow 1998 and Chapter One.
dilemma in order to look at them provisionally from another angle. Besides the socio-institutional
criterion for the definition of postcolonial, the central element in my definition of a particular
theoretical or critical discourse as such is whether it employs language as a foundational category.
Hence, a methodological presupposition – the how of postcolonial theory – is the key criterion for
categorization.

With “postcolonial critic” or “postcolonial theorist,” I refer to authors who are
conventionally categorized within the field and who identify themselves as such. I also employ the
term “the postcolonial-as-academic” synonymously. The postcolonial theorists I have chosen to
examine most extensively in this study are: Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Anthony Appiah and
Robert Young. All of them are active in the field today, all reside in the U.S.A. and, except for one,
are of “non-Western” origin. I also refer to them as occupying the postcolonial subject position, in
their capacity as authors of the texts I analyze. As far as academics whose work is explored at
length here are concerned, García Canclini is the only exception to the postcolonial corpus. I have
included analyses of his work in order to delimit the frame of that corpus, for he deals with roughly
the same subject matters yet from a different perspective. He is an Argentinean cultural critic at
UAM, Mexico City. 38 He does not identify as postcolonial, nor do critics place him as such. Yet, as
may be appreciated in Chapter Three, it is the how of his work, rather than the who or the where,
that most clearly marks his position of exteriority. 39

With “postcolonial other” (sometimes: “the postcolonial-as-subaltern”), I refer to the
subjects who are the objects of analysis of postcolonial theory. As “the other” is a relational
category, the actual social agencies to which it refers vary enormously. Although all the
“postcolonial others” considered in this work reside in the Third World, thus occupying the space
usually viewed by postcolonial theory as the space of geo-cultural difference, they are situated at
contrasting positions of power. They range from Spivak’s “subaltern” in her 1994 essay, who, by
definition, cannot access the subject position (i.e., the position of enunciation), to heads of state,
such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania or Salvador Allende of Chile.

My inclusion of discourses by Nyerere and Allende is partly due to the fact that, in both
cases, the Third-World state they represent functioned as an enclave of resistance to transnational
capital. Hence, they disrupt the commonplace association between State and oppression which, as

38 Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Autonomous Metropolitan University).
39 Yet the how of a theory can never be fully separated from its where and its who. The relationship between the how of
a theory, on the one hand, and its where and its who on the other, appears as most intricately interwoven when, as I have
proposed, we understand theory as pertaining to particular cultures of knowing.
Brennan signals, serves to obscure the role of economics in the exertion of power (2006). Actually, the overthrow of the Chilean project in 1973 inaugurates the neoliberalist era and roughly coincides with the change from the “Third World” to “the postcolonial” paradigm.40 Both Tanzania in the late 1960s and Chile in the early 1970s may be read as examples of what Klein calls Third-World developmentalism (2007). Yet both these projects also disrupt the practices that, as Ahmad argues, are traditionally associated with Third-World developmentalism insofar as in neither case was there a substantial displacement of the anti-imperialist movement from the popular masses to a nationalist bourgeoisie (1992: 293).

The other reason for including discourses by these statesmen is that, as its name suggests, postcolonial theory is traditionally concerned with dominance associated to political forms of authority. The cases of Nyerere and Allende strongly undo the association between political power and power as such, while making urgent the question of taking geo-economic forms of dominance into greater consideration. Although Nyerere, for example, is far removed from Spivak’s paradigmatic figure of the subaltern, in geo-economic terms his distance with renown First-World academics is perhaps equally great in the opposite direction. For now, suffice it to say that Nyerere’s salary in 1967 (before he reduced it by 20% because he already earned 25 times more than the average worker in his country) was 5,000 Tanzanian shillings a month, which, calculating an average inflation rate of 7.5%, would equal around 650 Euro today; significantly less than the minimum wage in any First-World country.41 This marks Nyerere’s subject position not only in terms of a limited capacity of acquisition and disposition at a global scale, but also in terms of the scarce value that his position represents. By comparing discourses by the two presidents with those of academics, I seek to address how postcolonial discourse functions as a site of selective creation and foreclosure of value, as well as the intricacies between authorship and authority in postcolonial texts. Since some academics may at times have a greater incidence in world-wide ideological hegemony than certain institutional political authorities in the Third World, which are often targeted

40 Taking “the postcolonial” in its historical sense, I aim to explore how and to what effect it has displaced the paradigm of the “Third World,” becoming the hegemonic narrative of an era. The displacement of “Third World” by “postcolonial” coincides with the so-called linguistic turn in contemporary thought, reacting to economic determinism, yet maintaining the binary opposition and teleology that were the objects of its critique.

41 Given that no exact figures are available for currency inflation rates in Tanzania prior to 1980, my conversion is only approximate. The 5,000 Tanzanian shillings figure was obtained from Lewis 1998: 133.
as sites of such power, I now turn to the subject position to which the (postcolonial) academic has access.  

The Subject of Discourse

This work is a critique of postcolonial theory. It is not the first, nor will it be the last. Why bother, then, to write it at all? Let me begin by suggesting that the existing critique of the field may be grouped into two distinct traditions: the self-critical tradition, and the materialist critique of postcolonial theory. Dividing that corpus into two single categories is, of course, an oversimplification. Many of the works I categorize are hybrids, benefiting simultaneously from both traditions. Some authors that I locate in the first of those, like Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan or Gayatri Spivak, seriously engage with dialectical materialism. Yet, they continue to rely on language as a foundational category. This single factor – whether or not an author employs language as a foundational category – is my central criterion for categorization. Foundational categories situate the author ideologically; they point to the specificity of the blind-spots inherent in any point of view. Dialectical materialism, in the works of the authors I have just mentioned, however present, is seldom, if ever, the structuring principle of their approach.

The self-critical tradition is the critique of postcolonialism that is constitutive of postcolonial theory itself. Robert Young characterizes it as styled in the form of a *mise-en-abyme*:

The production of a critique of *Orientalism* even today functions as the act or ceremony of initiation by which newcomers to the field assert their claim to take up the position of a speaking subject within the discourse of postcoloniality. It goes without saying that, as Eagleton has remarked, the statutory requirement of this initiation rite is that the newcomer denounces one or preferably several aspects of the founding father’s text, criticizes the very concept of the postcolonial and then asserts that he or she stands outside it, in a position of critique (Eagleton 1998: 24). This ritual has now even developed into a *mise-en-abyme* repetition effect, whereby the new critic makes his or her intervention by criticizing not only Said, but all previous commentators as well … (2001: 384)

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42 As Brennan (2006) has argued, the reduction of power to (Third-World) State power is common in postcolonial theory. Yet, as will be exemplified in Chapter Five, with an analysis by Critchley (2007), it is more likely to occur when authors that are not specialists in the field deal with it.

43 I use the term “seldom” for it is debatable whether texts such as Spivak’s “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value” (1985), or “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994), employ language as a foundational category. In both cases – and more explicitly so in the former – Spivak combines Derridean with Marxist frameworks. As may be exemplified by the contrast between the first and last parts of “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Spivak tends to rely on Marxist frameworks when dealing with theory, yet tends to rely on Derridean frameworks in her actual analysis of case studies.
The ritual described by Young has been practiced by countless postcolonial theorists. Perhaps the most classic examples are McClintock’s “Angel of Progress: Pitfalls in the Term Post-Colonialism” (1992), and Shohat’s “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’” (1992), both published in an issue of Social Text dedicated to the subject, which has by now become legendary. Other notable examples are Loomba (1988a), Appiah (1991), Radhakrishnan (2000), Mbembe (2001) and Desai (2001). This ritual has also been practiced by major postcolonial theorists, whether early or late in their careers. Some cases in point are Homi Bhabha in The Location of Culture (1994), Gayatri Spivak in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999), and even Young himself in White Mythologies (1990).

Notice that, in Young’s account of postcolonialism’s arrival at a mise-en-abyme, what is at stake is the newcomers’ thrust to “assert their claim to take up the position of the speaking subject” within the field. Access to the locus of enunciation is crucially at stake for the constitution or foreclosure of the subject status in postcolonial discourse. Furthermore, taking up the position of the speaking subject comprises both a performative thrust, regarding postcolonial theorists themselves (who strive to access Western academic audiences), and a thematic thrust, concerning the subjects that these theorists (endeavor to) represent. The contradictions produced by these two thrusts – that of the subject position performatively constituted in the traces of the author’s act of writing, and that of the (subaltern) subject positions established at the constative dimension of discourse – are a major focal point in this study.

The mise-en-abyme effect can also serve to describe, even if partially, the subject status. The concept, colloquially translated from the French as a “placing into the abyss” is defined by the OED as: “[a] term denoting) self-reflection within the structure of a literary work; a work employing self-reflection.” Self-reflexivity is a constitutive characteristic not only of this trope, but also of the individual subject. Slavoj Žižek, based at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, comments:

[T]here is no positive substantial determination of man: man is the animal which recognizes itself as man, what makes him human is this formal gesture of recognition as such, not the recognized content. Man is a lack which, in order to fill itself in, recognizes itself as something. (2006a: 44)

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44 In the section from which this passage is extracted, the Slovenian philosopher is arguing against “the standard deconstructionist criticism according to which Lacan’s theory of sexual difference falls into the trap of ‘binary logic’” (38). For Lacan, argues Žižek, “the original split is not between the One and the Other, but is strictly inherent to the One … the original couple is not that of two signifiers, but that of a signer and its reduplicatio, that is to say, the minimal difference between a signer and the place of its inscription, between one and zero” (32). To substantiate his position, Žižek focuses on what he terms the parallax gap, where “[p]arallax means that the bracketing itself produces its object” (57, emphasis in text). Examining the role of this gap in the constitution of subjectivity, he proposes that the gap appears at three levels, “that of the Universal-Particular-Individual” (44). The passage I have quoted in my text above is the one
Žižek’s description of a constitutive lack, (apparently) filled in by an act of recognition, could just as well have referred to the commonplace trope usually deployed to visualize *mise-en-abyme*: that of a person standing between two mirrors, seeing an infinite reproduction of her own image.\(^{45}\)

Self-reflexivity is not only a defining characteristic of a *mise-en-abyme*, and of the subject status that differentiates humans from other animals, but also stands in close association to the meta-position associated with theory. In the *OED* entry quoted before, notice how the definition in itself is self-reflexive. This effect is reached by means of the meta-comment in between parenthesis: *mise-en-abyme* is a term denoting a phenomenon, but also a term denoting that very act of denotation.

As Bal suggests, “what the French call a *mise en abyme*” is “a microstructure that contains a summary of the overall fabula in which it functions” (1987: 75). This figure:

… tells metatextually its own version of the fabula, its own story, by repeating the fabula. The figure integrates the mirroring between the imaginary and the symbolic reflection. In the mirror, the subject recognizes itself as a topic, by the mutual focalization of the mirroring and the mirrored subject. In intellectual reflection, the speaking/thinking subject reflects on its own status, thus becoming in its turn an object, radically different. (1987: 88)

As I discuss in Chapters One and Two, fractal-like figures, in which self-similarity occurs across scales, are one of the most characteristic rhetorical mechanisms employed in postcolonial discourses. There, I also discuss the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic reflections. The ambiguity between both that Bal points out is precisely that which is at stake in the conflation of internal and external otherness, denounced by Chow when she argues that First-World scholars in the humanities deliberately confuse “otherness” as an abstract function with the concrete geopolitical other (1998: xvi-xxi). In both cases, external otherness is a means more than an end in itself. As Bal indicates, “[t]he dramatic confrontation with the same by the perception of the different is staged in the *mise en abyme*”; furthermore, “[l]anguage is the source and the means of this paradox” (1987: 88, emphases in text). Likewise, the academics that are the target of Chow’s critique rely on the actual process of difference and deferral involved in their own writing practice to displace the geopolitical other.

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\(^{45}\) The mirror as such is the metaphor regularly used to describe the *mise-en-abyme*. See Bal 1987: 88.
Language thus plays a pivotal role in destabilizing the subject-object relationship. It is “the source and the means” of this destabilization, insofar as it is the act and place of “mirroring” (Bal, 1987: 88). Commenting on a contemporary artwork that benefits from the *mise-en-abyme* mechanism, Bal argues that:

There is no longer any telling apart of the historically remote object and the historically near subject of interpretation, for the subject in turn has become an object of interpelation, and henceforward these positions of object and subject have become caught in the movement that inscribed the act of viewing in time. (1999: 36)

As I indicated previously, postcolonial theorists are caught between two (apparently) incommensurable thrusts: to occupy the (academically legitimized) position of speaking subjects, and to liberate their objects of study from their condition as objects. This is a presumably impossible task because the latter are always merely represented, not enunciating themselves. The trope, as Bal shows, allows for a solution of that contradiction (at a certain level), for it inscribes both subject and object in the act of viewing. In the case of postcolonial theory this would be in the act of enunciation. Hence, the trope allows them to relate on commensurable terms. Yet the mirror only allows this to happen insofar as it is “itself iconic of the indistinguishable boundary” between reality and representation (Bal 1999: 228).

By way of Bal’s analysis of the trope, I have elaborated on the figure of the *mise-en-abyme* used by Young to describe postcolonial theory because self-reflexivity is one of the most distinctive traits in the field. As I have suggested, the importance of self-reflexivity within postcolonial discourse is not limited to the explicit reference to previous works in the field, issue on which

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46 This is how postcolonial theorists solve the contradiction between their two antagonistic thrusts, to access the position of enunciation, and to claim equal access for their represented subjects. But this solution is circumscribed to the level of language as a representational system and to the level of their own writing performance “that inscribe[s] the act of [enunciation] in time” (Bal 1999: 36). When these registered acts of enunciation are taken in a wider context, inequalities are likely to surface because the addressed other and the represented other in postcolonial texts rarely coincide. While there is a relative proximity between the postcolonial authors as socio-historical agencies and the enunciating principle of their texts, there is an insurmountable rift between the “other” of language as a representational system and the specific socio-cultural “others” discussed in postcolonial criticism. The otherness at stake in the *mise-en-abyme* is a differential, abstract category. As Bal indicates, the metaphorical driving motif of the *mise-en-abyme*, the mirror “can be used as an allegory, that eminently cultural mode of signifying through otherness’” (228). Here otherness appears as a logical counter-device in the production of signification. Yet, in the practice of *mise-en-abyme* within postcolonial theory, both language’s other and the socio-cultural other must find expression in the same arena: that of language. Thus, the practice runs the risk of minimizing – or obfuscating – the gap between otherness as an abstract category and the socio-cultural other.

47 Concerning the characterization of the postcolonial as a *mise-en-abyme*, let me only add that “as a disturber of chronology,” the figure points to the struggle for hegemony between the “postcolonial” and the “Third World,” discussed in the previous section (Bal 1987: 87).
Young centered. The figure of the *mise-en-abyme* characterizes the modus operandi of postcolonial theory in more general terms. It also reappears in the constitution of the place of the (speaking) subject and in the theoretical status of the written production of the field.

Thus, for example, as I will explore in Chapter Three, self-reflexivity is the key rhetorical mechanism that Spivak deploys in “More on Power Knowledge” (1993a). There, the author’s emphasis on the performative dimension of language allows her to foreground the epistemic and political limits of her own location and the arbitrariness of her medium of expression. Thus, in the work in question, the *mise-en-abyme* functions as a rhetorical tool, as an epistemic perspective and as a political strategy.

Another case in point is Dipesh Chakrabarty. When discussing his book *Rethinking Working-Class History* (1989), the author proposes that “all history is written across a barrier of difference,” because the subject and the object of that history are never the same. This is the case even with autobiography, due to the objectification to which the writer of an autobiography subjects himself (1998: 5). Therefore, “all history writing is cross-cultural,” and, since it is through the act of interpretation that this cross-culturality occurs, the question of culture in historiography is necessarily “a question of the hermeneutics of historical understanding” (1998: 40, 5). Chakrabarty elaborates with reference to his personal experience:

… I could not write a history in which I did not at all address the problem of writing that history. In other words, I knew who I was and where I came from. That relationship of proximity but that lack of intimacy, which I had to the working class people, was critical for me to think about in writing a history of these people. So half of my book is about navel gazing. It is about trying to think “what is the problem of writing about these people whom I know proximally but not intimately?” … The general point I am making is that … if my first proposition that every history is cross-cultural, that writing histories invariably involves the gesture of interpreting … holds, then some degree of self-reflexivity is absolutely critical in the writing of any history. (1998: 9, 10)

As Chakrabarty suggests, self-reflexivity, when taken as a means more than an end in itself, is informative not only of the subject who writes, but also of the object about which she writes, insofar as it establishes the particular angle from which the object is illuminated.

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48 Chakrabarty is a Subaltern Studies Bengali historiographer at Chicago University. Although the Subaltern Studies group is, strictly speaking, not a part of postcolonial theory, Chakrabarty has incurred in both. He is a founding editor of *Postcolonial Studies* and his book *Provincializing Europe* (2000) is one of the major contributions to the field.
Self-reflexivity, as a methodological instrument in (history) writing, is not necessarily about the author. Handled with the focused intent that Chakrabarty displays in the quote, it is about the relationship between the two entities involved. And it is only insofar as they are groups set in relationship to other groups, that class or cultural difference are constituted as such. Hence, to focus on the relationship between the historically situated writer and his equally situated object of study is to focus on the historical realities by which their difference is produced. In this way, self-reflexivity may be a political act and a political statement about that act. Furthermore, to the extent that it implies taking into account all elements involved in the historiographical act of interpretation, self-reflexive writing may enable a greater methodological accuracy. In sum, in works such as that of Chakrabarty (1989) or Spivak (1993a), self-reflexivity can be of major epistemological import, while also serving to make circumscribed yet crucial political commentary.

Only when the *mise-en-abyme* staged by the postcolonial theorist is productive in these ways do I call it self-reflexivity. I distinguish between self-reflexivity and self-referentiality. Self-reflexivity, constitutive of the subject and of the meta-position in language or theory, opens up a critical distance allowing a return to the same but with a qualitative difference. However, there can also be a degeneration of self-reflexivity into an empty gesture, into a mere simulacrum, which I call self-referentiality. Self-referentiality is a self-legitimating endeavor. Jonathan Culler writes of this tendency within post-structuralism at large. In “Structure of Ideology and Ideology of Structure,” he declares that deconstruction does not transcend ideology. The theorist begins by establishing that, while structuralism aims at dismantling ideology, post-structuralism attempts to supersede such truth-finding (1973: 471). However, he argues, being itself inescapably based on ideological assumptions, post-structuralism fails in its attempt. In uncritical poststructuralist theory, this attempt at self-transcendence is acted out by means of recursive self-referentiality. To subvert its representational tendencies, post-structuralism discursively deconstructs its own statements (471-77). The ultimate aim of that approach, states Culler, is self-legitimization (480-81). Hence, post-foundational discourses – including postcolonialism – are still founded on what Culler has called the “ideology of the sign” (473).

Culler’s conception of post-foundational discourses as relying on an “ideology of the sign” points to the key element of what I have termed the *mise-en-abyme* critical tradition of postcolonial theory. Whether it be in the form of self-reflexivity or in the form of self-referentiality, the *mise-en-
abyme form of critique is axiomatically characterized by one central feature: that of having language as its foundational category. As I elaborate in Chapter One, texts written in the traditions of self-reflexivity and self-referentiality express their reliance on language as a foundational category in different ways. While the self-reflexive practices may be associated to what Culler has termed the “ideology of the sign,” self-referential practices, guided by a hyper-literal impulse and fixated on the material support of language fall under the category of what I will term the “ideology of the signifier.”

This distinction responds to the fact that self-referential textual practices tend to exacerbate the materiality of the smallest units of technical mediation. It would not be fair to pinpoint self-referentiality here, as I did with self-reflexivity, by means of an example. This is because self-referentiality is by definition hermetic. Thus, it can only be deemed such when measured in relation to the context from which it is extracted. Many an isolated quote would appear as self-referential when taken out of context. Therefore, I only refer the reader to the instances of self-referential practices within postcolonial theory that are explored in Chapters One and Two of this study.

With self-referential discourses I refer to those that, to avoid metaphysical claims, rely on the chain of signifiers exclusively, but in doing so end up displacing belief onto the signifier as such. In other words, certain contemporary (postcolonial) authors, in their quest to question the unreliability of their medium of expression and the possibility of representation that it presupposes, assert the materiality of that medium itself as the only (accessible) reality.

Historically, the focus on language, or what is known as the linguistic turn in contemporary thought, served to question the presuppositions of grand meta-narratives that where written as if they were not enunciated from a particular place. Self-referential practices incur the same fault from the opposite standpoint. In foregrounding the rift between reality and language, they question the possibility of accessing anything beyond language, including their own sites of enunciation or subject positions. Hence, they tend to be framed in such a way that it would appear that there is no subject behind them and no history around them, or no access to either, which, for all practical purposes, amounts to the same. The simulacrum of language as a subject-free arena can be

50 According to Lacan, meaning is produced not by virtue of each isolated signifier, but because of the connection between them, or by what he terms the signifying chain, whereby “no signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification” (1977a: 740). Hence, “the chain of signifiers” refers to signifiers that produce meaning by virtue of their combination along a chain that is regulated by the laws of a closed order.

51 As Kaja Silverman argues with reference to the French-Algerian philosopher, Louis Althusser (1918-1990), ideology and the category of the subject are closely imbricated (1992: 23). This is why the apparent eradication of the subject in self-referential discourse may ultimately be read as an attempt to transcend ideology.
maintained because the signifier has a self-reflexive effect. Hence, in self-referential discourses the universal subject has not disappeared; it is merely reified in the signifier.

In other academic fields, self-referential textual practices may be limited to taking the signifier for the thing. In other words, self-referentiality may be expressed only as a reductive mechanism, but with no intrinsic political implications. When it comes to the field of postcoloniality, to this reduction is added yet another: that of (mis)taking linguistic otherness for geo-cultural otherness. But, furthermore, this metonymic displacement is enacted across different material supports of language. In postcolonial theory, racialized, gendered bodies play a crucial role, not only as objects, but also as bearers of culturally established meanings. Hence the body often acts as a form of language within the field.52

That trait in self-referential postcolonial theory relates to one of the most reiterated accusations made to the field: that it tends to disregard historical reality.53 Terry Eagleton, a British literary critic working at Lancaster University (U.K.), starts the article to which Young refers above with the following ironic comment: “There must surely be in existence somewhere a secret handbook for aspiring postcolonial theorists, whose second rule reads: ‘Begin your essay by calling into question the whole notion of postcolonialism’” (1998: 24). Eagleton points to this distancing as a way of claiming to be unpolluted by the ideologically problematic issues associated with the field. Yet, he suggests, the strategy is merely a rhetorical concealment of the fact that authors are repeating the same violence they denounce:

It is de rigueur, then, to begin one’s postcolonialist book or essay by pointing to the lamentable inadequacy of the term, thus stealing a march on other, supposedly more gullible souls, while obediently reproducing exactly what they are up to themselves. The term “postcolonialism” won’t do because it falsely homogenizes a set of diverse conditions; because it throws up all sorts of hair-raising chronological difficulties; because it suggests a confident posteriority to a condition which still prevails in transformed disguise; because it passes cavalierly over those sectors of the globe that are still fully-bloodedly colonial … because it is postmodernism’s way of taking care of everything south of Palermo … Having inserted one’s weighty caveats, one then naturally proceeds, in the next paragraph, to a discussion of what one has just described as non-existent. (24)

52 Spivak’s subaltern, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, the quintessential figure of the postcolonial other, dramatizes the fact that on the postcolonial terrain the material support of language is oftentimes bodily rather than literary. For an analysis of Spivak’s 1994 essay in this regard, see Chapter One.
The sarcastic tone of Eagleton’s commentary, informing the tensions between postcolonial and materialist critics, will be addressed below. Meanwhile allow me to focus on his paraphrasing of the drawbacks of the term, where Eagleton foregrounds some of the contradictions inherent in self-referential postcolonial criticism. The fundamental of these is the contradiction between what postcolonialist theorists say and what they actually do; that is, the contradiction between the constative and the performative dimensions of language. As I have suggested, this contradiction is not only coincidental, but constitutive of self-referential postcolonial criticism.

Most important here is Eagleton’s observation that postcolonial theorists unproblematically engage in an analysis of something they have declared non-existent. Eagleton’s accusation points to the absurdity concomitant with an enhanced practice of self-referentiality. As I have indicated, due to their radically literal impulse, self-referential discourses cannot see beyond the chain of signifiers that constitutes language as a closed system. Hence, they admit to the existence of the subject, but purely as a logical and structural necessity, reducing the subject to its grammatical function. So, the self-referential tendency within postcolonialism forecloses the possibility of dialogue for it admits of one single subject position: that of the text’s enunciator.

Traditionally, postcolonial criticism is supposed to be concerned with discourses articulated from places other than the First-World academy. So, the reduction of the historical subject to the grammatical one forecloses dialogue. It makes these discourses, articulated from the First-World academy, schizophrenic ones, for there is but one subject position possible. The quote from Eagleton points to the quasi-schizophrenic character of the hyper-literal practices of the *mise-en-abyme* critique of postcolonial theory as a result of their obsessive self-engagement and disregard of historical reality; this, to the degree that the very existence of their object – or lack thereof – becomes inconsequential.

I have so far pointed to the aspects of postcolonial theory that either enable (i.e. self-reflexivity) or foreclose (i.e. self-referentiality) the possibility of dialogue with its exteriority. In order to account for how external factors participate in the possibility or foreclosure of that dialogue, I now turn to the critical tradition to which Eagleton belongs. As I indicated at the beginning of this section, the existing critique of the field may be grouped into two traditions. The second tradition is what I term the materialist critique of postcolonial theory. Very few scholars in the humanities today, especially those working in interdisciplinary fields rather than traditional disciplinary frameworks, would acknowledge an idealist position. There is an ongoing battle
amongst scholars from contrasting ideological and methodological backgrounds to gain hegemony over the limits and possibilities of signification that “materialism” covers.54

Hence, it is important that I clarify what I mean by the term in the present context. With the materialist critique of postcolonial theory, I refer to the work of authors whose foundational category is external to language. Generally, such authors do not identify themselves as postcolonial theorists, whether their critique of the field is merely incidental (such as that of Terry Eagleton [1998] or Fredric Jameson [1991]), or whether they deal with the same geo-cultural areas, subject-matters and/or problematics as postcolonial theory, but from a largely different perspective. In the latter group I would include authors like Aijaz Ahmad (1992), Arif Dirlik (1994), Timothy Brennan (2001), Benita Parry (2004) and Peter Hitchcock (2007). What I call the materialist critique of postcolonial theory borrows considerably from Marxist and post-Marxist frameworks. In contrast to so-called “new materialisms,” it is not concerned with the bodily dimension of things per se, nor with analyzing the cultural and phenomenological intricacies of the issues that are addressed, but rather with the positioning of these issues within larger historical, socio-economic and ideological frames.55

At least since the publication of *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (2002), a collection of essays edited by Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarous, there have been incipient attempts to bridge the divide between the mise-en-abyme critique and its materialist counterpart. Individual authors such as Harish Trivedi (2008) have taken from both traditions for the purpose of situated analyses of so-called non-Western cultural objects, yet a fully-fleshed discussion between the two groups has by no means been achieved. While pertinent critique has been offered by those writing outside the field, this critique is often disregarded as “economic reductionism” by those comfortably identifying themselves as postcolonial theorists. Ramón Grosfoguel, a world-system scholar whose later work has increasingly integrated postcolonial approaches, stages the conflict between the two traditions in the following way:

Postcolonial critics characterize the capitalist system as a cultural system. They believe that culture is the constitutive element that determines economic and political relations in global

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54 The recent proliferation of so-called “new materialisms,” parallel to the persistence of the term in its original usage by (post-)Marxist scholars may be read in this light. Resignifying “materialism” in view of the present historical context may yield productive results. Yet, as Laclau indicates, the resignification of a term is never an exclusively epistemological, but also a political act (1997).

55 Some diverse examples of new materialism are Brown 2001, Felman 2003 and Bennett 2004. Brian Massumi, while being a mayor exponent of new materialism, also engages significantly with more classic materialist modes of analysis (2002).
capitalism (Said, 1979). On the other hand, most world-system scholars emphasize economic relations as constitutive of the capitalist world-system. Cultural and political relations are conceptualized as instrumental to, or epiphenomenon of, the capitalist accumulation processes. The fact is that world-system theorists have difficulties theorizing culture and postcolonial theorists have difficulties theorizing political-economic processes. The paradox is that many world-system scholars acknowledge the importance of culture but do not know what to do with it or how to articulate it in a nonreductive way; whereas many postcolonial scholars acknowledge the importance of political economy but do not know how to integrate it to cultural analysis. Thus both literatures fluctuate between the danger of economic reductionism and the danger of culturalism. (2008a: 100)

World-systems analysis, with Immanuel Wallerstein as its major exponent, is one of the many possible materialist arenas from where critique of postcolonial theory may and has been exerted. But even if it is only one among the several post-Marxist strands, world-systems theory is the one most often compared and contrasted with postcolonialism. The reason for this is that both approaches have the same object of investigation, global relations, but see it from contrasting ideological and disciplinary perspectives. What for the former is the core/periphery articulation is seen by the latter as a West/non-West relation. As Grosfoguel points out, the ideological disparity may be traced in their contrasting founding principles. Meanwhile, the contrasting methodologies of each may be largely attributed to their disciplinary biases: while most postcolonial scholars are educated in the humanities, most world-systems analysts have a background in the social sciences.

I find Grosfoguel’s analysis of these opposing approaches useful insofar as it frames the opposition in terms of the founding principles of each as ideology and the respective teleologies that derive thereof. I also coincide with Grosfoguel’s own position in this respect – that “the culture versus economy dichotomy is a ‘chicken-egg’ dilemma, or a false dilemma, that comes from what Immanuel Wallerstein has called the legacy of nineteenth century liberalism” (2003: 14). Yet, I challenge two of his assumptions in the quote above. The first is a commonplace assumption, and by no means particular to the Puerto-Rican theorist. I am referring to the fact that he phrases the opposition in terms of culture vs. economy rather than language vs. economy. I sustain that the latter formulation is much more pertinent, firstly because, as Grosfoguel himself argues, economics is a cultural phenomenon too. Furthermore, linguistic and economic forms of analysis, as relatively autonomous and relatively abstract systems, can be compared, while “culture” refers to the phenomenon addressed by both.56

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56 As opposed to Grosfoguel’s usage of the term, I believe that cultural analysis proper would refer to an open ended form of analysis which could, in principle, integrate linguistic as much as economic conceptual categories.
The second, and perhaps most important, contestation is that Grosfoguel’s phrasing, particularly in his first statement, implies that postcolonialists view capitalism as a singular cultural system. Although exceptional texts, such as Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” do suggest that, for all practical purposes, there is a single culture, insofar as there is a single legitimate culture, I sustain that postcolonialism functions around the notion of cultural difference. What French theorist Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) has called différance, implying difference and deferral as produced by language, is central to postcolonial frameworks of analysis. Postcolonialism deals with a duality if not a plurality of “cultures.” It cannot at any point be reduced to the question of culture, without a parallel understanding of culture as difference, for to view the world in terms of a single culture (called capitalism) is to have one’s grounding outside language. An understanding of cultural difference as a mere effect produced by a global totality such as capitalism situates class antagonism at a global scale, not a function of language, at the basis of its explanations.

In contrast, the understanding of the subject as a function of language is at the basis of postcolonialist analyses of cultural difference. Dirlik criticizes this approach because:

Since postcolonial criticism has focused on the postcolonial subject to the exclusion of an account of the world outside the subject, the global condition implied by postcoloniality appears at best as a projection onto the world of postcolonial subjectivity and epistemology – a discursive constitution of the world … (1994: 336)

Dirlik argues that this has, in turn, lead to a refusal to situate subjects in geo-economic terms (335). This is the case not only for the postcolonial subjects analyzed, but also for the postcolonial intellectuals themselves, “[n]ow that postcoloniality has been released from the fixity of Third-World location, the identity of the postcolonial is no longer structural but discursive” (332).

As indicated by Dirlik here (as well as by Loomba 1998a: 245-254, and Parry 2004), postcolonial criticism’s traditional affiliation with the “linguistic turn” in Western thought, and the negligent complicity with global capitalism this may imply, is the central issue in contemporary

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57 See Derrida 1982: 18. The concept of différance is often implied but sometimes also openly addressed in works of postcolonial theory. It plays a key role in Gayatri Spivak’s “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value” (1985), but much more of her work is also informed by the concept and by Derrida’s oeuvre in general. Actually, it was her translation of Derrida’s Of Grammatology into English that brought her to fame when it was first published in 1974. Other concepts coined by the French philosopher, such as that of the “dangerous supplement” occupy an important place in the work of postcolonial theorists such as English literature and African studies specialist at Tulane University (U.S.A.), Guarav Desai (2001).
debates within the field. The approaches of the *mise-en-abyme* and materialist critiques of postcolonialism can each be associated with one of the two logics described by Žižek:

the opposition of two logics, that of antagonism and that of difference, is the deployment of a logically preceding term, of the inherent “pure” difference, the minimal difference which marks the noncoincidence of the One with itself. This noncoincidence, this “pure difference” can either unravel into a multitude of entities forming a differential totality, or split into the antagonistic opposition of two terms. (2006a: 36)

While materialism subjects global culture to the logic of contradiction, postcolonialism subjects it to that of difference.

In this study, I propose to explore the epistemological interest and political productivity of each of these two approaches as well as that produced by the combination of both. As Brazilian critical pedagogy theorist Paulo Freire (1921-1997) holds, language, as praxis, can only be dialogic. Both activism, as the sacrifice of reflection, and verbalism, as the sacrifice of action, foreclose the possibility of that praxis (1972: 75-76). Rather than continue to reinforce the idea that language (or culture, when understood as referring to subjective experience and the sphere of representation), on the one hand, and economics, on the other, are mutually exclusive opposites, or the associated claim that political productivity and theoretical complexity are inversely proportional possibilities, I wish to contribute to the debate by putting to the test a different understanding of the same problem.

I take off from the hypothesis that the limits to postcolonial criticism’s political productivity have not been imposed by its focus on language, but by four other associated issues. The first of these is the granting of a foundational status to language, which is not the same as a mere focus on it. While the former implies a methodological (or even ideological) presupposition, the latter only reflects a thematic interest. Second, I take issue with the particular understanding of language that is presupposed. This is to say that I explore the consequences of the field’s tendency to rely on language as an abstract self-regulating system, rather than on discourse as a set of specifically located practices that co-constitute the world. The focus on language as an enclosed order implies a displacement of attention from historically particular expressions to a systemic totality. That displacement is further obscured when the notion of “the particular” is reified in the totality’s modes of internal differential particularity. Third, because the abstraction of language (understood as accessible) from its historical locatedness (understood as inaccessible), produces a hiatus between language and reality, the question of the political is preempted by the question of the possibility of
access to reality – the political allegedly being the exclusive domain of the latter. Hence, I am concerned with the displacement of political to ontological questions; with the conversion of issues of structural position into issues of phenomenal realization or potentiality. The fourth and final tendency that I view as imposing a limit to the field’s political productivity is that it often grants a priori a differentiated epistemological authority to the diverse sets of texts that the postcolonial critic deals with.58 The first three tendencies I have outlined will become clear in reading Chapters One and Two, where they are elaborated. Below, I focus on the fourth point exclusively.

The different sets of texts involved in the critic’s operations are: Western theory, non-Western literary objects, and her own written production. The postcolonial critic’s text is normally conceived of – if not actually functioning – as an intermediating agent between the highest (i.e. Western theory) and the lowest (i.e. non-Western object) levels of epistemological legitimacy.59 Typically, the non-Western literary object is treated according to all the nuances of post-modernist and post-structuralist paradigms: authorship, autonomy and originality are questioned; différance, dissemination, performativity and the permeability of boundaries are foregrounded. The non-Western literary object is portrayed primarily in terms of its political (understood as extra-textual) implications, and regarded as a strategy that plays with always-already existing meaning rather than as a site that may contribute to the construction of a meaning relevant beyond its immediate site of production.60

In contrast, the texts which postcolonial criticism takes as its theoretical sources are approached from a different perspective. Theory is usually treated according to modernist and structuralist understandings. Any text in postcolonial theory may be taken as an example here, for I am referring to the simple fact that canonical Western authors are quoted unproblematically. This is to say that the theoretical text is de facto assumed as transparent; as authored and authoritative; as an autonomous, coherent whole productive of innovative meaning, a meaning capable of transcending its site of production. Its extra-textual complicities are often left out of the picture. The reception of authoritative Western theory within postcolonial criticism prioritizes the former’s constative – over its performative – qualities. Although postcolonial criticism characteristically

58 The postcolonial critic’s object is not, of course, always literary. Nonetheless, I limit my discussion to “literary objects” for briefness’ sake and because the present study will only deal with such kinds of objects – in written, oral and media-broadcast forms.

59 For a critique of the equation of the West with theory, and the non-West with the object of study, see Chow 1998: xiii-13.

understands representation as politically charged, it poses the question of representation as problematic only concerning the postcolonial literary object, seldom the Western theoretical text.

I argue that taking the theoretical text as playfully as the postcolonial literary object is often taken allows for an exploration of what the academic’s text can actually do in its circumscribed field of direct social action (i.e. amongst its audience). Although writing styles in both poststructuralist and postcolonial theory tend to call attention to their own textual (and therefore to their own materially limited) dimension, this strategy tends to be read exclusively as an illustration of the text’s discursive propositions: as a further element in the multilayered coherence of the text as an autonomous whole. But the performative dimension of contemporary theory and postcolonial criticism in particular may be read well beyond its illustrative word-play. The performative does not account for a given rhetorical style but for the particular angle by which a speaker or writer cuts across, and thus co-relates, three layers, the rhetoric, the constative and the contextual, in a time- and place-specific occurrence (see Culler 2000). Thus, stylistic coincidences may produce completely different meanings according to their case specificity. Exploring the performative dimension of theoretical or critical discourse allows for an understanding of the text’s actual positioning before the reader as an addressed other. It allows for an understanding of the text as social action and as situated symbolic practice. In turn, this understanding, when contrasted with a text’s internal discursive coherence, may allow for a deeper exploration into the political and epistemological possibilities it opens up or forecloses.

Theorists such as Spivak or Bhabha are highly aware of the internal contradictions of language as a system of representation. Hence, the issue is not a lack of awareness of the internal contradictions of language as a system, but the actual, situated contradictions that are raised by a particular pronouncement, in relation to a particular modus operandi in the context of the sites of enunciation from which they take place, in relation to their publishing mediums, their objects of study, their sites of reception and the academic conventions by which they are wrought and circulate. Thus, I concentrate on the places of articulation between postcolonialism as a specific theory, postcolonialism as a specific modality of writing, and postcolonialism as a worldly practice.

61 Likewise, as exemplified in the analysis of Nyerere’s text in my last chapter, I consider that taking the postcolonial literary object, its epistemic statements and what Bal (1994) would call its “meaning-making” mechanisms as seriously as those of Western theory opens up the political potential of postcolonial criticism. Like any other analytical procedure, it does not lead to an immediate change in the material realm, because it pertains primarily to the realm of socio-cultural imaginaries. However, it channels the political impetus to the only place where, within the context of intellectual practice, it can be actually effective: towards an intervention in the cognitive and value systems that legitimize or modify, in the long run, the status quo.
This is why a major peculiarity of my insertion into the discussion surrounding postcolonial theory is that I take postcolonial theory itself as my object of investigation.

Since postcolonial theory, not its materialist critique, is my object, I have elaborated how the former – when enclosed in a self-referential dialogic simulacrum – has been responsible for the lack of productive communication between the two. I now point to the accountability of the latter. In the post-Cold War era, even if Marxism-informed perspectives are dismissed as passé and lack the institutional, economic and intellectual authority granted to their postcolonialist counterparts, they have also become less threatening to the capitalist status quo after the fall of the Berlin Wall.62 There are today a limited number of enclaves in the First-World academy in which (post-)Marxist analyses may be practiced comfortably while reaping the institutional, economic and intellectual prestige offered by the establishment. Eagleton is an example at hand.

My interest in stating this is by no means of a moral, nor even of a sociological, nature. I am presently concerned with the repercussions that those conditions of enunciation have in the foreclosure of a dialogue between postcolonialism and its materialist critique. Occupying a position of authority makes it unnecessary for the materialist critics to strategically engage with the language and logic of the texts they criticize. In other words, semi-comfortable positions occupied by several materialist critics of postcolonial theory in the First-World academy forecloses the necessity of engaging in a critique of the field that addresses its internal inconsistencies rather than simply dismissing it from an altogether distant framework of analysis.

Eagleton’s open sarcasm in the quote above, for instance, evidences the secure position of authority from which he speaks. As exemplified by the tone of his critique, and by Young’s subjection of Eagleton’s commentary to a further practice of mise-en-abyme, the dialogue between postcolonialism and its materialist counterpart is often characterized by dismissal on the side of the materialists and simulated dialogue on the side of the postcolonialists.63 The dialogue between the two does not take place, for they each speak different languages; they have incommensurable founding principles.

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62 Even if any system that gains hegemony has, in principle, the capacity to incorporate, and thus de-politicize, oppositional discourses, the strategy of global capitalism in this regard – commodification – seems to be particularly effective.

63 It is not the place here to analyze in detail how Young depoliticizes Eagleton’s critique. I trust, however, that it will be evident to the reader from the quote itself, whereby Young incorporates Eagleton’s critique as one more of the forms of dialogue of postcolonialism with itself. For detailed readings of similar procedures by Robert J. C. Young, see Chapters One and Three.
The difference between these two critical traditions may be conceived as the difference between internal and external critique in philosophy. British philosopher at the University of Auckland (New Zealand), James Marshall, explains:

By an *internal* critique I mean arguments that are directed either at providing an exhibition analysis so as to preserve the framework or system … or directed at perceived inconsistencies within a particular framework or philosophical system so as to threaten the retention of the framework or system – a replacement analysis. (2004: 459, emphasis in text)

In contrast, Marshall clarifies that “[b]y an *external* critique [he] means arguments that are diametrically opposed to the thesis being critiqued, because they are part of a different categorical framework … and can be launched oppositionally upon the framework, system, or position” (459, emphasis in text). The materialist critics of postcolonialism seldom have had an impact on that tradition, for theirs is often an external critique, one that judges the tradition criticized in terms that are inoperative within that tradition’s own terms.

In this study, I straddle the divide between the internal and external forms of critique. More precisely, it may be said that mine is an ideologically external but methodologically internal critique. In general terms, this is to say that my point of view is external to the conception of language as a foundational category, which is typical of most postcolonial theory. Nonetheless, in my modus operandi, I enter a “willing suspension of disbelief” and engage with my objects on their own terms, in order to later place this exercise in a wider perspective.64

Therefore, my methodology borrows from what I have called the self-reflexive mode of internal critique. Previously, I have indicated that I consider the self-reflexive strand of postcolonial criticism to be very productive in epistemological terms and politically pertinent in a circumscribed manner. Let me now add that I consider that these advantages cannot be fully realized as long as some of the criticisms made from its exteriority are not taken up. I mean not only the – a posteriori – positioning of the phenomena analyzed within a larger historical context, but also the recuperation of the epistemological possibilities offered by the materialist traditions.65 In other words, while the

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64 The phrase “willing suspension of disbelief” was coined by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and has come to be accepted as the definition of fiction. See Bal 1996: 22, 59; 2002: 126, 203; and Spivak 2001: 152-154, 162.

65 As Brennan has signaled, postcolonialism’s dialogue with Marxist traditions has concentrated around the figure of Gramsci. Brennan further criticizes the particular version of Gramsci that postcolonialism has appropriated (2001). In contrast, postcolonial theorists seldom engage with the work of Marx himself, or with critical theorists such as Theodor
confrontation between postcolonial and materialist critics may easily be reduced to a theory vs. politics opposition, it is important to remember that the former, if benefiting from Marxist and post-Marxist traditions, may thrive on an engagement not only with historical, but also with dialectical materialism. The reduction of the materialist critique of postcolonial theory to short-sighted economism once again rehearses the theory vs. politics opposition that marks the impossibility of dialogue. By means of an internal critique, one that engages with the logic of the system, I intend to open up shared spaces between postcolonial theory and its critique, and thus address what I consider to be the false opposition between language and the subject on the one hand, and economic structures on the other.

I approach postcolonial criticism from an external point of view as well, because only from that position can the collective subject position of the field be appreciated. To explain, I recapitulate. As I have suggested, outside texts, self-reflexivity is the defining trait of the subject as such. In consequence, the subject function in a text is where there is a self-reflexive effect. But access to this site is highly restricted and biased. In principle, that inequality is one of the central concerns that postcolonial theory sets out to address. By focusing on the (im)possibility of representation postcolonial theorists seek to avoid metaphysical claims. Nonetheless, postcolonial theory, as a specific kind of discourse, still relies on differently, yet equally, metaphysical presuppositions from those it critiques in order to be operative. In other words, it no longer conflates the subject it represents with an actual social agency yet, to be legitimate as an academic text, it relies strongly on the figure of the author (whether it be the enunciating or cited subject).

Thus, while postcolonial theory has emphasized the rift between the author and the represented subject, the academic writer and the academic reader, it has seldom, if ever, addressed two decisive subject positions by which it is structured. One of these I have mentioned: that of the cited author on which the academic system largely rests. The other, and perhaps most important subject position which postcolonial criticism has tended to disregard, is the structuring principle of the field.

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Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, or with contemporary discourse analysts in the post-Marxist tradition, such as Chantal Mouffe or Ernesto Laclau.

66 In this regard, Spivak is exceptional in the incorporation into her work of “Marx’s irreducible emphasis on the work of the negative, on the necessity of de-fetichizing the concrete.” (Spivak 1994: 72)

67 As French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has pointed out, the author is only functional because the organizing principle of a text and a (socially recognized) social agent are conflated (1977). That is to say, it holds due to a metaphysical claim, of a different kind.
With the “structuring principle of the field” I do not refer to the individual subject at the root of the text. I do not refer to the author figure who is constantly foregrounding and apparently subverting himself, while actually legitimating himself according to post-structuralist conventions. Rather, I refer to the collective subject by which the discursive practice is structured. This collective subject position is constituted by the institutional, economic and ideological surroundings that inform or restrict the author, to her awareness or not. Hence, it may be conceived as the paradigm of postcolonial theory, for a paradigm is “a conceptual or methodological model underlying the theories and practices of a science or discipline at a particular time; (hence) a generally accepted worldview” (OED). While touching upon this paradigmatic subject position at the core of discursive production in the field, my coverage makes no attempt of being comprehensive. I offer a study of a limited number of specific texts in postcolonial theory, which, taken as cultural objects, illuminate the constellation in which they are embedded.68

Before moving on to the next section, let me point to the specific aspect of “the subject of postcolonial discourse” that I deal with in each of the chapters. In the first chapter I investigate the reification of the subject in the signifier. In Chapter Two I explore the possibility that the subject of postcolonial discourse is in fact the author him or herself, as well as the complicities that operate between this self-referential practice and contemporary technological and ideological configurations. The third chapter delves into the collective subject positions that structure the postcolonial-as-intellectual and the postcolonial-as-subaltern into divergent poles. In Chapter Four I focus on the relationship between the materiality of the letter and the conventional aspect in the constitution of textual subject positions that circulate in academic texts. The last chapter explores the possibility and the consequences of taking at face value the fetishistic claim that the postcolonial scholar’s object of study may be rescued as a subject.

The New International Division of Labor

The “new international division of labor,” is a central category in this study. To explain why, I return to the categories for structuring a spatial totality mentioned earlier. As I indicated, postcolonial scholars have replaced the Three Worlds categories with a vocabulary that structures the globe into two distinct spaces. These new categories function as (psycho)analytical tools while

68 In Chapter One, I elaborate on this understanding of “constellation” which Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) borrowed from another Frankfurt scholar, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940).
simultaneously referring to concrete geo-historical spaces; for example: North/South, Occident/Orient, West/non-West, the West/the Rest, West/Other. As Mignolo argues, the privileged element in a binary opposition has the advantage of functioning at two levels: as one of the particulars in the opposition and as the universal place of enunciation (2002: 935). Note how some of the oppositions described – such as West/non-West and the West/the rest – explicitly phrase out the privileged position of one of the binaries. In these two examples, “the West” functions as both a particular within the opposition and as the overall structuring principle. This double standard – whether explicit or not – is what constitutes, in each case, the first of the opposing pairs as the place of the subject. Because it is both specific content and the general condition for the possibility of differentiated content as such, it is a disguised meta-position.

I have also suggested that, when considering written discourses, this meta-position is occupied by the author as the universal site of enunciation. In contrast, narrated subjects are reduced to the position of a differential particular, dependent upon the universal. But any form of representation by definition produces this rift between representing and represented subjects. Still, that epistemic impasse, while being a technical inevitability of any discourse, has significant political implications. In actuality, specific discourses always take place across differentiated positions of power, to greater or lesser extents. Access to the site of enunciation is socially and geo-economically restricted. These unequal discursive practices have been paradigmatically associated with ethnographic discourse, the legitimating practice in anthropology’s reduction of geo-culturally differentiated subjects to an object of study.69

Largely because of the above, the epistemic impasse has been a central concern of postcolonial theory. Due to both historical and methodological reasons, “one of the major ‘contact zones’ of post-colonial theory has concerned the practice and politics of ethnography” (Childs and Williams 1997:187). Ethnographic discourse was at the heart of the colonial enterprise; therefore, the critique of the latter could not overlook the former. At least since Edward Said’s Orientalism, colonial discourse analysis has been concerned with the discursive constitution of the West’s Other as an object. Hence, the West/Other dichotomy begs the question of the subject/object opposition; it is structured by it.

As implied by Fabian, the relationship between anthropology and its object is intimately linked with that between the West and its Other (1983: 147, 149). Ethnographic discourses tend to

69 Childs and Williams note that “Stephen Tyler has even claimed that ethnography is the ‘superordinate discourse to which all other discourses are relativized and in which they find their meaning and justification.’” (1997: 187)
“consistently align the Here and Now of the signifier (the form, the structure, the meaning) with the
Knower, and the There and Then of the signified (the content, the function or event, the symbol or
icon) with the known” (1983: 151). This differentiated epistemological alignment is what makes
ethnographic discursive practices central to the discussion of the subject vs. object dichotomy (and
the parallel self vs. other dichotomy) within postcolonial discourse.

The West/Other pairing is catachrestic in the sense that it conflates two separate binary
pairs: West/East and Self/Other. While the West/East dichotomy describes the charged spatial axis
of the postcolonial theater, Self/Other points more directly to the underlying power structure, to the
foreclosure of the “East” as a site of enunciation and its concomitant reduction to an object of
contemplation. Because of this, and because the West/Other opposition also surfaces as a symptom
of the intricacy of the where and the who of “the post-colonial,” my own search for the where
relates that axis.

However, I do not define the where in relation to the catachrestic opposition alone, but in
conjunction with the First World/Third World dichotomy. I have suggested that all the oppositions
mentioned structure a spatial totality. The West/Other registers that totality at a psychoanalytic and
epistemic level. The First/Third World opposition structures the totality in terms of the global
economy. I contend that the latter distinction is highly pertinent, for it determines the (im)possibility
of subject constitution to which the former distinction is dedicated.

Desai has argued that it is more productive to historicize problematic terminology, handling
it with a critical distance, than to do away with it altogether (2001: 11-13). Hence, despite the fact
that I uphold Ahmad’s critique of the First/Third World opposition, critique that I have broadly
sketched above, there is another reason why I persist in the cautious but nonetheless positive
inclusion of the category. While more recent categories such as core/periphery are less problematic,
the First/Third World opposition, referring to historical development rather than space, is the only
one to explicitly phrase out the teleological terms underpinning the geographical division. Hence,
the category may prove productive precisely because it exposes what Fabian would call the “denial
of coevalness,” a denial that continues to be operative today across the core/periphery division.70

Hence, I use the First/Third World opposition insofar as it points to the geo-economic
structuring of the globe and because it enunciates the ideology that legitimates that structure.
Nonetheless, I take a step away from the opposition because, as Ahmad has argued, “the world is

70 After introducing the term “denial of coevalness,” Fabian clarifies: “By that I mean a persistent and systematic
tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological
discourse.” (1983: 31; emphasis in text)
not divided into monolithic binaries; it is a hierarchically structured whole” (316). Therefore, my focus in this study is not on the distinct entities that constitute the opposition but on the bar by which it is structured: the international division of labor (IDL). Today this term, barely used in the humanities, is most prominent in the social sciences, particularly in world systems analysis. But even there, the term is scarcely mentioned since world systems analysis focuses on “center” and “periphery,” rather than on the divide by which “center” and “periphery” are imbricated (see, for example, Wallerstein 1980: 49-164).

I want to focus on the divide itself for a number of reasons. First, because it does not signal given geographical entities, but rather the principle by which they are constituted. In other words, it is a relational category allowing me to view given textual subject positions as a function of it. Second, and because of this, the IDL also allows me to establish a dialogue with a methodologically analogous, yet otherwise incommensurable analytical category in postcolonial theory, which, drawing from Spivak (1993a), I call “the epistemic divide.” The epistemic divide refers to the rift between enunciated and enunciating subjects that I have described, but emphasizes the relational nature of the impasse. The epistemic divide and the IDL are commensurable categories insofar as they both name a function by which discrete entities are produced. The inclusion of both analytical categories is crucial for bringing the micrological analyses of postcolonial theory and the macrological ones of its materialist critique to bear upon each other. Third, my interest in focusing on the IDL responds to the fact that, like García Canclini, I consider that, in the New World Order, economic structuring is more forceful while more invisible than ever (2004: 142).

This submergence of the international division of labor into invisibility historically coincides with the intensified period of de-colonization processes in Africa, the Asian subcontinent, South East Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean. The contemporary international division of labor (from the 1960s onwards) is technically referred to as the “new international division of labor,” in order to distinguish it from the “classic international division of labor,” which corresponds with the period of widespread colonial rule.71

During the late 1970s, Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs and Otto Kreye, then scholars at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg, Germany, described the emergence of a “new international division of labor.” What they term the classical IDL describes the differentiated roles of the so-

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71 I take the terms from Fröbel et al. (1980), who do not explicitly link the classic IDL with colonialism, nor the new IDL with post-colonialism. Yet, the historical periods in which they locate each, and the type of technologies and economies that they describe as related to each, allow me to make that association.
called developed and developing worlds in the global economy during the era of colonialism and up until the 1960s:

In the classical international division of labour the process of underdevelopment which countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America have experienced was determined by the development of their economies as plantation agriculture and raw material economies. (Fröbel et al. 1980: 403)

During that period, there existed a polarization between “a few industrialized countries producing capital-goods and consumer-goods,” on the one hand, and “the vast majority of underdeveloped countries,” on the other (Fröbel et al. 1980: 44). Limited to their role as suppliers of raw materials, developing countries then played a relatively passive role in the process of valorization of capital:

[Given the “classical” conditions of a couple of hundred years, capital, spreading out from Europe and later from North America and Japan, was only able to valorise itself in Asia, Africa and Latin America through the production of raw materials, but not to any significant degree through the production of manufactured goods, despite the fact that capital was operating on a world scale from its origins. (Fröbel et al. 1980: 44)

As is indicated by Karl Marx (1818-1883), capital’s process of valorization is intimately linked to manufacture, technological development and large-scale industry (1990: 431-32, 439, 446-69, 481-91). Hence, the scarce production of manufactured goods in the “developed world” to which Fröbel et al. point strongly determined capital’s inability to valorize itself there.

Marx’s analysis corresponds to the industrial era of capitalism, which is also the era of what Fröbel and his colleagues term the classical IDL. Many of those who deem Marx’s analysis of capitalism outdated rely on the fact that today we are living in the so-called post-industrial era. I contend that this assumption is questionable, since rather than a disappearance of industry, there has been a relocation of it across the IDL. While countries of the First World today concentrate services, they still rely on Third-World industrial production and on the local accumulation of capital that is valorized overseas.

As Fröbel et al. indicate, in the 1960s there is “a change in the conditions under which the valorisation of capital is taking place,” such as the development of advanced transport and communication technology (44). Although these conditions were subject to relatively gradual developments, in the 1960s they “began to be really operative” because, among other things, “the
overriding pressure of competition turns this possibility into a necessity for the survival of any individual capital” (Fröbel et al. 1980: 44). This new situation “compels the increasing subdivision of manufacturing processes into a number of partial operations at different industrial sites throughout the world” and produces the industrialization of developing countries as a consequence (Fröbel et al. 1980: 45).72

But while capital’s place of valorization changes, its place of accumulation remains the same. Hence, Fröbel and his colleagues open up the “Concluding remarks” of their book as follows:

The analysis of the world market oriented industrialisation of the underdeveloped countries through the establishment of free production zones and world market factories has shown that this industrialisation process, which is determined by a change in the conditions for the valorisation of capital, actually intensifies the tendency towards uneven development in the underdeveloped countries. (Fröbel et al. 1980: 403)

Thus, the authors draw to a conclusion by contesting the false impression created by the merely geographical democratization of industrial enclaves. It is likewise significant that they point here to the role of free production zones in bringing forth that equivocal impression. As may be appreciated from Marx’s Capital, the role of “freedom” as a floating signifier and its hegemonic appropriation by capitalism plays a crucial role in the ideological legitimation of the system (1990: 415-16, 477, 520).73

Marx states that “[t]he sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man” (1990: 280). Yet, he suggests, once we understand the precise ways in which the meaning of ideals such as “freedom” operate within the capitalist system, the fact is not as idyllic as it may appear. In contrast to the slave, the worker in the capitalist system is not only free to dispose of his own labor power as a commodity, but also free in the sense of having no possessions (272-73). With no other commodities to live off, he is cornered to sell the only commodity he has; that is to say, he is free to sell himself in the market. The worker’s “freedom,” in contrast to the slave’s lack of it, has further advantages for capital: because workers are kept on the brink of unemployment through temporary contracts, there is an excess supply of labor, which drops its value as a commodity in the

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72 Fröbel et al. (1980) also point to a second consequence: the appearance of structural unemployment in industrialized countries.

73 “Equality,” another humanist ideal inherited from the French Revolution is submitted to a parallel process of hegemonic appropriation by capital (see Marx 1990: 151-152, 280).
market. Furthermore, the regular payment of salaries post facto keeps the workers constantly in debt and thus structurally subjected to their class position (271-80).

Conflating freedom in the Enlightenment sense with the freedom of the worker to sell herself in the market, capital legitimates itself beyond the economic interest that is its drive and which it thus obscures. The persistence of this hegemonic appropriation of the term in contemporary society is exposed in Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine*. In an epigraph, Klein quotes Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano: “People were in prison so that prices could be free” (2007: 144). Klein’s case studies expose the incommensurability of human freedom and the freedom of capital, conflated by free-market ideology. Documenting the complicities between the imposition of authoritarian states and the free market (ranging from U.S.A. intervention as early as 1954 in Guatemala, to its most recent intervention in Iraq), she discredits the widespread belief that neoliberalism and democracy go hand in hand.74

Returning to Fröbel, it may be said that a parallel process of hegemonic appropriation occurs in relation to the new international division of labor (NIDL). Firstly, the change in conditions producing the NIDL – developments in transportation and communication technologies – appears to erase the IDL as such, while actually intensifying it. Secondly, the relocation of capital’s place of valorization hides from view the fact that accumulation is preserved in the same place, and that such a relocation is actually the only possible way, given the present technological, historical and economic conditions, to increase and perpetuate accumulation in the First World.

Valorization is the process which defines capital. In Marx’s words: “The value originally advanced … not only remains intact while in circulation, but adds to itself a surplus value or expands itself. It is this movement that converts it into capital” (Marx 1952: 71).75 While capital is self-valorizing value, it may be said, in broad terms, that value refers to abstract human labor.76

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74 Concerning the employment of proximate categories by the postcolonial project, Khanna asks: “How is it possible to conceive of hope when those categories of democracy and sovereignty that have become in enlightened thought the framework within which justice has been conceived seem adulterated at their foundation?” (2008: 26)

75 Cf. with this other translation: “The value originally advanced … not only remains intact while in circulation, but increases its magnitude, adds to itself a surplus-value or is valorized [verwertet sicht]. And this movement converts it into capital” (Marx 1990: 252). *Nota bene:* throughout this study, in quoting well known authors who write in languages other than English, such as Karl Marx, Michel Foucault or Jacques Lacan, I benefit from the availability of different translations. I switch between translations according to their suitability at a particular moment in my discussion. Since I do not make this switching explicit, and since the title of a given work is usually the same for both translations, please pay attention to the year in between parentheses to distinguish the edition to which I make reference.

76 The reductionism operative in my definition above cannot be overstated. The understanding of “value” is perhaps the most debated aspect amongst the different Marxist currents. Centrally, the debate spins around the place in which value is produced (i.e. in production or in circulation). For an account of Marx’s contested theory of value see Mandel 1990: 38-54. See also Žižek 2006a: 50-52. I deal with this issue in Chapter Four.
Hence, the fact that valorization is now located more intensively in the Third World means that it increasingly concentrates the class that produces value or, to phrase it differently, which allows for the valorization of value, but for its accumulation elsewhere (see Marx 1990: 300). In this way, exploitation across the IDL increases with the conditions brought about by the NIDL. Hence, the emergence of the NIDL at once dramatizes and obscures (by means of displacement) the persistence of industrial capitalism and the class divide by which it is constituted.

Postcolonialism, both as a historical event and as an academic reflection on that event, coincides with the advent of the NIDL. Furthermore, postcolonial theory deals with precisely those issues – such as the increased interconnectedness of the world – that are the conditions of the NIDL’s existence. Taking the operative force of the NIDL into account is therefore crucial for any analysis of postcolonial discourse.

Before moving on to brief descriptions of my chapters, allow me to suggest one last reason why, in the context of my concern with “the subject of (postcolonial) discourse,” the employment of the NIDL as an analytical category is important. Within Marx’s theory of capital, self-valorizing value occupies the place of the Subject:

In the circulation M-C-M [Money-Commodity-Money] both the money and the commodity function only as different modes of existence of value itself, the money as its general form of existence, the commodity as its particular form or, so to speak, disguised mode. It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. (1990: 255)

Furthermore, value and money hold a parallel relationship to the one held between the self-reflexive subject and that same subject as phenomenon observed. In other words, value’s self-identity in money produces the same self-reflexive effect that characterizes the subject position.77 Marx writes:

77 Brian Rotman, points to a similar parallelism insofar as he is concerned with “the emergence of a meta-subject” across economic, mathematic and artistic forms of representation. He proposes that: “There is a system (Hindu decimal place notation, principles of linear perspective, mechanism of capitalist exchange) which provides a means of producing infinitely many signs (numerals, pictures, transactions). These signs re-present (name, depict, price) items in what is taken to be a prior reality (numbers, visual scenes, goods) for an active human subject (one-who-counts, one-who-sees, one-who-buys and sells). The system allows the subject to enact a thought experiment (calculating, viewing, dealing) about this reality through the agency of a meta-sign (zero, vanishing point, imaginary money) which initiates the system and affects a change of codes (gestural/graphic, iconic/perspectival, product/commodity).” The emergence of a meta-subject in these diverse fields largely hinges on “the meta-sign which both initiates the signifying system and participates within it as a constituent sign.” (1987: 25, emphases in text)
As the dominant subject [übergreifendes Subjekt] of this process, in which it alternately assumes and looses the form of money and the form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through all these changes, value requires above all an independent form by means of which its identity with itself may be asserted. Only in the shape of money does it possess this form. (1990: 255)

Marx’s metaphors stress the understanding of self-valorizing value as the place of what I have previously described as the universal subject or the meta-position:

Instead of simply representing the relationship between commodities, it [value] now enters into a private relationship with itself, as it were. It differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus-value, just as God the Father differentiates himself from himself as God the Son, although both are of the same age and form, in fact one single person; for only by the surplus value of £10 does the £100 originally advanced become capital, and as soon as this has happened, as soon as the son has been created and, through the son, the father, their difference vanishes again and both become one, £110. (256)

As may be gathered from these descriptions, it is only in its self-identity with money (as opposed to its self-identity with commodities) that the split in the self that characterizes the meta-position is fully produced. Actually, only its self-identity in money (as opposed to the self-identity it finds in commodities), produces the equivalent of a universal subject position.

These are just a few examples where Marx establishes a connection between self-valorizing value and the subject position.78 Bearing this connection in mind, the geographical democratization of the valorization process that takes place with the emergence of the NIDL obscures the fact that the place of the subject remains restricted to the First World, the place where capital is accumulated. Although the valorization process now takes place largely in the Third World, the place of value’s self-reflexivity, that is, the place of its identification with its external form, money (including contemporary forms of representation of abstract value other than paper money), remains the same. Hence, there exists a parallelism between the hegemonic semiotic processes at work in the sphere of both economics and of what I have termed self-referential postcolonial discourses. In this study, it is one of my aims to explore how the elements in this analogy play into each other and whether their

78 In various passages of Capital, capital occupies the grammatical place of the subject and is not posed as a static structure but as a self-valorizing drive. Individual capitalists appear merely as the place where capital is personified; while, as part of the collective worker, laborers merely form a particular mode of existence of capital. See, for example, Marx 1990: 254, 433, 449-451, 480-491.
relationship, more than coincidentally analogical, is inscribed in actual teleologies driven by specifically situated interests.

The Chapters

As “Unrealized Promises” might suggest, this study is informed by Theodor W. Adorno’s theory of ideology and by performative approaches to discourse analysis. These diverse influences lead me to explore postcolonial academic texts as a social promise. “Unrealized” refers to the dilemma between potentiality and realization that concerns not only performativity theory, but also questions of representation in general, as well as technological situations that have become part of our everyday (academic) experience. Most importantly “Unrealized Promises” refers to a strategy of the contemporary hegemony that, in confounding the plane of potentiality and that of realization, turns political questions into ontological dilemmas, and thus elides the fulfillment of its avowed engagement.

The ways in which a number of texts in postcolonial criticism participate in, contest or complicate that strategy will be explored as this work unravels. The first two chapters deal with the “unrealized” aspect of the promise; Chapter One with the always postponed promise of difference, Chapter Two with that of connectivity. By contrasting a postcolonial and a materialist approach to the same issues, in Chapter Three I explore the foundational inclusions and exclusions on which the promise of postcolonial theory relies. The fourth chapter addresses a crucial factor when analyzing promises and their (lack of) realization: the question of time. In the last chapter I propose that, if an ideology is defined as such by what it promises and yet denies, then the shortcomings of postcolonial theory can only be properly contested by striving for the fulfillment of its own discursive promise.

More specifically, in the first chapter, I contrast the approach that postcolonial theorists have to one of the mainstays of their field, the concept of difference, with how that same question has been approached by Adorno. The objective of this comparison is to detect the incidence in postcolonialism of what I deem one of the key discursive strategies of the contemporary order of power. That strategy functions on the basis of an ideology that is committed to the signifier as a foundational category. I term it “metonymic” since it proceeds by displacing what were once political questions into ontological dilemmas. Against this strategy I argue that the sphere of the political should be conceived as a question of positioning, not one of realization.
The second chapter is a cultural analysis of a lecture by Homi Bhabha on the Internet. I explore how the modes of resistance to power that Bhabha proposes involve a displacement from the realm of the real to that of the virtual and what his reiteratively deferred promise of connectivity implies in relation to (the erasure of) the NIDL. Methodologically, in that chapter I am concerned with exploring the possibilities offered by a symptomatic reading of culture vis-à-vis forms of ideological critique developed on the basis of more contemporary forms of hegemony.

Chapter Three is the turning point from an external to an internal critique of the field. I contrast the use of the epistemic divide by a postcolonial author (Spivak) with the employment of the NIDL by one working outside the field (Canclini). I wish to explore ways in which these methodologies may be put to work together to push for the deliverance of the withheld aspects of their respective promises. By bringing these strategies together, I aim at opening up access to the subaltern other as an implied subject, one whose ontological constitution is mediated by history.

In the fourth chapter, I take into account the conventions of academic writing. Thus, citations emerge as a self-reflexive textual position. Through citation, the author is in a position to retroactively produce cultural capital. Crucial here is the awareness that the subject position of the cited author is valorized as cultural capital in circulation. In this sense, academic value is produced post facto, in the process of circulation. I analyze that process in the work of Anthony Appiah. Through that analysis, I argue that the impasse entailed by the incommensurability of enunciated and represented subjects may be transcended if we approach academic writing as a specific cultural practice.

In the last chapter I return to Adorno to propose that a critique of a system can only be realized by negating its constitutive exclusion. The constitutive exclusion of postcolonial theory is the postcolonial other, and often the field even functions as a fetishistic substitution of that other. Rather than simply criticize this possibility, I borrow from the logic of Adorno’s negative dialectics to take what such a fetishistic practice pledges at face value and research the extent to which its promise may be fulfilled. Exploring texts by Nyerere and Allende as catachrestic fetishes of postcolonialism, the last chapter at once critiques the constitutive incongruence, yet pushes for the realization of the withheld promise of postcolonial theory.