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THE NATURE OF DIALOGUE IN NON-EXPLOITATIVE APPROPRIATION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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To A.T., M.B. & W.S.
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CHAPTER I
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

During the summer of 1994 I noticed two black and white placards that had been put on display at all the bus and tram stops in Brussels. Each depicted a life-sized American cultural icon from the Roaring Twenties "caught in the act" of doing what each did best. The grainy quality of the images indicated that the posters were blow-ups of old journalistic photographs. Although neither figure was identified by name, one poster showed Jimmy Foxx," the fearsome slugger of the Philadelphia Athletics, swinging at a pitch--without, however, the use of a bat. His bat had been "digitized-out" and in its place Foxx swung a ketchup bottle. "Heinz, le vrai goût amèricain," proclaimed the poster. The companion advertisement showed a young Louis Armstrong--doubtless as familiar to Europeans as Foxx is unknown--up on the bandstand moving toward a microphone to take a vocal chorus. In one hand, in lieu of his trumpet,

"As best as I could ascertain--from memory and from scrutinizing photographs upon my return to the U.S.--the ballplayer was Foxx; however, I cannot say this with absolute certainty.
Armstrong held a ketchup bottle. Across the bottom, the same refrain: "Heinz, le vrai goût américain."

Nothing today—no image, no word, no sound, no event, no matter how remote historically or geographically—is immune from appropriation by advertising and marketing forces, whose reach has become increasingly global.

My focus in this project is on the process of appropriation as a communicative and creative practice and its affect on critical thinking. Specifically, I examine the transmogrification and circumscription in meaning that symbols undergo through appropriative recontextualization. My concern with advertising is as a communicative practice that sustains itself through the appropriation of cultural symbols and the transformation of "uncoded" cultural practices into recontextualized symbols.

I will argue that advertising—and to a lesser extent other forms of mass media—in its presentation and treatment of the world as one vast marketplace inhabited by "consumers," constitutes something akin to the dominant ideology\(^2\) of our day. In terming advertising a form of ideology, I have adapted and expanded Baudrillard’s (1981) theory that the mass media functions as a type of ideology by dint not only of its content, but also its form—a

\(^2\)Admittedly an unfashionable term; today "hegemonic worldview" is au courant. I shall have more to say on this in my subsequent discussion of ideology.
unilateral and monological distribution of messages that precludes response.

Advertising relies upon the use of "new" sounds, images and words to attract and hold an audience's attention. Thus, the communicative practices, the symbols, and the cultural artifacts that emanate from society's "margins"--a locus that includes the artistic avant-garde--and are carried to the surface by society's "deep currents," have become increasingly attractive targets for exploitative appropriation. Such cultural border zones are the locus of unrelenting cultural colonization. In their search for new material, the mass media's "creative" people ride roughshod over, around and through "high" and "low" culture, past and present.

This process of appropriation binds the dominant culture, society's "center," with its peripheries--here I use these terms metaphorically--in a dialectical relationship whose end result is the homogenization of heterogeneity. Innovation in the arts, as well as symbols and expressions that exemplify marginal communicative practices--and which often signify opposition to that mode of existence known as "consumer culture"--are appropriated, recontextualized and neutralized, i.e., drained of their critical power or complexity, which is predicated on ambiguity and polyvalence.
In the Heinz example, the immediate effects of appropriation seem nothing worse than a superficial wound: the appropriation and subsequent electronic distortion of image trivializes two serious pursuits\(^3\) while tainting the public memory—albeit nascent in Foxx's case—of two "artists" photographed at the height of their prowess by rendering them into unwitting buffoons. (Certainly neither Armstrong nor Foxx are alive to protest their transformation into "spokespersons" for a global food conglomerate.)

However, in this instance the particular personas of Foxx and Armstrong are less important than the newly minted metonymic coin stamped from their lives. Ironically, what Heinz is attempting to appropriate is the aura of "authenticity" that accrues to these images; yet precisely this type of unfettered play, action performed for its own sake, for pure joy rather than resale value, now seems near extinction owing to the commodification of nearly every sphere of existence—an extinction induced precisely by the type of commercial appropriation practiced by Heinz and their kind, hence the irony. Having decimated the last tracts of virgin forests, as it were, advertisers have no other recourse than to appropriate and market as "the real thing" photos of redwood forests as they stood before they were felled by appropriation.

Thus baseball and hot jazz, as they used to be played, function as metonyms for a wild and exotic American past—perhaps more mythic than real—that was less sullied by commercial appropriation than today's landscape. Foxx, wearing an "old-fashioned" baggy cotton uniform, literally stares at death, for he stands at the plate without a modern plastic batting helmet to protect him from a skull-fracturing inside fastball. And all of this is rendered in black and white to better signify the break with today's colorized commodified world. "Experience authenticity," the poster seems to entreat, taste Heinz—reconstituted tomato sauce and a reconstituted past in perfect symbiosis. But canned experience lacks the spice of spontaneity.

While the immediate surface effects of appropriation might seem superficial, the long-term effects of even such instances of "playful" appropriation such as the Heinz example are far from innocuous: each image, word, or sound that is thus appropriated diminishes the sensuous horizon of experience by boarding-up yet more space with distracting commercial signs. Indeed, certain instances of such physical and psychic encroachment are truly preposterous. For example, colorful advertising placards cover the boards around skating rinks and draw the eye from the skater; and during the 1994 season the Detroit Tigers became the first team to install a rotating sign behind home plate (Helyar, 1994); from a centerfield camera angle, one sees a long, low
rectangular pizza sign, predominantly orange, that engulfs the umpire and all but the batter's head.

A Caveat

To argue that advertising, by appropriating signs and artifacts from sub-dominant and emerging cultures, diminishes the horizon of human experience requires further clarification—particularly in light of the prominent treatment that I assign the creative process in this project. An obvious objection to my thesis is that in many instances advertisements are better crafted and more interesting than much of what the "art world" has to offer. Indeed, Erik Barnouw, among others, has argued that television commercials should be regarded as a new American art form. And one might argue that, in the parlance of the advertising business, the "creatives" whom the agencies employ are no lesser artists, and in some cases more talented, than those artists who would disdain them for "selling out"—and who themselves are not above "borrowing" ideas. For instance, among the better known designs created by commercial artist Raymond Loewy—or those under his direction—are the Lucky Strike cigarette package; the logos for Singer Sewing Machine, Shell Oil, Coca-Cola (and the red Coke dispenser of the 1950s); the Studebaker and that company's futuristic Avanti; the "Air Force One" that
transported President John F. Kennedy; and the interior of Sky Lab (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 84).

Certainly my purpose is not to denigrate commercial artists. Quite the contrary. In Chapter V, I point out that the term "Pop Art" was coined to expand the parameters of "serious" art to include some of the more interesting creations in advertising and mass entertainment. Rather, my intent is to point out that concerted oversaturation and recontextualization, the business of appropriating and rendering all manner of aesthetic material into cliches, circumscribes the possible range of signification or "meaning"—which Julia Kristeva has so aptly termed "the very stuff of human being"—in a particular ideological orbit.

The Problem

The loss of expressive power is the inevitable fate of all cultural objects that acquire social status or social value. In "passing from hand to hand they [become] worn down like an old coin" and lose their ability to arrest our attention and move us (Arendt, 1992, p. 90).

In my view, Arendt describes a cycle in which artistic innovation serves to balance a "self-cleansing" cultural mechanism that replaces the worn with the new. However, I wish to argue that today marketing and advertising have, in effect, commandeered the process. The appropriation has
accelerated at a rate that outraces the coefficient of change—the cycle has been thrown out of equilibrium. The effect on diversity has been devastating. Commercialization and standardization have spread to nearly every sector of the globe. Ritzer (1993) has termed this leveling of diversity "McDonaldization." 4

The appropriation of language from the margins of the dominate culture—sub-cultures, folk art, slang, literature—diminishes the means with which to articulate alternative modes of being. As they are bound to product endorsements, the emotional and critical tenacity of symbols and concepts are flattened into cliches and advertising jargon. Nothing is safe. As the Italian philosopher Vattimo (1990) said,

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4In December, 1994 the first McDonald's opened in Bulgaria, one of the former Eastern Bloc countries most inimical to American capitalism. To accommodate this enterprise -- one of 12 planned for the country and whose attraction to Bulgarians is more on the order of a Western icon than a fast-food restaurant -- a theater was gutted in the historic city of Plovdiv, which, in ancient Trace, was named Philipopolis, after Alexander the Great’s father, who founded the city in the 4th century B.C.

In addition, I note that Beijing is home to the world's largest McDonald's, which is the size of a department store; and also in December, 1994, McDonald's opened a unit in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Islam's holiest city, which only Muslims are permitted to enter. McDonald's officials said "meat used at the Mecca branch, as in other Muslim countries, will be prepared as prescribed by Islamic ritual" ("Mecca’s Golden Arches," 1994).
"They're scraping the top of the barrel, they're taking Parmenides, even critical theory."^5

Without the energy of fresh interpretation there is a danger that a culture or community will reach a state of moribundity where its symbols calcify and no longer signify anything but lifeless habits and narrow modes of existence, patterns without feeling. As Gadamer put it, "The very idea of a definitive interpretation seems to be intrinsically contradictory. Interpretation is always on the way" (1981, p. 105).

Rigidity of thought cramps human development, corrupts life, and dwarfs the possibilities of being. Life becomes a matter of drifting, of idle chatter, borrowed manners and imposed conventions.

Research Question

In Being and Time, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger argues that appropriation is a fundamental moment or stage in human communication; we come to understand something by making it our own. Building upon Heidegger's

^5Indeed, even critical theory has suffered from appropriation. The conceptual power of many of the terms that I will use in my analysis has been eclipsed by a commercial meaning that is more widely recognized than their critical or emancipatory sense. "Dialogue" is the name of a promotional sheet that Ameritech sends with its monthly bill. "Horizon" is the name of an automobile. To speak of "authentic being" today is difficult without evoking advertising jargon: Coke has been proclaimed the "real thing."
thinking, I have created two categories to describe the process of appropriation: exploitative appropriation, and dialogic or non-exploitative appropriation. Just as there are differing categories of appropriation, there are also various degrees within each category. In extreme cases--religious fundamentalism, for example--exploitative appropriation perpetuates rigid, univocal interpretations and conventional ways of seeing and being-in-the-world.

However, given that appropriation is fundamental to human communication, a crucial question surfaces, are appropriation and exploitation reciprocal? Is non-exploitative appropriation merely an ideal, or is it attainable? What, then, would a non-exploitative form of appropriation look or sound like? I will argue instances of non-exploitative appropriation abound, particularly in the aesthetic dimension, and that such appropriation may be viewed as polyphonic or dialogic in character. The question is not if but how non-exploitative appropriation occurs.

Thus the research question directing my project is: In what fashion does dialogue allow a non-exploitative form of appropriation to occur?

To explore this question I will show that the articulation of multiple perspectives is often characterized by the unveiling of hidden aspects, which may be conceptualized as dialogic--as comprising a polyphonic
dimension. Bakhtin (1981) has termed such many-voicedness polyglossia. In the most complex instances, polyglossia describes a cultural locus that comprises a melange of jargons, accents, dialects, and utterances that articulate the perspectives of all manner of social and cultural strata, past and present. I will show that exploitative appropriation renders polyphony monological or ideological.

When advertisers or political consultants, for example, appropriate word, image or sound they do so in such a fashion as to render the object ready-to-hand or univocal. The consequence is that meaning—the full range of the possibility of signification—becomes fixed or institutionalized, tainted with a commercial patina. Through assimilation and recontextualization, the object is codified, made monological, is made to "speak" the interests of vested parties. The object is appropriated into the order of things. In essence, the appropriated object is decapitated, severed from its roots. Its history—the polyphonic repository of tradition—is forgotten. What remains is an institutionalized meaning—part and parcel of a hegemonic worldview—that is harnessed to commerce, to

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"Codification is by no means the exclusive purview of the hegemonic power structures that are supported by the official or legitimate language. One need only recall the thought-deadening codification imposed upon philosophical and political language by vulgar Marxists who thought themselves "revolutionary."

maximum return on investment, to conventional ways of being-in-the-world.

In contrast, non-exploitative appropriation preserves an object's historical or polyvocal dimension by unveiling or articulating submerged voices, and thus premits the possibility of a greater range of signification. This unveiling occurs through dialogue. Thus, non-exploitative appropriation may be termed dialogic; the appropriated material is handled with care, with respect; the past—"the otherness of the other"—is given its due.

**Project Rationale**

My aim is to call attention to the diminishment of the horizon of experience, both physical and psychic: appropriation affects human sensibility and in turn the emancipation of thought, or critical thinking, which is my ultimate concern—the deadening effect of appropriation on thought and experience, on possibilities "for the reconstruction of the self and the world."

**Data**

I will use a song recorded by Jimi Hendrix to amplify and further define the category of dialogical appropriation. To show the relevance of my theoretical framework I will demonstrate its applicability. I will analyze a phrase from the Hendrix solo in "The Wind Cries Mary" in order to
provide an example of how a hidden facet of an object may be unveiled to reveal a plurality of voices—or styles—from the past that keep a tradition vibrant and thus suggest other possibilities of doing and being.

In addition, I will analyze several pieces of furniture designed by Memphis Milano, an international consortium of architects and designers, to exemplify dialogical appropriation and its relation to critical thinking and "self" actualization. In Western culture furniture is typically functional; it is not meant to induce contemplation or critical thinking. However, Memphis furniture was designed, in part, to make us think about the way society functions and structures our lives. To this end Memphis Milano occupied themselves with the nature of communication and meaning. Their works were an attempt to create new symbols, new meanings, in order that present-day culture might be reinvigorated. For Memphis, the rejuvenation of design was predicated on a critique of the tenets of modernism and involved "going behind" modernism by turning to myth and metaphor—a return to what Vico termed "poetic logic."

In turning to myth, Memphis employed a critical strategy presaged by the critique of modernism in other spheres. Kristeva (1994) pointed out that when France could no longer see the relevance of the traditional worn-out cliches propagated at the Sorbonne
and was tiring of the metaphysical generalities dear to existentialism. . . the "samurai" of the structuralist and poststructuralist generation were patiently but passionately grappling with the new signs emanating from the surrounding culture—from its myths, its writings, its images (p. 375).

This mention of "surrounding culture" is significant. I will argue that exploitative appropriation is a type of inscription or codification. In contrast, in dialogic appropriation, meaning is less inscribed, is not yet entirely codified, is still fluid. Places where aesthetic elements are in permutation are cultural border zones—where meaning isn't yet institutionalized or fixed and something new is emerging. Memphis attempted to "say something new" by appropriating colors, shapes, and materials whose meanings had yet to be codified.

The Memphis project also typifies the paradox of postmodern criticism, i.e., self-reflexivity, a radical questioning of the presuppositions of one's own thinking or tradition. For example, Michel Foucault problematized subject-based "reason"—from which Enlightened thinking drew its authority—yet employed "reason" to do so; had he not, his arguments would have been without "foundation"—literally—if not incomprehensible. As Karlis Racevskis (1993) points out,
in shaping a new form of thought, [Foucault] was attempting to extricate himself from the savoir that informed his thinking, from everything that had given his thought its particular shape and configuration. (p. 43)

Foucault once stated that he wrote in order to reconstruct or escape his "self." Yet doing so required that he question his intellectual heritage; the line of thinking, the various discursive formations, that had given birth to his own discourse or writing. In other words, in order to go beyond it, Foucault had to make use of the very tradition he was trying to escape. In analogous fashion, Memphis questioned the very tradition—in order to escape it—that had given rise to its work, namely, the so-called avant-garde.

Methodology

Methodology involves selection—the selection of what to look at and how to look at it, i.e., the perspective one adopts, one's critical stance. The emancipation of the senses and appropriation are related themes embedded within, and in large measure define, the tradition of "critical theory" that grew out of eighteenth century German philosophy. In light of my theme, appropriation as a communicative and creative practice, and the aesthetic examples I employ to concretize my theoretical forays, I
have developed a methodology that draws from critical theory and art criticism—and certainly the sources I draw from frequently evidence an organic connection between philosophy and art. From these traditions, I draw and synthesize the concepts best suited to articulate and examine appropriation and its sub-themes.

In my view, the general theme that binds the intellectual heritage that I have termed critical theory, is the actualization human potential or of the "self." For some thinkers, such as Marx, unleashing human potential involved the reconstruction of society, e.g., overhauling the mode of production and the elimination of private property. While recognizing his insights—and those of his latter day exponents, particularly Marcuse—especially in the area of aesthetics, here I admit a strong bias against the strain of what I will term "universalizing utopian revolutionary discourse" that runs throughout a good deal of critical theory, particularly the Frankfurt School.

More to my point is self-actualization. For Nietzsche, this meant "creating" one's life as if it were a work of art; for Heidegger, this meant straying from the trodden path of convention; for Foucault the adventure of self-transformation involved the act of writing—Foucault wrote to "escape himself" (Racevskis, 1993, p. 41).

Indeed, why else rail against the commodification of seemingly every facet of experience, against the thought-deadening effects of appropriation?
As I previously mentioned, I use Foucault's work as an exemplar of the *sine qua non* of critical thinking, self-reflexivity: Foucault critically examines the tradition or the discursive lineage from which his own discourse originates. Foucault's project of "self-escape" involved a radical examination of his cognitive suppositions; he built upon and extended the very intellectual heritage he sought to escape from.

The process of signification is a key facet of appropriation and codification, and my choice of exemplars (data) requires that I analyze "meaning" vis-a-vis art objects. To do so, I use a semiotic mode of analysis predicated upon an expanded notion of the "text" as a practice. Thus I also draw upon an East European linguistic tradition whose chief exemplars and innovators are Makail Bakhtin, Yury Lotman and Julia Kristeva. As Kristeva (1994) noted, one of Lotman's many contributions to semiotics was his notion of the text as a "reduced model of culture," not a philological phenomenon but the complex and interactive activity that creates meaning—the semiotic activity. This notion shifted the focus from the text to its periphery, thereby immersing the text in history and society: the text is engendered not only by the internal play of linguistic elements within a closed structure but also by cultural movements and documents (p. 376).
Kristeva rarely uses concepts as static objects—she purges, refines, augments, and synthesizes them with those she appropriates from other traditions and disciplines. While Kristeva's appropriation of source material can be dizzying in its encyclopedic breadth, I limit my use of her insights to those that bring the greatest conceptual power to bear on upon signification and codification. Primarily from these I develop a notion of "sensual semiotics" with which to elucidate the Memphis Milano project.

To the extent that I use concepts—bits and pieces—from a particular intellectual heritage to problematize certain themes and build an argument, my methodology may be termed bricolage. As Derrida pointed out:

If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is bricoleur (Cited in Payne, 1993, p. 16).

To borrow the words of Jennifer Stone, my methodology stresses a "continuous, dynamic process of interaction" among critics who work primarily within the critical tradition. To state my case, I mix and match, contrast and synthesize a variety of perspectives. Thus my argumentative framework, its actual mechanics or structure, may also be termed dialogic. My purpose is to call attention to the leveling effects of appropriation, to the absorption of marginal communicative practices and the effect this has on
critical thinking and creative expression. Because I term exploitative appropriation "ideological"—or "monological" or "authoritative"—and posit dialogue as its antithesis, a dialogic framework is the best-suited critical apparatus or criteria against which to examine appropriation.

As I mentioned, "meaning," or the process of signification is a salient subtopic. This topic necessarily involves the "signifying subject," which, in turn, I relate to self-identity, cultural-identity, and cultural difference. Marginal communicative practices, the targets of appropriation, presuppose cultural difference. By way of definition, I hold that culture is a shared way of doing things and that cultural identity is often tied to the collective value placed on certain symbols; thus cultural identity is based, in part, on shared images.

One of the consequences of appropriation is the assimilation and devaluation of cultural symbols. To couch this in philosophical language, appropriation strips the individual of his or her own orientation and interests by denying the individual his or her own historically and culturally differentiated life-world. To resist or refuse appropriation is to maintain one's autonomy; it is to be, in R.D. Laing's (1971) existential terminology, "an ontologically secure being."

The process by which one's image of self is formed has been variously termed the "dialectic of recognition" or the
"persona effect." I trace the exposition of this process to Hegel; and in the twentieth century both Jean-Paul Sartre (1973) and Laing (1971) have re-formulated Hegel's analysis is less abstract terminology. Bakhtin, another critic whose work I am heavily indebted to, has applied Hegel's insights on self-identity to the cultural sphere. Thus my argument also uses a dialectical frame of reference.

This strikes me as appropriate because there is an organic connection between dialectic and dialogue. The roots of each are in ancient Greece; and the concept dialectic has its origin--dialect--in dialogue. In ancient Greece, dialectic meant a "clash"\(^3\) of discourse(s)--the weak ideas would fall by the wayside and truth, or a piece of the truth, would emerge. Here truth is not empirical fact, but rather a direction or the unveiling of a possible opening that would reveal a heretofore hidden aspect of the world.

More to my point is a clash of cultures--sometimes a very powerful, but fertile, collision occurs, as when colonial tensions give rise to new expressions of native culture. My interest is with the sensual or aesthetic aspects that emerge from multicultural communication--and precisely these sensual aspects are most susceptible to

\(^3\)For this succinct description I am indebted to Alfred Meyer, Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan.
appropriation. To show how dialogue functions in non-exploitative appropriation I will concern myself with examples of visual and aural polyglossia: many voicedness, dialects, jargons, intonations, accents; multicultural communication viewed as a type of dialogue, as a bi- or multilingualism.

Certainly what is present counts. However, in the present there are traces of what has been, what is breaking and what will surface—a very powerful dynamic mix. Thus I have selected a methodology and conceptual framework geared to capture the dynamics of this mix.

Organization

In Chapter II, I elaborate my methodology, i.e., lay out the theoretical considerations and the concepts that I develop in order to articulate the process of dialogic appropriation and make my case. Chapter III extends this theoretical discussion and introduces a concept integral to my argument, codification. I examine linguistic codification and offer concrete examples of this process. In Chapter IV, I explain how I arrived at my conception of ideology and its pertinence to exploitative appropriation and the mass media. In Chapter V, I discuss Postmodernism to provide a historical context for the work of Memphis Milano, which I treat in Chapter VI. In Chapter VII, I come full circle in a sense; that is, I try to provide a type of narrative or
logical closure by further elucidating my central—and perhaps most obtuse—concept, dialogic appropriation, by demonstrating its applicability to a Jimi Hendrix recording. In Chapter VIII, I offer some concluding remarks.
CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss my methodology; explain how I formulated my research question, and expound its key terms, appropriation and dialogue. I will also introduce a dialectical framework—derived from Hegel—for two reasons: to illuminate the process by which self-identity is formed; and to introduce a conceptual vocabulary that will figure in my analysis of Memphis and Hendrix. By way of furthering my argument and leading into Chapter III, I conclude by arguing that the determination of cultural identity is governed by knowledge-power discursive formations that characterize modernity.

As previously stated, the concept of codification is central to my argument. However, codification is not merely a cerebral affair. A crucial point in my analysis of Memphis is that codification begins much earlier than is commonly supposed. It occurs in a pre-verbal realm that involves the body; hence the concept "sensual semiotics," to which I now turn.
Sensual Semiotics

Kristeva argues that signification has a sensual or corporeal origin. This is the basis of her critique of formal linguistics—that it eliminates social practices from its field of study. In essence, such formalism objectifies language and thereby decapitates it off, excluding social forces from analytical consideration.

To stress this point, Kristeva (1984) redefines and expands traditional linguistic terms so that they account for the biological drives and the social practices in which communicative practices realize themselves. For Kristeva, the concept of text encompasses a live force field through which flow both a primal biological energy and the inscriptive practices or control mechanisms that structure and displace this vital energy. Kristeva’s notion of text signifies discourse that

is not a mere depository of thin linguistic layers, an archive of structures, or the testimony of a withdrawn body, and is, instead, the essential element of a practice involving the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction and construction—productive violence . . . (p. 16).

Above all, in this conception, text and practice are reciprocal. As a practice, the complete analysis of a text would take into account the text’s peripheries, "immersing
the text in history and society" (Kristeva, 1994, p. 376). This involves semiotics in the synthesis of a wide range of disciplines: biology, politics, history, culture—in short, in various power/knowledge discursive formations. Therefore, textual analysis cannot be separated from the social and historical horizon that defines it and against which it unfolds. Kristeva calls the text a practice comparable to "political revolution" (p. 17). What she means to stress with this analogy is that ambiguity and polyvalence are the origins of what might be termed a revolutionary or innovative spark. The heterogeneous text is revolutionary precisely because it is the antithesis of univocal authoritarian meaning. To distinguish her conception of text as practice from formal dogmatics, Kristeva (1984) further refines her idea of heterogeneous practice and concludes by terming it *significance* in order to indicate, on the one hand, that biological urges are socially controlled, directed, and organized, producing an excess with regard to social apparatuses; and, on the other, that this instinctual operation becomes a *practice*—a transformation of natural and social resistances, limitations, and stagnations—if and only if it enters into the code of linguistic and social communication (p. 17).

Instinctual practice, raw primal energy, is bridled only through codification. Once codified, that which emanates from the pre-verbal or sub-verbal realm becomes a
practice. Repetition and pattern, these imprint their memory or form upon the living cells, thus shaping and directing the chaotic, the dangerous, the revolutionary. Here we see the vast extent of the realm that encompasses the extent of the codification process, much of which lies beyond our conscious awareness: precisely that which Foucault termed savoir, a vast "cognitive matrix that organizes different fields of knowledge and legitimates truths" (Racevskis, 1993, p. 43). Bourdieu (1982), for one, offers corroboration in his identification of the controlling structures that exist "outside" of the communicating subject as extralinguistic.

Foucault points out that every society imposes constraints on various types of discourse. In his analysis of the history of sexuality, of the seventeenth century, for example, Foucault notes that in order to implement certain prohibitions, "new rules of propriety screened out some words: there was a policing of statements" (1984, p. 301).

Similar constraints or legitimizing procedures have also been applied to what I have termed marginal communicative practices to designate means of expression outside the bounds of legitimacy. That such controlling procedures exist at all presupposes that marginal communicative practices are dangerous and powerful—and that this power derives from an unpredictability that imperils the structures or modes of domination. The production of
discourse must therefore be regulated, controlled. However, this is not to say that each society install certain people whose job it is to consciously effect the control of discourse—something like a board of censors—quite the contrary. Much of this regulation is anonymous and even occurs beyond conscious awareness, as the concept of savoir makes clear, controlling procedures are embedded in discursive practices as well as non-discursive or institutional practices. Indeed, if the term structure, apart from its pervasive metaphorical application, points to anything "real," perhaps it points to these controlling procedures, or what I will term codification, legitimization.

If the danger of unbridled communicative practices lies in their unpredictability, and the essence of unpredictability is untrammeled movement, then codification induces a stasis. In pathological terms, when stasis sets in, movement ceases, fluidity stagnates. If I may be permitted the use of a metaphor, to the extent that culture describes a shared perspective or way of doing things, it may be liken to a body; innovation is movement, new movement that quickens the pulse. "Art" is the vehicle through which innovation enters the social order. Art, says Kristeva (1984), is the only means by which jouissance may infiltrate the social and symbolic order:
In cracking the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, and releasing from beneath them the drives borne by vocalic or kinetic differences, jouissance works its way into the social and symbolic (pp. 79-80).

Kristeva (1984) asserts that art is the "semiotization of the symbolic." Again, to distance herself from formal linguistics, which completely excludes from consideration the body, the energy and drives that flow through the corpus, Kristeva reworks the terms "semiotic" and "symbolic."

For Kristeva, two inseparable modalities comprise the signifying process, the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic has to do with "the structure of drives and with the primary processes of their displacement and condensation," while the symbolic refers to the "social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures" (Cited in Payne, 1993, p. 167).

To show that signification has a literal corporeal origin, and to "account for the dynamic interrelations between the semiotic and the symbolic" Kristeva, notes Payne,

introduces the concept of the chora. In part this concept is derived from her incisive reading of Plato's
Timaeus. . . . But as she amplifies and reworks this concept . . . the chora comes to function both as an image opportunistically employed to fill a conceptual need in Kristeva’s theory and as a precise technical term (chorion) from embryology that specifically defines the bodily site of the first signifying processes of the fetus (1993, p. 163).

The semiotic and symbolic, then, are inseparable within the signifying process, they are bound by a dynamic that determines the type of discourse that the subject produces. Kristeva argues that language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But . . . this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both (1984, p. 27).

Here dialectic describes a flux that includes both the nature and the amount of influence that is exerted upon the subject by various social structures. What Kristeva is
getting at is that a certain type of codification is pre-verbal, "the chorion is where one of the earliest processes—perhaps the first—of signification occurs" (Payne, 1993, p. 169).

From Kristeva insights, then, I derive the term "sensual semiotics," which will figure in my analysis of Memphis. By way of concluding, and to presage the significance of the truncated exegesis I have offered, to say that Memphis furniture involves a sensual semiotics means that it functions on a physical, prelinguistic level as well as metaphorically. But as Kristeva has shown, these two modalities are bound together. Although the term pre-linguistic evokes a chronological causality, as if that aspect of the signifying process falls away after energy is channeled, transformed and "elevated" to the level of a sign. In actuality, however, both of these modalities—the semiotic and the symbolic—operate simultaneously, in a dialectic that ebbs and recedes according to the various biological and social vectors that comprise the inscription process affecting each subject—or literally "effecting" each subject, as Foucault might argue.

Sensual Appropriation

In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 Marx applied Hegel's conception of appropriation—which pertained to the estrangement or alienation of human thought
and its "recovery" through the recognition that that which appears alien actually originates in one's own consciousness—to the realm of the physical world and human labor, i.e., through labor, humans appropriate nature and achieve gratification. But Marx states that the concept of appropriation contains another dimension—a non-possessive sensuous aspect. He cautions against the conceptualizing of appropriation merely in terms of physical acquisition, such as the possession of private property, i.e., appropriation "merely in the sense of direct, one-sided gratification—merely in the sense of possessing, of having." Marx says that there is also a sensuous type of appropriation, a type of non-possessive possession of objects by means of which humans derive their sense of orientation in the world and through which the world itself is manifested:

Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his human relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, being aware, sensing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their objective orientation or in their orientation to the object, the appropriation of that object, the appropriation of the human world . . . . (1972, p. 73).
However, we are blind to the possibility of practicing this non-possessive form of appropriation, says Marx, because private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.—in short, when it is used by us (1972, p. 73).

Thus Marx expresses his wish for a less destructive and more humane world. And nearly one hundred and thirty years later, Marcuse (1972) reiterates this theme in a discourse that strikes me as filled with utopian longing:

The emancipated senses, in conjunction with a natural science proceeding on their basis, would guide the "human appropriation" of nature. Then, nature would have "lost its mere utility," it would appear not merely as stuff—organic or inorganic matter—but as life force in its own right. . . . the senses would "relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing" (p. 65).

That which Marcuse (1972) terms "human appropriation," in other words, "humane" appropriation would be nonviolent, nondestructive: oriented on the life-enhancing, sensuous, aesthetic qualities inherent in nature. Thus transformed, "humanized," nature would respond to man's striving for fulfillment, nay, the
latter would not be possible without the former (p. 67).

In both Marx and Marcuse the elucidation of non-
possessive or non-exploitative appropriation is presented as an ideal, a state-of-being or a form of social organization that has yet to arrive. Couched as it is in what I have termed a "utopian discourse," a question surfaces: is non-
possessive appropriation merely an ideal, something on the order of a telos whose striving towards provides a sense of direction and human purpose? Thus in formulating my research question, I asked, "Is non-exploitative appropriation an ideal? is it attainable? does it exist?"

From a rhetorical perspective one might argue that the intention of both authors is to inveigh against private property, and to power their discourses they employ a stock rhetorical device, the creation of an oxymoron or an antithesis—i.e., non-possessive appropriation or non-destructive appropriation—against which to contrast their respective societies, which they find so miserably inegalitarian. Indeed, the term "non-possessive appropriation" rings nonsensical.

However, I believe the term is more than rhetorical flourish. Marx provided an opening with which to examine the nature of non-exploitative appropriation—namely, that which he termed the sensuous aspect of non-possessive appropriation. Thus I narrowed my focus to the aesthetic
domain and asked: what, then, would a non-exploitative form of appropriation look or sound like? How does it function as a mode of visual or aural communication? In essence, what are its communicative characteristics? Refining the question thus, I then turned to Heidegger, who had elaborated the process of appropriation in terms of communication and self-actualization.

**Dialogic Appropriation**

The theoretical framework for appropriation as a basic facet of human communication was set down by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, which appeared in 1927. According to Heidegger, appropriation is a fundamental moment or stage in human communication; we come to understand something by making it our own. For Heidegger the ontological notion of truth has to do with the unveiling of hidden facets. Thus understanding occurs when a previously hidden dimension is uncovered or disclosed through a type of discourse.

Heidegger's language, i.e., "unveiling" "uncovering," shows that verbs of sight are central--metaphorically if not literally--to his hermeneutical description of the process of understanding as a type of appropriation.

When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is
understood is to be interpreted. In every case interpretation is grounded in something we see in advance—in a fore-sight (1962, p. 191).

Although Heidegger considers appropriation a fundamental aspect of human communication, he doesn't leave it at that. Heidegger further refines the concept of appropriation by giving it an existential twist. In Being and Time he speaks of two types of appropriation; these roughly correspond to his dichotomy between "authentic" and "inauthentic" being, i.e., following the "herd’s" beaten path, or exploring uncharted regions of the life-world. The "inauthentic" type of appropriation has to do with accepting ready-made, conventional assertions about the world: one understands or views something by the light of the "they’s" familiar and untroubled interpretations. However, this manner of communicating—"idle talk," "gossip," or the lack of a genuine concern or interest in being—with one's conversation partner—does not result in any genuine understanding because it fails to disclose any hidden aspects of the object under discussion. Such discourse does not beget new perspectives from which to see the hidden: if something is understood in light of conventional practice, by definition then, that which is widely known is not hidden.

As Heidegger put it, an assertion that is expressed in a certain manner as "something ready-to-hand" is "something
by which uncoveredness is preserved" (1962, p. 267). Tired habits of thought, commonplace interpretations, then, actually function to conceal things. Ultimately, this type of appropriation, this taking without question the ready-made habits of others, obscures new ways of seeing, new ways of being-in-the-world.

According to Heidegger, real interest or care in being-with a conversation partner is the condition that begets genuine communication, or that which he calls the primordial type of appropriation. Primordial appropriation grows out of the resistance to "the everyday way in which things have been interpreted" (1962, p. 213). Says Heidegger,

In it [the ready-made], out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all rediscovering and appropriation anew, are performed (p. 213).

This type of appropriation is called primordial not because it is somehow more ontologically fundamental than the appropriation of ready-to-hand assertions, but because it does not leave undone the task of going "back to the ground of what is talked about" (p. 213). Whereas in ready-to-hand appropriation discoursing has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about, or else has never achieved such a relationship, it does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in
a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of gossiping and passing the word along (p. 212).

This passage shows that communication is at the heart of primordial appropriation, or what I will term non-exploitative appropriation. Understanding emerges when that which was hidden is unveiled through a type of discourse.

*Being and Time* evidences Heidegger's early conception of appropriation as the taking for one's own, through discourse, a perspective that uncovers that which is veiled and in so doing keeps open the potential for new ways of being-in-the-world. In a later work Heidegger expands his conception of appropriation to encompass the notion of appropriation as an event, or the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*). Both senses of appropriation, the early and late, are related in that they both refer to the means by which uncovering occurs. However, the later conception of appropriation as an event is worth mentioning because it explicitly likens appropriation to artistic endeavor, i.e., a dynamic, creative event.

Primordial or non-exploitative appropriation is more of a private, individual matter having to do with living life as a type of intrepid and solitary journey, precisely the

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'Contributions to Philosophy', which was written between 1936 and 1938 but not published until 1989 (it appears as Vol. 65 in the German edition of his collected works); it has yet to be translated into English. See Zimmerman (1991).
type of existence extolled by Nietzsche (1968) in his conception of the *Übermensch* or the "overman" (see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, for example).

In contrast, the event of appropriation is a more wide-sweeping cultural affair. In *Being and Time* appropriation is regarded as the culmination of the process of understanding, which gathers its momentum through interpretation. There interpretation is treated as an aspect of the hermeneutic circle of understanding, which is a dynamic process.

The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility—that of developing itself. This development of the understanding we call 'interpretation.' In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. . . . [Interpretation] is the "working-out of possibilities projected in understanding (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 188-89).

In like fashion the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) involves dynamic interplay, but in one sense, on a more "cosmic" level. Heidegger argued that

being appropriates (er-eignet) human existence as the time-space clearing within which entities may be unconcealed and thus "be." Ereignis, then, means in
part the appropriation of human existence necessary for
the complex interplay between the self-concealment of
being and the corresponding unconcealment of entities,
an interplay which constitutes the "truth of being."
(Zimmerman, 1991, p. 370)^

In a poetic sense, then, the event of appropriation has
to do with Being "appropriating" human beings by serving as
the force or pull that causes humans to think about the
meaning of Being. The nature of Being is self-concealment.
In the dynamic process of human understanding entities are
unveiled and this unveiling constitutes the "truth of
Being." This "truth of Being" as unconcealment is precisely
the event of appropriation that permits the possibility of
another beginning for the German Volk—if not the human
race. This new beginning is not to be based on the static
metaphysical ground of entities, but on the interplay
between Being and human beings that uncovers and unleashes
new visions for life. If the Volk were

^Zimmerman, in translating passages into English, does
not employ a capital "B" to distinguish "Being" from "being."
The reader acquainted with Heidegger's idiosyncratic prose
will note that standard English translations employ such
phrases as "the Being of being." Simply put, I understand
"being" to mean that which has "presence" or that which
"appears," such as human beings, which are typically referred
to as "Dasein." In contrast, I understand "Being" in the
sense conceived of by Parmenides, as
self-existent, without beginning or end, as extended,
continuous, indivisible, and unchangeable. [Being
consists of everything that Parmenides called Truth.]
Everything else belonged to the region of Opinion, which
embraced all that was phenomenal, relative, and transient
(Grote, 1973, pp. 19-20).
to be saved from the spiritual impoverishment of modernity, Germany would have to be granted another beginning, one as powerful as the one granted to the Greeks, but one that would think [Being] on its own terms, as [the event of appropriation], not as the metaphysical ground of entities.

To awaken the possibility of the other beginning, thinkers, poets, and statesmen would have to experience the mood of horror associated with the Volk's uprootedness from its relation to self-concealing, self-withdrawing Being (Zimmerman, 1991, p. 371). As in the earlier conception of primordial appropriation, crucial to the event of appropriation is a particular mode of thinking that turns away from idle chatter and distances itself from the "incessant machination" of "planning, organizing, and producing that discloses everything as raw material" (Zimmerman, 1991, p. 371).

Finally, Heidegger's conception of the event of appropriation creates an opening for art, in that the essence of genuine art has to do with the revelation of hidden aspects, with the suggestion of new possibilities. One aspect of Heidegger's "turn" in thinking seems to be his appropriation of great artistic works of all types and all ages to serve his cause: "Great artists, like Holderlin, are appropriated for the mission of bringing forth the work
of art needed to found a new historical world upon the self-concealing earth" (Zimmerman, 1991, p. 372).

In Heidegger’s conception of the event of appropriation as the unveiling of Being, art is a type of communication that unconceals the "self-concealing earth."

Regarding art, Heidegger says:

Reflection on what art may be is completely and decidedly determined only in regard to the question of Being. Art is considered neither an area of cultural achievement nor an appearance of spirit; it belongs to the disclosure of appropriation [Ereignis] by way of which the "meaning of Being" . . . can alone be defined (Poetry, Language and Thought, p. 86, cited in Owens, 1989).

In a manner of expression that evokes Zen mysticism, Heidegger believed that everything that exists is bound together in the confluence of appropriation. In time, everything "belongs" to everything else, and anything is fair game for appropriation. Indeed, the fundamental activity of human beings is appropriation. Appropriation describes

the belonging-together of Being and time and the fluid relation between them. It also expressed the belonging-together of Being and man, things and world, and the "elements" of . . . (earth, sky, gods, and mortals). [The term appropriation expresses] the way
Being gives itself through time to all things—namely, in an event-like fashion—and the way everything is appropriated to other things in certain ways at certain times (Owens, 1989, p. 130).

There are manifold ways that consciousness appropriates things, thoughts and acts to each other—and all of this transpires within the open and unpredictable event of appropriation. Who can say when a novel and suggestive combination of these elements will occur? As in Heidegger’s early conception of appropriation, the result of the event of appropriation always reveals—and suggests even more hidden aspects—that are "atypical, novel, extraordinary." Again, these novel disclosures exist in contrast to the familiar ready-to-hand aspects.

While everyone is attuned to his or her world by the grace of the event of appropriation, not every person experiences appropriation in the same fashion. In contrast to the structuring effects of the conventional co-ordinations or groupings of thoughts, things and acts, a person may be attuned to "the fluidity" of the event of appropriation itself. This latter is what Heidegger called "releasement" or letting be (Gelassenheit).

Gelassenheit carried for Heidegger both proscriptive and prescriptive implications:

Proscriptively, it means that one gives up conventional, familiar coordinations of things,
thoughts, and acts. It means that we do not interpose between ourselves and the things of our world anything—in particular, familiar and canny sorts of attachments—that might disguise their always-manifold and every-changing character. In Gelassenheit one gives up all standard and established grounding in the way things have been seen and interpreted. Prescriptively, Gelassenheit, in tune with Ereignis [the event of appropriation], discovers new perspectives on things, allows the not-yet-uncovered—the heretofore concealed—to reveal itself and therefore allows one to dwell in the world in a new, hitherto unsuspected way (Owens, 1989 p. 131).

At bottom, the human quest for Heidegger is an infinite search for the yet unseen; infinite because every hidden aspect that is uncovered suggests new, heretofore unconsidered aspects, and so forth. As a process of discovery or appropriation, life is viewed as a creative enterprise resembling the process of artistic creation, which is the event of appropriation or disclosure par excellence. Thus, in essence, by virtue of the role that dialogic appropriation plays in the creative act, creativity may be regarded as a communicative act.
Dialogue and Creativity

At heart, dialogue is bound to openness—what Ehninger (1970) terms "self-risk." To engage in dialogue requires openness to difference. Thus the effect of dialogue is the opening of new possibilities; new paths, new modes of being-in-the-world.

This openness unfolds through the momentum that questions generate. To question means to lay open, to place in the open (Gadamer, 1989). And in dialogue, ideas, beliefs, ways of doing things, are placed in the open. To initiate a dialogue and enter into it in a spirit of openness, can be an act of courage; hence, the courage of the artist.

To confront difference is to confront a limit. Yet in recognizing limits, we exceed them. Gadamer (1989) points out that reason creates the distinction between self and other, thus reason sets its own limitations.

When dialogue works—and in spite of one's intentions, who can predict what's going to happen, or where—change ensues, a change in thinking, literally, the movement of thought. And this movement, this type of thinking—which Hegel termed dialectic—loosens the rigidity of fixed ideas, of patterned thinking.

The movement of thought itself, of dialectic, is spiral-like. A person steps out of a familiar perspective into an alien one, sees the world in a new way, and
assimilates new things. Thus a wider horizon comes into being. This is the structure of interpretation, which is at the heart of the creative process: an alien perspective is appropriated dialogically.

However, if this movement, this process of interpretation, doesn't come full circle, if it remains simply an arc—i.e., another perspective is adopted in a rigid fashion—then nothing new emerges and mere imitation or ready-to-hand appropriation occurs. All innovators in the arts retain their own identity, their own cultural roots, even when they appropriate "foreign" elements. There is no question of merely copying something and leaving it at that, as I will show when I treat Jimi Hendrix's appropriation of a Chuck Berry musical phrase. Dialogic appropriation involves a synthesis of horizons from which emerge new possibilities of signification.

Socratic Dialogue

Simply put, dialogue is a question-and-answer form of discourse, with an ethical content. In ancient Greece certain essential characteristics of dialogue were bound up with a form of logic termed dialectic.1 Meyer Schapiro

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1 In his analysis of Platonic dialectic, Gadamer (1989, pp. 362–69) uses the terms dialogue and dialectic interchangeably. And in Plato's Dialogues (1961) the notions of dialogue, dialectic, argument, rhetoric, and sophistry are often implicit and the distinctions are by no means unequivocal. For example, in much of Plato's writing, the terms rhetoric and sophistry are synonymous. Thus, in certain
reminds us that dialectic had "an organic connection both to 'dialogue'--the interchange of views, often dissimilar--and to 'dialect' the specific language by means of which human exchanges are interrelated" (Craven, 1994, p. 42). The idea of dialectic as a means of discovery was developed and first used systematically by the Eleatic philosopher Zeno in the 4th century B.C. (Russell, 1959). Socrates and Plato later adopted dialectic and--spurred by their opposition to Sophist rhetoric--developed it in their own ways.

In the Philebus dialectic is portrayed as the crowing glory of all the arts; Plato says that every scientific discovery was made plain by means of dialectic, which, says Socrates,

is a method easy to indicate, but very far from easy to employ. It is indeed the instrument through which every discovery ever made in the sphere of the arts and sciences has been brought to light (1980, p. 1092).

As Socrates remarks, the method is easy to indicate: in antiquity dialectic meant debate. In structure, dialectic is simple: argument and counter-argument, or question and answer. Two or more people hammer away at ideas and there is a clash. The weak ideas, the ones that can't stand up to the pounding, fall away and the "truth,"

instances, Plato reviles rhetoric as the method of the Sophists; however, in other instances, he lauds his own rhetoric, calling it "new" rhetoric (Hare, 1982). There are also different notions of dialectic in Plato's early and late writings (Robinson, 1941).
or a piece of the "truth" emerges; or, at the very least, the interlocutors are be pointed in the "right" direction. As Gadamer (1989) put it, the "essence of the question is to have sense. Now sense involves a sense of direction. Hence the sense of the question is the only direction from which the answer can be given if it is to make sense" (p. 362).

While the question-and-answer method may be easy to indicate, putting it into practice by asking the right questions is another matter:

Among the greatest insights that Plato’s account of Socrates affords us it that, contrary to the general opinion, it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them. When the partners in the Socratic dialogue are unable to answer Socrates’ awkward questions and try to turn the tables by assuming what they suppose is the preferable role of the questioner, they come to grief (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 362-63). What Plato decried as sophistry was the appropriation of the question-and-answer form of dialogue without its ethical content. Unlike sophistry or what Plato attacks as rhetoric, dialogue requires honesty of purpose and respect for one’s partner. Those without scruples set about using the form for self-gain, which is inimical to the spirit of dialogue. Gadamer (1989) points out that in the Platonic dialogues
there is the critical distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue. To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them (p. 363).

Those engaged in dialogue must avoid coercive methods of "winning." Instead, interlocutors must enter into "authentic" dialogue, or what Ehninger (1970) terms "a special sort of agreement" in which they become active participants in a corrective process. That is, each participant must also critique the ideas he or she has enunciated, rather than merely taking aim at those ideas enunciated by the other interlocutor. In contrast, a person who engages in argument only to prove himself or herself right engages in the type of discourse that marks the political assembly or the courtroom. In the Gorgias (1987), Socrates chides Polus thus:

My wonderful man, you're trying to refute me in oratorical style, the way people in law courts do when they think they're refuting some claim. There, too, one side thinks it's refuting the other when it produces many reputable witnesses on behalf of the arguments it presents, while the person who asserts the opposite produces only one witness, or none at all. This 'refutation' is worthless, as far as truth is concerned . . . . (p. 35).
In extreme cases of trying to win an argument, a person will resort to coercion. The Apology gives us a picture of a life-and-death argument whose point is victory, not the discovery of truth. Socrates complains to the jury that he can’t prove his innocence because there has been too little time for discussion. In inauthentic dialogue, the "partner" becomes an antagonist. In his opening remarks at his trial, Socrates addresses the jury thus:

I do not know what effect my accusers have had on you gentlemen, but for my own part I was almost carried away by them--their arguments were so convincing. On the other hand, scarcely a word of what they said was true (1951, p. 4).

These examples from Gorgias and the Apology draw the distinction between authentic dialogue and argument used to further vested interests. A person participates in a dialogue, he or she does not win a dialogue. The aim in dialogue is insight or sense of direction, not victory. Unlike top-down unilateral authoritarian discourse, dialogue must flow in two directions--what Ehninger has termed "bilateralism."

Furthermore, dialogue presupposes a relationship based on mutual respect among two subjects. In his analysis of the Spanish chronicles of the conquest of America, Todorov (1984) concluded that
in the best of cases the Spanish authors speak well of the Indians, but with very few exceptions they do not speak to the Indians. Now, it is only by speaking to the other (not giving orders but engaging in a dialogue) that I can acknowledge him as subject, comparable to what I am myself (p. 132).

In this passage, Todorov puts forth a conception of dialogue first explicitly formulated by the German theologian Martin Buber in I and Thou (1923). For Buber, the essence of genuine dialogue lies in the fact that "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them." The basic movement of the life of "monologue," in contrast, is not turning away from the other but "reflexion" in the physiological origin of the term—bending back on oneself. "Reflexion" is not egotism but the withdrawal from accepting the other person in his particularity in favor of letting him exist only as one's own experience, only as a part of oneself. Through this withdrawal "the essence of all reality begins to disintegrate." (Cited in Friedman, 1981, pp. 350-351)

In this critique of the basic unilateral movement "of the life of monologue," of treating another self-conscious as an object for one's experience, Buber alludes to Hegel's
conception of the dialectic of recognition or persona effect.

The Persona Effect

Hegel uses an abstract and idiosyncratic discourse to explain the dialectic of recognition, thus for ease of understanding—as well as to demonstrate the applicability of his theory—I will supplement my elaboration of Hegel’s thesis with "visual" or concrete passages from the works of authors who treat the theme in a literary fashion.

For Hegel, the dialectic of recognition is a process by which the formation of self-identity is predicated upon an I-It relationship. In The Phenomenology of Spirit, which appeared in 1807, Hegel states that self-consciousness "exists only in being acknowledged" (1977, p. 111).

Hegel calls this the "process of recognition." Here is how he describes it:

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being; secondly in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self . . . . it must proceed to supersede the other independent being in order thereby to become certain of
itself as the essential being, but in the other it sees its own self (1977, p. 111).

Self-consciousness does not see the other as "an essential being," but as an object for itself. Sartre (1973) expounded this idea by personifying it through the literary device of a voyeur in Being and Nothingness (1944). As long as the voyeur remains unseen, he is pure negativity, that is, pure potential or freedom. He is not tied to any role or designation forced upon him by another person. Bakhtin explained this in yet another fashion:

Everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others . . . . I realize myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself (1986, p. 138).

And to amplify this effect further, I will cite a passage from Andre Gide's novel The Counterfeiters. The novel unfolds through the intimate thoughts that the protagonist, Edouard, chronicles in his private journal. In confiding his thoughts about his relationship with Laura, Edouard, in effect, articulates the dialectic of recognition through the converse of the process that Hegel and Sartre describe, i.e., an image of self that is mirrored back to oneself through the eyes of another person. Of Laura, Edouard writes: "I think that if she were not there to give
definition to my personality, it would vanish in the excessive vagueness of its contours. It is only around her that I concentrate and define myself" (1955, p.63). When Edouard is alone, he is, in Hegelian terminology, pure negativity, pure potential, he has yet to be transformed into an object for another.

Sartre argues that it is a psychic/physical impossibility to simultaneously inhabit two states of being, i.e., perceive the world and think about how we are perceived by others. Sartre states that

We can not perceive the world and at the same time apprehend a look fastened upon us; it must be one or the other. This is because to perceive is to look at, and to apprehend a look is not to apprehend a look-as-object in the world (unless the look is not directed upon us); it is to be conscious of being looked at.

The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are, is a pure reference to myself (1973, p. 347).

Thus, when footsteps interrupt the voyeur, he turns to find himself looked at and vulnerable to "inscription," i.e., to being regarded as an object and suffering the imposition of an external definition.

Hegel couches this process in antagonistic terms: the nature of an encounter between two self-consciousness individuals "is that they prove themselves and each other
through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth." And doing so involves seeking "the other's death" (1977, pp. 113-114).

Metaphoric perhaps, Hegel's talk of death, but nonetheless, literal instances of a deadly dialectic of recognition are erupting throughout the world today, particularly in the Balkans, in which it appears that cultural identity is raised—if not formed anew—only through the destruction or denigration of an outside culture. Kristeva, a Bulgarian emigre to France in the mid-1960s, observed:

Recently, everyone has been harking back to his or her origins—you have noticed it, I suppose? Some proudly claim their French, Russian, Celtic, Slovene, Moslem, Catholic, Jewish, or American roots—and why shouldn't they? Others are sent back to and blamed for their Jewish, Moslem, Catholic, Kurdish, Baltic, Russian, Serb, Slovak, or American background—and why not? (1993, p. 1).

However, continues, Kristeva, the "cult of origins is a hate reaction. Hatred of those others who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally" (pp. 2-3). To exclude is to reduce the Other to a thing. This involves the use of binary terms to codify
that which is exterior. In underdeveloped countries, for example, according to Robinson (1990), the native intelligentsia often unwittingly introject the view that civilization is always white and primitivism is always black by appropriating in a ready-to-hand fashion the "manichaeism of the hegemon's dominant culture" (p. 84).

An example of a less subtle type of imposed cultural identity was noted by the Russian semiotician Yury Lotman. Lotman describes an eleventh century military expedition led by Yan Vyshatich against Slav tribes in Russia who were pagan. The campaign was officially chronicled by a monk in Kiev who put the following words into the mouth of a pagan priest from Chud. Just before his execution, the pagan "sorcerer" was asked where his gods lived by one of his Christian vainqueurs. The pagan replied: "'In the abyss. They are black of face, winged and have tails; they climb up beneath the heaven to listen to your gods. For your gods are in the heavens’" (1990, pp. 132-33).

This passage shows that the dialectic of recognition is often a literal matter of life and death.

However, Gadamer (1989) argues that Hegel didn't intend the dialectic of recognition as a dismal pronouncement on the human condition. Rather, Hegel's treatise on the dialectic of recognition should be understood as a preliminary moment that culminates in dialogue, in mutual respect.
Nevertheless, Hegel himself is not beyond demonizing the Alien, i.e., non-European. The following description is taken from one of a series of lectures Hegel gave in 1830 or 1831:

Deceit and cunning are the fundamental characteristics of the Hindoo. Cheating, stealing, robbing, murdering are with him habitual. Humbly crouching and abject before a victor and lord, he is recklessly barbarous to the vanquished and subject. . . . The Brahmins are especially immoral. According to English reports, they do nothing but eat and sleep. In what is not forbidden them by the rules of their order they follow natural impulses entirely. When they take any part in public life they show themselves to be avaricious, deceitful, voluptuous. . . . "I do not know an honest man among them," says an English authority. Children have no respect for their parents: sons maltreat their mothers (1956, pp. 158-59).

I cite this passage to give an example of the discourse of modernity, in which European culture serves as the criteria by which all other cultures are measured and defined. Todorov (1984) reminds us that "language has always been the companion of empire" (p. 221). Linguistic appropriation makes possible territorial appropriation (Spurr, 1993). The colonizer's binary codification scheme creates a totalizing discourse that subsumes all native
races under the title "mankind." Then through a verbal sleight-of-hand, the entire world is said to belong to "civilization," and the "burden" of ensuring that civilization advances through the exploitation of "its" resources falls upon the guardians of civilization.

In essence, the determination of cultural identity is predicated on various knowledge-power formations (Racevskis, 1993, p. 46).
CHAPTER III
CODIFICATION

Introduction

The binary codification scheme that tilted the recognition or the definition of the Other in the favor of those who did the naming, is precisely the type of universalizing discourse within which such concepts as "truth," "man," and "reason" occupied a central position—that paradigm of Western thought known as modernity, which has been unraveling for some time, but signs of the disintegration have been especially noticeable of late and can be observed in almost all areas of intellectual and artistic activity (Racevskis, 1993, p. 1).

Unraveling Modernism

Much of this unraveling began with Nietzsche's critique of subject-based reason, i.e., of traditional conceptions of the "self" as a substratum, and "truth" as a universal, discoverable entity. To think in this fashion is to treat truth as an abstract entity, something that Hegel rejected, and instead located "truth in the very
specificities with which traditional metaphysics was too refined to dirty its hands" (Adorno, 1993, p. 35).

Nietzsche (1968a) later refined this idea into one of various "local" truths that are created through discourse; and later Foucault, in developing his conception of power, built upon Nietzsche's insights into the phenomenality of the inner world:

"Thinking," as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction, arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility--
The "spirit," something that thinks: where possible even "absolute, pure spirit"--this conception is a second derivative of that false introspection which believes in "thinking": first an act is imagined which simply does not occur, "thinking," and secondly a subject-substratum in which every act of thinking, and nothing else, has its origin: that is to say, both the deed and the doer are fictions (1968b, p. 264).

In my view, this is one of Nietzsche's greatest insights: there is no inner substratum or bedrock, no "I" that wills thinking; thus there is no "I" that wills signification--and here I treat the creation of "meaning" as
a type of thinking. Rather, thinking is the purview of the entire organism. That which we recognize as thinking—or more to my purpose, signification—has a preverbal aspect, i.e., has its origin in the body, which is subject to biological energy and all manner of outside forces. Who then can say precisely from where a thought originates? To attempt to do so, as Nietzsche points out, is to select "one element" from a heterogeneous process and eliminate all the rest. Hence, the doer, i.e., a single homogeneous doer, is a fiction.

And the correlate to this fictive doer is the notion of a bedrock "truth," as if the latter were an impermeable object or condition "out there" waiting to be discovered. Instead, Nietzsche (1968a) puts forth the idea of "truth" as something that is created through discourse, and as such, truth is localized and even transitory:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms— in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which

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1Certainly, there are many facets or types of thinking. Arnheim (1969) has drawn striking parallels between visual thinking and that which we term abstract thinking.
have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal,
no longer as coins (pp. 46-47).

Here, Nietzsche captures the inevitable effects of appropriation: the loss of sensuous power, the power to arrest attention, the codification of metaphoric and poetic expression and its attendant reduction to cliche. Nietzsche corroborates Vico's ideas about poetic logic employing metaphors based upon the human body: truth is a "mobile army of metaphors, metonymys and anthropomorphisms."

The key point in this passage is Nietzsche's characterization of truth as "a sum of human relations," as something that is created, not discovered, and subject to all manner of heterogeneous factors. In the same scrap of writing, Nietzsche (1968a) speaks of knowledge as a human invention, whose "most universal effect is deception" (p. 43). But a propos of his aphoristic style and his eschewal of philosophic systems, Nietzsche leaves these ideas scattered about like precious stones that wait, as it were, for a future generation of thinkers to string them into a necklace.

This Foucault (1980) does by linking the production of "truth" or discourses to relations of power:

"Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operations of statements.
"Truth" is linked in a circular relations with systems of power which it induces and which extend it. A "regime" of truth (1980, p. 133).

Truth is not tied to an autonomous or free "subject." Rather, the "subject" or "Man" is an effect of a particular regime of truth, a particular discursive formation whose appearance signaled, for Foucault, the end of the Classical episteme and the inception of modernity. As Foucault so brilliantly explains, the threshold of modernity is not defined by the application of objective scientific methods to the study of man; rather, in actuality, the scientific discourse of modernity constituted its object of analysis, "an empirico-transcendental doublet which was called man" (1973, p. 319).

Truth/Power

The creation of any discourse is predicated on relations of power. There is no knowledge without power. One implies the other. Foucault puts it thus:

in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth
which operates through and on the basis of this association (1980, p. 93).

Racevskis (1993) points out that for Foucault, power is not a "real substance," but rather a complex network of relationships. Power is something that is both intentional and nonsubjective, because the grid of power does not originate in any one individual and the subject situates itself strategically within the grid (p. 62).

Power comprises a network of social relations. But while power is "positive" or constitutive, it does not reside in particular individuals. Rather, power dwells in particular discursive formations. Foucault (1980) says that power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They’re not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (p. 98).
Individual subjects, then, are conduits for power. Power is a grid, a network of relationships into which subjects are enmeshed. Power, activated through discourse, simultaneously animates individuals while subjugating or defining them, as in the case of the "empirico-transcendental doublet" called "man."

For Foucault the intellectual's task is not to engage in a battle for "truth," or for "the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted" (1980, p. 132). Rather, one's task is to discover how certain constraints or effects of power regulate the type of discourses that each society accepts,

the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (1980, p. 131).

In short, Foucault is talking about what I have termed codification, the expurgation of certain words and dialects, and the creation of an authorized or legitimate vocabulary.

Before codification there were a plentitude of dialects, polyglossia.
Codification of Language

In his analysis of the codification of language that occurred after the French Revolution, Bourdieu (1991), citing the unification of regional dialects under a central political authority, maintained that the production and reproduction of a nation's "official" or "legitimate" language is a political process. In his critique of what he termed "Saussurian language," or formal linguistics, Bourdieu argued that Saussure's theory treats language as a pre-formed object that is defined prior to the formulation of the linguistic theory that is supposed to account for language! Thus, formal linguistics fails to consider the social dynamics—the power relations and cultural antagonisms—that attend the production of a formal or legitimate language. In treating language as a pre-constructed object, formal linguistic theory forgets the social dynamics of language construction and thus masks the social genesis of language.

The production of an "official" language requires at the very least, a tripartite division of labor: those authors vested with the authority to write; grammarians who fix and codify the language; and teachers who inculcate their pupils with the official language. Bourdieu (1991) terms la langue officielle a "code." He employs the term code in two senses.
In the first sense, "le code" describes a scheme somewhat analogous to a numerical system that establishes equivalency between discrete sounds and meanings. For Foucault (1973), this equivalency characterized the Classical episteme:

language in so far as it represents—language that names, patterns, combines, and connects and disconnects things as it makes them visible in the transparency of words... In the Classical age, discourse is that translucent necessity through which representation and beings must pass—as beings are represented to the mind’s eye, and as representation renders beings visible in their truth (p. 311).

This type of codification is extant today in the social sciences, where propositions expressing judgments—which are context-bound and ripe with ambiguity—are leveled into definitive meanings by their reduction into monological symbols. Horkheimer (1972) explains that every codified expression is given

da definite meaning. A judgment is a compound symbol and every individual symbol in it is correlated either with a definite or indefinite entity. Judgments may, therefore, be dealt with in the same manner as any other definite thing (p. 169).

Ultimately, the expunction of ambiguity has a bearing on speculative thinking by streamlining or rationalizing the
tools of thought, i.e., concepts, whose power is proportional to their complexity and breadth of applicability. In modern consumer culture this has caused a sweeping redefinition of thought itself, of its function and content. The coordination of the individual with his society reaches into those layers of the mind where the very concepts are elaborated which are designed to comprehend the established reality. These concepts are taken from the intellectual tradition and translated into operational terms—a translation which has the effect of reducing the tension between thought and reality by weakening the negative power of thought (Marcuse, 1968, p. 104).

The negative or speculative power of thought may be called "thinking the unthought," to do so is to criticize the present order on the basis of that which has yet to be actualized. The tension between reality and "what-could-be"—which is pure negativity in its unrealized state—is seen to best effect in the aesthetic dimension. The tension between the negative (art) and positive (reality) is lessened as more and more of the marginal and artistic modes of expression are legitimated or appropriated by the dominant order. Philosophical and poetic language are deformed. This changes the nature of "legitimate" knowledge by excluding polyvalence as "irrational."
In Bourdieu's second sense of codification, the code refers to a system of norms that regulate linguistic practice. Unlike, and in opposition to, regional dialects—which comprise part of what I term marginal communicative practices—the official language is sustained through institutional conditions necessary for its codification and general imposition. Thus, in this second sense the code is a structure that exists "outside" the communicating subject and lies beyond his or her individual utterances.

Here Bourdieu seems to be getting at that which Foucault termed *savoir*:

In a society, all knowledge, philosophical ideas, everyday opinions, but also institutions, commercial and police practices, customs, everything is related to a certain *savoir* that is implicit in and characteristic of this society (Cited in Racevskis, 1993, p. 43). *Savoir*, then, encompasses both discursive and non-discursive practices, i.e., institutions, the order of things and their implications on patterns of life we typically adopt without question.

**Polylglossia**

The codification of language, then, is essentially a political process that produces and simultaneously legitimizes a dominant and central linguistic practice that stands in opposition to marginal communicative practices.
However, while official language, or the linguistic "center," stands in opposition to the "uncodified" margins, the elements that constitute official language, the "stuff" of which it is composed, have their origin in marginal communicative practices—regional dialects, foreign tongues, assorted hybridizations—that have been transmuted and "tamed." In essence, the codification process creates its own opposition—the official language refuses to recognize its own roots, it disowns its blood relative, whom it recasts as an inimical Other and an object of derision.

In Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, the codification of language is a process that transforms polyglossia into a walled-off and stable monoglossia. Bakhtin uses the concept polyglossia to describe the communicative heterogeneity of a region such as, for example, the Orient: a locus of "many languages and many cultures, crisscrossed with the intersecting boundary lines of ancient cultures and languages" (p. 64).

Polyglossia stands in opposition to monoglossia, but unlike polyglossia, of which historical instances abound, the concept monoglossia is akin to a Weberian ideal type—an abstraction that is "streamlined" for analytical purposes, i.e., the reality that an ideal type represents is typically thornier, more complex. Although a discursive formation, such as a nation’s "legitimate" language, may be termed "monoglossical," in reality such a system is never
"finished-off and indisputable." Rather, a language is a "living mix of varied and opposing voices, developing and renewing itself" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 49). Bakhtin reminds us that in actual practice monoglossia is always in essence relative. After all, one's own language is never a single language: in it there are always survivals of the past and a potential for other-languagedness that is more or less sharply perceived by the working literary and language consciousness . . . we encounter behind each separate genre the consolidation of a particular dialect. Behind these gross facts a complex trail-at-arms is concealed, a struggle between languages and dialects, between hybridizations, purifications, shifts and renovations, the long and twisted path of struggle for the unity of a literary language and for the unity of its system of genres. This was followed by a lengthy period of relative stabilization. But the memory of these past linguistic disturbances was retained, not only as congealed traces in language but also in literary and stylistic figuration—and preeminently in the parodying and travestying verbal forms (1981, p. 66).

This passage is significant for its conception of literary language as a living history that carries traces of the struggle that ensued during the codification process.
By literary language, in contrast to official, authoritative discourse, I read Bakhtin to mean that the former is characterized by ambivalence or polyvalence. Certainly, any artistic genre can harden into a stilted and bloodless type of monoglossia, into a period piece. However, owing to the "long and twisted path of struggle" that is at the origin of a unified literary language, it seems to me that if one sifts long enough one will discover at least a few embers, and possibly enough heat to rekindle innovation. Embedded in literary language, there seems always dormant, some element, what I suggest may be termed a pre-linguistic impetus or charge, that refuses official codification but at the same time is not available or discernable to ordinary consciousness—until it is unveiled through artistic creation.

In his analysis of the novel as a literary genre, Bakhtin (1981) presents evidence that whenever literary language becomes outmoded and period-bound, it "strives to renew itself by drawing on the fundamental elements of folk language" (p. 49). In other words, a once innovative and attention-arresting mode of expression, having subsequently been drawn into the center, more or less into the code's orbit, attempts to renew itself by drawing sustenance from the margins, from those unruly folk elements—and peasant melodies are precisely what Bela Bartok drew upon to revitalize a musical tradition that had become staid through
academic codification. As if unable to blossom fully in the stale, culturally arid climate of centralized discourse, literary language takes deepest root in the soil that bounds official discourse. It thrives best in the in between region of cultural border zones. Kristeva (1980) put it thus:

The poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture. Bakhtin was the first to study this logic, and he looked for its roots in carnival. Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law (p. 65).

To challenge the official linguistic codes is to challenge official law. The carnivalesque—uncensored, free, joyous and boisterous expression—recognizes no sanctified lieu, no official and cloistered monologism. The essence of the carnivalesque is polyphony.

The carnival, says Kristeva (1986), is essentially dialogical and thus presents a challenge to authority, which is monological. Carnivalesque elements, which include repetition, parody, drama, and cynicism,
produce a more flagrant dialogism than any other discourse. Disputing the laws of language based on the 0-1 interval, the carnival challenges God, authority and social law; in so far as it is dialogical, it is rebellious. Because of its subversive discourse, the word 'carnival' has understandably acquired a strongly derogatory or narrowly burlesque meaning in our society (Kristeva, 1986, p. 49).

Dialogue is a critical "tool" precisely because it is a form of communication that permits response. In contrast to dialogue's two-way flow, the mass media speaks, or something is spoken there, but in such a way as to exclude any response anywhere. This is why the only revolution in this domain--indeed, the revolution everywhere: the revolution tout court--lies in restoring this possibility of response (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 170). Elsewhere, Baudrillard (1981) uses an implicit conception of dialogue--i.e., a "responsive" form of communication--as a standard by which to characterize and define the mass media: they are what always prevents response, making all processes of exchange impossible (except in the various forms of response simulation, themselves integrated in the transmission process, thus leaving the unilateral nature of the communication intact). . . . And the system of social control and power is rooted in it (p. 170).
Unilateral communication and "top-down" or authoritative communication are reciprocal terms. If revolution is that which is characterized by a complete or a marked change, that which is revolutionary is that which opposes established forms of domination. Thus, vis-a-vis unilateral and authoritative forms of communication, dialogue is revolutionary by virtue of its inherent bilateralism. Furthermore, dialogue presupposes a relationship based on mutual respect among two subjects.

Appropriation of the Margins

With respect to the standardized language that allows for the administration of a nation's political and juridical practices, marginal communication practices may be regarded as fragmentary and ambivalent, whereas the central or legitimate language is unified and monological. In cases of appropriation and codification where a symbol is drained of its expressive and emotional potential through the compression of ambivalence, polyphony, and heterogeneity into a monological and authoritarian code, and this "new" meaning then achieves near maximal audience saturation—as in the case of certain advertisements or political slogans—appropriation suffocates critical thinking. In such instances, appropriation and codification blunt the critical edge of words that were born of a quest to actualize human
potential. In the quest for liberty, above all else there is

the need for an effective communication of the
indictment of the established reality and of the goals
of liberation. It is the effort to find forms of
communication that may break the oppressive rule of the
established language and images over the mind and body
of man—language and images which have long since
become a means of domination, indoctrination, and
deception (Marcuse, 1972, p. 79).

By the search for forms of communication that will
break the rule that established, or codified, language and
images exert over mind and body, Marcuse is, in essence,
speaking of innovative means of expression, of the aesthetic
dimension. However, finding the means to break the code
becomes more difficult as the last outposts of linguistic
resistance fall to appropriation and very little remains
with which to oppose the established order. As Andre Gorz
(1973) explained:

We are so deeply conditioned by [ideology] that we have
no words to say and to think what we really want or do
not want. There are only two ways to break out of this
ideological captivity: by subversive actions and by
finding words that subvert the dominant language. Each
leads to the other: subversive language leads to
subversive behavior and actions; and subversive action
to outbursts of words, to the invention of a liberated language of our own, a language to express our needs and desires (p. 16).

Yet when marginal communicative practices are appropriated by the center, a loss of expressive power typically ensues. For example, the expression "rip-off" first emerged on the margins of the dominant American culture. In its initial cultural context, the term "rip-off" functioned precisely to "break the oppressive rule of the established language." The term was first used in black urban centers and clearly identified the political and cultural orientation of the speaker. For example, in the ideological play S-L, which Amiri Baraka wrote in 1976 in order to raise the "revolutionary" consciousness of blacks living on the fringes in large northeastern American cities, the character Lillian speaks the following:

All the illusions will be gone now, the people here inside the U.S.A., where imperialism for so long has been able to give out bribes and concessions, reforms, based on the super profits they ripped out of the third World, and the rip-off of blacks and the other oppressed nationalities inside the U.S.A., now all that opportunism existing in this society is going to be ripped away, and the masses will see the naked cruelty of this bourgeois state, and finally they'll rise and smash it (1978, p. 202).
And another line from the play emphasizes perfectly that "rip-off" is an expression from the margins, and as such is not uttered by mainstream characters. A character whom Baraka identifies simply as "Conservative Legislator" is addressing a character identified as "Black Legislator":

And you, sir, Representative from Missouri, you have a reputation among certain of the people in this body and in Washington as a militant, a man of the people, but that, sir, I submit, is a joke. The black militants say you are a sellout, that you are, to quote them, "A rip-off specialist." They say you are part of this system you so scathingly denounce . . . . (1978, p. 173).

Like other instances of black slang, utterance of the expression rip-off served as a cultural bond, a way of building community. "Ripped-off" seemed to describe perfectly the experience of being victimized by a type of economic and social marginalization so lacking in subtly, so blatant, as to be violent—a tearing away. The expression was commonly used to describe the appropriation of black musical genres by white, particularly British, performers, who often failed to credit the originators. In time, however, the term "rip-off" was appropriated by members of the very social strata that it initially implicated. In the 1980s, through oversaturation and decontextualization—I can even recall hearing the term used in the campaign oratory of
mainstream politicians—rip-off had lost its efficacy as a means of voicing opposition to the dominant order; in simply becoming yet another synonym for "swindle," its meaning lost cultural depth. Its movement from the margins of society to the center dissipated its expressive power and its meaning flattened and became one dimensional. The expression no longer served as a cultural marker that identified a particular social and political locus. In short, the expression "rip-off" lost its critical edge and is today a worn cliche that has fallen out of use.

A more recent example from the Netherlands captures the dynamics of the early stages of the appropriation of concepts. Throughout the European Union there is a push to liberalize those telecommunication services and markets that comprise the bulwark of government sanctioned or controlled monopolies, such as residential telephone service. Last July in Amsterdam I attended a presentation given by a marketing executive from Royal PTT Nederland, the Dutch equivalent to AT&T before the American giant's break up in 1981. The speaker (one Pieter van Hoogstraten) introduced the PTT's new market strategy, which was the PTT's response to the inevitable advent of competition. The speaker unveiled a chart entitled "Key Words for Change." Among these, were the words "Empowered People." An enticing and curious listing considering the setting: the PTT's lavish
new headquarters, a towering mirrored geometric complex having nothing at all to do with the human scale.

The speaker was asked just what "Empowered People" specified. He answered, "Empowering the PTT staff to give the customer discounts." In one sentence, the concept "empowerment" was redefined, turned on its head and emptied of its critical content. Having been thus appropriated, and recontextualized, the concept "empowerment" no longer represented the goals of its original constituents; no longer signified a quest for self determination, rather it was turned into an empty casing waiting to be filled with the jargon of a new advertising campaign. Indeed, in the setting of the PTT headquarters, "Empowered People" was made to misstate its _raison d’etre_: it beckoned that power accrue not to "the people," the masses, but to the elite, in the form of the corporation, through increased sales.

As the latest buzzword in corporate management, "empowerment" has spread beyond the European telecommunications industry. In a recent interview, Robert D. Haas, chairman and CEO of Levi Strauss & Co., the world’s largest name brand apparel manufacturer, with nearly $6 billion in annual sales, had the following to say about empowerment:

At our company, we recognize we have 36,000 pairs of eyes and ears that are in the marketplace all the time. We really want to involve as many people as possible in
shaping the future. That is what empowerment is all about. That's what our team-based management style of change is. We want to respond in real time to changes rather than wait until some spiral-bound study works its way up to the chairman's office (Roessing, 1994, p. 67, emphasis added).

Such a brazen shift in context typifies the appropriation of words. A concept is thus severed from the source of its power, namely its historical origins, from which it acquires its depth of meaning. Once decontextualized, the revolutionary potential of language is further enfeebled through oversaturation, until the sound of concepts, their aesthetic qualities, lose their power to attract and retain attention. When such a state obtains, concepts are spoken but their call is not heard.

The same appropriative dynamic that works to debilitate evocative expressions and concepts is also at play in the realm of sound. The appropriation and subsequent decontextualization and oversaturation of music by advertising drains music of emotional and imaginative power. Today, for some, the thunderous cymbal-crashing finale of Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" evokes only the image of a breakfast cereal; rockabilly, the rebel yell of the 1950s, evokes images of the domestic beer and car advertisements that incessantly interrupt football games; James Brown's
innovations in rhythm and timbre, as evidenced in "I Feel Good," spur images of anthropomorphic raisins.

**Appropriation Cuts Both Ways**

I have argued that rampant appropriation by commercial forces diminishes the quality of experience and also drains critical discourse of its power. However, there are many instances of appropriation cutting both ways. That is, the practice is by no means relegated to the beneficiaries of hegemonic power structures. Following Heidegger, I have argued that appropriation is a fundamental aspect of social existence, a basic component of communication; as such, it occurs in all spheres of human activity, particularly the arts. Yet we seem only to decry appropriation as exploitative in instances when, to paraphrase the German cultural historian Heiner Muller, "the majority only take notice of the minority to seize what was theirs."²

²For example, Amiri Baraka, writing under his former name, LeRoi Jones -- see Black Music and Blues People -- has indicted the entire white music industry for its wholesale appropriation of black culture. Using an a priori dichotomy based on color, Jones, for the most part, equates anything black with vitality and anything white with decadence. Thus the white performer's art is dismissed out-of-hand as an inferior distillation of black essence. Since Baraka voiced these ideas in the mid-sixties, scores of critics have appropriated his invective, if not his factual accuracy. For instance, I attended a public lecture given by a professor of black studies who dismissed Elvis Presley's version of "Hound Dog" as a "rip-off" of Big Mama Thornton. In point of fact, "Hound Dog" was written expressly for Thorton by two Jewish song writers, Leiber and Stoller; however, Presley based his version on that of an anonymous Las Vegas lounge act. In addition, Presley's "Hound Dog" differs from Thorton's both in
For example, the view that the appropriation of cultural property is "stealing" resounds throughout studies of primitivism. Use of the term "primitivism" facilitates the theft of native art. The display of primitive art "in scientific or ethnographic museums using generic titles with functional descriptions rather than in art galleries as artistic objects" discredits such artifacts as "art" and therefore places them outside the domain of copyright protection (Sherman, 1992, p. 424).

However, Pai (1992) argues against the "simplistic" view that dominant cultures always wreak havoc on weaker cultures, and that such cross cultural contact always constitutes colonialist appropriation that diminishes the richness of the invaded culture. In examining the archaeological evidence—artifacts such as funerary pottery, jars, weapons, and chariot parts—of ancient China's push into the Korean peninsula, Pai maintains "that native individuals [the Hans] played an active role in initiating exchange for their own benefit and, contrary to past interpretations, were not merely a passive, exploited and oppressed peasantry" (pp. 308-09).

The nineteenth century cultural historian Alois Riegl—an expert on the history of textiles—has traced the form and content; the latter sang about a kept man, the former did not.
genealogy of fundamental types of ornamentation. Of particular interest is his analysis of how certain Islamic motifs, such as the arabesque, were appropriated from Hellenistic art. The Greeks, in their turn, had appropriated the geometric Egyptian spiral and transformed it into "a living tendril whose sheaths emitted beautifully formed blossom motifs" (1992, p. 235).

And to cite several contemporary examples, no one, for example, ever dreamt of taking the late Texas bluesman Freddie King to task for "ripping-off" Henri Mancini; or the Nigerian band leader King Sunny Adé for "ripping-off" urban southern American white culture by incorporating steel guitars and melodic bits appropriated from country music in his juju music.

Although both King and Adé are clearly appropriating elements from outside their cultural tradition, these are instances of a different type of appropriation, a non-exploitative or dialogic appropriation in that the material is appropriated in a fashion that permits it to sustain more than one voice.

Certainly the ideological perspective of the colonizer is forever present in the colonizer’s language, and the use

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3In the early 1960s King recorded an instrumental entitled "Hideaway" that was based on a standard 12-bar harmonic pattern. The song's fifth chorus is based on an appropriation of "Peter Gunn," the theme song that Mancini composed for a popular television detective program of that period.
of such language involves the risk of self-effacement because "to see himself through the eyes of the Other, he must enter the Other's imaginative space, assume its values, and provisionally at least, disown his own" (McNeece, 1993 p. 16). However, the appropriation of the colonizer's language also unleashes a subversive potential that has to do with the unveiling of the hidden:

- it exposes those elements in each culture that, for political and economic reasons, have remained hidden and unidentified. Writing in another's language, besides unveiling aspects of the Other's culture that are devalued or denied, highlights those features of one's own culture that are either invisible because too familiar, or so perturbing to the structures of power that they must be repressed (McNeece, 1993, p. 17).

As certain hidden cultural features are unveiled, typically through the device of differing narrative voices, conventional oppositions, such as "civilized" and "primitive" are disrupted. One is then able to "see" that while the Moslem culture is based on very different principles than those of the West, the former, far from being "primitive" is equally elaborate. As Bakhtin (1986) explains:

- It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that
see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures . . . such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched (p. 7).

Colonial tensions often give rise to the emergence of a new identity: national consciousness. Conventional forms of expression, the former "dregs of art," begin to reach out and come to life. The formal, fixed way of doing things is abandoned and crafts are modified, at first imperceptibly, then almost savagely. The colors, of which formerly there were but few and which obeyed the traditional rules of harmony, increase in number and are influenced by the repercussion of the rising revolution. Certain ochres and blues, which seemed forbidden to all eternity in a given cultural area, now assert themselves without giving rise to scandal . . . On the whole such changes are condemned in the name of a rigid code of artistic style and of a cultural life which grows up at the heart of the colonial system. The colonialist specialists do not recognize these new forms and rush
to the help of the traditions of the indigenous society. It is the colonialists who become the defenders of the native style (Fanon, 1968, p. 242).

New desires compel new forms of expression designed to break codified meaning and ossified forms of life. The appropriation and transformation of the "official" French language, for example, by a native writer becomes a means of translating into the colonizer's language a different sensibility, a different vision of the world, a means therefore of transforming the dominant conceptions circulated by the more standard idiom. . . .

To write in French is thus also to transform French into a language that becomes the writer's own: French is appropriated, made into a vehicle for expressing a hybrid, heteroglot universe. This creative act of "taking possession" of a language gives rise to the kind of linguistic metissage visible in many contemporary Francophone works (Lionnet, 1993, p. 104).
CHAPTER IV
DIALOGUE AND IDEOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the relationship between appropriation and ideology and show how the creation of ideology involves the appropriation of symbols. I will show that dialogue is the antithesis of ideology. Also, I will argue that the mass media, by virtue of its form, and irrespective of ownership or content, are destined to reproduce the dominant ideological order.

However, because the term "ideology" is fraught with controversy and in many quarters considered obsolete, part and parcel of a simplistic cause and effect schema based on two variables, the mode of production and the superstructure, I will begin by justifying my use of the term ideology.

Building on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Celeste Condit (1994) makes the excellent point that "hegemony has become primarily a popular substitute for the older buzzword, dominant ideology" (p. 205). Condit notes that "hegemony," because it conveys a "plurivocal set of interests," is a conceptual improvement over "ideology,"
which carries connotations of univocal vested interests created by a single, dominant economic or political faction. However, Condit says that many critics who apply a hegemonic frame of analysis simply replicate the assumptions of dominant ideology theory. She argues for the superiority of "concordance critique," which is predicated on a hegemonic analysis that takes account of plurivocal discourse, particularly with respect to the views articulated in the mass media. I have no argument with any of this.

However, regarding advertising, particularly its current state, the term dominant ideology is a much more accurate portrayal of its global manifestation.

In a 1983 article, Harvard Business School Professor Theodore Levitt proclaimed that the age of the multinational corporation had given way to the age of the global corporation:

Whereas the multinational corporation adjusts its products and marketing techniques to suit the idiosyncrasies of individual countries (at high relative cost), the global corporation treats the entire world as if it were a single entity and sells the same things in the same way everywhere (at a low relative cost). (Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1990, p. 171)

I will show that the mass media, in general, by dint not only of its content, but also its form—a unilateral and monological distribution of messages that precludes
response—constitutes the dominant ideology of our day, which presents the globe as one vast marketplace inhabited by consumers.

** Dialogue and Democracy**

We have seen that dialogue presupposes mutual respect. Pushed to its logical conclusion, respect for the Other surfaces in modern notions of democracy, where the aim is to foster a type of non-authoritarian dialogue by which citizens reach consensus. The idea of dialogue pervades the discourse of democracy to such an extent that dialogue and democracy are often treated as reciprocal terms.

Democracy is based on dialogue, argues the Swiss political scientist Robert Schnyder von Wartensee (emphasis mine; quoted in Gerdes, 1993, p. 238). And in the works of Jurgen Habermas the ideas of dialogue and democracy are so tightly bound that one can extrapolate from these a crude gauge with which to measure a society's level of egalitarianism: the more just a society, the freer and less distorted its dialogue:

Only in an emancipated society, whose members' autonomy and responsibility had been realized, would communication have developed into the non-authoritarian and universally practiced dialogue from which . . . our idea of true consensus (is) always implicitly derived (cited in Hardt, 1993, p. 88).
For Habermas, the major constraints against such non-autoritarian dialogue emanate from the ideology-laden macro structure of society. At the micro level, if left unencumbered, dialogue in the sense of reaching consensus, is unproblematic for individual subjects, who are naturally "capable of speech and action" (1987, pp. 295-296). Habermas conceives of dialogue as the formation of mutual understanding. The success of dialogue is predicated on "the performative attitude of participants in interaction, who coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world" (1987, p. 296).

This idea of mutual understanding harkens back to several characteristics of Platonic dialogue: the interlocutors must enter into a spirit of cooperation and avoid coercive methods of arguing. The goal isn't to win at dialogue, rather it's a mutual striving for a sense of direction, which is reached, more or less, when the participants reach a mutual understanding.

The concept of dialogue is such a powerful idea for socialists and feminists because, appropriately reinterpreted in critical terms, it suggests an ethics based on the mutual respect of all "speakers" who enjoy roughly equal dialogue-chances. It offers us the hope, if not further assurances, that a humane socialist-feminism is practicable as long as we commit ourselves, first, to talk to each other about our differences and
to keep talking no matter how much we may differ, and second, to ensure an egalitarian distribution of dialogue chances (Agger, 1991, p. 160).

I cite this passage to show the widespread currency of the idea that an egalitarian form of communication will beget an egalitarian society. Dialogue is the antithesis of authoritarian communication, in which a single, fixed voice from "above" precludes mutual respect and reciprocity of exchange.

In modern liberal democratic societies, the idea of a free press has been posited as the means by which "an egalitarian distribution of dialogue chances" would come to prevail. In mass society, the vast number of citizens renders personal interaction an improbable means of achieving mutual consensus. Therefore, the essential characteristics of dialogue must be mediated, if not transformed, through a mass medium capable of sustaining contradiction. Ideally conceived, then, the mass media, is a public sphere through which polyphony may be promulgated—something on the order of an expanded dialectic in the ancient sense, i.e., a clash of ideas that will test the mettle of each and leave the stronger ones, those able to withstand the pounding, standing. This conception of a free press as a public arena for the clash of ideas is explicit in the thinking of Thomas Jefferson, for example. Following
is a passage from a letter Jefferson wrote to his friend Carrington in 1787:

I am persuaded that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves. The people are the only censors of their governors; and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution. To punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty. The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people, is to give them full information of their affairs through the channel of the public papers, and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter (Cited in Emery & Emery, 1992, p. 74).

Errors, or "weak" ideas, will fall away through the self-cleansing mechanism of mutual consensus. The key is plurality, or "full information." And the "public papers" are the "channel" thorough which a type of mediated
dialogue may occur. The people are conceived of as a "mass" and the papers as a mass "channel" or medium. The mass media, then, constitute a public sphere within which ideas circulate and clash, thereby permitting the formation of mutual consensus, which provides the people with a sense of direction.

Just as in face-to-face dialogue, this ideal notion of mediated dialogue presupposes the existence of honesty and even-handedness on the part of those who administer the media institutions. For true mutual consensus to form, the channel must transmit ideas without corruption. However, today, the mass media are far from ideal; Habermas (1991) argues that the commercialization of the mass media has collapsed the public sphere.

**Ideology as Content**

Habermas (1991) points out that the sphere of mutual consensus, i.e., the "public sphere," has been co-opted by advertising and public relations. The public sphere has been structurally transformed "into a medium of advertising" (p. 189). Not only does the spread of advertising diminish the public sphere, it also erodes certain aspects of personal contact whose loss make the possibility of spontaneous dialogue even more remote. Horkheimer (1974) notes that
There is no longer room for acts of courtesy to individuals, for the old bow to the customer is being replaced by advertising, the latter, which constitutes a special large sector in the division of labor, being professionally standardized and rationalized, no less than the advertised goods or services (p. 129).

Advertising, a form of mass communication, has been standardized and rationalized so as to mitigate spontaneous communication.

Regarding the erosion of the public sphere at large, Habermas traces this transformation to the commercialization of the press, which leveled "the threshold between the circulation of a commodity and the exchange of communications among the members of a public" (1991, p. 181). However, the commercialization of the European and American press in the first half of the nineteenth century, which changed the character of the press while enabling publishers to shift some of the economic risk away from themselves, did not immediately transform the public sphere. As Habermas (1991) puts it:

The publishers procured for the press a commercial basis without, however, commercializing it as such. A press that had evolved out of the public’s use of its reason and that had merely been an extension of its debate remained thoroughly an institution of this very public: effective in the mode of a transmitter and
amplifier, no longer a mere vehicle for the transportation of information but not yet a medium for culture as an object of consumption (p. 183).

This passage is significant because it describes, ideally, how the mass media should function. The terms employed—"reason," "public," "debate," "effective," "transmitter and amplifier," "transportation of information," "medium"—are precisely those that one would use to formulate a conception of a "mediated" dialogue that would be integral to the formation of mutual consensus. However, with technological advances such as the high-speed printing press,

upgrading and perfection of the technical and organizational apparatus demanded an expansion of the capital basis, an increase of the commercial risks, and, necessarily, the subordination of entrepreneurial policy to the demands of business efficiency. (Habermas, 1991, p. 185).

Thus, continues Habermas, the newspaper, as it developed into a capitalist undertaking, became enmeshed in a web of interests extraneous to business that sought to exercise influence upon it. The history of the big daily papers in the second half of the nineteenth century proves that the press itself became manipulable to the extent that it became commercialized (p. 185).
The commercialization of the press saturated the public sphere first with advertising, and later, with an insidious form of ideology known as "public relations," which is often crafted to appear as though a "newsworthy" event. Boorstin (1972) has termed such staged presentations "pseudoevents." In addition to an absolute lack of spontaneity, pseudoevents are characterized above all by the elevation of image over substance: "Vivid image came to overshadow pale reality" (p. 13).

Today the pseudoevent so permeates the mass media as to obfuscate the question, what is real? For example, rather than initiating a public dialogue about gun control, the Executive Office's "spin doctors" crafted an early morning duck hunt that was covered by a platoon of reporters. What emerged from the "news story" were photographs of President Bill Clinton, wearing a camouflage outfit and holding a borrowed shotgun. After the eight-man hunting party spent two hours in subfreezing weather on the Maryland shore and returned with a single mallard, an empty-handed Clinton, who is not known as an avid hunter, told reporters that his gun control polices "don't have anything to do with hunting" ("Mallard no match for Clinton," 1993). With staged display, says Habermas (1991), "even arguments are transmuted into symbols to which again one can not respond by arguing but only by identifying with them" (p. 206). Identification replaces critical thinking.
Argument, debate, public opinion, all these fall away, as the image, the symbol, assumes prominence. Marcuse (1968) noted that the dominant ideology spreads by way of authoritarian language that exerts control precisely through the reduction of complex forms of thought to symbols: authoritarian language "controls by reducing the linguistic forms and symbols of reflection, abstraction, development, contradiction; by substituting images for concepts" (p. 103). Furthermore, Marcuse (1968) notes that politics and advertising now share the same language—one predicated on the appropriation and codification of symbols.

Jamieson and Campbell (1983) trace the development of "image advertising" to the late 1970s, when it became difficult, for example, to find

an ad for a gas company that was selling gasoline or the services a gas station provides. Instead, oil companies were selling their concern for the environment (p. 141).

That symbols function as ideology is by no means a new development. Here I use the term ideology to designate a system of ideas that expresses the interests of the dominant class but which represents class relations in an illusory form. Ideology expresses the interests of the dominant class in the sense that the ideas which compose ideology are ideas which, in any particular historical period, articulate
the ambitions, concerns and wishful deliberations of the dominant social groups as they struggle to secure and maintain their position of domination. But ideology represents class relations in an illusory form in so far as these ideas do not accurately portray the nature and relative positions of the classes concerned; rather, they misrepresent these relations in a way which concurs with the interests of the dominant class (Thompson, 1991, pp. 37-38).

This is a conception of ideology that has its origin in Marx. In *The German Ideology* (1845-46), Marx argues that there is a direct connection between material production and intellectual production:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make
the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance (1972, pp. 136-137).

Those who lack the means of material and mental production are subject to the ruling ideas of the dominant class; hence, the expression "dominant ideology." Here material and mental production are reciprocal; one fosters the other.

For Marx, certain members of the ruling class are actively engaged in the production of ideology. Not only do the ruling intelligentsia produce ideas, they also regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an "eternal law" (1972, p. 137).

The struggle among royalty, aristocracy and bourgeoisie describes one aspect of the class struggle in France that led to Louis Bonaparte's coup d'état of December 2, 1851. Marx’s analysis of the events leading to the coup d'état is significant because it reveals how the production of the dominant ideology in France was predicated on the appropriation of symbols and images from the cultural sphere. Like a modern advertising executive, Louis
Bonaparte, was pressed to create something "new"—namely to convey the appearance that he was conducting a revolutionary transformation of French society. In this, like other rogues, and demagogues before him, Louis Bonaparte was merely the latest actor to step into the newest version of a pageant play that has run through the ages.

Throughout history, Marx points out, the rise to power has often been masked or ideologized as the creation of "something entirely new." The production of ideology involves raiding the repository of Western culture and appropriating its tried and true symbols and images. Those who would obtain and hold power

conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, in turn, 1789 and the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795 (1972, p. 437).

And in particular,
Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Napoleon, the heroes, as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task
of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases. Similarly, at another stage of development, a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution (1972, pp. 437-38).

I cite this passage to show the connection between the production of ideology and the appropriation of precisely those symbols imbued with the greatest cultural value—the shared images that help define a culture. The following provides a recent example: in a 1974 speech to the Congress of African People in Detroit, Amiri Baraka urged people to look beyond the cultural symbolism displayed by certain officials: "Not only do we have a Black mayor, we have a Black police chief, with a big ol’ Afro. He wear dashikis, as a matter of fact" (p. 5). Again, the dashikis, the Afros—through such symbols are vested interests portrayed as public interests.

Horkheimer (1974) notes that the appropriation of symbols can take an odd turn, as when the dredged up symbols represent something that liberal democracy was presumed to have rejected, such as feudalism:

Bourgeois culture was deeply influenced by the dignity, honor, and freedom of the feudal lord and, in the last analysis, of the absolute ruler; it transferred these attributes to every individual man and especially to
anyone who was well-off. Works of art, language, personal culture, forms of intercourse in business and private life, all took over the symbols of that bygone social distinction which they were rejecting (p. 124).

This resurrection of the feudal lord—the Chrysler "Le Baron" automobile, for example—is prominently displayed in advertising that functions by depicting mastery over the environment. Smith has labeled this Madison Avenue technique "helmsmanship." Helmsmanship, for example, has given us one such transfigured symbol of the feudal lord in the dashing Russian count with eye patch (Hathaway shirts). That such appropriation of culture is also linked to advertising was noted by Veblen. As Adorno (1982) points out:

Culture, which today has assumed the character of advertising, was never anything for Veblen but advertising, a display of power, loot, and profit. . . . In the name of the right to unlimited disposition over human history, the metropolis of the nineteenth century assembled a deceptive collection of pillars from Attic temples, Gothic cathedrals, and the arrogant palaces of Italian city-states (p. 79).

The right to appropriate freely from the past, i.e., "unlimited disposition," characterizes the dominant ideology, which is also embedded in architecture and serves as advertising. For example, in large nineteenth century
American cities banks were constructed to look like pillars of Grecian justice.

As Veblen has shown, the link among appropriation, ideology and advertising is by no means a contemporary phenomenon. In this sense, the production of ideology is a communicative practice that has to do with the ways in which symbols are used and transformed in specific social contexts. [This conception] urges us to examine the ways in which social relations are created and sustained by the symbolic forms which circulate in social life, taking hold of people and orienting them in certain directions (Thompson, 1991, p. 41).

The significance of this passage lies in the conception of ideology as a symbolic force capable of creating and sustaining certain modes of existence, of suggesting a particular orientation toward the world. Ideology is a type of communication that creates or implies social relations, it is not simply the mysticized manifestation of a pre-existing discourse that is "behind" it.

Ideology takes hold of people, orienting them in certain directions. This recalls Gadamer's (1989) definition of dialogue as a type of questioning that results in a sense of direction, an orientation. If dialogue produces a true orientation, one derived from soul-baring mutual consensus, then its opposite number, ideology, may be
said to promulgate a false orientation that is derived from a unilateral type of communication whose creation precludes response.

Dialogue may be regarded as emancipatory to the extent that it effectively shatters the symbolism of ideology. Dialogue extends beyond mere criticism, is more than mere words, puffs of air. As the antithesis to ideology, dialogue is a practice. To live under the spell of ideology is to live in a type of bondage because once created, the symbolic constructions that constitute ideology have some degree of autonomy and efficacy. They constitute symbols and slogans, customs and traditions which move people or hold them back, propel them or constrain them, in such a way that we cannot think of these symbolic constructions as solely determined by, and fully explicable in terms of, the economic conditions of production (Thompson, 1991, p. 41).

Once created, ideology has a life of its own, a life not solely determined by the means and conditions of economic production. And whatever form or direction ideology takes, it acts to constrain people. Thus dialogue is emancipatory. To critique ideology is to simultaneously shatter image and bond. As Habermas (1985) points out, the critique of ideology is a "political force" when it "uncovers within apparently universal interests the particular interest of the ruling class" (p. 155).
Dialogue, then, were it permitted a sphere within which to take hold, would cause the critique of ideology to pass into a transformative activity.

However, as Habermas has argued, the public sphere has been transformed, co-opted by pseudo-events and saturated by advertising to such an extent that a space no longer exists within which dialogue may serve as a means of emancipation.

In his analysis of the transformation of the public sphere—its pre-emption or appropriation by vested interests—Habermas treats the mass media, qua technology that permits mass distribution, more or less as a neutral conduit. In an early (1962) untranslated work Habermas concludes that the public sphere refers to a realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. [It is a sphere in which citizens can] confer in an unrestricted fashion—that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions—about matters of general interest (Cited in Held, 1980, p. 260).

However, the issue with the public sphere today is not so much one of freedom of assembly—a proposition as unwieldy as it is unworkable in all but the tiniest of local governmental entities. If the concept of public sphere is to have any efficacy today, it must be enlarged so as to refer to more than a physical space, as though it were
a modern-day Grecian agora or assembly expanded through electronic amplification—rather, the public sphere is the mass media, or more properly, the range of discourse that transpires within the cyberspace that the mass media occupies. Although it involves quantity, in actuality the public sphere has more to do with the quality of the discourse that is transmitted. In essence, the public sphere is the content of the mass media. A true public sphere is synonymous with heterogeneity; whereas in a co-opted public sphere, the homogenous din of vested interests drown out all other voices. In Habermas' ideal conception of the mass media as a neutral channel, the key variable is ownership. The mass media may be, in turn, emancipatory or authoritarian, depending upon who controls the levers. By implication, then, should the media be placed in egalitarian hands, it would thus be possible for the media qua public sphere to fulfill its function as the centerpiece in democratic society: the facilitator of mutual consensus.

In this notion of the mass media, dialogue—albeit a transmuted form of dialogue—is not problematic. Inherent in the idea of a liberated or free-flowing mass media is the notion that respect must be accorded to other perspectives, and as we have seen, the notion of mutual respect is central to the concept of dialogue. In the public sphere this idea of respect for the Other is transformed into a plurality of voices.
Plurality is the antithesis of the dominant ideology—and today, the dominant ideology is the voice of the global corporation as manifested most prominently in advertising, public relations and pseudo-events, and political discourse—which now seem without clear lines of demarcation; they constitute a single voice. This voice is essentially the rationale for the expansion of global markets and increased return on investment.

But as Marx pointed out, dissemblance is the chief characteristic of the dominant ideology. In other words, vested interests are portrayed as the public’s interests. To give a recent example, I will summarize the findings of a 1994 European Union directive entitled The Bangemann Report.¹

The Bangemann Report

In December 1993 the European Union authorized a commission, headed by the German regulatory specialist Martin Bangemann, to draft a set of recommendations concerning the implementation of an EU-wide information infrastructure. The Report, which was delivered at the EU’s June, 1994 meeting in Corfu, raised the promise of using an EU-wide electronic superhighway to ameliorate a wide array of European social problems. By implication the EU’s less

¹The following information comes from interviews and documents I obtained on a research tour in Brussels in July, 1994.
affluent nations—Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and southern Italy—stand to reap the most dramatic and far-reaching benefits, narrowing the gulf between the EU’s "haves" and "have nots." A great deal of current EU telecommunications policy discussion is predicated on the axiomatic belief that enhanced communication capabilities mitigate the obstacles posed by geographic barriers. Geography thus overcome, the Bangemann Report holds out the promise that the proposed superhighway will smooth over the inequalities in employment opportunities that exist in the EU’s less prosperous regions. And indeed, in line with this the Bangemann Report argues that a superhighway would create all manner of social resources for the information-poor nations while simultaneously promoting and maintaining the existing plurality of local cultural traditions.

This, then, is the monological voice of the dominant ideology masquerading as the common weal. That this is so, may be seen by comparing the above with the responses that follow. These responses give a semblance of what turn a dialogue on the subject might take and how poorly the dominant or corporate ideology holds up against a plurality of views—a plurality not heard in official EU discourse, even though it was spoken by two of the EU’s own telecommunication experts, precisely because of its shattering effect on univocality. The heretofore "unspoken" view holds that the Bangemann Report is a thinly veiled
marketing strategy designed to serve the big telecommunication vendors and their business clients.

"Let’s not have any illusions about that. [The proposed information] highway is primarily for business customers," said Hans Peter Gephardt, a lawyer for the EU’s International Relations Unit 6. Gephardt is a specialist in the untapped East European market. Citing Bulgaria as an example, Gephardt said that if any infrastructure improvements were to be effected, they would involve only parts of Sofia, the nation’s capitol, and perhaps one or two Black Sea resort areas—precisely those areas which contain the potential for the greatest profits by virtue of an international corporate presence.

Daniel Dure, a lawyer employed by the EU, was equally candid in his assessment of the Bangemann Report’s notion that an EU-wide superhighway would ameliorate local conditions and provide increased employment opportunities: "Only a small piece of the services will be done locally. If you have a French firm selling information, their aim is to sell the service [to business customers], so it’s not going to really elevate the status of information-poor countries."

Dure pointed out that those information-poor countries regarded as "risky" in terms of return on investment will remain untouched by the introduction of new technology. Before any new technology is introduced, said Dure, "The
first thing you have to prove is that a region is profitable. I don't think it will be the case that no one will invest in Greece, but in Scotland--there is no one living there and I'm not sure [that a business venture] would work there."

So much, then, for the elevation of the "have-not" nations, for the Bangemann Report's concern with the public interest.

**Ideology as Form**

As noted, in Marx illusion is more than a figure of speech. As Marx detailed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the use of visual symbols to express the dominant ideology may take a theatrical turn when characters and symbolism from the storehouse of Western culture are appropriated whole cloth across the span of centuries. However, when the Marxian concept of dominant ideology is applied to contemporary mass media, while useful in certain facets, it does not adequately capture the depth and complexity of the process by which symbols are appropriated and homogenized. To account for these things requires an expanded conception of ideology--one that encompasses the mass media as more than simple transmitters of ideology, i.e., as merely various distribution channels. Rather, it is the very nature of these channels, in that they preclude genuine and
immediate response, that binds them to the very heart of the production of ideology.

Baudrillard (1981) points out that "it is not as vehicles of content, but in their form and very operation, that media induce a social relation" (p. 169). The media effect ideology, thus even if the media were de-commercialized and given over to the transmission of a plurality of voices, heterogeneity would still be homogenized, and thus, at least in its transmuted form, harnessed to the dominant ideology. Baudrillard (1981) says that the destiny of the mass media is far from revolutionary; the media are not even, somewhere else or potentially, neutral or non-ideological . . . . Reciprocally, ideology does not exist in some place apart, as the discourse of the dominant class, before it is channeled through the media (p. 169).

The very form of the mass media is inherently unilateral. Thus by virtue of the mass media preventing active response, they, at the abstract level, are monological and thus ideological to the extent that ideology is the antithesis of heterogeneity. Here Baudrillard's invective seems to hit the mark:

The mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication--this is what characterizes them, if one agrees to define
communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response, and thus of a responsibility (not a psychological or moral responsibility, but a personal, mutual correlation in exchange). We must understand communication as something other than the simple transmission-reception of a message, whether or not the latter is considered reversible through feedback. Now, the totality of the existing architecture of the media founds itself on this latter definition: they are what always prevents response, making all processes of exchange impossible (except in the various forms of response simulation, themselves integrated in the transmission process, thus leaving the unilateral nature of the communication intact). This is the real abstraction of the media. And the system of social control and power is rooted in it (pp. 169-70).

Baudrillard never mentions the concept "dialogue," but his analysis could serve as a primer on the essential characteristics of dialogue. His etymologizing of "responsibility" as a mutual exchange is especially apropos: the mass media may be termed "irresponsible" in that the form they assume precludes genuine response; and therein lies the origin of social control via the promulgation of the dominant ideology. A certain degree of codification or legitimation occurs simply via transmission over the mass
Irrespective of content, a message, an image, a symbol is sent hurling toward legitimacy—if not completely legitimated or made part of the dominant code—by its mere appearance in the mass media as media "content." To appear as content is to be appropriated in the most fundamental sense. In such cases, meaning is circumscribed or transmogrified, critical edge is lost.

Loss of Aura

A sense of loss attends the appropriation of heterogeneity. Benjamin’s concept of "aura" seems especially applicable in these instances. Benjamin (1969) used the terms aura and authentic to designate that which a work of art looses when it is replicated. In many instances the eye is unable to distinguish the original from a copy. Yet Benjamin wanted to privilege the original work over the copy and needed a basis to do so. He reasoned that the "uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition" (p.225). Thus an "authentic" work is a work that has born witness, that has been "there." An oak dresser splintered by a Union bullet on July 3, 1863 bears witness to the Battle of Gettysburg and thus also testifies as to its own historical authenticity, which is predicated upon context or "its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition." When a work of art---
or by extension any unique object— is wrenched from its historical context, it loses its aura:

An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura (p. 225).

So-called rap music provides a good example of the loss of aura sustained through a wrenching out from original context. In its "embedded fabric of tradition," in its original cultural ambiance, rap music functioned as the unbridled voice of social protest, a powerful marginal communicative practice from beyond the dominant culture's border zones. However, since rap was assimilated into the dominant culture, both as a stand-alone entertainment "product" and a soundtrack for advertisements, it lost its critical edge. This loss may be attributed to the loss of aura, or in less mystical language, to recontextualization. Rap has left the fringes, the cultural border zones and entered into the dominant orbit. It has been legitimated and codified. As Lusane (1993) observed,

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2In 1991 rap sales totalled $700 million. However, a survey revealed that 74 percent of rap music sold in the first six months of 1992 was purchased by whites. Thus every "major record company and communications conglomerate, from Sony to Atlantic, has made significant investments in rap music" (Lusane, 1993, p. 43).
It's critical to note that it has been more than just the multinational recording industry that has benefitted from the reduction of black culture to the circumscribed limits of Hip Hop. The alcohol, tennis shoe, clothing, hat and film industries have boomed as a result of the new markets that have opened up or expanded, based on the spread of Hip Hop and the often exploitative use of rap artists in advertising (p. 45). This placing of boundaries around black culture requires that heterogeneity be homogenized, that the aesthetic object be extirpated from its cultural locus. In short, an oppositional form of expression became codified; it entered the mainstream through advertisements, movies, and million-selling albums. Today rap music, basketball, and athletic shoes form an inextricable triangle.

For Baudrillard (1981) the defining example of the mass media's codification or legitimizing power—simply by virtue of the same ubiquitous form into which it condenses all content—was its coverage of the strike in France in May, 1968. In Baudrillard's terminology, the codification process entails a type of reinterpretation: raw, unmediated and ambiguous content is reinterpreted, or appropriated, i.e., made to fit a certain ready-to-hand formula. It is translated into a "sign." Any ambiguity, any "meaning" that lies outside the bounds of the code is lopped away. Ambiguity is articulated into what Baudrillard calls
"models" that are "administered by the code" (p. 176). The
mass media, says Baudrillard, is a totalizing interpretative
system, "a closed system of models of signification from
which no event escapes. Mass mediatization: that is its
quintessence. It is no ensemble of techniques for
broadcasting messages; it is the imposition of models" (p.
175).

The media killed any revolutionary spark that the
strike of May 1968 may have kindled simply by covering it,
literally--blanketing the spark. Media coverage in effect
suffocated the strike. What had appeared to be the strike’s
culmination, its exportation to all corners of France, was
in fact "the moment of its decompression, of its
asphyxiation by extension" (p. 176).

As Fishman (1982) showed in his study of media coverage
of police and court bureaucracies, all manner of complex
events are organized "on the basis of a few specific phase
structures" (p. 224). In other words, any spontaneous
happening is categorized as part of a pre-existing phase or
level that comprises an established model. Arrests,
sentencing, plea bargains, and arraignments are all phases
of an established model. Events are either made to fit the
model, i.e., are codified, imbued with legitimacy, or they
don’t "exist," as such, they are nonevents, happenings that
are seen as
"out of character" in the social settings in which they occur. Reporters, and others familiar with the routine business transacted in a given setting, ignore a nonevent because if it were attended to as a reasonable occurrence, the nonevent would call into question the procedural basis upon which all routine business is transacted and would make problematic reporters' routine methods for identifying "important" events (Fishman, 1982, p. 231).

Media coverage is based on routine classification schemes. Any event that is subjected to coverage will of necessity be typecast according to a pre-existing scheme. If a spontaneous and genuinely "new" event occurs it will either be regarded as a nonevent or a certain form will be imposed upon it. Media type-casting has given us a certain cast of caricatures whose accoutrements can be changed to fit the decade and audience. Adorno (1982) remarked the Slavic pianist, for instance, whose long mane is exemplary [and who is] grouped under the little esteemed stereotype of the artist who is starving and who flaunts the demands of the convention. This is the manifest content of the terminology (p. 130).

In this fashion, by leveling out heterogeneity via prefabricated roles, by imposing its form, does the mass media codify.
The imposition of this form, argues Baudrillard (1981), suffocated the strike of May 1968. The mass media imposed a sudden and inordinate development on the movement of events; and through this forced and anticipated extension, they deprived the original movement of its own rhythm and of its meaning. In a word: they short-circuited it. . . . Transgression and subversion never get "on the air" without being subtly negated as they are: transformed into models, neutralized into signs, they are eviscerated of their meaning (p. 173).

Spontaneity, which is subversive by its very nature—and thus the antithesis of the pseudoevent—is either codified or rendered nonexistent. Once codified, the new, the original, is "eviscerated" of its meaning. In other words, ambiguity and polyvalence are homogenized, are made to speak the unambiguity of the code. Everything that appears in/on the mass media must have meaning, must be made intelligible by legitimate standards. That which is revolutionary, by definition, transgresses ready-made frames of references, breaks pre-existing structures. As Baudrillard (1981) observes,

There is no model of transgression, prototypical or serial. Hence, there is no better way to reduce it than to administer it a mortal dose of publicity.

Originally, this process [blanket media coverage of the
May 1968 strike] might have left one impressed with the possibility of "spectacular" results. In fact, it was tantamount to dismantling the movement by depriving it of its own momentum. The act of rupture was transformed into a bureaucratic model at a distance—and such, in fact, is the ordinary labor of the media (pp. 173-174).

The key phrase here is depriving something of "its own momentum." This is precisely the nature and effect of appropriation. Whether the meaning of an expressive or communicative action is transfigured by media coverage, or whether an aesthetic object is deprived of its aura through recontextualization and appropriation, the mass media, by neutralizing polyvalent meaning deprives something of its own history or destiny and therefore of "its own momentum." Appropriated objects are not allowed to die a natural death—or live a natural life. Instead, oversaturation and codification speed the life cycle, causing premature aging and enfeeblement.

The Street

"The real revolutionary media during May," writes Baudrillard,

were the walls and their speech, the silk-screen posters and the hand-painted notices, the street where speech began and was exchanged—everything that was an
immediate inscription, given and returned, spoken and answered, mobile in the same space and time, reciprocal and antagonistic. The street is, in this sense, the alternative and subversive form of the mass media, since it isn’t, like the latter, an objectified support for answerless messages, a transmission system at a distance (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 176).

Where the mass media is irresponsible, the street, a return to the agora of sorts, is immediate, spontaneous, both "reciprocal and antagonistic." As the British architect Nigel Coates (1988) observed, despite the rationalization of cities and the discouragement of "their free-form diversity: experiences of the city do not mix with maps or plans" (p. 97). While perhaps not quite the true alternative media, as Baudrillard states, the street nonetheless suggests other communication mediums, other modes of expression, capable of exploding the monological code into a spray of multicultural fragments. Cultural border zones, apart from their metaphorical and ideological sense, when they describe a physical space, are, in many instances, streets or types of streets, such as subway trains. Trains, because they are well-travelled and function as moving canvasses for aerosol art, may be regarded as a type of border zone whose lines of demarcation are never quite fixed. An aerosol artist named Lee commented on this aspect of his art: "I look on the subway
cars themselves, literally, as a part of my message. They are the central nervous system of the city, you know" (Miller, 1993, p. 37).

By way of a type of urban bricolage that synthesizes the broken pieces of modern cityscapes, aerosol art functions as a critical communicative practice that reacts against appropriation and commodification. Miller (1993) observed that, "Aerosol art springs from an attitude of constant rebellion against the assimilation demanded by mass marketed culture" (p. 31). Aerosol art is polyvalent and dialogic--numerous voices resonate in the deformed letters that grace New York City's trains. Miller terms this recognition and appropriation of diverse cultural elements "creolisation." As such, subway art incorporates such dissimilar contemporary phenomena as advertising and popular culture

and social movements like Black, Latin and red power resonate in the work and attitudes of subway painters. . . . and several innovators among this group of rebellious artists creolized images and ideas from the society around them to create their work (Miller, 1993, p. 28).

Subway art is significant because it opened up a new non-commercial public sphere--the street as a border zone, a meeting place. Subway art is not for sale, it has nothing to do with dealers, galleries and art market investments.
It circumvents the mass media and is immediate, i.e., it permits individual response:

When a new piece rode by on the rails, other writers would study it, incorporating the styles or images they liked the best into their own work, and a fresh style would be born later that night in the train yard (Miller, 1993, p. 28).

Aerosol art is transitory, capable of being effaced or transformed by another painter. It never codified into a fixed mode of expression. Also, aerosol art originated in ritual, as did the earliest works of art, which were placed in the service of magic and then religion (Childe, 1951). In this, subway art rediscovered the communal and ritual origins of art. It represents a new primitivism, vital and un-mediated—precisely what Memphis would attempt to bring into the home.
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CHAPTER V
POSTMODERNISM

Appropriation as Social Comment

The history of twentieth century Western art is replete with examples that consciously and unconsciously embody a struggle against codification—against the type of appropriation that diminishes the communicative range of art. Indeed, during the twentieth century a type of codification or legitimation had so thoroughly permeated the world of "art," that in an essay written in 1941 Horkheimer (1972) declared that, "Today art is no longer communicative" (p. 278). In other words, art, to the extent that it embodies an inner logic that is an indictment of the commodification of existence, has the potential to be a liberating force. In Hegelian language, the content of art is precisely this potential, this unrealized moment in the actualization of human potential. Art may be viewed as a "negative moment"—i.e., potential that has yet to be realized—in a dialectic that binds it to the "positive moment" of the existing social order. The more irrational and exploitative the social order, the greater the dialectical tension between art and "reality." This,
tension--and the hope of realized dreams--is what art communicates. As Marcuse (1972) put it, "A subversive potential is in the very nature of art" (p. 103). To say that art no longer communicates is a comment on the range of codification, the extent to which the realm of art has been co-opted and commodified or made to speak the code. In the twentieth century, art was co-opted by the commercial apparatus, hence "the culture industry," which acts as a filter through which the whole world is made to pass through. . . . The stereotyped appropriation of everything, even the inchoate, for the purposes of mechanical reproduction surpasses the rigor and general currency of any "real style," in the sense in which cultural cognoscenti celebrate the organic precapitalist past (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, pp. 126-27).

In other words, as previously noted, there is a preordained slot, or "phase structure," into which any "style"--past or present--may be circumscribed and monologized so that polyvalent meaning and ambivalence, the root of subversive potential, in the most extreme case, are streamlined into exchange value, i.e., the market price a work will bear. That much twentieth century art was created in an attempt to escape, or to respond, to appropriation and commodification is made clear by Lyotard (1989), who terms
the forces of codification "the challenge of the mass media." Lyotard explains that

it is possible to ascribe the dialectics of the avant-gardes to the challenge posed by the realms of industry and mass communication to painting and the narrative arts. Duchamp's "ready made" does nothing but actively and parodistically signify this constant process of dispossession of the craft of painting or even of being an artist (p. 75).

The phrase "dialectics of the avant-gardes" describes how dominant or established practices influence the margins, how the artist who reacts to changes in the established order is in certain respects responding to the legitimizing procedures that comprise the code.

Beginning with the Dadaists, and their use of ready-made or found objects, some variant of appropriation has been employed as a strategy to resist codification. The history of ready-made art shows several episodes where the idea of appropriation was claimed by some artists and critics to oppose the continuation of the painting tradition. It was called "sovereignty of choice" by Andre Breton and in the heyday of Conceptual art it was often referred to as "de- and recontextualization". But it is in the Pop art episode, and especially in its French equivalent, Nouveau Realisme, that the word appropriation, thanks
for the most part to Pierre Restany, came to be equated with "the readymade strategy" (DeDuve, 1986, p. 111).

As DeDuve points out, painters appropriated readymade objects in an attempt to signify a break with tradition. If tradition is broken, if a new work, a mongrel work, emerges without a pedigree, then that work presumably escapes classification *qua* "work-of-art" in accordance with the legitimizing code. Thus, if commercial appropriation diminishes the power of a work of art—what I have termed a work’s communicative power, it’s power to move—then, through a type of obversion, the appropriation of the center by the margins enhances a work’s communicative power because the intention in these instances is to enrich meaning, not streamline it. An example of this is the parody of authoritarian language, the object of parody is "present," it comprises the context that gives the parody its meaning, thus parody is always a more complex coding than the object it appropriates. In addition, parody always moves the object it appropriates to a relative center or dominant position.

There are various ways by which appropriation expands an art work’s range of communication. Two things are noteworthy in instances of appropriation: the appropriation of a work of art transforms the original piece into a symbol, into a part of a sign system whose meaning is predicated on context; and, the locus of the appropriated
piece shifts from the margins to the center, thus appropriation conventionalizes an object. The same dynamics that are at play in the codification of the margins by the center seem to operate on a smaller scale when appropriation takes place on the margins.

Marter (1985) has identified three types of appropriation: (1) the appropriation of "quotations" from the masterpieces of high art that permit the creation of sometimes witty, narrative by setting up a "dialogue" between two works separated by time; this dialogue proceeds by way of visual metonymy and metaphor, where the part of the sign system that is appropriated stands for the totality of the original; (2) the total appropriation of a work, i.e., an exact copy, which may be used to "demystify" the aura of importance associated with the original artist; and, (3) the appropriation of popular commercial icons, e.g., Mickey Mouse, provides a vehicle for commentary on the commodification of art.

The best known artists to practice the second type of appropriation, exact copies, have been Sherry Levine, Elaine Sturtevant, and Mike Bidlo. Variously known as "appropriators" or "simulationists" these artists emerged in New York in the 1980s. A Bidlo show at the Leo Castelli Gallery was entitled "Picasso's Women," and consisted of exact copies of Picasso's paintings of women; Levine has made exact reproductions of famous photographs by Walker
Evans and others; and Sturtevant has made exact copies of well-known Pop Art paintings and drawings (Merryman, 1992, p. 46). The rationale behind the appropriation of Pop Art was explained in a press release by Sturtevant's art dealer, Bess Cutler:

Sturtevant models her work after well-known objects of contemporary art such as a Johns flag. These objects have been fully consumed by the art system and have already lived a full public life. In seeing a Johns flag, one no longer sees it as only an aesthetic object, but as a tamed reservoir of art-history and market values. In producing an identical flag, Sturtevant shifts the reference from Johns to herself, giving the flag a fresh perspective. In this new context, the flag becomes, once again, controversial (cited in Merryman, 1992, p. 71).

Having been codified, the original piece of Pop Art has been de-fanged. In the context of the "art system" a Johns flag derives its meaning from its rate of appreciation as an investment. The art work, just as any other commodity, may find that it exists primarily as an investment "product" within a diversified portfolio. The idea then, is that when Sturtevant, draws attention to herself by a blatant act of appropriation--some would say forgery--she is presumably able to dredge the original work from the "tamed reservoir"
of investment portfolios and once again wipe clean its aesthetic slate.

While contemporary artists and their dealers have argued that appropriation invigorates art and re-appropriates or returns the aesthetic dimension to central focus, the nation’s legal apparatus has on several occasions adopted the view that under certain conditions appropriation is a type of theft that should be redressed. I note a recent landmark case in which sculptor Jeff Koons was found guilty of copyright infringement for appropriating the work of a California photographer. Koons had argued that his life-size wooden sculpture of Art Rogers’ photograph of a man and woman holding eight German shepherd puppies was fair use because the parody that he produced of the photo was a legitimate form of social criticism (Buskirk, 1992).

Koons is not the first artist to have been sued for copyright infringement, but all the other cases—most notably Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and David Salle—were settled out of court. In the Koons affair, however, two different courts rejected the argument that appropriation, in itself, always constitutes a legitimate form of social criticism. U.S. district court Judge Charles Haight appeared to regard the terms appropriation and criticism as mutually exclusive, writing that, “Koons’ sculpture does not criticize or comment upon Rogers’
photography. It simply appropriates it" (Buskirk, 1992, p. 39).

Prior to this ruling, an appeals court judge found that Koons acted in bad faith on the grounds that in giving a copy of Rogers' photograph to the Italian artisans who fabricated *String of Puppies*, Koons had torn off the part of the card containing Roger's credit and copyright symbol. The judge insisted that the original creator receive due credit:

By requiring that the copied work be an object of the parody we merely insist that the audience be aware that underlying the parody there is an original and separate expression, attributable to a different artist. . . . [And that] the copied work must be, at least in part, an object of the parody, otherwise there would be no need to conjure up the original work (Buskirk, 1992, p. 39).

The Coons case raises questions about the appropriation of the images and cultural icons that permeate the "public sphere." Do celebrities, for example, own the exclusive rights to their own images? Would not the dialogic appropriation of media images by subaltern groups invest these images with new and oppositional meanings, and thus constitute a form of political dialogue? Several legal and social critics take this position (Lange, 1981; Conner, 1989; Coombe, 1992), arguing that the celebrity image itself
is a social creation. Madonna's social persona, for example, was not created in a cultural vacuum; it derives from a collective cultural heritage. Madonna's image is based on the appropriation of "earlier screen goddesses, religious symbolism, feminist rhetoric, and sadomasochistic fantasy" (Coombe, p. 63). To grant Madonna exclusive property rights to "her" image, argues Coombe, would deny marginal social groups the cultural resources with which to empower themselves. It would also reify or obscure the social relationships involved in the creation of "stars."

Coombe notes that

star images must be made, and like other cultural products, their creation occurs in social contexts and draws upon other resources, institutions, and technologies. Celebrity images are authored by studios, the mass media, public relations agencies, fan clubs, gossip columnists, photographers, hairdressers, body-building coaches, athletic trainers, teachers, screenwriters, ghostwriters, directors, lawyers, and doctors. Even if we only consider the production and dissemination of the star image, and see its value solely as the result of human labor, this value cannot be entirely attributed to the efforts of a single celebrity author (1992, pp. 61-62).

Certainly Coombe has a valid argument. Her thinking underscores the idea that today cultural consumption is
increasingly understood as an appropriative activity rather than a passive dependence upon codified or legitimate forms of signification. Nonetheless, Buskirk (1992) predicted that the Koons case will bring forth a legal climate in which "works based on nuance, multivalence or ambiguity are less likely to win the day in the legal arena" (p. 39).

Putting aside the question of whether appropriation is a valid creative move, that is, whether it truly "says something" or whether it is simply a new wrinkle in the art market perpetrated by charlatans, appropriation does call attention to a key aspect of the commodification of culture—its unmitigated encroachment upon heretofore uncommodified regions of culture, namely, ethnic art. Lowenthal (1992) points out that,

Fame, rarity, and uniqueness boost the value of originals. But because past masterpieces are a strictly non-renewable, ever-diminishing resource, the market always needs more originals than can be found. Hence new sources are sought in hitherto unplumbed pasts and exotic cultures. Since ethnic remoteness is itself a cachet of authenticity, previously unregarded artifacts readily enter the art market. But these exotic intakes soon spawn their own copies and corruptions. Because guidelines for newly canonical works are embryonic and untested, faking is easy and widespread. Debased
ethnic art, tourist art, airport art, and instant antiquities flood the markets (p. 93).

Kitsch, molded plastic reproductions, airport aesthetics, far from eschewing these tendencies, in an unusual twist, Memphis Milano uses such elements as building material, in the sense of a type of industrial and urban bricolage. Simply put, Memphis attempted to launch a failsafe strategy by re-appropriating from the appropriators. Rather than fall into the trap of the avant-garde, i.e., create something "new" only to watch its inevitable appropriation and diminution, Memphis attempted to fashion pieces from the debris of stale forms that had long since lost their shock value. Thus in grafting the garish colors and textures of suburbia onto totemic shaped furniture, Memphis revitalized modern design and created new communicative potential through a type of pre-emptive re-appropriation.

Pop Antecedents

Critics of contemporary art regard appropriation as a key aspect of Post-Modern art. Painters and architects who appropriate images or styles from the past are engaged in a creative commentary on the current state of affairs--one that forces a critical reading of the history of art. Appropriation creates an added, communicative dimension that
permits new, critical interpretations and, on occasion, witty social commentary.

In the Post-Modern art of the last three decades, appropriation has been widely accepted as a way to confront the psychic bombardment we are subjected to from commercial images—whose purveyors seem to have appropriated every conceivable public space. As a critical communicative strategy, appropriation functions to alter and enhance meaning through recontextualization. Ideally, when confronted by a work that features elements appropriated—or reappropriated—from the mass media, for example, the viewer would be sufficiently moved or compelled to consider the role of legitimizing and cultural practices in the formation of meaning.

Lawrence Alloway (1974, 1975) originated the term "pop art" to describe some of the more startling images that comprised the content of the mass media. He wanted to expand the parameters of "art" to include the man/woman-made environment. Although advertising, photography, movies, television and automobile styling weren't considered on the same level as fine arts, they were considered just as interesting. Pop Art was "pro-urban" and recognized that mass production begat the mass media. Pop art appropriated images from the mass media that had already been inscribed with meaning: brand logos, comic book art, flags—these already function as signs, are "pre-coded" in Alloway's
terminology. Thus, the appropriation of an image from mass culture creates a double-coded message in the resultant work of Pop art. Mickey Mouse in a Lichtenstein painting, for example, is the subject of a "portrait." But the cartoon also functions as a metonym: it represents the semiotic or cultural context that gives the image its meaning.

In mapping the emergence of the Post-Modern art movement from Pop art, Charles Jencks (1986) built upon Alloway's conception of "double-coding." In the 1960s, still in its infancy, Post-Modern culture rebelled against single, dogmatic interpretations. Its theorists attacked the narrow views of Modern art and orthodox Modern architecture. The former for "the aestheticism reigning in such institutes as the Museum of Modern Art"; the latter for its "elitism, urban destruction, bureaucracy and simplified language" (p. 6).

Because few words, if any, during the last decades have been as over-wrought as "Post-Modern," I wish to clarify how I am using the term—over-wrought as it is,¹ I believe it still carries conceptual force when applied to the sphere of architecture and design. Certainly to the extent that it incorporates the elements of both low and high culture, the work of Memphis Milano may be called "Post-Modern."

Although Jencks traces the initial usage of the expression

¹In a recent survey of the literature, Professor Karlis Racevskis noted that 200 titles contained the word "postmodern" or a derivative.
"Post-Modern" to Spanish literary theory of the 1930s, it came into prominence in the 1960s in the architectural field. Post-Modern described an architectural break from the austere steel and glass towers of modernism: whimsical pastiche replaced functionalism.

Although there is no consensus about the first Post-Modern building, Robert Venturi's Guild House is a good point of origin. As if to announce the advent of the Communication Age, an enormous TV aerial made of gold-anodized aluminum (a new crucifix?) crowned Guild House, a Quaker apartment project, built in Philadelphia in 1963. Guild House signaled perhaps the first self-conscious break with the primary tenet of modernism, functionalism: the TV antenna wasn't connected, it was pure ornament (Wolfe, 1981).

I use the term Post-Modern design to describe a hybrid of low (mass-media) culture and high culture; or in other terms, a mix of modernity and modernism. By modernity I refer to the ideas expressed in eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal democratic rhetoric, for example; notions that all people are equal, and that the high points of civilization, represented by certain cultural artifacts, are accessible to all people regardless of social and educational strata. In contrast, modernism is a reaction against the modernity; it creates a high/low, elite/mass dichotomy. In the sphere of design and art, modernism is
characterized by formalism. It is also the purview of the elite, it is only really understood by the privileged few who belong to the inner sanctums of culture, the avant-garde. In this sense, Post-Modernism appropriates modernism, the "meaning" of Post-Modern architecture, for example, the theories that inform it, are inscribed in a code accessible only to an elite few. But unlike modernism, Post-Modernism doesn't forget the past. Post-Modernism is dialogical, it is laced with "voices" or "images" from the past.

Jencks (1986) defines Post Modernism as a "paradoxical dualism, or double coding, which its hybrid name entails: the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence" (p. 7). He offers a succinct and clever definition of Post-Modern architecture as a type of double coding: "the combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects" (p. 14).

This double coding or synthesis of high and low culture, or elite and mass culture, functions to extend the communicative range of art and architecture. Indeed, Jencks argues that Modern architecture's social failure occurred in part "because it didn't communicate effectively with its ultimate users . . . and partly because it didn't make effective links with the city and history" (p. 14). The
Pruitt-Igoe affair has come to symbolize the failure of modern architecture to communication with its inhabitants. Minoru Yamasaki designed a 14-story housing project in St. Louis that opened in 1955 and won an prize from the American Institute of Architects—none of whom lived in the project. However, the actual dwellers hated it and applauded when the city dynamited the complex in 1972 (Wolfe, 1981). Yamasaki also designed the elegant World Trade Towers (1974), which are beautiful as sculpture, grey against a light-blue sky—but are not much fun to inhabit.

There is no single Post-Modern style; rather its "key definers are a pluralism both philosophical and stylistic, and a dialectical or critical relation to a pre-existing ideology" (Jencks, 1986, p. 23).

The characterization of Post-Modern style as a dialectical relation to pre-existing ideology is significant. Jencks refers to the process of appropriation, or re-appropriation; here the term "dialectic" describes the transformation in meaning that occurs when symbols or signs "move" from the center to the margins, when there is a radical shift in their contextual orientation. Signs that embody the dominant ideology derive their meaning by virtue of context. Recontextualization can have the effect of placing the symbol under a strong magnifying glass, where, without the meaning it derives from its usual context, it can be seen for what it is. For example, Andy Warhol's
**Still Life** (1976) depicts a red hammer and sickle—an ominous and terrifying "sign" to people in the West for most of the twentieth century, and certainly an integral component of dominant ideologies, both East and West. Warhol, however, completely demystifies this symbol by wrenching it out of its usual political context, where it functions in the dogmatic framework of political ideology as an absolute, its meaning univocal and beyond question. But in **Still Life**, Warhol turns the specter of Soviet domination into a display ad for garden tools by appropriating the form and style of magazine advertisements. **Still Life**, is rendered in a pen and ink style akin to that used to advertise lingerie in a glossy magazine. Warhol has set the hammer on its head and placed the sickle behind it like the arc of a rainbow, shifting the angle the two pieces normally assume when they combine to symbolize the unity of Soviet agriculture and industry, the peasant and the worker—or the hostile Other in the West. In **Still Life** these become the symbol of leisure time, household implements used by the weekend gardener and bricoleur or handyman, presented as the type of display seen in department store windows. **Still Life** leaves to doubt as to its lack of originality, it proudly bears its "readymade" pedigree: "True Tempered," the trade logo on the hammer is clearly displayed. **Still Life** demonstrates how appropriation enhances a work’s communicative range while lifting the veil that cloaks the
dominant ideology: the painting seems to ask a rhetorical question, "Is this what you’re afraid of, garden tools?" The painting evidences the double- and triple-coding that characterizes the most interesting Pop Art.

Pop Art appropriated the language—the signs and symbols—of mass communication, particularly those used in advertisements. Inherent in these signs and symbols, was the inducement to consume. As Branzi (1988) observed, the center of gravity shifted from the factory to what came out of the factory, namely, the diffusion of new patterns of behavior and new sign systems throughout society. In other words, modern culture was based on the factory, on the logic of production. However, with pop culture, societal orientation shifted to the consumer, the logic of consumption superseded the logic of production. In the transition from a

political economy to a market economy, the design or architectural project underwent a profound transformation. It accepted the need to seek the motives for its own existence within itself. No longer is it a move in the global advance of modernity, industrialization, or democracy. The project is a tautological creative act, a pure linguistic and economic invention, which sometimes tries to respond to a demand from the market and at (other times) invents a market for itself. At times it responds to an existing
code of values, at others it establishes new, temporary or lasting ones.
This is no small change. During the period of forced industrialization that lasted from 1920 to 1960, the hypothesis had been formed that design ought to help in bringing about a standardization of consumer goods and the patterns of behavior in society. [Design’s] work lay in a quest for primary needs, for that framework of healthy and indisputable requirements that could form the basis for mankind’s new relationships of production and consumption in industrial society (Branzi, 1988, p. 11). This shift from a political economy to a market economy, from Modernism to Post-Modernism, cut the ties between design and the dictates of the factory. Thus design was free to explore self-referentiality; design was now free to communicate in untold ways, it could even be philosophical.
Designers were no longer forced to design for a mass audience, they were free to target a limited segment. Rather than design objects with the intention of pleasing everyone, objects, said Branzi (1988), could now pick their own consumers. The language of design shifted from that of reason to that of emotion, from "the certainties of science to the perversities of fashion. From the object to the effect. . . . the design project was moving in search of itself, its own language and role" (p. 11).
For designers and architects the search for a language translated into a critical stance, namely, a wary attitude toward an image-laden social reality created by the mass media. Thus in its critical capacity, design assumes a world informed and defined by the mass media; a backdrop of digital images, LEDs, info-nets; a neon horizon of floating signs and disembodied television images. But severed from any "earth-bound" referential moorings, these signs and images are emptied of ambiguity or richness in meaning. They exist as symbols of lucre pointing only to themselves. Under this type of sensory bombardment, one's sense of what is real becomes problematic. The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo put it thus:

The proliferation of images in the world ends up making us lose our sense of reality. The world of the real has turned into a world of merchandise, of images. Instead of portraying a fundamental reality, the phantasmagoric world of the mass media serves up an illusion of reality in the form of the nostalgic idea of a stable fundamental reality (1990).

In such a world everything becomes problematic, especially value. Information is the highest value, the dearest commodity. The propagation of new ways to package and sell information or images attends the development of new transmission technologies. An industry whose main commodity is information demands a non-stop supply of
information to communicate. The logic of this market, Vattimo points out, "requires a continuous replication of itself because the market consequently forces everything to become an object of communication in some way or another" (1990).

The shift from an industrial to an information economy is essentially a shift in logic. An economy whose manufacturing logic once conferred value to objects based on utility, now values, above all else, the new. Of course, new in this sense doesn't refer to naissance, but rather to the way information is marketed or packaged.

In this economic orbit newness becomes synonymous with status. And status becomes a question of image. Hence, status can accrue to anything if consecrated by the right hands. And this was precisely the problem with the design avant-garde, it became engulfed in this logic of the "new." As producers of elite status objects, avant-garde designers simply replicated the dominant ideology.
CHAPTER VI
MEMPHIS

Introduction

My aim in this Chapter is to show the role that dialogue plays in non-exploitative appropriation. To this end, I will examine the philosophy and work of Memphis Milano. Memphis may be viewed as an attempt to resist the inevitable appropriation of critical language and the attendant reduction of its power to provoke thought. Certainly, Memphis were self-conscious about appropriation. Like their Pop artist precursors, Memphis employed re-appropriation and decontextualization as a deliberate strategy. However, when Memphis appropriated, they did so in a dialogic fashion; their pieces exude ambiguity and polyvalence. Memphis pieces are an example of visual polyglossia, they are a synthesis of high and low culture; they are carnivalesque, a term which Muller has used to describe popular culture’s revolt against authority; as such they are full of humor, parody, fantasy, obscenity.

But Memphis pieces also communicate through a mute sensuous logic that directly engage the body and senses. Memphis thus serves as a reminder that the codification
process begins much earlier, i.e., is less cerebral than is commonly supposed. As Kristeva has shown, codification begins with the body and plunges it into a "sensual semiotics." In a profound sense, the body is "codified" prior to, and simultaneous with, the intellect. The signification that emerges from the pre-linguistic realm uses the human body as its frame of reference. Vico termed this sensuous logic "poetic logic," the shining feature of which is metaphor. The first poets— as Vico imagined them to be— attributed their own animate features to the things around them. Thus was born metaphor. By dint of its corporeal origin, each metaphor, says Vico (1744/1984). "is a fable in brief," which gives us a basis for judging the time when metaphors made their appearance in the languages. All the metaphors conveyed by likenesses taken from bodies to signify the operations of abstract minds must date from times when philosophies were taking shape. . . . in all languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate things are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts and from the human senses and passions. Thus head for top or beginning; the brow and shoulders of a hill; the eyes of needles and of potatoes; mouth for any opening; the lip of a cup or pitcher; the teeth of a rake, a saw, a comb; the beard of wheat; the tongue of a shoe; the gorge of a river;
the neck of land; an arm of the sea; the hands of a
clock; heart for center . . . (p. 129).

In a basic sense, each Memphis piece may be read
metaphorically, as a fable in search of an author. Memphis
works with the "stuff" of myth, before it has been
congealed. Theirs is, in part, an attempt to communicate
through the body, whose mode of communication is non-verbal,
a type of silent exchange or dialogue. Memphis, in using
furniture as a mode of communication, reminds us that
signification is a heterogeneous practice, not simply the
cerebral affair posited by formal linguistics. In the pre-
linguistic and sensual realm, meaning is embryonic; it is
still up for grabs; it has yet to calcify. If meaning can
be made ambiguous or presented in a state that has yet to be
inscribed then there is no easy univocal sign or message
that can fall prey to exploitative appropriation. This is
not to say that verbal interpretations can't be affixed to
Memphis--indeed they can, and I will suggest a few, but
these are by no means definitive; Memphis invites us to
create our own individual meanings.

I will argue that the raison d'être of Memphis
furniture is to stimulate critical thinking. In a fashion
analogous to Foucault's critique of the totalizing and
universal discourse of Modernity, Memphis pieces were
designed to raise questions about dogmatic notions of
functionality by attempting to elicit and stimulate
individualistic responses. To the extent that the pieces may be said to convey a definitive intention, their purpose may be described as an attempt to trigger a meditative process and in so doing call attention to the significance of ritual and myth-making in the renewal of human society. The "content" of Memphis is communication. Memphis pieces "speak" about the act of communication and the process of meaning formation. Jencks (1986) popularized the term Post-Modern to signify a double coding; some Memphis pieces carry a triple coding and beyond.

In the U.S., attention toward what came to be known as the "Memphis style" peaked in 1985. That autumn, Bloomingdales, the New York department store, displayed Memphis furniture; a New York apartment complex called "Memphis" offered rental units; and Memphis design exhibitions toured museums in several major cities. An exhibit of 75 pieces of Memphis furniture and 510 drawings opened in September, 1985 at the Philadelphia Colleges of the Arts. The exhibit's director, Eleni Cocordas, said that crowds had been breaking attendance records (Osborne, 1985). But by year's end, the Memphis experiment had ended without fanfare. Bright colors, riveting dynamic patterns and unusual "non-functional" shapes had characterized Memphis design. However, in March 1986, when I attended an

Contrary to the wishes of the designers themselves; they insisted that Memphis was not a style, that Memphis was anti-style.
international design exhibition in New York, which introduced the new summer and fall designs, the work of many of the designers who had participated in the Memphis project was purposefully subdued. Subtlety reigned: cream and grey tones replaced the intense glare of primary colors. The overriding chromatic motif was cream with black trim; checker-board patterns seemed to predominate. These changes were the inevitable response to the Memphis "knock-offs," such as the zigzag and lightening bolt patterns that sports apparel manufacturers appropriated and turned into the latest fad in sweat pants. In explaining the new subdued pieces, the "father" of Memphis, Ettore Sottsass, later remarked that grey is a very sad color, and therefore creates problems for anyone trying to use it to advertise detergents and toothpaste (Burney, 1991).

Birth of Memphis

When Memphis was founded in Ettore Sottsass' apartment in 1980, its birth did not signal a "ground zero" for design. The seven architects and two designers who initiated the venture during the course of three December nights had previously participated in various group projects. Just that year, Sottsass formed Sottsass Associated with three architects who would also design for Memphis—Aldo Cibic, Matteo Thun and Marco Zanini. And even prior to their association with Studio Alchimia—the immediate precursor to
Memphis—Sottsass and Branzi had designed furniture and lamps for Croff Casa, a chain of furniture stores. The pieces met with misunderstanding and hostility. The chain's salesmen had apparently even discouraged customers from buying the objects. However, significantly, the Croff pieces had already been studied not as part of coordinated systems, but as small, independent expressive mechanisms on which special communicative care was concentrated. They were already conceived as travel companions, pieces one could talk to . . .

(Radice, 1984, p. 23, emphasis added).

All those present when Memphis was founded were under 30 years of age, except Sottsass. Unlike the others, Sottsass was well-known in the design field. Born in 1917 in Innsbruck, Austria, Sottsass graduated from the Turin "Politecnico" in 1939. He opened his first design studio in 1947 in Milan.

Sottsass' companion, the journalist Barbara Radice was present to chronicle the birth of Memphis. Versed in contemporary Continental philosophy, Radice subsequently articulated and promulgated the group's philosophy and goals in books and articles. Memphis, Radice (1984) noted, came into being owing to an urgently felt

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2 Biographical information on Sottsass was obtained from the New York offices of Artemide, an Italian lighting and furniture company that served as the North American distributor of Memphis furniture.
need to reinvent an approach to design, to plan other spaces, to foresee other environments, to imagine other lives. . . . one began to wonder if it was really necessary to continue to sink into beige leather sofas, surrounded by fixture-walls with sharp-cornered orthogonal planes in shiny polyester, or to march up and down steps and floors covered by eternal monochromatic carpets, a painting here, a sculpture there, lighted by black, acid structures in steel and sheet-metal, drinks and hors d’oeuvres lined up on severe coffee-tables, possibly in chrome and glass (p.23).

First Exhibition

By the time of their first public exhibition in Milan, Italy on September 18, 1981, Memphis Milano had swelled from a nucleus of seven to an international coterie of 35 architects and designers who were united in rebellion against the dictates of modern design that pervaded Europe and the U.S. for nearly 50 years. Two thousand five hundred people came to look at 51 pieces of unusual shape and color: 31 pieces of furniture, 11 pieces of ceramics, and 10 lamps. To what function these pieces had been designed to fulfill—and in what setting—was a mystery. As a whole, the collection radiated a cartoonish and playful air, shapes and colors that would certainly delight a child.
As if recalling Vico’s treatise on the origins of metaphor, many pieces had an anthropomorphic look. Casablanca, a sideboard in plastic laminate designed by Ettore Sottsass, looked like a garishly tri-toned primitive totem speckled in black, its red crown and arms angled toward the sky while encasing a white thorax and a yellow abdomen. A similar piece whose shape also conveyed upward momentum was Sottsass’ Carlton, a room divider in plastic laminate that revealed a full spectrum of solid colors at high intensity: black, brown, red, white, purple, orange, yellow, green and grey shelves and dividers rose—like appendages seekings an offering— from a gray base crawling with black amoebae, and on the top shelf, the same angles and squares formed a human figure with a see-through square for a head—a television box?

Then there were the Memphis lamps, Sottsass’ Tahiti, a pink-headed and yellow-throated duck from Mars in plastic laminate and metal— but decidedly friendly, more Walt Disney than H.G. Wells. Michele De Lucchi had designed a metal table lamp, Oceanic: a black and white candycane sea serpent, its path lighted by a leaning yellow head.

Memphis was comprised predominantly of architects who had turned their attention to the inside of the home and an architectural look characterized many of the pieces at the 1981 exhibition: Andrea Branzi’s Gritti, a bookcase fashioned from glass, metal, wood, and plastic laminate,
could have been a model for a futuristic highrise; the American architect Michael Graves designed Plaza, a geometric dressing table—composed of briar, lacquered wood, glass, mirrors and brass—whose four stories culminated in a cornice. Bright primary colors predominated, such as George J. Sowden’s D’Antibes, a canary-colored cabinet that rested on four stilts with blue "feet" and whose sideboards were covered with a silkscreened red kinetic pattern. But the Memphis collection also included muted pieces, such as Shiro Kuramata’s Imperial, a silver cabinet with a roll-away cavity that resembled the top of a street corner mail box set on long, insect-like legs.

What, then, did these objects mean—bookcases and cabinets that seemed to have been designed expressly to achieve minimum storage capacity. Did the names of the pieces carry significance? Many evoked distant and exotic cultures: Nefertiti, Matteo Thun’s ceramic tea service; Mandarin, Sottsass’s table in plastic laminate, lacquered wood, metal and glass; and Brazil, Peter Shire’s lacquered wood side table. And the colors and shapes, in what quarters could such pieces harmonize? Into what possible living room could one place Dublin, a plastic and metal couch covered with a nonflammable synthetic fabric that glowed red, orange and yellow, like an atomic sunset? Into what bedroom setting could one situate Sowden’s blue and green plastic double bed, Chelsea, with its padded edges
covered with hundreds of lightening bolts that bordered an equally kinetic quilted bedspread designed by Nathalie du Pasquier.

Was Memphis Milano some kind of radical avant-garde joke? After all, Ettore Sottsass, the 62-year-old mastermind behind Memphis, had been involved in the Italian avant-garde design movement since his student days in the 1930s. However, unlike previous avant-garde ventures that featured drawings and models, such as Studio Alchimia, Memphis Milano's opening exhibition showcased objects that were destined to be manufactured and distributed throughout Europe and North America.

Pre-Memphis: The Kandissi

In 1980 Sottsass and two other Memphis designers, Andrea Branzi and Michele De Lucchi, parted with Alessandro Mendini and the Studio Alchimia group over differences in direction. Alchimia, a graphic design studio, was founded in 1976 by Sandro Guerriero. As Radice (1984) explained:

After a fairly nebulous debut as a sponsor of radical and sometimes shoddy projects, [Studio Alchimia] became, in 1978, the repository of the most important experimental developments of the Milanese post-radical avant-garde (a role it was to retain for the next two

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^When citing Kazuko Sato, author of *Alchimia*, I retain his spelling of "Alchymia."
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years). This avant-garde gravitated more or less around Mendini, Sottsass and to some extent Branzi (p. 23).

Studio Alchimia gave its first public exhibitions in 1979 and 1980. These "cultural activities," which the designers regarded as ends-in-themselves, featured drawings and experimental prototypes. Perhaps the most significant prototype was Mendini's Kandissi (1979), a sofa fashioned of lacquered wood, briar-wood and gobelin—a tapestry of colored threads woven by hand.

Kandissi was significant because its functionality as a piece of furniture was secondary to its communicative power, the statement it made about advertising and consumption. Mendini said the sofa represented an exploration into kitsch and the banal. For this piece, Mendini had appropriated the shape of a typical "modern" sofa from the 1950s and covered it with a loud, jagged kinetic pattern.

The piece may be "read" as a statement that lays bare the process by which advertising appropriates images from "serious" art. For example, Mondrian, Picasso, and Miro "have ended up by rubbing shoulders even with women's dresses and their colours, with scarf designs and printed materials" (Dorfles, 1969, p. 178). Often, when such images are grafted on to the display of a product, the amalgam that results is kitsch, which Eco (1979) termed an "over-coding."
Dorfles (1969) explains how appropriation often begets kitsch:

Adaptation from one medium into another, from the means of expression of one type of art into that of another--this is an operation that often leads to kitsch. When a word, a sign or an image is used outside its usual context it will sometimes gain a new vigour, but unfortunately the opposite is usually true of works of art... it is wrong, or at best very risky, to transfer a work of art from its own particular and characteristic language into another which is not suited to it. Almost without exception this produces something in decidedly bad taste (p. 87).

Mendini's *Kandissi* sofa reveals the process by which the appropriation of avant-garde art transforms it into kitsch by virtue of its entry into advertising's force field. The aim of advertising is to draw attention to itself, hence the attraction of visual innovation as an object for appropriation. In naming his sofa after Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), the Russian painter and avant-garde theoretician, Mendini seemed to cut to the heart of the matter: if advertising is predicated on a perennial search for visual combinations that rivet the attention, i.e., a search for the "new," then advertising will always be lurking one step behind the avant-garde. In the language of visual perception, "movement" is the effect of structural
and/or chromatic elements that fuse to draw the eye. Arnheim (1974) explains that motion

is the strongest visual appeal to attention. A dog or cat may be resting peacefully, unimpressed by all the lights and shapes that make up the immobile setting around him; but as soon as anything stirs, his eyes will turn to the spot and follow the course of the motion. Young kittens seem completely at the mercy of any moving thing, as though their eyes were tied to it. Human beings are similarly attracted by movement; I need only mention the effectiveness of mobile advertising, whether it be flashing neon signs or television commercials . . . (p. 372).

The Kandissi exposes the logic of what has become the routine appropriation of aesthetic innovation by the commercial sector. If the Kandissi could speak it might say to those who would covet its power to draw the eye, "Is this what you want, something to grab the attention? Then here is the master of movement, Kandinsky." In his analysis of the properties of point, line and surface, Kandinsky wrote:

I replace the almost universally accepted concept 'movement' with 'tension.' The prevalent concept is imprecise and therefore leads to incorrect approaches, which in turn cause further terminological misunderstandings. Tension is the force inherent in the element; as such it is only one component of active
movement. To this must be added direction (Cited in Arnheim, 1974, p. 416).

The Kandissi is all tension: its "headrest" is a jagged asymmetrical—yet chromatically harmonious—clash of yellow and blue shapes that resemble pieces of lightening bolts. The gobelin upholstery is woven in zigzag patterns that resemble television test patterns. However, Mendini seems to have turned the logic of advertising on its head. A sofa from the 1950s—since become banal—a design symbolic of an established order based on the superficial, i.e., on fashion, now becomes a vehicle for Kandinsky’s revolutionary ideas. Instead of using the avant-garde to advertise the conventional, the conventional is used to "advertise" the avant-garde, and moreover, in a manner that completely transforms the conventional, rendering it unfit for the established order: the Kandissi, in its "beautiful" gaudiness, is virtually inassimilable, there is no living room into which it will fit, no product it can be harnessed to.

However, by 1980, Mendini had come to occupy himself more and more with the drawing aspect of the design process. Drawing, according to Mendini, was a pristine act of poetic introversion that constituted a "new morality." Mendini subsequently articulated his ideas about drawing in "The Alchimia Manifesto":
For the Alchimia group today the act of 'drawing' is important. Drawing, the emitting of signs, is neither 'design' nor 'project': it is a free and continuous movement of thought, when a 'motivated' movement is visually expressed. . . . The motivation for work lies not in its practical efficiency; the 'beauty' of an object consists in the love and magic with which it is designed, and in the soul which it contains. . . . If the transience of the times does not allow certain objectives to exist, if even philosophy seems closed to the future, and if it is impossible to think of general and rational transformations, the Alchimia Group is concentrated within itself. It seeks details of thought inside itself, with the sole intention of signalling its poetic vocation. It performs its act of introversion, its minimal creative will, beyond all judgement. This is Alchimia's 'new morality'. . . . Given the insufficiency of drawing to tackle the world, drawing itself becomes a continuous work, without beginning, without end and without justification (Sato, 1985).

Practical efficiency, utilitarian ends, actual space, real living quarters, manufacturing and distribution, these things Alchimia eschewed. Alchimia, Sottsass later noted, never looked beyond art gallery openings (Radice, 1984). To design objects destined for mass production and distribution
would require intercourse with the world of commerce, a sordid descent from the high vistas of the radical avant-garde. Whereas, "Alchymia had neither concerned itself with, nor succeeded in setting up even the shadow of a sales organization" (Radice, p. 24).

Beyond the Avant-Garde

Unlike Studio Alchimia (1976-1980), Memphis from the start attempted to evade the problems that had previously plagued the avant-garde—and Modern architecture and design, for that matter, from Le Corbusier and the International Style onward. Memphis was an attempt to go beyond the so-called "post radical avant-garde" typified by Studio Alchimia. Rather than basking in a smug elitism and disdaining to sully themselves in interaction with the world of production and commerce, Memphis would attempt to engage this quarter in dialogue. This meant an attempt to establish a relationship between design and industry based on autonomy and mutual respect. Past approaches based on antagonism had failed. If both parties prospered, then perhaps a great and healthy surge of energy would come from this growth. There would be, according to Branzi, "collaboration, mutual understanding, dispute or concord,

"The prefix "radical" itself an attempt to out avant-garde the avant-garde and thus keep alive the idea or purpose of the latter; a going beyond, "a thinking of the unthought."
but between independent entities and ways of thinking" (1988, p. 14).

This was radical thinking. Rather than attempting to overthrow the profit motive, a revolutionary idea emerged: from profit and growth come an energy; and furthermore, another great and healthy surge of energy comes into being when new and creative alliances are established.

The founders of Memphis appeared to have seen through the avant-garde: viewing it as an elite game, where certain objects are designated "art" and thereby become ordained as status objects, as valued commodities whose exchange value is subject to the same logic of production and consumption that governs the economic sphere. The very terms "avant-garde," "radical avant-garde," "post-radical avant-garde," evidence the "new-and-improved" logic of commodity scientism—the ostensible transfer of scientific breakthroughs to consumer goods. The avant-garde is not outside the code, outside the sphere of legitimacy that it opposes. To speak the words "avant-garde" is to speak codified language.

After years of talking about such problems, Sottsass and his associates announced that they were finally ready to do more than merely draw and the Memphis project was conceived.

When Andre Branzi was asked the inevitable question, "What is Memphis?" he answered not with a declaration of
policy, such as Mendini's "Alchimia Manifesto," but with a string of metaphors:

Memphis? It is a heat-wave.
Those who have to heat up old soup need not bother.
Those who have to cook eggs should wait.
Those who have to melt gold should step right in
(Radice, 1984, p. 19).

That Branzi should use metaphor to describe Memphis is telling: above functionality, the Memphis designers regarded their work, first and foremost, as a means of communication.

Reversing the Bauhaus

Prior to the Memphis project, Sottsass was known internationally for his efforts to push design and architecture beyond the functional orthodoxy that reigned both before and after World War II. In architecture, the formalism that ruled was known as the International Style, which resulted from a codification of the Bauhaus.\(^5\) As

\(^5\)In this project I have concentrated upon the mass media as the primary agents of codification. However, codification or legitimization also occur through a number of other institutions, such as museums. The Museum of Modern Art's 1932 exhibition of architectural models and photographs served to legitimize and codify the work of Bauhaus and other contemporary European architects. Philip Johnson, then 26, wrote the show's catalogue, "The International Style" (Wolfe, 1981, p. 35). Johnson, a Cleveland native, recently designed the Math Annex and Engineering Library at Ohio State University. In his use of rose-colored brick, Johnson attempted to set in motion a dialogue between the university buildings and turn-of-the-century buildings in a section of
Memphis would also insist about their movement nearly 60 years later, Walter Gropius, who founded the Bauhaus in Wiemar in 1919, insisted that the Bauhaus was not a "style." The object of the Bauhaus, Gropius (1966) explained, "was not to propagate any 'style', system, dogma, formula, or vogue, but simply to exert a revitalizing influence on design" (p.92). The Bauhaus idea was simply an attempt to renew design and architecture by eschewing empty ornamentation. It was a try at a new start:

A breach has been made with the past, which allows us to envisage a new aspect of architecture corresponding to the technical civilization of the age we live in; the morphology of dead styles has been destroyed; and we are returning to honesty of thought and feeling. The general public, formerly profoundly indifferent to everything to do with building, has been shaken out of its torpor; personal interest in architecture as something that concerns every one of us in our daily lives has been very widely aroused; and the broad lines of its future development are already clearly discernible (Gropuis, 1966, pp. 19-20).

Thus the Bauhaus turned its back on the elite class and concentrated on worker housing and mass-produced furniture and utensils. Gropius insisted that there was a soothing rhythm to the unadorned repetition that marked Bauhaus Columbus known as the Brewery District.
design. Also, this repetition was a reaction to the appropriation of culture and its subsequent use as ideology. Ornamentation symbolized exploitative appropriation and class domination. Cornices and pitched roofs symbolized the crowns of royalty, therefore all roofs were flat. In America, where banks were made to look like temples, Veblen had seen things in a similar light. For Veblen, ornamentation turned vicious with nineteenth-century kitsch, which resembled "images of aggressive barbarism" and "old models of repression." These things Veblen saw and particularly in the decorative efforts of the years after 1870, [which] represented relics of past epochs or indications of the regression of those who were not producing anything, those exempt from participation in the industrial labour-process (Adorno, 1982, p. 79).

However, despite Gropius’ intentions, the Bauhaus philosophy ossified into a style both elite and dogmatic. The Bauhaus became codified, even though the sweeping rationalization it fostered was intended only as a "purifying agency," and presumably a temporary one.

Sottsass, then, sought to revitalize design by attempting to find more sensorial ways of defining form and space for the domestic environment by giving a great importance to color as a potential source of energy and as a symbol of vitality in contrast to the intellectual stiffness of utilitarian structure, i.e., the cardinal principle of
rationalization. An early example of the importance that Sottsass attached to color was the mid-1960s red portable typewriter, known as "The Valentine," that he designed for Olivetti, for whom Sottsass had been a consultant and designer since 1959.

In the work of Memphis, color and shape, decoration—not function—took precedence. The Louis Sullivan dictum that "form follows function" had become dogmatic and oppressive. Memphis attempted to reverse or re-codify the form-follows-function adage. "Decoration lays bare the soul of things," declared Nathalie du Pasquier, whose patterns embraced Africa, Cubism, Futurism, Art Deco, India, graffiti, jungles, science fiction, and Japanese comics (Radice, 1984).

In the place of the formulaic, "form follows function," Memphis offered not a permanent design solution, but simply a possibility. In appropriating the concept of function they transformed its meaning into a hypothesis. The designs they created were meant to be seen as something on the order of a moment in Hegel’s dialectic: the design is a receptacle of possibilities, an unstable living form that evolves in time, a stage, a negative and transitory moment on the path toward actualization.

New functions would mean new freedoms. Sottsass recognized that when one designs a chair one designs a way of sitting down (Radice, 1984). Adorno (1974) also
recognized how designed objects constrict the range of potential experience:

The new human type cannot be properly understood without awareness of what he is continuously exposed to from the world of things about him. . . . Not the least to blame for the withering of experience, is the fact that things, under the law of pure functionality, assume a form that limits contact with them to mere operation, and tolerates no surplus, either in freedom of conduct or in autonomy of things, which would survive as the core of experience, because it is not consumed by the moment of action (p. 40).

Peter Shire’s side table *Brazil* (1981) is an example of a Memphis piece that used shape and color to loosen the bonds of pure functionality. The table is an assemblage of four geometric shapes, two of them non-symmetrical. A narrow, canary triangle that tapers to a point, like an ironing board, forms the "business-end" of the table. Here, utilitarian functionality is at an absolute minimum. Certainly, the function of this piece is not to support objects, but to show the juxtaposition of colors to best advantage. The yellow surface is supported by two "legs": a green arc, and a narrow black rectangle that rests on a curved, pink base.
I wish to point out how such use of color is dialogic on the sensuous plane. Dialogue requires openness—and this is precisely what color induces, an openness. As Matisse said: "If drawing is of the spirit and color of the senses, you must draw first, to cultivate the spirit and to be able to lead color into spiritual paths" (Cited in Arnheim, 1974, p. 336-37).

Color may be ideological, as evidenced in Warhol's Still Life—and in Bulgaria, for example, to wear read signifies allegiance to the BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party), blue to the UDF (Union of Democratic Forces). But such symbolism derives from context, as does the perception of color. Two colors placed side by side will exert an influence on each other. This is what Picasso meant by his remark that "Matisse has such good lungs." In other words, Matisse's colors "breathe," they expand and contract, they create dynamic energy. Arnheim (1974) explained that a color viewed in the context of other colors will change when moved elsewhere:

In no reliable sense can we speak of a color "as it really is"; it is always determined by its context. A white background is by no means a zero background but has strong indiosyncrasies of its own (p. 345).

In order to escape the symbolism of color, i.e., the use of color as an ideological vehicle, Memphis did not employ a dominant/background type of color scheme. In
addition, Sottsass had long been occupied with the search for colors devoid of any cultural references. For "nonculturized color" Sottsass looked to the colors of children (Radice, 1984).

*Brazil* is an example of a Memphis piece composed of no background colors. Shire appropriated the colors of the Brazilian flag, yellow and green, in much the same way that Picasso appropriated the colors of the French flag in a cubist still life. *Brazil* also expands the idea of "functionality" through an interpretative twist that liberates the concept's meaning from the single dimension into which it had become inscribed. The simple sensuous joy of color perception may be just as "useful" or utilitarian as the other "serious" uses found for tables. In this sense, the form in *Brazil* follows function. The table's form reveals its colors to best advantage, however, its function is to display color. Thus *Brazil* speaks of the importance—even primacy—of color in life. Here color is not appropriated in an exploitative fashion, i.e., to call attention to some sign or advertisement. It simply calls attention to itself, to the pleasure of the senses. As such, it effects a return to the things themselves, where meaning is embryonic and wide open and potential unlimited.
Memphis was a deliberate visual hybrid, informed by such divers influences as Pop Art, street "signs," archeology, anthropology, and iconography. By such means, Memphis would attempt to say something new, but to do so, it would have to avoid the pitfalls of the avant-garde, to somehow escape codification. How to counter an ideological web that thrives on the "new"—a web so vast and voracious as to assimilate all and everything in its path, even, as Vattimo (1990) observed, "the good stuff." One way is through an ancient dialogized hybrid: parody.

Bahktin has pointed out that any type of hybrid that is intentionally conceived is more or less dialogized. This means that the languages that are crossed in it relate to each other as do rejoinders in a dialogue; there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language. But it is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense, rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other (1981, p. 76).

And, according to Bakhtin, every parody "is an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another" (1981, p. 76). Bakhtin’s analysis of parody is illuminating and pertinent to Memphis design; parody is a means of breaking
the grip of authoritarian language. Authority is typically distant, aloof, unapproachable, in certain societies a glance cast at the king was punished by death. Physical or historical distance is cold, humor warm. Humor draws the object of mirth or ridicule close; under scrutiny, imperfections surface, the mystique of power evaporates. Parody is "bilingual," it always contains two points of view, two languages, "only one of these languages (the one that is parodied) is present in its own right, the other is present invisibly, as an actualizing background for creating and perceiving" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 76).

On one level, Memphis furniture functions as a parody of functionalism, of the rigid use value and symbolism that culture has inscribed upon objects. The parodied object is present, but twisted and pulled like taffy, deformed into humorous shapes. But beyond an attack of conventional meaning, and ready-to-hand modes of existence, Memphis furniture implies a setting that has yet to be conceived. Memphis pieces seem to have been designed for a new civilization, a new mode of existence that has yet to emerge. It was as if Memphis believed that if only they designed the appropriate backdrop, created the right set and props, new modes of existence would naturally follow. Memphis furniture seems to function as an impetus to tell an untold story. This approach recognizes the importance of narrative, of myths and rituals—that a people defines
itself, creates itself, through the stories it tells about itself. Through their designed objects, Memphis attempted to create the "electric" charge that would generate new myths and rituals to replace the cultural signs that had been codified into rigid meanings through appropriation and oversaturation and thus could no longer be used to express new desires.

To use Bakhtin's language, Memphis objects are a zone of dialogical contact, a zone of potentiality, from which something new might break open. But their pieces carry more meaning than the double coding of parody; they are truly polyglossic. Memphis absorbed the spirit and feel of Pop Art, but went beyond Pop Art's appropriation of mass media images so that it might pique an established order defined by runaway consumption. In Memphis, the zone of dialogic contact is non-linear, it encompasses not only what may emerge--the present's negative moment, but also what has been: the spirit of an ancient and atavistic past filled with myths and rituals is also present in Memphis. The very name Memphis reflects this polyvalence.

Radice (1984) recalled that during the initial meetings in Sottsass' apartment the Bob Dylan album, *Blond on Blond* (1966) was constantly on the turntable. The needle stuck on the track "Memphis Blues," a six minute-plus foray into American Gothic surrealism that features the refrain: "Oh mama, can this be the end, to be stuck inside of Mobile with
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the Memphis Blues again." Someone had written the name "Memphis" in a notebook and it stuck because it evoked images both new—Memphis, Tennessee, blues, rock n' roll—and old—ancient Memphis, the pharaoh’s capital, the holy city of the god Ptah.

A worm-bitten papyrus roll dating from about 2,500 B.C. asserts that Memphis has been the pharaoh’s capital since time immemorial and that a prime mover named Path—in essence sort of a primeval ocean, both male and female—is the creator of all. Creative thoughts were believed to have their origin in the heart and given wings by virtue of the tongue’s word. Thus, through "the creative word of Ptah the gods with their images and temples, life and death, every craft, and all the actions of the human body were then created" (Kramer, 1961, p. 63).

The very choice of the name "Memphis" signals a concern with cultural history, with the narrative component of design: materials, colors and shapes fashioned into a new iconographic landscape against which the telling of new myths might unfold, a zone of dialogical contact, a zone of potential—where perhaps something new and exciting might "take." While the mystery of ancient mythic culture imbues Memphis design with a type of spiritual aura, this aura hovers over an amalgam of old and new: Memphis pieces fuse old materials, marble, wood, glass, pearl, with new, zinc-
plated sheet metal, neon tubes, celluloids, industrial paints, and—above all—decorated plastic laminates:

Using different materials provides not only new structural possibilities, but—above all—new semantic and metaphoric possibilities, other modes of communication, another language, and even a change of direction, broadening of perspective, appropriation and digestion of new values and the concomitant rejection of traditional structures, that renewal always involves. With Memphis and plastic laminates, the renewal was generated by a violent switch of cultural context combined with, and magnified by, the introduction of an absolute novelty: surfaces decorated with patterns of the designer's own invention (Radice, 1984, p. 35).

Here, owing to a violent upheaval in traditional context, materials function as uninscribed signifiers in a special sensual semiotics. By divorcing materials from their conventional semantic function through new configurations, Memphis creates the potential for a new start, a sensual renewal. In Chapter II, I used the phrase "sensual semiotics" to call attention to a key point about codification, that it has its origin in the body.

Various pieces of Memphis design provide a perfect three-dimensional analogy of Kristeva's theory of signification. In the Memphis pieces, both the semiotic and
symbolic are always present, as if to remind us that signification has a sensual, kinetic origin. However, depending on the circumstances, one of these aspects, the symbolic or the semiotic, may accede to prominence. Sonja Foss (in press) has called attention to the sensual aspects of the First chair, designed by Michele De Lucchi for the 1983 Memphis collection.

The First was the best selling piece of Memphis furniture. In its debut year, 300 First chairs, retailing for $350 each, were manufactured. The following year, production increased to 1000 (Osborne, 1985). In appearance, the First resembles a model of an atom created for an elementary science class: two black protons orbit around a blue nucleus. Perhaps the bare, elemental motif accounts for the name First: a model of the first and most basic element. Foss described the First as having a flat, black disk for a seat and four legs of circular metal tubing. The same kind of tubing circles from a front leg of the chair up and around to the other to create the chair’s back. In the middle of this tubing is a small, flat, blue disk that forms the chair’s backrest. Two plastic, black, round spheres, positioned lower on the tubing, serve as the armrests for the chair (in press).

The First is a visual delight, the open space among its components forms an integral part of the design and gives it
a space-age look; the chair is elegant in its sparsity, it contains absolutely nothing extraneous, yet it manages to beckon with a playful air. However, in the First, visual delight does not equate to physical delight: "The cold, hard, metal surfaces that do not yield to the body and the omission of functional supports for back and arms suggest discomfort, disruption, alertness, and movement" (Foss, in press). The primary function of the First, suggests Foss, is "to launch the user into activity. The chair denies and disrupts the effort to rest, insisting that the user keep moving."

Thus the First demonstrates how the inscription of meaning takes place on a pre-verbal, physical level. Denied comfort, the user elevates herself or himself—or, in keeping with the space motif, is "launched," projected forward. Perhaps movement would then engender a train of signification, such as, "Now is not the time to rest, there is too much to be done." And on a symbolic level, the materials themselves, plastic, wood, metal, combine to form meaning by way of metaphor and metonymy. The materials may be viewed as representing the world of industry and commerce. As Foss (in press) put it:

a world of aluminum, industrial paints, and tubing—a world that is hard and cold and competitive. The hybrid conglomeration of the chair's form, added to the hard, industrial surfaces, references the chaotic,
incoherent, stimulating, varied world of the commercial strip, with its traffic, movement, giant illuminated and neon signs, and graffiti.

**Mythic Poetic Nucleus**

Myth lies at the heart of community and is also "meant to initiate a radical beginning" (Beistegui, 1991, p. 30). And to proceed with this Heideggerian notion:

The new myth will provide another historical beginning, it will found the community anew. And yet, in this very founding, it is always a question of the recapturing the lost or forgotten origin. It is always a matter of bridging the gap that separates us from the origin. For the knowing of the origin opens up the possibility of a future and asserts the power of the people (Beistegui, 1991, p. 30).

In their exploration of the semantic value of material, color, and shape, Memphis breaks open the process of myth-making. To work in the sensual realm is to reach deep into the roots of myth. One way of understanding Memphis, is to speak of first and second orders: the first order is primal, raw sense data, what I have been calling the pre-linguistic realm; here are found the elemental components--the stuff of myth--which presuppose meaning and upon which meaning is based. On this level, understanding involves the transformation of raw sense data into myths and narratives--
the world is understood as magical, as enchanting, precisely the discursive modes of understanding that the Enlightenment sought to eradicate. The Enlightenment asserted that in the authority of universal concepts, there was still discernible fear of the demonic spirits which men sought to portray in magic rituals, hoping thus to influence nature. From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities. For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 6).

The first order, an unlegitamized realm of ritual and magic, a realm of ambiguity not yet flattened out and brought under the control of computation and utility, is precisely that which Ricoeur refers to as the "mythic kernel." As such, it defies explanation in terms of some transparent model because it is constitutive of a culture before it can be expressed and reflected in specific representations or ideas. It is only if we try to grasp this kernel that we may discover the foundational mytho-poetic nucleus of a society (1991, p. 483).

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"The great irony of the Enlightenment, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue, is that while it sought to eradicate myth, it created a new myth, the myth of "reason."
Ricoeur makes the excellent point that whenever a second order form of rationality, such as historical or scientific explanation, is substituted for the elemental narrative understanding that precedes it and upon which it is based, the effectiveness of second order explanation—if not its very existence—"depends upon forgetting how rooted semiotic rationality is in narrative understanding, for which it attempts to provide an equivalent or a simulacrum on its own level" (p. 242).

Myth, the world of magic, disappears whenever its free floating signifiers and metaphors are replaced with rational, formal language that is based on the unity of signifier and signified. Inimical to it are discontinuity and unassignable meaning. As Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) point out about the Enlightenment—or the discursive formation Foucault termed modernity—number was its canon, abstraction its tool, with these it attempted to excise the incommensurable. In their efforts to liquidate the polyvalent, various types of codification schemes attempt to corral, if not level, polyglossia.

However, only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 61). The myth of language, is, of course, the notion that computation and utility, one-to-one correspondence between word and referent are able to serve up "truth" and "reality." On one level, then, Memphis
may be viewed as an attempt to communicate in the poetic language of the first order, to return to the realm of myth, to assemble stories with the prelinguistic stuff of which myths are fashioned—in short, to implement a polyglossia capable of transcending the narrow framework, the absolute dogma of monoglossia. As Memphis designer Marco Zanini stated:

Hoffmann often used precious materials like mother-of-pearl, but they were essentially lines. If we use mother-of-pearl, we use square miles of it, because it's the mother-of-pearl that tells the story and not the line (Radice, 1984, p. 67).

This use of materials qua symbolic properties, requires that materials be emptied of their institutionalized meanings—which are often bound up with their exchange value—i.e., that they be de-conventionalized; only then can Memphis procure a clean slate upon which to inscribe their symbolism. Memphis wants to break the dominant code in order to re-code material with new values. In this, Memphis recalls certain aspects of Russian chivalric culture, which in several respects was a precursor to Memphis. Lotman (1990) tells us that this medieval culture was oriented towards the sign. In order to acquire cultural value in this system, a thing had to become a sign, i.e. it had to be maximally purified of its practical and non-semiotic function. Hence for a
feudal lord in early Russia, "honour" was bound up with the acquisition of a rich portion of the booty of war, or a large handout, from his sovereign. However, once obtained, the law of honour required that it should be used in a way that maximally belittled its material value, and thereby emphasized its semiotic value (p. 258).

As in medieval Russia, so too in Memphis are materials converted into signs that have no inherent value, they acquire value only through the significance ascribed to them. And this significance has to do with ritual value.

**Bricolage**

In recent years, much has been made of Picasso’s appropriation of African art—where "appropriation" is a euphemism for theft. However, Picasso never literally copied any African object. Rather, Picasso appropriated the spirit of African art and its language, its semiotics of ambiguity, and by doing so was able to extend his range of metaphorical expression and thereby revitalize the syntax of painting. The "primitive" means of expression that Picasso appropriated consisted of a heterogeneous system of symbols, sort of a collection of prefabricated odds and ends that Levi-Strauss (1968) termed *bricolage*, and which Geertz (1973) likens to chips from a kaleidoscope that "are images
drawn from myth, ritual, magic, and empirical lore" (p. 352).

While Levi-Strauss, and, following him, Geertz press the point that "savage logic" is finite and operates in something of a box, Yves-Alain Bois found that in specific instances, such as the vocabulary evidenced in African masks, the primitive language system is arbitrary and infinite because the sculptural elements no longer have need of any direct resemblance to their referent. A cowry can represent an eye, but a nail can fill the same function . . . . a cowry can represent an eye but also a navel or a mouth; therefore, an eye is also a mouth or a navel. Picasso, in fact, had perceived African art's potential for metaphoric extension as early as 1907 (pp. 84-85).

In this African system, signifiers— for example, a cowry, a colored shell that is polished bright—are not welded to a single monological meaning. This mode of communication— at least as it is interpreted through Western eyes— is inimical to the rigidity of definite, authoritarian signification: signifiers operate in a type of free zone. In addition, anything may serve as a symbol— a nail, a sea shell— signification is truly heterogeneous. This type of heterogeneity is precisely the stuff from which myths are fashioned. Levi-Strauss (1968) has termed the use of such
"found" materials bricolage. The bricoleur, says Levi-Strauss, takes stock of the materials in his or her cultural inventory and begins a selection process by ascertaining what each object in the cultural treasury could possibly signify. The bricoleur selects from coded objects, but by virtue of new material combinations, may in fact express something new. In examining an already existent set of objects comprised of tools and materials, the bricoleur must consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify' and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize but which will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts. (Levi-Strauss, 1968, p. 18).

For Levi-Strauss, the bricoleur is an ideal type, a representative of mythic or first-order thinking, against which he compares the second-order thinking of the scientist or engineer. To put forth a hypothesis of what pre-scientific thinking might have been like, Levi-Strauss posits the idea of a bricoleur, sort of an aboriginal handyman who has a limited repertoire of "sign" material to
work with, and which is further constrained by cultural inscription. The possibilities of signification possessed by each item the bricoleur finds, says Levi-Strauss, always remain limited by the particular history of each piece and by those of its features which are already determined by the use for which it was originally intended or the modifications it has undergone for other purposes. The elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre (1968, p. 19).

In other words, the materials at one's disposal have already been inscribed—"pre-constrained"—in accordance with cultural tradition, and therefore possess a limited communicative range. Geertz (1973) elaborates on this notion of communication via a finite set of symbols comprised of prefabricated odds and ends. For Geertz, "savage logic" is like making a mosaic from kaleidoscopic elements:

the elements of the conceptual world are given, prefabricated as it were, and thinking consists in fiddling with the elements. Savage logic works like a kaleidoscope whose chips can fall into a variety of
patterns while remaining unchanged in quantity, form, or color. The number of patterns producible in this way may be large if the chips are numerous and varied enough, but it is not infinite. The patterns consist in the disposition of the chips vis-a-vis one another (that is, they are a function of the relationships among the chips rather than their individual properties considered separately). And their range of possible transformations is strictly determined by the construction of the kaleidoscope, the inner law which governs its operation. And so it is too with savage thought. Both anecdotal and geometric, it builds coherent structures of 'the odds and ends left over from psychological or historical process' (p. 352).

In order to communicate, if not exactly in a "savage logic," then in the pre-linguistic or sensual realm, one of the strategies Memphis employed involved the use of "pristine" materials, those that had yet to be inscribed with meaning. Memphis attempted to highjack images, patterns, colors, before they had congealed into a stable meaning. To ensure that their objects communicated in such a pre-linguistic fashion, Memphis searched for materials that were untainted by institutionalized culture. One source they mined were germinal cultures, such as the suburbanized fringes of Tokyo and Los Angeles, areas that appear to be in a permanent state of expansion and ferment.
Another source of "uninscribed" elements that Memphis used to fashion their pieces were those industrial materials that Sottsass termed "aseptic," i.e., uncontaminated. These included printed glass, zinc-plated and textured sheet metals, neon tubes, and especially plastic laminates.

Ritual

In much the same fashion that Picasso appropriated the spirit and semiotic ambiguity of African art, from India, Memphis appropriated the spirit and purpose of ritual, i.e., the role that icons and simple household objects play in the daily lives of even the poorest Indians.

Sottsass (Burney, 1991) remarked that small personal rituals give us pause for reflection, for the contemplation of the mystery of life. However, the ritualistic potential of objects is lost—or forgotten—on most people in the West, overwhelmed as they are by myriad consumer goods whose essential reason for existence is to drive a production system predicated on planned obsolescence. Branzi remarked the flood of commodities that has engulfed the West:

Among the many and radical upheavals resulting from the Industrial Revolution, there was also a change in the nature of objects. There was a progressive evolution of commodities, items of furniture, tools, appliances, systems of products, and services. Over the span of
roughly 200 years these commodities invaded the whole field of existence, until they formed a continual and close-packed presence in people's daily life. At the beginning of the last century, the home of a reasonably well-off family of four contained a set of objects comprising no more than 150-200 items, including crockery and clothing. The home of a comparable family today might contain 2500 to 3000 objects, including electric appliances and items used in the pursuance of hobbies but not such items as books, records, and tapes (1988, p. 14).

In such an environment objects suffocate the spirit. They emit the same unrelenting monosyllabic din: "buy." On one of his many global pilgrimages, Sottsass discovered that the poor have much to teach the rich:

An Indian family has nothing. They sit on the floor, eat with their hands, their dresses are just a piece of fabric; so that a small bronze bowl, for instance, becomes something of immense importance in the environment. It becomes an instrument for thought, for meditation, for signifying that someone is a leading person in society. And because of this importance, craftsmen work these objects more carefully, more subtly, so that they become beautiful, vibrating with mystery and magic (Burney, 1991, p. 95).
In contrast to other cultures and civilizations, Sottsass saw that we in the West consume everything at a relentless pace because there is always something else to consume after it. Indeed, advertising promotes the notion that our sense of self derives from our patterns of consumption. Memphis seized upon the notion of designing objects that could serve to stimulate a form of private ritualism that might serve to corral this incessant—largely meaningless—running in circles. The West does not lack large, public rituals—inaugurations, commencements, World Cups—but suffers from a dearth of private, contemplative rituals.

An analogous—if not directly related—condition obtains in our manner of thought. Heidegger (1966) has identified two essential modes of thought: calculative thinking and meditative thinking. Meditative thinking is synonymous with speculative or philosophical thought; while calculative thinking computes. It plans and investigates, its purview is means and ends, "it races from one prospect to the next" never stopping to gather itself. In contrast, meditative thinking is occupied with the deliberate, methodical contemplation of "the meaning which reigns in everything that is" (p. 46).

Both modes of thought are necessary. However, because of the emphasis placed on "getting ahead" people become
"maze bright" and calculation completely overshadows meditative thought, thereby dwarfing human potential.

The operative idea in Memphis is that the creation of new icons or signs will create new desires, which in turn will create an openness to new or different ways of life. To this end, many of their pieces have a totemic or anthropomorphic look, e.g., Casablanca, a sideboard in plastic laminate designed by Ettore Sottsass. Casablanca recalls the wooden totemic sculpture of Keith Haring, whose work comes out of the New York subway or aerosol art of the 1970s. As described earlier, Casablanca is a piece whose function is ambiguous. It resembles a garish primitive totem speckled in black, its red crown and arms angled toward the sky while encasing a white thorax and a yellow abdomen. Casablanca could be used as a dresser, but its primary function appears ritualistic. Perhaps the piece points to the ritual of dressing, to the symbolic use of clothing.

Memphis also invested a good deal of effort in designing teapots and vases—as if to remind us that such objects are as old as human culture and are handed down to us not merely as functional objects, but as ritual objects. A relatively modern ritual object is the clock. We tend to forget just how recent is this practice of quantifying our lives through ubiquitous timepieces. The clocks in the Memphis collection are all quite functional, yet their
mechanisms are contained in very dysfuction and loudly colored housings— as if to remind us that the rationalization of life known as scientific management is predicated on measuring efficiency through the stopwatch.

Less Inscribed

Memphis objects were designed with the intention that they would "interact" with people in novel and stimulating ways and thus induce the type of meditative thinking that would fill the objects and people's lives with new meanings. Memphis aimed to both circumvent, and call attention to the conventional meanings inscribed upon the objects that envelop and shape our lives. According to conventional meaning, i.e., how an object has been codified, the particular shape, color and material of a chair—a high-backed mahogany Chippendale, for example— "means" that it functions as a piece of dining room furniture. The chair's meaning derives from its cultural context, the way it has been used. As such, the Chippendale is not "meant" for the patio or the patriarch's den. As a dining room chair, the piece occupies a contextual role as one of the objects that constitute the horizon against which certain rituals are performed as people act out the drama of their lives. The chair participates in a web of meaning. It derives its meaning by pointing to other objects, to its designer and modes of production, to the ways of thinking and acting that
its appearance presuppose. In this pointing, the Chippendale reveals its dialogical dimension; even though the chair is "dumb," it speaks; it is "inhabited by linguisticality." In explicating Heidegger's conception of language as Logos, Pilotta and Mickunas say that,

The implement we employ, made by someone, communicates to us the other's presence, the one who designed, the one who made, and the one who transported this implement to us, are all gathered in the implement, and the implement transmits the presence of the others. The shape of the handle of a hammer, carved and polished by the hand of the other, points to, indicates, and speaks of the other, creating a silent dialogical process. And the hammer in turn is not just an object; as an implement it deploys its own world. It points to a nail and the nail points to a board and the board to a wall and the wall to a house and the house to a family, a town, or a region that one inhabits. In its deployment of the world, the hammer gathers it and signifies it. This hammer already radiates various possibilities and uses and thus constitutes an entire communicative system, a communicative world of dialogue (1990, pp. 57-58).

The Chippendale points not only to the past, but to the future as well. Its appearance in a particular context creates a set of possibilities--certain ways of being-in-
the-world—while excluding others. In other words, its power to communicate, to open new vistas and ways life is constricted; its range of expression constrained. Its meaning has become cliched, no longer animated by the movement, the energy, of fresh interpretation.

Recontextualization

Typically, we derive our understanding of signs from their context. One of the strategies adopted by Memphis is a shifting of context, inserting plastics into the living room, for example. These different coded elements—plastics, marble, even color—work by way of metaphor. In terms of their institutionalized meaning, marble is a metaphor for power, and plastic for the tawdry, for low culture. Sottsass' Park Lane coffee table is a good example of recontextualization in the way it juxtaposes cheap and expensive materials. The piece uses serpentine marble, in the shape of an enormous hockey puck, that rests upon cascading rectangular turquoise fiberglass feet. The marble may be read as a sign high culture, and the plastic as a sign of low or mass culture. However, the juxtaposition doesn’t lock the piece into any single fixed meaning. For example, the piece can be interpreted as a wish for a more egalitarian society, the masses and the elite working in harmony, each fulfilling an essential function; it can also be interpreted as the elite crushing the masses; or it can
be read as an attempt to reverse the scale of values attached to certain symbols.

Sottsass once remarked that people who covered themselves in gold thought they were the "best" because gold is the best. "I want to say," he said, "if you wear plastic you are the best because plastic is the best."

Memphis takes "into account how people read plastic laminates and garish colors as signs of the supposedly tacky masses and marble as a sign of power and wealth," said Richard Horn, author of Memphis (1983), one of the first books on Memphis. The incorporation of marble and plastic in a single piece "laughs off the hierarchies of powerful and powerless by which most societies are organized" (Osborne, 1985).

Memphis wants to change these inscribed meanings through contextual reversals and by creating new amalgams. In so doing, Memphis lays bare the process of meaning-making. They reveal the workings of iconographic shifts. Memphis seems to be saying: "We don't know what this means yet, but if we trace the origin of perceptual intensity, that which draws our attention, and chart how understanding emerges from this raw data and the process by which we ascribe meaning, then we will have some insight into what communication is all about, at least the structure of communication."
Ricoeur (1991) has noted that one of the functions of myth is to found or establish a community (p. 488). This is what Memphis invites us to do: re-create, create something new out of all of this. The Memphis strategy presupposes that the "mythic kernel," or the spirit of a culture, will take root in alien soil. In other words, Memphis is attempting to effect a non-exploitative form of appropriation or new interpretations.

If Heidegger is correct, interpretation is not merely an action in life, but the form of life. And this form is what is meant by structure. But structure here is invisible or only inferred from behavior, thus structure itself is a metaphor, it implies limits or boundaries. We ourselves aren’t typically aware of these. What we often take for natural boundaries spring from cultural or individual limitations, we don’t see the limits of our perception as a boundary.

As Gadamer and Bakhtin have shown, through dialogue with an alien "Other" we become aware of our limits, we "see" beyond our limits and thereby grow. Memphis may be seen as an attempt to chart and thereby expand our personal and cultural boundaries. This expansion or intensification of experience falls within the purview of dialogue:

Without dialogue our views and experiences would be locked within a narrow range. We discover our own limits only when our views are contested in a
dialogical encounter. The dialogical partner de-centers us from our own egocentricity and opens us up to experiences that not only contest our own, but also expand our horizons. This is prior to any reflective self-reference of the individual to itself (P&M, 1990, p. 63).
CHAPTER VII
THE WIND CRIES MARY

Introduction

In this chapter I will use several musical phrases to exemplify Heidegger's conception of non-exploitative appropriation as a type of communication that unveils an object's hidden aspects. To show how non-exploitative appropriation is essentially an unveiling—that it proceeds by way of previously veiled or untrammeled pathways and in so doing brings an object's hidden potential to light—I will analyze the hidden aspects contained in two popular recordings that continue to be widely heard decades after their initial releases: "Johnny B. Goode," recorded by Chuck Berry in 1957, and "The Wind Cries Mary," recorded by Jimi Hendrix in 1967. My analysis will focus on a single, one bar instrumental phrase, a musical statement four beats in duration—articulated on the electric guitar—that Hendrix appropriated from Berry. Hendrix, however, did not merely "steal" the phrase.¹ Starting with the same

¹The good ones rarely, if ever, merely "steal." They work the phrase until it becomes "theirs," sometimes to the point where even the artist who "originated" the phrase is unable to recognize it. When asked if he ever stole phrases from other guitar players, Keith Richard of the Rolling Stones
musical statement, or the same content, Hendrix appropriated it in such a way as to reveal its latent potential. Thus while an old phrase was articulated in a new (form) fashion, it was handled in a way that did not rupture the organic connection between old and new; the statement that Berry articulated on guitar can be heard in the Hendrix recording—provided one knows what to listen for. One must be acquainted with the root language(s) in order to discern any de-formation in phrasing. With Hendrix it is often difficult to hear his stock of appropriated root phrases because his kaleidoscopic tone is so enormously bewitching and often deliberately distorted that one hears nothing beyond the skeletal support.

answered: "Yeah, if it’s a good one, and I’ve never heard it before -- mainly because I want to know how it’s done. Then I get paranoid about using it. You eventually find that it will come out in a totally different way afterwards -- if you don’t just consciously copy it and throw it in the minute you’ve learned it. You sort of assimilate it and put something of your own into it, so it’s not an exact copy. And maybe the same guy you nicked it off of will think it’s so different that he will steal it back again. . . . . [If someone tells me, ‘Here’s a lick I stole from you,’] I’ll say, ‘Didn’t you know I stole that lick from Chuck Berry?’ -- or Muddy Waters or somebody like that. Yeah, you can be pretty sure that if you stole it from somebody then he got it from somebody else, too" (Kutina, 1977, p. 56).
Dialogic Appropriation as Unveiling

Had Hendrix appropriated Berry in a ready-to-hand manner, he would have merely embalmed the phrase, turning it into a museum piece, a stale musical convention. Therefore, as well known as these numbers are, few listeners would discern the phrase in "Johnny B. Goode" that was appropriated by Jimi Hendrix, even if both phrases were repeatedly played back-to-back.²

However, I will show that both phrases are surface manifestations of the same deep structure, that they flow from the same source, the same cultural tradition. Another way of saying that both phrases share the same deep structure is to say that they both employ the same syntax and grammar. Both musicians speak the same language—a hybrid of black and white southern folk traditions—although in a highly personal manner. While both phrases appropriate from the same tradition, they do so in a dialogic fashion that extends the breadth of the tradition and revitalizes it. The personal use of tradition, i.e., the appropriation of words and phrases from a musical vocabulary or language is analogous to linguistic appropriation as explained by Bakhtin (1981):

²There are, of course, other reasons for this. Some of these have to do with musical context, and duration or tempo — "Johnny B. Goode" is rhythmically different and twice as fast as "The Wind Cries Mary" — and the physical quality or "color" of sound, which is based, in part, on the "touch" and technique of each individual musician, and differences in musical and recording equipment.
As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes "one’s own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated--overpopulated--the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it
to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process (pp. 293-94).

We are all familiar with instances of musical appropriation that simply don't come off, that have been gotten out of a "dictionary"—for example, an Englishman who has never been further south than Coventry singing, in black dialect, about life on an Arkansas prison farm; indeed, a few centuries ago a Spanish guitarist remarked that a guitar in the hands of an Englishman is blasphemous. Just as language is "a living, socio-ideological concrete thing," so too are other cultural symbol systems or modes of communication, such as musical genres. In an "oral," i.e., non-written musical tradition, such as one of the variety of American southern folk traditions, musical phrases are not gotten out of a dictionary. They "belong" to someone else, who articulates the phrase in accordance with his or her intentions. At the same time, as long as the tradition is vibrant, the language is never closed off; the phrases are never finished.

To express this in dialectical terms, the difference in each musician's handling of traditional material is "essentially a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form" (Jameson, 1972, p. 348).

I will begin by offering a description "The Wind Cries Mary" that shows how the phrase Hendrix appropriated from Berry is one of several dialogic elements that constitute
the song. Then I will offer a partial genealogy of the phrase that shows its appearance in "Johnny B. Goode" to be a moment in its development rather than an originating event. I will conclude by showing how the elements I have highlighted function to effect a non-exploitative form of appropriation.

A Tale of Two Songs

Each song, "The Wind Cries Mary" and "Johnny B. Goode," may be viewed as a complete story, a self-contained whole that presents a world created through musical and verbal narration. In short, each song is an aural dialogic novel, a musical story told in a multiplicity of voices that reflect the confluence of the border cultures that each artist absorbed—primarily the meeting of black and white southern American traditions. If each song is a novel, then the individual 12-bar choruses\(^3\) that comprise the songs, may be viewed as chapters, and in turn, the individual bars that comprise the chapters may be viewed as paragraphs or perhaps sentences.

Each phrase that I will examine functions as a part of various greater "wholes," i.e., as a part in a chorus, song,

\(^3\)"Johnny B. Goode" follows the traditional 12-bar blues form, while "The Wind Cries Mary" is only loosely based on that form, having choruses of 11-bars and a harmonic pattern that incorporates elements from "country & western" music. However, in deviating from the "strict" blues form, Hendrix actually realigns himself with the true spirit of the blues tradition, which I will treat later in this chapter.
collection of songs on an album, and as a part of the entire musical output of each artist. However, each phrase is also capable of standing alone and makes perfect sense in isolation (but such a synchronic analysis would not succeed in revealing the hidden relationships that connect each phrase. As Jameson (1972) points out, the purpose of dialectical analysis is to show that what appears to be self-evident draws "its force from hosts of buried presuppositions" (p. 308).

Without an account of total content, that is, past and present—and thus a glimpse of future possibility—misapprehension is often the result. Looked at in isolation, particularly through the smudged lens of time, things that are seen as radically new for their era are actually expressions of a cultural tradition whose suppositions are invisible—or inaudible—to the observer. As Pete Welding has pointed out, "Many a presumed innovator actually was far less a personally creative performer than a gifted carrier and shaper of tradition, taking and remolding an existent regional approach to more or less personal ends."

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"Taken from the liner notes of the record album The Immortal Blind Lemon Jefferson. Milestone (MLP 2004)."
This slow, plaintive ballad is one of the "prettiest" songs Hendrix recorded. It appeared on the 1967 album *Are You Experienced?* the first of three albums recorded by the Jimi Hendrix Experience (Mitch Mitchell, drums; Noel Redding, bass). "The Wind Cries Mary" is an ambivalent wash of colors and cultures. In lyric, vocal delivery and mood, Hendrix the singer seems to have adopted the persona of a railroad tramp—albeit a deeply sensitive and poetic tramp. The broken chord voicings on the electric guitar's treble strings that open the performance contain echoes of the "high lonesome sound" of the Appalachian bluegrass banjo. Variations on this double-stopped rhythm guitar motif—which is allowed to blossom one octave higher during the 11-bar guitar solo—function throughout the song to "answer" a vocal line. A line is sung and the guitar not only punctuates the phrase, but seems to extend its emotional range by taking the impulse deeper and probing its origins.

For example, in the song's second chorus, Hendrix sings: "A broom is drearily sweeping"—then pauses while the guitar punctuates the vocal phrase with the rhythm motif, two bright splashes (appropriated from urban "country" music); then returns to the lyric—"up the broken

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5In lyric and delivery, Hendrix is appropriating Bob Dylan -- whose music he greatly admired -- to such an extent that the song sounds like a Bob Dylan cover.
pieces of yesterday's life"—the vocal line ends and the rhythm guitar motif is repeated, spreading a backwash of self-depreciating pathos. This call and response between the vocals and the guitar gives the song its basic structure. However, during the solo, which occurs in the song's third chorus, a reversal occurs. This two-note (double-stopped) punctuation that I have described is spread open, and it becomes the basis for a "lyric" sung on the guitar, which in turn is punctuated or answered by a hypnotic five-note "country" pattern that Hendrix plays on his guitar's bass strings.

In a harmonic sense, the solo may be viewed as Hendrix opening up the rhythm motif—as if those two notes were sadness itself, a vacillating blend of despair and hope—and then probing the origins of this sound, this feeling, asking what it's made of and how it's put together; and what occurs when these elements are articulated in different voicings. The solo unfolds as if it were a wave pushed by a warm sirocco that increases its force with each undulation. With each gust the wave increases in height, reaching its apex during the fourth revolution (the seventh bar of the solo).

Actually three notes, a skittish little grace note is hammered on that changes the interval from a major fourth to a minor third; or in non-technical terms, from a "happy" to a "sad" sound. Indeed, "The Wind Cries Mary" is a masterful synthesis of black and white cultural horizons. For example, in this rhythm motif, Hendrix blends notes from the major scale, which typifies country music, with notes from the minor scale, which characterizes "blues" music.
Following this, in the next measure, Hendrix plays the Berry phrase, which functions as the "point" of the solo. (See Appendix for a transcription of both phrases.)

Prior to the "point," the sound ebbed and flowed in the same direction. The "point" reverses the motion. The effect is like being given a sudden glimpse of a cool, underground stream, the secret source of that emotional compound that animates the song. The hidden is unveiled.

Johnny B. Goode

So completely and creatively did Hendrix appropriate and color this phrase that its source is virtually inaudible. Yet, if the phrase is double-timed in an eighth-note rhythm, Chuck Berry immediately appears.® I previously mentioned that even though both "Johnny B. Goode" and "The Wind Cries Mary" are well known songs, few

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®The "point" is a concept I appropriated from the Russian composer and pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff. I use "point" to designate not so much the climax of a piece, although in certain pieces the point may be the climax, but rather its key "statement." All the other elements in a composition work to set up or unveil the point. If a musician does not give proper weight and articulation to the supporting elements, he or she "misses the point." In "The Wind Cries Mary," the climax or apex of the solo occurs in the seventh measure, which sets up the point in the eighth measure.

®The same type of dialogic appropriation occurs on the Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper album. If stripped of all studio effects, and played up-tempo, virtually every guitar George Harrison fill on the album can be heard as having been appropriated from the classic rockabilly records of the 1950s.
listeners would be able to spot the appropriated phrase.® The reasons I listed had to do with the factors that contribute to the "coloring" of sound. However, once the phrases are "captured" and notated, their similarity becomes immediately apparent. However, while transcription may show derivation, it doesn't reveal another important aspect of appropriation, its physical or corporeal basis.

As Heidegger (1962) has shown, at base appropriation is a type of communication. The way in which an object is appropriated may reveal its hidden aspects. And to bring Heidegger's language down to earth, the significance of his conception of "unveiling" and that train of thinking, is manifested in a concrete analogue, journey. To unveil an object's hidden aspect is to literally reveal a new path that may be taken. Often, what we term creativity or innovation is the discovery of latent potential in some object. An object is appropriated or "inscribed" with one's style or meaning. It is meant in a new way. Such discovery has a physical rather than a cerebral basis in that inscription has a pre-linguistic origin, it originates in the feet of a dancer, in the hands of a musician. We make discoveries and explore the world through bodily movements, revealing the abilities to do something, to reach, push, pull, handle, and let go.

®The phrase occurs in the fourth measure of the introduction.
By exploring the world, we equally explore our movements and abilities in a way that there is a direct inner-communication with the world. . . . A missed reach, an unattained object directly reflects on the movement eliciting either prolongation or variation of the movement to reach (Pilotta & Mickunas, 1990, p. 132).

"A missed reach" or a missed note has resulted in many a "hit" song. But serendipity aside, the point I wish to make is that our discoveries are guided by "the order of things." Unveiling an object's hidden aspects, discovering a novel interpretation, is often a matter of taking a different path, which comes into view during the process of appropriation. In other words, the "idea" for what I have termed the "point" of the solo in "The Wind Cries Mary" most likely originated in a deviation from the patterned movement of Hendrix's fingers--a pattern, or a way of moving, that Hendrix appropriated if not from Berry, then from the same cultural reservoir.

In essence, Hendrix has appropriated Berry's phrase--or whom ever it belonged to, it rightfully belongs to a shared tradition, but it's owner may be identified as the last one to articulate it, i.e., appropriate it, dialogically--but not in a ready-to-hand fashion, and in so doing he has revealed a hidden aspect of the original phrase: a fork in the road, a path not taken. After the second beat, Berry
abandoned the D/F double-stop and turned "down" the road, taking the path of the tonic (B-flat) to the dominant (G). In contrast, after the second beat, Hendrix took a different route, he didn't totally abandon the double-stop, but moved up a half-step on the interval's lower rung, i.e., he climbed from a D to an E-flat. Berry's destination was also the E-flat, but he reached it in the following measure. One may say, then, that Hendrix took a "short-cut" and in so doing, created a new way of being-in-the-world by renewing a tradition.

Conclusion

My analysis has treated the appropriated phrase as if it originated with Chuck Berry. In one sense, it did, just as "The Wind Cries Mary" originated with Jimi Hendrix. But the vocabulary did not originate with Berry. The phrase has much deeper origins. Berry, in turn, had appropriated it from another musician, in all probability Charlie Christian. And one might suppose that Christian in turn

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10This interval is precisely what makes this phrase the "point." Certainly, I am not the first to recognize this measure's beauty and "originality."

11While I will not treat Berry's appropriation of Christian, I will point out that the basis for "Johnny B. Goode" -- in terms of approach and selection of notes, indeed, the "Wind Cries Mary" solo is based on the same notes -- may be found in the first solo Christian takes on Benny Goodman's "Breakfast Feud," recorded on Columbia (Co 29259) in either 1940 or 1941. Christian's influence on Berry has been remarked by Berry himself and others; for example, Christian's fingerprints are all over the introduction that Berry plays on
appropriated some variation of the phrase from Blind Lemon Jefferson, certainly the southern air they breathed was close in time and proximity: Oklahoma in the 1930s for Christian, and Texas in the 1920s for Jefferson. And Jefferson in turn could have appropriated it from any number of sources.

That the phrase is still a "live wire" has to do with the fact that it was not merely copied, which would have killed it. In not articulating it exactly, each musician appropriated the phrase in a dialogic fashion. For his part, Hendrix plays with time, he opens up the dimension of time, stepping out of normal time. Hendrix frequently stretches a phrase or note like a word becoming pure sound until it's meaning is forgotten and its elemental state is reached, its pure essence—sonority. As such, the phrase becomes pure negativity, uninscribed. It opens a rent in, and calls into question, ossified genres by straddling genres. In the language of my conceptual framework, "The Wind Cries Mary" is a dialogue between genres—black and white southern folk traditions. Yet it escapes easy codification. The song contains both blues and country elements yet it also violates both genres, thereby changing or, as Bakhtin would say, "renewing" each genre. Thus the phrase hasn't become a museum piece because it remains

fluid, and for the most part not recognizable, yet the echoes of too many voices are preserved in the phrase for it to fall prey to easy codification.

Too often we seem to pay attention to the core of meaning at the expense of the peripheries—the outer trappings of the form, the carrier of meaning, which we marginalize as merely decorative or non-functional. Yet, it seems to me, often it is precisely style that points to the marginal region of options. The unexplored periphery is the sphere of creativity, as evidenced in "The Wind Cries Mary." These outer regions contain untrammeled pathways. Thus the individual, without the loss of individuality, can become a carrier and transmitter of a tradition or institution without the loss of the ability to add to the "supra-consciousness" a unique meaning whose horizon of implications may change the tradition and institutions (P&M, 1990, pp. 69-70).
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The **raison d’etre** of this project was to call attention to a qualitative transformation in the sphere of experience—the horizon against which we act out the drama of our lives. I related this concern to the "project" of self-actualization, a theme that implicitly connects many of the writers whose works I synthesized. Nietzsche and Heidegger immediately come to mind, as does Foucault, who wrote to "escape" or transform himself. Racevskis has pointed out that what permits the possibility of such an escape or transformation is the gap or disjuncture "between the dimension shaping our knowledge of the world and our experience of the world" (1993, p. 41). It seems to me that the commodification of seemingly every sphere of experience, which the physical and psychic encroachment of advertising typifies and promotes, is diminishing or closing this gap.

Against the commodification of experience, against the leveling of diversity, I posited dialogue as an antidote. I argued that dialogue is inextricably bound to critical thinking, which has been posited as the agent of change since Plato. To change is to occupy a different position,
physically or psychically or both. And dialogue is a type of movement in thought. (Indeed, what is thinking if not movement?) But dialogue induces a specific type of change having to do with openness. In dialogue a change is wrought in one’s understanding of self; to the extent that one’s horizon has expanded and one’s sensibilities have sharpened in acuity, one can be said to have emerged from the experience of dialogue a changed "self." In the common parlance of artistic experience, one has been "moved"—moved quite literally into a new perspective, into new possibilities of signification. Thus one is able to view the world from a heretofore hidden perspective, to observe that which was once veiled from view. The endeavor to broaden one’s perspective is an attempt to engage in a more worldly experience. However, the spread of global advertising and consumer culture threatens to replace myriad local cultures and their attendant possibilities of being and doing with a single, frame of reference, consumption and maximum return on investment.

Memphis was an attempt to "shake things up." Do to so they employed a novel strategy. In one sense, they succeeded, in another, they failed—caught as they were in "the" postmodern dilemma. Having seen through the avant-garde as an elite status game tied to the exigencies of the art market, Memphis attempted to go beyond, to extricate themselves from—to paraphrase Foucault—the contingencies
that made them what they were, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what they were. Yet to go beyond, they had to take cognizance of their heritage, and in doing so they extended it. In essence, Memphis never escaped the avant-garde, they simply extended its envelope. But how better to escape the designation of *outre* than by a radical reversal of direction, by plunging into the center of consumer culture—mass production and distribution. But who could afford a $19,000 bed designed by Michael Graves, save the denizens of the very art world Memphis sought to repudiate?

Yet in another sense, if their works are "read" as philosophy, as an extension of the critical tradition, Memphis succeeded in two crucial and related areas: they called attention to the process of signification, and to the importance of myth.

In their attempt to commandeer the "levers" of commercial appropriation, Memphis illuminated the process of signification, its corporeal aspect. Certain of their pieces provide perfect three-dimensional exemplars of Kristeva’s theory of signification. In such pieces, both the semiotic and symbolic are present, reminding us that signification has a sensual, kinetic origin. Kristeva chastised formal linguistics for losing sight of the connection between signification and the world, i.e.,
historical and biological factors—the peripheries of the "text."

Memphis also served as a reminder of the importance of myth and rituals. The idea is not to try to eradicate myth, to somehow attempt to carry out the project of the Enlightenment—as if this were desirable or even possible. Every culture possesses a reservoir of inscribed meanings or signs—a bricolage—that make it possible to communicate certain things, but when a culture stagnates and the movement of creative interpretation comes to a standstill, meaning ossifies, becomes dogmatic. When this condition obtains, one is not able to use certain materials, forms and shapes to say something new (Radice, 1984, p. 67).

To enhance the possibility that their pieces would stimulate new interpretations, Memphis designed their objects to operate as predominately visual and sensual instruments of communication. The specific creative activity Memphis attempts to engender is the making of new myths and narratives, the telling of new stories about ourselves. Their strategy involved an attempt to wipe clean the slate of meaning and find a combination of shapes, colors and materials that would generate that aesthetic electric charge known variously as the "pathic moment" or the "mythic kernel." The Memphis experiment, in effect, was an attempt to go "behind" meaning, to manipulate the sensual elements—color, shape, texture—that give rise to meaning.
Prior to the bare possibility for the occurrence of dialogue, the world is presented to us, a perceptual field is given to us: we find ourselves in the midst of objects, persons, events.¹ Along with the appearance of the world, there emerge various possible ways of signifying or ascribing meaning to the objects that comprise the world. Thus the world is always woven into the dialogical process of signification.

The world is "given" to us or manifests itself through movement. Movement allows for the possibility of signification; and meaning, in turn, is the "hinge"² that connects movement and signification. Only through the process of signification—or pointing to something in the world—do our signifiers, be they corporeal gestures or the expression of some other type of medium or modality, acquire significance, that is, become "filled" or inscribed with meaning. This is not to speak of an ultimate fixity of meaning, but, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) point out, there must be at least a partial fixation, because meaning is never outside a system of differences. Thus without a partial inscription of meaning, "the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning" (p. 112).

¹Or in Samuel Beckett's less cheery description, we are "thrown" into the absurd glare of a pitiless world where the fulfillment of desire always seems an arm's length away.

²For this insight I am indebted to Joseph Pilotta.
Once an object or sign is filled or inscribed with meaning—at least partially—it suggests further possibilities of meaning. One signifier points to another signifier and so forth. This chain of signifiers extends the "dialogical domain." According to Pilotta and Mickunas, the intertwining of the world in the inscription process "allows the extension of the dialogical process across historical periods and dialogical partners who are not corporeally present" (1990, p. 67).

The unveiling of an object’s hidden aspects—traces of voices and cultures long past—engender possibilities for new meanings. In other words, "an unnoticed possibility from a temporal horizon may enter the field of dialogue and change the meanings constituting the current phase of the dialogue" (P&M, 1990, p. 68).

The past plays a significant role in the inscription of meaning. The past always lurks in the present. To speak of unveiling the hidden, or making the invisible visible, is to point to vestiges of the past—the sediment of experience—in the present. One way of conceptualizing the past is as unexplored options. The process of signifying, say Pilotta and Mickunas, may bring into view "a marginal region of options not explored." And at the same time, the personal style of those bound in dialogical partnership "add a novelty, add a shift to the dialogical domain and implicate unnoticed variations and horizons" (1990, p. 69).
As I demonstrated with Jimi Hendrix's appropriation of Chuck Berry, non-exploitative appropriation is dialogic, i.e., a mode of communication that discloses hidden aspects of the object under consideration while resisting or questioning the blind-acceptance of ready-made interpretations and conventional ways of being-in-the-world. The discourse of non-exploitative appropriation proceeds by returning to "the ground of what is talked about," in other words, it gives voice to a historical dimension that has been submerged under the weight of singular, ready-to-hand interpretations.
Phrase A is an approximation of what Chuck Berry played in the fourth measure of the introduction to "Johnny B. Goode."\(^1\) Phrase B is an approximation of what Jimi Hendrix played in the ninth measure of his solo in "The Wind Cries Mary."\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Transcription taken from \textit{Guitar} (1985, October, p. 42).

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