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KEY SCHOLARSHIP BY ANTHONY ELLIOTT

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CHAPTER 1
GENERAL INTRODUCTION
For those working in the social sciences and humanities – from social and political theorists to philosophers – identity is a topic that remains of fundamental significance and of enduring relevance to the world in which we live. The great foundational figures of philosophy and social thought – from Aristotle to Kant to Hegel – all underscored the essential importance of identity to the attainment of human reflectiveness, personal autonomy and political freedom. Similarly, the great figures of classical social theory such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Freud all developed conceptual accounts of world affairs that underscored the centrality of identity – at once individual and collective – to social relations and cultural praxis. According to classical social theory, the conditions, contours and consequences of identity were to undergo radical transformation as a result of social forces like capitalism, rationalization, the growing complexity of cultural organization, and the redrafting of the human passions and repressed desire. Identity demanded analysis, so it was claimed, because it was at the core of how people experienced – reacted to, and coped with – the early modern industrial transformations sweeping the globe. This emphasis on identity was not just a preoccupation of classical social theory and philosophy, however. Concepts of identity remained prominent in the social sciences throughout the twentieth century. Against the social-historical backcloth of two world wars, including the rise of fascism and socialism, as well as the spread of Western consumer affluence in the post-war years, the notion of identity received sustained analytical attention in the social sciences and humanities. Indeed, there was something of a flourishing of identity in fields as wide-ranging as sociology, political science, history, philosophy, economics and many others – as social scientists sought to come to grips with the major transitions of the era at the level of lived experience and everyday social life. To be sure, identity was recast and reframed time and again in order to better fit with the ebbs and flows of modern industrial society and, later in the century, the advent of post-industrial societies. During this period, identity was catapulted to become a dominant intellectual term for grasping processes of social change and historical transformation. This was evident in a range of analyses which sought to underscore the complex ways in which identity had been transfigured as a result of social upheavals and cultural transformations. Identity, at different times and in different fields, had become secularized, rationalized, administered, decentred, dispersed, isolated, fragmented, fractured or split. Quite remarkably, there were other accounts of identity on offer from the academy which rendered identity communicative, creative, innovative, progressive or future-orientated. This conceptual and political ambivalence informing the field of identity studies is traceable from the early twentieth century to the present day.

In the last few decades especially, identity has become a topic that is increasingly discussed and debated among social theorists. Indeed, subjectivity, selfhood and
identity have become the focus of intense social-theoretical, philosophical and feminist fascination, and it is against this backcloth that social theorists have especially sought to rethink the constitution and reproduction of the affective contours of identity – especially sexualities, bodies, pleasures, desires, impulses and sensations. How to think identity beyond the constraints of inherited social-theoretical categories is a question that is increasingly crucial to the possibilities of political radicalism today. The cultural prompting for this turn towards identity in social theory is not too difficult to discern. In the aftermath of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and particularly because of the rise of feminism, identity has come to be treated as infusing broad-ranging changes taking place in personal and social life. In retrieving what global capitalism and mainstream culture have pushed to the margins, social theory and cultural studies have emphasized the creativity of action essential to identity constitution and identity transformations. Identities, it has been emphasized, are located within the terms of a particular culture and way of life, and as such subjective categories of experience reflect vital details for scrutinizing social relations and political domination at the deepest level. This is not to say that identity is merely a reflex of the social, cultural or political domains. For it is equally the case that identity escapes the confines of social stability, cultural traditions or political imperialism. Or, more accurately, rather than identities merely reproducing the social and political, it multiplies and extends them. Identity may go hand in hand with culture and society, but there is always a remainder, a left-over, something more. It is identity then in the sense of particular subjectivity at work within social relations and cultural life that has gripped much recent social theory. This has been evident in debates in the social sciences and humanities over the politics of identity, sexual diversity, postmodern feminism or post-feminism, gay and lesbian identities, the crisis of personal relationships and family life, AIDS, as well as sexual ethics and the responsibilities of care, respect and love. Understanding how identities are both inside and outside of the complex history of societies has moved increasingly centre-stage in much recent progressive social thought.

In this introduction, I shall explore the central discourses of identity that have shaped, and been reshaped, by contemporary social theory and the social sciences. These approaches can be grouped under four broad headings – psychoanalytic; structuralism, post-structuralist and postmodern; feminism; and theories of identity, individualism and individualization more generally. I make no claim in this analysis to discuss all the significant themes raised by these discourses or theories. Rather I seek to portray the contributions of particular theorists in general terms, in order to suggest some central questions that the analysis of identity raises for social theory today.
IDENTITY AFTER PSYCHOANALYSIS

It is no longer possible, and has not been for many decades, to speak of “identity” without acknowledging the immense transmutation of the term as a result of the Freudian revolution. For Freudianism has changed our culture’s understanding of the very emotional coordinates of identity, twinning sexuality and repression at the very heart of the human subject. This rewriting of identity is complex and more technical than is often recognized in appropriations of Freudian psychoanalysis in popular culture, but nonetheless that such a rewriting of the whole terrain of identity has occurred is largely to Freud’s credit. The theory of psychoanalysis Freud developed views the mind as racked with conflicting desires and painful repressions; it is a model in which the self, or ego, wrestles with the sexual drives of the unconscious on the one hand, and the demands for restraint and denial arising from the superego on the other. Freud’s account of the complex ways in which individual identity is tormented by hidden sources of mental conflict provided a source of inspiration for the undoing of sexual repression in both personal and social life. In our therapeutic culture, constraints on, and denials of, individual identity have been (and, for many, still are) regarded as emotionally and socially harmful. The Freudian insight that personal identity is forged out of the psyche’s encounter with particular experiences, especially those forgotten experiences of childhood, has in turn led to an increasing interest in repressions and repetitions of the self (see Elliott 1998).

Many psychoanalytic critics working in the humanities and social sciences have sought to preserve the radical and critical edge of Freud’s doctrines for analyzing the discourse of identity (see Elliott 1999, 2004). For these theorists, psychoanalysis enjoys a highly privileged position in respect to social critique because of its focus on fantasy and desire, on the ‘inner nature’ or representational aspects of human subjectivity – aspects not reducible to social, political and economic forces. Indeed, social theorists have been drawn to psychoanalytic theory to address a very broad range of issues, ranging from destructiveness (Erich Fromm) to desire (Jean-François Lyotard), communication distortions (Jürgen Habermas) to the rise of narcissistic culture (Christopher Lasch). It is perhaps in terms of the analysis of identity, however, that Freud and psychoanalysis have most obviously contributed to (and some would also say hampered) social theory and cultural studies. Psychoanalysis has certainly been important as a theoretical resource for comprehending the centrality of specific configurations of desire and power at the level of “identity politics”, ranging from feminist and post-feminist identities to gay and lesbian politics. It is possible to identify three key approaches through which psychoanalytic thought has been connected to the study of sexuality in social theory: (1) as a form of social critique, providing the
conceptual terms (repression, unconscious desire, the Oedipus complex and the like) by which society and politics are evaluated; (2) as a form of thought to be challenged, deconstructed and analyzed, primarily in terms of its suspect gender, social and cultural assumptions; and, (3) as a form of thought that contains both insight and blindness, so that the tensions and paradoxes of psychoanalysis are brought to the fore. While I cannot do justice here to the full range of psychoanalytic-inspired social theories of identity, I shall in what follows develop some remarks which focus on the affective contours of identity when considered through a Freudian lens.

In what sense might Freudianism be said to radicalize our understanding of identity? In what exact sense does Freud trouble the inherited political terrain of identity studies? In the aftermath of the Second World War in the United States, during a period of high consumer affluence, economic self-interest and political cynicism, Freudianism did not seem an especially promising force for progressive politics. Indeed, a version of Freudianism had developed in the United States – termed ‘ego-psychology’ – emphasizing the harmony of relations (both descriptive and normative) between identity and society writ large. This seemed an unlikely development for a tradition of thought that had uncovered the repressed unconscious, and fortunately the ideological recasting of Freud at the hands of ego-psychology was to receive a sustained critique in Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1956). A member of the Frankfurt School who fled Nazi Germany for the United States, Marcuse developed a radical political interpretation of Freud that had a significant impact upon those working in the social sciences and humanities, as well as student activists and sexual liberationists. Marcuse added a novel twist to Freud’s theory of sexual repression, primarily because he insisted that the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s did not seriously threaten the established social order, but was rather another form of power and domination. Instead of offering true liberation, the sexual revolution of the 1960s was, in fact, an upshot of the advanced capitalist order. According to Marcuse, claims for sexual freedom and the liberation of identity involved, scandalously, the rechanneling of repressed desire into alternative, more commercial outlets. The demand for freedom had been seduced, indeed transfigured, by the lure of advertising and glossy commodities, the upshot of which was a defensive and narcissistic adaptation to the wider world. For Marcuse, this formulaically commercialism was evident in everything from identity to intimacy, and also explained the creeping conservatism of psychoanalysis itself. The narcissistic veneer characterizing contemporary social relations, Marcuse argued, had resulted in the conservative recasting of Freudian psychoanalysis as ego psychology in the United States – a brand of therapy in which self-mastery and self-control were elevated over and above the unconscious and repressed sexuality.
A range of psychoanalytic concepts – including repression, the division between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, the Oedipus complex, and the like – have proven to be a thorn in the side of political radicals seeking to develop a critical interpretation of Freud. Freud’s theories, many have argued, are politically conservative. Marcuse’s genius was to demonstrate why this is not so. Marcuse argued that political and social terms do not have to be grafted onto psychoanalysis, since they are already present in Freud’s work. Rather social and political categories need to be teased out from the core assumptions of Freudian theory. The core of Marcuse’s radical recasting of Freud’s account of identity lies in his division of repression into basic and surplus repression, as well as the connecting of the performance principle to the reality principle. Basic repression refers to that minimum level of psychological renunciation demanded by collective social life, in order for the reproduction of order, security and structure. Repression that is surplus, by contrast, refers to the intensification of self-restraint demanded by asymmetrical relations of power. Marcuse describes the ‘monogamic-patriarchal’ family, for example, as one cultural form in which surplus repression operates. Such a repressive surplus, he says, functions according to the ‘performance principle’, defined essentially as the culture of capitalism. According to Marcuse, the capitalist performance principle transforms individuals into ‘things’ or ‘objects’; it replaces eroticism with masculinist genital sexuality; and it demands a disciplining of the human body (what Marcuse terms ‘repressive desublimation’) so as to prevent desire from disrupting the established social order.

Freudianism, then, had re-established that it could be radical rather than reformist. Politically speaking, Marcuse’s celebrity in the United States – both inside and beyond the academy – put this radical version of the identity/repression problem at the core of public political debate. But it was not only in the United States where psychoanalytic notions of identity as a political force were gaining currency. Europe itself was also awash with theoretical and political debate about the status of identity, especially in France – where a very different version of psychoanalysis was developed. The most influential thinker who influenced debates about identity in this connection is the controversial French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Like Marcuse, Lacan criticized the conformist tendencies of much psychoanalytic therapy; he was particularly scathing of ego psychology, a school of psychoanalysis that he thought denied the powerful and disturbing dimensions of human sexuality. Also like Marcuse, Lacan privileged the force of the unconscious in human subjectivity and social relations. Unlike Marcuse, however, Lacan was pessimistic about the possibilities for transforming identities and social relations.
In an infamous ‘return to Freud’, Lacan interpreted psychoanalytic concepts in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist linguistics – especially such core Saussurian concepts as system, difference and the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. One of the most important features of Lacan’s psychoanalysis is the idea that the unconscious, just like language, is an endless process of difference, lack and absence. For Lacan, as for Saussure, the ‘I’ is a linguistic shifter that marks difference and division in interpersonal communication; there is always in speech a split between the self which utters ‘I’ and the word ‘I’ which is spoken. The individual subject, Lacan says, is structured by and denies this splitting, shifting from one signifier to another in a potentially endless play of desires. Language and the unconscious thus thrive on difference: signs fill-in for the absence of actual objects at the level of the mind and in social exchange. The unconscious, Lacan argues, is structured like a language. And the language that dominates the psyche is that of sexuality – of fantasies, dreams, desires, pleasures and anxieties.

This interweaving of language and the unconscious is given formal expression in Lacan’s notion of the Symbolic Order – a crucial register for grasping the constitution of identity. The Symbolic Order, says Lacan, institutes meaning, logic and differentiation; it is a realm in which signs fill-in for lost loves, such as one’s mother or father. Whereas the small child fantasizes that it is at one with the maternal body in its earliest years, the Symbolic Order permits the developing individual to symbolize and express desires and passions in relation to the self, to others and within the wider culture. The key term in Lacan’s theory, which accounts for this division between imaginary unity and symbolic differentiation is the phallus, a term used by Freud in theorizing the Oedipus complex. For Lacan, as for Freud, the phallus is the prime marker of sexual difference. The phallus functions in the Symbolic Order, according to Lacan, through the enforcement of the Name-of-the-Father (nom-du-père). This does not mean, absurdly, that each individual father actually forbids the infant/mother union, which Freud said the small child fantasizes. Rather it means that a ‘paternal metaphor’ intrudes into the child’s narcissistically structured ego to refer her or him to what is outside, to what has the force of law – namely, language. The phallus, says Lacan, is fictitious, illusory and imaginary. Yet it has powerful effects, especially at the level of gender. The phallus functions less in the sense of biology than as fantasy, a fantasy which merges desire with power, omnipotence and mastery.

It is against this complex psychoanalytic backdrop that Lacan develops a global portrait of the relation between the sexes. Males are able to gain phallic prestige, he says, since the image of the penis comes to be symbolically equated with the phallus.
at the level of sexual difference. ‘It can be said that the phallic signifier’, comments Lacan (1977: 287), ‘is chosen because it is the most tangible elements in the role of sexual copulation ... it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation’. Masculinity is thus forged through appropriation of the sign of the phallus, a sign that confers power, mastery and domination. Femininity, by contrast, is constructed around exclusion from phallic power. Femininity holds a precarious, even fragile, relation to language, rationality and power. ‘There is no woman’, says Lacan (1975: 221), ‘but excluded from the value of words’. This viewpoint, as the reader might have already gathered, is hardly likely to win much support from feminists; and, in fact, Lacan has been taken to task by many feminist authors for his perpetuation of patriarchal assumptions within the discourse of psychoanalysis. However it is perhaps also worth holding in mind that more fluid possibilities for gender transformation are contained within Lacan’s formulation of sexual difference and its cultural consequences. Beyond the bleak Oedipal power of the phallus, Lacan deconstructs sexuality identity as fiction or fraud. Desire, he maintains, lurks beneath the signifiers upon which identity and sex are fabricated. Gender fixity is always open to displacement.

Psychoanalysis, from Freud to Lacan and beyond, has exercised an enormous influence upon debates over identity in social theory, especially in feminist and gender studies – of which more shortly. Throughout these volumes, the reader will encounter various psychoanalytically-informed contributions to the critique of identity – from Cornelius Castoriadis to Julia Kristeva, from David Reisman to Hélène Cixous. There are also many detailed psychoanalytic mappings of identity presented, including contributions from Melanie Klein, Thomas Ogden, Jessica Benjamin, Christopher Bollas, D.W. Winnicott and many others.

THE DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF IDENTITY: STRUCTURALISM, POST-STRUCTURALISM AND POSTMODERNISM

The claim that identity and the repressed unconscious are intricately interwoven is at the heart of psychoanalysis. But there are other ways of approaching the analysis and critique of identity, and these other approaches tend to view psychoanalytic approaches with suspicion. The symbolic violence which wrests identity out of the unconscious might be conceptualized in terms of primordial repression within the discourse of psychoanalysis, but in other influential European traditions of social thought this constitution of the subject comes about not as a result of internal or affective forces, but rather through the imposition of linguistic codes or social discourses. For the French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault, identity is
intricately bound up with advanced systems of power and domination within our broader culture. Foucault’s major studies in the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Madness and Civilization* [2001 [1967]], *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [2002 [1989]] and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), examine the deeper social implications of configurations of knowledge and power in the human sciences – for example, psychiatry, sexology, criminology, penology and demography. Giving a novel twist to Bacon’s dictum that ‘knowledge is power’, Foucault argues that scientific discourses, while aiming to uncover the truth about ‘the criminal’ or ‘madness’ or ‘sex’, are in fact used to control individuals. In his genealogies of power/knowledge networks, he argues that scientific disciplines and discourses shape the social structures in which culture defines what is acceptable and unacceptable; of what can be said from a position of authority, and by whom and in what social conditions. The production of discourses, texts and knowledge are deeply interwoven with identity. The individual subject is viewed by Foucault, in this early phase of his career, as an upshot or product of discursive positioning and fixation; individual identity is increasingly subjected to new forms of power and control in what Foucault terms our ‘disciplinary society’.

If there is identity, there is also power. We can obtain a better understanding of how this broadly structuralist – or, more accurately, post-structuralist – account of identity diverges from psychoanalytic understandings of identity by briefly considering Foucault’s late work on sexuality. In *The History of Sexuality* [1978], Foucault sets out to overturn what he calls ‘the repressive hypothesis’ – where he sees psychoanalysis as perpetuating in the contemporary era. According to this hypothesis, the healthy expression of sexuality has been censured, negated, forbidden; at any rate, this is held to be the case in the West. Sexuality as repressed: this theorem has been crucial not only to Freudian and post-Freudian theory, but also to various sexual liberationists. Foucault, however, rejects the thesis of sexual repression. Sex, he says, has not been driven underground in contemporary culture. On the contrary, there has been a widening discussion of sex and sexuality. Sexuality, says Foucault, has flourished. Sexuality for Foucault is an end-effect, a product, of our endless monitoring, discussion, classification, ordering, recording and regulation of sex. As an example, Foucault considers attitudes toward sexuality in the Victorian age of the late nineteenth century. Victorianism, writes Foucault, is usually associated with the emergence of prudishness, the silencing of sexuality, and the rationalization of sex within the domestic sphere, the home and the family. Against such conventional wisdom, though, he argues that the production of sexuality during the Victorian era as a secret, as something forbidden or taboo, created a culture in which sex then had to be administered, regulated and policed. For example, doctors, psychiatrists and
others catalogued and classified numerous perversions, from which issues about sex became endlessly tracked and monitored with the growth of social medicine, education, criminology and sexology.

According to Foucault, this fostering of a science of sexuality arose from the connection of confession to the growth of knowledge about sex. The Roman Catholic confessional, Foucault contends, was the principal means of regulating the individual sexuality of believers; the Church was the site in which subjects came to tell the truth about themselves, especially in relation to sexuality, to their priests. The confessional can be regarded as the source of the West’s preoccupation with sex, particularly in terms of the sanctioned inducement to talk of it. Confession became disconnected from its broad religious framework, however, somewhere in the late eighteenth century and was transformed into a type of investigation or interrogation through the scientific study of sex and the creation of medical discourses about it. Sexes became increasingly bound up with networks of knowledge and power, and in time a matter for increasing self-policing, self-regulation and self-interrogation. In other words, instead of sex being regulated by external forces, it is much more a matter of attitudinal discipline, which is in turn connected to issues of, say, knowledge and education. Psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, says Foucault, are key instances of such self-policing in the contemporary era. In therapy, the individual does not so much feel coerced into confessing about sexual practices and erotic fantasies; rather the information divulged by the patient is treated as the means to freedom, the realization of a liberation from repression, the road to a new identity.

Structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of identity have proved a valuable corrective to liberal notions of the free, autonomous individual – so often imagined without limitation or constraint. In the writings of many authors connected to these traditions of thought – from Louis Althusser to Jean-Francois Lyotard – identity is revealed as constituted to its roots in linguistic codes and discursive constructions. However, structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to identity have also been sharply criticized on the grounds of sociological determinism – that is, that the definition of identity primarily in terms of political domination upon passive individuals denies the power of human agency [Giddens 1984; Habermas 1987]. Notwithstanding these criticisms, however, many social theorists, ranging from sociologists to literary critics, have drawn from structuralism and post-structuralism to debunk traditional notions of identity, the unified subject and autonomous selfhood.

The structuralist and post-structuralist critique of identity reigned supreme during the 1970s and 1980s, but was then superseded to some extent by the arrival of the
Postmodern 1990s. Postmodernist investigations of identity had a tremendous impact in cultural and media studies as well as having significantly influenced social science conceptions of identity more generally. Indeed, the term ‘postmodern identity’ was undoubtedly one of the most widely used in the social sciences during the late twentieth century and in the early years of the twenty-first century, ranging as it did across transformations in identity from speed dating to iPads. As regards the analysis of identity, it is important to distinguish a more structural, sociological use of the term ‘postmodernity’ from the aesthetic, more cultural term ‘postmodernism’. Whilst postmodernism denotes an aesthetic style or form of culture which takes off in the West, roughly speaking, following the decline of modernism (especially in the fields of popular culture, literature, architecture and the plastic arts), postmodernity means something more specific about changes in everyday life, social relations and the lived textures of identity. Postmodernity, at least in terms of identity, involves the deconstruction and reconstruction of the self as fluid, fragmented, discontinuous, decentred, dispersed, culturally eclectic, hybrid-like. Postmodern identity means life lived in the wake of the collapse of modernist grand narratives of reasons, truth, progress and universal freedom, with a profound recognition that the Enlightenment search for solid foundations and certitude was, ultimately, self-destructive. A streetwise, sceptical culture, postmodernity involves a radically ironic turn (see Rorty 1989). Rejecting the Enlightenment dream of solid, foundational forms of life and knowledge, individuals in conditions of postmodernity live their lives as a kind of artful fiction. Identity, in the post-traditional world of the postmodern, becomes principally performative – depthless, playful, ironic, just a plurality of selves, scripts, discourses and desires (see Elliott 2004).

For some theorists of the postmodern, these profound social and cultural changes signal the end of modernity altogether. The postmodern, in this view, is the historical unfolding of an epoch beyond modernity. However for other theorists of the postmodern condition, including Zygmunt Bauman, who contributes to this volume, postmodernity should not be conceptually bracketed off from modernity in this fashion. Postmodernity, as Bauman’s work makes clear, is not some overarching totality in the same sense as modernity. Rather, the postmodern is perhaps best conceived as a form of reflection or state of mind that rounds back upon the modern itself. In Bauman’s influential formulation, postmodernity is *modernity minus illusions* (Bauman 1990). What this means, essentially, is that fabrications of postmodern identity do not mark a point beyond modernist forms of life and identity, but rather function as reflective engagements and reworkings of some of the core presuppositions that frame personal and social life.
The debate over postmodern identities, which focused largely on the eclipse of modernist forms of identity, took place as mentioned during the 1990s and into the early 2000s. During this period, social and cultural analysts of identity drew from the modernity/postmodernity debate to consider afresh major transformations in personal and social life. In social theory and cultural studies in particular, much valuable work was done on the intersections between subjectivity and personal identity on the one hand, and new forms of popular and media culture on the other. In general, this was a period of consolidation for the development of identity studies in the humanities and social sciences. That said, the 1990s, or at least the latter half of them, were a time of mounting criticism of the notion of postmodernity, and by association the critique of postmodern identities. For one thing, the unduly negative side of postmodernity became increasingly palpable and frustrating to many critics. The postmodern culture of ‘anything goes’ may have seemed liberating and intoxicating to some, but for others it was merely another narrative about ‘endings’, with little of value to say about the novelty of identity transformations in the current age. For another, it was increasingly evident to any casual observer of politics and society that modernity was far from over, and that modernist solids, traditions and customary ways of organizing identities continued to inform our social practices.

FEMINISM AND IDENTITY

There are many different approaches that feminists have adopted in exploring the themes of identity and gender. Some feminists have offered perspectives on the social role of women from the viewpoint of our patriarchal society, in which women are the targets of sexual oppression, abuse, harassment and denigration. Other feminists have concentrated on, say, the regimes of beautification or modes of self-presentation to which women submit in adopting ‘masks of femininity’, in order to function as objects of men’s sexual desire. Still other feminists have examined the broader influences of economics and public policy in the reduction of women’s sexuality to the tasks of child rearing and household duties. In these contrasting approaches, the issues of sexual difference, gender hierarchy, social marginalization and the politics of identity achieve different levels of prominence. For the purposes of this brief discussion here, I will explore the crucial links between identity and gender practices as elaborated in contemporary feminist thought, cultural analysis and psychoanalysis.

The interlocking of identity, gender and society were powerfully theorized in the late 1970s by the American feminist sociologist Nancy Chodorow. In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), which is now considered a classic feminist statement on sexuality and gender, Chodorow combines sociological and psychoanalytic approaches to study
the reproduction of gender asymmetries in modern societies. Her idea was to focus on the emotional, social and political ramifications of exclusive female mothering, giving special attention to the construction of masculinity and femininity. Against the tide of various socialization theories, Chodorow contends that gender is not so much a matter of ‘role’ as a consequence of the ways in which mothers emotionally relate to their children.

In explaining the sex roles to which women and men are expected to conform, Chodorow argues that the developing infant acquires a core gender identity that functions as a psychological force in the perpetuation of patriarchy. The core of her argument concerns gender difference. Mothers, she says, experience their daughters as doubles of themselves, through a narcissistic projection of sameness. The mother emotionally relates to her daughter as an extension of herself, not as an independent person; the daughter, as a consequence, finds it extremely difficult to emotionally disengage from her mother, and to create a sense of independence and individuality. Chodorow sees gains and losses here. Empathy, sensitivity and intimacy are the gains that flow from this narcissistic merging of mother and daughter. Daughters, she argues, are likely to grow up with a core sense of emotional continuity with their mother, a continuity that provides for strong relational connections in adult life. In this account, girls become mothers since their mothers’ feminine selves are deeply inscribed within their psyche. However the losses are that, because daughters are not perceived as separate others, women consequently lack a strong sense of self and agency. Feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-control and a fear of merging with others arise as core emotional problems for women.

By contrast, Chodorow sees masculine sexual identity as based upon a firm repression of maternal love. Boys, she says, must deny their primary bond to maternal love – thus repressing femininity permanently into the unconscious. This is not a psychic task that boys complete by themselves, however. Mothers, according to Chodorow, assist boys in this painful process of psychic repression through their own tacit understanding of gender difference. That is to say, because mothers experience sons as other, mothers in turn propel their sons towards individuation, differentiation and autonomy. Mothers thus lead their sons to emotionally disengage from intimacy. The mother, in effect, prepares her son for an instrumental, abstract relation to the self, to other people and to the wider society; and this, of course, is a relation that males will be expected to maintain in the public world of work, social relations and politics.

Chodorow’s work is an important contribution to feminist scholarship; her psychoanalytically-orientated sociology has influenced many feminists researching
gender identity in the wider frame of families and communities. Her general claim that women mother in order to recapture an intensity of feeling originally experienced in the mother/daughter relation has been especially fruitful. For such a claim connects in Chodorow’s work to a wider social explanation of gender alienation and oppression. Women’s emotional lives are drained and empty since men are cut off from interpersonal communication and sexual intimacy. From this angle, the desire to have a child is, in part, rooted in the repression and distortion of the current gender system. Against this backdrop, Chodorow argues for shared parenting as a means of transforming the current gender regime.

A similar focus on the mother/daughter relationship is to be found in the writings of the French philosopher Luce Irigaray. Like Chodorow, Irigaray is out to analyze the deeper symbolic forces that limit or constrain women’s autonomy and power. Unlike Chodorow, however, Irigaray proposes a more formalistic or structuralist thesis. Taking her cue from Lacan, Irigaray contends that woman is, by definition, excluded from the Symbolic Order. On this view, the feminine cannot be adequately symbolized under patriarchal conditions. As Irigaray (1985: 143) argues:

> there is no possibility whatsoever, within the current logic of sociocultural operations, for a daughter to situate herself with respect to her mother: because, strictly speaking, they make neither one nor two, neither has a name, meaning, sex of her own, neither can be ‘identified’ with respect to the other.

Similarly, the French psychoanalytic feminist Julia Kristeva (1984) argues against the patriarchal bent of the Lacanian Symbolic Order, to which she contrasts the ‘semiotic’ – a realm of pre-Oedipal prolinguistic experience, consisting of drives, affects, rhythms, tonalities. According to Kristeva, semiotic drives circle around the loss of the pre-Oedipal mother, and make themselves felt in the breakup of language – in slips, silences, tonal rhythms. These semiotic drives, she suggests, are subversive of the symbolic Law of the Father since they are rooted in a pre-Oedipal connection with the maternal body. The subversive potential of the semiotic is thus closely tied to femininity, and Kristeva devotes much of her psychoanalytic work to the analysis of motherhood and its psychical consequences.

Most recently, the development of a social theory of identity has been transformed by the writings of the American feminist post-structuralist Judith Butler. Butler seeks to debunk the work of theorists, such as Chodorow, who appeal to women as a foundation or basis for feminist theory and politics. She argues that notions of ‘identity’ or ‘core gender identity’ serve to reinforce a binary gender order that
maintains women’s oppression. Like Kristeva and Irigaray, Butler sees sexual identity as shot through with desire, fantasy, emotion, symbol conflict and ambivalence. Unlike Kristeva and Irigaray, however, Butler argues that desire is not so much some inner psychic force as a result of the internalization of gender images upon the surface of our bodies. Drawing upon the work of Foucault, Butler contends that the link between sex and gender power is produced, not through nature, biology or reason, but through the deployment of knowledge, discourses and forms of power, actualized through acting bodies and sexual practices.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler argues that identity and sexuality are constituted and reproduced through the body that performs – the production of masculine and feminine bodies, lesbian and gay bodies, the sexy body, the fit and healthy body, the anorexic body, the body beautiful. Gender, says Butler, is not the outcome of the ‘true self’ or ‘core sex identity’, but rather a matter of performance, the performance of a corporeal style. Individuals for Butler model their gender performances after fantasies, imitations and idealizations of what we think it means to be a ‘man’ or ‘woman’ within the range of cultural representations of sex in the current gender regime. Butler’s notion of performance, of the body that performs, encompasses the copying, imitation and repetition of cultural stereotypes, linguistic conventions and symbolic forms governing the production of masculinity and femininity.

**IDENTITY, INDIVIDUALIZATION AND BEYOND**

Postmodern critiques of identity, which reigned supreme throughout the 1990s, remained influential in the early 2000s – but there were also other fresh approaches to rethinking identity starting to emerge. Postmodernism had powerfully mixed transformations in identity and culture in equal measure. If there was pulsating desire and frenetic depthlessness to postmodern identity, there was also cultural dispersal, discord and disillusionment. In this, postmodernism made a fetish out of difference, thereby underwriting the plural, multiple and fragmented texture of human experience in an age of intensive computerization and hi-tech. Yet it was ironic that postmodern thought should be so mad with desire for difference, given that its own tendency was to actually totalize the eclipse of identity. For authors working in a broadly postmodern tradition, and certainly for those influenced in some significant way by the premises of post-structuralist social theory, identity appeared largely as an upshot or construct of the linguistic or symbolic systems which help constitute it. Identity in social theory had, arguably, always been about representations and signs; but with postmodernism, even the interior life of the
subject became coterminous with the supremacy of the signifier. A variety of concepts were introduced to capture this symbolic determination of the subject, from Foucault’s notion of ‘technologies of the self’ to Baudrillard’s account of ‘simulacra’, or virtualization of identity. These accounts, in quite different ways, sought to specify the ways that the decentred world of postmodernity extended to the core of experience and everyday life, locking identity into new structures of seduction, securitization, mediatization and virtualization. The political conundrums (and, in time, dead-ends) of postmodernism was that culture in the form of decentred and differential identity seemed increasingly out of step with our fast globalizing world – particularly the globalizing forces of media, communications and culture. It seemed difficult, to say the least, to track signs of cultural difference and identity diversity in a world increasingly dominated by News Corporation, CNN and Yahoo.

As a consequence, new theories of identity emerged. There were, for example, a variety of new theories of individualization – for which identity in the broad sense was conceived as more than a mere ‘imposition’ from the outside, or ‘society’. According to this account, identity is viewed not as an outcome of external linguistic or symbolic systems, but as an open-ended and reflexive process of self-formation. In recent years, social theorists such as Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Manuel Castells, Charles Lemert and Gilles Lipovetsky have developed powerful accounts of such a view. For Giddens, in *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), identity today becomes increasingly reflexive: self-identity is cast as a self-defining process that depends upon the monitoring of, and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible trajectories of life. Any such information gleaned about self and world is not simply incidental to experience and everyday life; it is actually constitutive of what people do, who they think they are and how they ‘live’ their identities. ‘The reflexivity of modern social life’, writes Giddens (1991: 38), ‘consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character’.

Somewhat similar arguments have been developed by Beck. Traditional identity practices, the anchor of premodern societies as well as all of the early phases of modernization, take on a radically different status in conditions of what Beck calls ‘reflexive modernization’. Reflexive or accelerated modernization for Beck means that traditions become less secure or taken for granted, and that consequently the production of identity is something that becomes more and more open to choice, scrutiny, debate and revision. This is an identity process that Beck calls ‘individualization’. To live in a detraditionalized world is to live in a society where life is no longer lived as fate or destiny. According to Beck, new demands, opportunities
and controls are being placed on people today, such that it is questionable whether collective or system units of meaning and action are socially significant. The rise of reflexive modernization, according to Beck, is the living of lives increasingly decision-dependent and in need of justification, re-elaboration, reworking and, above all, reinvention. As a consequence, problems of self/society cohesion – the integration of individualized individuals into the network of broader social relations – necessarily arise in novel forms at both the micro and macro levels.

The new social theories of individualization have been subject to a barrage of criticisms. Some critics argue that Giddens and Beck’s account of DIY self-actualization exhibits a distinctly individualist bent, in a social theory that reduces struggles over power and politics to mere individual negotiations of personal change. Other critics have argued that the thesis of reflexive monitoring of the self clashes with more critical understandings – psychoanalytic, post-structural and post-feminist – of subjectivity in terms of repressed desire, difference or sexual power. A somewhat related, but different slant on contemporary identity practices has been developed by Elliott and Lemert, who contend that there is an emergent ‘new individualism’ sweeping the globe – one centred on continual self-actualization and instant self-reinvention. Today this is nowhere more evident, argue Elliott and Lemert, than in the pressure that consumerism puts on us to ‘transform’ and ‘improve’ every aspect of ourselves: not just our homes and gardens but our careers, our food, our clothes, our sex lives, our faces, minds and bodies. This reinvention trend occurs all around us, not only in the rise of plastic surgery and the instant identity makeovers of reality TV but also in compulsive consumerism, speed dating and therapy culture. In a world that places a premium on instant gratification, the desire for immediate results has never been as pervasive or acute. We have become accustomed to emailing others across the planet in seconds, buying flashy consumer goods with the click of a mouse, and drifting in and out of relations with others without long-term commitments. Is it any wonder, Elliott and Lemert ask, that we now have different expectations about life’s possibilities and the potential for change?

A world in which there is no choice but to choose, to paraphrase Giddens, is a world in which identity becomes profoundly self-questioning, reflexive, re-inventive and experimental. But if identity is experimental, then it is radically open-ended. There are, in other words, no guarantees or guidelines for the conduct and consequences of identity. This is the opportunity and the cost of identity in the early years of the twenty-first century. And these are the challenges that the social sciences and humanities face today in theorizing the possible trajectories of identity in a context of advanced globalization. What prospects identity in a world of extensive new
information technologies? What prospects the self as post-humanism radically restructures the very definition of what it means to be human? How might identity be configured in relation to autonomy and freedom in a world in which globalization reigns supreme? These are just some of the pressing questions which arise for theorists of identity today.

ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUMES

This collection is designed to give both students and lecturers a sense of the social-historical formation of identity studies, ranging from classical debates in philosophy and social theory through to contemporary discussions in feminism, post-structuralism, postmodernism and what is today broadly termed cultural studies or theory. My central aim is a collection of principal texts that serve as both a guide and a stimulus to readers engaged with the analysis and critique of identity.

A central claim of this work is that we can only adequately understand the concept of identity if we engage with the classical philosophical and social-theoretical debates which led to the emergence of the many different definitions of the topic. This, necessarily, means an engagement with the complex history of identity studies. Volume I, ‘Discovering the Subject’, examines identity in the framework of classical social theory and philosophy, with particular attention to constitution of key interpretations of human nature, personhood and subjectivity in the social sciences and humanities. This volume traces the lineage of identity in various political, philosophical, sociological and psychoanalytic sources – from the formulations of Aristotle and Kant to the departures of Hegel and Freud. The purpose of this opening volume is to underscore how social-historical forces and the role of language and communication are critical to understandings – both lay and professional – of identity.

Volume II, ‘Theorizing Identity’, charts some of the fundamental conceptualizations of identity in the social sciences and humanities, and underscores how these social-theoretical interpretations have contributed to new forms of understanding for personhood and subjectivity in the modern world. This volume includes, among others, discussions concerning the constitution of human character, the role of language, the complex links between identity and individualism, and the relation of self to society more generally. Throughout I have tried to show that phenomena which are central to the reproduction of modern societies – for example, power, technology and ideology – are intricately interwoven with the production of identity, subjectivity and individuality.

Volume III, ‘Situating Identity’, is concerned in exploring some of the ways in which the analysis and critique of identity has affected the daily lives of individuals in social,
cultural and political terms. The volume is divided into three parts – dealing with psychoanalysis, gender and sexuality, and race and ethnicity. This volume includes a variety of debates about identity in psychoanalysis, from object relations theory to post-Kleinian contributions; debates over identity in the frame of gender and sexualities; and, discussions of identity in relation to issues of race, ethnicity and culture. As I have argued in this introduction, and as the contributions in this volume highlight, if we wish to understand the conditions and consequences within which the dislocation and subjugation of identity occurs we must take account of psychodynamic, gendered and racial/ethnic orderings of experience.

Volume IV, ‘Identity Transformations’, addresses questions of the transformation of identity today – primarily by focusing on contemporary social theories of self and subjectivity in the context of global social change. Drawing from a range of social-theoretical accounts of a new age in which we live our lives today – from postmodernism to reflexive modernization to post-humanism – identity is directly situated in relation to key issues of consumption, capitalism, globalization, informationalism, risk and catastrophe. The volume explores the consequences of increasing digitization, new information technologies and radical medical breakthroughs in terms of the core contours of identity. In particular, questions over the future of identity (and identity theory) are given central prominence. In this, and indeed in all of these volumes, we focus on the deeply rooted global transformations that shape identity and are, in turn, reshaped by identity practices.

REFERENCES
1 :: GENERAL INTRODUCTION


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CHAPTER 2
THE REINVENTION OF PERSONS
Self-reflection and critical self-examination are not qualities most people might associate with parties, but psychologists and psychotherapists who run “speed shrinking parties” apparently thrive on mixing advice and adventure in newfound proportion. Parties of the speed shrinking variety represent a new trend in psychotherapy, one geared to the denizens of a 24/7 media culture in which the desire for fast lifestyles is matched by a desire for quick assessment of any associated emotional problems. In a world of corporate networking, short-term contracts, negotiated intimacies and just-in-time deliveries, the three-minute analytical session offered by speed shrinking is one clearly geared to those seeking reinvention on the run. This is no doubt a central reason for the explosion of interest in fast therapy, which as Susan Shapiro – author of *Speed Shrinking* – notes has taken off “like wildfire”.

The rapid-fire therapy dished out at speed shrinking parties, writes Vincent M. Mallozzi in *The New York Times*, consists of “therapists, many sitting behind piles of business cards and books they had written, hoping to achieve chemistry with their newfound clients”. Such sought after chemistry, presumably desired as much by the patient [read: client] as the therapist, needs to be mixed in three-minute bursts – for this is a form of therapy in which overshooting the allotted analytic session time equals only thirty seconds. Mallozzi reports from one such speed shrinking party the plight of a middle-aged man worried about the tenure of his job, and increasingly anxious at the prospects of finding himself unemployed. With the clock ticking on the session, the therapist queried whether her client had any fallback skills, or perhaps residual career ambitions. Nothing readily came to mind for the client, although the desire to write a work of fiction is mentioned in passing. As the three-minute deadline approaches, the therapist delivers her fast assessment: “Pursue this new venture. When you are in a situation like this, you must reinvent yourself.” Therapy and reinvention, it transpires, go together hand in hand.

In this chapter, elaborating upon the theme of the reinvention of persons, I shall critically examine the rise of therapy and uses of self-help literature. In examining the pervasiveness of therapy in contemporary societies, I shall in the first section of the chapter briefly consider the views of those writers who have suggested that therapy represents an oppressive conformity through the management of people’s emotions. Rejecting such evaluations, I want to suggest that therapy should be understood instead as primarily a mechanism of self-reinvention, one increasingly geared to speed and instant change. The second section of the chapter turns to consider the centrality of self-help literature in reconstituting the self today. In the final section I discuss the intricate connections between celebrity culture and reinvention society.
FAST THERAPY

Ours is the age of therapy. Ever since Sigmund Freud discovered the powers of "the talking cure" – in which the so-called patient speaks to the so-called therapist about whatever comes to mind, freely and without limitation – women and men throughout the expensive, polished cities of the West have sought out the cultivated benefits and diversions of therapy. In this sense, psychoanalysis as a form of therapy has offered people the possibility of alternatives, of different lives. Psychoanalysis shows, among other things, that the emotional lives women and men lead (as well as the emotional lives they do not lead) are open to interrogation, reappraisal and redrafting.

Ours is also the age of therapeutics, especially at the level of the reconstruction and reinvention of the self. The language of therapeutics today reigns supreme, at least throughout the contemporary Western world, for engaging and reflecting on core dilemmas of the self. Anxiety, narcissism, depression, neurosis, phobia, mourning, acting-out, defence-mechanism, compulsion and trauma: the vocabulary of therapeutics has become a central aspect of the emotional scripts through which contemporary women and men engage with the self, others and the wider world.

Finally, and in addition to the pervasiveness of therapy and the language of therapeutics, ours is the age of a wholesale therapy culture. That is to say, the culture of therapy pervades not only the worldview of individuals but also a framework of meaning for companies, organizations, institutions and, indeed, nations and geopolitical regions. Today, and as never before, companies routinely undergo (and seek to recover from) periods of crisis or stress. Organizations and corporations go about the business of "confidence-building", in order to "heal" employee distrust in leadership or management. Entire countries are said to experience periods of "national trauma" - such as the United States after the terror attacks of 9/11 or the United Kingdom after the London riots of 2011. Traumatized national communities are, arguably, part and parcel of a therapeutic imperative which has moved centre stage in the contemporary period.

This overlapping of individual therapy, the language of therapeutics and therapy culture can be found in various sectors of everyday life and popular culture. From the therapist’s couch to cybertherapy, from TV talk shows such as Oprah, Ricki Lake and Geraldo, to confessional autobiographies like Elizabeth Wurtzel’s Prozac Nation, from life coaching to speed shrinking: the imperative of the talking cure holds sway. Notwithstanding the immense complexities of (as well as the differences between) psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and its related variants, the notion of self-reinvention lies at the core of all such endeavours. Therapy is, from this angle, deeply interwoven
with the search for "the New You". An overriding belief in the possibilities of self-reconstruction, redesign and reorganization infuses various versions of individual therapy, but such longings are also marshalled in living rooms across the globe, as a mass-mediated spectacle of private anxieties are dramatized for public consumption. Radio talkback, TV talk-shows and cybertherapy are all at the core of this restructuring of the "talking cure" through the twin forces of multimedia and popular culture.

What accounts for our culture’s fascination with therapy? How should we understand the rise of therapy, both its uses at the level of individual psychology and the wider power it exerts at the level of culture? Do therapy and the language of therapeutics represent simply a new form of social control? Some critics have suggested precisely this and, given the attention accorded to such views, it is important to briefly consider these now.

In his influential book of the late 1950s, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Philip Rieff cast the rise of therapy in terms of a rebranding of emotional life, principally with reference to psychological illness. This rebranding involved the therapeutic scrutiny of people’s psychology (particularly focusing on personal unhappiness), framed as part of a broader quest for "emotional health". In wider cultural terms, therapy for Rieff seeks to construct "the sane self in a mad world" (1965). Developing upon Rieff’s notion of the triumph of the therapeutic, the American historian Christopher Lasch also criticized therapy, writing of an emergent "culture of narcissism" (1991). According to Lasch, the therapeutic encounter promotes a kind of cultural hypochondria in which individuals turn away from the collective problems of society and retreat narrowly inwards on the self. For Lasch, the spread of a culture of narcissism opens the way for a therapeutic imperative in which crisis becomes both permanent and personalized. More recently, Frank Furedi, in his book *Therapy Culture* (2003), has likewise attacked the dominance of therapy culture, which he claims imposes a new cultural conformity through an oppressive management of people’s emotions.

Another critique of the rise of therapy – a more complex and, I think, more interesting one – focuses on its recoding of traditional religious confession for a secular age. One version of this criticism is that developed by the late French historian, Michel Foucault. Foucault’s writings, indebted to structural linguistics and post-structuralist theory, are technically dense; the argument I seek to develop here, which draws on but also departs from Foucault, thus involves a somewhat more complex vocabulary than I have used elsewhere in this book. The core of Foucault’s argument, bluntly put, is that therapy reorders traditional religious confession as a form of privatism; this it does through “manufacturing” a truth in the ongoing production of stories by which
people narrate their lives. From this perspective, individuals are able to access some deeper emotional “truth” about their life through a therapeutic dialogue in which confession (usually confessing to unacceptable sexual desires) is central. Therapy for Foucault is part and parcel of the rise of “confessional society”:

> The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. (1978:59)

In developing this argument Foucault traces a move during the late nineteenth century in the language of confession away from the Church and onto the psychoanalyst’s couch, where the worried-well allegedly manufacture new identity truths through the “talking cure”. “In the Californian cult of the self”, Foucault reflected on the rise of therapy culture, “one is supposed to discover one’s true self, to separate it from what might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytic science.”

The “talking cure” of therapy for Foucault fits with a whole gamut of experiences that he calls “technologies of the self”. Like prisons or clinics or hospitals, therapies function to lock the self within the discourses or scripts of what is considered appropriate behaviour; we relinquish what we might have become in order to fit with the scripts of who we are supposed to be. Foucault sees therapy, or the Californian cult of the self, as interwoven with the rise of “disciplinary power”, in which discourse circulates to regulate the production of “docile bodies” (1978).

Foucault’s account of technologies of the self, as a critique of therapy and the psy-professions, has been hugely influential in the social sciences and humanities. And there is much in this account which is compelling, as therapy has undoubtedly been intricately connected with the production of power and the regulation of behavioural patterns of individuals in modern societies. That said, there are serious limitations to Foucault’s analysis of the self (see Elliott 2007). Certainly, Foucault’s suggestion that therapy has become simply an extension of religious confession is less than convincing: psychoanalysis, for example, is premised on the notion of a repressed unconscious, which renders problematic the idea that people can simply “confess” to the secret promptings of desire. But what I want to focus on here, which is equally problematic because Foucault does not focus on this point, concerns the
changing ways in which contemporary confessions – or, if you will, therapy – take place in public. I refer to the rise of therapeutic confession in the mass media, but also Web 2.0 and related digital technologies. Had Foucault been able to consider the role of new communication technologies upon the formation and reformation of the self, he might have seen just how powerfully confessional culture constructs new privatized relations – in which, contrary to his sometimes fatalistic account of how power mysteriously operates behind the backs of individuals, the reinvention of self and broader social relations arises as a skilled cultural accomplishment.

Therapy, I am suggesting, is a system of reinvention through which contemporary women and men seek to reconstruct the self. Therapy, at least those versions of it influenced by psychoanalysis and psychotherapeutics, is not just a means to limit or overcome psychological “illnesses” and “trauma” – although its language is often couched in this way. As an expression of the drive to reinvention, therapy seeks to promote the redesign of the self as a means of achieving a sense of greater personal autonomy. This is not to say that those engaged in therapeutic endeavours are necessarily successful in achieving greater selfunderstanding; therapy, as has been well documented in various studies, can sometimes also promote dependence – and in extreme situations might also function as a form of addiction. Yet the general point remains that the goals of therapy are geared to self-reinvention, and thus it should be evaluated as part of a broader technology of reinvention.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing ways in which therapy, understood as a technology of reinvention, has developed in the twenty-first century concerns the radical speeding-up of its delivery time. Consider, for example, the following. In Freud’s Vienna, people committing to psychoanalytic treatment were, in effect, signing up for a programme of self-exploration that might range anywhere from three to five years. Moreover, the slow, emotionally difficult work of therapy would be undertaken on an almost daily basis – typically, three to four days a week over the duration of approximately one hour each session. By contrast, many versions of contemporary therapy centre on quick delivery. Fast therapy, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, has become all the rage. From life coaching to phone therapy, and from cyber-therapy to speed shrinking: therapy today is delivered faster than ever before, with an immediacy to the promise of self-reinvention which is especially striking. In our high-speed society, time has been radically compressed – hence, the spread of fast therapy.

Accompanying this acceleration in the delivery-time of therapy, the contemporary period has also been marked by the spread of therapeutics into more and more sectors
of popular culture and everyday life. As a result of Web 2.0, digital culture and new forms of media interaction, the therapeutic ethos has moved well beyond the consulting room and into every facet of daily life. In promoting new forms of therapy as part of a wider system of mediated reinvention, the influence of the talking cure can be tracked at the levels of talkback radio, TV talk-shows and online dialogues. Aspects of popular culture become reorganized in terms of therapeutics, with the imperative to confess (somewhat in the fashion analysed by Foucault) a central theme.

“Ours is a society”, writes Susan Sontag, “in which secrets of private life that, formerly, you would have given nearly anything to conceal, you now clamour to get on a television show to reveal” (2004). One reason that the public display of emotion is experienced by growing numbers of women and men as energizing is that therapeutics has gone global – offering to reach new audiences in distant locations. American media theorist Mimi White argues that contemporary popular culture has given a novel twist to therapeutic confession, switching confessional speech away from a singular expert (the therapist) and towards a whole host of possible audiences, including listeners, viewers, hosts, experts and others. “At the heart of the new therapeutic culture”, says White, “everyone confesses over and over again to everybody else” (White, 1992: 179). Psychotherapy is only one very particular model advanced by our globalized confessional culture. Twelve-step therapy programmes, personal counselling, memory recovery experts, addiction management programmes, Gestalt and behavioural therapy, phone and cybertherapy, peer counsellors, Internet analysts: the list of therapies today continually crosses and multiplies, producing hybrids and new techniques and models for public confession.

If living in a mediated therapeutic culture offers new possibilities for the redesign of the self, it is also the case that new burdens arise as well. Many critics of therapy culture are correct, in some part at least, to dismiss aspects of the confessional turn in public life as apolitical or trivial. Arguably the spread of confessional morality has contributed, at least for some individuals, to a retreat from social problems, in a turn towards privatism. Eva Moskowitz, in In Therapy We Trust, argues that therapy culture “focuses our attention on the private life, blinding us to the larger, public good” (2001:7). Moskowitz’s standpoint is interesting, but needs to be recast in order to adequately grasp how therapeutics intersects with reinvention society. Confessional culture, to be sure, can promote a narrowing of the arts of public political life, but not necessarily. The public confession of private sentiments can, in fact, work the other way around – opening out of the self to an increasingly interconnected world and thus promoting self-reinvention.
THE SEDUCTIONS OF SELF-HELP

These days, when we are not being bombarded with advertising and promotions for the reinvention of self, we are being told that the self is a site for endless improvement. Once again, the psychological sciences figure prominently in this cultural underwriting of the arts of self-improvement. Psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and related discourses of self-investigation loom large in contemporary mappings of our relationship to ourselves. In an age which dethrones the power of expert knowledge, however, the role of therapist has been largely outsourced, passed over to the actual customers of self-improvement and self-reinvention. In this shift from expert (therapist) to customer (patient), we find the commercial logics of do-it-yourself. Enter the self-improvement industry, inclusive of everything from 12-step recovery programmes to life coaching, and its dazzling techniques for “self-help”.

From one angle, the rise of self-help represents the contemporary search for balance between secure self-identity on the one hand and experimental reinvention on the other. It is a feature of global capitalism that advancement, progress and the future are all represented as more or less synonymous with a complete break from the past; the established patterns of custom, habit or routine are of apparently little value for contemplating the novel challenges and risks of tomorrow, let alone those of the day after. The modern age instead delivers choice, and as never before. We cherish choice as promotional of self-flourishing and freedom, while believing we are free agents capable of making autonomous choices among an indefinite range of possible goods and services. Ironically, this very complex diversity of choices – a world in which there is no choice but to choose – confronts the individual as overwhelming. And it is this cultural contradiction from which the launching of self-help proceeds.

The genre of self-help literature, the explosive popularity of which has served to bolster an otherwise faltering publishing industry, fulfils various reinvention functions. To begin with, self-help literature is a kind of overall lifestyle reinvention, largely dismissive of the past (even when proclaiming its importance) and in love with the prospect of future possibilities. The reinvention of persons all that was past – family upbringing, childhood experiences, significant intimate relationships, established cognitive frames of reference – transforms to an “open future”. In this sense, the genre of self-help underwrites the changeability of persons and things. The literature of self-help, broadly speaking, proclaims that identities can be shucked off, recast, other identities tried on for size and then profligately performed throughout the theatres of social life until such time as the self’s identity demands further reshuffling. In the midst of a world of perpetual global change, the genre of self-help reassuringly consoles of the availability of potential alternative lives and lifestyles.
Self-help, too, for all its crass commercialism, is intricately interwoven with reinvention in a more strategic sense. Like the reinvented “new you” which the genre promises, self-help offers various tools of reinvention as a means of preparing for the attainment of a desired lifestyle. This is what the British sociologist Anthony Giddens calls “strategic life-planning” or “life-plan calendars” (1991:85). Strategic life-planning centres on an adherence to certain timing devices for the realization of lifestyle change desired by the individual, and Giddens argues that self-help literature makes clear the importance of preparing for the future in a world which is increasingly post-traditional in orientation. Such timing devices, or tools of reinvention, offered by self-help literature range from, say, programmes of self-writing (the keeping of a journal, or autobiography) to five easy steps for taking charge of one’s life. Understanding that the individual is responsible for the building and re-building of life-plan calendars, and that persons must continuously engage in the making of their identities, is a pervasive feature of the self-help genre. Self-help, on this view, is essentially an endeavour of reinvention.

It is, though, and perhaps above all, speed that counts most in the negotiation of self-help today. We live, as Milan Kundera brilliantly put it, in a culture of “pure speed” (1995:1) – where lines of flight from person to person, organization to organization, at once proliferate and intensify. This is well illustrated, for example, by considering self-help books currently on the market. Title after title underscores how the time/space architecture of our lives is driven by the pressures of pure speed. The 4 Hour Body, 34 Instant Stress Busters, Instant Self-Confidence, Fast Road to Happiness: these are just some of the books currently available to women and men seeking to refashion, restructure and rebuild their personal lives. But, as I say, professional life is also ripe for a menu of continual instant change. 1 Hour Negotiator, 30 Minute Career Fast Track Kit, Fast Thinking, Fast Track to the Top and The Attention Deficit Workplace: professionals the world over are busy remaking and reorganizing their careers on the pure speed model promoting the faster, quicker, lighter.

In this emergent cultural fantasy tailored for the twenty-first century, professionalism turns into performance, presentation and public relations. The mantra runs as follows: just as there are no constraints on the individual self, so there are no natural limits to promoting speed in one’s personal and professional life.

CELEBRITY CULTURE: REINVENTION AS PUBLIC OBSESSION

Celebrity is at once astonishingly mesmerizing and mindnumbingly dull, crazily libertarian and depressingly conformist. Our culture of celebrity feigns the new, the contemporary, the up-to-date, as it recycles the past. Celebrities are constantly on the brink of obsolescence, of appearing out of date. Today Lady Gaga, yesterday
Beyoncé, the day before Madonna. Celebrities are radically excessive in this respect: in a world teeming with images and information, celebrities trade in sheer novelty as a means of transcending the fame of others with whom they compete for public renown. To a large extent, celebrity represents a central driving force behind the cascade of our reinvention society.

The conduit of celebrity arises, in sociological terms, from massive institutional changes throughout the West, involving a wholesale shift from industrial manufacture to a post-industrial economy orientated to the finance, service, hi-tech and communications sectors. As the economy becomes cultural as never before, ever more dependent on media, image and public relations, so personal identity comes under the spotlight and open to revision. The new economy, in which the globalization of media looms large, celebrates both technological culture and the power of new technologies to reshape the order of things. The current cultural obsession with the remaking and transformation of the self is reflective of this, and arguably nowhere more so than in the attention that popular culture lavishes upon celebrity. The relentless media scrutiny of the private lives of celebrities – especially the shape, size, exercise regimes, addictions, recoveries, cures, cosmetic enhancements and surgical alterations of celebrity bodies – runs all the way from paparazzi and gossip magazines to entertainment news and YouTube.

In any case, today’s celebrity-led recasting of reinvention is pitched on an altogether different terrain to yesteryear’s notions of fame. The historian Leo Braudy, in his pioneering study *The Frenzy of Renown* (1997), contends that the era of Hollywood and its invention of glamorous film stars served to personalize fame, with public renown arising as a result of such factors as personal uniqueness, artistic originality or individual creativity. Fame, in a sense, was tied to genius. From Laurence Olivier’s dramatic talents to Rudolf Nureyev’s ballet grace, from Groucho Marx’s comic mastermind to John Lennon’s pop virtuosity: fame was primarily cast in the sense of value, art, innovation and tradition. Yet such an understanding of public renown has, to a large extent, fallen on hard times today. Thanks to technological advances and the spread of digital culture, the terrain of public renown has migrated from Hollywood-inspired definitions of fame to multi-media driven forms of celebrity. This has involved a very broad change from narrow, elite definitions of public renown to more open, inclusive understandings. This is a shift, in effect, from the Hollywood blockbuster to Reality TV, from lifelong stardom to 15 minutes of public renown, and from pop music to *Pop Idol*.

Reinvention comes into its own in this context. If fame was about the cultivation of talent, artistry and originality, celebrity embraces instead the inauthentic,
performance, pastiche and parody. What powers the careers of celebrities today is change, disjuncture, trauma and transformation. In a world that has less and less time for long-term commitments and durable relationships, continual reinvention has become a normative part of the field of celebrity. Indeed, how celebrities undertake the reinvention of their private lives has today become a public obsession. From media reports of the drug hell of Amy Winehouse to rumours about Rihanna’s latest super-fast diet, from gossip about the marriage of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt to the alleged drug habits of Nicole Richie, the stable regimen of magazines such as OK and People concerns transformations in the private lives of public figures.

To speak of the fast shifting terrain of celebrity may be to speak too hastily. After all, celebrity may look light and liquid when we consider X Factor or Pop Idol, but such ephemerality is hardly the case for Robert De Niro or The Rolling Stones. Thus it might be a mistake to believe that long-term fame has been completely eclipsed by short-term celebrity, even if the latter has undeniably made inroads into the former in the era of reinvention society. But perhaps such dualism is misleading. Perhaps like most forms of popular culture, the powers and limits of reinvention are deeply interwoven with the production and marketing of celebrities in a deeper sense too. Consider, for example, Oprah Winfrey – who, having retired in 2011 from American daytime television after 25 years in the business, could hardly be described as a stopgap celebrity. The high priestess of change-your-life TV, Winfrey’s departure from the circuit of celebrity was globally mourned as an exit of a unique, gifted individual. Her retirement was of course surely that, but also – and perhaps equally interestingly – a fascinating insight into what our culture values in these early decades of the twenty-first century.

Novelist Ian McEwan has written of daytime confessional TV as “the democrat’s pornography” (1987), and there can be little doubt that Winfrey lifted this art to the second power. In her book Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon (2011), Yale academic Kathryn Lofton writes of Winfrey’s “confessional promiscuity” – the daytime television talkfest by which people willingly submit to their personal makeovers in front of millions of viewers and from which they adopt new identities. It is the zoning of makeover or reinvention, I suggest, that takes us to the heart of brand “Winfrey”. One of America’s richest women, Oprah is estimated to be worth in excess of $US1.5 billion. Winfrey’s life story – of a girl who pulled herself up by her own bootstraps and made it on the global media stage – is one her audience has enthusiastically embraced in the form of escape from anxiety over getting stuck in the land of nowhere. Winfrey’s key message – “you can reinvent yourself however you so choose” – is music to the ears of contemporary women and men seeking to embrace the therapeutic mantra of flexible reinvention.
The Winfrey brand, in short, fits hand in glove with today’s pursuit of endless reinvention, continual change, breakneck speed and a short-termist mentality. Oprah’s change-your-life TV dealt this out in spades, and this is obviously one reason her retirement generated such high levels of global media attention. But, significantly, her absence will only be missed temporarily, for our culture of reinvention, serviced by the celebrity preachers of instant therapeutics, is everywhere on the rise.
CHAPTER 3

NEW TECHNOLOGIES, NEW MOBILITIES
NEW TECHNOLOGIES, NEW MOBILITIES

As we encounter the object world we are substantially metamorphosed by the structure of objects; internally transformed by objects that leave their trace within us.

Christopher Bollas

DIGITAL MOBILITIES

Sandra Fletcher is sophisticated and smart – a high-profile advertising executive. At forty-four, she describes her life as ‘full’ in both professional and personal terms. The mother of three children (ranging in age from nine to fourteen), and married to a successful architect, Sandra divides her week between the family home in Leeds and the company office in London. She had felt somewhat troubled about a working arrangement that would take her away from her family three (and sometimes four) nights a week, or at least she did when first experimenting with living and working this way some years ago. But much of her worry was unfounded. Her children have adapted well to her weekly absence and appear fond of the live-in nanny whom Sandra and her husband, Michael, selected (and screened) from an agency, many of which have spring up in order to provide mobile childcare for mobile couples. She also discovered that her relationship with Michael was fine, indeed thriving, when living and working away during the week and then reuniting for ‘quality time’ over weekends. Taken together, these factors meant she could feel relaxed about navigating the demands of her professional and personal lives. Indeed, she looks forward to the routine departure from Leeds on Tuesday mornings, eager to embrace the exciting challenges of professional life in London.

Helping her coordinate, manage and sort through this life divided between London and Leeds are various digital technologies. For Sandra threads and rethreads her professional and personal life together through the use of such technologies. She actively embraces a digital lifestyle. An avid follower of consumer electronic technologies, mobile and wireless products, Sandra relies on mobile communications in order to keep on the move, to access information and to communicate with others. From the broadband terrain of wireless and storage technology to videoconferencing and laptop imaging, Sandra deploys digital lifestyle technologies in order to fashion a mobile, multiplex, connected life with others. In doing so, she has found a new kind of freedom: one that allows her to experience and explore other kinds of communication, information and knowledge. This has been of key importance to her professional success, to locating herself in new and ever-expanding advertising networks, and to the

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2 The figure of Sandra is a composite of two case studies for research funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP877817).
flourishing of her own business. But, for Sandra, the beauty of the digital lifestyle is that 
she gets to bring her family (or, more accurately, her emotional connection with her 
family) along on these virtual networks. For though she might be physically separated 
from family life for much of the week, the digital lifestyle of mobile communications 
means she is also never far away from them – or so it seems to Sandra.

Consider Sandra’s weekly journey from Leeds to London, usually under - taken by 
car. A journey of approximately four hours (much longer than the train), this might 
well be ‘empty time’, but Sandra (like countless motorists) prizes this time as a 
period for both strategic business thinking and com - municating with others. 
Viewing her car as somewhat akin to a mobile office, Sandra commences her journey 
by checking her voice-activated email and subsequently undertakes various business 
calls using her Blue - tooth, hands-free mobile.3 Along the way, she also dictates 
letters to her secretary on her Apple iPhone, using its ‘voice memos’ function. These 
recorded letters she often emails to her secretary while taking a coffee break on the 
long journey, especially if the communications are a priority and need to be sent out 
later in the day. When she is not working while driving to London, Sandra’s car meta 
morphoses into a personal entertainment system. She listens to music while driving, 
lost in private reverie to songs that she has selected and arranged on ‘track lists’ on 
her iPod.4

To be sure, Sandra plays music using various technologies – internet downloads, 
iPod, iPhone – throughout her working week in London. A selfdescribed pop music 
enthusiast, she likes listening to the latest hits (and mentions that she feels this draws 
her closer to some of the cultural interests of her eldest daughter, Victoria). But she 
also spends much time listening to past favourites – especially music current when 
her children were very young, and she was at home full-time. This immersion in music, 
especially being able to recapture memories and feeling-states from years gone by, 
is very important to Sandra, and is a theme we develop throughout this chapter.

The complex relations between digital technologies and identity are also manifest in 
Sandra’s living arrangements in London. The Kensington apartment that Sandra and 
her husband purchased some years ago is fitted with the standard array of new 
technologies, which Sandra describes as her ‘open communication line’ to the family 
in Leeds. Landline, fax, email, Skype: these are the main ways in which she keeps in 
touch with her husband and children throughout the working week. In Sandra’s case, 
however, such technologies are not only a medium through which to communicate 
with others. Importantly, they also function as a basis for self-exploration and 
self-experiment. For Sandra describes herself as immersed in, and sometimes

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3 See Eric Laurier, ‘Doing office work on 
the motorway’, Theory, Culture & Society, 

4 See Michael Bull, ‘Automobility and the 
power of sound’, Theory, Culture & Society, 
consumed by, the ‘film’ of her life, and especially of her role as mother to her young children. She speaks of the ‘thousands’ of family photos she has stored on Google’s Picasa, and of devoting extensive time to cataloguing these family snapshots, arranging them in folders. She also spends countless hours editing home-recorded family videos, mixing vision and sound on Apple’s iMovie. Sandra comments that she finds all this engrossing, captivating, but she worries that she might be a little ‘too obsessive’, given the amount of time devoted to her digital life. At the emotional core of this experience, as we will subsequently examine, there lies anxiety, mourning and melancholia.

What does Sandra’s mobile life tell us about the role of new digital technologies in contemporary societies? What are the social consequences of digital technologies in light of the rise of global mobilities? Do software operated, digital, wireless technologies give rise to any specific contemporary anxieties? Do they contain anxiety, or do they help create it? In exploring these and related questions, this chapter examines how mobile lives are interwoven with digital technologies and are reshaped in the process as techno-mobilities. Throughout the chapter, we explore how mobile lives are fashioned and transformed through various technological forms – virtualities, electronic discourse – in the emotional connections people develop with themselves, others and the wider world. Today's culture of mobile lives, we argue, is substantially created in and through the deployment of various miniaturized mobilities – mobile phones, laptop computers, wireless connections. We introduce and contextualize the concept of miniaturized mobilities in the next section of this chapter, deploying it to underscore how digital technologies intricately interweave with mobile lives. Computers and databases, mobile telephony and SMS texting, the internet and email, digital broadcast and satellites, all go into performing mobile lives. Yet digital technologies also facilitate the mobilization of feelings and affect, memories and desires, dreams and anxieties. What is at stake in the deployment of communications technologies in mobile lives, we contend, is not simply an increased digitization of social relationships, but a broad and extensive change in how emotions are contained (stored, deposited, retrieved) and thus a restructuring of identity more generally.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND MINIATURIZED MOBILITIES

The dichotomies of professional/private, work/home, external/internal and presence/absence are all put into question by Sandra’s mobile life. Such a digital life is inextricably intertwined with the engendering of new kinds of sociability, as Sandra’s mobile connectivity serves to both expand the network capital she enjoys in advertising and rewrites experiences of her personal and family life in more fluid and
negotiated ways. In order to grasp the sociological complexities of such experience, we introduce the concept of *miniaturized mobilities*. We have coined this term to capture both essential elements of communications ‘on the move’ and specifically how digital technologies are corporeally interwoven with self in the production of mobile lives. Miniaturized mobilities, we contend, are fundamental to the current phase of development of contemporary societies and facilitate an intensification of ‘life on the move’ through advances in new portable software and hardware products.

Our understanding of this miniaturization of mobile technologies dates back to 1948, when Bell Telephone Laboratories held a press conference to announce the invention of the transistor. The transistor-powered radio represented a major break with previous ways of regulating power flows in electronics through vacuum tubes, which were very bulky and immobile. Small and relatively mobile, the first transistors were roughly the size of a golf ball – though quite expensive to produce. The subsequent introduction of circuit boards reduced transistors dramatically in size, and today they are only microns across in integrated circuits. As it happens, scientists predicted in 1961 that no transistor on a chip could ever be produced smaller than 10 millionths of a metre\(^5\), whereas today, for example on an Intel Pentium chip, they are 100 times smaller than that. Moreover, transistors today are not only mobile but mass: it has been estimated, for example, that there are approximately 60 million transistors for every person on the planet. Whereas a single transistor used to cost up to fifty dollars, it is difficult today to even speak of a price for a single transistor, given that one can buy millions for a dollar.

Over the past thirty years or so, miniaturization has progressively increased with the expansion of new technologies. Developments in microelectronics for the portable production, consumption and transfer of music, speech and data date from the late 1970s. The Sony Walkman, unveiled to the international press initially in 1979, is perhaps the most important innovation from this period. Paul du Gay *et al.* sum up what is culturally distinctive about the Walkman in their study of this iconic Japanese product thus:

> We do various things with the Walkman ... listening while travelling in a crowded train, on a bus or in an underground carriage; listening while waiting for something to happen or someone to turn up; listening while doing something else – going for a walk or jogging.\(^6\)

The Walkman occupies an important place in the historical emergence of miniaturized mobilities because it represents an early instance of ‘technoblending’.
3 :: NEW TECHNOLOGIES, NEW MOBILITIES

– the reorganization of temporal/spatial settings or contexts in human sensory experience. Doing two different things at once, and the psychic corollary of being in two different places at once, became widespread with daily use of the Walkman: ‘being in a typically crowded, noisy, urban space while also being tuned in, through your headphones, to the very different, imaginary space or soundscape in your head which develops in conjunction with the music you are listening to’.

In more recent years, the emergence of portable, powerful communications-based systems – the ‘mobile machines’ of BlackBerry devices and iPhones, Bluetooth wireless connectivity, laptops and compact DVD players – have fast transformed the production, organization and dissemination of interpersonal communication, information-sharing and knowledge transfer. This can be seen, for example, in the revolution of private databases concerning addresses, contacts, schedules, photos and music. Whereas traditional, stationary forms of communication (letters, telegrams) were dependent upon large, bulky collections of information (office filing cabinets, family photo collections, large music libraries), today’s post-traditional, digitized world of communication initiates new kinds of ‘virtual object’, increasingly central to mobile lives. These miniaturized systems, often carried directly on the body and thus increasingly central to the organization of self, are software-based and serve to inform various aspects of the self’s communication with itself, others and the wider world. Electronic address books, hand-held iPhoto libraries, iTunes music collections, digital video libraries: these techno-systems usher in worlds that are information rich, of considerable sensory and auditory complexity, as well as easily transportable.

As miniaturized mobilities are packaged and sold in the marketplace as smaller, sleeker and more stylish than ‘last year’s model’, so the capacity to use such technical objects as corporeally interwoven with the body grows exponentially. Castells captures the contemporariness of this well:

> What is specific to our world is the extension and augmentation of the body and mind of human subjects in networks of interaction powered by micro-electronics-based, software-operated, communications technologies. These technologies are increasingly diffused throughout the entire realm of human activity by growing miniaturization.7

This twinning of lives and systems through miniaturized mobilities is also captured by Thrift’s notion of ‘movement-spaces’, that is: ‘the utterly mundane frameworks that move “subjects” and “objects” about’.8 Miniaturized mobilities, corporeally

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interwoven with the body, become organized in terms of ‘movement-spaces’: as software-operated, digital technologies that serve to augment the mobile capacities of individuals.

But there is more at stake than just the technical and socio-spatial range of such digital technologies. Miniaturized mobilities influence social relations in more subtle ways, especially in regard to the redrafting of the self. Lay understandings of such digital technologies tend to emphasize the expanded reach of the self’s communicative actions – of ‘what can be done’. In doing this, lay understandings of digital lifestyles are surely correct, but this is only part of the story. The individual self does not just ‘use’, or activate, digital technologies in day-to-day life. On the contrary, the self – in conditions of intensive mobilities – becomes deeply ‘layered’ within technological networks, as well as reshaped by their influence. Indeed, as we explore in this chapter, not only are mobile lives lived against the digital backdrop of miniaturized mobilities, but such portable technical systems give specific form to the self’s relations with affect, anxiety, memory and desire.

There are four central ways in which miniaturized mobilities enter into the constitution of self and of other novel social patterns, all of which are discernable from Sandra’s mobile life.

First there is mobile connectivity, which, in constituting the person as the portal, unties the self from specific locations or places and reconfigures identity as dispersed, adrift, ‘on the move’. ‘Mobile phones’, writes Barry Wellman, ‘afford a fundamental liberation from place.’9 If landline telephones designate a fixed location (for example, ‘the office’), mobile telephony (an example par excellence of miniaturized mobilities) is emblematic of wireless technology, international roaming, spatial fluidity. This much is clear from Sandra’s personalized, wireless world, in which – as the designer of her own networks and connections – she is able to remain in routine contact with colleagues, friends and family, no matter where she is travelling. In so doing, Sandra’s life is reflective of wider social trends: not only are there now more mobile phones than landline phones, but research undertaken by Nokia suggests that approximately two-thirds of the world’s population will deploy mobile connectivity by 2015.10 This worldwide spread of powerful, inter dependent, communications-based systems forms a virtual infrastructure, or what Knorr Cetina terms ‘flow architectures’,11 for the routine, repetitive actions that constitute the mobile lives of many today. Such virtual back grounds – mobile phones, ringtones, voicemail, signals, satellites – make it possible for Sandra to activate email while driving to London, transfer voice recordings to her secretary at the push of a button and video-call her family back home in Leeds. One consequence of digital...

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10 See John Urry, Mobilities [Cambridge: Polity, 2007], Chapter 5.
communications technologies is that aspects of social life are recast as adaptable, flexible, transferable and self-organizing. New systems of mobile, virtual communications permit fast, flexible sociabilities, which in turn cut to the core of lived identities, relationships, intimacies, sexualities, careers and families. But it is not only de-spatialized, dispersed and fluid communications, activated telephonically at any moment, that come to the fore under conditions of intensive mobilities. What is equally striking is the social impact of mobile communications upon the self and its cultural coordinates. For what Sandra’s digital lifestyle reveals is a world of increased negotiation between family, work and the private sphere, which in turn involves continuous and flexible coordination of arrangements, communications and face-to-face meetings with others. This leads directly to our next point.

Second, miniaturized mobilities are part and parcel of a continuous coordination of communications, social networks and the mobile self. We have seen already how developments in digital technologies have made possible novel relations with others at-a-distance and have desynchronized social life more generally. Research indicates, however, that all social ties at-a-distance depend upon multiple processes of coordination, negotiation and renegotiation with others. ‘Renegotiation’ is especially significant in the coordination of mobile networks, as people ‘on the move’ use new technologies to reset and reorganize times and places for meetings, events and happenings as they go about preparing to meet with others at previously agreed times. The work of Ling, for example, underscores the often impromptu nature of most mobile calls and texting. Again, this can be gleaned from Sandra’s mobile life – from the brief calls she makes to her office to rearrange business meetings to the texts she makes to her family upon returning to Leeds on Friday evenings, whether to advise of last minute train delays or arrange for the collection of take out food on the way home. Such ‘revisions to clock-time’ enacted through mobile calls, emailing and texting suggest a deeper shift in how people experience time itself in conditions of advanced mobilities. For what the continuous coordination of communications, social networks and the mobile self spells is a transformation from punctual time to negotiated time.

Third, in a world saturated with miniaturized mobilities, strategic travel planning and communications scheduling become of key importance. With the advent of miniaturized mobilities, travel times of one kind or another increasingly revolve around the pursuit of work, business or leisure activities while travelling. That is to say, the complex connections that exist today between transport systems and new communications technologies mean that travel time is less likely to be approached by individuals as unproductive, ‘wasted’ time, and more likely to be used productively

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for a range of both professional and personal activities. Indeed, communications scheduling ‘on the move’ comprises a substantial amount of the individual’s travel patterns in conditions of advanced mobilities. In contrast to the immobile, fixed desk of previous work environments, today’s digitized, mobile work stations, made up of palmtops, laptops, PDAs, WiFi and 3G phones, mean that portable offices are increasingly commonplace throughout cars, planes and rail carriages and places of waiting en route. It is true, of course, that work and related professional activities have been undertaken by people throughout time and across a wide spectrum of traditional travel forms – from strategic military thinking on ships to routine paperwork done on trains. But contemporary communications scheduling performed in relation to travel times and travel planning is different in scope to previous types of travel communication, because of the instantaneity of new communications technologies and the global reach of digital networks. This is significant because we may also speak of reflexivity at the heart of communications-based travel planning, in relation to both the calendars of work and professional activities that individuals intend to undertake while ‘on the move’, and also in terms of alterations to schedules that arise from either not being able to ‘get hold’ of key contacts or learning of new information that demands a revision to one’s work schedule. That such strategic travel planning and communications scheduling ‘on the move’ is commonplace depends on a vast array of technological infrastructures – for example, the ‘screens’ located in business class areas of planes and rail carriages or the provision of computing facilities throughout airports and railway stations.

In such travel situations, it is not only the substantive time of the journey itself that can be ‘filled’ with productive work or meaningful life pursuits. It is also the ‘edges’ of travel time – waiting in an airport terminal lounge, sitting on a delayed train – that become potentially usable in this way. It is characteristic of contemporary attitudes to work and related professional activities that people seek to undertake various productive activities – mobile telephony, SMS texting, email – while experiencing unanticipated temporal delays when travelling. Only when ready-to-hand miniaturized mobilities are more or less easily available, however, can we speak of networked communication and information as productive possibilities for people in this context. These delayed edges of travel time have been captured nicely by Lyons et al., who describe the importance of ‘equipped waiting’. Equipped waiting, situated on the delayed edges of travel time, allows for an inhabiting of, or dwelling within, information communications networks, from which individuals can conduct business, work, romance and family negotiations.

Finally, as a result of the widespread use of miniaturized mobilities, the technological unconscious comes to the fore and functions as a psycho social mechanism for the negotiation of sociabilities based upon widespread patterns of absence, lack, distance and disconnection. In underscoring the generative, creative aspects of the unconscious for both self-identity and social relations, Freud uncovered the complex, contradictory emotional connections between presence and absence – for example in the Oedipus complex, or the ‘symbolic order’ in Jacques Lacan’s Freud – which constitute psychic life. In classical Freudian theory, patterns of presence and absence primarily refer to significant others, such as parents, siblings, extended family and such like. With complex, network-driven systems, by contrast, we witness the emergence of various ‘virtual’ others and objects resulting from the revolution of digital technologies. These virtual others and objects reconstitute the background to psychic experiences of presence and absence in novel ways, through, for example, the virtual experience of otherness in Second Life. As a result, it is necessary to speak of a technological unconscious at work in the negotiation of social relations involving high degrees of absence, distance and disconnection. This last theme provides a convenient transition to the next section of the chapter, which deals with the transformations of emotional containment brought about by digital, wireless technologies.

DIGITAL LIFE: DEPOSITS, STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL OF AFFECT

The backdrop here is the restructuring, or renegotiation, of professional and personal realms that is characteristic of mobile lives. The technocommunications systems of twenty-first-century mobilities create slices of life where people can simultaneously be ‘on the move’, access vast amounts of information, and communicate with others (both near and far) in real time through miniaturized mobilities. As we have seen in the case of Sandra, approaching life in terms of mobile technologies certainly has its rewarding and uplifting aspects – as the more or less constant technological communication and continual travel produce a world of rapid change and dazzling excitement. But mobile life also has some very unsettling aspects, again connected to the sheer momentum of change and often tied to novel trials and tribulations stemming from difficulties in relating professional, intimate and family lives. Mobile technologies, as Sandra’s story reveals, assist in connecting, understanding and discovering meaningful aspects entailed by the various time-space dislocations of life ‘on the move’. But technological intervention into, and restructuring of, mobile lives result in no straight forward victory over emotional difficulties. For, whatever the more positive aspects heralded by mobile lives (and we do not deny that they are many and varied), we emphasize that life ‘on the move’ is also bumpy, full of the unexpected and unpredictable, involving considerable ambivalence.

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17 See Patricia Clough, Auto-affection: unconscious thought in the age of technology [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000].
Understanding how miniaturized machines play an important role in containing many forms of anxiety helps explain why, in conditions of complex mobilities, people come to dwell within communications networks, activities and capabilities. There is an emerging literature on this subject, although we do not review it in detail.\textsuperscript{18}

‘Technological containment’ may sound somewhat odd or jarring, as the term ‘containment’ is usually associated with the sympathy or support of another person (for example, a therapist) in much psychological research. On an emotional plane, however, there are close connections between digital technologies, miniaturized mobilities and emotional containment. Think, for example, of a person talking on their mobile phone while on a train: the intimacy shared with the person to whom they are speaking may be very close (even though this other is ‘at-a-distance’), while those co-present on the train merely ‘fade into the background’. In ‘filtering out’ the presence of other people on the train, a sense of self-identity involving perhaps major transitions or tensions – for example, a marriage breakdown – might be explored in the mobile phone conversation. In such a situation, miniaturized mobilities facilitate forms of emotional containment – the opportunity to express and explore anxieties, doubts, worries or dangers.

One reason we chose to write about Sandra’s story is that her experiences of digital technologies reflect the deeply ambivalent psychological dimensions that come to the fore in living mobile lives. There is, for example, little doubt that Sandra’s routine use of miniaturized mobilities helps her maintain ‘shared histories’ of intimacy with her family. Sandra’s shared history of intimacy with her family may be created and sustained through very different orderings of time and space to those processes of intimacy she was part of when living full time in Leeds as a young mother, but, nevertheless, the role of miniaturized mobilities is plainly evident in how she today integrates aspects of her family’s calendar into her professional and personal lives. To that extent, Sandra’s digital life is deeply dialogical, built as it is out of ongoing virtual connections with significant others. Mobile technologies thus play, not only a facilitating role in the maintenance of Sandra’s close emotional bonds, but a containing one as well. She comments, for instance, that she finds it ‘deeply reassuring’ to know that she can have virtually instantaneous contact with family members at-a-distance through mobile telephony or electronic communications (assuming they work). Again, this is partly to do with the ‘use’ of such technologies; but, more than that, miniaturized mobilities offer some reassurance, some degree of emotional containment of anxiety, even when not activated. Simply knowing that her mobile is ‘at hand’, or that she can see and talk with her children through Skype if she wants to, is oftentimes enough to contain Sandra’s anxieties about working and

\textsuperscript{18} For an overview of psychoanalytic contributions to the analysis of technological containment, see Anthony Elliott, \textit{Subject to ourselves: social theory, psychoanalysis and postmodernity} (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2004). Also see Mark Poster, \textit{The second media age} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
living away from home for extended periods. Such a focus on the ‘potential’ for mobility [in this case, communicative and virtual] is sometimes referred to in the literature of mobilities as ‘motility’.19

We may also trace in Sandra’s story, however, various disturbing pathologies of the self – again related to matters of containment – in her burgeoning preoccupation with these technologies. This is evident especially from her immersion in electronic family photos and videos – conducted on both Apple’s iMovie and Google’s Picasa. What was meant to become a ‘family resource’ (in which members of the family could access this virtual archive) has, in recent times, shaded over into something that Sandra worries is ‘too obsessive’. Of course, many people spend large amounts of their leisure time immersed in pursuits such as photography or video editing. In the case of Sandra, however, something else appears to be at work here. She acknowledges that she feels

considerable levels of guilt over being away from the family so regularly. She also seems aware of the disquieting scenario of loss more generally. But Sandra’s reflexive level of self-awareness also seems to falter in this connection. She feels not on ‘solid ground’ when it comes to understanding the countless hours she spends organizing their electronic photo library, or editing family videos. Because she does not quite understand the emotional prompts for these activities, she says that she feels worried.

Post-Freudian developments in psychoanalytic theory, we contend, are especially helpful for grasping the state of mind that Sandra has entered through her ongoing, relentless technological explorations. Although psycho analysis is sometimes portrayed as anti-sociological in its examination of the imaginative, unconscious forms of self-identity, it nevertheless provides a sophisticated conceptual means for exploring the self’s relationship to cultural meanings and society more generally. Post-Freudian developments in psychoanalytic theory, we contend, are especially helpful for grasping the state of mind that Sandra has entered through her ongoing, relentless technological explorations. Although psycho analysis is sometimes portrayed as anti-sociological in its examination of the imaginative, unconscious forms of self-identity, it nevertheless provides a sophisticated conceptual means for exploring the self’s relationship to cultural meanings and society more generally. This applies, not only to social relationships, but also the self’s relations with non-human objects (such as digital technologies). Given the emphasis in this chapter on the theme of emotional containment in the context of mobile lives, the conceptualization of anxiety developed by the psychoanalytic tradition known as Kleinian and post-Kleinian theory is especially relevant. Kleinian psychoanalysis is fundamentally concerned with the emotional logics of primitive anxiety – both in the life of the young infant, and also throughout the life-course. Kleinianism stresses that the infant’s early sense of anxiety comes from a primary destructiveness, or fear that envy and rage may result in injury to loved objects – principally the mother or primary caretaker. Anxiety in this perspective ‘eats away’ at the core of the self, and consequently Kleinian theory devotes great attention to the interpersonal forms in and through which anxiety may be ameliorated, contained and transformed. For it is only through the containment of anxiety, or so argue Kleinians, that basic trust in self and others can be developed and nourished.

The post-Kleinian contribution of psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion is especially important, given the attention he paid to the emotional processes by which normal anxiety can spill over into neurotic anxiety. Again, the theme of containment looms large. Bion emphasized the complex emotional processes through which an individual generates new experience as genuinely new. Human experience, according to Bion, has to be understood in relation to the overall processing of emotion that an individual develops across time, rather than as something that impacts upon people only in a generalized manner. For Bion, experience generated with others has the capacity to unlock previously unknown, unthought or unpredicted aspects of emotional life. Reflective engagement with others – facilitative of the containment and transformation of unconscious anxiety – is essential to experiencing the world as new as well as to
autonomous thought. The flipside, says Bion, is when people become emotionally stuck, caught in stultifying routines and endless repetition. From this angle, if an individual’s emotional repertoire becomes constrained or damaged, this in turn discounts fresh experiences as new. Indeed, the emotional imprint of an individual’s previous encounters – from early family relationships through childhood to maturity – is very often limiting or coercive to learning and development from fresh experiences.

One of us has elsewhere explored in detail the import of Bion’s psychoanalytic approach for social theory, especially in terms of the analysis of modern communications within contemporary societies. What we underscore here is that Bion’s work is insightful for the critique of mobile lives because of its emphasis on both the projection outwards, and subsequent retrieval into self, of affects regarding surrounding objects, both human and inhuman. In order for experience of the world to become emotionally imprinted upon the psyche, according to Bion, the individual self must surrender itself to the here-and-now of daily happenings. This involves, in effect, a ‘letting go’ of consciousness of self and an immersion in sectors of pure experience. Indeed, it is only through immersion in the object world that the self can subsequently ‘attach meaning to experience’ in creative and open-ended ways. It is only in terms of the ‘processing’ of experience, the origin of the reflective self, that the individual comes to engage in that act which Bion calls ‘thinking’, as well as the storing of thoughts as memory. Thus, there is an essential interplay between experience and thinking, raw emotions and reflective life, which is essential to the individual’s creative engagement with the self, other people and the wider world.

The psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, influenced by Bion, has undertaken various studies that demonstrate the emotional impact of nonhuman objects [such as communications technologies] upon the self. In a passage from Being a character, Bollas makes a fundamental point about the process of object engagement:

the processional integrity of any object – that which is inherent to any object when brought to life by an engaging subject – is used by the individual according to the laws of the dream work. When we use an object it is as if we know the terms of engagement; we know we shall ‘enter into’ an intermediate space, and at this point of entry we change the nature of perception, as we are now released to dream work, in which subjectivity is scattered and disseminated into the object world, transformed by that encounter, then returned to itself after the dialectic, changed in its inner contents by the history of that moment.
Understanding the interweaving of self and object in this way directs our attention to the complexities of affect in the production of meaning. For Bollas, all psychic engagement with others and the world involves a kind of ‘holding’ of the trace of the object itself. It is as if part of the object itself becomes deeply lodged in the self. All individuals, according to Bollas, inhabit highly condensed psychic textures of the object world. Or, to put it slightly differently, it is as if the unconscious communications that arise between people in their use of everyday objects are somehow deeply inscribed within these structures of interaction, preserved in the object world for future forms of self-reference, self-experiencing and self-understanding. ‘As we encounter the object world’, writes Bollas, ‘we are substantially metamorphosed by the structure of objects; internally transformed by objects that leave their trace within us’.

What is meant by the term ‘trace’ in this context? And how, exactly, can the self use an object (either human or non-human) in such a way that the latter comes to act as a kind of emotional container for the former? According to Bollas, the trace of any object lodged deep within the self has its roots in a web of affects, splittings, projective identifications, part–object relatedness and omnipotent thinking. Such psychic processes mark a structural boundary for the ‘self-holding’ of affective states, preserved, as it were, for future forms of thinking and symbolic elaboration. All object use is emotionally tensional, involving an unconscious oscillation between love and hate, excitement and guilt. Seeking to capture the experiential dimensions of emotional containment, Bollas contends that certain objects are like ‘psychic keys’ for particular individuals, in that they enable an opening out of unconscious experience, a symbolic context for the elaboration of selves. Hence, Bollas speaks of the transformational aspects of the object, as that which releases and preserves the erotics of individual subjectivity.

Provocatively, Bollas claims that the preservation of affective states – that is, their storage – is based on modalities of conservative or mnemonic objects. This relates to the storing of affects within the object world of places, events and things.25 This investment of affect in objects, both real and virtual, can remain ‘stored’ until such time as the individual is able to reclaim such self-defining experience in and through symbolic elaboration. In so doing, the individual might be said to be engaged in an act of ‘emotional banking’, depositing affects, moods and dispositions into the object world and storing such aspects of self-experience until they are withdrawn for future forms of symbolization and thinking. For example, the self-psychological analysts Atwood and Stolorow discuss the case of a man who regularly used a tape recorder to deposit and monitor his feelings outside therapy. ‘This use of the tape recorder as a transitional object’, they comment, ‘both concretized the injured state of the self and reinvoked the

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empathic bond with the therapist, thereby enabling the patient to regain a sense of being substantial and real.\textsuperscript{26} This is suggestive of what we mean by affect storage.

Different objects, of course, have different levels of significance for individuals. For Bollas, individuals in the unconsciousness of day-to-day life invest various objects (both human and inhuman) to both contain and elaborate the complexity of the self. The investment of affect in objects is therefore something of an open-ended affair: such investment can either help to unlock or to imprison the creativity of the self. The imprisoning of the self within the object world – in which thoughts and feelings are not experienced as symbolic elaborations, but as things-in-themselves – is theorized by Bollas as a point of affective closure. Further, the mind is emptied of pain through the defensive use of omnipotent thinking and denial, and the self is fixed through an ideological framing (familial, religious, nationalistic and so forth) of what the world is actually like. The unlocking of the self through the storing of affects in the object world, however, permits a multiplication of experience and a transformation in pleasure, creativity and fulfilment. The use of an object as transformational, whether we speak of an immersion in music, literature or football, can help open the self to the multiplicity and discontinuity of experience. Likewise, in the context of mobile lives, the investment of affect in virtual objects, such as Facebook, Second Life or Skype, can function as a form of emotional containment, the storing of affect for subsequent retrieval, processing and thinking.

From this psychoanalytic standpoint, the creativity of self, which means the capacity to engage new experience as genuinely new, is closely tied to the openness of psychic life. Openness in this context involves a kind of processing – a thinking through – of emotions. A creative involvement with one’s emotional life, as well as the emotional lives of others, stems from an openness to the complexity, and indeed multiplicity, of human experience. In this sense, both other people and surrounding objects can help facilitate experience that is transformational in impact. That is to say, containing environments supplied by other people and transitional objects assist in the processing of unthought emotion. Where individuals cannot live creatively, either because of dominant emotional imprints from past experience that are corrosive, or because their capacity for processing emotion is underdeveloped or impaired, chronic depressive and related pathologies are likely to emerge.

Although this psychoanalytic understanding of containment only refers to ‘transitional objects’ in a very general sense, there is no reason to suppose that the main lines of this argument do not apply with less force to the impact of digital technologies in day-to-day social life. While we are at the edge of where current psychoanalytic

theory takes us, our claim is that digital technologies should be understood, at least in part, in relation to the containment of anxiety and emotional conflicts of the self. That is to say, mobile technologies are not only technical objects of adjustment through which people coordinate their activities with others. They are also constitutive of how people go about the production and transformation of their mobile lives. As anxiety, trust and technologies of mobile interaction are intricately interwoven, it is not surprising that miniaturized mobilities should function to some large extent as containing mechanisms. For miniaturized mobilities, we contend, are never free of the emotions, anxieties and conflicts of the individuals that use them.

The difficulties and complexities of containment are certainly evident from Sandra’s story, a woman who has poured a good deal of her need for emotional contact into digital technologies. In a sense, there is much that is ordinary in Sandra’s use of digital technologies as a mechanism of anxiety reduction. Like millions the world over, she uses mobile telephony, the internet and related electronic communications to keep in touch with significant others in her daily life. Although somewhat unremarkable from a lay standpoint (after all, this is arguably how people now live throughout advanced, network societies), it is worth underscoring the importance of such technologies to the emotional fabric of Sandra’s life. Such technologies are deeply interwoven with all aspects of Sandra’s professional and personal activities, from mobile conference meetings with colleagues (also ‘on the move’) to the scheduling and rescheduling of family get-togethers and outings. As we have seen, however, this mobile life extends well beyond the use of digital technologies to maintain relations of generalized contact or intimacy with others. Her technological activities also become the means by which she makes a connection with other, displaced (and sometimes only barely recognized or acknowledged) aspects of self-experience. Although an immersion in such technologies – in this instance, Picasa and iMovie – was gratifying in the early stages of her time living in London, with the sense that more and more of her evenings were taken up with such activities, it was as though Sandra was becoming disconnected from her own life. Perhaps this is why she expressed concern about the ‘obsessional’ aspects of such activity.

There is the sense here of digital technologies shifting in Sandra’s experience from intoxicating to threatening. Listening to how she talks about her intensely mobile worlds of mediated interaction, it is as if she is describing a psychic power struggle between her personal and techno – logical lives, of which the latter comes to limit the former. What has limited Sandra’s inner reality, it seems, is the isolation experienced as she goes about her entrenched ways of using, and her absorption in, these technologies. It is as if this confrontation with mobile technology for Sandra has
resulted in an engulfing of herself, an engulfment that has left the self drained and lifeless. Trapped in the isolation box of these new technologies, the emotional connections Sandra was seeking to re-establish with others – namely, her children and family – come to be eaten away from within. And this is even more the case when those relations-at-a-distance involve different countries or continents, and the families involved possess little network capital to enable relationship work and repair.

Sandra is not alone in finding that mobile technologies can switch from containment to engulfment. Research in psychology, for example, highlights the growing relations between problematic internet use and depression or psychic isolation. Other recent research has focused on the psychological distress and connected pathological symptoms stemming from the mal adaptive use of both mobile telephony and the internet. A Japanese study of web-based communities found that excessive use of the internet increases depression and aggression, as well as the desire for further virtual communication, but in contrast to findings in the abovementioned research does not impact on loneliness. Much of the research concerning pathologies of the self arising in the context of mobile communications remains controversial, and there appears to be little overall consensus in the social sciences as to the emotional consequences of conducting much of one’s life on small screens.

As Norman H. Nie et al. have pointed out, however, social critique needs to shift away from general categorizations of whether mobile technologies are good or bad for sociability, and focus on how specific technological deployments affect the self and interpersonal relations. In this connection, the psychoanalytic approach we have detailed to the generation of experience, mediated through digital technologies, is of considerable importance. It underscores the affective complexity of the self in its deployment of new communications technologies. This approach sees the benefits of new communications technologies, at the level of the self, as generating forms of experience that often involve creative dreaming or reverie. What accounts for disturbances in the self’s engagement with digital technologies stems from closures in psychic life. When digital processes fail to function as emotional containers for experience, the individual can become overwhelmed by communications technologies, with disowned aspects of self-experience – ranging from paranoid anxiety to guilt, despair and depression. What gives rise to failures in emotional containment in conditions of complex mobile lives needs greater analytical attention than it has so far received in the social sciences. Similarly, how different forms of mobile connectivity – from SMS texting to videoconferencing to online fast communications – facilitate or constrain the autonomy of the self also demands further critical attention.

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CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have critically appraised the role of digital technologies in the constitution of mobile lives. Especially significant to living mobile lives are the multiple and intersecting software-operated, digital technologies that we term *miniaturized mobilities*. From Apple iPhones to Bluetooth wireless connectivity, *miniaturized mobilities* are corporeally interwoven with the body and serve to augment the mobile capacities of individual subjects in physical, communicative and virtual forms. We have outlined various ways in which new digital technologies enter into the patterning and restructuring of mobile lives, with particular concentration on the theme of emotional anxiety and its containment. Drawing from post-Freudian developments in psychoanalysis, we argued that digital life is increasingly organized as deposits, storage and retrieval of affect in and through miniaturized mobilities. From this perspective, we noted that virtual objects such as Facebook, Second Life or Skype are used, in part, for the ‘holding’ or containment of anxiety. We further noted that such containment can either facilitate thinking in relation to mobile lives, or can turn defensively back upon the self in various pathologies of mobile lives. Throughout, we have emphasized that the living of digital lives, realized increasingly through the augmentation of miniaturized mobilities, occurs in the broader context of complex networks of connection, and this provides the connection to the next chapter, on networks.
EXPERIMENTAL WORLDS

ON POSTHUMAN IDENTITY

The year is 2045. You are at home, storing information into your biological system and saving some new skill sets directly into your brain. You also send this information, wirelessly, to the brain of a close friend. Nanobots – tiny robots the size of blood cells – pulse within your bloodstream. Keeping you healthy at the cellular and molecular levels, these nanoscopic robots provide nutrients and hormones as well as remove toxins and waste products from the body. Consequently, you can eat as much as you wish without putting on weight. For food, much like sex, has now been decoupled from its biological function. So too, the arrival of full-scale nanotechnology transforms your relationship to others and the object-world. You can email a kettle, overcoat or bottle of wine as an attachment to family or friends. You can transform your body into an endless assemblage of physical forms, as you shift seamlessly between virtual and physical realities. In such a time, in the not-too-distant future, you live free from disease. Crucially, you will also die at a time of your own choosing.

Science fiction? Or, a techno-future forecast with a utopian edge? One might be forgiven for thinking so. But this grand-scale prediction about life and identity in the future comes from acclaimed inventor Ray Kurzweil, in his book *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005). Kurzweil’s speculations about life in 2045 derive from an analysis of institutional transformations already well underway today, specifically the exponential growth in information technologies. These transformations, contends Kurzweil, are in fact neither fanciful nor utopian; today’s technological and scientific transformations are irreversibly changing our prospects for the future. The core argument of the book derives from Kurzweil’s ‘law’ of accelerating returns, which holds that on the present annual doubling of the power of information technologies there will be a tipping point – the Singularity – in which nonbiological, artificial intelligence becomes a billion times more powerful than human intelligence. If he is correct, something of a global disruptive transformation in human capability – and indeed the very definition and meaning of ‘the human’ – may await us. This concerns a series of interconnected technological, genetic and informational developments which means that human identity will be irrevocably transformed. Such transformational developments in genetics, nanotechnology and robotics – what Kurzweil terms ‘GNR’ – will reconstitute identities of unrecognizably high cognition, comprehension, memory and so on and so forth.

Kurzweil is a respected inventor, entrepreneur and public intellectual in the United States, and he was the principal developer of technologies including print-to-speech...
reading devices for the blind and the first CCD flat-bed scanner. Dubbed by the media as the ‘rightful heir to Thomas Edison’, and appointed Director of Engineering at Google in California in the 2010s, the controversial inventor and futurist sees his own work as mapping the exponential expansion of information technologies in terms of our biology, our social development and possible pathways for the future. *The Singularity Is Near* is a remarkably broad analysis of artificial intelligence and the information processes underlying and reshaping biology. Kurzweil focuses on everything from quantum computing to reverse engineering of the brain, from GNR technologies to global warming. But what of our identities? Kurzweil keeps his analytical focus centrally on biology, or more accurately the eclipse of biology by nonbiological, artificial intelligence. According to Kurzweil, the recreation of human intelligence through hardware and software applications will result in vastly greater cognitive capacity and speed, as well as knowledge storage and retrieval. The central transformation, Kurzweil argues, is the erasure of the distinction between the biological and the nonbiological. ‘The most important application of circa-2030 nanobots’, writes Kurzweil (2005: 316–317),

will be literally to expand our minds through the merger of biological and nonbiological intelligence.... Nonbiological intelligence should still be considered human, since it is fully derived from human-machine civilization and will be based, at least in part, on 89 EXPERIMENTAL WORLDS reverse engineering human intelligence.... The merger of these two worlds of intelligence is not merely a merger of biological and nonbiological thinking mediums, but more important, one of methods and organization of thinking, one that will be able to expand our minds virtually any imaginable way.

The result is a paradigm shift that sees the human utterly redefined, a shift which (although not explicitly theorized by Kurzweil) irrevocably transforms our identities.

To speak of a fundamental transformation of the human and associated redefinition of social identities is to enter the conceptual and political terrain of posthumanism. Whilst Kurzweil does not use this term, *The Singularity Is Near* connects to a number of works that have advanced the proposition that changes in biotechnology will alter human identity beyond recognition. From N. Katherine Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman* (2008) to Francis Fukuyama’s *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), there have been various academic and popular treatments assessing the prospects of a posthuman future. Many discussions of the
posthuman are distinctly gloomy. Fukuyama, for instance, sees potentially terrible political consequences in posthumanism. By contrast, Kurzweil’s analysis is supremely positive – with brain circuit expansion, ecological harmony and cybernetic immortality as key themes. Yet it is a matter of some puzzlement that predications of the posthuman future – whether utopian or dystopian – have very little to say about the transfiguration of the human itself, especially of how identity will change as a result of the exponential expansion in information technology, bioinformatics and biotechnologies. It is partly with the objective of filling this omission in contemporary debates on posthumanism that I set out in this chapter to critically examine the notion of posthuman identity and consider its wider personal, social, cultural and political consequences.

The notion of posthuman identity is one that emerges from various fields, ranging across social theory and philosophy to contemporary art, futurology and science fiction. My focus in what follows will be concentrated primarily on recent social theory. I seek to explore in this chapter our hopes, our fascination and our fears concerning the drafting of posthuman identities in recent social theory. In turning to some of the most compelling and sophisticated accounts of posthuman identities in the literature of recent social theory, the first part of the chapter explores the cultural and political factors that have brought posthumanism to prominence in the academy and in wider public debate. The second part of the chapter develops a critique of the gains and losses of posthuman social theory, focusing especially on the theme of identity and its possible transformations as a result of the impacts of information technology, genetics, nanotechnology and so on and so forth. I shall be concerned to show that, notwithstanding various reservations concerning the manner in which posthumanism has been theorized in the literature of social theory, the consequences of the advent of posthuman identities are far-reaching.

CURRENT CONTROVERSIES ON POSTHUMAN IDENTITIES

Debates about posthuman identities and their social, cultural and political consequences are informed by two key axes of orientation. The first axis concerns the challenges presented by contemporary processes of globalization, biotechnologies and information technologies for the development of posthuman social thought. This axis is, then, principally concerned with the descriptive, analytic and conceptual adequacy of posthumanism for understanding transformations in the dynamics of contemporary subjectivity. The second axis concerns the development of a normative frame of reference to the critique of posthuman identities today. Here the focus is centrally on the desirability or otherwise of the posthuman turn, and of whether
emergent and novel blendings of human and non-human actors should be celebrated, criticized, resisted or rejected.

Notwithstanding the remarkable plurality of voices in the debate over posthumanism and its consequences for understanding forms of contemporary subjectivity, I want to focus in what follows on two major strands of social thought associated with such transformations of the social landscape. The first significant posthuman development comes from contemporary transformations in biomedicine and associated mutations in bio-identities. Here I shall briefly review the contribution of sociologist Nikolas Rose and how the Foucaultian inspired conceptualization of what he terms ‘bio-sociality’ is transforming structures of subjectivity and the conduct of life. Rose’s work is sociologically interesting because he addresses the complex ways in which biotechnologies and biomedicine are producing new molecular understandings of minds, bodies and identities – even though he questions the explanatory purchase of the very concept of the posthuman itself. The second strand of thought I shall consider proposes an affirmative posthumanism, one that underscores the new opportunities and exciting possibilities, as well as the ethical and cultural challenges, arising from the advent of posthuman forms of subjectivity and identity. Here I shall review, in a selective and partial manner, the work of the philosopher and feminist Rosi Braidotti on the posthuman subject.

Nikolas Rose, in his *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007), argues that the twenty-first biotech century represents an emergent mixture of biomedicine, bio-sociality and the appearance of new forms of ‘biopower’ governing the conduct of identities. As the reference to biopower suggests, Rose’s work is strongly indebted to the late French historian, Michel Foucault. Rose takes his cue from recent advances in the life sciences and biomedicine – with reference to the biomedical techniques of genetic manipulation, organ transplants, reproductive technologies and the spread of psychopharmacological drugs. The age of human genome sequencing opens a world of biological reengineering and the redesign of people, although Rose himself does not equate this unprecedented mediation of biomedicine into the fabric and structure of human identity with the advent of posthumanism. Rather, the complex, intricate association between biomedicine and human subjects is for Rose constitutive of a new way of understanding the biological sphere – in which processes of isolation, storage, delimitation, mobilization, accumulation and exchange comes to the fore.

Rose holds that the age of biomedicine and biotechnology has unleashed an action of universal import involving new fabrications of identity and new sets of social relations. Medical technologies, or technologies of health, are geared to the goal of
optimization. In typical Foucaultian vein, Rose is out to stress the productive functions of biomedicine – even though the manipulation of basic life processes at the level of cells, molecules and genes is oftentimes rendered as constraining, and oftentimes oppressive. But this is rushing ahead. Rose’s opening argument is that biomedicine and biotechnology is transforming our social landscapes, recasting the core of our identities and our cultural relations. He writes (2007: 17), for example:

Once one has witnessed the effects of psychiatric drugs in reconfiguring the thresholds, norms, volatilities of the affects, of cognition, of the will, it is difficult to imagine a self that is not open to modification in this way. Once one has seen the norms of female reproduction reshaped by assisted conception, the nature and limits of procreation and the space of hopes and fears around it are irrevocably changed. Once one has seen the norms of female aging reshaped by hormone replacement therapy, or the norms of aging male sexuality reshaped by Viagra, the “normal” process of growing old seems only one possibility in a field of choices, at least for those in the wealthy West.

There is also the question of the domain or field on which life itself is grasped. The traditionalist argument in the social sciences has been that life is the property of the individual agent, subjectively mediated and experienced from beginning to end. On this view, the well-regulated nature of Western living goes hand-in-hand with its individualist ethos. But Rose is rightly suspicious of individualist ideologies, arguing that the age of biomedicine and biotechnology shifts the whole terrain of subjectivity and of life itself. Such shifts in the fabric of life are not necessarily easily discernible, however. Self-understanding in the West, as elsewhere, has been deeply conditioned by traditionalist ‘molar’ thinking. This is a kind of thinking in and through which women and men picture the human body in molar terms – as a mix of limbs, organs, blood, hormones and so on and so forth. But when it comes to the body, there is today another level of discourse which is increasingly dominant – that of the ‘molecular’. There is, to be sure, a new way of conceptualizing life – its possibilities and extensions – as a result of the ‘molecular gaze’. Such biomedical visualization, says Rose, encompasses coding sequences of nucleotide bases, molecular mechanisms, the functional properties of proteins and intracellular transformations, such as membrane potentials, enzyme activities, transporter genes and ion channels.

The arrival of molecular biopolitics brings us to the centre of Rose’s argument. The medical gaze now constituted, understood and acted upon at the molecular level is
predicated upon a lifting of ‘the biological’ to the second power. In twenty-first-century biopolitics, writes Rose (2007: 20), ‘the human becomes, not less biological, but all the more biological’. Once again, the analytic focus here is on productivities – the generation of a novel biomedical field. ‘The new molecular enhancement technologies’, contends Rose (2007: 20), ‘do not attempt to hybridize the body with mechanical equipment but to transform it at the organic level, to reshape vitality from the inside’. On this view, the implantation of nanobots in our bloodstream – already trialed on rats, and projected by some researchers as a pathway to radical human life extension – will not only keep women and men healthy at the cellular and molecular level but transform the very definition of life itself. Thus by combining a Foucaultian notion of biopolitics as underscoring the powers of mobilization, accumulation and exchange, Rose seeks to demonstrate biomedicine as both ideological discourse and production of life, as ‘managing’ subjectivity but also ‘performing’ it.

The path to molecular biopolitics for Rose is intricately intertwined with global capitalism, specifically the extraction of economic value from biological processes. As a result of various economic crises and the spread of globalization, capitalism has undergone in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries a dramatic makeover – one in which technologies controlled by capital seek now to ‘capitalize’ on the vital processes of living things. Rose terms this the arrival of ‘bioeconomics’. In a world of multinational pharmaceutical industries, biotech companies, genetech firms, biobanks and molecular manipulation, capital has become biological – ever more reliant on the transfer, mobilization, manipulation and commodification of living nature. We are now confronted by the bioeconomy, the interweaving of finance and the laboratory. Molecularization is, from this angle, part and parcel of the West’s global ambitions for capitalist optimization. Molecular biopolitics, says Rose (2007: 15), ‘is conferring a new mobility on the elements of life, enabling them to enter new circuits – organic, interpersonal, geographical and financial’. This is more than saying that biomedicine is big business; rather, biological processes and technological capitalization interpenetrate in a new configuration.

A second strand of social thought addressing posthuman identity comes from critical European thought and philosophy, and is broadly speaking more affirmative in character. Rosi Braidotti makes the case for what she terms ‘critical posthumanism’, and across a range of publications has addressed the implications of the posthuman turn for the analysis of identities and newly emergent forms of subjectivity. Braidotti’s starting point is that the crisis of Western humanism is not catastrophic, but rather involves various positive consequences. For Braidotti, the crisis of Western humanism – reflected in recent sociological and philosophical critiques of Eurocentrism,
anthropocentrism and masculinism – is intricately interwoven with the fall of Europe as an imperial world power. The worldwide geo-political shift from national to post-national political constellations, and associated notions of a pluralist cosmopolitanism, is part of the wider posthuman recomposition of identity and new forms of subjectivity, of new social bonding and alternative community building.

The arrival of posthumanism, or post-anthropocentrism, is especially consequential for subjectivity and the critique of identity. The spread of a globalized, multi-ethnic, multi-media culture across the planet, according to Braidotti, has carried major implications for the very understanding of identity. Nowhere is this more obviously so than as a consequence of the intrusion of the global economy and technologically mediated processes of digitization into the very fabric of subjectivity itself. From the arrival of digital ‘second life’ to the spread of medical reproductive technologies, and from prosthetics to robotics, the traditional humanistic unity ascribed to the human subject has come utterly undone – as traditional distinctions between human actors and non-human forces have been erased. In this connection, Braidotti speaks of the emergence of the ‘posthuman nomadic subject’. As she theorizes this critical posthumanist recasting of identity:

The posthuman nomadic subject is materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded – it is firmly located somewhere, according to the radical immanence of the “politics of location” ... It is a multifaceted and relational subject, conceptualized within a monistic ontology, through the lenses of Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, plus feminist and post-colonial theories. It is a subject actualized by the relational vitality and elemental complexity that mark posthuman thought itself. (Braidotti 2013: 189)

For Braidotti, the arrival of posthumanism spells the death of the strenuously self-affirming subject of liberal individualism. This demise represents a wholesale sociological, philosophical and cultural shift from the notion of unitary subjectivity to that of nomadic identity.

Braidotti’s views on the relation between posthuman identity and contemporary society and culture are complex and sometimes quite obscure. But the main thesis she attempts to advance focuses on two threads of recent social thought, threads which she seeks to interweave. The first of these concerns critical race perspectives and postcolonial theories; the second concerns eco-feminism. Bluntly put, Braidotti finds in postcolonial and critical race theories a productive engagement with the posthuman
cultural predicament. ‘The work of post-colonial and race theorists’, Braidotti remarks, ‘displays a situated cosmopolitan posthumanism that is supported as much by the European tradition as by non-Western sources of moral and intellectual inspiration’ (2013: 46). Culture, in the sense of the European ideal of the Enlightenment, has been intricately interwoven with violent domination, structural injustice and barbarism. Braidotti finds in postcolonial theory a powerful attempt to think through the Western failure to realize the ideals of the humanist Enlightenment, and especially to critique such political and ethical failings, without succumbing to cultural relativism or moral nihilism. Here she finds inspiration from, and frequently cites, the work of Edward Said on the colonial experience and its entanglement with Enlightenment-based secular humanism, as well as the more recent ideas of Paul Gilroy on the spread of a ‘planetary cosmopolitanism’. In particular, she underscores the importance of postcolonial theory for conceptualizing the powers of cultural hybridity, mixture, difference and cosmopolitanism, and asserts the crucial significance of subaltern secular spaces for contemporary reconfigurations of critical posthumanism.

The second contemporary cultural influence on Braidotti’s critical posthumanism is that of eco-feminism. In her work *The Posthuman*, Braidotti tries to integrate what she calls a ‘nomadic’ viewpoint of the human subject with a critical posthumanism that draws from environmentalism, ecological theory and feminism. In this connection, she references the environmental theory of Shiva and Mies on new ecological values and feminist spiritualities, especially the centrality of the sacredness of life and human concern for everything that lives. In conceptualizing this fusing of new ecological and feminist values, Braidotti writes (2013: 49):

I define the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable.... A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or “earth” others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism.

Braidotti thus argues it is useful to conceive of posthuman relationality between nomadic subjects and non-human or ‘earth’ others. The concept of the conscious, acting subject she sees as a redundant one.

It is through this integration of post-modern social theory (specifically, the work of Deleuze and Guattarri), feminist, environmental and postcolonial theory that Braidotti
seeks to interrogate the posthuman condition. In doing so, Braidotti is able to demonstrate a considerable cosmopolitan range – for example, she consistently speaks out against xenophobic violence and argues instead for a pluralist cosmopolitan political practice that recognizes the rights of stateless people and refugees. Even the most erudite student of modern European thought will find themselves learning from Braidotti’s encyclopedic knowledge of post-structuralist and post-modern philosophy, as she travels effortlessly across Spinoza’s monism, Deleuze’s account of ‘micro-fascisms’, Guattari’s call for a ‘virtual social ecology’ and Giorgio Agamben’s conceptualization of ‘life/zoe’. Like many post-postmodern philosophers, she is not necessarily at her clearest when it comes to marshaling the heavy-duty concepts of contemporary European social theory for the purposes of social and political analysis, and there are times when her vitalist eco-feminist critique of ‘multiple belongings’, ‘earth others’ and ‘personal intensities’ sounds perilously close to a 1960s hippy-collectivism – albeit one updated for theory-savvy readers. Even so, it is on the theme of subjectivity, and specifically the need to make sense of the complexities of emergent posthuman forms of identity, that Braidotti has important things to say. In Braidotti’s view, only a revised critical theory of subjectivity is capable of adequately addressing the complex phenomena surrounding the advent of posthuman identities and the postanthropocentric bodies of global capitalism. Such a standpoint makes Braidotti’s contribution to the debate over posthumanism uniquely valuable, especially in the context of the dominance of science and technology studies – and its strong anti-identity position – in the posthuman debate. By contrast to such anti-subjectivity positions, Braidotti’s conception of posthuman identity emphasizes the anchoring of identity in internally differentiated, embodied, embedded and relational configurations as essential components to new posthuman social transformations. I shall suggest subsequently that the psychic and social implications of Braidotti’s conception of posthuman identity stretches much further, and is considerably more complex, than some of her formulations suggest. But for the moment there are a few further elements in her critique of flexible and multiple posthuman identities that should be briefly noted.

Braidotti has frequently offered powerful defenses of the centrality of identity in the frame of our globally networked and technologically mediated societies. Human subjectivity and identity are currently undergoing a profound series of mutations, and it is patently absurd, she contends, to suppose that social theory can engage with such transformations without a critically reflexive and sophisticated account of the human subject. The chief object of Braidotti’s work is to identify how posthuman subjects traverse, link and tangle with non-human, techno and ‘earth’ others. As she writes (2013: 102–103) of the importance of identity in this context:
One needs at least some subject position: this need not be either unitary or exclusively anthropocentric, but it must be the site for political and ethical accountability, for collective imaginaries and shared aspirations. Philosophical investigations of alternative ways of accounting for the embedded and embodied nature of the subject are relevant to develop an approach to subjectivity worthy of the complexities of our age.... Both kinship and ethical accountability need to be redefined in such a way as to rethink links of affectivity and responsibility not only for non-anthropomorphic organic others, but also for those technologically mediated, newly patented creatures we are sharing our planet with.

In short, Braidotti takes seriously the challenges posed by the advent of bio-medical scientific advances and global technological transformations as they impact on networks of human and non-human actors. But she is insistent that the critical challenge is a reformulated theory of subjectivity which reinscribes posthuman identity into ‘radical relationality, including webs of power relations at the social, psychic, ecological and micro-biological or cellular levels’ (2013: 102).

Whilst not reliant on psychoanalysis as a critical method for the reinterpretation of subjectivity, Braidotti appears at times broadly sympathetic to certain central themes in European-inspired post- Freudian thought. She writes, for example, of the posthuman subject as ‘internally differentiated’. In The Posthuman (2013: 189), she casts nomadic subjectivity in terms of the ‘psyche – with its affective, fantasy-ridden, desire-driven complications’. Indeed in some respect, there are certain overall – albeit admittedly distant – similarities between the views of Braidotti and Lacan. Braidotti’s belief that the notion of ‘man’ is an upshot of European culture, a notion which has subsequently atrophied, has some similarities to Lacan’s attempt to break with traditional notions of consciousness of self through a ‘decentring of the subject’. Elsewhere, she invokes Lacan’s account of the ‘Real’ – along with Freud’s ‘uncanny’ and Kristeva’s ‘abjection’ – for thinking the productive forces of monadic subjectivity. But this is where any similarities end. Braidotti’s nomadic subject is not that of Lacan, and nor will she have much truck with his notions of the imaginary and symbolic as essential to the constitution of identity. ‘The posthuman subject’, she proposes (2013: 188),

is not post-structuralist, because it does not function within the linguistic turn or other forms of deconstruction. Not being framed by the ineluctable powers of signification, it is consequently not
In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti takes aim at Lacan’s structuralist determinism, and strongly argues against his blending of psychoanalysis and structural linguistics – which produces, she contends, an understanding of subjectivity ‘based on Lack and Law’. Invoking Deleuze and Guattari, she writes (2013: 189): ‘Lacan’s notion of the symbolic is as out-dated as a Polaroid shot of a world that has since moved on’. Instead, Braidotti wants to speak up for a version of our psychic lives that stresses possibility, pleasure, power and plenitude. This is an understanding of the psychic subject as pure affirmation. Desire as plenitude, not lack. The passage towards a utopic, affirmative version of the posthuman is thus opened by Braidotti.

**POSTHUMAN IDENTITY, OR THE REINVENTION OF LIFE**

If the very foundations of modernity are literally under fire, posthumanism in the theoretical sense of the word may arguably seem a wholly inadequate description of current and likely future global transformations. In an age where the boundary between the digital universe and the actual world is dissolving, and where dramatic transformations in robotics and artificial intelligence are moving centre stage, social theory cannot afford to merely recount the same narratives of the end of humanism, history and modernity, crucial though these debates may have been in the past. Digital production, and specifically the advent of 3D printers, is especially consequential in this connection. 3D printers can already process a diversity of objects (including organic matter), and digital production is strongly converging with developments in biotechnology and nanotechnology (for social-scientific analyses of 3D printing and its consequences see Giddens 2013, Urry 2014). The crucial move in social-theoretical inquiry – irrespective of the deployment of the term posthumanism – is the development of theoretical resources which are equal in depth, scope and range to the transformed global landscape that social theory now confronts.

In a remorselessly transformational climate, the posthumanization of identity emerges as a wildly popular topic – partly because the pliable, remouldable, endlessly plastic self is increasingly everywhere on display. But beyond the power and limits of current reinvention society, there is also a more profound sense in which the extraordinary pace of technological change today intersects with the posthumanization of identity. Digital technologies and other technological innovations are transforming what ‘identity’ and ‘the body’ actually mean. In addition to organ development technologies, 3D printers have been used in research to print out living human embryonic stem cells
blood vessels (German Fraunhofer Institute), human skin (Lothar Koch of the Laser Centre Hannover in Germany) and even sheets of cardiac tissue that can ‘beat’ like a real heart (Cabor Forgacs, University of Missouri in Columbia). In the light of these developments, some have claimed that growing bio-organs (by printing them) will eventually replace the need for donor organ transplants in the future. Like 3D printing, developments in artificial intelligence are part of this broader posthuman transformation. Craig Venter, author of Life at the Speed of Light (2013), and one of the leaders to have mapped the first draft sequence of the human genome in 2000, has been at the forefront of the digitization of synthetic life. In 2010, Venter and his team produced the first synthetic organism by transplanting man-made DNA into a vacant bacterial cell. For Venter, developments in synthetic life are only in their infancy. For example, consider the possibility of biological teleportation – involving the transmission of a genome across the solar system at the speed of light and its reconstitution on the other side of the planet – which in Venter’s view is no longer the stuff of science fiction but a burgeoning field of actual possibility (see Corbyn 2013). Whilst such developments are presently confined to bacteria and microplasma only, the implications of synthetic life – from vastly accelerated vaccine production to the potential creation of entirely new life forms – when combined with the rapidly decreasing costs of synthesis and sequencing technologies means that the definition of life as we know it is undergoing radical transformation.

Then there is the impact of robotics to consider. In 2013, Rich Walker and Matthew Godden of Shadow Robot Company in the UK assembled ‘Rex’ – billed as the first true walking, talking and heart-beating bionic man. Using the most advanced human prostheses available – from robotic limbs to artificial organs and even a synthetic blood-pumping circulatory system – it was reported that Rex simulates approximately two-thirds of the human body, including artificial hands, feet, wrists, ankles and an almost complete set of artificial organs from an artificial heart to synthetic blood, lungs (and windpipe), pancreas, spleen, kidney and even a fully functional circulatory system (Dixon 2013). Rex also sports a human-like prosthetic face, and an exoskeleton made by REX Bionics in New Zealand. Equipped with a sophisticated ‘chatbot’ program, Rex can carry out rudimentary conversations – achieved largely through retinal prosthesis and cochlear implants which facilitates speech recognition and speech production systems (Channel 4 2013). The advent of Rex indicates just how much the blending of the nonbiological and biological is becoming increasingly hard to distinguish in today’s era of the posthuman.

These radical transformations of the interrelations between the human and its others involve immense theoretical, socioeconomic, cultural and political consequences,
and I will now summarize these consequences in six key points. First, there is the widespread sense that the ‘posthuman’ is an idea whose time has truly arrived. This emergent ‘structure of feeling’, to invoke Raymond Williams, involves a greater appreciation of the non-naturalistic or nonbiological dimensions of human subjectivity, a breakdown in categorical distinctions between humans and various ‘earth others’ (including animals, species, bacteria and plants), as well as the consequences of post-anthropocentric philosophy and social thought. The intellectual consequences of this emergent posthuman structure of feeling are ambivalent. While some academics and public intellectuals applaud the posthuman turn as the next frontier in social, political and philosophical thought, other critics have been quick to dismiss posthumanism as simply radical posturing or a passing theoretical fad. Even so, the posthuman turn has already had a large impact upon a considerable range of social practices and intellectual discourses, including biotechnology and bioinformatics, art and architecture, future studies and forecasting, robotics, science fiction, consumer design, artificial intelligence, literary and social theory, nanotechnology, computing and so on. However, while many intellectual discourses, especially in the social sciences, humanities and creative arts, are in the process of undertaking the posthuman turn, there are serious conceptual limitations to an uncritical adoption of the term ‘posthuman identity’ – or so I shall propose subsequently in this chapter.

Second, the scientific and technological advances linked to the posthuman turn need to be situated within an institutional analysis of modernity. That is to say, the institutional drivers of the posthuman condition include – amongst others – globalization and the new global electronic economy, information and communication technologies, biomedicine and advances in artificial intelligence. These institutional transformations form the backdrop for claims advanced in posthumanist social thought that we stand at the opening of a new era, one in which nonbiological intelligence will come to match the capability and subtlety of human intelligence and is thus radically transformative of the interrelations between the human and the non-human. In this connection, the continuing acceleration of information-based technologies coupled with the unprecedented intrusion of globalized, technologically mediated processes into the very structure of our lives and our identities will carry far-reaching consequences for the shape, direction and complexity of future identities, societies, politics and global governance. Crucially, however, these transformations should not be understood as somehow predetermined by technology alone. Technology is a powerful social force, certainly. But the power of technology arises as a result of complex social practices, and in particular the ways in which
technology is taken up, adopted, coped with and reacted to in situated social performances. In other words, as social scientists we need to be attentive to how people perform – that is, how they ‘do’ – technology in their everyday lives. 101

EXPERIMENTAL WORLDS

Third, posthuman identity both presupposes the notion of the human and of the recasting of human subjectivity. This is a complex point, and requires explication. The opening of a new posthuman era has been expressed through a dazzling variety of terms, including ‘beyond humanism’, ‘after humanism’, the ‘transhuman’ and so on. Yet we can never be ‘after the human’, in the sense that there can be no reflective, creative life without subjects. Subjectivity is framed in and through the human psyche – split between consciousness, the preconscious and the repressed unconscious. This is not to say, however, that the institutional transformations of the current era are not in certain respects unique – distinct in form from previous types of social life associated with modernity. There can be little doubt, I think, that the posthuman outlook presents social theory with a fresh challenge. But the changes occurring early in the twenty-first century, whether in biotechnology, biomedicine or information technologies, cannot be made sense of if identity is excluded from analytical consideration. This takes us to the core strength of the contributions from Rose and Braidotti. Both theorists argue, though from very different conceptual positions, that identity and subjectivity must remain central to the frame of analytic reference in order to grasp how posthumanism (invoked variously as contemporary science, biomedicine, information technologies) affects and recasts the very fabric and structure of life and thus of what now counts as human. From this angle, social theory cannot afford simply to replay the narrative of analytic posthumanism – such as the anti-subjectivity position advanced in science and technology studies by authors such as Latour and his followers. Rather, it needs to explore new possibilities and consider how identity is transfigured in and through the posthuman. What is underscored here, following Rose and Braidotti, is not simply identity but the biopolitical dynamics of contemporary subjectivity.

Fourth, and following on from the previous point that the critique of subjectivity is central to the advent of posthumanism, my argument is that identity is interdependent with multiple structural forms of the posthuman that generate different possibilities for identity – and especially the recalibration or reinvention of identity itself. A standard response to this kind of formulation is to seek to demonstrate how identity has been reconfigured into some kind of ‘machinic hybridization’, in which the subject is colonized by the object. But in developing and detailing this point, I want to take a different tack. Let me develop this point now in some more detail.
The traditional consensus about identity in the social sciences, at least up until the transformations unleashed in the first instance by globalization and more recently the advent of posthumanism, has been focused upon the interconnections between individual agents (usually cast with limited powers) and social structures (usually cast as all-powerful and determining). From this angle, capitalism as a structure has been understood as constituting class identities; or, patriarchy as a structural feature of modern societies has been understood as generating oppressive gender identities. In such social science, identity is conceived as a property of the individual agent – a ‘location’ from which the self seeks to navigate opportunities and constraints in the wider mix of social relations. Against the backdrop of the agency and structure couplet, individuals exercise agency in the context of constraint appearing primarily from external or structural forces, conceived largely in terms of the limitations of the actions of other human agents or interpersonal relations on the one hand and the constraints of socio-structural forces of large-scale institutions or cultural forces on the other.

However, the advent of posthumanism (as described in this chapter) subverts such conventional distinctions between agency and structure, or the individual and society. The arrival of the posthuman – from genomics and nanotechnology to information technologies and robotics – transfigures the orthodox division between the agency of identity and the determinism of structures. As current scientific and technological advances have come to penetrate or invade the very structure of living matter itself, the posthuman transfigures the manner in which identity has been constituted as agency. But once this is recognized, what then should comprise a critically reflexive, posthumanist approach to identity?

Contemporary science and technology studies, as advanced by Latour and developed by writers such as Law and Franklin, have proffered a conceptualization of the human and non-human environment in which society and culture are cast within the biotechnologically mediated world of posthumanism. Broadly speaking, this is an approach which views the scientific and technological as invading the human and simultaneously sees the human as a grafted extension of technological artefacts. Thus, technological devices such as Google Goggles or the Apple Watch can be seen as an extension of the individual’s body, creating new hybridizations of the subject-object. On this view, there is no need to analytically keep apart subject and object, or identity and culture, since the complexity of the humanmachine hybrid generates a form of ‘machinic intentionality’ which is grounded and productive of the social field itself. The strength of this standpoint lies in its recognition of the complexity of scientific worlds that are involved in various technological systems.
But there are serious conceptual limitations here, especially as regards the analysis of identity. Whilst science and technology studies correctly stipulate that identity is not opposed to science, nor to technological mediation, and whilst it suggestively seeks to capture how the human is rendered continuous with socio-technical systems, it fails to address how patterns of posthuman social development necessitate a revised vision of identity. Most constraining of all, as Braidotti argues (2013: 41–43), science and technology studies displace questions concerning intentionality and thus ethics onto the side of technology itself. What is displaced is the whole question of human autonomy. Transformations of identity arising in and through posthumanism are thus squeezed to the sidelines. The analytical task, by contrast, concerns grappling with how the posthuman organization and consequences of the flows of various scientific and technological materials – especially energy, genes, information and data – fuse to produce complex combinations of identity, imagination and innovation.

Before considering how the flows of scientific and technological materials interpenetrate with identity, it is necessary to complement the preceding point with an analysis of the creativity of identity rather than of systems. Fifth, this brings us to issues to do with the psychic investment of objects – both human and non-human. Grasping the complex ways in which new information technologies and biomedical developments become emotionally imprinted upon the psyche, as well as the simultaneous re-grooving of the psyche around both human and non-human objects, is crucial for the analysis of identity in conditions of posthumanism. This is a point, I argue, that neither Rose nor Braidotti satisfactorily resolve. In a Foucaultian vein, Rose sees biomedicine inaugurating a new order of discourse by constituting the order of ‘biocapital’, articulating novel kinds of subjectification and vitalities of the human. And like Foucault, Rose harbours a suspicion of creative agency, which in typically post-structuralist fashion he sees as an outcrop of discourse. Braidotti’s case carries a more refreshing tone as concerns the centrality of subjectivity, and explicitly acknowledges the role of fantasy, affect and desire in configurations of the posthuman. But beyond various neo-Nietzschean formulations on the productivities of desire, her analysis lacks specificity concerning the diffusion of posthuman scientific and technical systems at the level of identity.

Braidotti’s emphasis on fantasy, desire and affect is important, but it needs to be extended and radicalized. I argue this is best done through a psychoanalytic frame of reference, and I turn to consider the import of some strands of post-Freudian theory for the analysis of identity in the context of posthumanism. The work of Wilfred Bion provides a major source of insights into the intertwining of identities and objects.
across diverse emotional scales. In a radical extension of Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic approach, Bion draws attention to the projection outwards, as well as retrieval into self, of affects circulating objects. These phenomena or objects are at once human and non-human. In order to think and to act in creative, reflective ways, according to Bion, the individual subject must ‘let go’ of consciousness and become immersed in sectors of pure experience. It is through such immersion in the objectworld – both human and non-human – that the self subsequently undertakes the creative, reconstructive work of ‘attaching meaning to experience’. As Bion formulates this, thought precedes thinking. In order to obtain knowledge of self-experience, a series of transformations must occur (what Bion terms ’thinking’) to the raw emotional materials (both human and non-human) which have impinged on the psyche. A prime instance of this synchronization of selves, others and objects, says Bion, occurs when the infant learns to become immersed in the experience of its familial surround – most typically, in relation to its mother. But at the same time, this so-called foundational synchronization of selves and objects establishes a pathway for what Bion terms the ‘processing’ of experience over time and space.

What Bion’s psychoanalytic move involves, in effect, is an underscoring of the intricate relations between experience, emotional processing and thinking. The effect of running these phenomenological and psychoanalytic themes together is to underscore the complexity of synchronized actions and objects, or identities and systems, which structure our very form of life. This synchronization of actions and objects – which does not, at least in this psychoanalytic account, follow any traditional dualism between the inside and outside – is highly complex, but especially consequential for grasping the production and performance of the posthuman condition. Christopher Bollas, a psychoanalyst strongly influenced by Bion, reflects on the psychic dynamics of such criss-crossings between actions and objects thus:

The concept of self-experiencing is ironic, as its referential ambiguity (does it mean the self that experiences or the experiencing of our self?) is strangely true to the complexity of being human. All self-experiencing involves this split, which can be described as a division between ourself as simple selves (when we are immersed in desired or evoked experience) and ourself as complex selves (when we think about experience). Naturally such distinctive states may overlie one another, so that I may be reflecting upon an experience in the immediate past while another part of me is already within a disseminating experience.

(Bollas 1992: 27)
The central tension or contradiction in self-experiencing is therefore reinscribed in every process of object selection: an unconscious immersion in units of experience which are only partly thinkable (since that immersion is itself a dense condensation of self and object world), and a reflective lifting of such unconscious experience into thinking and articulation.

Following Bion and Bollas, it can be said that the recovery of affects ‘stored’ in the object-world facilitates the proliferation of experience as well as possible transformations in pleasure, creativity and fulfilment. The use of an object as transformational – from the pre-Oedipal maternal object on the one hand to technological or bio-medically engineered objects on the other – opens the self to the sheer multiplicity of experience. Likewise, in the context of posthuman lives, the investment of affect in scientific and technical objects such as robotics, prosthetics, nanotechnology or artificial intelligence can function as a form of emotional containment – that is, the storing of affect (available for subsequent retrieval) in terms of emotional processing or thinking. Such a psychoanalytically informed account of subject-constitution captures how actions and objects (both human and non-human) cross, tangle and synchronize across diverse configurations of the posthuman – extending, enhancing and redefining the very fabric of identities in the process.

Sixth, and following directly from the previous point, the interpenetration of posthuman identities and objects (information technologies, biomedicine, artificial intelligence and so on) occur through non-linear points of transformation, complexity, feedback loops and dynamic change which reconfigure and transform social inequalities and unequal relations of power. The advent of posthumanism in relation to inequality and power should not be thought of as constituted through technology alone; what is opening up today, rather, is the examination of social inequalities through the lens of posthumanism. This is a development which significantly alters what inequality is, how it operates and how societies might seek to redress its impacts. As the new posthuman enhancement divide becomes deeply layered within the existing digital divide, the *posthumanization of identities becomes a central stratifying factor of contemporary societies* – particularly in the rich North. We have seen that posthumanism reinvents identity: one avenue is through the advent of genetically modified (GM) posthumans; the other avenue is through the advent of technologically enhanced (TE) posthumans. Such GM and TE posthumans require economic resources in order to embrace these very identities and negotiated spaces; this is a constraint which operates from within already existing social inequalities. But there are additional ramifications, as these very GM and TE posthumans then interact, relate, engage, respond and cope with other people, social settings and
techno-scientific systems. Today’s enhanced identities – that is, GM and TE posthumans – are becoming increasingly differentiated, distant and socially marked off from unenhanced persons. Inequality of power does not, therefore, just depend on material inequality, but is also created and sustained through techno-biological bodies and genetically modified identities. The ability of people to access the services and facilities surrounding the advent of posthuman identities depends upon economic, socio-cultural, organizational and temporal factors, and are in turn distributed and redistributed through engagement with very different kinds of scientific and technological systems (Thrift 2008). As a result, very many identities are produced and performed within this diffusion of complex technical-scientific systems. But all such productions of posthuman worlds are, from this angle, identity productions – resulting from the joint fusions of individual and collective imaginings on the one hand and orchestrated processes of scientific and technological innovation on the other. Such forms of institutional innovation involve creative and reflective agents [individuals, groups and organizations] who play a central role in the multiple landscape of posthuman relations of power and social order.

This standpoint again contrasts directly with analytic posthumanism – specifically, that version of posthumanism elaborated by science and technology studies – which renders the question of intentionality on the side of technology itself. By neglecting new forms of identity experimentation created out of the fusing of human and non-human forces occurring within posthuman configurations, science and technology studies result (as Braidotti correctly identifies) in a moralization of machines. It is as if the advent of various smart technologies – predicted by authors such as Kurzweil to become exponentially smarter in the next few decades – strips human agents of creative agency altogether. Whether the discourse is that of ‘bio-sociality’, ‘actants’ or ‘machinic intentionality’, this brand of posthumanism demonstrates a curt rejection of the whole concept of identity, which is imagined as merely a hangover from the era of humanism. But it is only because science and technology studies reduce identity to the straw target of an individualized self exercising voluntary agency in the social world that it declares the concept of subjectivity wholly unacceptable. Yet there is no valid reason to accept such a backwardlooking rendition of the notion of identity. With the launch of a new global narrative of posthumanism, the more interesting challenge is to explore the complex, contradictory interconnections or assemblages of human and non-human forces which are reconstituting and transforming the contours of identity today.

Finally, let me note some implications for current and future identity profiles of posthumanism arising from the foregoing discussion:
4 :: POSTHUMAN IDENTITY

1. *Posthumanization of identity* in the sense of extensity: for example, the sweep of scientific and technological transformations such as biotechnology, bioinformatics, robotics, artificial intelligence and nanotechnology throughout the rich North and beyond.

2. *Posthumanization of identity* in the sense of intensity: the re-grooving of the psychic make-up (affect, desire, fantasy) of individuals as a result of creative, reflective engagements with posthuman technical forms and systems.

3. *Posthumanization of identity* in the sense of social acceleration: the speed of transformations, especially arising from information-based technologies, rewriting the connections between human intelligence and nonbiological intelligence.

4. *Posthumanization of identity* in the sense of impacts: for example, the diffusion of posthuman scientific and technological developments across identities and associated fields of agents and social practices.

These are some of the core structures and dynamics that are affecting transformations of identity in the age of posthumanism. While there are, at present, no clear answers to the many issues and dilemmas arising from such transformations, there can be little doubt that posthuman identities present social theory with a fresh challenge. It is my view that if a theory of posthuman identities has value at all, it needs to be one that engages with the life-changing processes I have sought to review and analyse in this chapter.
CHAPTER 5
SOCIAL THEORY SINCE FREUD
TRAVERSING SOCIAL IMAGINARIES
Freud’s theory is in its very substance ‘sociological’. Freud’s ‘biologism’ is social theory in a depth dimension that has been consistently flattened out by the Neo-Freudian schools.

[Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation*]

In psychoanalysis nothing is true except the exaggerations.

[Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*]

Freudian analysis is the steadfast penetration of the injured psyche. It takes so seriously the damage that it offers nothing for the immediate.

[Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*]

Social theory has the task of providing conceptions of the nature of human agency, social life and the cultural products of human action which can be placed in the services of the social sciences and humanities in general. Among other problems, social theory is concerned with language and the interpretation of meaning, the character of social institutions, the explication of social practices and processes, questions of social transformation and the like. The reproduction of social life, however, is never only a matter of impersonal ‘processes’ and ‘structures’: it is also created and lived within, in the depths of an inner world, of our most personal needs, passions and desires. Love, empathy, anxiety, shame, guilt, depression: no study of social life can be successfully carried out, or meaningfully interpreted, without reference to the human element of agency. Modernity is the age in which this human element is constituted as a systematic field of knowledge. That field of knowledge is known as psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis, a product of the culture of late nineteenth-century Europe, has had a profound influence on contemporary social thought. Psychoanalysis, as elaborated by Freud and his followers, has been enthusiastically taken up by social and political theorists, literary and cultural critics, and by feminists and postmodernists, such is its rich theoretical suggestiveness and powerful diagnosis of our contemporary cultural malaise. The importance of psycho-analysis to social theory, although a focus of much intellectual debate and controversy, can be seen in quite specific areas, especially as concerns contemporary debates on human subjectivity, sexuality, gender hierarchy and political debates over culture. Indeed, Freudian concepts and theories have played a vital role in the construction of contemporary social theory.
itself. The writings of social theorists as diverse as Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, Jürgen Habermas, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Jean-François Lyotard all share a Freudian debt. Yet there can be little doubt that the motivating reason for this turn to Freud among social theorists is as much political as intellectual. In a century which has witnessed the rise of totalitarianism, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and the possibility of a ‘nuclear winter’, social theory has demanded a language which is able to grapple with modernity’s unleashing of its unprecedented powers of destruction. Psychoanalysis has provided that conceptual vocabulary.

FREUD AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SOCIAL

Freudian psychoanalysis is of signal importance to three major areas of concern in the social sciences and the humanities, and each of these covers a diversity of issues and problems. The first is the theory of human subjectivity; the second is that of social analysis; and the third concerns epistemology.

Freud compels us to question, to endeavour to reflect upon, the construction of meaning—representation, affects, desires—as pertaining to human subjectivity, intersubjectivity and cultural processes more generally. Against the ontology of determinacy which has pervaded the history of Western social thought, Freud argues that this world is not predetermined but is actively created, in and through the production of psychical representations and significations. The psyche is the launching pad from which people make meaning; and, as Freud says, the registration of meaning is split between the production of conscious and unconscious representation. Another way of putting this point is to say that meaning is always overdetermined: people make more meaning than they can psychically process at any one time. This is what Freud meant by the unconscious: he sought to underscore radical ruptures in the life of the mind of the subject which arises as a consequence of the registration and storing of psychical representatives, or affective signification.

Freud’s underwriting of the complexity of our unconscious erotic lives has been tremendously influential in contemporary social and political theory. A preoccupation with unconscious sources of human motivation is evident in social- theoretical approaches as diverse as the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, the sociological departures of Talcott Parsons and the philosophical postmodernism of Jean-François Lyotard. Indeed, the theme of the decentring of the subject in structuralist and post-structuralist traditions derives much of its impetus from Lacan’s ‘return to Freud’—specifically, his reconceptualization of the conscious/unconscious dualism as a linguistic relation. But while the general theme of the decentred subject has gained...
ascendancy throughout the academy, much current social-theoretical debate has focused on the detour needed to recover a sense of human agency as well as to account for multi-dimensional forms of human imagination. In Kristeva’s discussion of the semiotic dimension of human experience, the imagination is primarily assessed in terms of the semiotic structuration of psychic space. In Ricoeur, it is a series of claims about the hermeneutics of imagination, giving of course special attention to the narratives of ideology and utopia, experience and norm. In Deleuze, it is part of an attempt to reconnect the productivities of desire to the affective force-field of postmodern culture.

This leads, second, into a consideration of the complex ways in which Freud’s work has served as a theoretical framework for the analysis of contemporary culture and modern societies. The Frankfurt School, to which I shall turn in detail shortly, was for many years the key reference point here. Well before the rise of Lacanian social theory, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm articulated a conception of psychoanalysis as an account of self-divided, alienated individuals, which was understood as the subjective correlate of the capitalist economic order. While Marcuse’s work became celebrated in the 1960s as offering a route to revolution, it has been Adorno’s interpretation of Freud which has exercised perhaps most influence upon contemporary scholars seeking to rethink the psychic ambivalences of modernity itself (see, for example, Dews, 1995; Žižek, 1994). In this connection, Adorno’s thesis that psychoanalysis uncovers a ‘de-psychologization’ of the subject is now the subject of widespread discussion (Whitebook, 1995). Those who share this vision of modernity place emphasis on the rise of consumer society, the seductive imagery of mass media and the pervasiveness of narcissism.

Some versions of Freudian-inspired social theory, however, have stressed more creative and imaginative political possibilities. Against the tide of Lacanian and postmodern currents of thought, several general frameworks for understanding modernity and postmodern culture as an open-ended process have emerged (for example, Cornell, 1991, 1993; Frosh, 2002; Elliott, 2003, 2004). What is distinctive about this kind of Freudian social thought is its understanding of everyday life as a form of dreaming or fantasizing; there is an emphasis on the pluralism of imagined worlds, the complexity of the intertwining of psychical and social life, as well as alternative political possibilities. This insistence on the utopic dimension of Freudian thought is characteristic of much recent social and cultural theory; but it is also the case that various standpoints assign a high priority to issues of repression, repetition and negativity. Freud was, of course, much concerned with emotional problems generated by repetition, the actions people cannot stop repeating or the narratives
people cannot stop recounting. He understood such repetitions as symptomatic of a failure to remember, the closing down of creative imagination. For Freud, the aims of analysis centred on the uncovering of the deep psychological forces of such repressed motivations; free association, the pleasures of imagination and the freedom to explore fantasy are at once method and outcome in psychoanalysis. Such concerns are also central to contemporary social and political thought, as Freud has been drawn upon with profit to map the paths through which individuals and collectivities remember and repress the past, at once psychical and social-historical.

For many social critics, the power of imagination is inescapably situated within the project of modernity, played out at the level of identity-politics, feminism, postmodern aesthetics and the like. Notwithstanding current techniques of domination and technologies of the self, there are many who claim that the postmodern phase of modernity unleashes a radical experimentation with alternative states of mind and possible selves. At the core of this perspective there is an interpretation about the restructuring of tradition as well as transformations of personal identity and world-views which necessarily alter the conditions of social life today. ([The thesis of modernity as a reflexive process of detraditionalization is proposed by Giddens, 1991 and Beck, 1992.] Broadly speaking, traditional ways of doing things are said to give way to actively debated courses of action, such that individuals confront their own personal and social choices as individuals. On this account, there is a reflexive awareness of an internal relation of subjectivity to desire, for personal identity is increasingly defined on its own experimental terms. Such an excavation of the psychological conditions of subjectivity and intersubjective relations clearly has profound implications for the nature of contemporary politics as well as the democratic organization of society (see Elliott 2004).

Finally, social thought has been revitalized through its engagement with Freud as a form of emancipatory critique. This concern is motivated by a conviction that critical social theory should offer paths for transforming self and world in the interests of autonomy. (Habermas [1972] is perhaps the most important social theorist who has drawn from Freud in developing a model of emancipatory critique in social analysis. Freudian theory, in Habermas’s interpretation, is directed towards freeing the patient from the repetition compulsions that dominate her or his unconscious psychical life, and thereby altering the possibilities for reflective, autonomous subjectivity. However, a reading of the emancipatory dimensions of Freudian psychoanalysis which is more in keeping with a postmodern position is one in which desire is viewed as integral to the construction of alternative selves and possible collective futures. In this reading, it is not a matter of doing away with the distorting dross of fantasy, but rather of
responding to, and engaging with, the passions of the self as a means of enlarging
the radical imagination and creative life.

In this opening chapter, I shall briefly summarize some of the core trajectories of
psychoanalytic theory, and then examine the relevance and power of psychoanalysis
in terms of social-theoretical debates in the human sciences. Throughout, I will
attempt to defend the view that psychoanalytic theory has much to offer social
theorists, including feminists and postmodernists, in the analysis of subjectivity,
ideology, sexual politics, and in coming to terms with crises in contemporary culture.

THE LEGACY OF FREUD

It is now more than a century since psychoanalysis emerged under the direction of a
single man, Sigmund Freud. Freud, working from his private neurological practice,
founded psychoanalysis in late nineteenth-century Vienna as both therapy and a
theory of the human mind. Therapeutically, psychoanalysis is perhaps best known
as the ‘talking cure’ —a slogan used to describe the magical power of language to
relieve mental suffering. The nub of the talking cure is known as ‘free association’.
The patient says to the analyst everything that comes to mind, no matter how trivial
or unpleasant. This gives the analyst access to the patient’s imagined desires and
narrative histories, which may then be interpreted and reconstructed within a clinical
session. The aim of psycho-analysis as a clinical practice is to uncover the hidden
passions and disruptive emotional conflicts that fuel neurosis and other forms of
mental suffering, in order to relieve the patient of his or her distressing symptoms.

Theoretically, psychoanalysis is rooted in a set of dynamic models relating to the
human subject’s articulations of desire. The unconscious, repression, drives,
representation, trauma, narcissism, denial, displacement: these are the core
dimensions of the Freudian account of selfhood. For Freud, the subject does not exist
independently of sexuality, libidinal enjoyment, fantasy, or the social and patriarchal
codes of cultural life. In fact, the human subject of Enlightenment reason—an identity
seemingly self-identical to itself—is deconstructed by psychoanalysis as a fantasy
which is itself secretly libidinal. Knowledge, for Freud as for Schopenhauer and
Nietzsche, is internal to the world of desire. In the light of Freudian psychoanalysis,
a whole series of contemporary ideological oppositions—the intellect and emotion,
commerce and pleasure, masculinity and femininity, rationality and irrationality—are
potentially open to displacement.

In order to detail an accurate map of the intersections between psycho-analysis and
social theory, it is necessary to outline some of the basic concepts of Freudian theory
These concepts have become so familiar that they require only a schematic commentary (For more detailed treatments see Rieff, 1959; Ricoeur, 1970; Gay, 1988; Frosh, 1999; Elliott, 2002.) Moreover, the theoretical ambiguities and political ambivalences pervading Freud’s work will be noted only in passing, although many issues arising from these will be discussed in depth later in the book.

‘All our conscious motives are superficial phenomena: behind them stands the conflict of our drives.... The great basic activity is unconscious. Our consciousness limps along afterward.’ It was Friedrich Nietzsche, not Freud, who wrote this. Similarly, Romantic poets, such as Goethe and Schiller, and nineteenth-century philosophers, such as Schopenhauer and Feuerbach, also placed the determinate effects of unconscious passion at the centre of human subjectivity Freud was aware of these insights, and often referred to them in his own writings, although he was also sceptical about the Romantic idealization of the unconscious.

If these poets and philosophers looked at the nature of unconscious passion in terms of the aesthetic, Freud traced repressed desire in terms of human sexuality and the psyche. Freud’s originality is to be found in his critical analysis of the unconscious as repressed. One of Freud’s most substantial findings is that there are psychical phenomena which are not available to consciousness, but which nevertheless exert a determining influence on everyday life. In his celebrated metapsychological essay ‘The unconscious’ (1914a), Freud argued that the individual’s self-understanding is not immediately available to itself, that consciousness is not the expression of some core of continuous self-hood. On the contrary, the human subject is for Freud a split subject, torn between consciousness of self and repressed desire. For Freud, examination of the language of his patients revealed a profound turbulence of passion behind all draftings of self-identity, a radical otherness at the heart of subjective life. In discussing human subjectivity, Freud divides the psyche into the unconscious, preconscious and conscious. The preconscious can be thought of as a vast storehouse of memories, most of which may be recalled at will. By contrast, unconscious memories and desires are cut off, or buried, from consciousness. According to Freud, the unconscious is not ‘another’ consciousness but a separate psychic system with its own distinct processes and mechanisms. The unconscious, Freud comments, is indifferent to reality; it knows no causality or contradiction or logic or negation; it is entirely given over to the search for pleasure and libidinal enjoyment. Moreover, the unconscious cannot be known directly, and is rather detected only through its effects, through the distortions it inflicts on consciousness.
Freud’s unmasking of the human subject as an endless flow of unconscious love and loathing is pressed into a psychoanalytic deconstruction of inherited Western conceptions of ontology. Rejecting the idea that consciousness can provide a foundation for subjectivity and knowledge, Freud traces the psychic effects of our early dependence on others—usually our parents—in terms of our biologically fixed needs. The infant, Freud says, is incapable of surviving without the provision of care, warmth and nourishment from others. However—and this is fundamental in Freud—human needs always outstrip the biological, linked as needs are to the attaining of pleasure. Freud’s exemplary case is the small child sucking milk from her or his mother’s breast. After the infant’s biological need for nourishment is satisfied, there is the emergence of a certain pleasure in sucking itself, which for Freud is a kind of prototype for the complexity of our erotic lives. As Freud (1940: 154) writes:

The baby’s obstinate persistence in sucking gives evidence at an early stage of a need for satisfaction which, though it originates from and is instigated by the taking of nourishment, nevertheless strives to obtain pleasure independently of nourishment and for that reason may and should be termed sexual.

From this angle, sexuality is not some preordained, unitary biological force that springs into existence fully formed at birth. Sexuality is created, not pre-packaged. For Freud, sexuality is ‘polymorphously perverse’: subjectivity emerges as a precarious and contingent organization of libidinal pleasures, an interestingly mobile set of identity-constructions, all carried on within the tangled frame of infantile sexuality.

Any emotional investment put into an object or other becomes for Freud a form of self-definition, and so shot through with unconscious ambivalence. In a series of path-breaking essays written on the eve of the First World War, Freud tied the constitution of the ego to mourning, melancholia, and grief. In ‘On Narcissism: an introduction’ (1914), Freud argued that the ego is not simply a defensive product of the self-preservative reality principle, but is rather a structured sedimentation of lost objects; such lost loves are, in turn, incorporated into the tissue of subjectivity itself. The loss of a loved person, says Freud, necessarily involves an introjection of this absent other into the ego. As Freud (1923:28) explains the link between loss and ego-formation:

We succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that [in overcoming this hurt] an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis has
been replaced by an identification. At that time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its ‘character’.

Ego-identity is constituted as a fantasy substitution, through multiple, narcissistic identifications with significant other persons.

We become the identities we are in Freud’s view because we have inside us buried identifications with people we have previously loved (and also hated), most usually our parents. And yet the foundational loss to which we must respond, and which in effect sets in motion the unfolding of our unconscious sexual fantasies, remains that of the maternal body. The break-up or restructuring of our primary emotional tie to the maternal body is, in fact, so significant that it becomes the founding moment not only of individuation and differentiation, but also sexual and gender difference. Loss and gender affinity are directly linked in Freud’s theory to the Oedipus complex, the psyche’s entry into received social meanings. For Freud, the Oedipus complex is the nodal point of sexual development, the symbolic internalization of a lost, tabooed object of desire. In the act of internalizing the loss of the pre-Oedipal mother, the infant’s relationship with the father (or, more accurately, symbolic representations of paternal power) becomes crucial for the consolidation of both selfhood and gender identity. Trust in the intersubjective nature of social life begin here: the father, holding a structural position which is outside and other to this imaginary sphere, functions to break the child/mother dyad, thus referring the child to the wider culture and social network. The paternal prohibition on desire for the mother, which is experienced as castration, at once instantiates repressed desire and refers the infant beyond itself, to an external world of social meanings. And yet the work of culture, according to Freud, is always outstripped by unconscious desire, the return of the repressed. Identity, sexuality, gender, signification: these are all radically divided between an ongoing development of conscious self-awareness and the unconscious, or repressed desire. (For further discussion on this point see Ricoeur, 1970:211–29.)

Freud’s writings show the ego not to be master in its own home. The unconscious, repression, libido, narcissism: these are the core dimensions of Freud’s psychoanalytic dislocation of the subject. Moreover, it is because of this fragmentation of identity that the concept of identification is so crucial in psychoanalytic theory: the subject creates identity by means of identification with
other persons, located in the symbolic context of society, culture and politics. The psychoanalytic dislocation of the subject emerges in various guises in contemporary social theory. In the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, it is part of an attempt to rethink the powerlessness of identity in the face of the objectifying aspects of contemporary science, technology and bureaucracy. In Habermas, it is a series of claims about the nature of distorted intersubjective and public communication as a means of theorizing repressive ideologies. In Lacan, it is a means for tracing imaginary constructions of self-concealment, as linked to the idea that language is what founds the repressed unconscious. In Lacanian and post-structuralist feminism, it is harnessed to a thoroughgoing political critique of sexual difference and gender hierarchy. In the postmodern works of Deleuze and Guattari, and of Lyotard, it is primarily a set of socio-political observations about psychic fragmentation and dislocation in the face of global capitalism.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGIES OF RATIONALITY: THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Most conversations these days in social theory and philosophy are about ‘endings’. The end of history, the death of the subject, the disintegration of metaphysics, the disappearance of community, the fragmentation of political power: all such ‘endings’ play the role of a symptomatic element which allows us to perceive a widespread sense of political pessimism, of an overwhelming irrationality, of generalized anomie and groundlessness, that permeates postmodernity. Against this backdrop, psychoanalytic social theory has been credited by some observers with going against the grain of the contemporary critical climate, rejecting the manic celebration of fragmentation and dispersion in postmodernism, and instead addressing the profound political difficulties of finding new paths for the radical imagination in order to further the project of autonomy. Indeed, psychoanalysis in recent years has been drawn upon in order to rethink the new and the different in contemporary social life. This turn to psychoanalysis has been undertaken in the name of both conceptual adequacy and political proficiency. At a conceptual level, the turn to Freud reflects a growing sense that social theory must address the libidinal, traumatic dimensions which traverse relations between self and other, identity and non-identity, subjectivity and history. At a political level, the turn to Freud is more strategic: given the flattening of the political imagination and the rising fortunes of technocratic rationality, psychoanalysis is for many a potentially fruitful arena for radical political engagement at the current historical juncture.

Freud’s relevance to social critique remains perhaps nowhere better dramatized than in the various writings of the first generation of critical theorists associated with the
Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. The Frankfurt School, as it came to be called, was formed in the decade prior to the Nazi reign of terror in Germany, and not surprisingly many of its leading theorists conducted numerous studies seeking to grasp the wave of political irrationalism and totalitarianism sweeping Western Europe. In a daring theoretical move, the School brought Freudian categories to bear upon the sociological analysis of everyday life, in order to fathom the myriad ways that political power imprints itself upon the internal world of human subjects and, more specifically, to critically examine the obscene, meaningless kind of evil that Hitler had actually unleashed. Of the School’s attempts to fathom the psychopathologies of fascism, the writings of Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm particularly stand out; each of these authors, in quite different ways, drew upon Freudian categories to figure out the core dynamics and pathologies of post-liberal rationality, culture and politics, and also to trace the sociological deadlocks of modernity itself. The result was a dramatic underscoring of both the political dimensions of psychoanalysis and also the psychodynamic elements of public political life.

The philosophical backdrop to the Frankfurt School’s engagement with Freud and psychoanalysis was spelt out in particular detail by Adorno, who sketched along with co-author Max Horkheimer—in Dialectic of Enlightenment—a bleak portrait of the personal and political pathologies of instrumental rationality. Humanization of drives and passions, resulting in the transformation from blind instinct to consciousness of self, was for Adorno necessary to release the subject from its enslavement to Nature. But, in a tragic irony, the unconscious forces facilitating the achievement of autonomy undergo a mind-shattering repression that leaves the subject marked by inner division, isolation and compulsion. The Janus-face of this forging of the self is clearly discerned in Adorno’s historicization of Freud’s Oedipus complex. According to Adorno, the bourgeois liberal subject repressed unconscious desire in and through oedipal prohibitions and, as a consequence, achieved a level of self-control in order to reproduce capitalist social relations. But not so in the administered world of late modernity. In post-liberal societies, changes in family life means that the father no longer functions as an agency of social repression. Instead, individuals are increasingly brought under the sway of the logic of techno-rationality itself, as registered in and through the rise of the culture industries. The concept of ‘repressive desublimation’ is crucial here. The shift from simple to advanced modernity comes about through the destruction of the psychological dimensions of human experience: the socialization of the unconscious in the administered world directly loops the id and the superego at the expense of the mediating agency of the ego itself. As Adorno summarized these historical developments in identity-constitution: “The prebourgeois
world does not yet know psychology, the oversocialised knows it no longer.’ Repressive desublimation functions in Frankfurt School sociology as that psychic process which links what Adorno called the ‘post-psychological individual’ to the historical emergence of fascism and totalitarian societies.

It was against this psychoanalytic backdrop that Adorno and Horkheimer theorized the self-cancelling dynamic of the civilizing process in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, proposing a structural fixity in which all forms of rationality and identity are constituted through a violent coercion of inner and outer nature; or, to put the matter in a more psychoanalytic idiom, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are always-already the direct outcrop of the heteronomous, hypnotic power of superego law. Accordingly, the search was now on within the first generation of critical theory to locate the good Other of instrumental reason. In this connection, Adorno reserved a privileged place for high art as dislocating repressive types of logic and bringing low all forms of ‘identifying’ thought. Marcuse, for a time, thought that it might be possible to recast sexual perversion, and specifically the domain of fantasy, as somehow prefigurative of a utopian social order—on the grounds that the primary processes slipped past the net of the reality/performance principle.

These and other images of Utopia arose from the School’s intriguing blend of Marxism and Freudianism. And yet the issue of critique—specifically the vantage-point from which the School launched its devastating condemnation of capitalist culture—has dogged followers of Frankfurt sociology. In *Perversion and Utopia*, the American philosopher Joel Whitebook writes of the performative contradiction in Frankfurt School sociology between asserting that identity is necessarily as rigid, spiritless and abstract as the reified object it dominates in the administered world on the one hand, and of confidently maintaining that an in-depth psycho-social critique of these processes can be undertaken on the other hand. Something is amiss here (from which world, exactly, were the Frankfurt School analysts able to critique such systematic pathologies?), and for Whitebook the answer lies in the Frankfurt School’s global portrayal of all subjective synthesis as violence or domination. Developing upon perspectives advanced by the work of those associated with the second generation of critical theory, specifically the writings of Albrecht Wellmer, Whitebook argues that Adorno mistook distortions of language in contemporary rationalism for language as such, and was therefore led to deny the social-historical gains of discursive rationality tout court. (Like Wellmer’s *The Persistence of Modernity* [1991], Whitebook’s *Perversion and Utopia* is an attempt to release the frozen potential of the first generation of Critical Theory from its aporetic confinement to the philosophy of consciousness, but in a manner that fully
incorporates psychoanalysis into a theory of intersubjectivity.) Injecting Freudian psychoanalysis into Weberian social theory, Adorno is said by Whitebook to have effectively pitted unconscious rage against the non-identical — registered in the administered world’s blind ‘compulsion for unity’, the manic articulations of which arise precisely at that historical moment in which the psychological possibilities for reflexivity are rendered superfluous. But there are considerable difficulties with the interpretation that the ‘psychological’ dimensions of liberal individualism have been replaced by the ‘post-psychological’ individual of the administered world of late capitalism. These difficulties include, among others, Adorno’s reductionistic reading of psychoanalysis as a ‘psychological theory’ (but see Žižek, 1994).

What has been of incomparable value, however, is the School’s analysis of why human subjects, apparently without resistance, submit to the dominant ideologies of late capitalism. The general explanatory model developed by the Frankfurt School to study the socio-psychological dimension of the relation between the individual and culture has received considerable attention in social theory (Jay, 1973; Benjamin, 1977; Held, 1980; Elliott, 1999). In what follows, I shall concentrate principally on the social-theoretical reconstructions of psychoanalysis offered by Fromm and Marcuse.

ERICH FROMM

Fromm, who had been practising as an analyst since 1926 and was a member of the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute, sought in his early studies to integrate Freud’s theory of the unconscious with Marxist sociology. Influenced by Wilhelm Reich’s book *Character Analysis*, which connects society to the repressed unconscious, Fromm became preoccupied with the cultural consequences of sexual repression, as well as the mediating influence of the family between the economy and the individual. According to Fromm, Freudian psychoanalysis must supplement Marxism in order to grasp how social structures influence, indeed shape, the inner dimensions of human subjectivity. Fromm’s concern with the effects of repression, however, differed substantially from the analysis worked out by Reich. In Fromm’s view, Reich had been unable to develop an adequate theory of social reproduction because he had reduced Freud’s theory of sexuality to a monadic focus on genital sexuality. Yet Freudian psychoanalysis, Fromm maintained, was fundamentally a ‘social psychology’. For Fromm, the individual must be understood in his or her relation to others.

The bourgeois nuclear family, Fromm says, is pivotal to understanding the links between individual repression, cultural reproduction and ideological domination. An agency of social reproduction, the family is described as ‘the essential medium
through which the economic situation exerts its...influence on the individual's psyche’ (Fromm, 1932:483). Fromm contends that the family implants regression at the heart of subjectivity, sustains economic conditions as ideology, and infuses perceptions of the self as submissive, self-effacing and powerless. The central message of Fromm’s early work is that the destructive effects of late capitalism are not only centred in economic mechanisms and institutions, but involve the anchoring of domination within the inner life and psychodynamic struggles of each individual.

As the 1930s progressed, Fromm became increasingly sceptical of orthodox Freudianism. He strongly criticized Freud’s notion of the death drive for its biological reductionism, and argued that it only served to legitimate at a theoretical level the destructive and aggressive tendencies of capitalism. Significantly, Fromm also became influenced by neo-Freudian analysts—such as Harry Stack Sullivan and Karen Homey—who stressed larger social and cultural factors in the constitution of selfhood. This emphasis on cultural contributions to identity-formation was underscored by Fromm in his major books, *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and *The Sane Society* (1956), both of which argued the idea of an essential ‘nature of man’, a nature repressed and distorted by capitalist patterns of domination.

Although Fromm’s early studies on the integration of individuals into capitalism were broadly accepted by other members of the Frankfurt School, his subsequent, more sociological diagnosis of an essential human nature twisted out of shape by capitalism was strongly rejected. Marcuse, for example, charged Fromm [and other neo-Freudian revisionists] with undoing the critical force of Freud’s most important ideas, such as the unconscious, repression and infantile sexuality. According to Marcuse, Fromm’s revisionism underwrites the smooth functioning of the ego only by displacing the dislocating nature of the unconscious. Marcuse (1956:240–1) sums up the central point in the following way:

> Whereas Freud, focusing on the vicissitudes of the primary drives, discovered society in the most concealed layer of the genus and individual man, the revisionists, aiming at the reified, ready-made form rather than at the origin of the societal institutions and relations, fail to comprehend what these institutions and relations have done to the personality that they are supposed to fulfil.

Fromm’s attempt to add sociological factors to psychoanalysis, says Marcuse, results in a false political optimism as well as a liquidation of what is truly revolutionary in Freud: the discovery of the repressed unconscious.
Marcuse, like Fromm, views psychological and political repression as deeply interwoven. For Marcuse, Freudian psychoanalysis is relevant for tracing the exercise of domination upon the inner world of the subject, for understanding how capitalism and mass culture shape personal desires, and for analysing the possibilities of human emancipation. Unlike Fromm, however, Marcuse rejects the view that sociological and historical factors must be added to Freudian theory. Instead, Marcuse seeks to unfold the liberative potential in Freud’s work from the inside out, in order to reveal its radical political edge.

Marcuse’s reconceptualization of psychoanalysis seeks to develop the ‘political and sociological substance’ of Freud’s work (Marcuse, 1956: xii). His analysis proceeds from an acceptance of some of the core claims of psychoanalysis. These include the theory of the unconscious, the conflict between the pleasure and reality principles, the life and death drives, and the view that civilization entails sexual repression. Marcuse contends, however, that Freud was wrong about the permanent cultural necessity of psychological repression. Marcuse agrees that all social reproduction demands a certain level of repression. Yet what Freud did not see, Marcuse argues, is that capitalism creates a crippling [though impermanent] burden of repression. From this angle, individuals are in fact adapting to the destructive forces of capitalist domination, forces that masquerade as the ‘reality principle’.

These provocative ideas are developed by Marcuse in his classic *Eros and Civilization* (1956) and Five Lectures (1970). The key to Marcuse’s interpretation of Freud is the division of repression into ‘basic’ and ‘surplus’. Basic repression refers to that minimum level of libidinal renunciation deemed necessary for facing social life. What this means, in short, is that a certain amount of repression underlies the constitution of the ‘socialized subject’, a subject capable of sustaining the business of social and sexual reproduction. By contrast, surplus repression refers to the intensification of restraint created in and through asymmetrical relations of power. Marcuse points to patriarchy (especially in terms of family relationships) and to the workplace as socio-symbolic fields containing a surplus of repression. This repressive surplus, says Marcuse, operates through the ‘performance principle’, a culturally specific form of reality structured by the economic order of capitalism. For Marcuse, the destructive psychological effects of this principle are highly consequential. ‘Performance’ recasts individuals as mere ‘things’ or ‘objects’, replaces eroticism with genital sexuality, and fashions a disciplining of the human body (what Marcuse terms ‘repressive desublimation’) in order to prevent repressed desire from interfering with capitalist exchange values.
Marcuse presses this reinterpretation of Freud into a critical theory of the psychic costs of modernity. In Marcuse’s view, the massive social and industrial transformations which have occurred in the twentieth century—changes in systems of economy and technology as well as cultural production—have produced a radical escalation in psychological repression. The more technocapitalism has advanced, he argues, the more repression has become surplus. The immense productive capacities released from technology, modernism and monopoly capitalism have been turned back upon the individual subject with a vengeance. As a consequence, the personal sphere is subject to decomposition and fragmentation. According to Marcuse, the psychoanalytic division of the individual into id, ego, and superego is no longer relevant. A weakening in patriarchal authority within the bourgeois nuclear family, accompanied by the impact of the mass media and commodified culture, has led to an authority-bound, easily manipulable subject. Subjecthood, in conditions of late capitalism, is rendered a mere functional component of the system of domination.

Notwithstanding this bleak picture of the contemporary epoch, Marcuse was optimistic about social change. In one sense, he used Freudian psychoanalysis against itself, to trace the emancipatory potentials of modernity. He argued that the performance principle, ironically, generates the economic and social conditions necessary for a radical transformation of society. That is, the material affluence generated by capitalism opens the way for undoing surplus repression. Emancipation for Marcuse is linked to a reconciliation between culture, nature, and unconscious pleasure, what he termed ‘libidinal rationality’. The pre-conditions for the realization of libidinal rationality include the overcoming of the split between pleasure and reality, life and death, and a recovery of repressed needs and aspirations. Through changes in fantasy structures and the social context, Marcuse says, society can become re-eroticized.

Marcuse’s analysis of contemporary ideological pressures toward ‘surplus repression’ contains many insights, but it is also clear that there are important limitations to his approach. For one thing, he fails to point in anything but the most general way to how ideology transforms repression from ‘basic’ into ‘surplus’, and so it is far from easy to grasp the complex ways in which culture implants political domination upon the emotional economy of subjects. (For a detailed discussion of this and related psycho-political difficulties in Marcuse’s work, see Elliott, 1993). Similarly, the argument that reason or rationality can be located in repressed drives (the notion of ‘libidinal rationality’) is underdeveloped. Marcuse’s work fails to analyse in any substantive way intersubjective social relationships. Instead, his vision of political autonomy is one in which repressed drives become liberated, and thus transfigurative.
of social relations. From this angle, some critics have suggested that Marcuse’s conception of the relation between repressed desire and social transformation is individualistic and asocial in character (see Held, 1980; Chodorow, 1989).

CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY: HABERMAS’S READING OF FREUD AND THE THEOREM OF DISTORTED COMMUNICATION

An attempt to overcome some of the core theoretical and political limitations of the Frankfurt School, while also retaining Freudian psychoanalysis as an exemplar for critical social theory, is to be found in the writings of the contemporary German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas. Influenced by Marcuse in particular, Habermas uses psychoanalytic theory to supplement and enrich critical theory as concerns the analysis of social power and ideological domination. Habermas, like Marcuse, agrees with Freud that the development of social organization and productive economic forces has required a certain amount of psychological repression. But in conditions of late modernity, says Habermas, as the constraints of economic scarcity are overcome, we begin to witness the radicalizing possibilities of the transformation (and perhaps eradication) of social repression.

Perhaps somewhat strangely, most of Habermas’s major contributions to a radical appropriation of psychoanalysis for social critique—stemming from the late 1960s especially, but also through the 1970s and into the 1980s—fail to profit from the pivotal research conducted by the first generation of critical theorists on the psychopathologies of European rationalism and the Enlightenment. Rather than seeing the substantive claims of psychoanalysis as a political resource for critical social theory, Habermas instead develops a methodological interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis as linked to the objectives of critical theory. In one important sense, as will be highlighted in subsequent discussion, Habermas’s reconceptualization of Freud has many elements in common with Lacanian psychoanalysis, though the final result is radically different. Like Lacan, Habermas conceives of psychoanalysis as a theoretical and methodological structure which traces public, intersubjective communication. Also like Lacan, Habermas argues that the unconscious is essentially linguistic in character. In contrast to Lacan, however, Habermas argues for the possibility of emancipation through the recovery of the repressed unconscious. By developing a literalist understanding of psychoanalysis as the ‘talking cure’—that is, that the unconscious can be made conscious via speech—Habermas seeks to link the overcoming of social repression to transformations in structures of communication and public political discourse.
Ideology, says Habermas, is a structure of communication that has become systematically bent out of shape by power. Distortion marks the point at which social rationalization intrudes into everyday life, or of what Habermas terms the ‘lifeworld’ —the domains of cultural reproduction, socialization and personal identity. Like the early Frankfurt School, Habermas argues that the increasing penetration of a rationalizing, bureaucratizing logic into cultural life has degraded social relations and the autonomy of personhood. The uncontrolled growth of anonymous systems of administration and economy increasingly reach into every sphere of social life. But this besieging of the lifeworld by economic and administrative subsystems is not just a matter of social domination: on the contrary, such pathology becomes incorporated into the rigid, monotonous character of contemporary identity-patterns. Indeed, Habermas speaks of an ‘inner colonization of the lifeworld’, which suggests that desire and passion are increasingly colonized and controlled by the ideological dictates of the social system itself.

Habermas regards psychoanalysis as a discourse that traces the communicative distortions of social power and ideology upon subjectivity. In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972), he argues that unconscious repression is an effect of linguistic distortion. ‘The ego’s flight from itself,’ says Habermas, ‘is an operation that is carried out in and with language. Otherwise it would not be possible to reverse the defensive process hermeneutically, via the analysis of language’ (1972: 241). In this communications reading of Freud, repression is understood as a process of excommunication. Drawing on Alfred Lorenzer’s psychoanalytic research on linguistic pathologies, Habermas claims that the unconscious is constituted through an excommunication of language from public, intersubjective relations through a process of privatization. The unconscious, on this reckoning, is conceived as that which is excluded from public, intersubjective communication. As Habermas (1972:223) argues: ‘The psychically most effective way to render undesired need dispositions harmless is to exclude from public communication the interpretations to which they are attached.’ From this angle, Habermas contends that emancipation entails the elimination of unconscious distortions of communication in order to secure a self-reflective movement toward political autonomy.

As with the first generation of critical theorists, and especially Marcuse, Habermas’s recasting of repression as a process of excommunication has significantly stimulated and influenced contemporary social theory. In contrast to the individualistic interpretation of Freud developed by Marcuse, Habermas’s communications reading of psychoanalysis directly confronts the intersubjective nature of repressed desire, thus making the psychoanalytic tradition more immediately relevant to the concerns
of social theory. However, a number of important objections have been made of Habermas’s use of psychoanalysis. First, it appears that Habermas conflates repression with the unconscious, and thus fails to consider the importance of other unconscious processes and mechanisms such as fantasy, wish-fulfilment, projection, introjection and the like (see Giddens, 1979; Whitebook, 1989). Second, and related to this criticism, Habermas’s linguistic reconceptualization of the psyche, like Lacan, erases the prelinguistic realm of unconscious passion, thereby screening from view the role of affect in the constitution and reproduction of social practices (see Elliott, 1999). Finally, by discarding these vital elements of the Freudian conceptual field, Habermas is left with an account of the unconscious which is essentially negative and constraining—which is why he argues that, at a collective level, the unconscious must be made conscious! What this overlooks, of course, are the creative dimensions of unconscious fantasy and affect; these are dimensions of psychical experience, I contend, which are fundamental to social life and critical self-reflection (see Elliott, 1999: chapter 3).

RETURNING TO FREUD: JACQUES LACAN

Many psychoanalytic theorists have identified loss as central to self-constitution. From the fall from pre-Oedipal Eden, in which the small infant becomes separated from the maternal body, through alarming and painful terrors of the Oedipal constellation, and onto subsequent adult disappointments, rejections and negations: loss infiltrates all emotional transactions between self and others, and so in a sense is at the root from which desire flows uncontrollably. Yet while the intricate connections between loss and selfhood have been underwritten throughout the history of psychoanalysis, perhaps the most remarkable contribution remains that elaborated by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. The world of illusion which we fashion to avoid the traumatic and impenetrable mysteries of loss are for Lacan the very stuff out of which we are made. For Lacan, the individual subject is constituted in and through loss, as an excess of lack. In a radical revision of Freud, largely through a widening of the horizons of psychoanalysis to embrace structuralist linguistics and poststructuralist theories of discourse, Lacan makes lack the cause which ensures that as human subjects we are continually falling short, failing, fading and lapsing.

The writings of Lacan have been widely regarded (especially in the English-speaking world) as inexhaustibly complex, and one reason for this may be that Lacan himself believed it necessary to fashion a theoretical discourse at odds with itself in order for psychoanalysis to do justice to the rich vagaries of emotional life. Another reason
concerns the immense conceptual shifts inaugurated by Lacan, shifts in the language of psychoanalysis away from the world of biology and toward the study of language and human speech, away from the deterministic forces of instincts and appetites and toward the analysis of structures and culture. In taking psychoanalysis in this largely anti-biological direction, Lacan was dazzlingly eclectic, in his writings borrowing one moment from the structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the next from the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, while in his seminars putting to work the insights of the linguist Roman Jakobson and recontextualizing Hegel’s master/slave dialectic for the analysis of human desire. The work of Lacan and his followers will be returned to in the context of feminist and postmodern theories discussed later in the chapter. At this point, it is necessary to consider the main features of Lacan’s revision of Freud.

The world of sense-perception, for Lacan as for Freud, is born from immersion in a sublimely opaque realm of images, of very early experience of imaginings and imagoes, of primitive fantasies of the body of another. It was noted earlier that Freud viewed the small infant, from the very start of life, in a symbiotic relation with the maternal body. At this preindividualistic, premimetic stage of life, the infant makes no distinction between itself and the maternal body, or between a space that is inside and outside. Instead, the infant’s world consists of a merging of itself and the maternal body. Lacan calls this realm, caught between wonderful delight and terrifying anguish, the Imaginary. The Imaginary for Lacan is a prelinguistic, pre-Oedipal register, solely visual in operation and in which desire slides around and recircles an endless array of part-objects—breasts, lips, gaze, skin. According to Lacan, this imaginary drafting of the world of illusion, of wholeness, is broken apart once the infant comes to identify with, and introject, things or objects beyond itself, thus shifting beyond the lures of the Imaginary. This primordial moment of separation is devastating, a loss so painful that it results in a primary repression of the pre-Oedipal connection to the maternal sphere, a repression which in one stroke founds the repressed unconscious. Once severed from primary identification with the pre-Oedipal mother, the infant is projected into the realm of language, the Symbolic in Lacan’s theory is a plane of received social meanings, logic, differentiation. Symbolization and language permit the subject to represent desire, both to itself and to others. Yet the representation of desire, says Lacan, is always stained by a scar of imaginary, maternal identification. As speaking subjects, our discourse is always marked by lack, the repressed unconscious. The unconscious’ says Lacan, ‘is the discourse of the Other.’
Lacan theorizes the imaginary tribulations of self-constitution largely through a novel consideration of Freud’s theory of narcissism. In The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I’ (1949), Lacan contends that the infant apprehends a sense of bodily unity through the recognition of its image in a mirror. The ‘mirror’ provides the infant with consoling image of itself as unified and self-sufficient. As Lacan (1977:1) puts this:

unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial...he nevertheless overcomes in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstruction of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image.

This reflecting mirror image is not at all, however, what it seems. Lacan says that what the mirror produces is a ‘mirage of coherence’, an alienating misrecognition. In short, the mirror lies. Mirroring leads the infant to imagine itself as stable and unified, when in fact psychical space is fragmented, and the infant’s physical movements uncoordinated. The reflecting mirror leads the infant into an unfettered realm of narcissism, underpinned by hate and aggression, given the unbridgeable gap between ideal and actuality. This imaginary drafting of the self, says Lacan, ‘situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction’ (1977:2).

The imaginary can thus be described as a kind of archaic realm of distorted mirror images, a spatial world of indistinction between self and other, from which primary narcissism and aggressivity are drawn as key building blocks in the formation of identity. But if the Imaginary order is already an alienation of desire, then the same is certainly true of the Symbolic order of language. The Symbolic, says Lacan, smashes the mirror unity of the Imaginary. For Lacan, as for Freud, this happens with the entry of the father into the psychic world of the child. In disturbing the mother-child link, the Oedipal father breaks up the self—other unity of the Imaginary order. For Lacan, language is the fundamental medium which structures the Oedipal process. The child enters the symbolic via language, which ushers in temporal, spatial and logical differences, which are foundational to self and other, subject and object. Language for Lacan is an intersubjective order of symbolization which carries the force of cultural sanctions, of what he terms ‘the Law of the Father’—for it is in and through language that the subject attempts a reconstruction of lost, imagined unities.

Rewriting the unconscious and Oedipus in terms of the symbolic dimensions of language, Lacan’s theoretical point of reference is the structural linguistics of
Ferdinand de Saussure. It is not possible here to provide an adequate exegesis of Lacan’s appropriation and reconstruction of Saussure’s ideas [see Elliott, 1999]; in what follows I shall only emphasize certain aspects of Lacan’s use of Saussure’s structural linguistics, particularly those aspects most relevant to the concerns of social theory. In Saussurian linguistics, language is explicated as a system of internal differences. In this view, signs are made up of a signifier (a sound or image) and a signified (the concept or meaning evoked). The meaning of a word arises through its differences from other words: a pencil, for example, is not a pen. A book is not a pamphlet, not a magazine, not a newspaper. Words as such do not ‘mean’ their objects. Language creates meaning only through an internal play of differences. Now Lacan accepts the key elements of Saussure’s structural linguistics, but he radicalizes the relation between the signifier and the signified. Lacan will have nothing of the Saussurian search for the signified, or concept, however ‘arbitrary’ the relation between signifiers that generates meaning may be. Instead, Lacan inverts Saussure’s interpretation of the sign, asserting that the signifier has primacy over the signified in the production of meaning. As he explicates this:

The first network, that of the signifier, is the synchronic structure of the language material in so far as in that structure each element assumes its precise function by being different from the others. The second network, that of the signified, is the diachronic set of the concretely pronounced discourses, which reacts historically on the first, just as the structure of the first governs the pathways of the second. The dominant fact here is the unity of signification, which proves never to be resolved into a pure indication of the real, but always refers back to another signification.

(Lacan, 1977:126)

In Lacan’s psychoanalytic reading, the two orders of discourse are always separated by censorship, marked by a bar of repression. The signified, says Lacan, cannot be elucidated once and for all since it is always ‘sinking’ or ‘fading’ into the unconscious; the signified is, in effect, always just another signifier. And for Lacan the signifier is itself coterminal with the unconscious. The unconscious, says Lacan, is ‘the sum of the effects of the parole on a subject, at the level where the subject constitutes itself from the effects of the signifier’ [Lacan quoted in Ragland-Sullivan, 1986:116].

Language, as a system of differences, constitutes the subject’s repressed desire through and through. The subject, once severed from the narcissistic fullness of the
Imaginary, is inserted into linguistic and symbolic structures that both generate the unconscious and allow for its contents to traverse the intersubjective field of culture. Access to ourselves and others, however, is complicated by the fact that desire is itself an ‘effect of the signifier’, an outcrop of the spacings or differences of linguistic structures. From this angle, the unconscious is less a realm on the ‘inside’ of the individual, or ‘underneath’ language, than an intersubjective space between subjects—located in those gaps which separate word from word, meaning from meaning. ‘The exteriority of the symbolic in relation to man,’ says Lacan, ‘is the very notion of the unconscious’ (1966:469). Or, in Lacan’s infamous slogan: ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF LACAN’S THEORY

Lacan’s re-reading of Freud has powerfully influenced contemporary social theory. His emphasis on the centrality of symbolic structures in the constitution of the subject, as well as the disruption caused to these structures through the fracturing effects of the unconscious, has been of core importance to recent debates concerning identity and cultural forms (see, for example, Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher, 1991; Leupin, 1991). His stress on the complicated interweaving of language and desire has been original and provocative. Significantly, it has served as a useful corrective to social-theoretical accounts that portray the self as the site of rational psychological functioning. Moreover, his linguistic reconceptualization of the unconscious powerfully deconstructs theories of representation which presume that mind and world automatically fit together.

There are many limitations, however, with the Lacanian account of subjectivity and social relations. The most important of these, as concerns subjecthood, is Lacan’s claim that imaginary identification with the self and others, as forged in the mirror stage, involves an inescapable sentence of alienation. While it is undeniable that Freud viewed miscognition as internally tied to ego-formation, Lacan’s version of this process involves a number of substantive problems. Consider the following: what is it that allows the individual to (mis)recognize itself from its mirror image? How, exactly, does it cash in on this conferring of selfhood? The problem with the argument that the mirror distorts is that it fails to specify the psychic capacities which make any such misrecognition possible. That is, it fails to detail how the mirror is constituted as real (see Elliott, 1992:138–6). Related to this is the criticism that Lacan’s linguistic reconceptualization of psychoanalysis actually suppresses the radical implications of Freud’s discovery of the unconscious by structuralizing it, reducing it to a chance play of signifiers. In this respect, Lacan’s claim that the unconscious is naturally tied to
language has come under fire (see Ricoeur, 1970; Castoriadis, 1984; Laplanche, 1987). Here it is asserted that the unconscious is the pre-condition for language and not the reverse. As concerns social theory, the problems in this respect are significant. For it is certainly arguable that, in presenting an account of desire as disembodied and prestructured linguistically, Lacan effectively strips the subject of any capacity for autonomy, reflection and transformation.

Equally serious are the criticisms that have been made of Lacan’s account of culture. Lacan’s linkage of the ‘subject of the unconscious’ with the idea of the ‘arbitrary nature of the sign’ raises the thorny problem of the replication of ideological power. In this connection, Lacan fails to explain how some ideological and political meanings predominate over others in the shaping of the personal sphere. Instead, cultural domination is equated with language as such. It is the subjection of the individual to the symbolic, to the force of the Law, which accounts for the fall of the subject. However, as Dews (1987) argues, Lacan’s equation of language with domination seriously downplays the importance of power, ideology and social institutions in the reproduction of cultural life.

LACANIAN AND POST-LACANIAN CONTEXTS

Lacan’s return to Freud has powerfully influenced debates concerning the links between self and society in the late modern age. The emphasis on problems of language and communication in Lacanianism has made this current of thought highly relevant to a variety of social-theoretical issues in the social sciences.

In his essay ‘Ideology and ideological state apparatuses’ (1971), the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser seeks to integrate structural Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to understand the working of ideology in modern societies. Althusser traces ideology as a discourse which leads the individual subject to understand itself and others in such a way as to support the reproduction of ruling-class power. Like Lacan, Althusser argues that social forms are experienced, not so much in the public world of institutions, as in the fantasy realm of the imaginary. ‘All ideology’ represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion is not the existing relations of production...but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them’ (1971:38–9). From this angle, ideology provides an imaginary centring to everyday life, it confers identity on the self and Others, and makes the individual feel valued within the social, cultural network.
What are the psychic mechanisms which underpin ideology? Echoing Lacan, Althusser argues that ideology functions in and through mirroring. Like the Lacanian child in front of its mirror-image, the ideological mirror implants received social meanings at the heart of the subject’s world. Yet, as in the mirror stage, the constitution of social forms necessarily involves a misrecognition, since ideology idealizes and distorts the intersubjective world of society, culture and politics. Through a ‘subjection’ to ideological discourses of class, race, gender, nationalism and the like, the individual comes to misrecognize itself as an autonomous, self-legislating subject. Imaginary misrecognition occurs through a process that Althusser terms ‘interpellation’. It is in and through ideology that society ‘interpellates’ the individual as a ‘subject’, at once conferring identity and subjecting the individual to that social position. This interweaving of signification and imaginary misrecognition, Althusser contends, is rooted in ‘ideological state apparatuses’, which include schools, trade unions and the mass media, and whose function is to ensure the subjection of individuals to different social positions in modern class-based societies.

That human subjects should come to overlook the nature of their real decentred subjectivity, says Althusser, is precisely the function of ideology—thus serving to reinforce the dominant power interests of late capitalism.

The theory of ideology developed by Althusser, with its implicit use of Lacanian psychoanalysis, marks one of the major sources of stimulus in twentieth-century social thought. It sets out an array of ideas about the relations between the personal and social domains, the imaginary and institutional life. Althusser’s argument that ideology is an indispensable imaginary medium for social reproduction is provocative and important, and it did much to discredit traditional Marxist theories of ideology as mere false consciousness. Like the unconscious for Freud, ideology for Althusser is eternal. However, it is now widely agreed that there are many problems with Althusser’s account of ideology. Most importantly, Althusser’s argument about the mirroring distortion of ideology runs into the same kind of theoretical dead-end as does Lacan’s account of the imaginary. That is, in order for an individual subject to (mis)recognize itself in and through ideological discourse, then surely she or he must already possess certain affective capacities for subjective response. From a psychoanalytic angle, the psychical capacity for identification, representation and reflection suggests that the relations between the personal and the ideological spheres are extremely complex, and are certainly anything but a simple ‘implantation’ of culturally controlled and closed social forms—as Althusser’s work suggests. The central problem in this respect is that Althusser’s theory implies an unsatisfactory notion of cultural domination, one in which subjects are rigidly inserted into the ideological process. [For detailed treatments of Althusser’s misreading of Lacanian psychoanalysis see Barrett, 1991: chapter 5; Elliott, 1992: chapter 5.]
Whatever these shortcomings, however, the Althusserian/Lacanian model remains a powerful source of influence in contemporary social theory. Indeed, Althusser’s Lacan has recently been examined with new interest that concerns the study of subjectivity, society and culture. Jameson (1990:51–4) argues for a return to the Lacanian underpinnings of Althusser’s social theory in order to fashion what he calls a ‘cognitive mapping’ of postmodern symbolic forms. So too, Žižek (1989; 1991) recasts the Althusserian model of ‘interpellation’ in order to trace the fantasy identifications created in and through cultural forms such as media and film.

FEMINIST PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

In recent years, some of the most important conceptual advances in psychoanalytic social theory have come from feminist debates on sexual subjectivity and gender hierarchy. Broadly speaking, the major division in psychoanalytic feminism is between Anglo-American object relations theory on the one hand, and French Lacanian and post-Lacanian theory on the other. Through the object—relations perspective, feminist theorists analyse sexuality and gender against the backdrop of interpersonal relationships—with particular emphasis on the pre-Oedipal child —mother bond. Post-structuralist feminists indebted to Lacanian psychoanalysis, by contrast, deconstruct gender terms with reference to the structuring power of the order of the Symbolic, of language as such. In previous writings, I have explored in detail both the theoretical and political differences between these competing psychoanalytic standpoints in feminism and contemporary sexuality studies (Elliott, 2002, 2003). In what follows, I shall concentrate for the most part upon developments in feminist theories of sexual difference that draw from, rework or transfigure Lacanian theory. The central concerns that I touch on include an exploration of the political ramifications of psychoanalysis; the psychic forces which affect women’s desexualization and lack of agency in modern culture; the relationship between maternal and paternal power in infant development; and the connections between sexuality, the body and its pleasures. For in addressing these issues, feminist psychoanalytic theorists have sought to enlarge their understandings of polarized sexual identities in modern societies and to rethink the possibilities for restructuring existing forms of gender power.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is probably the most influential current in feminist social theory today (cf. Benjamin, 1988; Flax, 1990; and Elliott, 2002, for detailed treatments of the contributions of the object–relations school of psychoanalysis to feminist criticism). In Lacan’s deployment of Saussurian linguistics, as noted above, meaning arises from difference. In the order of language, a signifier attains reference to a signified through the exclusion of other signifiers. In patriarchal culture, that which is
excluded is the feminine: woman is denied a voice of her own. Lacan thus claims, in what is regarded by many as a clear indication of his anti-feminism, that The Woman does not exist.’ Linking the unconscious with the essentially patriarchal organization of language and culture, Lacan defines the feminine in the negative. Woman as the Other, as something which is outside the symbolic order: this is what gives the masculine unconscious its self-presence as power and authority.

At this point, it is necessary to briefly consider some central features of the Lacanian theory of gender-differentiated subjectivity. For Lacan, as for Freud, the phallus is the marker of sexual difference par excellence. The father and his phallus smash the incestuous unity of the mother—infant bond, and thereby refer the infant to the wider cultural, social network. In contrast to Freud, however, Lacan claims to conceptually disconnect the phallus from any linkage with the penis. The phallus, says Lacan, is illusory, fictitious, imaginary. It exists less in the sense of biology than in a kind of fantasy realm which merges desire with power, omnipotence, wholeness. In Lacanian theory, the power that the phallus promises is directly tied to maternal, imaginary space. According to Lacan, the infant wishes to be loved exclusively by the mother. The infant painfully learns, however, that the mother’s desire is invested elsewhere: in the phallus. Significantly, this discovery occurs at the same time that the infant is discovering itself in language, as a separate subject. In this connection, it is important to note that Lacan says that both sexes enter the symbolic order of language as castrated. The infant’s separation from maternal space is experienced as a devastating loss. The pain of this loss is castration, from which sexual subjectivity becomes deeply interwoven with absence and lack.

Lack, therefore, cuts across gender: both boys and girls undergo castration. Yet to enter the symbolic, says Lacan, is to enter the masculine world. For Lacan, sexual identity is established through a privileging of the visible, of having or not having the phallus. As Lacan puts this: ‘It can be said that the [phallic] signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the role of sexual copulation... it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation’ (1977:287). Lacan thus underwrites the constitution of masculinity as phallic and femininity as non-phallic. In this scenario, the feminine is on the outside of language, culture, reason and power. Yet, since meaning arises only out of difference, Lacan infuses this argument with a subtle twist as concerns gender. Man’s self-presence as phallic authority, says Lacan, is secured only through the exclusion of the feminine. The displaced feminine makes the masculine as phallic power exist, yet it also threatens its disruption. At the limit of the symbolic order, the feminine at once maintains and subverts existing forms of gender power.
Lacan was not much interested in the social application of his theories. But this has not prevented feminists from making critical appropriations of Lacanian psychoanalysis for rethinking the social theory of gender. Interest in Lacan’s ideas for feminism was initiated in the English-speaking world by Juliet Mitchell, who in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) uses Freud and Lacan to explore the contemporary gender system.

In Mitchell’s Lacanian-based feminism, an analysis of sexual politics is developed which stresses that the symbolic order of language creates sexual division. Gendered subjectivity, for Mitchell, is necessarily tied to a fundamental loss: that of maternal, imaginary space. In this connection, the phallus, as ‘transcendental signifier’, functions as an imaginary lining or construction which masks the lack of the human subject at the level of sexual division. Yet the crucial point, according to Mitchell, is that these imaginary scenarios position males and females within unequal gender relations.

Man is constituted as a self-determining, autonomous agent, and woman as the lacking Other, as sexual object. Using Lacanian theory against itself, however, Mitchell also explores potentialities for gender transformation. Though the phallus may stand for entry to the symbolic order, Mitchell claims, it is an imaginary object that either sex can secure once and for all. Seen as a transactional negotiation of identity, the phallus need not be tied to male domination. Mitchell thus concludes: ‘Some other expression of the entry into culture than the implication for the unconscious of the exchange of women will have to be found in non-patriarchal society’ (1974:415).

Though generating much interest at the time, most commentators would now agree that Mitchell’s analysis of gender contains serious theoretical and political difficulties. It seems to assume, for example, that the social reproduction of sexuality and gender is a relatively stable affair, without allowing room for the contradictions and ambiguities of split subjectivity and the unconscious. This involves important political implications. For if women are symbolically fixed in relation to masculinity as the lacking Other, via a repression of desire, then it remains far from clear as to why women would ever feel compelled to question or challenge the contemporary gender system. This point can be made in another way. The Lacanian specification of the feminine as that which is always defined negatively—lack, the Other, the dark continent—carries a number of theoretical and political ambiguities. On the one hand, Lacan’s doctrines have been a valuable theoretical resource for feminists analysing how women are rendered the excluded Other in patriarchal discourse and culture. On the other hand, the recurring problem for feminism when set within Lacanian parameters is that all dimensions of human sexuality become inscribed within the signifier and therefore trapped by the Law. Lacan’s reduction of the feminine to mere oppositeness implies that woman can be defined only as mirror to
the masculine subject, and thus can never escape the domination of a rigidly
genderized discourse.

In opposition to Lacan, however, a number of French feminists have recently
sought to articulate an alternative vision of female sexual subjectivity in French
psychoanalysis. This approach to revaluing the feminine is generally referred to as
post-Lacanian feminism, though it is worth briefly expanding on this label. This
branch of feminist psychoanalysis is generally considered ‘Lacanian’ because
theorists associated with it adopt a broadly structuralist interpretation of gender
categories, situating woman as the excluded Other of masculinist discourse and
culture. Yet this approach is also ‘anti-Lacanian’ since such theorists tend to oppose
the view that woman can only be defined as the mirror opposite of the masculine
subject, and thus never escape the domination of a rigidly genderized discourse.

Broadly speaking, post-Lacanian feminists evoke a positive image of femininity, an
image that underscores the multiple and plural dimensions of women’s sexuality.
Hélène Cixous, for example, speaks of the rhythms, flows, and sensations of the
feminine libidinal economy, contrasting this with the exaggerated masculinist stress
on genital sexuality. Woman, says Cixous, has the ‘capacity to depropriate unselfishly,
body without end, without appendage, without principal “parts”… Her libido is
 cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide’ (1976:95). Similarly, Luce Irigaray
locates the feminine in the multiplicity of bodily sensations arising from the lips,
vagina, clitoris, breasts. In contrast to the imperial phallic compulsiveness of male
sexuality, women’s capacity and need for sexual expression resides in the multiplicity
and flux of feminine desire itself. As Irigaray says of woman: ‘Her sexuality, always at
least double, is in fact plural’ (1977:102). Women, argues Irigaray, need to establish a
different relationship to feminine sexuality, establishing a range of displacements to
patriarchy through writing as a cultural practice. Speaking the feminine, for Irigaray,
can potentially transform the oppressive sexed identities of patriarchy. In her more
recent work, particularly *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993) and *To Be Two* (1999),
Irigaray situates the renegotiation of identities in the frame of ethics, specifically the
dilemma of recognizing the Otherness of the other sex. An ethics of sexual difference,
she argues, would respect the Other in her or his own right, with regard to
considerations of finitude, mortality, creation and the divine.

Finally, we can find another meeting point of feminist and psychoanalytic theories in
the work of Kristeva, who elaborates the idea of a specifically feminine mode of being
which dislocates patriarchal language and culture. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*
(1974), Kristeva contrasts the Lacanian symbolic, the Law which the father embodies,
with the multiple libidinal forces of the ‘semiotic’. The semiotic is a realm of
prelinguistic experience—including feelings, drives and rhythms experienced by the infant in its pre-Oedipal relation to the mother. According to Kristeva, our semiotic longing for the pre-Oedipal mother, though repressed with entry to the symbolic, remains present in the unconscious and cannot be shut off from society and culture. The semiotic, Kristeva says, is present in the rhythms, slips and silences in speech; and it is subversive of the Law of the Father since it is rooted in a pre-patriarchal connection with the feminine. Yet Kristeva denies that the feminine semiotic has any intrinsic link with gender, because it stems from the pre-Oedipal phase and is thus prior to sexual difference. Thus, if the semiotic is ‘feminine’, it is a femininity that is always potentially available to women and men in their efforts to transform gender power. Kristeva looks to the semiotic as a means of subverting the male-dominated symbolic order. She finds a clear expression of the semiotic in the writings of avant-garde authors, such as Mallarme, Lautréamont and Artaud, writing which she feels defies patriarchal language. Kristeva also locates semiotic subversion in pregnancy. The psychic experience of giving birth, Kristeva says, reproduces ‘the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech’ (1986:206).

In her more recent work, especially Black Sun (1989) and New Maladies of the Soul (1993), Kristeva situates the emotional turmoil produced by contemporary culture with reference to depression, mourning and melancholia. In depression, argues Kristeva, there is an emotional disinvestment from the Symbolic, from language as such. The depressed person, overwhelmed by sadness, suffers from a paralysis of symbolic activity. In effect, language fails to substitute for what has been lost at the level of the psyche. The loss of loved ones, the loss of ideals, the loss of pasts: as the depressed person loses all interest in the surrounding world, in language itself, psychic energy shifts to a more primitive mode of functioning, to a maternal, drive-orientated form of experience. In short, depression produces a trauma of symbolic identification, a trauma which unleashes the power of semiotic energy. In the force field of the semiotic—rhythms, semantic shifts, changes in intimation—Kristeva finds a means to connect the unspoken experience of the depressed person to established meaning, thereby facilitating an emotional reorganization of the self.

The foregoing feminist theories represent one of the most important areas of contemporary psychoanalytic criticism. They help explain, more clearly than conventional Lacanian accounts, the ways in which dominant sexual ideologies penetrate everyday life, and also explore the radicalizing possibilities of a feminine transformation of gender. But assumptions are made in these theories which need to be questioned. For one thing, the male-dominated Law is opposed in these accounts
either by the woman’s body or the subversive relationship of women to language. However, some feminists have argued that this merely reinstates a ‘female essence’ prior to the construction of sexual subjectivity, and is therefore in danger of reinforcing traditional gender divisions through an unintended biologism [see Moi, 1985; Frosh, 1987; Flax, 1990; Elliott, 1992]. Related to this is the concern that these theories erase the mediating factors which link fantasy and social reality, either by displacing the psychoanalytic account of the construction of sexual difference [as in the case of Irigaray and Cixous], or by essentialism [as with Kristeva’s merging of the semiotic and motherhood]. [For further discussion on these points see Benhabib and Cornell, 1987; Cornell, 1991.]

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND POSTMODERN THEORY

The Enlightenment reading of psychoanalysis—represented in, say, Habermas’s rendition of Freud’s epigram ‘Where Id was, there Ego shall become’ as culturally prefigurative of the possibility for undistorted communication—has come in for sustained criticism in recent years. One of the sources of the suspicion of modernist psychoanalysis, with its characteristic emphasis on maximizing an individual’s freedom, derives from the Lacanian argument that the notion of the autonomous ego is itself an imaginary construct. Some authors and analysts associated with the postmodern turn of recent theorizing rework the Lacanian order of the Imaginary and apply it to culture and knowledge in general, reinterpreting warnings of the death of the subject as a kind of dawning realization that the whole category of subjectivity is itself illusory. The postmodern critique, which combines elements from the philosophical standpoint of post-structuralism with elements of anti-psychoanalysis, tries to dismantle the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious, cultural prohibitions and repressed libido, subjugation and liberation. In postmodern conditions, with its dramatic speed-up in technologies, the subject is not only decentred but desubjectivized as well. What this means, at least in its more thoroughgoing versions, is a radical deconstruction of the notion of subjectivity itself. How can psychoanalysis, after all, conceivably represent the subject as a bundle of organized dispositions, affects and appetites, when contemporary society is marked in its entirety by fluidity, pluralism, variety and ambivalence? A radical assault on fixed positions and boundaries of all imagination, the postmodern re-writing of psychoanalysis underscores the fluid and multiple trajectories of libidinal enjoyment. The indeterminacy of desire, repetition, the death drive, bodily zones and intensities: these are core elements of the postmodern celebration of the multidimensional and fragmented aspects of our contemporary imaginary.
Broadly speaking, the aim of postmodern psychoanalysis is to rethink the relationship between desire and politics in a way which opens possibilities for social transformation. In this respect, Lacanian psychoanalysis has been sharply criticized by postmodernists as having politically reactionary implications. In their celebrated postmodern treatise *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari contend that the Lacanian account of desire, insofar as it binds the subject to the social order, works in the service of repression. Psychoanalysis, in this sense, functions in the service of capitalism, as a kind of vortex around which the unconscious becomes bent out of shape. As Deleuze and Guattari see it, the Lacanian underwriting of lack is almost the opposite of desire, lack being for them just a capitalist ploy by which consumerism can plug the alleged hungers of desire. They argue that psychoanalysis, both Freudian and Lacanian, functions to *personalize desire*, referring all unconscious productions to the incestuous sexual realm of the nuclear family. Oedipal prohibitions, on this reckoning, are just the signifiers which chain desire to normative representations—the point at which we come to desire what capitalism wants us to desire. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari seek to critique this psychoanalytic privileging of desire rooted in lack as a *product* of Law. They argue that desire in fact precedes representation: there is nothing at all personal to the flows of libido, which continually burst out anew. Perhaps the most striking feature here of Deleuze and Guattari’s use of psychoanalytic concepts lies in their attempt to give full throttle to the flows of libidinous energy: a social theory in which the absolute positivity of unconscious productions is underscored, and in which schizophrenia is taken as a potentially emancipatory mode.

Deleuze was one of France’s most celebrated philosophers of the late twentieth century, and his co-author Guattari was a radical psychoanalyst, opposed to orthodox (both Freudian and Lacanian) theory. *Anti-Oedipus* was a courageous, poetic attempt to explode the normative power of categories like Oedipus and castration in psychoanalysis from the inside out, using psychoanalytic concepts against the colonizing conceptual logic of psychoanalysis itself. Deleuze and Guattari trace the ‘free lines’ of schizophrenic desire as affirmative force, pure positivity, a series of enabling rhythms and intensities as well as transforming possibilities. From this angle, the schizoid process is what enables libidinal pulsations to be uncoupled from systems, structures or cultural objects, which may in turn transform the production of the political network, making it no longer unfold according to the repressive functioning of Law. Rejecting the rigid and closed worlds of Oedipus and capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari wish to speak up for schizophrenia over neurosis, the flows of desire over lack, fragments over totalities, differences over uniformity. ‘Schizophrenia’, they write, ‘is desiring production at the limit of social production’ (1977:35). Against the Oedipalizing...
logic of capitalist discourse, where desire is channelled into prescribed pathways, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the impersonalized flows of schizoid desire can herald a radical transformation of society.

Similar theoretical directions are taken in the early writings of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who argues that political society is itself secretly libidinal. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire is codified and repressed in and through capitalism, Lyotard views contemporary society as an immense desiring system. As he sees it, the postmodern is a vast libidinal circuit of technologies, a culture swamped with seductive signs and images. In underscoring the indeterminancy of intensities, Lyotard effects a shift in focus away from theories of representation and structures of the psyche and toward bodily intensities and erotogenic surfaces. In his book *Libidinal Economy* (1993), Lyotard constructs the excitations of libido on the model of the Moebius strip, conceptualized as an endless series of rotations, twistings and contortions.

The upshot of this, in political terms, is a series of arguments about how best to extract libidinal pleasure and intensity from postmodern culture. ‘What would be interesting,’ writes Lyotard, ‘would be to stay where we are, but at the same time to grab all opportunities to function as good conductors of intensities’ (1974:311).

In terms of postmodernism, the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and of Lyotard, underscores the point that contemporary experience is an experience of fragmentation, dislocation, polyvalency. From this angle, the belief that social transformation may be linked to the undoing of hidden meanings or discourses (as suggested in psychoanalytic social theory from Marcuse to Habermas) appears as little more than an ideological fantasy. By contrast, truth in postmodern psychoanalysis is located in the immediacy of libidinal intensity itself. The unconscious cannot be tamed or organized; desire needs no interpretation, it simply is. Moreover, it is within the diffuse, perverse, and schizophrenic manifestations of desire that new forms of identity, otherness, fantasy and symbolism can be found.

The issues raised by postmodern psychoanalysis are important, especially when considered in the light of contemporary social transformations such as globalization and new communications technology. It is not apparent, however, that such theories generate any criteria for the critical assessment of social practices, politics, or value positions. As Dews (1987) points out, the dissimulation of libidinal intensities urged in many currents of postmodern psychoanalysis is something that can be ideologically marshalled by both progressive and reactionary political forces. Significantly, the view that desire is *ipso facto* rebellious and subversive is premised upon a naive
naturalism, one that fails to examine the social, cultural and political forms in which unconscious passion is embedded (see Frank, 1984). Moreover, there is little consideration of the potential harm, pain and damage that psychical states of fragmentation and fluidity may comprise.