

# Introduction: Historicism and the Cultural Present in Shakespeare Studies: Subjectivity in Early and Late Modernity

When I surveyed innovative forms of literary criticism in the late 1980s for the last chapter of my 1991 *The Modernist Shakespeare*, there seemed to be three separate if related newer critical paradigms which had come into existence to replace older methods: deconstruction, new historicism/cultural materialism, and feminism. In only a few years more these three had essentially become only one, as 1980s textualist deconstruction and an older feminism largely disappeared from view, and newer forms of each appeared after having made accommodations with historicism. Thus today in early modern literary studies, historicism, new or old, interwoven with feminism and psychoanalysis or not, has become virtually an unrivalled paradigm for professional writing. The turn to historicism has become taken for granted, its connections to the cultural present often unexamined or suppressed.

The major exception to this generalization has been the growth of a new trend, especially in Shakespeare studies, of ‘presentist’<sup>1</sup> studies of literary classics as cultural phenomena in later periods, particularly in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In one sense these works are extensions of new

<sup>1</sup> I borrow and redefine this term from the field of history and the philosophy of history, where it is a pejorative designating a naive view of the past as homogeneous with the present. However, so dominant have historicist premisses become in Shakespeare studies that we need a positive term for that necessary form of historical perception which understands that *any* view of the past is formed within discourses of the present. Because of its pejorative associations, ‘presentism’ is perhaps not ideal, but it serves here for want of a better. See Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2002), for a similar positive use of *presentism* to advocate a consciousness of the present’s influence on our constructions of the past.

<sup>2</sup> See Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag: Essays on a Critical Process* (New York:

historicism, inasmuch as they perform the same kind of contextualizing of cultural production, using some of the same theorists (Marx and Foucault, for example) as have new historicists. But in another sense they constitute an important challenge to historicist premisses because they underline the salient point that all our knowledge of works from the past is conditioned by and dependent upon the culture, language, and ideologies of the present, and this means that historicism itself necessarily produces an implicit allegory of the present in its configuration of the past. Far from being a defect of our knowledge of the past, let me emphasize, this quality is inescapable and a key to understanding the necessary cultural labour of renewing the past as we create new art and new culture for a new century. To put it simply, the past takes on new contours and qualities for us as our own thinking shifts in the present. History changes as we evolve and develop, and so do historical figures and cultural icons like Shakespeare. I tried to demonstrate this dynamic in my last book, *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf*, by showing how familiar themes of 'good and evil' in four central Shakespearian plays could be reconceptualized in the light of recent cultural and social theory as representing emerging modernity and its logic of reification. Of course, part of this work of reinterpretation involved coming to understand how and why themes of late modernity might have been produced in the discourses of early modernity in forms close enough to our own to seem cognate to us. Thus, while the major thrust of that work was 'presentist', in the sense of using theory from our cultural present to help understand and reinterpret works from the past, it also involved a historicist dimension, an investigation into those qualities of the Jacobean *mentalité* analogous enough to suppositions of our own cultural present to allow for an interpretative 'translation' to a late twentieth-century idiom. Given the primary presentist thrust of that work, however, this historicist dimension was necessarily subordinate and sketchy. In the present work I am trying to reverse those priorities and bring the historicist moment of my Shakespearian critical project into greater prominence—without losing sight of its presentist dimensions. Thus while this book shares its theoretical frame and certain of its central concepts with my previous work, the emphasis of the two books is quite different: the present work is more self-consciously historicist—in the sense of concentrating on the Renaissance

Methuen, 1986) and *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992); Graham Holderness (ed.), *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Hugh Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare: Critical Texts in a Material World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Michael D. Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare among the Moderns* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

sources for concepts which proved analogous to nineteenth- and twentieth-century ones, if not in attempting new historicist negotiations with the details of contemporaneous texts—a method I believe to be only one of a number of useful ways to study cultural history. Instead, I am sketching a broad historical overview to substantiate some of the theoretical notions developed in my earlier work and to provide context for discussion of the specific plays of concern here.

I am focusing on plays which borrow central themes and contradictions from the discussion of Machiavelli's *The Prince* which was pervasive in the 1580s and 1590s within the political class of London—a class which supplied an important audience and important patrons for Shakespeare and his company. Similarly, I am using Montaigne's *Essays* as another predecessor text which directly or indirectly impacted on the works of Shakespeare and other dramatists of his era. In *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf*, I had indicated in a general way the importance of Machiavelli and Montaigne in a broad process of desacralizing modernization<sup>3</sup> but deferred a more specific historicizing discussion until a later occasion—which has now arrived. This book is thus meant as at least a partial redemption of the claim made in the introduction to *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf* that 'the thesis I am arguing is historical, and it can be, in fact, supported in great historical detail'.<sup>4</sup>

### *Allegories of the Present in Historicism*

By turning to the discourses of Machiavelli and Montaigne, however, I am also addressing central problems on the nature of subjectivity prominent in the literary and cultural studies of the late twentieth century. Every historicism, as I emphasized, necessarily has an allegorical dimension, encoding a story for the present as it attempts as rigorously as possible to reconstruct for us stories of the past.<sup>5</sup> In studying the configuration and reconfiguration of the themes of power and subjectivity in central Shakespearean plays, I have come to the conclusion that these plays, in effect, constitute interventions within our own theoretical discourses on these

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 53–4, 140, and 218–19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

<sup>5</sup> This notion, central to both of my earlier books, goes back at least to Marx's remarks on the presentist dimensions of discourses on republican Rome in the French Revolution in his *The Civil Wars in France*; but it was an important idea as well for critics as different in their values and politics as Walter Benjamin and T. S. Eliot. For a bracing and provocative reassertion of these ideas within a Shakespeare studies now given over almost completely to a present-suppressing historicism, see Halpern, *Shakespeare among the Moderns*.

topics within late modernity. The Foucault- and Nietzsche-influenced theories of the subject which have dominated much of recent literary and cultural theory reproduce, inadvertently or not, the dynamics of Machiavellian approaches. The parallel is particularly relevant in the way all these discourses treat subjectivity as an effect of impersonal power. Of course, as I will discuss in Chapter 1, Machiavelli has notoriously suffered from oversimplifying accounts of his often complex arguments, and the notion of the self implied in *The Prince* is complicated in the further-ranging discussions of *The Discourses*. But it has been precisely the Machiavelli of *The Prince* who has been most consequential in cultural history. Nor is Machiavelli necessarily a direct ‘source’ of recent cultural materialist discussions of the subject. Cultural transmission is rarely that direct, and Machiavellian discourse conceptualizes central tenets of the cultural contradictions of modernity, contradictions which have been discussed, reconceptualized, and rediscovered many times since their Renaissance formulations. My focus here is less on Machiavelli as source than on Machiavelli as a figure for a discourse which he helped inaugurate and which has descended to us marked by any number of other interventions by theorists from Hobbes to Foucault. The discourse of power that circulated in the Renaissance and found its way into the Elizabethan theatre was coded ‘Machiavellian’ in its own day, and I will retain and investigate that helpful labelling. Four hundred years later, theories of power have proliferated and can no longer be considered ‘Machiavellian’ in the same way—they have many other ‘authors’, with complex relations to Machiavelli.<sup>6</sup> At times, however, it will be useful to designate the theories of power of our own day with the term Machiavellian in order to bring out the important analogies and parallels that can be discerned.

The connection of Shakespeare and his contemporaries with Renaissance power dynamics—conceptualized in the 1980s as informed by Foucauldian and Nietzschean, rather than Machiavellian, dynamics—has in recent years encountered its own critics, leading to a corrective counter-discourse which questions the adequacy of these theories of power for understanding social life, human history in general, and Shakespeare’s

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, for example, argued that modern political theory descends not from Machiavelli, but from the reaction against him typified in Gentillet’s *Contre-Machiavel*; see Michel Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104; 88–90. Similarly, Althusser defined the relation between Machiavelli and Marxism as ‘one of coincidence and repetition, rather than one of direct influence’; Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, ed. François Matheron, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1999), 116.

plays in particular.<sup>7</sup> New themes of resistance to power have emerged as cultural theorists have addressed these criticisms.

What has occurred to me more recently in thinking about the parallels between these themes in early and late modernity is that, in this regard, the Renaissance theorist of resistance, parallel to new theorists of subjectivity of the 1990s, is Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne, of course, was a political pragmatist who made sure his own works never provoked the ire of the authorities of Church and State in France. Underneath that, however, is a potentially subversive scepticism and, interestingly in the modern context, an account of subjectivity which emphasizes its potential for resistance to power and ideology as these terms have come to be defined in the late twentieth century. In short, Montaigne, with all his sceptical contradictions and complexities, is a Renaissance proto-theorist who challenges the relatively one-dimensional theories of power I associate with Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Foucault. And I began to see the potential for undertaking within Shakespeare's own treatment of power and subjectivity a fascinating investigation of the connections and contradictions of these two Renaissance intellectuals who have often figured previously in accounts of Shakespeare's intellectual sources and who seemed to me now highly relevant to late twentieth-century debates about power and subjectivity. We are dealing, it is worth repeating, with analogies rather than the 'source-and-influence' dynamics of traditional positivist historicism. In what follows Machiavelli and Montaigne are convenient labels for discursive formations associated with the writings of each, but not every work of these iconic Renaissance humanists is relevant to the discourses being discussed. With these provisos in mind, however, I believe the terms will prove useful and enabling.

In these terms, then, Shakespeare in the plays studied here complicated his Machiavellian thematics with Montaignean ones, and in so doing implicitly and presciently criticized the theories of power and the subject which dominated the insurgent Shakespeare criticism of the 1980s.

<sup>7</sup> There have been many critiques of the power-oriented theories from the standpoint of earlier established critical methods; see for example Edward Pechter, 'The New Historicism and its Discontents', *PMLA* 102 (May 1987), 292–303; Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Lynda Boos, 'The Family in Shakespeare Studies; or—Studies in the Family of Shakespearians; or—The Politics of Politics', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40 (Winter 1987), 707–42; Howard Felperin, *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). More recent critiques include Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and John Lee, *Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and the Controversies of Self* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

For example, it seems to me, he depicts subjectivity as something of a dialectical negation of power, not a mere effect of its operations; as an orientation to multiple potential selves or identities, not merely the production of a unitary one; as a mental space critically distanced from, and not entirely defined by, the circulating ideologies and discourses of institutions of power. In short, then, to follow Shakespeare, we will have in turn to follow a dynamic of much cultural theory since the 1980s, from notions of subjectivity wholly determined by power to notions of subjectivity as potentially resistant to power—and this is particularly true within the plays of the *Henriad* and of the milestone tragedy which soon followed these, *Hamlet*.

*Postmodernism within New Historicism*

In what follows, I am pursuing a version of historicism, in the sense that I am trying to define probable meanings the Shakespearian texts had in their own social contexts. As I indicated, I am leaving the specific, ‘localized’ reading techniques which have been perfected by leading new historicists to others better situated and more inclined than I am to pursue them; instead I am following my own interest in what I take to be competing discourses or intellectual frameworks (connected, as we will see, to specific texts and specific material practices) in early modern Europe. I am arguing that in the Shakespearian works of roughly 1595–1600 we can discern the working out of a complicated set of concepts and themes—concepts of political power and of autonomous subjectivity—in a changing but interconnected development which is distinct from the constellation of these same themes in earlier and later Shakespearian plays.

In addition, I am investigating themes which have been central ones in the poststructuralist-influenced criticism of the last twenty years in Shakespeare studies: power and the subject.<sup>8</sup> These themes have been central for two broad reasons: first, they have been crucial terms in the unfolding array of critical theory for the present, as we try to understand our own embedded situation within late, globalized capitalism in a post-Cold War world. In our new cultural and intellectual context (which I

<sup>8</sup> For a useful thematizing review of treatments of the subject in recent years, see Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Sallibrass, ‘Introduction’, in de Grazia, Quilligan, and Sallibrass (eds.), *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–13. As the argument demonstrates, subjects and objects need to be conceptualized as dialectically interconnected. However, as will become clear, I believe the further argument against the long tradition linking Shakespeare to modernity is mistaken.

think of as one dominated by a new Postmodernist aesthetic paradigm), older notions of autonomous, rational selves, which had been in any case under attack since the nineteenth century in discourses inaugurated by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, but which have nevertheless persisted as central categories of political and aesthetic discourse to the present, came under new critical scrutiny and aesthetic representation. Life in the rapidly modernizing late twentieth century became increasingly dominated by new technologies and economic arrangements productive of massification, globalization, and cultural homogenization.

Western art in Romanticism had been constituted as an enclave resistant to these processes, and even Modernism, while it coquetted with the aestheticizing of modernization itself in a few experiments, by and large continued Romanticism's search for enclaves in myths and traditions, condemning technology as soulless and inhuman. Shakespeare was a major icon for both aesthetic movements, the Poet of Nature and Character for the Romantics, then the Poet of Myth and Symbolic Meaning for Modernists, but in each case a repository of values and meanings seen as redemptive of life in a degraded modernity.

In the turn to aesthetic Postmodernism of recent decades, however, Shakespeare's meaning has shifted once again in a complex process still very much in progress, in both academic and popular culture. Aesthetic Postmodernism, as almost all of its major interpreters have agreed, has been involved in intensifying and thematizing a Modernist tendency to undermine prevalent notions of a unitary, rational 'bourgeois' subjectivity, championing images and representations of fragmented, decentred selves. And the Postmodernist decentred self, instead of being situated in a 'Primitivist' enclave, freed of the corruptions of capitalist commodification and modernizing technology (as in Romanticism and mainline Modernism), has been more often represented as fully enmeshed in the (ambivalently aestheticized) surfaces of a commodified and reified social reality.<sup>9</sup> The 1996 film version of *Romeo and Juliet* by Baz Luhrmann is an excellent example of this trend at a popular level. By being resituated in the highly commodified, media-saturated environs of the greater Los Angeles of today, the play became a study in the colonization of idealized sexuality by a reified commodity culture of random violence and alienated street gangs. Similarly Michael Almereyda's 2000 version of

<sup>9</sup> I am drawing here on an earlier treatment of Postmodernism and Shakespeare in Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare*, 204–11, and from a more recent update of those themes, Hugh Grady, 'Modernity, Modernism, and Postmodernism in the Twentieth Century's Shakespeare', in Michael Bristol and Kathleen McLuskie (eds.), *The Performance of Modernity: Shakespeare and the Modern Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2001), 20–35.

*Hamlet* is set in a contemporary, globalized New York, in which computers and video define a kind of hyperreality which is also the medium through which the play's Ghost first appears. And while several other of the recent spate of Shakespeare films are much less consistently Postmodernist in their approach—Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet* seem particularly to have been conceived within the aesthetic idiom of an older 'classical' (not even consistently Modernist) theatrical idiom—Postmodernist ideas have certainly penetrated massively into contemporary avant-garde productions, particularly in non-English-speaking countries<sup>10</sup>—and much recent academic Shakespeare criticism.

In academia, Postmodernist theories of subjectivity, perhaps surprisingly, have proven to have important relevance for 400-year-old Shakespearian texts, revealing for us aspects of Shakespearian character dynamics kept hidden as long as these plays were read through the theoretical lenses formed by assumptions of unitary, static, or 'essentialist' ideas of the self and of literary characters modelling the self. These 'essentialist' readings began as early as the eighteenth century, then entered a Romantic phase from Schlegel to A. C. Bradley. They continued into the twentieth century, but more sporadically than before, because the 'character' became a suspect literary category for Modernist Shakespearian criticism after T. S. Eliot and G. W. Knight.

Since the 1980s a number of pioneering works of contemporary Shakespearian criticism, influenced by recent cultural theory and aesthetic Postmodernism, have demonstrated the fruitful results of dropping these older 'essentialist' assumptions about Shakespeare's characters and conceptualizing them instead through the descendants of the decentering discourses of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—most notably, of course, those produced from the remarkable theoretical ferment of post-Second World War structuralism and poststructuralism, first in France, then throughout the Western academy.

Much of the early thrust of this collective labour was directed against essentialist ideas of 'author' and 'text', as they had come to be constituted in an interacting mid-century Anglo-American critical methodology variously called New Criticism or 'liberal humanism'. Freed from narrow assumptions that Shakespeare's plays, like other works of literature proper, were timeless masterpieces whose most lasting values resided in

<sup>10</sup> This was particularly clear at the October 1997 conference on Shakespeare and Theatrical Modernism held at McGill University in Montreal, which featured presentations on a number of 20th-century Shakespearian productions influenced by Modernist and Postmodernist aesthetics. See Bristol and McLuskie (eds.), *The Performance of Modernity*, for selections from the presentations of this conference.

their formal artistic properties, the newer readings tended to resituate the works in politicized, social contexts that brought out their interconnections with structures of power and domination, then and now. Shakespeare's plays thus became interconnected with vital social questions and debate again, reasserting something of the cultural centrality that had not been theirs since the heydays of Eliot, Empson, Leavis, and Brooks in the 1930s and 1940s, but of course in a completely new social context and invoking ideas and methods anathema to earlier generations of critics.

I have written elsewhere on the crucial role in this critical revolution played by Stephen Greenblatt in resituating the literary works of early modern England in a newly defined cultural context and in producing models of anti-dogmatic, socially conscious, and aesthetically supple literary/cultural criticism that were crucial as models for me and many others in imagining possibilities for new directions in Renaissance or (as it now came to be called) early modern studies.<sup>11</sup> On the other side of the Atlantic, in an analogous development influenced by an emerging British cultural studies, critics Terence Hawkes, John Drakakis, Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore, and Alan Sinfield among others developed a more theorized but equally political and historicizing critical method out of French structuralist and poststructuralist theories, especially in the 1980s those of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. British cultural materialism has been critical of Greenblatt on some issues, congruent with him on many more, but also provides both impetus and models for a new generation of critics. While Greenblatt and other related American new historicists were certainly interested in issues of selfhood, identity, and subjectivity (in the chapters that follow I return continually to points Greenblatt had earlier made about the plays discussed here), they tended, as a self-conscious practice of their own methodology, to avoid the kind of theory-construction that was a major feature of such cultural materialists as Catherine Belsey, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Consequently, theories of the self are much easier to discern in the productions of British cultural materialism than in those of American new historicism, and in much of what follows immediately I take these as a starting point.

My own viewpoint develops out of a 'coming-to-theoretical-age' quite distinct from those of leading British cultural materialists, more cognate in its way to the development Greenblatt described in his personal

<sup>11</sup> Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare*, 228–30; and 'Containment, Subversion—and Postmodernism', *Textual Practice*, 7/1 (Spring 1993), 31–49.

introduction to *Learning to Curse*.<sup>12</sup> In particular, like any number of others caught up in the United States' political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, my search for left-wing alternatives to the doctrinaire and oppressive ideologies constituted by Soviet and Chinese Communism led me, before the poststructuralist revolution, to versions of feminism and socialist-feminism and to a number of 'unorthodox' critical versions of Marxism in theorists like the young Lukács, Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and the Frankfurt School. In this context the writings of Louis Althusser, with their rhetoric of fidelity to Lenin and the dictatorship of the proletariat and their tightly controlled but evident psychodrama of submission to and rebellion against parental/ecclesiastical/Communist orthodoxy, seemed like a completely wrong-headed return to Marxist-Leninist dogmatism.

My early aversive reaction to Althusser was completely at odds with the creative ferment Althusser's works provoked at roughly the same time in analogous left-wing circles in the UK, where Althusser, instead of representing orthodoxy, was a crucial figure in the development of an avant-garde critical method responsible for transporting a good deal of the letter and the insurgent spirit of post-1968 French poststructuralism to the anglophone world. In that context structuralism-poststructuralism seemed the insurgent force challenging a reformist-tending, older-generation cultural Marxism, and Althusser—and the most Althusserian, anti-humanist moments of Foucault—played a central role in early cultural materialist interventions in Shakespeare studies, inciting me to a closer study of Althusser, a new appreciation for his challenges to Marxist orthodoxy, but an ultimate wish to move beyond him into other areas of French poststructuralism (notably Foucault and Lacan) which seem to me less theoretically problematic and much more compatible with some of the central Frankfurt School motifs which I have found indispensable to my own critical thinking. As I have worked more closely with early modern texts, I have come to believe that these Althusser- and Foucault-influenced theories of the subject were, in the analogous sense previously defined, Machiavellian in their approach. In fact, for the case of Althusser, the posthumous publication of his manuscript *Machiavelli and Us* has belatedly demonstrated that Machiavelli's influence on the French philosopher was direct and major.<sup>13</sup> One of his students defined the influence this way:

<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1–15.

<sup>13</sup> Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*. See especially the introduction by Gregory Elliott for

The name of Machiavelli is rarely cited in Althusser's work. . . . I can only find two citations of any importance. . . . A more meticulous and detailed examination . . . would turn up a few supplementary references. But it would not change the general impression that Machiavelli is explicitly present in Althusser's published works only occasionally and in a scattered way. Yet all who were taught orally by Althusser know it: this impression is misleading. It does not at all reflect the extreme importance that Althusser accorded to the thought of the Florentine Secretary, the historical role he recognized in him. In the presence of such silences, I always remember this verse by St.-John Perse: 'And the sun is unmentioned but his power is amongst us'.<sup>14</sup>

But this confirmation of a connection between Machiavelli and Althusser only underlines the relevance of Renaissance literature and philosophy for our own times and reinforces for me the view that we, like Shakespeare, need to supplement Althusser and Machiavelli with more Montaignean theories, more appreciatory of the resistance of the subject to interpellation and cognizant of the instability of identity and the openness of subjectivity to new investments, identities, and relations to power.

In what follows I am attempting to approach contemporary theories of the subject, as it were, allegorically—by using Montaigne as a major source of concepts to think the subject and subjectivity, as a corrective to Machiavelli and the Machiavellianism of much contemporary theory. As we will see, Machiavelli and Montaigne turn out to have some very significant commonalities, and both seem to be in their own ways 'anti-essentialist'; at issue particularly is that 'Machiavellian' version of the self which impacted on Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists as can be seen in their creation of stage-villains like Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Richard III.<sup>15</sup> This Machiavellian model of the self consists of an inner will-to-power and an outer deceptive façade drawing on the conventional pieties of received tradition to mask its anti-traditional intentions and actions. And this emphasis on a deceptive surface and an interior of power dynamics in turn mirrors the most problematic aspects of the theories of subjectivity of Foucault and Althusser that were so influential in the 1980s and persist in today's Shakespeare studies.

specific information on the composition of the work and its relation to Althusser's other writings.

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Terray, 'An Encounter: Althusser and Machiavelli', trans. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio, in Callari and Ruccio (eds.), *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), 257–77; 257–8; quoted in Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, p. xi.

<sup>15</sup> See Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, 35–71, for a discussion of the Machiavellian self in the Elizabethan theatre and culture generally.

In the complex case of Foucault two concepts tended to be appropriated within literary criticism as part of theories of subjectivity. One of these was the idea of the episteme, which seemed to provide a map of an era's *mentalité* which could explain observed differences in historical or cultural periods and account for what was thought to be a common shared mentality in an era. Use of this large-scale determiner of *mentalité* as a basis of subjectivity lies behind a number of the most problematic generalizations in the theories of subjectivity of the 1980s, for example, in Leonard Tennenhouse's *Power on Display* and Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy*. However, I would argue, this particular interpretation of the idea of the episteme went against the literal grain of Foucault's own definitions, in which he insisted he was defining a structure of *scientific discourse*, somewhere between general culture and an individual's specific ideology<sup>16</sup>—a definition which would seem to rule out the episteme as a medium of subjectivity.

But Foucault also had recourse to a related but different concept to explain modern subjectivity: that of *discourse*—a concept central to me here and to which I will return in the opening of Chapter 1. Discourses could be loosely defined as culturally generated sets of ideas working to create and define power relations in institutions and, cumulatively, in society generally. They were much more 'local' than epistemes and much more closely associated with the institutions (prisons, hospitals, factories, schools) of which they were essential, generative components. The notion of discourses thus overcame many of the over-generalizing tendencies of the episteme. In some of Foucault's most powerful passages, to be sure, discourses were indeed the agents of a subjectivity falsely imagined to be autonomous, against which resistance was futile. Foucauldian subjects were locked in an ironclad process which seemed to make challenging it impossible. A number of interviews given by Foucault in the years before his untimely death, however, showed clearly that this outcome was far from his intention. He spoke of counter-discourses and counter-memories as providing alternatives to dominating discourses. But because of the gap between his formal theory-building and his interviews, it was necessary to appropriate the Foucault of resistance against the Foucault of containment, and this was not always appreciated by his followers.

Althusser's related reformulation of the classical Marxian concept of ideology led to similar problems. As I think is now widely appreciated, what Althusser left out when he appropriated Lacan on the formation of

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 191–2.

the subject in his own theory of ‘interpellation by Ideology’ turned out to be decisive and crippling of the new theory. In contrast to such a one-dimensional account, Lacan had described a complex, differentiated subject closely connected to both pre-linguistic and linguistic stages of development. The complex Lacanian self is both ‘interpellated’ by social discourses and resistant to such interpellations. It is resistant because one of the four centres of the Lacanian decentred self is formed outside language and hence outside ideology. Instead of Althusser’s singular subject, in Lacan the subject is just one aspect of a more complicated schema. In Lacan’s terms there is a division between the ‘speaking self’ or *je*, formed in language, and the ‘bodily ego’ or *moi*, formed outside language in the mirror stage.<sup>17</sup> Lacan identified reductive notions of the subject—which of course, had a basis, in his model, in the phenomenon of the *je*—with Descartes.<sup>18</sup> Interesting in the present context is that Lacan thought a much better understanding of the complexity of the whole self-system could also be found in another classic figure of French philosophy-literature: Michel de Montaigne, whom Lacan invoked as a precursor of his theory of a radically split subject, and a corrective of Descartes’s subsequent construction of a singular subject:

I would show you that Montaigne is truly the one who has centered himself, not around scepticism but around the living moment of the *aphanisis* [‘fading’] of the subject. And it is in this that he is fruitful, that he is an eternal guide, who goes beyond whatever may be represented of the moment to be defined as a historical turning point.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the discourse of the Lacanian speaking subject is influenced not only by the logic of the ideologies contained in the received wisdom of the culture (whose language of course conditions the speaker’s discourse) but also by the unconscious and by the libido of the (mirror-stage) bodily ego or *moi*, in the domain Lacan calls the Imaginary, which is separate from the speaking subject. Or as one of Lacan’s premier English-language interpreters has written, this mirror-stage ego or *moi* ‘gives life and focus to the speaking subject. The latter would otherwise be a neutral automaton,

<sup>17</sup> Lacan himself summarized this complex, differentiated concept of the self in terms of a diagram with four corners he called ‘Schema L’ (in reference to the visual diagram’s similarity in shape to the French cursive letter ‘L’); see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 193–7.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed. Jacques Allain-Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 44–5, 221–6.

<sup>19</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 223–4; and see Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 7–10, for an elaboration of Montaigne’s key place in the history of the concept of the subject in a Lacanian reading of the history of French literature.

mouth the clichés and conventions of a given culture.<sup>20</sup> Lacan can thus help us avoid those reductive tendencies of Foucault and Althusser, which too easily make of the subject the kind of ‘neutral automaton’ indicated above, and I return to Lacan more than once in the following chapters.

Althusser, however, omitted reference to an unconscious, to desire, or to a decentred self, and so turned the subject into a single, simple effect of the social power arrangements encoded by Ideology.<sup>21</sup> Ideology becomes in this schema a straitjacket which, for Althusser in his original texts, could only be removed by science—and that meant, in this context, the ‘science’ of Marxism-Leninism, as elaborated by himself and a few comrades. To the extent that social change meant critical distance from Ideology, then, it could only be effected by a ‘scientific’ vanguard party with the correct line.

As the scandalous, highly ideological nature of this claim became more and more of an embarrassment, post-Althusserianism developed, in which the notion of ideology-escaping science was jettisoned in favour of a view that all human mental life, including versions of science, is ideological—that is, textual in regard to a presumed and unreachable reality as well as serving the material interests of contending classes and other socio-economic agents. This post-Althusserianism is thus very close to Foucault on the self, and both these positions are essentially Nietzschean (and, in an analogous sense, Machiavellian), with ideology and power displaced but unmistakable versions of Nietzsche’s will-to-power.

As Jürgen Habermas has tirelessly repeated throughout the age of post-structuralism, however, this position leaves us abandoned in a world without rationality and without alternatives to force and violence.<sup>22</sup> And it lands us squarely in that antinomy of Nietzschean thought which Peter Dews recently defined in one of the clearest and most consequential critiques of this aspect of French poststructuralism that I know.

Dews, a contemporary British critic of French poststructuralism from the point of view of German philosophy generally and Habermas and Adorno in particular, argues that Nietzsche, and those aspects of the post-structuralist theorizing based on him, never overcame a fundamental contradiction between two strands of Nietzsche’s thought: on the one hand, all our knowledge of the world is an imposed, imperializing

<sup>20</sup> Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, 59.

<sup>21</sup> See David Macey, ‘Thinking with Borrowed Concepts: Althusser and Lacan’, in Gregory Elliott (ed.), *Althusser: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 142–58, for a detailed discussion of Althusser’s misunderstandings of Lacan.

<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon, 1984, 1987).

knowledge, the product of the desperate human need to cover the chaos of existence underneath a veneer of systematic but false rationality—or ideology in Althusser's terms. On the other hand, we can recognize the falsity of that rationality because we somehow 'know', in contradiction to the earlier idealist epistemology described above, a fluid, Dionysian reality underneath the false appearance of Apollonian rationality. In short, as Dews summarizes it, there both is and is not a knowable 'thing-in-itself' in Nietzsche. And his French poststructuralist followers Lyotard and Foucault reproduce this dilemma in several forms, while Althusser had recourse to a neo-positivist concept of science precisely to solve this problem. The jettisoning of Althusser's solution in post-Althusserianism, then, simply brings us back to the original problem, which we can see elsewhere: in, for example, Foucault's difficulties in attempting to present madness and sexuality solely in terms of the histories of the various discourses which have constituted them over several centuries, while time after time backing into acknowledgements of a madness beyond any of its specific discourses and of a body and its pleasures beyond any specific discourses of sexuality.<sup>23</sup>

However, late twentieth-century critics are far from the first to discuss these fundamental problems of knowledge and power. In the next chapter I will show in detail how Machiavellian discourse produced a conceptual crisis in the sixteenth century through a set of arguments with some crucial parallels to those of Nietzsche-influenced theories of the subject. This Machiavellian crisis was the context for Montaigne's complex response to be discussed below as well. Crucially, Montaigne creates a sphere of freedom—but at the considerable price of overtly withdrawing from the political world and by conducting an enquiry into the flux of subjectivity released by the withdrawal. The resulting subjectivity is in a sense 'subjectless', and thus the subjectivity I am discussing in the chapters that follow is a quite different one from that which earlier instances of new historicism and cultural materialism have defined in Shakespeare studies. In the 'presentist' allegory represented by these historicizing concepts, then, the idea of Montaignean subjectivity acts in our own time as a call to rethink the relation of subjectivity and power, and of course a number of contemporary critics and theorists have been doing exactly that.<sup>24</sup> In that

<sup>23</sup> Peter Dews, 'Adorno, Poststructuralism and the Critique of Identity', in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1–22.

<sup>24</sup> See Hugh Grady, 'Renewing Modernity: Changing Contexts and Contents of a Nearly Invisible Concept', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 50/3 (Fall 1999), 268–84, for a selected survey of such theorists of the 1990s.

sense the cultural theory of the 1990s became less Machiavellian, more Montaignean over the years. In the 1990s, for example, the more complex view of Lacan as a theorist of a complexly constituted self began to form, to replace his image from the 1970s and 1980s as essentially a structuralist. Similarly, the 1990s saw the rediscovery of the Frankfurt School (especially Adorno, Benjamin, and Horkheimer)—a development which was from my point of view one of the most crucial developments of critical theory in recent decades.

Prematurely dismissed in the excitement of the encounter with French structuralism and poststructuralism in the 1970s and 1980s, Frankfurt theory has become in the last ten years an object of new appreciation precisely because it helped overcome some of the most serious blind spots of poststructuralism, deepening without overthrowing the latter's political, socially critical agenda. In what follows it will serve as a prime example of what I mean by calling certain cultural theories relatively 'Montaignean'. In this connection Adorno and Benjamin were incisive counter-critics of those would-be radical critics of the 1980s who surrounded the aesthetic and the subjective with steel walls of suspicion, reduction, and dismissal through their narrow reading of Foucault and their mistaken appraisal of Althusser as a major theorist. Adorno and Benjamin in particular showed how the aesthetic and the subjective were instead historically new categories generated in the processes of Enlightenment that created modernity and its economic engine, capitalism. Rather than being merely containers of disciplinary discourses and capitalist-imbued ideology, however—as they were in influential formulas of Foucault and Althusser much discussed in the earliest phases of the new historicism and cultural materialism—they were *in addition* repositories, or potential repositories, for psychic and social impulses resistant to the homogenizing, commodifying dynamics of both instrumental reason and capitalist economics. They contained archaic, pre-modern impulses of meaning-giving and value-creation, but they did so without an 'objective' structure like that of the Great Chain of Being to provide a ground for these impulses. Instead, Adorno argued (often elliptically and borrowing selectively from Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, among many others), the categories of the aesthetic and the subjective slowly came into cultural existence in variegated attempts across the cultures of modernity to conceptualize, understand, contain, and champion such impulses.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Recently, Slavoj Žižek has memorably thematized the return of the autonomous subject to critical respectability with a bravura exaggeration but to trenchant effect. With its strong grounding in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, French structuralism-poststructuralism, and Frankfurt School critical theory (and its background in both Marxism and classical German philosophy), Žižek's work is an excellent example of the critical trends of the 1990s I am describing, and his *The Ticklish Subject* is a major contribution to its development. Žižek begins his argument with a tongue-in-cheek defence of 'the Cartesian subject' written in parallel with the famous opening of *The Communist Manifesto*:

A spectre is haunting Western Academia . . . the spectre of the Cartesian subject. All academic powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre. . . . Two things result from this:

1. Cartesian subjectivity continues to be acknowledged by all academic powers as a powerful and still active intellectual tradition.
2. It is high time that the partisans of Cartesian subjectivity should, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of Cartesian subjectivity with the philosophical manifesto of Cartesian subjectivity itself.<sup>26</sup>

The writer being Žižek, one should not take this defence completely literally, although the language signals a clear intent by Žižek to part company with the reductive tendencies of French poststructuralism, and he goes on to lead the reader on a provocative journey through Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Althusser and four of his critics, Judith Butler, Freud, and Lacan in search of usable theories of the subject. Despite his opening gambit, he clearly ends up as a critic of the Cartesian subject, but not in any simple, completely negative way. It is not necessary to agree with each of his (often deliberately provocative) theses to welcome this rich discussion of what I am calling Montaignean subjectivity—a process and approach, perhaps, more than a set of doctrines.

Up to this point, however, the new appreciation of these themes of Frankfurt theory has been relatively neglected in Shakespeare studies.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), 1–2.

<sup>27</sup> An important exception is John J. Joughin, 'Shakespeare, Modernity and the Aesthetic: Art, Truth and Judgement in *The Winter's Tale*', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity: From Early Modern to Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2000), 61–84. As I write Joughin is working on a book-length study of these issues informed by Adorno's aesthetic theory. In addition, the Frankfurt contribution to recent cultural studies is reflected in the work of a number of newer voices in Shakespeare studies influenced by cultural studies; see, for example, several of the contributions in the anthology Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (eds.), *Marxist Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2001).

One reason for this relative neglect of a potentially rich lode of cultural analysis is the uncanny way in which the major Frankfurt themes seem to echo the discredited Modernist theorizing of a pre-Enlightenment ‘unified sensibility’ from Eliot, Knight, Brooks, and Tillyard. Indeed, the parallel is not merely a mirage; Adorno, in his exile in the USA in the 1940s, encountered American New Critical father-figure John Crowe Ransom and found striking areas of convergence and agreement in their otherwise disparate critical theories. Clearly both men identified with those strains of international Modernism which championed art as a refuge from and potential challenge to a culture now overwhelmed by the new entertainment industries of twentieth-century mass media and commercialism.<sup>28</sup>

But one of the crucial differences between the Anglo-American Modernists and the Frankfurt theorists is precisely the resistance of the latter to the temptation of making of pre-modern societies and cultures a Paradise Lost of human meaning and plenitude. Their approach instead is always complex and dialectical, constantly reconceptualizing and re-evaluating the richness of cultural moments and cultural value itself, seeing modernity as full of the potential for both human liberation and human catastrophe, seeing non-modern societies as rich, variegated, and contradictory. It was the nostalgic collector of pre-industrial art Walter Benjamin, for example, who famously and trenchantly wrote that every history of civilization is a history of barbarism, and his classic essay ‘The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ is a corrective case in point for anyone trying to construct a unitary narrative of the production of modernity in Frankfurt School theory, as it in turn celebrates and deplores the end of the aura of the artwork in twentieth-century society.

Similarly, if Adorno’s definition of ‘negative dialectics’ is a dazzling critique of positivist dreams of objective knowledge, it is also a corrective to the most extreme poststructuralist or Postmodernist denials (found in certain readings of Derrida, for example) of the referential quality of concepts. Scientific concepts, Adorno argued, have at least that adequacy to reality which allows technology to dominate nature.<sup>29</sup> And for related reasons cultural theory must acknowledge and make use of the relative adequacy of its many narratives and concepts for understanding the development, strengths and weaknesses, limits and potentials, of the world we live in. No concept, Adorno argues, is identical with its object; we must always assume a certain non-identity in any concept.<sup>30</sup> Concepts

<sup>28</sup> Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare*, 154–6.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), 174–97.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 146–8 *et passim*.

are to facts as constellations are to stars, Benjamin famously wrote.<sup>31</sup> They always involve selection, exclusion, and construction. Without them, however, the world is blank to us; with them, we can grasp aspects of the world and live within it. In what follows I am making central use of constellations constructed under the rubrics ‘modernity’, ‘subjectivity’, ‘instrumentality’, ‘Machiavellian’, and ‘Montaignean’. The simultaneous production of a new kind of objectivity in Machiavelli and Renaissance science and a new kind of subjectivity in Montaigne and Shakespeare is profoundly connected with the epochal differentiations between subject and object described in Frankfurt and related critical theory.<sup>32</sup> This ground was opened up by some of the early work of Max Horkheimer centrally preoccupied with issues of sixteenth-century history. Calvin, Luther, Machiavelli, and Montaigne are major figures for the development of modernity and modern subjectivity in several essays from this period,<sup>33</sup> and at times the Horkheimer of the 1930s reads like a prescient critic of poststructuralist Machiavellianism, with an acute sense of how subjectivity both embodies and resists ideology:

a person’s deeper psychic layers are not determined by it [ideology] alone, but equally by the constant experience of contradictory reality. The manifest ideology is just one of the factors that give rise to the personalities typical of the society. The humanism that pervades the history of the new spirit shows a double face.<sup>34</sup>

In these essays, however, Horkheimer had yet to be influenced by the theories of negative dialectics and of aesthetics of his colleague and friend Theodor Adorno, and they are most relevant here for specific insights rather than their overall picture of the era. The best Frankfurt text on the epochal differentiations of modernity I am investigating here remains

<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1928), trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977), 14.

<sup>32</sup> The fullest and most recent treatment of the Frankfurt School is Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School* (1986), trans. Michael Robertson (Oxford: Polity, 1994). For still useful (and more succinct) introductions to Frankfurt critical theory, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Boston: Little, 1973), and David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980); and for central Frankfurt theorists, see Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). A very helpful recent study, focused around the concept of modernity, is Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> The most interesting have been collected and newly translated in Max Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 98–9.

Horkheimer and Adorno's jointly written *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

Rather than trying to work out the specific constellation of Frankfurt and contemporary theories of subjectivity and modernity relevant to the readings of Shakespearian texts below, however, I intend instead to pursue the readings in terms of their own contemporaneous discourses, primarily those of Machiavelli and Montaigne. Occasionally, references to twentieth-century theories can help clarify a point or enable a reading of Shakespeare, and when that is the case a note or comment will identify the borrowing. While the chapters below have a clear 'presentist' dimension related to contemporary debates in cultural theory about subjectivity and modernity, I am choosing in this work, as I indicated, to put the historicist dimension first, to complement the opposite procedure of my previous book *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf*. As I argued in that work, the case constituted by the works of William Shakespeare suggests that important aspects of the dialectic of enlightenment defined by Horkheimer and Adorno were in operation already in the sixteenth century—and earlier in Italy. Shakespeare's works depict a dialectic of enlightenment in all genres and 'periods' of his writing, with characteristic differences of emphasis and evaluation. The following study is dedicated to exploring one of the most interesting of these phases, the plays from 1595 to 1600 that form both a dialectic of enlightenment and a kind of 'Machiavellian moment' in Shakespeare's work. This moment is Machiavellian, not in the sense that Shakespeare necessarily read or took in the many facets of the complex body of work of this singular Renaissance humanist and harbinger of modernity, but in the sense that many of the plays written in this period take Machiavelli's most famous ideas on value-free realpolitik and use them as the starting point for multidimensional probings and conflicting interpretations of the cultural and political crises these ideas produce. Shakespeare was never 'a Machiavellian' in any straightforward sense—in fact, there is no direct evidence that he ever read a page of Machiavelli's works. Instead, *The Prince's* problematic was the political problematic of the day, both in Elizabeth's Privy Council and on the stages of the London public theatres. In the terms I am developing here, Machiavelli was the conduit through which what Horkheimer and Adorno called 'instrumental reason' came to be thought about in Shakespeare's day. Of course this role as a provider of the concept of autonomous, instrumental reason by no means exhausts Machiavelli's impact on English political thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond. J. G. A. Pocock famously argued, for example, that Machiavelli's republican concepts

were the seeds from which eventually blossomed a whole new discourse of anti-monarchical, republican, and democratic ideas which infiltrated the Puritan discourse of the English Revolution of 1642 and eventually became incorporated in the founding documents of the democracy of the United States. There is a clear sense in which the whole tradition of Marxist critical theory, including that of the Frankfurt School, could be said to descend from the meditations on class struggle and the corruption of the people from Machiavelli's *The Discourses*. That creative Marxist Antonio Gramsci famously praised Machiavelli as the theorist of the possibility of autonomous political activity, of providing a way to think about shaping human society and history with some measure of intentionality and humanization, rather than consigning history to the blind operations of fortune and fate. And, as already mentioned, the late Althusser also found Machiavelli a seminal figure, albeit one who directly influenced not Marx and Engels, but Gramsci and himself. But while these aspects of Machiavelli's thought will occasionally come into view in what follows, for the most part I am asking readers to 'bracket' the richness of Machiavelli's legacy and to focus instead—as much of the world has always done—on some of his most controversial, even shocking ideas concerning the necessity of deception, immorality, and violence in politics in a world in which men are not good and he who would be good invites defeat. This is a doctrine which appears to have preoccupied a segment of the English political class in the Elizabethan era, and it is a set of ideas in particular which seems to animate the puzzling actions of the young Earl of Essex in this period, including and most importantly his failed attempt to overthrow Queen Elizabeth and set himself up as England's monarch. Most importantly here, they seem to be concepts which challenged the imagination and rationality of William Shakespeare.

It is no surprise that Shakespeare might be preoccupied with such issues. Since at least Hegel, he has been recognized as a figure who has achieved his ultimate cultural centrality precisely because he was one of the first and most original enunciators of modernity and its peculiar conception of the modern subject. Hegel's specific approach to the modernity of Shakespeare, however, is badly in need of an updating for which the development of contemporary cultural theory has now produced the elements.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For further development of this theme, see Grady, 'Renewing Modernity', and Hugh Grady, 'Introduction', in Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity*, 1–19.

*Toward a non-reductive theory of subjectivity*

One of the crucial preconditions for ‘modern’ subjectivity for Frankfurt theory and its descendants is the fragmentation of belief systems and the desacralization (at least in principle) of hitherto sacred domains so that within modernity meaning and value are problematic, ‘private’, and uncertain. Modern subjectivity is paradoxically both a social and a private mythology, the atomized subject’s more or less unique configuration of the bewildering array of socially produced beliefs, opinions, world views, tastes, values, feelings, prejudices, cognitive processes, and so on. These provide a framework for experiencing and understanding the world in a situation in which the ‘normal’ condition of pre-modern cultures—a shared mythology and belief system—has fragmented and been replaced by the various forms of modern, secular rationality. One of the central myths of received Western ideology about itself has been the notion that such subjectivity is autonomous, the basis of the sovereign individual, the ‘bourgeois’ or ‘liberal’ subject of much recent left-wing criticism. I want to be clear that in trying to improve Machiavellian theory with Montaignean understandings of subjectivity, it would be no improvement at all if in the process one ended up reproducing ‘bourgeois’ illusions of a sovereign self.

The ideological functions of subjectivity are potent and have been closely associated with capitalism since the age of Shakespeare at least. The cultivation of self-authored identity and interiority celebrated by Iago in his ‘Virtue, a fig!’ speech, for example, helps to justify a new social fetishism of commodities and profits. ‘Put money in thy purse,’ Iago repeats to Roderigo, underlining the connections between the egoistic celebration of self and the profit necessary for the functioning of capitalism. The innumerable celebrations of the individual, the subject, and the ego of subsequent capitalist modernity serve the unmistakable ideological function of justifying these ethically dubious values. Throughout modernity, ideologies of individualism have entered subjectivity through socialization, sometimes at a very deep, identity-connected level. We all attempt to ‘fit in’ to the world we are given in one way or the other. In short, going beyond what I am calling Machiavellian theories of subjectivity need not mean abandoning their critique of the myth of the autonomous subject. I am not attempting here to deny the ideological component of subjectivity—but to deny instead that subjectivity is always and only ideological. Just as people believe in the social status quo, they sometimes come to feel alienated from it, to question it, to criticize it, even to make revolution against it. They can do so, it seems to me, only because

ideology is not as completely totalizing and enchaining as widely influential aspects of Althusser, Foucault, and Lyotard have argued that it is. Both belief and the conceptual system of language, in short, as many theorists of the 1990s have argued, are open to negotiation. People learn from, and criticize, their experiences with mental structures; they are not inevitably enchained by them.

One of the corollaries of these views of the subject is the need to abandon earlier attempts to identify a single, unitary ideology or discursive formation—‘liberal humanism’—which constructs modern subjectivities out of whole cloth.<sup>36</sup> Instead, I want to follow a motif defined not only in the Frankfurt School and in Habermas, but emphasized as well in works of Pierre Bourdieu and Charles Taylor, on the *differentiations* which constitute modernity and modern subjects.<sup>37</sup> In probably the most influential theory of unitary ‘liberal humanism’, *The Subject of Tragedy*, Catherine Belsey had in fact defined three distinct components of liberal humanism which she argued were ultimately amalgamated by the mid-seventeenth century to produce a unified ‘liberal humanist’ ideology. The first was that associated with Hamlet, Milton’s Satan, the Duchess of Malfi, and a number of others, and it is a liberal humanism defined by (an apparently new) ‘interiority’ seen as ‘author and origin of meaning and choice’.<sup>38</sup> The second was constituted by the objectifying methods of Francis Bacon and, more importantly, the empirical philosophy of John Locke, whereby the liberal subject creates science and positive concepts generally through an instrumental language.<sup>39</sup> The culmination of these first two, in the late seventeenth century, was Locke’s conception of an autonomous, natural self, endowed with certain inalienable rights—only, of course, Locke made the right to own property the central one of these and thus became one of the great ideologues of a rapidly maturing capitalism.

My own view is that, rather than constituting a single ‘liberal humanism’, these motifs are differentiated practices and discourses, with the first two of them dialectically related, agonistic socio-historical developments

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed development of this thesis, see Hugh Grady, ‘On the Need for a Differentiated Theory of the (Early) Modern Subject’, in John J. Joughin (ed.), *Philosophical Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2000), 34–50.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*, (London: Methuen, 1985), 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

key to understanding the structures and dynamics of early modernity. That is, in what follows, I want to argue that two of the three strands Belsey united as part of 'liberal humanism' ('interiority' and instrumental reason) can be more adequately conceptualized as forms of rationality which became differentiated from each other in a meaningful way in Renaissance intellectual developments that would be institutionalized and established as basic features of the social order later in the Enlightenment. In separating, however, they also constituted a dialectic; that is, their constitution as separate categories left within each concept traces of their logical links to each other. Belsey's third strand of Lockean social contract theory, in contrast, I believe to be a genuinely Enlightenment construct foreign to the thinking of the age of Shakespeare in England.

Thus I will be presupposing an alternative 'Montaignean' theory of early modern subjectivity, one based much more on themes of Adorno, Horkheimer, Lacan, and others to be identified below as the discussion develops, rather than the 'Machiavellian' French poststructuralism that has set the agenda for much previous cultural materialism. In the theory I am working with here, subjectivity cannot be reduced to the effect of static structures of domination like ideology and discourses. Instead, it participates in a relatively autonomous, socially constructed realm of meaning and communication, which rather than being static and reified is in principle open to negotiation, modification, and reconstitution through dialogue. This has been an emphasis of many different versions of the social theory of the 1990s, but it was of course as well an insight marvellously articulated more than 400 years earlier:

Les autres forment l'homme; je le recite et en represente un particulier bien mal formé, et lequel, si j'avoy à façonner de nouveau, je ferois vrayement bien autre qu'il n'est. Meshuy c'est fait. Or les traits de ma peinture ne forvoyent point, quoy qu'ils se changent et diversifient. Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenene. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Égypte, et du branle public et du leur. La constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant. Je ne puis assurer mon object. Il va trouble et chancelant, d'une yresse naturelle. Je le prens en ce point, comme il est, en l'instant que je m'amuse à luy. Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: non un passage d'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute.<sup>40</sup>

(Others form man; I tell of him, and portray a particular one, very ill-formed, whom I should really make very different from what he is if I had to fashion him over again. But now it is done.

<sup>40</sup> Michel de Montaigne, 'Du repentir', *Les Essais*, 3.2 ed. Pierre Villey (Quadrige: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), 804–5.

Now the lines of my painting do not go astray, though they change and vary. The world is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion—the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt—both with the common motion and their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion.

I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being; I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute.<sup>41</sup>)

<sup>41</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1965), 610–11.