# Theory in an Uneven World

R. Radhakrishnan

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This book is dedicated to Surya
With love, respect, and gratitude
For teaching me how to live in the moment
And combine the work ethic with the pleasure principle.

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# Preface

I have always thought of theory in its broadest, "universal" meaning as being both worldly (in the Saidian sense) *and* intentionally out of sync with the world. Theory can be legitimately worldly only if it states and elaborates the conditions of its non-acceptance of the world. To put it differently, theory cannot be an acquiescence in the status quo. With one foot in and one foot out, theory has to straddle the punishing and crippling givenness of the world and the utopian–transcendent urge to imagine otherwise. Historicity and facticity cannot be ends in themselves as far as theory is concerned. It is only by invoking and gesturing symptomatically and namelessly towards "the after" that theory earns its legitimacy, its ineluctable but dissenting worldliness. Between solidarity and critique, theory opens up a space that is neither captive to the "world as it is," nor naively credulous of visions of "the world as it should be."

I am aware that such a mandate on behalf of theory might sound totalizing and falsely universalistic, hence my thematic insistence on "unevenness" as a category. Paradoxical and cynical as it may sound, what makes the world "thinkable" as one, in all its relationality, is the symptomatic richness of the term "unevenness." Once we enfranchise unevenness as a fundamental semantic principle, it becomes impossible to think of, say, "prosperity" and "development" without symptomatic–diagnostic reference to "poverty" and "underdevelopment." Contrary to friction-free visions of globalization based on the motto "The Elites and the Haves of the World Unite" (in ruthless denial of injustice and inequality, and in passionate celebration of "trickle down" visions of socioeconomic justice), theory's thematization of "unevenness" achieves the following effect: "the symptomatic *immanentization* of unevenness." Let me explain. Theory here follows a deeply ethical impulse. Whereas

merely historico-political blueprints of progress, development, and techno-globalization can afford to characterize "unevenness" as the hapless shibboleth of "losers," or justify it as an inevitable result of a world-historical and hence unipolar capitalism, an ethically inspired and motivated theory dares to envision cooperations and solidarities across the divide and the asymmetry. To put it simply, it is only on the basis of such a theoretical ethic that a young entrepreneurial billionaire can be persuaded to feel, perceive, and understand his or her reality as an inhabitant symptom of global unevenness – as much of a symptom as the abject and voiceless poverty of a homeless being anywhere in the world. In other words, within the etiology as well as the pathology of the disease, both the billionaire with a plutocratic lifestyle and the instant-to-instant contingency of the homeless person are co-symptomatic.

Something is "radically wrong" with the pleasurable reality of the billionaire. To invoke Herman Melville: the stories of the narrating lawyer, of Wall Street, and of Bartleby in *Bartleby, the Scrivener* are all co-symptomatic of the disease called global capitalism. The thematization of unevenness across locations and subject positions is a guarantee against the unconscionable *naïveté* or heartlessness of manifestos such as: "How can I be symptomatic of unevenness when I am a winner and not a loser?" or "As a winner I have conquered and transcended unevenness; so why can't he, she, or they?" In a way what I am suggesting is compatible with Freud's generalization and "quotidianization" of pathology. Every reality, whatever its geopolitical location, is a surface expression of an underlying unevenness; therefore, each reality is obliged in its self-presentation to include as a constitutive prolegomenon its specific and determinate relationship to the abiding subtending unevenness. Clarissa Dalloway and her high society are as much a pathological symptom of colonial London in the wake of World War I as is the suicidal, schizophrenic, posttraumatic stress-disordered Septimus Warren Smith.

Why then look to theory to do justice to "differences in identity" and "identification despite differences?" Theory, in the best sense of the term, enables the subject to see beyond his or her nose in active and proactive acknowledgment of similarities and commonalities across situations and locations. Here, I attempt to infuse into theory a sensibility or a capacity that Amitav Ghosh calls in his novel *The Shadow Lines* "imagining with precision." What is being imagined is at the same time internal and external to the imagination. "What is" is just not enough or satisfactory, and therefore reality has to be imagined otherwise. At the same time, such an imagining is neither wildly capricious nor non-referential; indeed, it has the obligation to be precise. It should be precise with respect to the way things ought to be and precise with respect to a vision whose reality is otherwise than the solidity of the world as it is. In a move that is at once both representational and post-representational, Ghosh's narrative

intelligence finds a way to dwell critically in "the shadow lines" of regnant identity regimes, and thereby render the very authority of those regimes "shadowy." In the radical and vertiginous cartographic reordering of the world that Ghosh's protagonist imagines towards the end of the novel, a newness is born: a newness in and of the imagination. If only the world could be imagined that way! – new and emergent perceptions of nearness and distance; longdenied and repressed affirmations of solidarities and fellow-heartedness in transgression of dominant relationships and axes of power; new and emergent identifications and recognitions in profound alienation from canonical–dominant mystifications and fixations of identity. What is most appealing (sensuously and affectively) and persuasive (theoretically and cognitively) about this reordering is the rigor with which it attempts to align, connect, and cathect experiential impulses with a meta-level reflexivity. In other words, the critical–utopian desire of Ghosh's novel insists that the world – structurally, systemically, cartographically – cannot remain the way it is if new realities are to be ushered in and celebrated. To state it obversely, the staging of these new registers of being demands a different stage, a different performative space. This world exists *in theory, and therefore in principle and reality*. The novel resolutely refuses to surrender reality to "what is," the facticity of history. That precisely is why and how *The Shadow Lines* is theoretical and fictional within and about itself: its abiding commitment to referentiality is realized as a critical function of its disobedience of referentiality in its available and dominant manifestations.

Theory can help build connections and find common ground where they seem least likely or plausible (here again I am indebted to Edward Said), whereas a merely locational immurement in one's own history can actively militate against the capacity of the subject to generalize, or honor the historicity in an "other" history. Theory, I believe, can be invoked in much the same way "Poesie" was valorized by Philip Sidney as superior to the non-ideal and non-transformative descriptive facticity of history on the one hand, and the utterly other-worldly and esoteric complexity of philosophy on the other. The provocative argument that Sidney constructs takes the form of a post-veracious claim on behalf of the "veracity of Poesie." The poet can neither lie nor tell the truth, for he does not deal in truths and lies: that indeed is his superior truthfulness.

True, theory has been deservedly in disrepute for its complicity with a variety of dominant "isms," and for trying to anoint itself as a transhistorical form of knowledge. The cry "Always historicize" was intended as a powerful antidote to the self-indulgent excesses of "high theory." Just as I argue in chapter 5 in the case of Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and "dominance in deconstruction" in general, it is precisely because these sins of omission and

commission have been internal to the body/history of theory, that theory is a desirable and viable site for projects of "correction," transformation, and "self-consciencization." Nowhere else has "representation" been posed both as poison and remedy, as problem and answer, as oppression and liberation, to such an extent than within the symptomatic body of "theory." Whereas in the realms of politics and history, "representation" continues to be exercised axiomatically, correctly, and virtuously, it is "in theory" that representation is besmirched, compromised, and compelled to view itself "otherwise." And that is a good thing.

What, then, about unevenness? In theory, unevenness is a symptom to be "enjoyed" in a Žižekian psychoanalytic sense of the term, and thematized intransitively even as its virulent transitive effects are to be resisted and combated transitively. I certainly do not advocate a historically truncated experience of "symptom as *jouissance*"; instead, I point to a rigorous critical sensibility that will dwell in the symptom, speak from within the symptom, and only on that basis initiate the discourse of cure and remediation. In other words, in my vocabulary, theory, unevenness, and double consciousness function together as powerful coordinates. If there is unevenness between the "West" and the "Rest" (and of course there is), the most rigorous and systemic way to dismantle this unevenness is through a critical instrumentalization of double consciousness, and not through a disavowal of it. There is indeed a qualitative difference between merely inheriting unevenness as a given world-historical condition, and making it work against itself through critical exercises of double consciousness. Unlike a few decades ago, when postmodernism enjoyed an exemplary hold over the flows and movements of "post-ality," now, on the basis of the historical realities of "double consciousness," the "post-" has traveled, and not necessarily in celebration of its metropolitan/European provenance. And just as discourses of Eurocentric modernity have been taught to understand themselves as "colonial modernity," so too, the Eurocentrically avant-gardist "post-" has been hybridized, relativized, and radically reterritorialized and deterritorialized in response to postcolonial subaltern and non-Western histories and cultural formations. As Edward Said would have it, it is through travel that theory is made to divest itself of its dominance and its hubris of avant-gardism. My only significant departure from Said is that I do not necessarily see any antagonism between "theory" and "critical consciousness." I discuss some of this in my treatment of Said and Spivak in chapter 5.

In a sense, what I am calling for is a more subtle and inflected relationship between "Always historicize" and "Always theorize." Sometimes and often enough, when history and histories become vertical traps from which the subject is unable to escape, it may not be a bad idea to combine a certain kind of strategic "over-theorizing" with a certain kind of strategic "under-

historicizing." As I have tried to maintain throughout this volume, it is only through these strategies that a "common humanity" entrenched in different histories and historiographies can delineate a transcendent ethical horizon that is not reducible to the merely historico-political. The virulently overdetermined binary oppositions of self and other in a variety of macro-political contexts are in need of a double strategy: historico-political measures to rectify imbalances within the binary unevenness have to be co-thought with ethico-theoretical gestures towards alterity as such. Perhaps it is in the name of a post-political persuasion (i.e., a persuasion that will last beyond the polemicized heat and urgency of the moment), the kind that Mohandas Gandhi strove for all his life, that this book makes a big deal of the figure of the hyphen, which both conjoins and differentiates ethics and politics, history and theory. I hope my discussion of the triangulated relationship among ethics, epistemology, and politics, by way of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theorization of subalternity, will reassure my readers that the ethical dimension I am trying to "ubiquitize" through theory is neither a privatized ethics nor a primordial ethics protected from historical and ideological "contamination." It is only on the basis of a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the ways in which the "relative autonomy" of each of these domains has inflated itself into a non-negotiable absolute that this book aspires to the immanence of the ethical–theoretical connection, as a corrective to the myopias of history and the inadequacies of the exclusively political.

This work, like my *Diasporic Mediations*, is a collection of essays, but "theory" resonates a lot more consistently as a theme than did "diaspora" in the earlier volume. I suspect I will never write a conventional book that is "about" a theme/period/author within the logic of a representational one-to-one correspondence. I prefer the idea of a book as a contingent collectivization of multiple intersections, departures, and arrivals. Chapter 1, "Postmodernism and the Rest of the World," seeks to provincialize the mighty claims of postmodernism from a postcolonial/subaltern perspective that both allows and disallows "the postmodern." My "double-conscious" point here is not that "Pomo" is or should be alien to postcoloniality. Instead, I am concerned with how the political and the theoretical/epistemological claims of postmodernity are in mutual contradiction, particularly when it comes to issues such as representation, nationalism, and essentialism. Postmodernism, to be deserving of global attention, has to learn to historicize itself multilaterally and multi-historically. If postmodernism is an epistemological condition, such a condition as "universal" claim cannot be unilateral: it has to bear the burden of multiple and uneven histories before it can be legislated. Chapter 1 also argues against the thesis that the so-called "origins" of an "ism" have a privileged hold over its meaning and valence.

Chapter 2, "The Use and Abuse of Multiculturalism," finds itself in a symptomatic dangle between a resistance politics that is in response to a world structured in dominance and an "ethical surrender" to alterity as such. In this chapter the hyphen opens up between the ethical and the political, both as a problem and as an enabling condition of persuasion. The bulk of the chapter takes the form of a rigorous phenomenological and discursive critique of liberal versions of multiculturalism, including a critical reading of Charles Taylor. Its objective is to open up a space of empowerment between "recognition" and "representation": a space where profound relationalities may be imagined beyond liberal empathy and ontological binarism. The chapter ends on an ambivalent note envisioning "fusion" groundlessly, and this after a thorough problematization of the "fusion of horizons."

Chapter 3, "Globalization, Desire, and the Politics of Representation," argues for a return, not to the practice, but to critical considerations of how nationalism works differentially between the developed and the developing worlds. Deracinated and simulacral seductions of a transnational techno-capital, I argue, are attempting to mediatize the real in the here and now of techno-temporality: a move that has to be resisted ethically, politically, and epistemologically. I suggest that the way out of representation also has to be a way through and beyond representation, and that deterritorialized utopian longings need to be marked by the ethics of universal suffering, as theorized by Ashis Nandy.

Chapter 4, "Derivative Discourses and the Problem of Signification," performs a double-take on the category of "derivativeness" (developed superbly by Partha Chatterjee), viewing it as a "corrigible historical symptom" *and* as an inevitable epistemological condition experienced by hegemonic, dominant, and subaltern formations. In the space that opens up between the allegory and the history of derivativeness, and between derivativeness as an epistemological phenomenon and derivativeness as a political predicament, the postcolonial dilemma both finds and loses itself.

Chapter 5 has the same title as the book and is the *pièce de résistance* (at least on the basis of its prolixity): it is appropriately way too long and thereby symptomatic of the reluctant unevenness of closure. Starting with a critical rehearsal of the "politics of location" and the "politics of subject positionality," it takes on the problem of unevenness both micro-politically and macro-politically; that is, both from the perspective of general intellectuality and that of academic or specific intellectuality. The overall objective of the first half of the chapter is to articulate a sharable ethic between dominance in deconstruction and subalternity in emergence. Crucial in this context is my reading of Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*. Starting with an appreciative reading of a powerful short story by the famous contemporary Tamil writer and

intellectual Jayakanthan, the remainder of the chapter reads diagnostically into the politics of secularism as it functions internationally between the West and the East. Is secularism an ontology, an epistemology, or both? If it is indeed a "worldview," how did the "worlding" of such a world take place? How does the third world signify itself on the "Western" body of secularism? *Contra* Rushdie, is it even thinkable that the third world may have critical and "reasonable" options that are not reducible to "Occidental" secularism? The work of William Connolly was a tremendous inspiration in the context of my critical engagement with the claims of secular discourse. His deeply moving book, *Why I am not a Secularist*, is of great importance to non-Western critiques of secularism – not as a model, but as a "fellow venture" inaugurated from a different location.

If these five chapters do not add up to a cumulative thesis, that too is symptomatic. Fragmented and alienated by location, limited and chastened by subject positionality, and yet haunted by utopian visions of oceanic oneness, my problem has been similar to that of the storyteller who is caught without recourse between perspectivism and the impulse to get the whole picture, between the need to produce authority and a kind of empathic "negative capability" that laughs at authority. Add to this my conviction that each human subject simultaneously occupies different terrains – dominant, hegemonic, and subaltern – and what you get is not the plenitude of representation, but representation as interruption. Perhaps for me, existentially speaking, the truest and most moving moment in the book is the conclusion to chapter 2. The answer to representation is "Who knows?" intended as a question, but in the name of an answer.

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To Asha, my comrade–friend–*humsafar*: let me begin with something specific. Thank you for letting me know ever so casually and matter-of-factly that my pages need to breathe: " Hello! Will you please break up those monolithic paragraphs?" Through ups and downs, you egged me on towards the farther side of procrastination. Yes indeed, there is the other side, and it sure feels good. Whichever side of whatever bounded space I may find myself in, I would want you there, with love and gratitude. To Surya, my main man: I think I will try and keep pace with you as you introduce me, from your point of view, to a world drenched in complexity and rhythms too deep even for pulsation. Let us hang out, chill, and share some music (rev up the volume); talk to me about globalization – its pros and cons – and we will keep driving on and on. It is time for me to ask you, "Who am I?" I know you will respond with candid humor.

# 1
# Postmodernism and the Rest of the World

I want to begin with a gloss on my title. In yoking together "postmodernism" and "the rest of the world" my purpose is to suggest both a connection and a disjunction: in other words, an uneven relationship, or a relationship structured in asymmetry. Postmodernism is no more idiosyncratic or singular than the world is general or normal. Nor is it the case that there are two entirely hermetic worlds: the one postmodern, and the other "non-postmodern." There is lots of travel and traffic among locations and what they represent; and postmodernism, for whatever reason, has taken on the imprimatur of the avant-garde; particularly when it comes to questions of theory and epistemology. At the same time, as postmodernism travels from its metropolitan "Western" origins to other sites and occasions, or is appropriated differentially by the minorities and feminists even within the West, its truth claims get "multi-historicized" and relativized with reference to "the Rest." My title attempts to engage this overdetermined binarity between "the West" and "the Rest," and in the process think through and (if possible) beyond it. The entire book is an attempt to critically "theorize" the unevenness of the global situation from a postcolonial perspective. In other words, "postality" is a condition that has to be contested and negotiated between the elite avant-garde and the subaltern. It is all a matter for a "double-conscious" but agential and perspectival signification.

For one thing, I am interested in delineating postcoloniality as a form of double consciousness, and not as an act of secession from the metropolitan regime. Not only is postcoloniality a historiography in its own terms, but it is also a critical perspective on metropolitan goings on. Indeed, these two functions of postcoloniality are mutually constitutive. It seems to me that it is incumbent on the third world, having been coercively interpellated by

colonialism and modernity, to continue to have a crucial say in the further developments, post- or otherwise, of modernity. The third world, which is often and almost always choicelessly globalized by advanced capital, cannot afford to forfeit its capacity to intervene in matters transnational and postmodern. Unlike theorists of the third world such as Aijaz Ahmad, I do not read ambivalence as a sign of postcolonial weakness or instability. Quite to the contrary, I wish to argue that postcoloniality is always already marked by ambivalence, and the task is to politicize this "given ambivalence" and produce it agentially. This taking charge of ambivalence, this polemical production of double consciousness, is intended as an act of affirmation and as a substantive intervention in the "business as usual" of metropolitan temporality.

It might be argued that there are indigenous realities of the non-West that are not necessarily related to colonialism and modernity. While this is indeed true, the brute fact that every conceivable local–native–indigenous reality has been touched by the morphology of modernism and the dominance of nationalism and the nation-state (notice that the very efficacy of countless grassroots movements and NGOs has to be mediated athwart the authority of regnant nationalisms) makes it imperative for postcoloniality to participate on more than one level, in more than one location. My purpose here is neither to realize a pure either/or relationship between West and non-West, nor to offer any one version of postcoloniality as exemplary or authentic. Rather, my assumption is that there is a place for the ethico-politics of persuasion, and within this space postcoloniality or the "rest of the world" has much to say to the postmodern West. I am aware that there are sections where I might be guilty of conflating postmodernism and poststructuralism. It is well beyond my scope here to begin to differentiate postmodernism and poststructuralism, but suffice it to say that for my present purposes postmodernism is the object of address if for no other reason than that more than poststructuralism, "pomo" has taken on the authority of a global umbrella. And besides, the travel of pomo all over the world, on the wings of capital and virtual technologies, has been more insidious than the travel of poststructuralism, which in many ways can actually be articulated sympathetically with the concerns of postcoloniality.

I would like to begin this chapter with a naive and perhaps brazen "world-historical" observation. The peoples of the world are currently unevenly situated between two historiographic discourses: discourses of the "post-" and the "trans-" whose objective seems to be to read historical meaning in terms of travel, displacement, deracination, and the transcendence of origins; and discourses motivated by the need to return to precolonial, premodern, and prenationalist traditions of indigeny. My intention here is somewhat to bridge the gap between these polar choices and to suggest that these two paths need to be

historicized relationally, and not as two discrete and mutually exclusive options.

Having said this, I would like to briefly analyze three recent happenings in the context of global postmodernity and the emerging new world order. First, the NAFTA agreement. Much has been written about this deal from both sides. The debates are over, and NAFTA is for real. And yet the real implications of the treaty are far from clear. If on the one hand NAFTA represents deterritorialization, the breaking down of international economic borders, and the celebration of a seamless spatiality achieved by the spread of capital,[1] why then on the other hand did the rhetoric of NAFTA advocacy resort to assurances that *American* jobs will not be lost and that *American* identity will be intact, undeterritorialized by NAFTA? As Marx's elegant analysis of the contradictory logic of capitalism points out, the discourse of protectionism on behalf of the dominant order goes hand in hand with the dehistoricization of the periphery. The polemical focus on American jobs and American identity demonstrates that despite all claims of free trade, clearly, there is a *home* and a *not-home*, an *inside* to be protected and an *outside* that is really not our concern. And how do we distinguish between who is "us" and who is "them"? Of course, through the good old category of "nationality." Thus, the return of nationalism lies at the very heart of a despatializing postmodernity.

Secondly, the floundering of GATT on issues concerning cultural autonomy and specificity. The sticking point here was the exportation to Europe of American culture through videos and television programs. Unlike NAFTA that pits two developed countries against a third world country, here the transaction is all Western. And yet this particular instance dramatizes the disjuncture between cultural and political/economic interests. It was not just a question of taxes and tariffs. Surely we are all aware that in the age of late capitalism, culture itself is nothing but a commodity infiltrated irrevocably by exchange value? And still Europe resists American cultural commodities in the name of its own separate identity. Falling back on the notion of organic cultural inter pellation, Europe resists the logic of postmodern homogenization or de-differentiation. Clearly this confrontation is taking place on the all too familiar turf of Identity; and we had thought that Identity had been sent packing in the advanced postmodern world of simulacra and the hyperreal. Culture becomes the embattled rhetoric of home, authenticity, and "one's ownness" deployed strategically to resist the economic impulse toward "sameness." Yes, we want to be part of the borderless economic continuum, but at the same time, let us be who we are; our cultural identities are not up for sale or commercial influence. It would seem then that the economic terrain activates a pure process without a Subject,[2] whereas the cultural domain is anchored deeply in Identity.

Thirdly, in the case of the Puerto Rican referendum concerning statehood, "culture" became a fraught term. Would Puerto Rico sacrifice its cultural/historical uniqueness as a consequence of economic/political unionization? Tax issues and citizenship questions apart, the question of culture was raised in all its resistant autonomy. Not unlike a number of non-Western ex-colonized nations that assimilate the West as part of their "outer selves" and cultivate their "inner selves" in response to indigenous imperatives, the people of Puerto Rico chose to symbolize the cultural domain in opposition to a capitalist postmodernist integration with the "Nation of nations."[3]

I bring up these examples to show that the "identity question" in our own times is profoundly fissured along different and often mutually exclusive trajectories. Also, all these events are taking place in a progressively postmodern world, which is also being seen as a postnationalist world. Why is it that Identity and Nationalism are celebrating their return under the postmodern aegis? Why is it that the ideology of postmodernism is unable to chase away or exorcize the ghosts of Identity and Nationalism? Is it possible that the "identity question" and a variety of nationalisms[4] have become the political weapon of "underdeveloped" peoples in their battle against the phenomenon of "unequal global development":[5] a phenomenon that is being exacerbated by the spread of postmodernism? But before we can respond to these questions (questions that focus on the global effects of postmodernism), we need to take a closer look at postmodernism as it has developed in the West.

## Historicizing Postmodernism

What are the origins of postmodernism? What is the extent of its geopolitical jurisdiction and what is its statute of limitations? Let us keep in mind that the text that gave postmodernity its undeniable cognitive–epistemic status (Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*)[6] made three important and binding gestures. First of all, postmodernity was a condition. Secondly, it had to do with knowledge and epistemology. And third, it was taking place within the advanced capitalist, postindustrial computerized societies. The term "condition" (as in say, the human condition) has a strong ontological appeal. Unlike words such as "crisis," "predicament," or "dilemma," "condition" carries with it a semantics of finality and fully achieved meaning. It is in the form of a *fait accompli*. In other words, the condition is real, and it was theorized into lexical significance within the first world well before the underdeveloped world could even take a look at it, leave alone have a say in its ideological determination.

Well might one ask, why should the underdeveloped countries of the third world even be allowed a peek into what after all is exclusively a first world phenomenon? And here lies the ideological duplicity of postmodernity as an epistemic condition: its simultaneity both as a regional and a global phenomenon. The epistemic location of postmodernity, given the dominance of the West, has a *virtual* hold over the rest of the world too. If modernity functions as a structure-in-dominance that regulates and normativizes the relationship between the West and the Rest, postmodernism, despite the so-called break from modernity,[7] sustains and prolongs this relationship. Furthermore, given the avant-gardism of the West, it is only inevitable that the very regionality of Western forms will travel the world over as dominant universal forms. In other words, Western realities have the power to realize themselves as "general human conditions." The passage from a specific reality to a general condition is effected through the mediation of knowledge and epistemology.

It is the formulation of the postmodern "condition" as a matter of "knowledge" that paves the way for the uncontested spread of first world priorities across the world. It is the ability of the developed world to conceptualize and theorize its particular organic empirical reality into a cognitive–epistemic formula on behalf of the entire world that poses a dire threat to other knowledges.[8] For after all, how can knowledge be irrelevant, especially when accompanied by claims of universality? Thus a report on epistemology elaborated in the metropolis either begins to speak for the human condition the world over, or assumes a virtual reality to be devoutly wished for by the rest of the world. To put it differently, the theoretical need to take postmodernism seriously becomes an imperative even in places where postmodernity is not a lived reality (i.e., has no historical roots). The third world is then compulsorily interpellated by postmodernity even though its own realities are thoroughly out of sync with the temporality of the postmodern.[9]

To what extent and in what specific ways does postmodernism problematize and deconstruct the ideology of modernity? To what extent is postmodernism a radical critique of, and perhaps a form of secession from, the authority of modernity? If indeed postmodernism is an effective interrogation of the legitimacy of modernity within the confines of the first world, then how useful or relevant is this interrogation to other geopolitical areas in the rest of the world? Is there common cause between the interrogation of modernity within the developed world and third world critiques of modernity? Are there sharable issues, agendas, and objectives between these two constituencies, despite the fundamental asymmetry that sustains East–West relationships? In other words, why should the rest of the world pay attention to the emergence of postmodernism in politics if all it is is an intramural "occidental" antagonism?