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Social criticism, cultural creativity and the contemporary dialectics of transformations: A poser

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, all societies have been subjected to fundamental processes of transformation which have challenged the prevalent social and ideological systems. These processes have also challenged the familiar models of social criticism and methods of social transformation. The ideological systems of Marxism and liberal democracy had emphasized the proletarian class and political citizen as the main agents of social criticism. But contemporary changes have pointed to the limits of these categories as bearers of criticism, creativity and transformation. The present article discusses the task and functioning of criticism at the contemporary juncture and points to the need for broadening its agenda from its predominantly political articulation to practices and processes of self-criticism, moral struggles, cultural creativity and self-transformation. It also discusses the issue of criticism and creativity in the field of culture. The article concludes with an engagement with the dialectics of contemporary transformations. It argues that dialectics needs to be rethought today in the light of contemporary processes of multi-dimentional tranformation political and spiritural and needs to be linked to both the pulse of dialogue and the pulse of freedom.

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I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but bring an *oeuvre*, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep.

Michel Foucault (1988),
"Practicing Criticism," p. 326

[A contemporary critique of capitalism] is perhaps more needed than ever, as the demise of state socialism has increased capitalism's self-assertion. Today there is scarcely anyone who wants to criticize capitalism. And yet in the European Union alone we have seventeen million unemployed. xxx We have to imagine something new in order to criticize this system. But the standard of criticism can only be the realization of a radical democracy, which naturally involves taming capitalism by means of a social state to a degree yet unknown

Jurgen Habermas,
"Overcoming the Past," p. 11

To go inside in the life of the spirit is also to expand oneself in terms of consciousness, to break down the separating wall between oneself and the all. Self-realization with the medieval saints of India was not a running away from the world to what is called to save one's soul; it is being reborn egoless, so that you are able to look at the whole world in a different eye. You become a rebel because you want the relationships and arrangements of society to be determined anew.

Chitta Ranjan Das (1982),
"A Glimpse into Oriya Literature," p. 80.

Social criticism is part of a wider criticism of life and is animated by a passion of both critique and construction. It begins with an enquiry into the foundations of our life and an awareness about its multi-dimensional origin and dynamics--the material and the spiritual, the collective and the individual; it evaluates the nature of our contemporary social institutions from the point of view of justice and human dignity. Life means multiple webs of relationships and criticism is an inquiry into the quality of these relationships. Criticism also seeks to understand whether the modes of togetherness suggested in life's architecture of relationships genuinely holds together or not. Criticism begins with a description of the dynamics of relationships in life; observes and describes both coherence and incoherence, harmonies and contradictions at work in life; and seeks to move from incoherence to coherence, darkness to light, and from light to more light. An eternal desire to move from one summit of perfection to another is the objective of criticism which is not a specialized attribute of life; it is life itself.

Sociologically, self, society and culture are three dimensions, domains or levels of reality where the webs of relationship called life are at work. Though social criticism has definitely more to do with the field called the social, it is

not separated from the dynamics of criticism and creativity in the field of self and culture. Society consists of the dialectic of value and power and social criticism is an enquiry into the mode of this dialectic without presupposing that this dialectic is a process of determination where power determines the terms of discourse and holds the keys to human emancipation (cf. Beteille 1980; Giri 1996). Social criticism is an inquiry into the nature of legitimacy of a society's structure of power and the dignity of its institutional order. But the process of social criticism goes hand in hand with the process of self-criticism (i.e. self-criticism in the life of the subjects as well as an object of concern in the life of fellow beings) and cultural criticism. In fact, self-criticism is the base of social criticism while cultural criticism constitutes its sky.

The task of social criticism is one of interrogating the foundations of one's society (also of another's; consider the exemplary social criticism of American democracy presented to us by the French Alexis de Tocqueville) and reinterpreting it. What is the dynamics of such criticism and who are its actors? The actor can be an individual, a group of like-minded individuals whom we can call a community of critics, a group or a movement. The actors of social criticism can either conceive their role as one of just standing by the side of the river and never jumping into it or immersing themselves totally in it and presenting a critique from the inside out. In the case of the former, the critics perceive their role as one of pointing out the faults and contradictions of the society concerned but they do not take responsibility for their critical positions. Here social critics behave as marginal men and women; like Simmel's strangers, "they are in but not wholly of their society" (Walzer 1988: 32). In contrast to this, we can find critics who are related to the society they criticize both politically and morally. "It is opposition, far more than detachment, that determines" the shape of such social criticism. Here the critic takes sides and "sets himself against the political forces" (Walzer 1988: 48).

But while a critic or a community of critics or a movement takes a political side; he or she may not feel the necessity of taking the beliefs and values of the people whose life is the object of her / his criticism seriously. The critic may proceed with an assumption or arrogance that she is endowed with a uniquely revealed Truth and it is his destiny to preach it to the many unfortunate whose life is in urgent need of redemption. Therefore the politically responsible criticism that Walzer associates with connected social criticism can go without taking seriously or having a dialogue with the internal tradition of a society. This seems to have been the case with many of the major movements of criticism in the modern world, for instance, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism. True, many creative critics within these movements of criticism have tried to make a dialogue between their modernist agenda of criticism and their lived traditions giving rise to a Buddhist Marxism or a vedantic psychoanalysis or a truly indigenous feminism, but such moves have by and large been on the fringe and have been looked with suspicion by the ideological proponents of such systems of social criticism.[1]

But in order to make social criticism a worthwhile engagement, there is a need to take the tradition of a society seriously. This seems to constitute the difference between a Platonic approach to social criticism and an Aristotelian mode which takes people's practices as the starting point of an inquiry. While "for Plato, the opinions of finite and imperfect people, as embodied in their traditions, are hardly a sufficient basis for an account of what is really good, even good for these very same people," Aristotle urges the critics to "seek conviction through arguments using the traditional beliefs as our witnesses and standards" (Nussbaum and Sen 1987: 23). But at the same time the evaluation of tradition in the Artistotelian agenda also involves a movement "beyond the superficial desires of participants to a deeper and more objective level" (Nussbaum & Sen 1957: 23). Criticism here is a deliberative process which "confronts the reflecting participant with all of the alternative views on a topic, leads him or her through a thorough imaginative exploration of each," leading to modification of their many unconsidered positions. Yet, "this modification, if it takes place, will take place not as an imposition from without, but as a discovery about which, among that person's own values, are the deepest and the most central. This is self-discovery and discovery of one's own traditions" (1987: 24).

While taking seriously the internal tradition of a society in one's act of criticism, two points have to be born in mind. *First*, sources of social criticism are not solely internal to a society concerned; they are invariably born out of a global interpenetration of traditions, societal consciousness and civilizational perspectives. For example, in understanding the sources of criticism in a seeker such as Gandhi we find that these are not solely internal to Indian tradition; rather it is born out of the dialectic between the emancipatory traditions in the West represented by Thoreau, Ruskin and Tolstoy and Indian traditions of spiritual criticism. The same is the case with Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda whose critical agenda is difficult to understand without understanding their dialogue with the emancipatory agenda of modernity. Such a view of the multiple sources of social criticism is particularly important in the present day world where societies and cultures are increasingly part of a process of mutual intepenetration where the vision and the experiment of good life in one holds a critical mirror for the unjust social arrangement that is perpetuated in the other. *Second*, the dialogue between

tradition and critique may not be a smooth one and social criticism must have the courage to break away from tradition and create new ones for the sake of justice and human dignity.

In fact, social criticism involves taking a hypothetical attitude to one's culture, society and one's taken-for-granted conceptions of self. Taking such a hypothetical attitude is a difficult task, but an inevitable challenge to be overcome, because "individuals who have been socialized cannot take a hypothetical attitude to the form of life and the personal life-history that have shaped their own identity" (Habermas 1990: 104). For many interlocutors within the Western critical tradition--from Aristotle to Habermas—this overcoming of the natural blindness is possible by participating in a rational deliberation on the form of life to which one belongs. Habermas calls such modes of engagement discourse ethics and argues that "for the hypothesis-testing participant in a discourse, the relevance of the experiential context of his life world tends to pale. To him, the normativity of existing institutions seems just as open to question as the objectivity of things and events" (1990: 109). Habermas (1990: 108) further tells us in his memorable phrase: "Under the unrelenting moralizing gaze of participants in discourse xxx familiar institutions can be transformed into so many instances of problematic justice."

But after taking a hypothetical attitude to one's society, a critic has to come back to the society in order to transform it. To put it in the words of historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee, the process of withdrawal has to be accompanied by a process of return and an attempt at a new life based on self-realized, transformed values. Habermas also helps us understand this: "concern for the fate of one's neighbor is a necessary emotional prerequisite for the cognitive operations expected of participants in discourses." But how do we achieve "integration of cognitive operations and emotional dispositions" in our critical engagements? Here is the rationalist binding in the Habermasian discourse ethics adequate and enough? Realizing this integration also involves going beyond one's rational mind and discover the spiritual dimension in one's self and the other. But even while looking for hermeneutic supplements after realizing that "the discursive justification of norms is no guarantor of moral insights," the farthest Habermas can go is towards neighborhood solidarity and "internalization of authority" (1990: 170).

But the problem with such a supplementary exercise is that it fails to realise that "reflective dialectical examination" also requires "reflective self" whose sources are not only material and rational but also spiritual. Critical theory from Aristotle to Habermas has shared an uncritical faith in the ability of rationality to arrive at integration of our life and in thinking about the task of social criticism today there is probably a crucial need to think about the limit and possibility of such a preoccupation. There is a commitment here to a "rational criticism of culture" which leaves untouched the question of the infrarational and the superrational or the supramental challenges of the human condition, not to mention that it is not reflective enough about such a basic problem as the cultural construction of rationality itself. But as Sri Aurobindo (1962: 206) has argued, in realizing an integration between cognitive distantiation and emotional care, "A rational satisfaction cannot give (a person) safety from the pull from below nor deliver him from the attraction from above." "It is spiritual, a greater than rational, enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antatgonisms and discords" (ibid).

I wish to submit for your consideration that social criticism now needs to have an agenda of spiritual criticism which encompasses rational criticism. More specifically, the Habermasian agenda of practical discourse needs to be a part of an agenda of what can be called practical spirituality. Practical spirituality, as Swami Vivekenanda argues, urges us to realize that "the highest idea of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest idea of metaphysical conception" (Vivekananda 1991: 354). This highest conception pertains to the realization that man himself is God: "You are that Impersonal Being: that God for whom you have been searching all over the time is yourself--yourself not in the personal sense but in the impersonal" (Vivekananda 1991: 332). The task of practical spirituality begins with this self-realization but does not end there: its objective is to transform the world. The same Vivekananda thus challenges us: "The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good is not "I" but "thou." Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt" (Vivekananda 1991: 353).

The objective of practical spirituality is to solve the concrete problems of men and women and enable them to move from food to freedom. Spiritual criticism is animated by such a passion of integration and transformation. Let us try to understand the varieties of spiritual criticism at work in society and history. Prophetic criticism about which Walzer (1988) has so insightfully told us is an instance of spiritual criticism of society where prophets use the name of God to build their movements against the forces of oppression. Not only in traditional societies but also in varieties of contemporary societies one is back to the beginning where social critic is a prophet. The prophets are not only opposed to priesthood but also to

the State. As Walzer speaks of the prophet Amos: "In the dispute between Amos and the priest Amaziah, it is the prophet who appeals to religious tradition, the priest only to the reason of the state". For Walzer, "Prophecy aims to arouse remembrance, recognition, indignation and repentance" (Walzer 1988: 63).

Prophecy also aims to arouse realization in each one of us that we contain the reality and possibility of being a prophet ourselves. As we think about prophetic criticism, it is essential to realize that "the typological differentiation between man and overman no longer makes much sense, if it ever did" (Connolly 1991: 182). As Connolly tells us: "The 'overman' now falls apart as a set of distinct dispositions concentrated in a particular caste or type and its spiritual qualities migrate to a set of dispositions that may compete for presence in any self" (ibid). In an exciting way, developments in quantum physics buttress such a view of criticism and creativity. For Donah Zohar and Ian Marshall: "If we are looking for 'God' within Physics the vacuum would be the most appropriate place to look xxx the vacuum has all the characteristics of the Immanent God, or the Godhead, spoken of by the mystics, the God within, the God who creates and discovers Himself through the unfolding existence of His creation" (Zohar & Marshall 1993: 197 / 198). But "there is nobody here to act but us.. Perhaps the "Second Coming" for which so many people have waited is nothing else but the realization that we are that "coming." The job of transforming ourselves and saving the world is down to us" (ibid).

Closely related to prophetic criticism is the agenda of martyrdom. J.P.S. Uberoi tells us in his recent provocative study of Sikhism and Gandhism that in their struggle against the power of the state the martyrs show that "no power on earth can make the self do anything against its nature, except indirectly confer martyrdom on it" (Uberoi 1996: 88). For Uberoi, the elementary structure of martyrdom is "manifestly the non-dualism of loving self-sacrifice..but equally it is the responsibility of "arising to bear witness" on the duality of the true and false, religion and irreligion, liberation and bondage" (Uberoi 1996: 130). Furthermore, "The martyr is one who must love his enemy in some sense since he or she is the perfect witness (saheed-ul-kamil) that God, who at this time takes an interest in history and politics, does not want his servant to suppose, as the dualist would, that Satanism has any true independent existence, and so *dharmayudhya*, the righteous war, can be transformed into *satyagraha*" (Uberoi 1996: 124). Giving the examples of Antigone, Socrates, Jesus Gandhi and the Sikh Gurus Uberoi urges us to realize that martyrs as social critics criticize the existing structure of power for the sake of "self-rule, self-reforms" and the "self-management of society."

Bhakti movements in Indian traditions have been yet another example of spiritual criticism where we meet social critics as saints who dissolve the category between the priest and the laity and fight for a relationship of dignity. Some proponents of the Bhakti Movement in medieval India such as the poet Achyutananda Das of Orissa have made a distinction between different kinds of Bhakti--Brahmana Bhakti, Vaishya Bhakti, Khastriya Bhakti and Shudra Bhakti--and have put Shudra Bhakti at the top.[2] Shudra Bhakti is characterized by a passion to serve God, society and the Other without any precondition. The objective of criticism and creativity then is to enable human beings to be Shudras--servants of God, servants of an ideal relationship and good society which grants human dignity to all. Shudras represent labor in Indian tradition and in Bhakti movements labour and devotion, that is, *shrama* and *bhakti* come together for the sake of transformation.

Prophetic criticism, martyrdom and the Bhakti movements are examples of spiritual criticism in society and history. They are not innocent of the dynamics of power both in their method and object of social criticism but they are not confined to it. They propose a different relationship between knowledge and power where knowledge does not end in the acquisition of power but in the cultivation of an understanding and *sraddha*. These initiatives in criticism help us to realize that the social critic is a *tapashyi* and the tapashya of criticism is a *tapashya* of *sraddha*. As Chitta Ranjan Das argues: "like the demon [the critic] is not engaged in this *tapashya* for the acquisition of more power but for more *sraddha* (reverence for life). It is *sraddha* which makes knowledge radiant, expands it to right fields of activities and makes one capable of more giving and true *sraddha* acts as the mother of courage" (Das 1991: 35).

Das also argues that the bearer of social criticism is a "creative man" who looks at the world through the eyes of a friend--*mitrashya chakhusya*, as he calls it. Social criticism in the modern world has been governed very much by the ideals of liberty and equality but criticism as friendship reiterates the transformational significance of fraternity and sisterhood in our critical engagement. A social critic is primarily a friend of the man / woman on the street and a friend of the world. This view of criticism is illumined by Dallmayr's (1993) recent discussion of Heidegger as a "friend of the world." Neither Dallmayr nor I condone Heidegger's initial support for Fascism and his total silence on the holocaust but that should not disable us to draw lessons from his critical and creative *ouevre*, from an "other Heidegger," as Dallmayr presents it. From Heidegger we can have a vision of the social critic as a "house friend" who comes and sits in our backyards but

encourages us to discover the depth dimension of our lives as well as other horizons. Social criticism is a genuine dialogue between fellow beings whom Heidgegger calls "co-beings."[3] What Heidegger writes of genuine dialogue is true of criticism: both of these are located at the "midpoint of friendship of friends." For Heidegger, "the partners of such dialogue recognize each other in their difference or distinctiveness, a distinctiveness that involves not separation but a mode of "letting be" and "setting free" which allows human "truth" to emerge; the emblem of such truth again, is friendship" (ibid).

As we are invited by the calling of social criticism as friendship, it has to be noted that social criticism also involves serious social antagonism and many critics in society and history have used explicit political insurrection as a method as well. These moves have also helped to make the world a better place to live in as much they have contributed to the creation of a more democratic arrangement of power.

If rationality has been a deep structure of social criticism in the Western critical tradition, so has it been a preoccupation with politics and power. It is quite striking that power as a tool of criticism and emancipation is such an uncritically taken for-granted assumption under the regime of modernity that critics cannot but think of discourse without politics and can not utter a sentence without the adjective and the noun--political and politics. Thus Seyla Benhabib can not proceed further in her meditation on norm and utopia without talking about the "politics of fullfillment" and "politics of self-transfiguration" and Anthony Giddens cannot talk about self-identities without talking of "life politics." I do not want to belittle the significance of politics in the agenda of social criticism and I agree with Derrida (1994) that deconstruction could not have been possible in a "Pre-Marxist space." As it is difficult for a hungry person to realize God it is equally for a society governed by unjust power to realize its spiritual worth. At one point, the relationship between power and spirituality has a relationship of succession, very much like the primary need and secondary needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.[4] But my submission is that both work on transformation of undemocratic structures of power and self-transformation which enables the actors to use power with a spirit of *Bhakti*--not with a will to dominate--ought to go together and, in fact, can go together. Without esentializing, we can understand the significance of Gandhi in terms of both these simultaneous--not merely successive--seekings.

One contemporary interlocutor whose work has been very influential in terms of a power perspective is Foucault. For Foucault, social criticism is a criticism of not only macro power but also micro power: "critique must begin from an analytic of relations of power" (quoted in Caputo & Yount 1993: 7). But as J.N. Mohanty (1993: 33) argues, like the Heideggerian "cunning of reason," Foucault's "power" also succeeds by "hiding its own mechanism," and I should say, by hiding its own limitations. But in Foucault, we also find a realization of the limitation of power as a tool and object of criticism in ensuring human emancipation. There is also an other within Foucault which questions the primacy of the political in the craft of social criticism. As Foucault writes: "In fact, I have especially wanted to question politics, and to bring to light in the political field, as in the field of historical and philosophical interrogation, some problems that had not been recognized there before. I mean that the questions I am trying ask are not determined by a preestablished political outlook and do not tend to the realization of some definite political project" (Foucault 1984: 376).

In reflecting on the task of social criticism, we have had a dialogue with Habermas and Foucault. How do we relate to another major interlocutor of criticism and creativity of our times, namely Jacques Derrida? Derrida's project of "difference" is a radical project in as much it is integrally linked to the critique of the system and the dynamics of movements (Barnett 1989. But as we make a dialogue with Derrida, we realise that "deconstruction alone is not enough, it must be accompanied by an at least tentative reconstruction grounded in the political and theoretical demands of the contemporary world" (Soja 1989: 74). Seeing the work of deconstructionists in the contemporary world we are also bound to ask, "Is there nothing for the philosopher to do, after the demise of the metaphysical seriousness, but to be an intellectual "Kibitzer," a concern-free creator of abnormal discourse; an insouciant player of deconstructive and fanciful word games, an agile figure shaken on the thin ice of a bottomless chessboard?" (Madison 1989: 107).

Derrida has a horizontal notion of difference and cannot think of difference in terms of what Taylor (1989) calls "qualitative distinction" and what Heller calls "Beyond." It is to be noted that "Beyond" here does not refer only to being different but to something "higher." True, Derrida speaks of God but for him God is "wholly other" but such a perspective heightens the difference between God and Self, self and other rather than help us realize that God is also part of the self. Furthermore, Derrida urges us to understand the work of "deferral" of differences but does not either urge or help us to understand the frame of co-ordination between differences. But to strive to arrive at a framework of co-ordination is not to clear the grounds for totalitarianism or totalization. The task for deconstructive politics is now to realize, as Ernesto Laclau has so forcefully argued, that a "politics of pure difference" is not enough (Giri 1995; Laclau 1994). Both the

Foucauldian agenda and Derrida's share a suspicion of the universal and urge us for a "critique of universality."[5] While being enriched by this critical suspicion about the violence of universal categories and processes, the task of social criticism is also to describe and understand the manifold relationship between the universal and the particular that exists today with a view to working out an emancipatory space which inhabits both universal and the particular and transforms their respective arrogance and narrowness to one of creative reconciliation.

In fact, description of existing processes, forms of life and movements is / has to be an integral part of a project of critical engagement. Such a project gets inspiration from the project of a critical anthropology / ethnography which submits that it is possible to make a move from description to critical dialogue. Criticism begins with a description of the society it seeks to understand, a description which is not bound by any particular theory of social criticism and model of social transformation. In fact, the problem with contemporary criticism is that it is too much theory-driven and has very little passion to understand the critical movements that are at work in a form of life without fitting them to apriori theoretical models or using one's critical engagements to prove or disprove a theory.

If social criticism has to maintain a mutually enriching dialogue with theories, it has to maintain a cautious distance from the use of adjectives. Characterizing either the mode of social criticism or the form of life by certain adjectives--for example, a Marxian criticism or a Gandhian society--does not lead us anywhere and the challenge that confronts us now is to be liberated from such an adjectival regime.

It was Richard Rorty (1989) who had challenged us some time ago with his argument that human solidarity is achieved not by theory but by description--description of the unfamiliar and redescription of the familiar. If the task of social criticism is to create solidarity between human being through the help of description, then how do we make sense of the critical engagements / works of our times? Here, we can take the work of Veena Das, a thought-provoking intellectual of India, as a case in point. In her *Critical Events* Das urges social theory and analysis to be sensitive to social suffering and understand the need for creating an embodied solidarity which dissolves the distinction between the self and the other. She speaks about the suffering of the abducted women during the Partition of India and the victims of Bhopal Gas disaster, among others. But she does not provide a single life-story of the victims nor of those who have come forward to establish embodied solidarity with them. In fact in case of a tragedy like the Bhopal, an ethnographic (i.e., critically-descriptive) portrayal of lives and communities could have inspired efforts for creating solidarity and could have given rise to an engaged public debate on this issue. But Das does not do this. One of the few voices we hear in this text is the one by an illiterate woman who address her speech towards the judges of the Supreme Court of India: "We only ask the judges for one thing. Please come here and count us" (Das 1995: 164). But Das's anthropological discourse on suffering is not very different from the judicial discourse in as much she does not establish our friendship with a few real life victims and noble souls. In Das's text, suffering of real human beings thus gets displaced by the passion for theory and interpretation. This suggests that the mode of writing crucially determines the impact of our critical engagement. If social criticism is written descriptively and ethnographically it has the potential to create multi-dimensional and multi-pronged solidarity between the victims and the concerned citizens of society than if it is written in an abstract, theoretical mode.

Another critical work in the recent times which succeeds in performing such a task is *Creating a Nationality: Ramajanmabhooml Movement and the Fear of the Self* by Ashis Nandy and his colleagues. A sympathetic and critical discussion of the victims of communalism in this has the potential to create a solidarity for collective action against this all-pervasive virus. The first chapter of this book, "Hindutva as Savarna Purana," is remarkable from this point of view. But the authors seem to lack a deep engagement in few other instances of their narrations. They find the house of a victim in Ayodhya and even though they find his story heart-rendering, they are in a hurry to leave the village before the fall of night. They cannot wait. But it is needless to reiterate that social criticism requires a deep immersion in the life of fellow-beings--an immersion which one misses in Nandy and his colleagues' critical text.

In thinking about the efficacy of social criticism its language is a very decisive factor. Many of our social critics to day do not write in the language of the people. Even in a society such as India, our critics hoping to create revolution in peoples' consciousness through their critical exegesis, write only in English. Common men and women do not become part of such a conversation. But such a mode creates a division between people and writers in the present day world similar to that between people and the court pundits in the days of the Maharajas (Devy 1992).

But the problem here is not simply one of writing in English rather than in the vernacular. The key question is one of comprehension, commitment and desire for dialogue. What is written in the name of social criticism in a language--English or Oriya--may not be understood by people who speak the same language. As Russell Jacoby (1987: 236) tells us about

the intellectuals in the contemporary US, it is difficult for common people to understand their "professional and arcane languages" which symbolize their "refuse as well as flight." Social critics today have become professionals and they are no more a Socrates on the street but members of the system world of the university or the kindred institutions. This spells of "privatization," "withdrawal from a larger public discourse" and lack of concern for the ongoing dynamics and struggle in the outside world. In this context, it is no wonder then that the radicals among the critics and intellectuals today in a society such as the contemporary U.S. suddenly turn to new fields like semiotics "as if the really interesting thing about the homeless were the variety of coded messages of protest that cardboard boxes could convey" (Harvey 1991: 69).

We began this journey with the view that self-criticism is the foundation of social criticism and now we should try to understand some of its implications. The first step here is that social critic has to make his or her own life subject of criticism. He or she has to reflect whether the transformation that is desired in institutions and society in her critical agenda is also at work in her own life. Self-criticism as a mode of criticism is also meant to enable others to be critical of themselves. As a mode of critical engagement, it is meant to help us realize the distinction between ego and self. Self-criticism also seeks to interrogate the life that one is leading keeping in mind the condition of the majority and the agenda of transformation. If the two-third of the world are not able to have two square meal a day then the object of self-criticism is to make us think about our life governed by conspicuous consumption. Self-criticism also goes beyond a formal legalistic view of one's goodness and responsibility. For instance, one may not be violating any law but if the society is itself unjust then the task of self-criticism is to make one realize the responsibility one has to change the current social arrangement and create a new one.

Criticism, Creativity and Culture

Having discussed some of the questions that confront us in the craft of social criticism, now I wish to discuss some of the issues that call for our reflection in the field of cultural creativity. The first issue here is the issue of culture as a source of criticism and creativity in the field of society. Culture is not a mirror image of the political and economic structures of a society. Culture contains a critical possibility to interrogate the foundations of society and its structure of power. Even Edward Said who is known for his outstanding work on the relationship between culture and power tells us: "Culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalizing urban existence. You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society and tradition in these best lights" (Said 1993: xii). As culture is a pattern implicated in a field of power, culture also contains within it a dimension of ideal seeking vis-a-vis self-realization, modes of intersubjectivity, and the constitution of a good society which puts it in a relationship of conflict and transcendence with the structure of power.

Indian philosopher G.C. Pande helps us in understanding this ideal dimension in culture. For Pande, "It is only with reflective consciousness that the subjective-objective world of culture can be apprehended" (Pande 1982: 23). For Pande, culture is a dialectical process of value-seeking: "to seek a value is to seek progress in infinite direction, for it is in the nature of value to be a standard of perfection which judges all alternatives to fall short of ideal. From the lower realization of the self in terms of finite accidents (upadhis) to their complete transcendence in pure self-experience, the human seeking follows a process of dialectical evolution." Pande urges us to realize that the "the dialectic of value-seeking is the dialectic of self-transformation through the interaction of vision and praxis. *It implies not merely progress within a plane of consciousness but a change in the plane of consciousness*" (Pande 1982: 26-27; emphases added).

Culture has a dimension of "beyond" within it which resists its absolutization and political fixation. Every culture has and ought to cultivate a "metaculture" which can radicalize both culture and self (Bidney 1967).[6] As Homi Bhaba (1994 7) argues: "...to dwell in the beyond is also..to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to redescribe our human, historic commonalty, to touch the future on its hitherside. In that sense, the intervening space of beyond becomes a space of intervention in here and now." But this "beyond" dimension of culture is not fully appreciated in contemporary reflections on it. For instance, in her provocative essay, "The nice thing about culture is that everyone has it," anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1995) points to the need for sources of creativity in culture in an "elsewhere." But she just leaves her critical exploration at that and fails to realize that it is the ideal and "Beyond" dimension in culture which constitutes that "elsewhere."

Confronting the challenge of cultural difference as such difference is becoming a ground for new exclusionary practices such as racism and violence against the cultural alien in one's land is an important task now, a task which requires for its fulfillment "certain readjustment in both our rhetorical habits and sense of mission" (Geertz 1986: 119). The creation of exclusion in the name of culture is most evident in the anti-immigration rhetoric and law in Europe, North America and now in many parts of the world. As a commentator helps us understand this: "Immigrants threaten to swamp us with their alien culture and if they are allowed in large numbers, they will destroy the 'homogeneity of the nation'. At the heart of this new racism is the notion of culture and tradition" (Barker quoted in Stolcke 1995: 3). While earlier racism inferiorized the other, the new racism, in the name of culture, as anthropologist Verena Stolcke argues, can even assert the "absolute, irreducible *difference* of the "self" and the incommensurability of different cultural identities (Stolcke 1995: 4).

Stolcke argues that contemporary cultural fundamentalism's rhetoric of exclusion and its reification of cultural difference draws, for its argumentative force, "on the contradictory 19th- century conception of the modern nation-state which assumed that the territorial state and its people are founded on a cultural heritage that is bounded, compact, and distinct..." (Stolcke 1995: 12). A way out of the erasure of the other in the name of culture requires going beyond such politicization of culture and the accompanying conflation between society and culture and state and culture. According to Stolcke, "Genuine tolerance for cultural diversity can flourish without entailing disadvantages only when society and polity are democratic and egalitarian enough to enable people to resist discrimination (whether as immigrants, foreigners, women, blacks) and develop differences without jeopardizing themselves and solidarity among them" (Stolcke 1995: 13). But it is instructive that Stolcke herself writes in the very next line of her essay: "I wonder whether this is possible within the confines of the modern nation-state or, for that matter of any state"(ibid). Thus Stolcke is sensitizing us to the limits of the state-centric approach in dealing with the problem of the other and the fundamentalism of culture though others characterize her diagnosis as utopian.[7]

It is precisely the utopian dimension in self and culture that needs to be retrieved, articulated, and lived by at the contemporary juncture. The tendency to erase an "other" because of difference of culture cannot be fought only at the level of State and now creative responses to it has to be explored in the domains of self and culture. But such a sensitivity to the limits of politics in addressing the challenge of cultural difference and the fundamentalism of culture seems to be lacking in the contemporary debate on multi-culturalism. Starting in North America, like all fashions, the discourse of multi-culturalism is now catching up with the rest of the world as if it contains a new revelation about toleration. But the proponents of this debate can only talk of "politics of recognition." The most obvious example here is Charles Taylor's (1994) agenda of multi-culturalism. It is striking that Taylor does not bring the project of a "reflective self" (cf. Taylor 1989) to his project on multi-culturalism as a bearer and agent which would have helped to create a deeper ontological ground for the acceptance of cultural difference and helped to transform it from the present state of juxtaposition and hyphenation to one of interpenetration and dialogue.

The project of multi-culturalism also can valorize one's cultural identity and demand for cultural rights. But this can lead to the suppression of the right of individuals and their capacity for creative ways. Both K. Anthony Appiah and Veena Das quite insightfully draw our attention to this problem. The identities whose recognition are pleaded for in the politics of multi-culturalism are the collective identities but valorizing these can lead to the suppression of creative variations within a collective. Appiah urges us to be attentive to the two levels of authenticity—the collective and the individual—and cautions us: "..a politics of identity can be counted on to transform the identities on whose behalf it ostensibly labors. Between the politics of recognition and the politics of compulsion, there is no bright line" (Appiah 1994: 163). In a similar way, Veena Das also helps in widening our universe of discourse when she writes: "An individual's capacity to make sense of the world presupposes the existence of collective traditions; but individuals must be able to experiment with these collective traditions by being allowed to live at their limits. A simultaneous development of the rights of groups and individuals will depend on the extent to which these paradoxes can be given voice, both in the realm of the state and in the realm of the public culture of civil society" (Das 1995: 116).

Now let us direct our attention to two exciting emergent processes where cultural creativity is embodied at the contemporary juncture. One is the rise of what is called the new social movements both in the advanced societies and the developing world which "fight for symbolic and cultural states, for the achievement of new meaning in social action" (Walker 1988:96). These movements are considered socio-cultural rather than socio-political insofar as their objective is to realize a new grammar of creativity in social life rather than capture power. These movements have been bearers of cultural creativity and have offered alternative imagination of self and society often denied by the media-steered systems of our society. They provide an alternative language of self-actualization and social governance— reciprocity, sharing,

co-operation and renunciation. Whether we talk of liberation theology in Latin America, Habitat for Humanity in the USA, Swadhyaya in Western India, new social movements in Western Europe, the Chipko in the Himalayas we find a new mode of social criticism whose objective is not the capture of power but realization of what one such movement, Swadhyaya, calls *sanskrutika krantl*, a cultural revolution.

Another aspect of the culture shift in contemporary advanced societies is the rise of what Roland Inglehart calls a post- materialist culture. In the words of Inglehart (1990: 278), "The major existing political parties were established in an era when economic issues were dominant and the working class was the main base of support for socio-political change. Today, the most heated issues tend to be non-economic, and support for change on these issues comes from postmaterialists, largely of middle-class origin". But Inglehart leaves unexplored the way the emergent post-materialist culture relates to the material deprivation in the advanced industrial societies and the world at large. For instance, what happens to the issue of poverty and unemployment in the discourse of post-materialism? As one of Alain Touraine's informants puts it: "The ecology movement has been totally incapable of explaining to workers and discussing with them the importance of those themes for their day-to-day problems" (Touraine 1983: 71).

This points to the need for developing a cultural critique of the economic system which binds us to many chains of unfreedom. Culture plays an important role in the dynamics of the economy at present. As Scott Lash and John Urry (Lash & Urry 1987) argue, culture is not simply an object of production now, production itself is becoming increasingly cultural. Thus it is no wonder then that the production of aesthetically beautiful and lofty apartments is a vital part of the speculative regime of late capitalism today. But Lash and Urry do not analyze the human cost of such an economy and the enormous problem of homelessness that the shift of capital from production to speculation in lofty real estate creates. Their account of the shifting trajectory of capitalism and its increasing cultural turn is devoid of a normative criticism. We here need a cultural criticism of contemporary capitalism as an institutional regime. As Alf Hornborg argues, "The counterdrive to total commoditization is the cognitive discrimination we know as culture" (Hornborg 1993: 317).

To speak of culture and the contemporary condition without speaking of the communications revolution underway in the present-day world would be an incomplete exercise. Now television is a household reality for many of us in all comers of the world. Television has helped to dissolve the distinction between the "high culture" and "low culture" and we must not fail to acknowledge the democratizing potential in this dissolution. But at the same time we have to realize that television has made us consumers of culture, making us believe that the vicarious consumption of culture is the same thing as its creation (see, Das 1984, 1993). But if many of us become consumers of culture when culture means soap operas, media-steered system images and advertisements for the system of money and power then what is the fate of culture as a source and process of transformation?

A contemporary meditation on self, other and culture cannot absolve itself of the obligation of criticism and creativity. The challenge for us is to continue to create culture in an age where culture itself has been made an object of consumption and commodification. When consumption of what on an average is understood as culture seems to be our new weltanschauung—our new *yugadharma*—the task for us is to recover the ground where cultural creativity as a *sadhana* of self and institutional transformation becomes a powerful ideal in our individual lives and in our public sphere. It is needless to mention that the realization of such a task requires multi-dimensional effort at both individual and collective levels.

Creation of culture is a work of *sadhana*. It is a work of silence. But the culture of TV is the culture of the bombardment of words (Miller 1988). So the first step is to learn to be silent in our age of communications revolution. Silence would help us realize that if we watch television four hours a day or even two hours a day then even God cannot help us from being slipped into what Baudrillard calls the "silent majority" and Toyenbee called "the uncreative majority." But this desired silence may not come so spontaneously. The struggle for the meaning of culture in the next century may begin with the breaking of television sets which would complete the unfinished agenda of transformation inaugurated by the Luddite breaking of the machines of industrial production in the last century.

The Dialectics of Contemporary Transformations

Certain features of the contemporary processes of change immediately arrest our attention. One is having to do with the increasing significance of science and technology in creating ever more powerful systems where the professionals

who manage these are our new "colonial masters," to put it in the memorable phrase of Habermas. Along with this new colonialism of the elites and the holders of power what American social critic Christopher Lasch characterizes as the revolt of the elites, we also witness movements for freedom everywhere which is passionately put in the following lines of Ken Saro-Wiwa (1995: 15), the great soul of the Ogoni tribe whose life was terminated by the dictator of Nigeria: "We are witnessing the birth of a new phenomenon, the decision of a small group of people that they will not tolerate their dehumanization..And all the guns of the world, the casuistry of dictatorship and the threat of death and imprisonment cannot deter a people to secure their God-given rights.."

Saro-Wiwa's struggle and martyrdom emphasize the crucial significance of issue of autonomy and "self-organization," what Gandhi had identified long time ago as the issue of *swaraj*. Speaking of his own predicament and at the same time identifying himself with the sorrow of annihilation of groups and individuals everywhere in the world, Saro-Wiwa tells us: "In virtually every nation-state are several "Ogonies"--despairing and disappearing peoples suffering the yoke of political marginalization, economic strangulation and environmental degradation..What is their future?" The future, as Saro-Wiwa himself (1995: 76) tells us lies in creating what he calls "undiluted federalism." Autonomy movements all over the world--whether in Kashmir, Punjab, Palestine or Tibet--are fighting for "self-organization" and the answer to their struggle lies in creating genuine federal frames of co-ordination. But the question of "self-organization" of groups is related to the "democratic self-legislation" (cf. Habermas 1995) of individuals. Many of the leaders of the autonomy movements use authoritarian means to achieve their goal and one does not know whether their realized "swaraj" would replace one tyranny with another.

Realization of radical democracy is an important challenge at the contemporary juncture and this can provide us an yardstick to evaluate our struggles for autonomy as well as our current economic systems which is based on the split between what Amartya Sen calls "food and freedom." It is not possible here to go into in all its details the exciting question of radical democracy except to point out four most crucial issues in this regard. The first is the issue of economic democracy. The second relates to the need for creating a "reflective self" as the actor and bearer of democracy who is able to overcome the dualism between negative freedom and positive freedom. The third relates to the issue of civil society. Civil society, like the discourse of democracy, has become a globally influential ideal today. But the idea of civil society is very much state-centric and its essential political and modernist bias needs a spiritual and universal opening today (cf. Giddens 1994; Uberoi 1996). Furthermore, the way globalization both threatens and opens up new possibilities for civil society has to be understood. Dahrendorf's argument that "the condition of global competition coupled with social disintegration is not favorable to the constitution of liberty" helps us to understand the threat to civil society because of its consequent twin processes of "individualization" and "centralization" (Dahrendorf 1995: 17). At the same time, the transnational initiatives that proliferate today in the form of transnational people's movements and international NGO activities open up a creative space for establishing people-to-people solidarity without the mediation of the nation-state.

The fourth issue in striving for the realization of radical democracy relates to the creation of transformative institutions and transforming existing institutions. It is because the foundation of many of the existing institutions--from the family to the University--do not fit in well with the agenda of a radical democracy. We now need to move from our preoccupation with electoral democracy to what can be called "dialogic democracy" (cf. Giddens 1995; Giri 1996) both in the sphere of intimate relations and in our public sphere. But the realization of "dialogic democracy" is not possible today without a "radical form of self-government" (cf. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 194). The transformative institutions have to create a ground for such a flowering of criticism and creativity in the life of the individuals. As Claus Offe urges us to realise, "institutional conditions of collective action within civil society" today are "significant factors in the development of moral competence" (Offe 1992: 80). Offe and his colleague Heinze further argue that institutions today have a moral responsibility to educate our desire when we are enmeshed in an "inner conflict between" our "more desirable" and "less desirable desires" (Offe and Heinze 1991: 167).

But how do we create transformative institutions at the contemporary juncture? Can they be created by socio-political struggles alone? Institutions are not manufactured but they are nurtured like flowers and this requires both transformative practice in the life of individuals and an alternative relation of intersubjectivity dynamically at work in the field of culture and society. Alternative relationships founded on intimacy, sincerity and egolessness can be the genealogical grounds of new institutions. Transforming existing institutions requires the work of what Pantham (1995), following Gandhi calls "experimental subjectivity". Such a work brings self-transformation and transformation of society together. As Roberto M. Unger (1987: 400) argues,

> The ability to see institutional transformation as part of an attempt to change the character of our most elementary personal interactions pushes the conflict over the form of society beyond the instrumental struggle over material advantage. It extends strategic prudence into visionary ardor, thereby offering the incitement to sacrifice and self-restraint that cold calculation is rarely enough to ensure.

The agenda of transformation also involves the task of reinterpreting emancipatory ideals and concepts currently in vogue. In a recent insightful paper Immanuel Wallerstein (1995) argues that the first task here is "undoing of the Eurocentric assumptions that have dominated for the last two centuries," an undoing which involves "acute and constant political and cultural struggle." As Wallerstein cautions us about the aristocratic bias and the anti-democratic thrust of liberalism and argues: "We can contribute nothing to a desirable resolution of the terminal crisis of our world-system unless we make it very clear that only a relatively egalitarian, fully democratic historical system is desirable" (Wallerstein 1995: 16).

But Wallerstein seems to have taken for granted the meaning of egalitarianism and democracy. Similar is also the problem with the work of an engaging critic such as Manoranjan Mohanty who concludes his fascinating critique of the contemporary discourse of empowerment with the argument that the concept of empowerment now has to contend with other "concepts like liberation, freedom, and equality" (Mohanty 1995). But Mohanty does not discuss the need for critically examining the genealogies and relevance of these concepts as they proliferate today. An engagement with transformative practice can suggest that all these three concepts are need of reinterpretation today--a reinterpretation not simply for the sake of pleasure of semantic juggiery but as a guide to transformative action. Consider, for instance, a concept like equality and the conjoint ideal of egalitarianism. How do we realize an egalitarian society in the light of failure of both socialism and welfare state to achieve distributive equality? Just reiterating the slogan of equality now won't do. In this context, Anthony Giddens's distinction between distributive equality and "generative equality" has the potential for a new departure (Giddens 1994). A generative model of equality emphasizes upon the mutual collaboration between the affluent and the poor in building the collective foundations of a good life and in overcoming "collective bads" (Giddens 1994: 191). Equalization here is primarily understood in terms of equalization of a quest for a meaningful life and relationship. In a generative striving for equality, inequality in life chances is tackled through changes in life-style (Giddens 1994: 194).

Similar is also the challenge of reinterpretation with an ideal like justice. In thinking about the calling of justice in the human condition the most important challenge is creating what Rawls (1972) himself calls a "capacity for justice" within the individual. But the Rawlsian project is silent about the ontological preparation for this capacity which requires for its fulfillment the realization that "I am more than just my brother's keeper, I am my brother" (Zohar & Marshall 1993: 174).

And now finally coming to the question of rethinking dialectics at the contemporary juncture. Dialectical thinking whether of the Hegelian or Marxian kind has deeply influenced collective action and critical reflection in the last one hundred and fifty years. But how do we look at the theory and practice of dialectics in the light of contemporary changes? As a prelude to this rethinking we can consider the following points. First, dialectics does not always involve the conflict between thesis and anti-thesis and there is also a process of co-operation at work. Second, the dialectical process is a reflective process where self-reflection is an important agent, leading to a fundamental transformation of the phenomena and persons engaged in the process of dialectical interpenetration.

In a recent important work Roy Bhaskar (1993) helps us in this journey of rethinking. Bhaskar (1993: 3) argues that "dialectical processes and configurations are not always sublatory (i.e., suppressive), let alone preservative. Nor are they necessarily characterized by opposition or antagonism..." Reminding us of the ideal of "permanent criticism" discussed in the beginning of this paper, Bhaskar (1993: 20) tells us: "Dialectic is a method..which enables the dialectical commentator to observe the process by which the various categories, notion or forms of consciousness arise out of each other to form ever more inclusive totalities until the system of categories, notions or forms as a whole is completed." But Bhaskar quickly urges us to realize the distinction between "bad totalities" and "good totalities. While "good totalities" are open; bad totalities are, "whether constetionally or otherwise, closed" (Bhaskar 1993: 24). While for Hegel, totality is "constentionally closed" and the idea of "an open totality would conjure up the specter of an infinite regress" (Bhaskar 1993: 25), the objective of a transformed dialectical engagement is to realize open totality.[8]

Bhaskar helps us to relate dialectic to what he calls "the pulse of freedom." I wish to conclude by relating it to the pulse of dialogue. Dialogue is different from oppositional confrontation and is always characterized by a reflexivity about one's own position and transformation of the initial starting point. It is also characterized by a process of resynthesis where people discover that "they have to listen to each other in a new way" (Zohar & Marshall 1993: 236). Like the

dialectical objective of realization of an open totality, the objective of dialogue, after the transformation of one's own initial point of view and mutual deconstruction of each other's positions, is to move in a new order. As Donnah Zohar & Ian Marshall (1993: 236) help us understand this: "This new order is a whole new, emergent level of consciousness in which the participants get beyond the fragmented state of individual consciousness to a shared pool of meaning and value.." Zohar and Marshall (1993: 248) further tell us, "Every time that we try to understand another person's point of view it is a small religious act. It is also a small political act." As we address the challenge of social criticism, cultural creativity and the contemporary dialectics of transformations there is probably an epochal need to understand the spiritual and political significance of dialogue and to transform the world in accordance with such an understanding.

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Notes

1 As Ashis Nandy (1995: 112) helps us understand this: "Thus, psychoanalysts such as Carl Jung, who were especially open to the Indian world view, found few adherents in India; Marxist scholars such as Ernst Bloch, who sought to establish a continuity between the Marxist vision and the older religious worldviews, never enjoyed a vogue in non-European societies organized around religion."

2 Achyutananda Das says that in the spiritual life of a person, the first bhava or feeling is the bhava of Kshatriya. First he has to fight, fight with one's ripus (enemies) and annihilate them. Then comes the feeling of vaishya. At that time, a bhakta wants to do commerce with one's god, he wants to enhance his wealth. The third step in this ascending order is the step of Brahmana bhava. At that time one spends time with rituals; the worship continues with mantra and murti. And the fourth stage is the stage of Shudra bhava during which one wants to serve God and the other without any precondition. For Achyutananda Das, the highest stage of self is the stage where one acquires Shudra bhava (cf. Das 1992).

3 For Heidegger, "co-being means not a social juxtaposition but rather a constitutive juncture or correlation" (Dallmayr 1993: 182).

4 What Nandy writes about bread and freedom applies to the logic of a hierarchical and successive formulation (in terms of freedom coming after paper) between power and freedom: "...there is not only Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs but also a half-articulated anti-Maslowian logic which says that if freedom can be an ego defense and not a real substitute for bread, bread too can be an ego defense and not a real substitute for freedom" (Nandy 1986: 250).

5 For Foucault, a critic is a "specific intellectual" as different from a "universal intellectual" and "one dimension of criticism for the specific intellectual is the critique of universality perse.." (Caputo & Yount 1993: 8).

6 In order to understand the work and the critical significance of "metaculture" let us consider the way three different thinkers use it in three different contexts. Speaking of the predicament of globalization, anthropologist Ulf Hannerz uses it in the following manner: "A more genuine cosmopolitanism entails a certain metacultural position. There is first of all a willingness to engage with the other.." On the other hand sociologist Roland Robertson uses it in the following manner: "there is a need for more discussion of what I call metaculture as a way of addressing the varying links between culture and social structure and individual and collective action" (Robertson 1992: 34). Theologian Rienhold Niebuhr sums up its significance in the following lines:

> We cannot expect even the wisest of nations to escape every peril of moral and spiritual complacency; for nations have always been constitutionally self-righteous. But it will make a difference whether the culture in which politics of nations are formed is only as deep and high as nation's ideals; or whether there is a dimension in the culture from the standpoint of which the element of vanity in all human ambitions and achievements is discerned.

7 For instance, Jonathan Benthall, in his comments on Stolcke's essay writes: "The last seven words of Stolcke's lecture suggest that she wants all state power to be weakened which sounds utopian" (Benthall 1995: 13)

8 In this context, what Bhaskar (1993: 26) writes is noteworthy: "Even if it is admitted that there is some kind of inadequacy or lack in an open totality..., there is no inadequacy in the thought of an open totality, which is what is at stake here."

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