The Teatro del Lago and After

The Teatro del Lago was a "movie palace" dating from the golden era of Hollywood.[1] Though not as expansive or ornate as many, with its heyday already long past by the time my friends and I frequented it as teenagers in the late 1950s and 1960s, it nonetheless possessed an impressive, if tarnished, splendor. The lot on which it stood was sandwiched between two suburbs on Chicago's North Shore, known locally as "No Man's Land," an appropriate name for a location in which celluloid dreams were shown. The theater has long since been razed, of course, and its place, inevitably, taken by an upscale shopping mall echoing its predecessor in name and style, if not in whimsy. Whenever I go back to the North Shore and drive past the lot, I still refer to it as "No Man's Land," though nobody except the old-timers remember it, and remember even less that a theater once stood there. I believe, though I am not absolutely certain, that it was in the Teatro del Lago in 1963 that I saw the film *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) for the first time.

My reaction to the film was apparently enthusiastic in spite of its Wagnerian length. According to my mother, I couldn't stop talking about it for weeks at the dinner table, especially Peter O'Toole's performance. I couldn't persuade her to see it, however. The harder I tried to make the story clear to her, the more I realized that a simple retelling was quite beside the point for capturing the movie experience. Besides, she said, she didn't have the time. Who wanted to see a movie about a lot of sand and sun anyway? And who cares about the British?

When in December of 1989 the reconstructed version was showing in one of the Chicago theaters with a large screen, I reminded my mother of our conversation of more than twenty-five years ago. What excuse did she have not to see it, I asked, now that her children were grown up and her husband retired? She agreed, and we made the trek on an icy, blustery day; first by car to the suburban El station, then on the El to Chicago's Loop, and finally trudging several blocks to the theater. By this time I was starting to get nervous. Would she be bored? Would she get angry at the effort expended, the time wasted? As it turned out, I needn't have worried. Already by the intermission she was hooked. "God," she exclaimed, "it's nice to be reminded of how gorgeous O'Toole and Sharif were." When we left the theater, I was the one who was complaining. "We should have our heads examined, braving this god-awful weather to see a movie made over twenty years ago," I grumbled as I slapped my mittened hands together to get the blood circulating. I said this partly in sympathy for my mother, who was not in good health at the time and even in some pain. She would have none of my pity, however, whether directed at her or myself. She stopped and straightened. "Steven, have you forgotten what Lawrence said?" I gave her a blank look. "'The trick is . . . not minding that it hurts.'" With that salvo, she pulled her muffler around her face as though it were her burnoose and walked resolutely into the wind, across her own wintry Nefud.

For weeks afterward, an image occasionally popped into mind. It was the Teatro del Lago with its white plastered walls, red-tiled roof, black wrought-iron grills, ornate gilt and brass railings, and wooden shutters. The image then became more complex. I saw a boy inside the theater who looked a little like I imagine myself to have looked at the age of thirteen, with a round face and red hair in a crew cut, sitting quietly in his seat. Dim reflections of light flickered on his face. I would attempt to shift the angle of vision in the daydream, to see the movie as the boy saw it. Why, for instance, did it fascinate him that Lawrence dressed in native garb? Why did he find the relationship between his two servant boys charming and then the friendship developing between Lawrence and Ali intriguing? Why, ultimately, was he simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the main character? What emotionally or psychologically might the movie have meant to him as a thirteen-year-old that it should have returned to him through the years like a lingering ghost? I have even wondered to what extent the film he saw in the Teatro del Lago inspired him to go to the Middle East.

The film critic Janet Maslin has written:

> First love between a person and a film can be as intoxicating as first love between two people. It can mean just as much crazy behavior, just as many sleepless nights. As a young adolescent, I became so desperately obsessed with a certain film that I saw it over and over, spent years studying the life of its hero, regarding him as a kind of role model and even dragged my family on a long, dusty pilgrimage to a place where he had lived. If one measure of a film's greatness is its power to affect the lives of those who see it, then "Lawrence of Arabia" must be the best film I know.[2]

One woman, explaining how she felt when she saw *Lawrence of Arabia* for the first time at the age of eleven, expressed similar sentiments. "It was like having a crush on someone," she explained to me. "I drew pictures of Peter O'Toole and made little figurines of camels and Arabs out of clay. It was my secret obsession." Partly, that is what I wish to understand in this book: the power of this film to have touched so deeply many people's lives.

> "I was transfixed," Spielberg recalls a quarter of a century later. "After the experience of seeing *Lawrence of Arabia,* I never wanted to do anything else with my life but make films." "I had never seen anything on such a breathtaking scale that had real-looking people in it," says Scorsese, "people who seemed as if they could have come out of the world I lived in."[3]

And here is film critic Stephen Farber, one of the most perceptive commentators on David Lean's work:

> When I first saw "Lawrence of Arabia" I was 19, and it was one of the films that suggested to me what movies might attempt and accomplish, the special power and excitement that made them the great art form of our time. It had the same effect on many of my friends in college, and I still find in meeting people who are close to me in age—young people who are not necessarily film professionals or cineastes but love movies—that "Lawrence of Arabia" is almost invariably one of the films they remember most vividly. . . . "Lawrence of Arabia" was one of the few films made during the sixties that touched the imaginations of a generation.[4]

I would have thought that a generation growing up after mine would have difficulty identifying with this movie, and yet I have been surprised by some of the responses I have heard from its viewers. When I once discovered *Lawrence* playing on the monitors of a local video store I frequent, I asked the manager who happened to be waiting on me at the time why this movie was being shown. She blushed slightly. She confessed that it was her favorite movie, adding jokingly that she "inflicted"

it (because of its length) on her help from time to time. I asked why she liked it, explaining that I was writing a book on the movie and was casually interviewing people about it. "After all," I said, trying to provoke her with one of the standard complaints made by women, "there are no female characters in it." She nodded, observing, "I suppose the situation he was in precluded much contact with women." She became more reflective. "It's the Heart of Darkness theme that I find intriguing." By coincidence, we happened to be watching the scene in which Lawrence's guide Tafas is killed by Sherif Ali. Two other people in their midtwenties who had seen and liked the movie reiterated the Conradian theme, one of them comparing it to *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which he said was "sort of my generation's *Lawrence of Arabia.*" Nor has a contemporary generation of filmmakers been left untouched by its influence. Anyone who has seen *The English Patient* (1996) will know what I mean.

While expressing enthusiasm for a film like *Lawrence of Arabia* might be unproblematical to some, it becomes disturbing to others. It is one of those movies that artistically high-minded cineastes hate to love as one of the most pleasurable Hollywood epics ever made and that the same critics might love to hate as a quintessential, orientalist discourse.[5] However, more than one academic has turned out to be a closet fan of *Lawrence of Arabia* and has blushingly confessed, "How I loved it!" after I had divulged my fascination with the movie. It is almost as though one were disabled from taking a complex position, at least in public, toward a work of art that is politically reprehensible on many counts, if one wants to remain loyal to the project of multiculturalism and sensitive to the cultural representation of others.

I have learned that a general problem of subjectivity emerges for the cultural critic who would interest herself or himself in a "repugnant" subject. For example, Tania Modleski found it difficult to explain herself as a feminist when she "liked" Hitchcock's films, knowing full well how they had been excoriated by feminists.[6] A similar risk was faced by Linda Williams, a feminist scholar who honestly admitted "enjoying" certain aspects of pornographic film. As she explains in her book:

> For a woman to admit to any . . . coincidence of scholarly and sexual pleasure undercuts her authority in a way that does not occur with a male scholar. It is not surprising, then, that I should want to protect myself against the perceived contaminations of a "filthy subject"—lest I be condemned along with it. At the same time, however, I feel it is important not to perpetuate the pervasive attitude among feminists that pornography is both the cause and the symptom of all women's problems. For even though I know that the slightest

> admission that not every image of every film was absolutely disgusting to me may render my insights worthless to many women, I also know that not to admit some enjoyment is to perpetuate an equally invidious double standard that still insists that the nonsexual woman is the credible, "good" woman. Clearly, it is difficult to strike a proper attitude toward pornography.[7]

As a man who would like to enter into a conversation with scholars working on issues of gender and as an anthropologist who wants to be respected for his ethnographic work in the Middle East, I know that my fascination with a movie that seems to be yet another "buddy picture" ridiculing Arabs puts me in hardly a more enviable position.

The way Modleski expresses the dilemma, it is a matter of one's subjectivity wanting redemption. As a girl, she loved watching Hitchcock's films. Did her identification with them mean that she was herself "masochistic," which is to be placed in the victim position that perpetuates a subordination from which she and other women would wish to escape? Did her continued enjoyment of his films indicate that as an adult she was beyond redemption? What was the way out of the dilemma? Was it a matter of her being able to resist Hitchcock's patriarchal constructions by creating an alternative position from which to view and judge them? Or were the films themselves deeply ambivalent about the patriarchal constructions they were articulating, and was she then as a viewer able to work these contradictions into productive, alternative readings? I cannot imagine that, even as a teenager, I would have enjoyed *Lawrence of Arabia* if it had been as racist or sexist or orientalist as cultural criticisms inspired from many sources might condemn it to be. As a thirteen-year-old, I was in fact acutely conscious of the problem of cultural stereotyping and the damage it could do, having been subjected to it myself as a recent immigrant from Germany to the United States. I think I would have taken grave exception to it in any form that I could have noticed at that age and historical moment in film reception. Of course, that does not mean that "objectifications" of the "Arab" don't exist in the movie, but rather that they are more subtle and ambivalent than critics might presuppose of a product from Hollywood.

As is obvious from the comments of Modleski and Williams, I am not alone in my dissatisfaction with some of the currents of today's ideological criticisms. The problem is this: How does one get to an intellectually adequate criticism of such artistically complex and ideologically loaded works? I suggest that we may, in fact, be entering a new phase, which I will call "dialectical critique." In part this change of critical practice has to do with the way we now view dominant institutions as no longer nec-

essarily monolithic or uniform, and therefore the works they produce as containing contradictions that become more, not less, problematical for hegemonic projects. Another related view of power suggests that the difference between center and margin, between dominant groups and subalterns, is not as stark as may have once been supposed; that, in fact, a subtle and complex collaboration has historically existed between the two. Yet another reformulation of margin and center, one that I will explore in this book, is to consider possibilities within the center of producing works that are critical of the hegemonic project they propose and of those individuals who perpetuate it. We might productively ask a set of questions of such works. What conditions encourage self-criticism, and what conditions stifle it? Is the moment sustainable or fleeting, and why? Works produced in such a moment would be read *dialectically*. One not only would hunt for the ways they construct cultural representations that perpetuate the domination of some over others—an important project that I would not want to block—but also would ferret out the unease of their producers in regard to such representations, an unease that may be a covert or explicit criticism of the center and its domination of the margins.

Although it is rarely called "dialectical" (sometimes a phrase such as "reading against the grain" is more common), one can see this approach emerging in a number of fields of criticism. In this introduction I will consider just two of these—feminist film criticism and postcolonial studies.[8] Let us turn our attention, first, to the way in which the feminist critique of the film spectator has evolved in the last twenty years into what I call here a dialectical critique.

As it was originally formulated, the spectator was not an actual person but a role or a position that the film constructed for its audience. Since the literature from which the concept emerged was primarily a feminist one, it is the issue of gender that the concept initially addressed. Its most influential formulation was given by Laura Mulvey in a now classic article that combined trenchant film criticism with an original application of psychoanalytic theory.[9] She criticized classic Hollywood cinema for presenting narratives and characters that demanded an identification with a male spectator's point of view, regardless of whether the actual viewer were male or female, in accordance with the patriarchal order dominant in the society at large. If one is female under such a regime, one has no choice but to identify with the male's "gaze." More is at stake here than sexist stereotypes in the way men represent women on the screen, however. The critique was meant to go deep into the cine-

matic apparatus, arguing that the camera is used to photograph women in countless, subtle ways that objectify their bodies as objects of male desire.

Over the years, Mulvey has modified her original formulation somewhat,[10] and feminists in the 1980s have begun to doubt the hegemonic power of the patriarchal regime that her model presumes. Without at all wishing to downplay the power of the patriarchy, they have insisted that it may be more complex than originally supposed, in that Hollywood films contain enough internal contradictions to allow for subversions of the conventional male gaze or even constructions of an alternative "female" spectator with which women and some men can identify.[11]

Modleski's book on the films of Alfred Hitchcock, for example, is at heart a critique of the unidirectional way in which an earlier feminist theory has tended to read movies made by patriarchal film directors. She argues, "Feminist criticism has frequently tended to see only one aspect of female spectatorship—the complicity or the resistance; I have argued throughout this book, however, that woman's response is complex and contradictory and requires an understanding of woman's placement on the margins of patriarchal culture—at once inside and outside its codes and structures."[12] At another point she invokes the idea of a "characteristic" female spectator who, as a result of her subordinate positioning within patriarchy, is more than likely to develop a "dialectical" response to cinema (of the sort alluded to in the preceding quotation). Of course, Modleski would include herself within this category. It is understandable, therefore, not only that she would take the critical position she does but that, by the end of her book, she would be describing her project as "the ongoing development of female subjectivity,"[13] both her own and that of other women who "like" Hitchcock's films but don't want to think of themselves as masochists. Therefore, to call her reading "dialectical," as I have done, does not depart too much from her own text and stated intentions. In a position somewhat analogous to Modleski is Carol Clover, who found herself enjoying horror movies in spite of the fact that they have a reputation for showing men as sadistic victimizers of women.[14] On closer examination, however, they seemed to offer a far more complex representation of both genders, often reversing conventional roles or blurring their boundaries, and overturning one's expectations of a mastering, voyeuristic male (audience) gaze when it identifies with a female victim.

Let us now turn to postcolonial studies to see whether what I call a dialectical criticism can be identified in it as well. To begin, it is necessary

to summarize Edward Said's critique of orientalism which is many respects the seminal work in this field.[15] According to Said, orientalism is a structure of knowledge composed of "representations" (or what he elsewhere also calls "stereotypes"). Some of these representations assert, for example, that the Orient is a "mysterious" place, "decadent" and "sensual," or that its peoples live in endemically "violent" societies and understand only "force" in political dealings, or that its religions are "fanatical" and their governments hopelessly despotic, incapable of assuring a dignity of life for their citizens, and so forth. These representations presuppose a distinction between "us" and "them" or "self" and "other," a distinction so binary and strongly drawn that it carries with it hostile attitudes toward the non-West. Furthermore, because these representations are produced by "experts" in the academy or by "geniuses" in literature, they become authoritative for the reading public and have the power, as Foucault would put it, to constitute an object not merely of study but of reality itself. The "episteme" of orientalism has been in place for a very long time—for how long is a matter of considerable controversy, though, even within Said's own writings. It is even more important to note that relatively little can be done to dislodge it, in Said's view, because institutions of knowledge tend to operate as closed systems—that is, as endless cycles of self-referring statements—allowing for few counterrepresentations that might challenge authoritative knowledge. Significantly, Said charges that these representations that pass for knowledge are tied to a project of power, and he specifies what that project is: the ends of Western imperialism to dominate the (post)colonial world.

Since the publication of *Orientalism* (1978), the examination of the ways in which Western academic or scientific knowledge and artistic production perpetuate the construct of the "orient" and are tied to Western colonial projects has continued at a furious pace, resulting in what is now one of the most flourishing fields of cultural criticism. In the process of expanding, however, postcolonial studies has also begun the healthy process of questioning some of its own assumptions and attempting new directions of criticism. In my judgment, nowhere is this criticism more innovative and insightful than in the work of Homi Bhabha[16] and Sara Suleri.[17] Let me review some of their work, and in the process clarify what I mean by dialectical criticism.

One way of critiquing Said, while remaining sympathetic to his overall project, is to suggest that a text can be read more ambivalently than he would, and then to ask what difference such a reading would make

for our understanding of representation, subjectivity, and power in the colonial context. Homi Bhabha says of Said's orientalist critique, for example, that "where the originality of this pioneering theory loses its inventiveness, and for me its usefulness, is with Said's reluctance to engage with alterity and ambivalence in the articulation of orientalist discourse."[18] Bhabha illustrates his criticism with an examination of the stereotype,[19] asserting that the stereotype, far from offering a secure point of identification for the colonizer, as Said would have it, is in fact "a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive."[20] The ambivalence that the stereotype provokes in the colonizer consequently subverts the binariness of the "us" versus "them" distinction; that is, the "them" begins to look more and more like the "us" in colonial representation. How can such a resemblance come about? Bhabha's reading of colonial discourse would have it that the representation of the "them" is a "return of the oppressed [this, I gather, is an intended pun, not a typographical error] —those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire."[21] Bhabha urges us to include a "traumatized" colonizing subject in our calculation of the power/knowledge nexus in addition to the traumatized colonized subject that is more usually considered.[22] The reason for this insistence is, I presume, that such a subject, producing such ambivalent representations of the other, would tend to subvert, as much as it would impose, its will to power over the other, thereby rendering the hegemonic project of colonialism unstable.

This insightful and quite productive reading of orientalist texts, and the alterity they construct as inherently ambivalent, owes much to Freud, especially to his formulation of fetishism.[23] Freud's notion of the fetish, as I understand it, is specifically related to castration anxiety, which is projected onto a symbol whose very superabundance of meaning is supposed to conceal the "lack" that the subject fears within himself. The concept had already made its way into film criticism, of course, especially in the work of feminist critics such as Mulvey, who argued that the film spectator would gaze at the female as a fetishized object. What I think interests Bhabha is less Freud's explanation in terms of a universalist oedipal scenario and castration complex than the emotional *structure* of the fetishized sign—- an unconscious tension that it encapsulates between desire and disavowal, affinity and aversion.

With regard to Bhabha's reading of Freud, it is curious, however, that not much attention is paid to his famous essay "The 'Uncanny'" (1919),

where we learn that the uncanny has a lot to do with ambivalence as concretized in the "double," among other symbols. This apparent elision of a crucial essay on ambivalence is interesting because the double has relevance to Bhabha's concern with mimicry in colonialist discourse.[24] Bhabha's examples of mimicry are almost all of the kind in which the colonized subject's persona, or the "other," is made to appear like the colonizer's "self"—appear like, but not be the same as, the self, for that is the nature of ambivalence—but I presume that he is at the same time concerned with the ways in which the mimicry would work in the other direction (as in "going native"). In either case, according to Bhabha: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.* Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence. . . . the authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy."[25] My reason for bringing up the connection between Bhabha's analysis of mimicry[26] and Freud's notion of the double as a manifestation of the uncanny is that Freud emphasizes an aspect of ambivalence that Bhabha ignores, an aspect that expands my notion of dialectical criticism. Not only is the double a supremely ambivalent sign in Freud's formulation of the uncanny; it is also what Freud calls the ego's "conscience," and in later essays will refer to as the ego ideal or superego. As he explains, the double "is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind."[27] As an obvious example of mimicry through doubling, consider the character of Sherif Ali in the film *Lawrence of Arabia.* In roughly Part One of the movie, he is an ambivalent, fetishized object of mimicry *for* Lawrence. But as the story unfolds, his function as a double expands (especially so as Lawrence goes native), becoming in the end Lawrence's conscience, as evidenced in several scenes in which he admonishes his friend to avoid bloodshed. Thus I want to do more than point out the ambivalences in the orientalist representation of the other that operate to destabilize the colonial project; I also want to consider those moments in colonial discourse that allow for possibilities of self-criticism on the part of the colonizer and thus would further place in abeyance the colonial project or even subvert it.

A critic who in my estimation would be sympathetic to this approach is Sara Suleri. Like Bhabha, she too is concerned with breaking down the binarisms that have influenced the criticism of orientalist discourse. Regarding the distinction between colonizer and colonized, as well as be-

tween margin and center, she remarks that "the story of colonial encounter is in itself a radically decentering narrative that is impelled to realign with violence any static binarism."[28] She concludes that the discourse of Anglo-Indian history and literature "demands to be read against the grain of the rhetoric of binarism that informs, either explicitly or implicitly, contemporary critiques of alterity in colonial discourse."[29] The result of eschewing such a binary discourse, Suleri argues, is to view domination and subordination in less rigid terms as well; the colonizer is not monolithically powerful, nor the colonized correspondingly powerless. She would destabilize the power of the colonizer by suggesting ways of reading terror or horror into his or her colonial texts, a psychic trauma symptomatic of anxiety about dispossession of, or even aversion toward, the imperialist project. "The stories of colonialism—in which heterogeneous cultures are yoked by violence—offer nuances of trauma that cannot be neatly partitioned between colonizer and colonized."[30]

One can get a sense of the difference between Suleri's and Said's conceptions of cultural criticism by examining their analyses of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), a story about an orphaned boy of an Irish soldier who grows up in the Indian city of Lahore. Because he is fully conversant, linguistically and culturally, with the city's "native" context, Kim is enlisted by a Colonel Creighton, an ethnographer, to collect intelligence information useful to the British.

Said is a great admirer of the text, though in the end, agreeing (with the American critic Edmund Wilson) that "the conflict between Kim's colonial service and loyalty to his Indian companions is unresolved" but adding (beyond Wilson) that it is unresolved "not because Kipling could not face it, but because for Kipling there was no conflict; one purpose of the novel is in fact to show the absence of conflict once Kim is cured of his doubts."[31] For Suleri, both Wilson's and Said's readings "seem unwilling to address" an irony in Kipling's story. Like Said, she remarks upon Kim's ostensible ability to "pass for a native," and not only that, but to transform himself into many *different* guises of "native" identity. For Said, this virtuoso cultural impersonation, this linguistic ventriloquism, is a delirious fantasy, a blatant expression of imperial control that seems to be saying "Isn't it possible in India to do everything? be anything? go anywhere with impunity?"[32] For Suleri, on the other hand, Kim's mobility is only apparent because, far from being able to choose, as Wilson suggests (and Said concurs), whether to play the Great Game, Kim's tragedy is that "[he] is the Game, and finally is unable to separate

it from the parameters of his own history."[33] What she stresses, then, is the vicariousness rather than the supposed empowerment of Kim's ambiguous cultural positioning. Colonial messages for which Kim is a relayer are not transparently read; rather, they are fraught with possibilities of misunderstanding, which render the enterprise of intelligence gathering precarious and hence Kim's footing in the Great Game insecure. In the end does Kim have any choice but to join the colonial regime and betray his Indian friends? In other words, what appears to be a "choice" may be nothing more than coercion in disguise. For Suleri "The marvelous boy [is] an analogy for colonial casualty"[34] who has been thoroughly used (and one might say abused) by the colonial system.

Suleri's strategy of reading might be seen as the antithesis of Said's, which is to dispute rather than to grant to the colonizer his or her authority and unquestioned confidence in the Great Game. The "heart of darkness" in orientalist narratives, the panic or horror that they repress, confirms the sense of powerlessness of their producers. Imperialism is an inherently unstable project, which, if it believes in its absolute power, is *delusional* in that belief and therefore anxiously concealing its own doubts. It is far more enabling, in my view, to explore the possibilities of such ironic and ultimately destabilizing or decentering readings of the colonial tradition, much in the spirit of Suleri, than to foreclose them. Indeed, I think this is one of the most promising directions in which the field of postcolonial criticism can proceed.

If Kipling's apprehension about empire is largely intuitive or unconscious, it is far more self-conscious, far more overtly critical, in the case of Edmund Burke's indictment of the East India Company and its handling of affairs, as Suleri demonstrates in her splendid chapters on Burke's parliamentary rhetoric.[35] However, though specific colonialist practices might have been called into question, the notion of empire tout court was not. But there are always limits to criticism. The interesting question, it seems to me, is what those limits might be and the historical conditions that set them. Admittedly, that is too large a question to attempt to answer here. Less ambitiously, I would simply observe that the reading of colonial texts has advanced considerably since Said's pioneering work, and I would put forward the term "dialectical criticism" as a way to capture that kind of reading. That is, colonial texts not only represent the Other in the most disturbingly orientalist ways imaginable that Said was one of the first to criticize, but they may at the same time counteract those representations, either by the ambivalences (read also

horror or terror) they betray or, perhaps more rarely, by consciously engaging in a criticism of colonial practices and regimes.

Something like this kind of criticism of Said's project has been made before, though in entirely different terms, by Marxists. Sadeq al-'Azm[36] and Aijaz Ahmad,[37] for instance, have noted that Said is virtually silent about the criticisms against colonialism that were voiced in the West almost from the beginning of the period of European expansion and economic exploitation. They claim that Marxist literature was particularly vociferous in such attacks. No doubt in response to such criticisms, Said attempted in his most recent book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), to include intellectual currents and political movements in European societies that countered imperialism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—only to dismiss them as small-scale, sporadic, and in the long run ineffectual. If his assessment is valid, it raises the more general question of the effectiveness of all such criticism, including Said's; or to put it differently, we have to examine the conditions under which political criticism becomes not only possible but also potent.

In an effort to give these emergent critical practices more theoretical grounding, I argue that we might profit—though not without important reservations—from the Frankfurt school's formulation of dialectical criticism. This is not the place in which to describe the history of this important group of German scholars (most notably, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse) who achieved prominence in the days of the Weimar Republic and many of whom came to the United States in the Nazi period.[38] Nor is it necessary to explain the important differences between them regarding their specific concerns and approaches. Of the individuals identified with the school, probably Adorno and Benjamin are most relevant to the concerns in this book; the former because of his influential philosophical statement on (negative) dialectics,[39] the latter because of his formulation of commodity fetishism and the fact that he took works of popular culture extremely seriously.[40]

The Frankfurt school derived its idea of dialectical criticism from Marx, though perhaps the Marx who was most heavily influenced by Hegel. According to Marx, any cultural phenomenon such as a work of art not only expresses an ideologically dominant position in society but also reflects something of the contradictions latent in the material conditions at the moment of its production. Thus, every work or cultural phenomenon must be "read" or "interpreted" dialectically, as contain-

ing at the same time a representation of reality that is historically dominant and a representation or representations that contradict it, as though anticipating a (not necessarily bright) future that will undermine the hegemonic status quo. Adorno tended to favor an "immanent" dialectical critique: that is, he would push the presuppositions of a particular system to their limits until their dialectical opposite would emerge.

Unfortunately, when it came to analyzing the products of what Horkheimer and Adorno called the "culture industry," they tended to be quite *un*dialectical, seeing them as blindly reinforcing the status quo; in U.S. mass culture, for example, as the totalitarian equivalents of the European fascist state. The beginning of their essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" sets the pessimistic tone: "Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system."[41] Gone is the notion of internal contradiction. Complete is the hegemony of the dominant ideological position. Even when the culture industry comes up with novel forms, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that this newness is only apparent, leading to reabsorption into traditional forms. With regard to film specifically, they were most cynical. Thus, they asserted that in the movies "sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts . . . no scope is left for the imagination."[42] Such criticisms have to be taken seriously, of course, and I will entertain them in chapter 3, where I discuss problems of reflexivity in film spectatorship, but in the end the criticisms of Horkheimer and Adorno on the culture industry seem too one-sided. Perhaps Adorno was overcommitted to the avant-garde as a critical-political force in society: compare, for example, his analyses of Schoenberg and the possibilities unleashed by atonal music with his far more disparaging account of "decadent" jazz.[43]

Benjamin's writings on popular culture—though fragmentary and elusive—offer a corrective to this one-sidedness. His formulation, at least from my point of view, has the added advantage of synthesizing psychoanalytical frameworks with a materialist Marxist theory of cultural production. The mass production of art, according to Benjamin, may on the one hand destroy a work's "aura" (its distinction or value arising from a particular placement in its originary context),[44] but in the realms of photography and film it may also enhance what he called the "optical unconscious."[45] Meanings might become associated with a photographic or filmic image that could startle, charm, and disturb. As

a result, products of the culture industry might quicken rather than, as Horkheimer and Adorno predicted, deaden the imagination.

As long as the preceding qualifications are kept in mind, especially in regard to the remarks of Horkheimer and Adorno on the culture industry, I think the Frankfurt school's notion of dialectical criticism can be usefully employed in the analysis of films like *Lawrence of Arabia.* The challenge lies in understanding in what specific ways a work may be internally "contradictory." Here psychological phenomena can be of the utmost importance. For example, I have argued that the idea of ambivalence developed by Freud and lately recouped for postcolonial criticism by Homi Bhabha can be seen as a dialectic of the unconscious (that is, a *negation* of a powerful psychological identification). Alongside psychological phenomena such as ambivalence, I would put poetic figures such as irony, which, according to literary critic Kenneth Burke,[46] is another way of understanding dialectic. And finally, there is the form of counterargument or logical thought—what philosophers since Plato have mostly meant by dialectic—which I think also enters into a film such as *Lawrence of Arabia.* In other words, while works of the culture industry construct representations of reality that accord with the interests of a certain hegemonic position (however defined economically, socially, and so forth)—the contours of which should be exposed and traced by the critic—they also contain the dialectical negations of those representations, either implicitly and unconsciously or explicitly and consciously, whether in the form of irony or of logical syllogism, which the analyst is equally obliged to unearth.

Some people will disagree with this two-way critical practice. For them it will seem sufficient for criticism to expose the ways in which a work reaffirms a dominant ideology. It is at that point, I will argue, that earlier kinds of feminist film criticism as well as the Saidean formulation of orientalism and its critique have stopped. The result of such unidirectional criticism is to give the impression, ironically, that the work of art is impervious to criticism and change because of its monolithic quality. Why, in fact, bother to criticize it at all? But there is something deeper at stake in the dialectical exercise than exposing the weak points in the work of art or the stresses at which it is most vulnerable to critical pressure. It is also important to identify those aspects of the work—if any exist at all—where it seems to be engaged in a criticism of its *own* hegemonic project. To some, again, this may be rendering to Caesar more than he deserves, on the assumption that any work coming from the center is only "falsely" self-critical. The corollary of this view is that the only

"genuine" or "authentic" criticism is the one issuing from groups that are the most oppressed or marginalized in the system. The conclusion might be, for example, that it is the workers more than the bourgeoisie who are capable of the most sustained and penetrating criticism of the evils of capitalism—the exception of at least Engels notwithstanding. The project of taking seriously the self-criticism contained in works produced by hegemonic institutions such as Hollywood should not be interpreted as uncritical approval of those works, and even less so as an effort to redeem those institutions; rather, it is to identify what, if any, critical awareness of the hegemonic project and its consequences exists in those works, making it the basis of positive transformation.

Having discussed one notion of dialectical criticism in the Frankfurt school—a critique immanent in the work of art containing its own contradictions—it is time now to consider another one connected to it, which is more usually understood as "materialist" in a narrow sense. It has to do with the relationship of the work of art to its economic contexts and technological production, questions that are particularly relevant to a Hollywood film like *Lawrence of Arabia.*

Lawrence of Arabia was an international and independently produced film of the sort that emerged in the 1950s after the studio system had collapsed and Hollywood was attempting to compete with television through large-scale productions involving stars from different countries. International film also commodified images of otherness, images that had to be more, not less, "authentic" as audiences in the United States and Europe became more knowledgeable and sophisticated in the postwar period through business travel and tourism. These and other themes are explored in chapter 1. For example, in the cinema of David Lean from the early fifties until his final uncompleted project, there was a continuous preoccupation with international themes such as tourism, war, travel, and colonialism, and this after a period of complete immersion in the British film industry as well as in British cultural subjects. As Hollywood realized that its films had to sell in international markets if it was to recoup its huge investments, it was also willing to accede to the demands of authenticity made by the countries into whose midst it was permitted to shoot its films. Even though these countries and their audiences were hardly on an equal footing with Hollywood, they were not without influence in shaping more complex and sympathetic images of their peoples and cultures. One could go further and claim that foreign countries sometimes saw it as within their political interests to collude