

THE
IDEOLOGIES
OF THEORY
FREDRIC JAMESON

THE IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY

THE IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY



FREDRIC JAMESON



VERSO

London • New York

This edition first published by Verso 2008
Copyright © Fredric Jameson 2008
All rights reserved

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Verso

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG
USA: 20 Jay Street, Suite 1010, Brooklyn, NY 11201
www.versobooks.com

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN-13: 978-1-84467-277-6 (pbk)
ISBN-13: 978-1-84467-276-9 (hbk)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset in Garamond by WestKey Ltd, Falmouth, Cornwall
Printed in the USA by Maple Vail

An die Nachgeborenen:
Seth, Anne, Justin, Jenny,
Cassie, Stacy, Cade, Charlotte

Contents

Introduction	ix
--------------	----

PART I. SITUATIONS OF THEORY

1 Metacommentary	5
2 The Ideology of the Text	20
3 Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan	77
4 Criticism in History	125
5 Symbolic Inference; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis	144
6 Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography	161
7 Modernism and Its Repressed; or, Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist	175
8 Morality Versus Ethical Substance; or, Aristotelian Marxism in Alasdair MacIntyre	189
9 On Negt and Kluge	194
10 Benjamin's Readings	222
11 Foreword to Jean-François Lyotard's <i>The Postmodern Condition</i>	243
12 Foreword to Jacques Attali's <i>Noise: The Political Economy of Music</i>	256
13 The Theoretical Hesitation: Benjamin's Sociological Predecessor	264
14 How Not to Historicize Theory	286

PART II. SYNTAX OF HISTORY

1	The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller	309
2	Architecture and the Critique of Ideology	344
3	Pleasure: A Political Issue	372
4	Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse	386
5	Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism	415
6	Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate	434
7	Marxism and Historicism	451
8	Periodizing the 60s	483
9	Foreword to A. J. Greimas' <i>On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory</i>	516
10	On the Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity	534
11	Space and Congestion: Rem Kool Haas and <i>S, M, L, XL</i>	555
12	Future City	563
13	Marc Angenot and the Literary History of a Year	577
14	On "Cultural Studies"	598
15	The End of Temporality	636
	Index	659
	Acknowledgements	677

Introduction

Ideology is the mediatory concept par excellence, bridging gaps between the individual and the social, between fantasy and cognition, between economics and aesthetics, objectivity and the subject, reason and the unconscious, the private and the public. This is to say that ideology is not an achieved concept at all, but rather a problematic, itself subject to profound historical change and upheaval on both slopes of its mediatory function. It is subject also to slippage in either direction, always on the point of being absorbed by the purely subjective or dissipating out into the ideas in the air and the fashions of the zeitgeist, the values of groups and the facts-of-the-matter of their objective situations. But if ideology is grasped as either psychological or sociological, it has for all intents and purposes disappeared as a productive operation. The word, meanwhile, is inevitably tainted by history, in the form of its relationship with Marxism as a tradition and a political practice, as well as its origins in the philosophical context of a now universally criticized philosophy of the centered subject and of totality. Yet no other term or concept has been proposed to assume its multiple functions.

The essays in this book all seek, in their varied historical situations, to acknowledge the viral omnipresence of ideology and to identify and reformulate its all-informing and form-producing power. In the first, two-volume edition of this work (published in 1988), the essays' arrangement corresponded to a rough distinction between the ideologies inherent in various textual interpretations as such and the visions of history projected by those ideologies. With the addition of a mass of new material that division has been blurred, and supplemented by additional thematic oppositions and perspectives, which it might be well to enumerate from the outset.

The essays were written over a forty-year period, and it is not unreasonable to expect some shift in perspective from the earlier ones to those following what we may call the postmodern break, or the onset of the free market period, which we correlate with Reagan-Thatcher deregulation and which may be identified with late capitalism (or globalization, or the third

stage of capitalism). Indeed, I associate the earlier collection with a specific problematic, for which the label “Marxist literary criticism” seems too confining and specialized. It had to do, indeed, with the way in which one was to relate the literary text to its “context,” however that was defined; and in a variety of ways I sought to replace the well-worn formula of reflexion, let alone determination, with that of situation and response.

After the break, the specifically literary dilemma seemed to have been enlarged to include the problem of culture as a whole, including daily life. The enlargement did not only correspond to a crisis in high literature, or to some new centrality of the media and of commercial or mass culture, something which may not be popular culture exactly in the technical sense, however popular it might be. The latter was itself a sign of the systemic expansion of cultural literacy, but also of a dedifferentiation of culture in such a way that even the economic could be observed to have become cultural (just as culture could be observed to have become economic and commodified). The essay on Lyotard’s pioneering “report” (Part I, Chapter 11) is then followed by essays on music (I, 12) and on architecture (II, 2, 11, and 12) and on cultural studies as such (II, 14). The concluding essay offers some impertinent suggestions about a different reading of postmodern daily life.

The question of method clearly runs through these essays, as does that of theory itself and its fate. The first five essays of Part I, along with those on semiotics (II, 9) and literary history (II, 13), raise methodological issues more openly; while others interrogate historiography as such and its relationship to narrative (I, 6 and 9; II, 7 and 8). Sexuality and the bodily sensorium are touched on (II, 3 and 10), while Marxism is not merely an underlying ground of reference but is also interrogated at specific points (II, 6 and 7). Other thematic paths can certainly be hacked through a thicket like this, whose positions are systematized in other works of mine. In any case, I remain committed to the perspective of the earliest of these essays, “Metacommentary” (I, 1), as well as to the ongoing significance and vitality of that discourse called theory (I, 14), which I have identified elsewhere as the construction of a language beyond that of traditional philosophy, and offering at least one possible contemporary equivalent of what used to be called the dialectic.

Yet no theoretical deployment of the term ideology can hope to escape the inevitable question about the distinction seemingly eclipsed by postmodernity or late capitalism, with its unique combination of affluence and historical closure. Our dominant or hegemonic ideology today is what has been called “cynical reason,” and its weaker opposite number, Utopia, itself seems by definition to confirm the former’s luxurious impotence. Yet to identify such an ideology is also to reach the confines and limits of what the current situation allows us to think: it thereby at once reopens the

perspective of futures unimaginable within our present time, changing the valences on the regressive and the acquiescent in such a way that the massive technologies of our post-electronic and galactic confinement again become the instruments of future liberation. I should add that, inasmuch as ideological analysis is so frequently associated with querulous and irritable negativism, it may be appropriate to stress the interest and delight all these topics, dilemmas and contradictions as well as jests and positions—still have for me.

Durham
September 2008

*Wenn die Verknüpfung der Einzelphänomene zum
Kategorienproblem geworden ist, so wird durch
ebendenselben dialektischen Prozess jedes
Kategorienproblem wieder in ein geschichtliches Problem
verwandelt ...*

When the problem of connecting isolated phenomena has become a problem of categories, by the same dialectical process every problem of categories becomes transformed into a historical problem ...

—Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

I. SITUATIONS OF THEORY

Metacommentary

In our time exegesis, interpretation, commentary have fallen into disrepute. Books like Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation*¹ emphasize a development no less central to modern literature than to modern philosophy, where all great twentieth-century schools—whether those of pragmatism or phenomenology, existentialism, logical positivism, or structuralism—share a renunciation of *content*, find their fulfillment in formalism, in the refusal of all presuppositions about substance and human nature, and in the substitution of method for metaphysical system.

What is felt to be content varies, of course, with the historical situation: thus the concept of a “symbol” once served a negative, critical function, as a wedge against an older Victorian moralizing criticism; now, however, along with the other basic components of the New Critical ideology such as irony and point of view, it all too often encourages the most irresponsible interpretation of an ethical or mythical and religious character. To name a symbol is to turn it into an allegory, to pronounce the word “irony” is to find that the thing itself, with all its impossible lived tension, has vanished into thin air. No wonder we feel symbolism in the novel to be such a lie; no wonder Williams's attack on metaphor came as a liberation to a whole generation of American poets!

The question about meaning, most frequently expressing perplexity before an object described as obscure, signals a fateful impatience with perception on the part of the reader, an increasing temptation to short-circuit it with abstract thought. Yet just as every idea is true at the point at which we are able to reckon its conceptual situation, its ideological distortion, back into it, so also every work is clear, provided we locate the angle from which the blur becomes so natural as to pass unnoticed—provided, in other words, we determine and repeat that conceptual operation, often of a very specialized and limited type, in which the style itself originates. Thus the sentence of Gertrude Stein “A dog that you have never had has sighed” is transparent on a level of pure sentence formation, as paradigmatic as the operations of translation machines or transformational grammar. But I

would hesitate to claim that it has a meaning, and indeed Gertrude Stein is a particularly good example of a writer whose characteristic materials—household odds and ends, string, boxes, lettuce leaves, cushions, buttons—disarm modern criticism in that they neither solicit visual perception nor haunt the mind with the symbolic investment of depth psychology. We cannot, therefore, interpret these sentences, but we can describe the distinctive mental operations of which they are a mark and which in the present case (distant relatives in that of Ionesco's mimicry of French middle-class conversation) consist in collages of American words designed to reveal in pure syntactical fashion, above and beyond any individual meanings, the peculiar flatness of the American idiom.

In matters of art, and particularly of artistic perception, in other words, it is wrong to want to *decide*, to want to *resolve* a difficulty. What is wanted is a kind of mental procedure that suddenly shifts gears, that throws everything in an inextricable tangle one floor higher and turns the very problem itself (the obscurity of this sentence) into its own solution (the varieties of Obscurity) by widening its frame in such a way that it now takes in its own mental processes as well as the object of those processes. In the earlier, naive state, we struggle with the object in question; in this heightened and self-conscious one, we observe our own struggles and patiently set about characterizing them.

Thus, very often the urge to interpret results from an optical illusion: it is no doubt a fairly natural first thought to imagine that there exists somewhere, ultimately attainable, some final and transparent reading of, say, a late sonnet of Mallarmé. But very often that ultimate reading, always just a hair beyond our own reach, turns out to be simply the reading of other people, the prestige of the printed word, a kind of ontological inferiority complex. Mallarmé's works exasperate this hopeless effect through their very structure, in that—wholly relational—nothing ever remains behind, even from the most exhaustive reading, from the most thoroughgoing familiarity. For the poet has devised his sentences in such a way that they contain no tangible substances or objects which we can substitute for the work itself, not even as a mnemonic device. All the apparent symbols dissolve back into sheer process, which lasts only as long as the reading lasts. Thus Mallarmé shows us how the reluctance to interpret, on the part of the critic, tends to veer around into an aesthetic on the part of the artist, tends to reappear in the work itself as the will to be *uninterpretable*. So form tends to glide imperceptibly into content; and Sontag's book is itself not exempt from the conceptual embarrassment of this position, which begins by denying the rights of *all* interpretation, of *all* content, only to end up defending a particular type of (modernistic) art that cannot be interpreted, that seems to have no determinate content in the older sense.

We must apply to the problem of interpretation itself the method I have

suggested for the interpretation of individually problematic works: not a head-on, direct solution or resolution, but a commentary on the very conditions of existence of the problem itself. For we are all now in a position to judge the sterility of efforts to devise a coherent, positive, universally valid theory of literature, of attempts to work out some universal combination good for all times and places by weighing the various critical “methods”: the illusion of Method has come to seem just as abstract and systematic an enterprise—in the bad sense—as the older theories of beauty that it replaced.² Far more useful for our purposes is Paul Ricoeur’s distinction, in his monumental study of Freud, *De l’interprétation* (English title, *Freud and Philosophy*), between a negative and a positive hermeneutic: the latter aiming at the restoration of some original, forgotten meaning (which Ricoeur for his part can only conceive of in the form of access to the *sacred*), while the former has as its essential function demystification, and is in that at one with the most fundamental modern critiques of ideology and illusory consciousness associated with the names of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud.

The starting point for any genuinely profitable discussion of interpretation therefore must be not the nature of interpretation, but the need for it in the first place. What initially needs explanation is, in other words, not how we go about interpreting a text properly, but rather why we should even have to do so. All thinking about interpretation must sink itself in the strangeness, the unnaturalness, of the hermeneutic situation; or to put it another way, every individual interpretation must include an interpretation of its own existence, must show its own credentials and justify itself: every commentary must be at the same time a metacommentary as well.

Thus genuine interpretation directs the attention back to history itself, and to the historical situation of the commentator as well as of the work. In this light, it becomes clear how the great traditional systems of hermeneutic—the Talmudic and the Alexandrian, the medieval and the abortive Romantic effort—sprang from cultural need and from the desperate attempt of the society in question to assimilate monuments of other times and places, whose original impulses were quite foreign to them and which required a kind of rewriting—through elaborate commentary and by means of the theory of figures—to take their place in the new scheme of things. Thus Homer was allegorized, and both pagan texts and the Old Testament itself were refashioned to bring them into consonance with the New.

It will, of course, be objected that such rewriting is discredited in our own time, and that if the invention of History means anything, it means respect for the intrinsic difference of the past itself and of other cultures. Yet as we become a single world system, as the other cultures die off, we alone inherit their pasts and assume the attempt to master that inheritance. *Finnegans Wake*, on the one hand, and Malraux’s *Voices of Silence*, on the other, stand as two examples—the mythical and the conceptual—of the attempt to

build a syncretistic Western system. In the socialist countries, where the feeling of a conscious elaboration of a universal world culture and world view is stronger than in our own, the problem of a Marxist hermeneutic poses itself with increasing intensity. Let the work of Ernst Bloch stand as an illustration of everything it has so far achieved. Yet our initial embarrassment remains: for in modern times what cries out for interpretation is not the art of other cultures so much as that of our own.

Thus it would seem that we are condemned to interpret at the same time that we feel an increasing repugnance to do so. Paradoxically, however, the rejection of interpretation does not necessarily result in anti-intellectualism, or in a mystique of the work; it has also, historically, been itself the source of a new method. I am referring to Russian Formalism, whose originality was precisely to have operated a crucial shift in the distance between the literary object and its "meaning," between form and content. For the Formalists carried the conventional notion of artistic technique to its logical conclusion; in Aristotelianism, this concept of technique had always led outside the work of art itself, toward the "end" or purpose for which it was constructed, toward its effect, toward psychology or anthropology or ethics.

The Formalists reversed this model and saw the aim of all technique simply as the production of the work of art itself. Now the meanings of a work, the effect it produces, the world view it embodies (such as Swift's misanthropy, Flaubert's ennui), become themselves technique: raw materials which are there in order to permit this particular work to come into being. With this inversion of priorities the work itself is turned inside out, seen now from the standpoint of the producer rather than that of the consumer, and a critical revolution is achieved that bears striking resemblance to what the "epoche" or setting of reality between parentheses does for Husserl's phenomenology. For now the referential values of the work (its meaning, the "reality" it presents, reflects, or imitates) are suspended, and for the first time the intrinsic structures of the work, in its autonomy as a construction, become visible to the naked eye.

At the same time, a host of false problems are disposed of. In his classic essay "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' Is Made," for instance, Boris Eichenbaum is able to adjourn permanently the vexing problem of whether Gogol is to be considered a "romantic" (the grotesques, the ghost at the end, the occasional pathos in tone) or a "realist" (the evocation of Saint Petersburg, of poverty, of the lives of little people). For Gogol's starting point is not a "vision of life," not a meaning, but rather a style, a particular type of sentence: he wishes to transpose to the level of the art-story the gestures and storytelling techniques characteristic of the traditional Russian *skaz*, or oral yarn (something on the order of the American tall tale or the stories of Mark Twain, as the Formalists were fond of pointing out). It is therefore a misconception to imagine that in Gogol form is adequate to content: on the

contrary, it is because Gogol wishes to work in a particular kind of form, and to speak in the tone of voice of the *skaz*, that he casts about for raw materials appropriate to it, for anecdotes, names, piquant details, sudden shifts in manner. It now becomes clear why neither the grotesque nor the pathetic can be seen as the dominant mode of the story: for the *skaz* lives by their opposition, by their abrupt alternation with each other.³

In much the same way, Viktor Shklovsky undertook to prove that the meaning of character, the implications of apparently mythical figures, results from a similar kind of optical illusion: Don Quixote is not really a character at all, but rather an organizational device that permits Cervantes to write his book, serving as a thread that holds a number of different types of anecdotes together in a single form. (Thus Hamlet's madness permitted Shakespeare to piece together several heterogeneous plot sources, and Goethe's Faust is an excuse for the dramatization of many different moods; indeed, one begins to wonder whether there is not some deeper correlation between these Western "myth" figures and their technical function as a means of holding together and unifying large quantities of disparate raw material.)

Ultimately, of course, the implications of Formalist doctrine spill out the work into life itself: for clearly, if content exists in order to permit form, it follows that the lived sources of that content—the social experiences, the psychological obsessions and dispositions of the author—also come to be formally motivated, to be seen as means rather than ultimate ends or meanings. "*Tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre*" ("The function of the world is to serve as raw material for its own book"), said Mallarmé, and Formalism is a similarly radical aesthetization of life, but one of a relatively non-mystical, artisanal variety. In an essay entitled "Tolstoy's Crises," Eichenbaum shows how even Tolstoy's religious conversion itself can be considered a kind of "motivation of the device," in the sense that it provided new material for an artistic practice on the point of exhausting itself. Thus the writer becomes himself/herself only one more instrument toward the bringing into being of the work.

Formalism is thus, as we have suggested, the basic mode of interpretation of those who refuse interpretation: at the same time, it is important to stress the fact that this method finds its privileged objects in the smaller forms, in short stories or folktales, poems, anecdotes, in the decorative detail of larger works. For reasons to which we cannot do justice in the present context, the Formalistic model is essentially synchronic and cannot adequately deal with diachrony, either in literary history or in the form of the individual work, which is to say that Formalism as a method stops short at the point where the novel as a problem begins.

For the novel—no longer really a "genre" in the traditional sense—may be thought of as an attempt to come to terms with Time, and since it is a

temporal process, and never fully present at any point, every effort to grasp it conceptually, to step back and think about it as an object, is of necessity interpretation before the fact. So that what cries out for explanation above all else is not so much that we interpret novels, but that we do not always feel the need to do so, that there are certain types of novels which, for whatever reasons of internal structure, somehow seem self-justifying and to dispense with external commentary. I am thinking, for example, of the classical well-made plot, the novel of intrigue and denouement, of which the model, no doubt, remains *Tom Jones*.

At this point, therefore, we reach a second basic principle of meta-commentary: namely, that the absence of any need for interpretation is itself a fact that calls out for interpretation. In the novel of plot, in particular, the feeling of completeness is substituted for the feeling of meaning; there would seem to be something mutually exclusive about the type of attention required in apprehension of the various strands of plot, and the transformational process whereby for the sentences of the individual work is substituted a sudden global feeling of a vision of life of some kind. The processes of plot resolution tend to sink us ever more deeply into the empirical events themselves and find their intrinsic satisfaction in a logical immanent to the anecdotal. Indeed, the "philosophic" effect of the well-made plot, if I may term it that, is first and foremost to convince us that such a logic exists, that events have their own inner meaning along with their own development and do not have to be transformed into images. But such "philosophic content" is not a question of ideas or insights, but rather something more closely approximating what classical German philosophy would have called a formal Idea, one that works through sensible appearance only and cannot be abstracted out, cannot exist in the form of the general but only in its particular, sensory mode. Not as illustration to abstract thesis, therefore, but rather as experience to the very preconditions of experience itself, the novel of plot persuades us in concrete fashion that human action, human life, is somehow a complete, interlocking whole, a single, formed, meaningful substance.

In the long run, of course, the source of this lived unity lies not in metaphysics or religion, but in society itself, which may be judged, at any given moment of its development, from the fact that it does or does not offer raw materials such that plot can be constructed from them. Thus the appearance of a melodramatic strain in classical plots (particularly toward the middle of the nineteenth century) is a sign that events no longer cohere, that the author has had to appeal to Evil, to villains and conspiracies, to restore some of the unity he felt it beyond his power to convey in the events themselves.

For it is axiomatic that the existence of a determinate literary form always reflects a certain possibility of experience in the moment of social development in question. Our satisfaction with the completeness of plot is therefore

a kind of satisfaction with society as well, which has through the very possibility of such an ordering of events revealed itself to be a coherent totality, and one with which, for the moment, the individual unit, the individual human life itself, is not in contradiction. That the possibility of plot may serve as something like a proof of the vitality of the social organism we may deduce, negatively, from our own time, where that possibility is no longer present, where the inner and the outer, the subjective and the objective, the individual and the social, have fallen apart so effectively that they stand as two incommensurable realities, two wholly different languages or codes, two separate equation systems for which no transformational mechanism has been found: on the one hand, the existential truth of individual life, which at its limit is incommunicable, and at its most universal turns out to be nothing more than the case history; and, on the other, the interpretive stereotype, most generally a sociological overview of collective institutions that deals in types of character when it is not frankly expressed in statistics or probabilities. But at the time of the classical novel, this is not yet so; and faced with such tangible demonstration of the way in which individual destinies interweave and are slowly, through the process of their interaction, transformed into the collective substance itself before our very eyes, we are not unwilling to limit ourselves for a time to the “realistic” mode of thinking about life. For the existential always excludes the symbolic, the interpretive: we cannot see the surface of life and see through it simultaneously.

Melodrama is, however, only a symptom of the breakdown of this reality. Far more significant, from the point of view of literary history, is the replacement of the novel of plot with something new, in the occurrence, with what we have come to call the psychological novel. This consists in the substitution of the unity of personality for the unity of action, at which point that essential “philosophical” satisfaction of which we spoke above is shifted from the feeling of completeness of events to the feeling of identity or permanence in time of the monad or point of view. But that shift is, of course, a qualitative leap, what Bachelard called a “*coupure épistémologique*,” a kind of mutation in our distance from life and our thinking about it. What is relevant about the psychological novel for our present purposes is that in the novel of point of view, where little by little the action of the book comes to coincide with the consciousness of the hero, interpretation is once more interiorized, immanent to the work itself, for it is now the point-of-view figure who from within the book, reflecting on the meaning of his experiences, or hers, does the actual work of exegesis for us before our own eyes.

Point of view, therefore, is something a little more than sheer technique and expresses the increasing atomization of our societies, in which the privileged meeting places of collective life and of the intertwining of collective destinies—the tavern, the marketplace, the high road, the court, the paseo,

the cathedral, yes, and even the city itself—have decayed and, with them, the vital sources of the anecdote. The essential formal problem of monadic storytelling is, of course, the location of the proper windows. In this sense, when Jean Rousset sees the very paradigm of the novel form in the act of *eavesdropping*—from *La Princesse de Clèves* to *Sodome et Gomorrhe*—he thereby designates the essential narrative gesture of the psychological novel, rather than that of the novel in general, which can have no paradigm.⁴ Ultimately, the social reality that lies behind point of view—the isolation and juxtaposition of closed subjectivities—stands revealed in the very effort of the form to transcend itself: think of those *récits* through which Gide expressed the truth of individual existence, and then of his attempt, in his one *roman*, to “combine” them in additive fashion, as though to fashion a genuinely collective structure through an effort of the will.

With the death of the subject, of the consciousness that governed point of view, the novel, bereft of either unity of action or unity of character, becomes what we are henceforth agreed to call “plotless,” and with the plotless novel, interpretation reasserts its claims with a vengeance. For once again it is a question of sheer reading time itself, sheer length. On every page, a book like *Naked Lunch* approaches the hallucinatory intensity of the movie or the dream, a kind of narcosis of sensory perception. But over longer stretches the mind blows its fuses, and its abstract, pattern-making functions reappear underground: reason, one is tempted to say, at work unconsciously, is unable to cease making those intricate cross-references and interconnections that the surface of the work seems to deny.

The plotless work thus stands before us as a kind of rebus in narrative language, a strange kind of code written in events or hieroglyphs, and analogous to primitive myth or fairy tales. At this point, therefore, a new hermeneutic, developed precisely out of the study of such privileged objects, proposes itself, that of structuralism. For structuralism as a method or mode of research is formalistic in that it studies organization rather than content and assumes the primacy of the linguistic model, the predominance of language and of linguistic structures in the shaping of meaningful experiences. All the layers or levels of social life are ordered or systematic only insofar as they form languages of their own, in strictest analogy to the purely linguistic. Styles of clothing, economic relationships, table manners and national cuisines, kinship systems, the publicity apparatus of the capitalist countries, the cosmological legends of primitive tribes, even the mechanisms of the Freudian mental topology—all are systems of *signs*, based on differential perceptions and governed by categories of exchange and transformation.⁵

Structuralism may thus be seen as one of the most thoroughgoing reactions against substantialist thinking in general, proposing as it does to replace the substance (or the substantive) with relations and purely

relational perceptions. This means, in our own terms, that it eschews interpretation in the older sense, which was essentially substantialistic: for just as Adam, naming the creatures, founded a poetry of nouns, so for the older forms of interpretation symbols are visual nouns, which you translate back into their meanings; and the attachment to content in general may be seen as a mark of belief in substance as such. But when, as in structuralism, substance is replaced by relationship, then the noun, the object, even the individual ego itself, become nothing but a locus of cross-references—not things, but differential perceptions. That is to say, a sense of the *identity* of a given element derives solely from our awareness of its *difference* from other elements, and ultimately from an implicit comparison of it with its own opposite. Thus the dominant category of structuralism as a method is the concept of the binary opposition, the notion that all meanings are organized, following the pattern of phonology, in pairs of oppositions or determinate differences.

The value of the binary opposition as an instrument of exegesis may be most strikingly demonstrated, perhaps, in Lévi-Strauss's henceforth classic analysis of the Oedipus legends, the episodes of which he sorts out into paired groups of ever widening comprehensiveness.⁶ Thus, on the one hand, struggles with monsters (the Sphinx, Cadmus's dragon); on the other, physical deformity (as signaled etymologically by the names of Oedipus and of his forefathers); elsewhere an "unnatural" intimacy between kin, which stands in evident contrast to the murder of fathers and brothers. These groupings or categories are not, however, empirically derived, for they could scarcely have been formulated in the absence of the key methodological presupposition as to the essential structural organization of the material by pairs of opposites in the first place. In a different scheme of things, for instance, the Antigone episode might have been understood in contrast to the paternal incest, as the defense of natural law against the unnatural breaking of a taboo. Here, however, the two episodes are pronounced to entertain a structural relationship to each other; their classification together is preselected by the initial arrangement of the material into an opposition of the "overestimated kinship relations," of which they are the embodiment, with the "underestimated" ones of patricide and fratricide.

The interpretation by binary opposition depends, therefore, on a process of increasing abstraction, on the evolving of a concept "such that" otherwise unrelated episodes may be perceived in its light to be opposed to each other, a concept sufficiently general to allow two relatively heterogeneous and contingent phenomena to be subsumed beneath it as a positive to a negative. Nowhere is this process more transparent than in the construction of the first pair of oppositions, where it is the category of the Inhuman in general that allows us to assimilate the Monstrous to the Deformed, that permits us therefore to correlate the slaying of the monsters (as a triumph of man over

the dark forces) with that physical deformation of life which marks a partial defeat at their hands.

Binary opposition is, of course, only one of the heuristic instruments of structuralist analysis, just as it is only one aspect of the structure of language. It seems to me an exceedingly useful device for the exploration of enigmatic works, such as medieval romances, where a string of apparently arbitrary episodes must somehow be correlated together meaningfully. Yet when the structuralists come to deal with more conventional literary forms, we find that the concept of binary opposition is subsumed under the analogy of discourse in general, and that the standard procedure of such analysis is the attempt to determine the unity of a single work as though it were a single *sentence* or message. Here the most revealing paradigm, perhaps, is that of Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, particularly as the unconscious mechanisms described in it have been reworked by Jacques Lacan into a series of rhetorical figures.⁷ And let us also mention here, for the sake of completeness, that ultimate linguistic opposition of metaphor to metonymy, codified by Roman Jakobson, and similarly adopted by Lacan to describe the psychic forces. The work is therefore analyzable as a communication elaborated according to these mechanisms, which are the basic mechanisms of language and of all language systems or systems of signs.

But a sentence, of course, also has a *meaning*; and to return to Lévi-Strauss's treatment of the Oedipus myth, we may there surprise an imperceptible slippage from form into content, which is one way or another characteristic of all the other types of structuralist analysis as well. For having worked out his essential pattern of oppositions, Lévi-Strauss then proceeds to *interpret* it. The monsters are Earth deities, or symbols of Nature; the human figures either possessed by them or liberating themselves from them are consequently images of consciousness or better still of Culture in general: "the overevaluation of blood relationship is to the underevaluation of the latter as the effort to escape autochthony is to the impossibility of doing so" (*AS*, 239/215, translation modified). The myth becomes a meditation on the mystery of the opposition between Nature and Culture, becomes a statement about the aims of Culture (the creation of the kinship system and the incest taboo) and about its ultimate contradiction by the natural itself, which it fails in the long run to organize and to subdue. But what I would like to stress is not so much the overemphasis on knowledge (for Lévi-Strauss, as is well known, so-called primitive thought is a type of perceptual science as worthy of respect as, although quite different from, our own), but rather the way in which the myth is ultimately given a content that is none other than the very creation of the myth (Culture) itself. "Myths," he says elsewhere, "signify the spirit which elaborates them by means of the world of which it is itself a part."⁸ Thus a method that began by seeing myths or artworks as language systems or codes in their own right

ends up passing over into the view that the very subject matter of such works or myths is the emergence of Language or of Communication, ends up interpreting the work as a statement *about* language.

As a pure formalism, therefore, structuralism yields us an analysis of the work of art as an equation the variables of which we are free to fill in with whatever type of content happens to appeal to us—Freudian, Marxist, religious, or indeed the secondary and, as it were, involuntary content of structuralism itself as a statement about language. The distinction would seem to be that described by Hirsch (following Frege and Carnap) as the meaning, or *Sinn*, of the work, its essential and unchanging formal organization, and its significance, or *Bedeutung*, the changing evaluations and uses to which it is put by its generations of readers, or indeed, what we have called the giving of a type of content, *interpretation* in the more traditional sense (*ViI*, 8, 211).⁹ But I cannot think that this literary agnosticism offers anything more than a temporary and pragmatic solution to the deeper theoretical problems involved.

It seems to me that a genuine transcendence of structuralism (which means a completion, rather than a repudiation, of it) is possible only on condition we transform the basic structuralist categories (metaphor and metonymy, the rhetorical figures, binary oppositions)—conceived by the structuralists to be ultimate and rather Kantian forms of the mind, fixed and universal modes of organizing and perceiving experience—into *historical* ones. For structuralism necessarily falls short of genuine metacommentary in that it thus forbids itself all comment on itself and on its own conceptual instruments, which are taken to be eternal. For us, however, it is a matter not only of solving the riddle of the sphinx, that is, of comprehending it as a locus of oppositions, but also, once that is done, of standing back in such a way as to apprehend the very form of the riddle itself as a literary genre and the very categories of our understanding as reflections of a particular and determinate moment of history.

Metacommentary therefore implies a model not unlike the Freudian hermeneutic (divested, to be sure, of its own specific content, of the topology of the unconscious, the nature of libido, and so forth), one based on the distinction between symptom and repressed idea, between manifest and latent content, between the disguise and the message disguised. This initial distinction already answers our basic question—Why does the work require interpretation in the first place?—by posing it forthrightly from the outset, by implying the presence of some type of Censor which the message must slip past. For traditional hermeneutic, that Censor was ultimately History itself, or cultural Difference, insofar as the latter deflected the original force and sullied the original transparency of Revelation.

But before we can identify the place of censorship in our own time, we must first come to terms with the message itself, which may very loosely be

described as a type of *Erlebnis*, or *expérience vécue*, a lived experience of some sort, no matter how minimal or specialized. The essential characteristic of such raw material or latent content is that it is never initially formless, never, like the unshaped substances of the other arts, initially contingent, but rather is itself already meaningful from the outset, being nothing more nor less than the very components of our concrete social life: words, thoughts, objects, desires, people, places, activities. The work does not confer meaning on these elements, but rather transforms their initial meanings into a new and heightened construction of meaning; and that transformation can hardly be an arbitrary process. I do not mean by that that it must be realistic, but only that all stylization, all abstraction in the form, ultimately expresses some profound inner logic in its content and is ultimately dependent for its existence on the structures of the raw materials themselves.

At this point, therefore, we touch on the most basic justification for the attack on “interpretation,” and for the resolute formalism of a meta-commentary or a metacriticism. *Content does not need to be treated or interpreted because it is itself already essentially and immediately meaningful*, meaningful as gestures in situation are meaningful, as sentences in a conversation. Content is already concrete, in that it is essentially social and historical experience, and we may say of it what Michelangelo said of his stone, that it sufficed to remove all extraneous portions for the statue to appear, already latent in the marble block. Thus, the process of criticism is not so much an interpretation of content as it is a revealing of it, a laying bare, a restoration of the original message, the original experience, from beneath the distortions of the censor: and this revelation takes the form of an explanation why the content was so distorted; it is inseparable from a description of the mechanism of censorship itself.

And since I have mentioned Susan Sontag above, let me take as a demonstration of this process her essay on science fiction, “The Imagination of Disaster,” in which she reconstructs the basic paradigm of the science-fiction movie, seeing in it an expression of “the deepest anxieties about contemporary existence . . . about physical disaster, the prospect of universal mutilation and even annihilation . . . [but more particularly] about the condition of the individual psyche” (*AI*, 220). All of this is so, and her essay provides a thorough working through of the materials of science fiction *taken on its own terms*. But what if those terms were themselves but a disguise, but the “manifest content” that served to mask and distract us from some more basic satisfaction at work in the form?

For beneath the surface diversion of these entertainments, beneath the surface preoccupation of our minds as we watch them, introspection reveals a secondary motivation quite different from the one described above. For one thing, these works, particularly in the period atmosphere of their heyday after the war and in the 1950s, rather openly express the mystique of

the scientist. And by that I do not refer to external prestige or social function, but rather to a kind of collective folk dream about the condition of the scientist himself—he does not do *real* work, yet he has power and crucial significance; his remuneration is not monetary, or at the very least money seems no object; there is something fascinating about his laboratory (the home workshop magnified into institutional status, a combination of factory and clinic), about the way he works nights (he is not bound by routine or by the eight-hour day); his very intellectual operations themselves are caricatures of the way the nonintellectual imagines brainwork and book knowledge to be. There is, moreover, the suggestion of a return to older modes of work organization, to the more personal and psychologically satisfying world of the guilds, in which the older scientist is the master and the younger one the apprentice, in which the daughter of the older man becomes “naturally enough” the symbol of the transfer of functions. And so forth: these traits may be indefinitely enumerated and enriched. What I want to convey is that ultimately none of this has anything to do with science itself but is simply a distorted reflection of 1950s male feelings and dreams about *work*, alienated and nonalienated: it is a wish fulfillment that takes as its object a vision of ideal work, or what Herbert Marcuse would call “libidinally gratifying” work. But it is a wish fulfillment of a peculiar type (and it is this structure that I wish also to insist on); for we do not deal here with the kind of direct and open psychic identification and wish fulfillment that might be illustrated (for the subject matter of scientists) through the works of C. P. Snow, for instance. Rather, this is a symbolic gratification that wishes to conceal its own presence: the identification with the scientist is not here the mainspring of the plot, but rather its pre-condition only, and it is as though, in a rather Kantian way, this symbolic gratification attached itself, not to the events of the story, but to that framework (the universe of science, the splitting of the atom, the astronomer’s gaze into outer space, and also, no doubt, some patriarchal guild system) without which the story could not have come into being in the first place. Thus, in this perspective, all the cataclysmic violence of the science-fiction narrative—the toppling buildings, the monsters rising out of Tokyo Bay, the state of siege or martial law—is but a pretext, which serves to divert the mind from its deepest operations and fantasies, and to motivate those fantasies themselves. (In this fashion, metacommentary adopts, if not the ideology, then at least the operative techniques of Russian Formalism, in its absolute inversion of the priorities of the work itself.)

No doubt we could go on and show that alongside the fantasy about work there is present yet another, which deals with collective life, and which uses the cosmic emergencies of science fiction as a way of reliving a kind of wartime togetherness and morale, a kind of drawing together among survivors, which is itself merely a distorted dream of a more humane collectivity

and social organization. In this sense, the surface violence of the work is doubly motivated, for it can now be seen as a breaking of the routine boredom of middle-class existence as well, and may contain within itself impulses of resentment and vengeance at the nonrealization of the unconscious fantasy thus awakened.

But the key to the disguises of such deep content, of such positive but unconscious fantasy, lies in the very nature of that fantasy itself: we have attached it thematically to the idea of work satisfaction, and it is certain that experience has as its most fundamental structure *work* itself, as the production of value and the transformation of the world. Yet the content of such experience can never be determined in advance, and varies from the most grandiose forms of action to the most minute and limited feelings and perceptions in which consciousness can be specialized. It is easier to express the properties of this phenomenon negatively, by saying that the idea of Experience always presupposes its own opposite, that is, a kind of life that is mere vegetation, that is routine, emptiness, passage of time. The work of art therefore proves to unite a lived experience of some kind, as its content, with an implied question as to the very possibilities of Experience itself, as its form.

It thereby obeys a double impulse. On the one hand, it preserves the subject's fitful contact with genuine life and serves as the repository for that mutilated fragment of Experience which is her treasure, or his. Meanwhile, its mechanisms function as a censorship, which secures the subject against awareness of the resulting impoverishment, while preventing him/her from identifying connections between that impoverishment and mutilation and the social system itself.

When we pass from a collective product like science fiction to the products of what might be called official literature or official culture, this situation changes only in degree and in complexity, and not in its basic structure. For one thing, there is now to be reckoned into it the value of writing itself, of the elaboration of style or of the individual sentences of the work; but as we have already suggested, this value (which makes the Formalist inversion of the work possible, and which justifies stylistics as a way into the work) may at once be converted into terms of work satisfaction, for it is precisely in the form of the sentence that the modernist writer conceives of concrete work in the first place. For another, the work now shows a far greater degree of conscious and unconscious artistic *elaboration* on the basis of its primitive element or original content; but it is this elaboration and its mechanisms that form the object of the methods described above. Metacommentary, however, aims at tracing the logic of the censorship itself and of the situation from which it springs: a language that hides what it displays beneath its own reality as language, a glance that designates, through the very process of avoiding, the object forbidden.

Notes

- 1 Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, New York: Macmillan, 1966. Future references to this work are denoted *AI*.
- 2 E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, strikes me as a victim of its own Anglo-American, “analytic” method: the most interesting idea of the book—that of a “generic” dimension to every reading, a pre-conception as to the type and nature of the text or Whole that conditions our apprehension of various parts—is on the contrary a speculative and dialectical one. Future references to this work are denoted *ViI*.
- 3 *Theorie de la littérature*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, Paris: Seuil, 1965. Compare Shklovsky on the predominance of a particular authorial mode of being-in-the-world such as sentimentality: “Sentimentality cannot serve as the content of art, if only because art has no separate contents in the first place. The presentation of things “from a sentimental point of view” is a special method of presentation, like the presentation of them from the point of view of a horse (as in Tolstoy’s *Kholstomer*) or of a giant (as in Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*). Art is essentially trans-emotional ... unsympathetic—or beyond sympathy—except where the feeling of compassion is evoked as material for the artistic structure.” Lee T. Lemon and Marian J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1965; translation modified.
- 4 Jean Rousset, *Forme et signification*, Paris: J. Corti, 1965.
- 5 The model derives from the Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale*, Lausanne-Paris: Payot, 1916. Its wider relevance was suggested by Marcel Mauss’s “*Essai sur le don*,” *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950, where various behavior patterns are analyzed in terms of presentation or exchange, thus making them easily assimilable to the exchange of information in the linguistic circuit.
- 6 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris: Pion, 1958, “La Structure des mythes,” especially 235–42; in English, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1963. Future references to this work are denoted *AS* and are cited with page references for the French original and the English translation respectively.
- 7 See Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1968, especially 30–31: “Ellipsis and pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, regression, repetition, apposition—these are the syntactical displacements; metaphor, catachresis, antonomasis, allegory, metonymy, and synecdoche—these are the semantic condensations in which Freud teaches us to read the intentions—ostentatious or demonstrative, dissimulating or persuasive, retaliatory or seductive—out of which the subject modulates his oneiric discourse.”
- 8 *Le Cru et le cuit*, Paris: Pion, 1964, 346; in English, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. Don and Doreen Weightman, New York: Harper & Row, 1969, 341; translation modified.
- 9 Compare Roland Barthes’ analogous distinction between literary *science* and literary *criticism* in *Critique et vérité*, Paris: Seuil, 1966, 56.

The Ideology of the Text

All the straws in the wind seem to confirm the widespread feeling that “modern times are now over” and that some fundamental divide, some basic *coupure*, or qualitative leap, now separates us decisively from what used to be the new world of the early or mid-twentieth century, of triumphant modernism and the revolt against positivism and Victorian or Third Republic bourgeois culture. McLuhanism, theories of the *société de consommation* and of postindustrial society, postmodernism in literature and art, the shift from physics to biology as the prototype of the hard sciences, the influence of the computer and information theory, the end of the Cold War and the ratification of a Soviet-American world system of “peaceful coexistence,” the New Left and the countercultural instinctual politics, the primacy of the linguistic model with its ideological expression in structuralism as a new movement—all of these phenomena testify to some irrevocable distance from the immediate past (itself reconfirmed by the surge of 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s nostalgia everywhere in the advanced countries) at the same time that each offers something like an apologetics for its own version of the transformation. So the awareness that a change has taken place is subtly converted into a prophetic affirmation that the change is good, or, in the terminology we follow in the present essay, the theory of the change becomes at length, through a process of inner momentum, the latter’s *ideology*. This apparently unavoidable slippage from what are essentially historical perceptions into the ideologizing of those perceptions is a function of an incomplete historical view and of the failure to make connections between what are basically local or “superstructural transformations” and ongoing concrete modifications of the social order as a whole, the failure—indeed, the unwillingness—to put all of these observations together and see them in terms of the long-range destiny of our particular socioeconomic system, in other words, monopoly capitalism.

Even in the local regions enumerated above, however, this particular “great transformation”—grasped idealistically in terms of transformations in our modes of *thinking* rather than in those of more concrete structures or

situations—has rarely been the object of a systematic anatomy. Rather, the new conceptuality has been enthusiastically developed and applied in the absence of a measured and diagnostic investigation of what Collingwood would have called its “absolute presuppositions” or what more recent historians of ideas have called its “basic paradigms” (Kuhn) or its “underlying epistémé” (Foucault). Such an investigation would perhaps better be realized in individual probes rather than by way of some inconceivable global system; such is at any rate the strategy of the following pages, in which a few recent critical works have provided the occasion for more general reflections on one of the more fundamental of the new conceptual categories, namely the idea of textuality.

Textuality may rapidly be described as a methodological hypothesis whereby the objects of study of the human sciences (but not only of the human ones: witness the genetic “code” of DNA!) are considered to constitute so many texts that we *decipher* and *interpret*, as distinguished from the older views of those objects as realities or existants or substances that we in one way or another attempt to *know*. The advantages of such a model are perhaps most clearly visible in the nonliterary disciplines, where it seems to afford a more adequate “solution” to the dilemmas of positivism than the more provisory one of phenomenological bracketing. The latter merely suspends the ontological problem and postpones the ultimate epistemological decisions, while in some ways actually reinforcing the old subject/object dichotomy that was at the root of the contradictions of classical epistemology. The notion of textuality, whatever fundamental objections may be made to it, has at least the advantage as a strategy of cutting across both epistemology and the subject/object antithesis in such a way as to neutralize both, and of focusing the attention of the analyst on her own position as a *reader* and on her own mental operations as *interpretation*. At once, then, she finds herself obliged to give an account of the nature of her object of study *qua* text: she is thus no longer tempted to view it as some kind of empirically existing reality in its own right (think, for instance, of the false problems to which the optical illusion of society, or even of the various social “institutions,” has given rise), but must rather reconstitute it in such a way as to resolve her “facts” back into so many semantic or syntactic components of the text she is about to decipher. In fields like anthropology or sociology, in the lingering atmosphere of an older referential or “realistic” positivism, this requirement to “textualize” data serves the function of restoring the concrete contexts in which the so-called data were gathered, at the same time that it extends the interpretive situation to the totality of social life itself. This is the spirit in which the ethnomethodologists replace the events of social life with our accounts and interpretations of those events, and in which the newer anthropology seeks to dissolve the practices, habits, and rituals that used to be thought of as so many “institutions” and

to grasp them, in a new transparency, as so many types of discourse a social group holds about itself.¹ Meanwhile, in linguistics itself, the concept of the text provides the means of breaking out of the artificial confinement of smaller and more abstract units of study like the sentence and evolving in the direction of pragmatics and text grammars, which try to reincorporate the concrete context and positions of the participants back into purely verbal phenomena, which are, taken alone, a mere hypostasis of language as such.

It is possible, of course, to see the new textual model as a reflex of the changes wrought by the media, and the information explosion, in our experience of society and of the world. It is tempting, indeed, to associate the illusions of a traditional Aristotelian realism (reality existing calmly “out there,” truth nothing but the adequation of the ideas in our head with the things themselves of which they are the pictures) with a world poor in messages, in which the shimmering heat waves of a swarm of signs and codes are not present to blur our limpid gaze across the distance that separates us from the realm of things. And it is certain that the sensitivity of recent times for problems of language, models, communication, and the like, is closely linked with the emergence of these phenomena as relatively autonomous and opaque objects in their own right in the new distribution mechanisms of industrial capitalism.

At any rate, it would seem that the relevance of the concept of textuality is most problematic there, paradoxically, where it would seem the least metaphorical, namely, in the realm of literary study itself. The paradox indeed is simply this: why and how the analysis of literary works can be transformed by a reminder of what it must have known all along, namely, that its objects of study are “nothing but” verbal texts. A whole range of newer theories reorient the interpretive process around the hypothesis—generally borrowed from Chomsky in a metaphorical way—that the empirical text we see before us is only the end-result and product or effect of some deeper absent linguistic or textual structure which must be reconstituted, a deep-textual machinery whose characterization ranges from systems of tropes (Hayden White, Lotman, DeMan) to the narrative apparatus of Greimassian semiotics. An interpretation, however, is generally effective only when it visibly or even violently rewrites the surface appearance of the text, that is, when the restoration of the “deep structure” alters our initial reception of the sentences themselves. Such interpretive intervention generally requires the added presupposition that the logic of the deeper structure is somehow in conflict or in contradiction with the surface appearance, something posited most dramatically in Kristeva’s notion that the “genotext”—the forces of Desire or the unconscious—erupts into the surface or “phenotext” to subvert it in ways the interpreter seeks to make visible.

Yet the concept of textuality can also modify our approach to the literary text in a different way, which I am tempted to call horizontal, in distinction to this deep-structural “vertical” model. Here the model of textual production makes for an intensified sense of the emergence of individual sentences in isolation, which stands in marked contrast to the more traditional valorization of the aesthetic whole (of which all the parts are hierarchically organized components and expressions). The view of the literary text as a perpetual production of sentences, indeed, now seems to exclude traditional emphasis on the organic unity of literary form. It is precisely because its very mode of presentation dramatizes this opposition that Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*—a lengthy line-by-line commentary on a little known and romantically melodramatic novella of Balzac, “Sarrasine”—seems preeminently symptomatic for our present purposes, which involve the assessment of the results of textuality as a framework for literary analysis just as much as an account of the ideological service into which it may be pressed.²

I

S/Z is also symptomatic of the intellectual itinerary of Roland Barthes himself, of all the foxes of modern criticism (Lukács may be said in retrospect to have been the latter’s most stubborn hedgehog) surely the most exemplary. Like Lukács, indeed, had he never existed in the first place, someone like Barthes would have had to have been invented, for his virtuoso practice of critical methods was contemporaneous with a methodological explosion in the human sciences, and what is generalizable about his work is precisely his solution to the dilemma of methodological proliferation, which may be characterized, following Adorno’s terminology in the *Philosophy of Modern Music*, as the valorization of “pastiche.” For the crisis in modern criticism is surely closely linked to that more fundamental crisis in modern literature and art, which is the proliferation of styles and private languages; and Adorno had argued, in the Stravinsky section of his book, that the Russian composer’s composition of music about other music was a characteristic and virtually textbook illustration of one of the two basic strategies of modern artists, faced with a crushing accumulation of dead styles in a situation in which it seems unjustifiable to invest in still newer ones. (The hedgehog panel of Adorno’s diptych was then represented by Arnold Schoenberg, who eschewed pastiche in favor of a relentless and sometimes forbiddingly inhuman totalization—a strategy that no doubt has its equivalent in modern literary criticism as well.)

Of the first, eclectic, parody- or pastiche-oriented strategy (of which he himself offered the defense in his pamphlet *Critique et vérité*), Barthes’ work is the monument, constituting a veritable fever-chart of all the significant

intellectual and critical tendencies since World War II: Bachelardian phenomenology (in his book on Michelet), Sartrean Marxism (in *Writing Degree Zero*), Hjelmslevian linguistics, but also Brechtian *Verfremdung* (in *Mythologies*), orthodox Freudianism (in *On Racine*), hard-core semiotics (in *Système de la mode*), *Tel Quel* textual productivity, as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis (in *S/Z* itself), poststructuralism (in *Le Plaisir du texte*), and finally, a return to origins, in that ultimate squaring of the circle that is his recent commentary on himself (*Roland Barthes par lui-même*), a work that, as he himself observes, reminds one of nothing quite so much as the subject of his own first published essay, namely the *Journals* of André Gide. Such a trajectory suggests that it is less productive to read Barthes as a theorist than as the intuitive and idiosyncratic practitioner of a host of different methods, whose perspicacity, shot through with sudden fits of boredom, makes the ultimate *yield* of such methods clearer than any theoretical disquisition. What happened to Barthes was, I think, that he became too conscious of what he himself calls the “precritical” or presystematic nature of his own observations, too lucid about the process of formation of his own sentences: this is the ultimate implication of his notion of the *scriptible*—sentences whose *gestus* arouses the desire to emulate it, sentences that make you want to write sentences of your own. (Meanwhile, the emphasis on the expressive and gestural capacities of the individual sentence tends with time to result in a virtual canonization of the fragment, although Barthes’ increasing predilection for brief notes and glosses is perhaps evident in *S/Z*, where it is motivated and “covered” by the traditional requirements of the exegesis or line-by-line commentary.)

Still, it is evidently only a self-conscious sentence that can provoke such emulation, and this accounts for Barthes’ need, in *S/Z*, to devise another category, namely the *lisible*, or “legible,” to designate the dull and rusty lack of finish of the so-called realistic or representational kind. For *S/Z* is also, as we shall see, something like a replay of the realism/modernism controversy, although its force certainly springs in part from Barthes’ own ambivalence in the matter:

Things I Like: lettuce, cinnamon, cheese, spices, frangipan, newly mown hay (I’d like some ‘taster’ to make a scent out of it), roses, peonies, lavender, champagne, political *désinvolture*, Glenn Gould, ice-cold beer, flat pillows, toast, Havana cigars, Handel, measured walks, pears, white peaches, cherries, colors, pocket watches, ball-point pens, quill pens, main courses, coarse salt, realistic novels, the piano, coffee, Pollock, Twombly, romantic music.³

It should be added, however, that the view of “realism” that emerges from *S/Z* is generally implied rather than directly stated, in a study whose object, an early work of Balzac and a throwback—like so much high-Romantic

storytelling—to the older Renaissance-type novella, is distant enough from Balzacian realism, let alone the triumphant realistic discourse of the nineteenth-century novel as its apogee. The essentials of Barthes' conception of realism are more succinctly exposed in a short essay, "L'Effet de réel," in which, as the title suggests, realistic narrative is defined less as a structure of discourse in its own right than as a kind of optical illusion, the production of a so-called reality-effect by means of a certain number of key *details* that function as *signals*. So it is with Michelet's observation that when Charlotte Corday's final portrait was being painted in her death cell, "after an hour and a half, someone tapped softly at a little door behind her": the detail is without any genuine function, in the sense that it might easily have been omitted without damage to the narrative. What is more important is that in the strict sense it has no *meaning*—in contrast, let us say, to the expressivity of a "timorous" knock on a door or a "feeble" rapping on a wall, which would have converted this "sign" into a genuine *symbol*. Thus we can say that for Barthes the vehicle of a reality-effect is relatively indifferent: any number of other analogous details would have done just as well; in other words, unlike those of the canonical theorists of realism, Barthes' analysis suggests that the *content* of the Michelet passage is what is least important in it, serving merely as a kind of pro forma credentials for the accreditation of the "referential illusion" on which such discourse depends. "The truth of this illusion is as follows: suppressed from realistic enunciation *qua* denotative signified, the 'real' returns to inhabit it as a signified of connotation; for in the very moment in which these details are supposed to denote reality directly, they do little else—without saying so—than to signify it. Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little rear door finally have nothing to say but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of the 'real' itself (and not its contingent content) which is thereby signified. In other words, it is the very deficiency of signified as opposed to referent which becomes itself the signified of realism: a 'reality-effect' is produced, the basis of that unspoken category of verisimilitude which makes up the aesthetic of all of the standard works of modern times."⁴

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that this analysis, which so radically devalues the importance of content in realistic discourse, is for all that an example of some incorrigibly formalistic practice either; for the reality-effect would appear to be something more closely resembling a *by-product* of realistic discourse than a mark of its fundamental linguistic structure. And while Barthes does not go so far as to say that *any* type of discourse can on occasion, and as it were laterally, in passing, generate the *effet de réel*, it would seem implicit in his description that what has hitherto passed under the name of "realistic narrative" is at least a mirage to the degree that it has nothing structurally to distinguish it from narrative discourse in general.

A key term in the passage quoted above suggests the specificity of Barthes' approach here and explains how it can do the seemingly impossible and avoid categorization in either the formalistic camp or that of content-oriented analyses: this is the word "connotation," which may be said to designate the fundamental method of the early Barthes, a method that persists into more recent books like *S/Z*, where, as we shall see, it coexists uneasily with the later methodology of semiotics proper. The connotative method, indeed—derived from the work of the Danish linguist Hjelmslev and most fully codified by Barthes himself in the long theoretical conclusion to his *Mythologies*—differs from current semiotic practice in that, where the latter takes as its object of study the mechanisms by which signs function, the former is resolutely "semioclastic" (Barthes' own term) and finds its vocation in a *denunciation* of the ideological uses of signs, which is irreconcilable with the "scientific" character of semiotics itself. Thus the analysis of the reality-effect outlined above is precisely an ideological one in its exposure of the illusion the realistic detail is designed to produce (the ideological purpose of such an illusion—the propagation of a belief in the "referent" or in nature—is considered later in the present essay). The transcendence of form and content both can meanwhile be explained by a brief account of what Hjelmslev meant by connotation in the first place: to follow Barthes' helpful simplification, it is a kind of second-degree construction in which a complete previous sign (the combination signifier/signified) is pressed into service in the edification of a new and more complex sign of which it becomes itself the signifier. Thus the words of an individual sentence bear their own intrinsic meaning within the "frame" that is proper to them (denotation), while at the same time the sentence as a complete sign in its own right (the words plus the meaning, or the signifier plus the signified) may be used to convey a supplementary meaning of a more stylistic type, such as elegance or social distinction in a dialogue, for instance, or a value of some kind, as when the sentences of a Flaubert or a Joyce proclaim, above and beyond their own denotative content, "I am Literature."

The dissatisfaction of orthodox semiotics with this conception of a supplementary meaning or message which is the idea of connotation may be accounted for by the global character of the designation, which does not seem to allow much room for the more minute work of syntactic or semantic dissection. In effect, the connotative method seizes on the *entire* sentence or the *entire* sign as the vehicle for a supplementary meaning, thus virtually cutting itself off from the possibility of further analysis. The semiotic abandonment of the concept, however, has the signal disadvantage (it is of course a positive benefit for a discipline that wishes to flee the political into an untroubled realm of scientific research) of shutting down one of the few powerful instruments available to register the ideological. I would argue that there is a profound incompatibility between a "scientific" method,

which seeks to restrict its work to pure positivities, and a dialectical one, which, thrusting its hands into the strange and paradoxical element of the negative, is alone capable of doing justice to “mixed” phenomena such as ideology, false consciousness, repression, and in all likelihood, connotation itself: one of the secondary interests of *S/Z*, indeed, will be precisely this tension between the two approaches, which runs throughout the work. In the present instance, however, the relatively spatial character of Barthes’ objects of study in *Mythologies* (images, photographs, relatively visual oppositions, faces, and so forth) suggests a means of correcting the imbalance noted above, which would involve the *temporalization* of the concept of connotation and the reintroduction into it of process and of reading time. Such an approach would entitle us to speak now of a “connotation-effect,” which is produced at a particular moment in the reception of a sign, and which can be described as a kind of ninety-degree rotation in which form is momentarily transformed into a new type of content in its own right, without losing its older properties; so, not the detail itself, not the little rear door, but rather the very form of the narrative sentence itself at that point suddenly begins to emit a secondary message about historiographic discourse in general. And such a view, linking autoreferentiality and connotation, by making of the latter a textual *event* in its own right, would then permit this method to be reabsorbed into a more complex, yet still ideology-oriented, investigation of the text in question.

At any rate, the tension between semiotic and semiclastic aims in *S/Z* reappears in a somewhat different register as a tension between text and form, or, more precisely, between modernism and realism, in Barthes’ view of the Balzacian novella itself. Such a coexistence between the two modes is of course itself a feature of the theory:

Thus the theory of the text tends to favor modernistic texts (from Lautréamont to Philippe Sollers) for a two-fold reason: such texts are exemplary because they manifest (to a degree hitherto unattained) “the operation of *semiosis* in language and with the subject,” and because they constitute a de facto protest against the constraints of the traditional ideology of meaning ... Yet, by virtue of the very fact that texts are massive (rather than cumulative), and that they do not necessarily coincide with the works themselves, it is possible to discover textuality [*du texte*], although to a lesser degree, even in older productions; a classical work (Flaubert, Proust, why not even Bossuet?) may well include layers or fragments of *écriture*.⁵

Therewith the fundamental purpose of *S/Z* is set: to track and uncover “*du texte*” in Balzac, to expose layers and traces of textuality in what seems otherwise a traditional or even relatively conventional narrative. This is why it would be unwise to expect the kind of systematic attention to the plot of “Sarrasine” that we have learned from other types of narrative analysis, such

as those of Lévi-Strauss, Propp, and Greimas, whose effort is directed toward reading the events of the plot as a complete message of some kind; or traditional Anglo-American studies of fiction, which remain stubbornly committed to the principle that all the elements of a masterwork—style, images, episodes, etc.—cohere in some harmonious ethical or thematic statement, which it is the business of the critic to recover. The latter is indeed generally stigmatized by the theorists of the text as *interpretation* in the bad sense, while even the relatively “value-free” decipherment of the former remains holistic and demands a kind of distance, a kind of speculative leap in the grasping and positing of narrative wholes, which the minute and microscopic focus of Barthes’ commentary can scarcely accommodate. This also results, it should be observed in passing, in the repression of one whole area of historical reality, namely that of the evolution of narrative form itself; for, ironically, the Barthes of *S/Z* is in no position to convey the purely formal *connotations* that result from Balzac’s adaptation of older storytelling conventions to the newer reified and quantified narrative and social materials of his own time, a perspective to which we will return at the end of this essay.

Still, it would be a mistake to think such considerations have been completely eliminated from Barthes’ commentary. In fact, *S/Z*, like the novella of which it is a study, may be said to be very much a mixed or hybrid object, and just as “Sarrasine” will include elements of textuality within an older “classical” or traditional form, so we may suggest that *S/Z* itself combines both realistic and modernistic features. For within the “modernistic” text-oriented structure of the commentary form, we may also from time to time detect elements of some older “realistic” or “representational” critical essay on Balzac, to which an earlier Barthes, one less addicted to the fragment, might well have lent the lapidary and elliptical form familiar to readers of *Writing Degree Zero* or of his *Collected Essays*. This more conventional study might then have been resumed as a thesis about the relationship between castration and artistic production in Balzac’s tale (which involves the passion of a sculptor for a *castrato*), an anecdote then transformed by the “frame” of the novella into an exchangeable commodity in such a way as to make a statement about the relationship between classical storytelling and capitalism.

We will return to this “realistic kernel” of *S/Z* later; for the moment, we are concerned with what I will call Barthes’ textualization of Balzac’s story. It is, of course, Barthes’ disentanglement of the *codes* of “Sarrasine” that is the most dramatic embodiment of the new textual methods. The structure of narrativity is here rewritten in language that will not be unfamiliar to the reader of Pound:

The text, in its mass, is comparable to a sky at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks; like the soothsayer drawing on it with the tip of his staff an imaginary rectangle wherein to consult, according to certain principles, the flight of birds, the commentator traces through the text certain zones of reading, in order to observe therein the migration of meanings, the outcroppings of codes, the passage of citations. (*S/Z*, 14/20–21)

The notion of the musical score, which will not be long in following this one, introduces, however, as we will see, the phenomenon of temporal succession into this splendidly spatial image, whose counterpart may be found in the very etymology of text itself, literally a *tissue* woven together by those fundamental molecular components of narrativity that are for Barthes the codes:

In their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is 'lost' in the vast perspective of the *already-written*) de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes *writing*, a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect: the Voice of Empirical Realities (the proairetisms), the Voice of the Person (the semes), the Voice of Knowledge (the cultural codes), the Voice of Truth (the hermeneutic codes), the Voice of Symbol. (*S/Z*, 21/28)⁶

What is tempting for that part of our minds that is still under the spell of an optical illusion of scientific rigor, what may be termed a kind of Cartesian idol in its own right, is the notion that the text may thereby be broken up into its minimal unities and the latter carefully and in businesslike scientific fashion analyzed one by one. From this point of view, of course, all interpretation of the other type, described above, is inadmissible precisely because it is speculative and seems to grasp intuitively at wholes, which are nothing but imaginary objects from the point of view of the patient and minute dissection of the text by its painstakingly scientific analyst. Unfortunately, perception does not work in this additive fashion, neither in storytelling nor in the visual arts, where the *Gestalt* refutations of the notion of some atomistic combination of small sensations into unified perceptions are the most striking reply to the Cartesian procedure. Hence the very real dangers of the commentary form as practiced here, which encourages a laborious enumeration of detail through which the essentials tend to slip (Barthes himself, in another context, mentioned that game described in a novel of Agatha Christie in which the more experienced player chooses a place name that marches so boldly across the map—for example, EUROPE—that the other participants do not even notice it).

Barthes' five codes fall into two groups, and the distinction is not without its symptomatic value. The first group—those of the semes ("Code of the Person"), of cultural commonplaces ("Knowledge"), and of the

symbol—are essentially batches of what he elsewhere calls *indexes*, that is, shorthand supplementary messages drawn from some more basic pool of shared cultural attitudes that permit us to decipher them (so, in a well-known example, Barthes reads the four telephones on James Bond's desk as an index of "advanced bureaucratic technology"; here the index might be seen as something like a nonideological connotation). This is perhaps the moment to remind the reader that the term "code," drawn from information theory, has little more than metaphorical value when applied, not to first-degree communications, but rather to those "secondary modeling systems" that are verbal representations. There are, it would seem, two relatively distinct uses of the term that both serve in different ways to articulate or underscore linguistic realities that might otherwise pass unnoticed. In the first use the word, code, in the singular, is coupled with the notion of a message, so that the term forces the analyst to work more diligently at defining the structural affinities between the type of message emitted and the sign system or code through which it is conveyed. The other use is distinct from this, inasmuch as it stresses the multiplicity of different codes, or subcodes, at work in a given communicational act: thus, I convey a verbal statement, but accompany it by facial expressions that derive from an organized expressive system of their own, as well as gestures of the hand and shoulder that stem possibly from a different sign system (as when I imitate the gestural sign system of European speakers). In this usage, the emphasis has shifted to the contradictions, or at least imbalances, of the various codes among each other; and it is in this sense that, characterizing the cultural situation of the modern *Gesellschaft*, we speak of the proliferation or the explosion of codes as a symptom of the breakdown of the older social groups, which were relatively unified linguistically as well as institutionally (a perception which makes its literary appearance for the first time in Flaubert). In this sense, our own use of the term "code," drawn from a relatively technical and specialized discipline and applied to the quite unrelated one of literary study, is itself an example of code-switching. Still, one would think that these two approaches require either, for the first, that we show the unity of the sign system or code utilized in the transmission of a given message, or, for the second, that we reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies between the multiple codes in such a way as to make those contradictions and that multiplicity available to us as a phenomenon for analysis in its own right. But essentially Barthes does neither of these things, and for this reason one so often has the feeling that the commentary form, or the fragmented discourse, of *S/Z* tends to suggest that problems have been solved at the very moment in which they are becoming interesting.

Thus, to take up Barthes' *semes*, or "Code of the Person," one can certainly, as he does, make an inventory of the various indexes that a writer marshals as a kind of characterological shorthand (thus, the description of

Sarrasine's peremptory entry into Bouchardon's studio, besides conveying a fact that accounts for his subsequent development as a painter, functions as a manifestation of the underlying character trait *Obstinacy*). Yet such an inventory would seem to have a merely lexical interest, even when certain semes are isolated as culturally idiosyncratic (only a nineteenth-century Frenchman would take this gesture as a sign of this attribute) or as personally and stylistically determined (only Balzac would have tried to convey this particular nature through this kind of action). The larger issue at stake here is raised only incidentally when, in one of those splendid asides that are, of course, the whole reason for being of *S/Z*, Barthes passes from the semes or indexes of the individual character to what holds the entire character together as a substantive unity, namely, the proper name itself:

To call characters, as Furetière does, *Javotte, Nicodème, Belastre* is (without keeping completely aloof from a certain half-bourgeois, half-classicist code) to emphasize the structural function of the Name, to state its arbitrary nature, to depersonalize it, to accept the currency of the Name as pure convention. To say *Sarrasine, Rochefide, Lanty, Zambinella* (not to mention *Bouchardon*, who really existed) is to maintain that the patronymic substitute is *filled* with a person (civic, national, social); it is to insist that appellative currency be in gold (and not left to be decided arbitrarily). All subversion, or all novelistic submission, thus begins with the Proper Name. (*S/Z*, 95/101–2)

With such an observation (echoing the classic chapter on naming systems in Lévi-Strauss's *Pensée sauvage*), we are on the threshold of one of the fundamental problems of narrative analysis, namely, the relationship between the category of a "character" and the cognitive content (traits, ideas, symbolism) that makes up a given character. The structural analysis of narrative has developed out of a refusal of the surface phenomena of narrative itself, substituting for them its own terminology in much the same way that chemistry or physics substitutes the language and categories of atomic particles for the common-sense experiential data of physical substances like mud, rust, stones, wood, and the like. Yet the concept of character alone has proved recalcitrant to this kind of analytic translation, and it is hard to see how the structural analysis of narrative can make any further theoretical progress without attacking this particular problem, which may be described as that of the stubbornly anthropomorphic nature of our present categories of character. At this point, clearly, the problem intersects with the vaster philosophic one of the historical nature of the Subject itself, but characteristically, Barthes takes his own observation as a vehicle for sounding his own fundamental theme of naturalization (for example, the proper name gives a natural appearance to what is essentially a historical determination of the person), to which we will return later.

The cultural code is something like a storehouse of proverbial wisdom or commonplace knowledge about acts, events, and life in general, and will be articulated whenever a given detail needs motivation. In a sense, therefore, this code is the locus of ideology, albeit of a relatively inactive, nonfunctional type; one is tempted, indeed, to see it, not so much as a system in its own right, as any living ideology might be supposed to be, but rather as a kind of storehouse of older ideological fragments that can be appealed to now and then for a digression or an acceptable justification for some necessary move in narrative strategy. The basic object of study here would therefore be the various forms of what the Russian Formalists called “motivation,” that is to say, what has to be pressed into service to make a given detail pass unquestioned by the reader, or, to use what will presently become an ideologically charged term, to make it seem “natural” to him. Indeed, in an interesting article, Gérard Genette has suggested that verisimilitude—*le vraisemblable*—is itself nothing but the degree zero of just such motivation, something like a cultural code that is able to dispense with its content.⁷

These considerations, of course, lead directly back to literary history insofar as a text of Balzac is a good deal more self-indulgent in this respect than would be any post-Flaubertian narrative. Indeed, one of the new and self-imposed constraints of the latter is precisely to reinvent something like Genette’s notion of the *vraisemblable* by eliminating all recourse to such cultural codes and motivations that are so common to Balzac. At the same time, it should be observed that Barthes’ Cartesian method, his pursuit of nothing but the minimal unities, obscures another fundamental role played by just such cultural codes, namely the overall organization of narrative ironies, as when, in the cumulative disasters of some naturalist novel, we sense the active informing presence of a commonplace of the proverbial type (waste not, want not; pride goeth before a fall). The relationship between the global structure of a long narrative and such ideational or conceptual elements has never been adequately studied, and this is all the more surprising in view of the fact that one of the deepest vocations of the twentieth-century novel has been its attempt to expunge just such elements, which are rightly thought to be vestiges of older and more superstitious thought-ways. We will return to this problem shortly in connection with another of Barthes’ codes.

The enigmatically designated “Code of the Symbol” proves to designate bodily and sexual realities in a fashion preeminently characteristic of Barthes, who has always insisted on the body as the locus of a particular kind of nonuniversalizable private dimension of language. And as in his own work, the materials of this code range from the Bachelardian psychoanalysis of the elements to the Lacanian motifs of castration and phallic signifiers. Paradoxically, it is in this private and relatively ahistorical realm more than

elsewhere that the lack of genuine historical reference proves limiting; for one would want to find these observations grounded in some sense of the incomparably poorer physiological reality of Balzac's style when compared with the later instrumental registers of Flaubert or of Zola.

On the whole, however, it would seem clear that the purpose of these three ("reversible") codes is to probe for the roots of the intelligible detail (the *seme*)—on the one hand in the socially conventional or ideological (the Code of Knowledge), and on the other in the psychoanalytic (that of the Symbol). Here, then, concealed beneath a scheme of code classifications, we once again touch on that fundamental option of contemporary criticism (sociology versus psychoanalysis), which is itself a prime symptom of the fundamental split in modern life between the public and the private, the political and the sexual, between the untotally collective and the alienated experience of the individual. We may wonder, however, whether the procedure of assigning each of these dimensions to a different code really helps clarify this dilemma (in fact, it would seem to presuppose that each dimension of being had found *adequate* expression in a full code or sign-system of its own), or whether the concept of various codes here merely forestalls the problem and prevents it from being adequately explored. Certainly, in the case of the ideological materials, it is clear that Barthes is concerned, in his later, semiotic period, to defuse this material and to reduce it to data as inert and malleable as possible (and we have seen how the conceptualization of ideology as mere cultural and proverbial knowledge achieves precisely this aim).

The other two codes are clearly, and by Barthes' own admission, of a quite different structure, in his term "irreversible," inasmuch as they are *forms in time*, and thus, passing now into musical figures, far more akin to melodic structures than to the harmonies of the previous "reversible" types:

The readerly text is a *tonal* text (for which habit creates a reading process just as conditioned as our hearing: one might say there is a *reading eye* just as there is a tonal ear, so that to unlearn the readerly would be the same as to unlearn the tonal), and its tonal unity is basically dependent on two sequential codes: the revelation of truth [hermeneutic code] and the coordination of the actions represented [proairetic code]: there is the same constraint in the gradual order of melody and in the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence ... The five codes mentioned, frequently heard simultaneously, in fact endow the text with a kind of plural quality (the text is actually polyphonic), but of the five codes, only three establish permutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time (the semic, cultural and symbolic codes); the other two impose their terms according to an irreversible order (the hermeneutic and proairetic codes). (*S/Z*, 30/37)

It should be observed, however, that to name a thing does not always suffice to explain it: in particular, in *Morphology of the Folktale*, the structural analysis of narrative from Propp's on, an unjustifiable use has been made of the term "irreversibility," as though it did any more than to designate the basic problem to be accounted for, namely, that of the diachrony or sequentiality of narrative discourse.

In many ways, it is the proairetic code—that of empirical realities, or of the ordinary gestural and circumstantial unities of everyday life—which raises the most interesting issues for future study. What Barthes describes here is something like a dialectic of names, and of the realities—he calls them the "folds"—designated by those names:

What is a series of actions: the unfolding of a name. To *enter*? I can unfold it into 'to appear' and 'to come inside.' To *leave*? I can unfold it into 'to want to,' 'to break off,' 'to go on my way.' To *give*?: 'to present the opportunity,' 'to hand over,' 'to accept.' Inversely, to establish the sequence is to find the name: the sequence is the currency, the *exchange value* of the name. By what divisions is this exchange established? What is there in 'Farewell,' 'Door,' 'Gift'? What subsequent, constitutive actions? Along what folds can we close the fan of the sequence? ... The proairetic sequence is indeed a series, i.e., 'a multiplicity possessing a rule of order' (Leibnitz), but the rule of order here is cultural (*habit*, in short), and linguistic (the possibility of the word, the word pregnant with its possibilities) ... Thus to read ... is to proceed from name to name, from fold to fold; it is to fold the text according to one name and then to unfold it along the new folds of this name. This is proairetism: an artifice (or art) of reading that seeks out names, that tends towards them: an act of lexical transcendence, a labor of classification carried out on the basis of the classification of language. (*S/Z*, 82–83/88–89)

At this point, indeed, we may glimpse an exploration of the proairetic code that leads in a direction different from that explored by Barthes, and that would be comparable to his observations here only as a kind of X-ray of the molecular structure of the textual substance might be juxtaposed with something on the order of a psychology of perception in which the activity of reading, like that of visual perception, is seen as the construction of meaningful wholes, or *Gestalts*, out of the initial raw material of verbal stimuli. Here the most suggestive methodological discussion is furnished by Gombrich's classic *Art and Illusion*: drawing independently on Roman Jakobson's views of language, this work has protostructuralist credentials of its own, and its more orthodox account of the nature and function of an artistic code has interesting implications for the whole realism/modernism controversy, quite different from those implied by Barthes himself.⁸

Gombrich is of course arguing *for* representationality just as strongly as Barthes is arguing against it; yet his apologia of the realistic mode does not

take the path of the more traditional valorization of the object—of “reality,” historical, social, or natural—against mere artistic formalisms. It is not an apologia based on mimesis, but rather it seeks to insert between subject and object that third and more properly structuralist realm of artistic and perceptual codes that is the painter’s essential medium: thus the latter does not paint images that look like things, but rather works out and sharpens a set of relationships (the classic binary oppositions, in this instance between figure and ground, light and shade, and the like), which may then be perceived to be analogous to the relationships that make up our perception of the object. It is the binary pairs that are matched, not the objects themselves; the *parole* of the various visual styles, of the languages of painting itself, that is then—sometimes naively and unconsciously—read as an artistic equivalent for a complex of nonlinguistic perceptions.⁸

It is not, however, this aspect of Gombrich’s account of the psychology of artistic perception that is comparable to Barthes’ codes, for the latter is not really interested in the binary oppositions that organize narrative perception, and we would have to go to Lévi-Strauss’s studies of myth for something analogous in the literary realm. It is at a somewhat later step in his reasoning that Gombrich will have something suggestive to tell us about the problems raised by *S/Z*. The art historian is indeed involved in a battle on two fronts: on the one hand, through his assertion of an intermediary realm—that of the artistic code—between the subject and his object in the real world, he seeks to dispel the illusions of a naive realism, in particular what might be called the Whorfian hypothesis about the relationship between artistic style and actual perception. Whorf’s name is of course associated with the idea that the structure and inner limits of a given language may be at once translated into propositions about the structure and inner limits of its speaker’s thinking. Applied to the languages of art, this suggests that readers whose minds have been enlarged by the complex perspectives of narrative realism as Auerbach showed them to have been developed over a number of centuries will necessarily have a more adequate instrument at their disposal for deciphering external reality than would have been the case for earlier generations. We will return to this hypothesis later; suffice it to say that Gombrich’s attempt radically to dissociate style and perception—based on the *reductio ad absurdum* of a view that would finally suggest that only post-Renaissance Europeans have ever seen a three-dimensional world!—is not altogether satisfying either.

But his other conceptual adversary is something like the reverse of this one, and is constituted by the very psychologists whose work Gombrich had seemed to draw in making his first point. Here the target is what he considers to be the imaginary entity of those atomistic “sensations” on which, according to the psychologists, perception is itself constructed: the meaningless data of the various visual stimuli, which are then ultimately, through

some mysterious process of transformation, metamorphosed into the recognizable objects of a familiar external world. For Gombrich, indeed, the existential reality of such a fictive entity as the visual sensation is simply the painted canvas itself, as, particularly since impressionism, it has seemed to offer the evidence of a host of unrelated and fragmented colors and brush strokes, which magically, as we step away from it, reorganize themselves into, say, the Mont Sainte Victoire. Still, the existence of phenomena like caricature—a few bare lines that cannot be read in any other way than as some well-known face—suggests what will be Gombrich's basic hypothesis in this area, namely that the visual raw materials are reordered into a meaningful "parole" or artistic representation by means of the intervening agency of what he calls "schemata"—a storehouse of ideas of things trigger our recognition of them in the language of art—in other words, precisely what Barthes means by proairetics, or the "Code of Empirical Realities" (*la Voix de l'Empirie*).

The Gombrich version of this concept strikes me as more suggestive than that of Barthes, however, precisely because it seems to open up a whole realm of conceptual categories to our exploration, a realm in principle extending all the way from the isolated individual gesture to that of some overall generic comprehension itself. To be sure, for both writers, the immediate examples tend to be relatively local ones: thus, for Gombrich, the various recognizable natural phenomena that make up a Constable landscape, and, for Barthes, the various acts (coming and going), the various emotions (anger or sadness), the various gestures (a curious glance, a sudden look of bewilderment), whose conventional *names* provide our means of organizing the necessarily sketchy indications furnished by the narrative sentences themselves. And to be sure, the proof *a contrario*—the various examples of a pre-Brechtian estrangement-effect of which, for instance, we find so many in *Tristram Shandy*, those lengthy anatomies of a given physical gesture that force us to search for the identifying name that has been withheld—has also tended to find its privileged objects in the smaller unities of gesture and individual act. Yet I would suggest that such schemata have a much vaster functional role, particularly in more traditional narratives, one that is customarily assimilated to an illicit didacticism and moralism and that the present view for the first time puts us in a position to explore properly. This is the whole area of a kind of conventionalized identification of human experience itself, one that finds linguistic codification not so much in *names*—the experiences are a little too complex for that—as in *proverbs* and conventionalized poetic "ironies" of all kinds. The proverbial wisdom, however—"pride goeth before a fall"—is not so much a lesson to be taught by the events of a given narrative as it is rather the *name* of a recognizable destiny and of a single overall meaningful unity of human experience, and the reader uses it as a schema in precisely Gombrich's sense:

a way of organizing the various, still fragmented events furnished by the narrative into a *Gestalt* whose form *is* its meaning. This is the way in which something like a psychology of perception might be developed for narrative analysis itself, yet it is conceivable only at the price of breaking with the kind of Cartesian attachment to visible analytic minimal unities that is reinforced by Barthes' commentary method in *S/Z*; for the most interesting narrative schemata lie on the most distant circumference of the hermeneutic circle, and, like the distance that alone permits us to identify the object in a landscape of Cézanne, are never present as positivities at any moment of the text itself, their existence deducible only by inference, from the forms into which its events slowly arrange themselves.

Such an approach would then allow something like an inventory of the various conventional concepts of human experience operative at a given historical moment, in a given social formation, and in the narratives that find currency within it. What is more interesting in the present context is that it is precisely as a break with such narrative schemata that literary modernism can be understood, and here again, the analogy with the history of painting is revealing. For surely nothing has been considered quite so illicit and unjustifiable by modernist aesthetics as the operation of just such tacit and subterranean, even *ideological*, messages of the type described above: modern literature's break with plot is in reality far better understood as a break with the older narrative schemata, which are felt—rightly—to be indefensible conventional presuppositions about the nature of life and experience. The dilemma of the plotless novel, then, emerges only when it becomes clear to what degree plot is itself structurally inseparable from just such conventionalized schemata, which alone permit the reader to grasp a long series of events and pages in the unity of some larger form.

What happened in painting may serve as a dramatic object lesson in such a process, where description fatally overturns into prescription, and the new "scientific" descriptions of the process of perception are themselves transformed into a program for the production of a perceptual art of a wholly new type. This is of course what happened in impressionism when the psychological accounts of the organization of atomistic sensations into larger perceptual wholes were enlisted in an attempt to make painting reflect this psychology "more truthfully" than did the older classical type: clearly, contemporaries of such a scientific "truth" were unable to persevere calmly in the conviction that their world of *appearance*—that of the ordinary recognizable perceptions of everyday life—was stubbornly accompanied by some ghostly realm of *reality*—in other words, the stimuli and sensations supposedly at work in the retina of the eye, "objectively," and before any transformation into the merely subjective impressions of perception. They therefore itched to turn their own appearances back into realities, and much the same may be said for Barthes' revelation of the "textuality" at work

within Balzacian narrative, that it can only be seen, no matter what the formal disclaimers, as a kind of manifesto urging the substitution, henceforth, in the literature of the future, of the most uncompromising textuality for all such older pretextual narrative forms: so difficult is it to identify something like this so-called proairetic code without at the same time calling for its abolition.

When we turn, finally, to the last of Barthes' five codes, the "hermeneutic" one, it does not seem superfluous to object to the confusion that is bound to arise when, for what might more properly be called the "Code of Enigma," Barthes revives the ancient term for the very science of interpretation itself. He no doubt wishes thereby to stigmatize this concept of critical activity in the process; what he has in mind descriptively, however, is the emphasis of the classical storyteller on sensational disclosures and his consequent misuse of all the rhetorical mannerisms that hold the reader in suspense and whet his appetite for melodramatic satisfactions. And it is clear that in its overall plan just as much as its sentence-by-sentence detail, Balzac's tale of the horrible secret behind the Lanty fortune is profoundly ideological in its projection of a whole series of tacit presuppositions about the nature of time and events, the role of origins, the relationship of past to present, and so forth. It has become conventional to associate these presuppositions with the so-called closed form of the traditional novella or storytelling plot, and Sartre is no doubt perfectly justified in suggesting in *What Is Literature?* that the frame novella, with its comfortable after-dinner audience taking in an anecdote along with their cigars and brandy, projects human action as "a brief disorder which is suppressed ... told from the point of view of order. Order triumphs, order is everywhere, and contemplates an ancient abolished disorder as though the motionless water of a summer day preserved the ripples that once crossed it."⁹ What is new in Barthes' denunciation of such classical plots (besides the relationship he established in this particular one between castration, storytelling, and the commodity) is the assimilation of the classical reader's desire for plot *resolution* to that more fundamental commitment of bourgeois ideology to a conception of objectivity and absolute truth that had already been the object of the critique of the *Tel Quel* group. The solution to the enigmas of plot, indeed, the kind of reading that attaches itself to finding out how everything turns out in the end, thus becomes a profoundly ideological activity in its own right, and something like the aesthetic equivalent of the quasi-theological need for certainty of bourgeois thinking in general. Here also, one would like to distinguish between the practice of something like an empty form—those "irreversible" sequences opened and closed by the so-called hermeneutic code (the mysterious wizened figure of the opening pages, whose identity is revealed in the concluding ones)—and the supplementary ideological message for which this particular form is then used.

And it is clear that here, once again, we find ourselves in the presence of that peculiar operatory overdetermination for which early Barthes reserved the term “connotation.”

Still, the issue is a good deal broader than that of melodrama and of the code with which Barthes associates it. In its more general form, it concerns a literary phenomenon—irony (now understood in a more local and stylistic sense than we used the term above)—in which Balzac’s text is relatively poor. Before evaluating the ultimate premises of *S/Z*, it therefore seems worthwhile to turn to another recent work in this tradition, namely, Jonathan Culler’s study of Flaubert, whose title, *The Uses of Uncertainty*, suggests its affinity with the French positions, the need for “certainty” in this context designating something very much like that mirage of absolute truth denounced by *Tel Quel* and tracked by Barthes into the most minute folds and articulations of the hermeneutic code.¹⁰

II

Flaubert is in any case the historical fountainhead of an aesthetics of textuality, and, unlike the Balzac of Barthes, may be said for Culler to represent the first genuinely *scriptible* novelist in terms of which the older “legible” and traditional ones are explicitly or implicitly condemned. But Culler’s book is not only a study of Flaubert, but a study of Flaubert’s interpreters as well, and where Barthes, faced with the apparent formal unity of the older novella, set out to pulverize the text and to shatter it into its multiple codes, Culler’s “metacommentary” makes its point by a series of snapshots gleefully arresting the various Flaubertians in the act of desperately trying to put their master back together again.

So Culler has a field day detecting the nostalgia for meaning in a host of Flaubert commentaries, beginning with Charles Bovary’s hideous cap and all of the attempts uncomfortable critics have made to transform it into a symbol of one kind or another, that is to say, into a fully meaningful literary or verbal object. Yet the cap solicits interpretation: “its mute ugliness has the depths of expressiveness of an imbecile’s face”; the critics have done no more than to rise to the occasion, and the resultant readings, which range from the psychological (Charles’s personality) to the social and historical (the layers on the cap representing the strata of French society), become, in the present context, and like anyone’s comments in front of the paintings in a museum, so many candidates for an enlarged *sottisier*. This is no doubt appropriate for those with temerity enough to pronounce themselves in public about a writer whose fondest hope, in collecting his file of clichés, was to make people afraid to open their mouths in the first place for fear of uttering one of them. The point is, of course, that Flaubert’s terrorism aims

not only at stupid remarks but also, and above all, at intelligent ones and at the secretly imbecilic face of all sentences that aim at finality, or, as Culler would put it, at certainty. (“There are a whole crowd of such topics,” Flaubert confided in a letter, “which annoy me just as much whatever way they are approached . . . Whether one speak good or ill of them I am equally irritated. Most of the time conclusions seem to be acts of stupidity.”) So the critic of Flaubert’s critics plays fair and chooses as his targets not the worst of the latter but the best. Still, it remains an open question whether they could have done otherwise faced with a text that demands interpretation at the same time that it undermines it:

It is as if the exuberant narrator, still characterized as a youth engaged in mocking the new boy, had set out to reveal ‘depths of expressiveness’ and been defeated by his run-away prose, and the critic who seeks the comfort of a world in which everything signifies must avert his eyes from this defeat and treat the object as a sign whose *signifie* is Charles. (*U*, 93)

But is not this simply to say that Flaubert—or his putative narrator in this passage—*writes badly*? We have of course long seen Flaubert’s revolution in terms of a destruction of *rhetoric* in the name of *style* (see Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*): What can this mean but that the systematic machinery of the rhetorical conventions, variously pressed into the service of oratorical ends or of such late effects as that of the “sublime,” are here thoroughly subverted? For Culler, however, the resultant “style” is only incidentally, in Barthes’ sense, a vehicle for private physiological expression; the principal function of such “bad writing” is rather the discrediting of the previous reading norms, and a stray description of Yonville, in *Madame Bovary*, allows us to witness the remarkable process whereby description of the older rhetorical type (*ekphrasis* in the terminology of the ancients) undergoes a sea-change into what can henceforth only be known as a “text”:

It is not simply that each sentence appears to fritter itself away, as it runs down towards the minute and trivial; that is almost a by-product of the spectacle mounted by a prose style determined to show how grammatical devices enable it to link together a set of disparate and trivial facts . . . The particularity suggests a single scene, but the mode is one of generalization; and the result is simply that we do not know who speaks or from where. The narrator is depersonalized, in that we cannot give him a character which would explain and hold together the moments of his discourse. We have, in short, a written text, which stands before us cut off from a speaker. (*U*, 76–77)

Thus the text is organized neither objectively (according to the proportions of its object, which its various clauses and subclauses might imitate in some harmonious way), nor subjectively (through the consecutive experiences of

a viewer that it might “render”), but is rather simply held together by “grammatical devices.” The materials themselves are inert and fragmented, but it is as though the writer had discovered some new principle of order in the process by which the sentences are made to succeed each other across the page, the object of the game now being to marshal all the resources of syntax to prevent the reader from noticing how illogical is such a succession on the level of the content. (Mallarmé will then not long after this erect Syntax itself into the very narrative substance of his poems.)

The kind of coherent meaning thereby discredited on the level of the sentences is now shown by Culler to be analogous to that sought by critics on the level of the plot itself. Here the principal exhibit is that climactic final meeting between Frédéric and Mme Arnoux, in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, whose “irony” is for him as self-contradictory as the clauses in those humble descriptive sentences in *Madame Bovary* to which we have already alluded: “Flaubert must be either deflating, with consummate irony, the illusions of the characters and revealing their supposed love as false posturing or he must be defending, in a deeply touching scene, the ideal nature of this transcending love” (*U*, 152). The fact that neither of these mutually exclusive alternatives works may be taken as a symptom of the beginning crisis in the relationship between narrative and those proairestisms, or schemata, of which we spoke in the previous section: the latter are beginning to become unstuck, to wobble; they no longer function unequivocally as means of organizing narrative perception, yet the reader still gropes blindly for them, now applying the lens of the one, now the other, with imperfect and unsatisfactory results.

Under those conditions, it is the characters themselves who must attempt to reorder their pasts: “since Flaubert will not oblige, they must attempt for themselves to organize their lives as a nineteenth-century novel told from the point of view of order.” But their own, preeminently romantic reading is patently unsatisfactory:

If we accept this reading of the penultimate scene [in other words, that devised by Frédéric and Mme Arnoux themselves] we find we have made nonsense of our earlier perceptions and indeed of the explicit contrasts in terms of which the rest of the book appears to be constructed ... This penultimate scene, which overcomes oppositions and produces a fragile romantic triumph, seems to step outside the line of development adumbrated by earlier scenes. It is not, that is to say, the logical culmination of an experience, which enables us to see what Frédéric learned about love; it is rather an affirmation that while life must be lived and while this will entail disappointment and failure, nevertheless one can, if one proceeds with care, create a purified fiction which remains disconnected from one's experience. Instead of conferring meaning on earlier episodes and pointing to their lesson, it seems to empty the sentimental education, which is the ostensible subject of the book, of the content which it appeared to have. (*U*, 155)

Such a reading, or an antireading, suggests that Culler's principal theoretical adversary—although he is nowhere mentioned here—is Wayne Booth, whose own work has been concerned to denounce precisely such “irresponsible ironies” as are here offered as textual models. A careful rereading of the *Rhetoric of Fiction* shows that the “immorality” and lack of narrative perspective of a Céline merely provide Booth with a particularly striking scapegoat; the real villain, as it should be, although identified with only the greatest of tact, is evidently Flaubert himself:

Henry James talks of Flaubert's “two refuges” from the need to look at humanity squarely. One was the exotic, as in *Salammbô* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, the “getting away from the human” altogether. The other was irony, which enabled him to deal with the human without having to commit himself about it directly. But, James asks, “when all was said and done was he absolutely and exclusively condemned to irony?” Might he “not after all have fought out his case a little more on the spot?” Coming from James, this is a powerful question. One cannot help feeling, as one reads many of the “objective” yet corrosive portraits that have been given us since James, that the author is using irony to protect himself rather than to reveal his subject. If the author's characters reveal themselves as fools and knaves when we cast a cold eye upon them, how about the author himself? How would he look if his true opinions were served up cold? Or does he have no opinions?¹¹

In reality, Booth and Culler have surprisingly similar views on the “meaninglessness” of Flaubertian narrative; only what the one rejoices in, the other repudiates. And it is useful, in drawing the consequences of an “ideology of the text,” to juxtapose a critic whose attachment to the formal completeness of the individual work and the coherent messages it will convey has led him to draw the final logical conclusions of his own position, whether these be of an unpopular or old-fashioned moralizing kind, or, as in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, a plea for a restriction of the play of literary meanings to what he calls “stable ironies,” that is, those that permit coherent interpretations, or, in other words, what Culler would call “certainties”:

The serious loss comes when readers, barraged with critical talk hailing the discovery of ambiguities as a major achievement, learn to live with blurred senses and dulled attention, and deprive themselves of the delights of precise and subtle communication that skillful stable ironists provide.¹²

And it is certain that what Booth calls “irresponsible irony,” that is, an irony that takes its own ironies ironically, engages me in a process of infinite regression to which I must ultimately put an end by confessing that I no longer know what is meant by the term “irony” in the first place. Clearly, then, it is for readers like myself that Booth's new book is intended,

suggesting as it does that the term can only recover its function when restricted to its narrowest and most manageable sense: unfortunately, I do not really know what to do with this recommendation either, since the texts in question already exist in history and cannot be wished out of being again.

So it would seem that Culler has the last word, inasmuch as the climactic interview between Frédéric and Mme Arnoux exists in writing, as a text, in spite of its “theoretical impossibility” and against all attempts to assign it a coherent meaning (*U*, 152). Nothing is indeed more irresponsible, from Booth’s point of view, than a scene like this, which cannot be made to tell us something unambiguous about life; and Culler’s examination of such self-unraveling mechanisms goes a long way toward explaining why this novel is one of the most fascinating and exasperating of world literature, at one and the same time the richest and the emptiest of books, an immense failure and at the same time—perhaps precisely *because* we are never able to make final sense of it—one of the rare novels to which one can return endlessly without exhausting it, a veritable summa of sentences, an encyclopedia of everything it is interesting to see narrative language do.

Still, we must take into account the possibility that Culler’s victory may be a Pyrrhic one; for we cannot accept the implication that Flaubert is a kind of proto-existentialist, inventing diabolically meaningless objects—like Donald Barthelme’s immense balloon that one day sags down upon Manhattan, or the indecipherable sentient ocean of Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris*—that have as their ultimate purpose the therapeutic humiliation of the pretensions of the human mind to understanding. Clearly, Charles’s cap is not yet an object of this kind, and indeed, Culler distances himself from such an extreme position, testily characterizing as “arrant nonsense” the description by Nathalie Sarraute of Flaubert’s works as “books about nothing, almost devoid of subject, rid of characters, plots and all the old accessories” (*U*, 134).

Yet to say so puts his denunciation of Flaubertian “interpretation” in a somewhat different light, so it does not seem quite right to dismiss, as he does, Victor Brombert’s reading of the landscape in Fontainebleau, through which Frédéric and Rosanette wander during the June massacre of 1848. (“There is irony in those trees which, on the one hand, join each other high up in the air like immense triumphal arches, and on the other seem to be ‘falling columns’ . . . The political revolution is measured against the geological ‘revolutions.’ The ‘immobilized Titans’ remind us, in their angry pose, of the revolutionary fervor,” and so on [quoted in *U*, 101].) To be sure, once the drive to interpret gets out of hand and we transform all of these natural objects into *symbols* of history or nature or whatever, then all of Culler’s strictures become applicable; yet Culler’s own observations would themselves be impossible were we not precisely *tempted* by just such a longing for complete meaning. So, quoting other remarks by Brombert on

the “feeling of numbness and torpor” aroused by this scene in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Culler goes on to say:

It is as if he had responded to the scene in ways which seem wholly appropriate but had no other critical procedures for dealing with the text except those of symbolic interpretation. But it is not difficult to show that it is precisely through its resistance to the critical operations Brombert applies that the text produces the effects which he discerns.

Resistance, yet invitation as well—for if, persuaded by Culler’s reasoning, we decide to read Flaubert without any interpretive efforts whatsoever, the stuffing goes out of the novel in a different, but equally irremediable, way. It seems more adequate to say that such passages are *haunted* by a symbolic meaning that never completely coheres with them, and that our practice of Flaubert’s text—which can be neither interpretation itself nor some outright indifference to the interpretive process—is very much a matter of “transgression” in the self-contradictory sense in which Bataille applied that term to a certain kind of sexual gratification, which must reaffirm the norm in whose infraction it finds its own pleasure.

To put it this way, however, is to wish to reexamine the unique structure of the Flaubertian text, and indeed the more general theory of the text that emerges from it, in terms of their contradictions and within a framework that Culler does not really supply, namely, that of history itself; yet it is appropriate, before doing so, to glance at the twist ending with which he transforms his formal observations into considerations about the deeper content of these works. The mechanism is indeed that of Russian Formalism, in which content is at length seen as the projection of sheer technique; and Culler’s account of the two major themes of Flaubert, his rage before the bourgeois “stupidity” of the present and his nostalgia for a sacred that is for the most part projected into the distant past (the exception is Félicité’s parrot in *Un Coeur simple*), ingeniously converts both into thematizations of the peculiar type of reading demanded by the text. Thus, stupidity becomes “the operation which reduces [the world] to a surface and makes it a series of signs without meaning [thereby leaving] the subject free before it” (*U*, 179). And if stupidity thereby stands as the condition of possibility of the text as such, the sacred is then seen as the hypostasis of some ultimate yet impossible *parole pleine*, or full interpretive certainty: “The Zaimph [the enigmatic sacred veil of Tanit in *Salammbo*] remains a symbol for a possible narrative integration which the text denies us.”¹³

It is to designate this process of autoreferentiality that Culler then usefully revives the term “allegory,” now used in a hermeneutic rather than a pejorative sense. For to say that such symbolic, or meaning-projective, elements of a text are to be grasped as allegories of the reading process itself, in

other words, as figures for the very attempt to interpret and to assign textual meanings, is, it seems to me, quite a different type of hypothesis from the rather static and now somewhat conventionalized allegorical interpretations of the Derrida school, which, for example, by seeing Charles's cap as a figure of *écriture* and textual productivity, result in "certainties" no less unjustifiable and peremptory than the other kinds of interpretations Culler denounces. The advantage of his own approach is not only to make visible a whole range of autoreferential phenomena of this kind in traditional literature (one might, for instance, wish to see the preoccupation of a Proust or a Thackeray with memory as just such a disguised commentary on the sheer duration of the reader's reception of their own pages), but also to make possible a dialogue with that quite different, phenomenologically oriented, hermeneutic school of criticism referred to above, whose methods have not hitherto seemed compatible with those of the French or structuralizing tendency. And it is certain that we need a more adequate account of autoreferentiality in literary history than any that has previously been given; yet as Culler's demonstration of it in Flaubert alone suggests, without some more adequate historical framework, this particular phenomenon—with its suggestion of a kind of self-consciousness of the text—is only too easily pressed back into the service of the old modernism/realism antinomy, to which we therefore return in our conclusion.

III

"Sarrasine" was published in November 1830, a few weeks before the appearance of Balzac's first "signed" novel (and first great success)—*La Peau de chagrin*—and a few months after the "three glorious days" of June, which saw the fall of the Bourbon dynasty. The moment is therefore a crucial one for Balzac, in which his "general ideology" (or political system) will be definitively formed, and in which his "aesthetic ideology" (his attempts to construct a distinctive form of his own) is ambitiously and energetically projected, in what will turn out to be something of a false step. For "Sarrasine" is only one of a cycle of what we would call "fantastic tales" (the influence of Hoffman is often adduced), which will very shortly be collected and republished in a three-volume edition called *Romans et contes philosophiques* along with *La Peau de chagrin* itself, of which the new collection is thus a second printing, drawing the *cortège* of the fantastic tales along behind it. The title of the collection will live on into the definitive classification scheme of *La Comédie humaine* of 1842, where it is modified as "Études philosophiques." A few additional (and very important) texts are added under this particular classification to the contents of the original collection, but none of them is written later than 1835, at which point Balzac's

interest in this particular narrative form seems exhausted. Significantly, however, in 1835 Balzac will remove "Sarrasine" from the rubric of "philosophical tales" and reprint it as part of another subset entirely, the "scènes de la vie parisienne."

The subclassifications of *La Comédie humaine* often serve (particularly for the shorter texts) to focalize and thematize our reading and to orient it toward the production of a specific *Gestalt*, something of which the interpretive options of "Sarrasine" are virtually a paradigm case. Read as a "scene of Parisian life," the story organizes itself into an opposition between Italian and Parisian (or French) life which is relatively conventional throughout this period (and dramatized most forcefully in the works of Stendhal)—a world of passion versus a world of money and gossip. The dominant image or emblem of the tale, then, the opposition between the skeleton and the living woman's body, between death and life, on this reading becomes the retroactive interpretant of that essentially social and historical content, which we might reformulate as the radical difference between capitalism and precapitalist society, and which also governs the formal division of the tale into its two sections: the Parisian frame and the interpolated anecdote set in the Rome of the *ancien régime*.

When we replace "Sarrasine" in its first classification, however, that of the "étude philosophique" or fantastic tale, this reading or perceptual organization is with one stroke tangibly and dramatically restructured. To appreciate the extent of this reorganization, however, we must now observe that Balzac's category—the "étude philosophique" or philosophical tale—is at least in its ambitions and its concept broader than what we now designate as "fantastic" literature, since it specifically includes narratives set in earlier historical periods (*Sur Catherine de Médicis*) as well as texts with overtly philosophical, metaphysical, or mystical pretensions (*Louis Lambert, Séraphita*). The first of these features now far more strongly foregrounds the historical (and foreign) setting of the interpolated narrative of "Sarrasine," which ceases to function in opposition to the contemporary frame and becomes a kind of autonomous vision in its own right. We may indeed note in passing something like a definitive settling of accounts here with Sir Walter Scott, whose deeper historicist perspective has now so deeply penetrated the contemporary (or nineteenth-century) narratives that make up the bulk of *La Comédie humaine* that the antiquarian husk and trappings of Scott's romance can be discarded, and its Balzacian remnants gathered under the rather marginalizing and eccentric rubric of the "étude philosophique."

Meanwhile, the overtly "philosophical" focus captures the allegory of life and death and transforms it into an outright metaphysical theme, in the process transforming the historical opposition of the first interpretive option into a more existential sense of the withering of beauty and the passage of time.

On this second reading (chronologically the prior one), the “fantastic” component of the story is expressed through the “uncanny” repulsion/fascination of the aged Zambinella (younger people literally feel a chill in her proximity) and turns on the trick or secret of the castration itself, which in a wholly conventional way allows you to read the tale twice, first in all the ominous mysteries of ignorance, and then, in the light of disclosure, full of admiration for the storyteller’s calculated ambiguities. This double reading, or inverted reading structure, is obviously what Barthes designates as the operation of the “hermeneutic code”; what is not yet clear is the way in which this rather limited narrative sleight of hand will be transformed by our other, more social and historical, interpretive option. But this is also the moment to read Barthes’ own “interpretation” into the record, as I have summarized it elsewhere:

Balzac’s novella speaks to us at once of itself and of its subject matter, of art and of desire, both of which are present, with reversed emphasis, in the frame and in the actual tale alike. In the frame, the narrator tells a tale in order to seduce his listener; while within the tale itself an artist is destroyed by his desire, leaving only its representation—a statue and a portrait of Zambinella—behind in the catastrophe. This passion is narcissism and castration: the infatuated artist in reality sees his own image in the *castrato* with whom he falls in love, so that the gesture of symbolic castration or sexual renunciation is here given to be the very source of artistic productivity, just as it turns out elsewhere in the story to be the very source of the Lanty family’s mysterious fortune (Zambinella as prima donna). The fable thus has something to say about the origins of classical art and the origins of capitalism and their relationship to each other; yet it does not leave the frame within which it is told intact. Rather, it contaminates teller and listener alike, who separate at its close, in the desexualized and desexualizing atmosphere, without having consummated their desire.¹⁴

It should be added that this résumé is in the nature of an artificial reconstruction of Barthes’ reading after the fact: the commentary form precludes the synthesis into any such general proposition of its local elements and punctual observations (all of which are to be found here and there in *S/Z*). But the invocation of historical material with which this section began, as well as the memory of the legendary Barthes-Picard debate on the former’s rewriting of Racine along the lines of *Totem and Taboo*, should not lead us to the overhasty conclusion that Barthes has here willfully and arbitrarily “modernized” Balzac. On the contrary, all the elements enumerated in our summary are present in the text itself, and it is rather our “modern” sense that Balzac could not possibly have meant such things, or thought such “modern” thoughts, which is anachronistic. In fact, one cannot insist strongly enough on the “modernity” of Balzac’s tactful but explicit (and no doubt rather

daring) designations of a whole range of sexual peculiarities. In the text that concerns us here, for example, the narrator observes, to his listener: "*L'aventure a des passages dangereux pour le narrateur*" (Some parts of this adventure are dangerous for the storyteller) (*S/Z*, 234/239). It is hard to see what this might mean unless one adopts Barthes' reading, which is also confirmed by the ending of the story ("*Vous m'avez dégoutée de la vie et des passions pour longtemps... Laissez-moi seule*" [You have given me a disgust for life and for passions that will last a long time ... Leave me alone]) (*S/Z*, 253/257).

But this *aphanisis* (Ernest Jones's word, systematically recovered by Lacan, for the sudden extinction of sexual desire and the aimlessness in which the subject is left by its unexpected disappearance) marks a fundamental permutation in the earlier reading of the hermeneutic code: now the trick or the secret is a little more than a trick; it is no longer neutral, no longer a matter of possessing a crucial piece of information. Now, like the aged mummy himself, it sends a chill through the narrative itself and actively contaminates what we have read. We are, therefore, no longer in the fantastic, but rather very much in the "uncanny" in Freud's sense. What remains to be seen is the relationship between this effect and what must be called the ideological terminology or conceptuality of Desire evoked by Barthes to convey its meaning.

Metacommentary, as I sought to lay its groundwork in the preceding essay, should not be misunderstood as a refutation of other critical positions; if one insists on using that language, it would be better to say that it seeks to refute the interpretive code in which a given analysis is staged and articulated, while preserving the content of the analysis in question. Metacommentary demands, among other things, that we also account for Barthes' errors (to continue to use an older language); that is, that we have an obligation, not merely to endorse his insights and perceptions, or to denounce the faults and vices of his conceptualizations, but also to explain where these last came from in the first place (if not, indeed, to show historical necessity itself: why he had to think all of this as he did, why he could not have thought it otherwise). That second and more perplexing obligation can only be acquitted, I must feel, by showing that Barthes' conceptualizations are also projections of his content, afterimages of his object of study, mistaken for universal truths. In this, therefore, the movement of metacommentary replicates and reproduces the movement of dialectical thinking in general as it confronts its object and seeks to grasp, for example, the form of a work as the articulation of the deeper logic of the work's concrete content (in Hjelmslev's terminology, the determination of the dimension of form by that of *substance*). Only where in Balzac that content or substance is an untextualized history, a class, psychic, political, and aesthetic situation that must be reconstructed after the fact, for Barthes (besides being all of these things!) it is simply the historical object or text, "Sarrasine," whose

historical peculiarities imperceptibly govern the thinking that takes it for its occasion and its pretext.

S/Z is in effect Barthes' return upon his moment of semiotic orthodoxy (embodied most notably in the classic "Structural Analysis of Narrative"): his farewell to the attempt "scientifically" to disengage from the infinite variety of human stories and tales some ultimate abstract narrative structure from which they are all generated. The shift in optical machinery, the exclusion of overall narrative form and its replacement by a line-by-line attention (which rewrites "Sarrasine" into a very different kind of aesthetic object), seems at once to banish the older ambitions (which Greimas' *Maupassant: La Sémiotique du texte*—an explicit reply to *S/Z*—demandingly reinstates by giving attention to the structures of narrative memory—anaphora, cataphora—within the text's individual sentences). Nonetheless it would seem that Barthes' "semic code" or "voice of the person" constitutes something of a survival of the older narrative perspective, insofar as it is still obliged to retain the stubbornly anthropomorphic category of the "character" on which to string its indexes. The other codes effectively explode the text, as Barthes intended them to do; this one—despite all "good intentions"—reintegrates it at least distantly into what still looks like an old-fashioned narrative about "people."

As for the cultural code, which seems to draw *doxa*, the "*sagesse des nations*," the broken pieces of stereotypes and dead proverbs, behind it with an inertia that forbids genuinely historical—that is to say, *situational*—analysis, it can readily be shown that Balzac's text deconstructs it in the very moment it is invoked and pressed into service. To limit ourselves only to Balzac's most annoying mannerism—the authoritative appeal to older works of art ("*Et joignez à ces détails qui eussent ravi un peintre, toutes les merveilles de Venus révérees et rendues par le ciseau des Grecs*") [And along with these details, which would have enraptured a painter, were all the wonders of those images of Venus revered and rendered by the chisels of the Greeks])—it is clear that the interpretive regression that leads from Vien's painting to Sarrasine's "original" statue, and beyond that to the ambiguous "real-life" model itself, now transformed from a fascinating young woman into a repulsive old man, retroactively undermines the legitimacy and the authority of such acts of reference by causing the "referent" itself to vanish in a sleight of hand (*S/Z*, 238/243). Meanwhile, the dual structure of the tale, its capacity to generate the two distinct and incompatible kinds of readings we have already mentioned—the historical one, appropriate to a "*scène de la vie parisienne*," the metaphysical one, appropriate to an "*étude philosophique*"—here finds its source: everything depends, indeed, on the nature of the question to which the interpolated story or anecdote—the adventure of the unhappy Sarrasine—is the answer. If the story is told in order to reveal the identity of the aged mummy, we have a fantastic tale that

liberates a whole spectrum of “metaphysical” impulses and investments (specifically including Barthes’ own Lacanian fantasies); yet at the same time something peculiar happens to what seemed to be the very center of the narrative, namely the story of Sarrasine himself, who is no longer essential in any way to the destiny of the famous singer, in whose career he will have been but a very brief episode, without any particular relevance for the solution to this particular enigma. We will return to this odd structural discontinuity in the text in a moment. That the “revelation” feels like the climax of the narrative every reader of the story can judge; a closer look at the text, however, shows this to be a misreading, since Sarrasine’s story is in fact told in response to a question about the “identity” of the *painting*, and it is only in the context of that rather different question that it has any point.

This *Gestalt*-like shift in reading perspectives determines other fundamental changes as well, for example in Barthes’ “symbolic code” in which the dynamics of what begin by tropes are ultimately grounded in the experience of the body itself, in that unnameable prelinguistic carnal existence to which, most notably, the central theme of gender and sexual identity will be linked. But if one sets contemporary *doxa* (including our own obsessions with sexuality and gender and Desire) aside, it seems to me by no means irrefutable that such an ultimate “code of the body” constitutes the interpretive bottom line of Balzac’s story. An inspection of the narrative of Sarrasine’s youth, indeed, discloses a movement from the male to the female subject, from the heroic materials of war and glory to the intimate or “sentimental” materials of love, which can historically be decoded in a very different way, as a displacement in formal paradigms, a shift in artistic styles, an *embourgeoisement* and interiorization of older aristocratic traditions, a displacement of categories of Line by those of Color, about which the art historians have had much to tell us in recent years. It seems to me at least plausible that the thematics of castration and desire metaphorize and express this historical situation, rather than, on our contemporary reading, the other way round. Meanwhile, this concrete but specialized historical topic—the emergence of bourgeois painting thematized as a transformation of masculine into feminine content—is itself overdetermined by a political anxiety specific to the period when Balzac wrote the story and to the generation of writers and intellectuals to which he belonged: namely the well-known sense of *Epigontum* felt by this entire generation and most programmatically expressed in Musset’s *Confessions d’un enfant du siècle*, where the shift from war to love, from public to private, is articulated as the disappearance of the great Napoleonic occasion and the melancholy of the latecomer whom History has passed by. Read from this perspective, in which the diachrony of the eighteenth century and Mediterranean material is grasped as a projection of Balzac’s synchronic situation at the inaugural moment of the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe, “Sarrasine” sheds its

Lacanian overtones and comes to look a little like Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. In the process, however, Barthes' symbolic code has disappeared.

We have not yet, however, confronted the formal specificity (and the historical peculiarity) of this *novella*, which bears little relationship to the modern short story and may rather be seen as an anachronism, an artificial revival of the older form of the classical or Renaissance framed tale in conditions that no longer have anything to do with that kind of cultural production, which is far more archaic and regressive than Scott's "romance." That the story's fantastic content (Freud analyzes such content and such effects in "The Uncanny" as the marks and the consequence of a "return" of psychically regressive materials) is related to the "return" of an archaizing form I will try to show in a moment. First, however, it is necessary to disentangle several distinct approaches to the historicity of a text, approaches which it would be simplistic to sort out in terms of a stereotypical opposition between form and content. I have found it more adequate, elsewhere, to suggest that each of the three approaches or methodological perspectives in question in effect reconstructs its object or text in a distinct way from the others (and in a way in which, for each reconstruction, specific relationships between form and content—or form and substance—obtain).

"Sarrasine" may thus be inserted into what I will call a specifically *political* rhythm and temporality of the events and chronological agitation of the momentous year 1830, to which it can then be seen as an elaborate and complex, mediated, symbolic reaction: the contemporary satire of a fallen commercial society being now accompanied by a nostalgic image of that society's precapitalist Other which must be displaced onto another culture and another time, insofar as the palpable vacuousness and debility of the Bourbon Restoration block any recourse to that immediate historical material and indeed, at least for the moment, paralyze the conservative capacity to imagine history (a paralysis which Balzac will later overcome in interesting ways). Sarrasine's doomed obsession, therefore, which leaves only an absent work of art behind it, may here be taken as a figure for this imaginative and ideological contradiction, the difficulty of maintaining a satiric repudiation of the present in the absence of energizing visions of either a radically different past or a radically different future.

A second perspective or horizon takes the place of this one, and is accompanied by a thoroughgoing restructuration of the text or object, when "Sarrasine" becomes an episode in the larger crisis of bourgeois ideology that emerges after the triumph of this class in the Revolution of 1789, when its essentially negative and critical values and ideological instruments become hegemonic and universal or "positive" ones. This is something like a *social* level, or realm of class discourse and class struggle, which can be textualized and articulated only by the identification of a whole play or specific "ideologemes," and demands, as I have suggested above, the translation

of Barthes' "cultural code," but also his "symbolic" one, into local lexical moves, in which general "themes" are invested with a specific ideological significance which may be lost on a later readership which has forgotten the meaning of those tacitly but universally understood ideological vocabulary words. The French literature of the early middle-class period (to limit ourselves only to that) tended to express and to confront its class antinomies and general ideological dilemmas by way of the figuration of the role of the artist, who thus comes to "represent" the situation of the bourgeois intellectual with something of the obsessive force and concentration of symptom-formation. From this perspective, then, "Sarrasine" will no longer be read as a political allegory, but rather as that seemingly more limited thing, the story of the artist, which, however, symbolically vehiculates larger issues of class and ideology (of which our remarks on heroic and sentimental painting, on line and color, are to be taken as one "coding" among others). The thematics of castration are here, then, something more than a punctual difficulty in "thinking" the Revolution of 1830; they express the more general problem of forging a new ideology (in Balzac's case, a new conservatism) in the historical situation that emerges from that revolution.

But there remains a final level or interpretive horizon that is historically vaster than either of these (and which I have therefore felt it appropriate to designate as *historical* in the most general sense), insofar as it opens onto the realm of modes of production as such and the transitions from one form of human society to another. Paradoxically, it is at this most general level of interpretation that literary form in its more specialized sense becomes visible as an ideologically charged move, as a socially symbolic strategy. It is therefore within this final perspective that we must return to the issue of Balzac's revival of an archaic form of storytelling, with a view toward some ultimate settling of accounts with Barthes' conception of a "hermeneutic code."

This will also, however, present the occasion for the reevaluation of another enormously influential contemporary critical text, which we have found it necessary to mention from time to time in this discussion, namely Freud's essay on "The Uncanny," whose object of study, E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" (1816), has at least some distant kinship with Balzac's romantic tale. Indeed, the most obscure and least discussed section of Freud's essay—offered with uncharacteristic diffidence and hesitation—deals with the relationship between "uncanny" effects and the formal structures of narrative in ways that seem relevant to the dual structure or *Gestalt* of Balzac's novella noted above. Freud here shrewdly suggests that the formal articulation of uncanny or repressed materials may be organized as a kind of shell game (my image) in which the reader's attention is diverted to the empty receptacle in such a way as to preclude the psychic effect the filled one would inevitably have determined:

In the Herodotus story our thoughts are concentrated much more on the superior cunning of the master-thief than on the feelings of the princess. The princess may very well have had an uncanny feeling, indeed she probably fell into a swoon; but *we* have no such sensations, for we put ourselves in the thief's place, not in hers.¹⁵

At this point, Freud unaccountably breaks off, having demonstrated only the first of the two points he intended to develop:

The somewhat paradoxical result is that in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life. (*CW*, IX, 249)

Yet Hoffmann's story allows us to reestablish this second proposition in such a way as to shed light on "Sarrasine" as well, by raising the whole issue of the narrative *frame* as the fundamental mechanism in the shifting of *Gestalt* perceptions, and as the locus of that trick whereby, in the shell game of fiction, an uncanny effect can be produced by the unexpected appearance of the fateful token under a receptacle thought to be empty.

I use the terminology of framing here by way of analogy with off-camera space in film, where a peculiar *lateral* effect is possible in the insertion, as it were, of images between the camera apparatus and the eye, images that have nothing of the density of the objects before the camera but rather hover, divested of their object-world or background, and thereby of their normal materiality, with something of the free-floating quality of hallucinations that move across the perceptual field without belonging to it. Something like this has always disturbed me in the reading of the opening pages of Hoffmann's story, arousing the suspicion that Freud's topic had more to do with form than the conventional interpretation of this essay in terms of content (castration, regression, images of the double or the simulacrum) suggested. I will not go so far as to identify this connection with epistolary narrative as such (although it is a very peculiar form indeed); but it seems to me obvious that the strangeness of the Hoffmann text has a good deal to do with the inexplicable shift from the epistolary mode to conventional third-person narrative, something Freud does not mention but which Hoffmann himself awkwardly and unsuccessfully devotes a few pages to motivating.

The reader cannot help feeling a nagging skepticism about the improbability of these opening pages. It is a skepticism readily enough repressed in the name of literary convention (since by definition the fantastic is not supposed to be governed by verisimilitude), but which on the other hand does not really attach to the events themselves (the villainy of Coppélius, the secret experiments, the "significance" of the eyes); rather it is a skepticism that involves the initial narrative contract, and it bears on the unlikeliness of

a situation in which the protagonist could grow up in the company of those who will become his betrothed and his best friend without their ever hearing anything about his traumatic childhood experiences. They cannot *not* have known; or, if we must have it this way, the reader's skepticism reverses itself and comes to focus on the peculiarity of the protagonist's confession at this point, at this *now* of the epistolary experience—so convenient for the storyteller, one thinks absurdly, as though it were not the chance appearance of Coppélius's double, the lens-grinder Coppola, which motivated the revelation in question. Only in the reading experience this follows that; and one has the sense of some simple but thoroughgoing and inadmissible narrative fraud, as when for the purposes of the denouement a novelist endows a long-familiar character with a hitherto concealed and quite preposterous and unexpected life history. But that is not quite the right way to put it either, since the conventional reversal of the detective story repeatedly does this without arousing anything of the feeling of protest and scandal I am trying to register here. It would be better to say, therefore, that what is "familiar" about the character to whom this unexpected past is somehow "spuriously" attributed is his first-person status, or at least his formal status as the protagonist, with whom, therefore, what is often loosely called "identification" is solicited. It is this contract, then, which is summarily broken and disregarded in the unexpected revelation itself, which abruptly separates us from the former protagonist, brutally shifting from first to third person, and stamping him as Other to us in all respects, no longer capable of sustaining our identification, indeed repelling it. The peculiarity of the situation may be conveyed by analogous (but structurally inverted) and equally artificial experiments in "first-person" film where we are asked to watch the contents of the screen through the hero's eyes. I have dwelt on it in such length not merely because it seems to me to hold the structural key to "the uncanny" itself (Freud's account shows us becoming *other* to ourselves), but also and above all because it characterizes the major literary and formal achievement of Balzac's "fantastic" period, namely the novel *La Peau de chagrin*, rigorously contemporaneous with "Sarrasine." Critics have not often been willing to admit, let alone discuss or theorize, the outrageous way in which—analogous in that to the introduction of the childhood memory in "Der Sandmann," but on a much more enormous scale—Raphael's autobiographical reminiscences (including a childhood evocation of the father very much in the spirit of the Freudian generic convention) drive a wedge between reader and protagonist, such that this last is moved inexorably and irrevocably into a third-person position in which, at the close of the novel, we observe him coldly and remorselessly in the throes of the absolute otherness of possession by what, in one characteristic period language, was then called "the demonic" and, in another, "frenzy." Indeed, in the psychological ideology of the period, "frenzy" is the specific

ideologeme that designates a certain kind of otherness, or, more precisely, a certain kind of impotent rage and irredeemable agitation into which the "Other" who has been split off from the self is precipitated: Nathanael of "Der Sandmann" undergoes the same formal metamorphosis, as does the eponymous sculptor in Balzac's short story (although here one is tempted to say that the moment of frenzy, radically foreshortened in its second- or third-hand retelling, is prolonged under another form in the phenomenon of *aphanisis* in which the frame story concludes).

It seems to me at least plausible that Freud's own interest in the Hoffmann variant of this peculiar structure was awakened by its analogy to the analytic situation itself, and to the dialectic of identification and otherness generated by a first-person frame which, violated, necessarily gives way to the more disinterested detachment of third-person observation. In our present context, however, it seems appropriate to evaluate these psychological but also textual peculiarities in terms of the history of form, and in particular in terms of the survival and readaptation of a form developed within one mode of production within the very different environment and ecosystem of a later one. This is already, as I have suggested, something of a return of the repressed in its own right, an unexpected repetition, a recurrence of the archaic; the Romantic revival of the Renaissance art-story or novella therefore already bears within itself formally the powers of the uncanny, irrespective of the content of this or that Romantic tale.

But I now want to suggest more than that, and to relate the form of the various kinds of narratives in question here to the structure of the psychic subject as it is variously constructed in distinct modes of production (or, as in capitalism, in distinct moments of a single mode of production). The art-novella, however, whose revival we are considering here, cannot be said to express the cultural dominant of the mode of production that precedes capitalism. Feudal art—whatever its dialectical transformations over a very long historical period—articulates the *ethos* of its twin ruling classes, a *samurai* nobility, obsessed with fate, death and glory, and a church whose function is to devise an essentially agricultural or peasant theology; and in the process it must address, reconcile, or resolve the contradictions between those two ideologies. Art historians, however, have often remarked about the simultaneity, in many distinct cultures, between the emergence of "realistic" or "naturalistic" forms of representation and the growth of commerce or the development of a money economy and a system of cash exchange. It seems plausible, then, to posit some general relationship between the "realism" of the art-novella (Boccaccio, the *Novelas ejemplares* of Cervantes, Marguerite de Navarre) and commercial activity, provided this last is grasped as a limited enclave within a radically different economic system, an activity structurally subordinate to this last and assigned specific spatial and temporal boundaries (the city, the trade fair), within which it is "free" to develop

in a semiautonomous way. Such a qualification suggests that we must also grasp the specific cultural production associated with the art-novella in a similarly restricted and subordinate fashion: as a specific kind of narrative production that takes place within the pores and interstices, the intermundia, of a feudal narrative production that is organized on very different principles. The art-novella, then, will be governed by the experience of money, but of money at a specific moment of its historical development: the stage of commerce rather than the stage of capital proper. This is the stage Marx describes as exchange on the frontiers between two modes of production, which have not yet been subsumed under a single standard of value; so great fortunes can be made and lost overnight, ships sink or against all expectation appear in the harbor, heroic travelers reappear with cheap goods whose scarcity in the home society lends them extraordinary worth. This is therefore an experience of money which marks the form rather than the content of narratives; these last may include rudimentary commodities and coins incidentally, but nascent Value organizes them around a conception of the Event which is formed by categories of Fortune and Providence, the wheel that turns, bringing great good luck and then dashing it, the sense of what is not yet an invisible hand guiding human destinies and endowing them with what is not yet “success” or “failure,” but rather the irreversibility of an unprecedented fate, which makes its bearer into the protagonist of a unique and “memorable” story. In this cultural production, then, the individual subject is still considered to be the locus of events and can only be articulated by way of nonpsychological narrative.

The bourgeois world, however, the life world of a now properly capitalist exchange system, is one in which the individual subject—now an economic and juridical unit within a matrix of equivalencies—begins to develop that rich, monadic, properly psychological autonomy which is thought to be the spiritual property of the West and has been celebrated (or denounced) in any number of familiar ways. In the formal context of the present discussion, it will be useful to mark its full narrative codification by means of the shorthand of the Jamesian conception of “point of view,” whose function will be, among other things, to exclude the kinds of peculiar first/third person dysfunctionality we have glimpsed in Hoffmann and Balzac, and to regulate our distance from the protagonist in a more stable alternation of identification and irony. Looking back from this triumphant moment of narrative and psychic stabilization, then, it is clear that the texts we have dealt with here can be little more than oddities and curiosities, historical eccentricities.

Reestablished in its own historical situation, however, which is that of the setting in place of the new market system, but also of its provisional coexistence with institutions and ideologies that, incompletely liquidated, still survive from an older mode of production, the uncanny tale will take on a

rather different historical and symptomatic significance—that of something like an interference or a contamination between two distinct cultural principles, which are structurally incompatible, but whose forced conjunction yields a text to be thought of less in terms of hybridization than of anamorphosis. Indeed, the uncanny tale presents some of the properties of a two-dimensional geometrical plane projected into a three-dimensional system: in it, a narrative governed by categories of the Event must now be represented by means of the very different representational categories of a narrative process organized around the Person or Subject. The uncanny tale is by no means the only formal symptom of this immense systemic transformation, in which the properties of an older cultural system survive, bereft of their function, within the emergent force field of a new one. It is appropriate to inscribe here, without exploring it further now, the very different, yet equally anomalous, peculiarities of the *reading play*, as it comes into being in the *Walpurgisnacht* scene of Goethe's *Faust* and is bequeathed, via Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, all the way down to the Nighttown section of *Ulysses*. Here the representational paradoxes of the frame are mobilized, not around categories of event, but rather in terms of perception and description, by way of the interference between printed space and the properties of a spectacle now merely remembered or conceptualized.

Barthes' "hermeneutic code" can now at any rate be seen to be either excessively or insufficiently theorized, insofar as its specific object of study or raw material (what happened? when will we learn what happened?) is a historical form, the art-novella, on the point of artificial revival, and also extinction. Yet its inadequacies as a purely analytic instrument recover a certain use and functionality on a dialectical level, where this concept can serve to direct our attention to the presence or survival of more archaic narrative features within texts organized by different principles—provided we remember that this "code" governs, not all narrative as such (let alone "realism," or "the scriptible text"), but merely and very specifically this historical form of narrative as such.

As for Barthes' "proairetic code," it can now be seen to locate with unerring precision the places at which the new cultural logic eats away at archaic figures of the event and the act and undermines or decodes them. This is why it would be a mistake to consider *S/Z* as a contribution to the analysis of the short story as such; for the modern short story, as it emerges in Chekhov, bears no genetic relationship to the archaic tale revived in Balzac's text—or rather, if there is some distant genetic or evolutionary relationship between the two, it would be better to imagine it according to the eccentric model of filiation proposed by the Russian Formalists—the "knight's gambit," not an inheritance from father to son, but at best one from uncle to nephew. Indeed, the modern short story emerges, not from the narrative system of the classical tale, but from what disintegrates it, that is to say, very

precisely from the “proairetic code” itself, whose “unfoldings” of the older conventional names for events and actions open up a space for the writing of new kinds of texts. Paradoxically these texts—the modern short story—disclose an immediate and unexpected affiliation with another emergent form, namely the novel itself—but not the so-called realistic or classical nineteenth-century novel, rather its “modernist” successor (whose act of succession is equally to be grasped according to the Formalists’ discontinuous model of development). That *Ulysses* should have first begun life as the project for a short story on the dimensions of *Dubliners*, that *The Magic Mountain* should equally have been first conceived as a novella not much more ambitious than “Death in Venice”—these otherwise peculiar facts are testimony to the corrosive power of the “proairetic code,” which it was Barthes’ supreme achievement to have formulated in *S/Z* but whose richness and suggestiveness we can explore only by grasping it, not as yet another analytic category in the “structural analysis of narrative,” but rather as a historical force in its own right, as that active logic of disjuncture, separation, disaggregation, and abstraction which in other areas of study bears the name reification.

Such are, then, some of the ways in which Barthes’ own critical categories are secretly informed by the “logic of content” of his texts, thereby cleaving to history and to the difference and resistance of the past despite his brilliant and Nietzschean “forgetfulness” of traditional literary history. That in this, however, such concepts also cleave to history in the present it will be the task of a final section to demonstrate.

IV

Returning in a very different way to the question of frames, it seems useful to pursue a hypothesis I have proposed elsewhere, namely that all apparently synchronic or ahistorical analysis depends on and presupposes (for the most part covertly) a diachronic scheme, a vision or “philosophy” of history, a historical “master narrative,” in terms of which its evaluations are processed. In an intellectual climate, however, in which such abstractions as the older “universal” histories with their broad periodizing schemes (along with any other diachronic patterns or “teleological” or evolutionary narratives that seem to have affinities with them) have fallen into disrepute and opprobrium, this structurally indispensable diachronic frame tends to be repressed, and at best to return in the form of a dualism or binary opposition. In the case of *S/Z*, this dualistic framing structure is articulated as that opposition between the “legible” and the “scriptible” which both generates Barthes’ analytic categories in the first place (the five codes) and is then invoked for a more ambiguous evaluation of the findings they produce

(Balzac's manifestly "legible" text turning imperceptibly into a "scriptible" one).

That this dualistic framing process in *S/Z* is by no means an isolated instance or an idiosyncrasy can be appreciated by a random checklist of other such binary schemes at work in the most influential currents of contemporary thought: in the omnipresent Heideggerian story about "Western metaphysics," for example, but also in the Frankfurt School's conception of "enlightenment" (their word for "reification," accompanied by an ever-receding initial moment of the archaic, or of pre-Enlightenment); in the various anarchist (or Foucauldian or Weberian) conceptions of Power (always preceded by a moment before which "power" was formed); in various aesthetic forms of value or the absolute, such as "indeterminacy" or New Critical paradox or irony (both preceded by kinds of texts that had not yet self-consciously become aware of those essences of literariness); representation and the "centered subject" versus whatever is taken to be the opposite of those things; and so forth and so on—the list, clearly, might be extended indefinitely.

The objection to such dualisms is complicated, and involves a little more than the suspicion that all this makes for bad history (which it may well do). I want to say, first, that such diachronic frames are not in themselves objectionable; they are in fact indispensable, so that the vices of the various kinds of thinking enumerated above do not lie in the existence of such a frame but rather in the way it has been constructed. Second, it is clearly the binary structure of the frame that demands critical and negative attention, since in all these cases the very presence of a dualistic structure makes it quite inevitable for the mind to assimilate that opposition to the fundamental ethical one, and to sort the opposing terms out into a good one and a bad one. It is, then, this often imperceptible contamination by ethical thinking or moralizing which deprives such perceptions and formulations of trends and processes of their historical validity.

It is, however, the third qualification that may be the most unexpected: namely, that, as I have tried to show locally for Barthes' text, the defectiveness of what I have been calling the diachronic frame need not invalidate the work done within it (and in a moment I will add a fourth qualification: "on the contrary"). It is, indeed, with the relationship and the articulation of these two kinds of structures—a diachronic frame and a synchronic analysis—a little like the problem of the relationship of propositions and subordinate clauses in Frege, where the falsity or fictionality of the one need not necessarily entail the falsity of the other. But in this case, the priorities of Freud's joke (which has been adduced to dramatize this dilemma) may well be reversed: "Is this the place where the Duke of Wellington spoke those words?—Yes, this is the place; but he never spoke the words." There would seem to be something in the dynamics of contemporary theory that makes

for a situation in which the Duke spoke the words, but not in this place at all.

I have introduced the question of the nature of contemporary “theoretical discourse” at this point to historicize the whole issue and to allow for at least the possibility that my fourth qualification may have some more general applicability: namely that for some reason what we call “theory” today seems to require a dualistic or binary frame in order to “produce” its “concepts.” This will not, however, be a meaningful proposition unless “theoretical discourse” is grasped as a historical form of language production in its own right, a discursive phenomenon or genre developed in the last few decades, with only the most distant structural affinities to apparently related forms of writing associated with traditional philosophy or other disciplines. Indeed, one of the sub-themes of the essays collected here can be identified as the attempt to position “theory” historically and to formulate its status as a discourse, something that is undertaken more formally in the study of the 1960s in the second part of this collection, but whose essentials will also begin to emerge in the course of the present discussion. For the moment, it will be enough to retain this preliminary hypothesis on the structure of theoretical discourse as such: a binary diachronic frame within which “new” concepts or neologisms are generated for essentially synchronic operations of a linguistic nature.

This said, we may again take up the Barthesian opposition between the legible and the scriptible with a view toward determining its relationship to the older realism/modernism dispute, of which the newer “textual” issues often seem a contemporary replay. Indeed, the new terminology may be understood as the result of a French situation in which—paradoxically enough for the place in which it originated—modernism has borne no particular name as such (the word *modernité*, traditionally used in the sense of “modern times” in general or in what social scientists call *modernization*, is only now coming to take on this meaning). I want to suggest that this opposition is unsatisfactory, from a historical point of view, and that the premature ideological but also ethical judgments that are made in its name must be seen as *compensations* for its structural incapacity to do justice to diachronic phenomena.

But of course, from another point of view, the realism/modernism opposition is useful precisely in the kind of covert diachronic or genetic thinking it enables without declaring itself as such. Thus, we may observe that the division of literature into these two starkly antithetical tendencies (form-oriented versus content-oriented, artistic play versus imitation of the real, etc.) is dictated by the attempt to deal adequately with modernism, rather than the other way round (in this sense, even Lukács’s accounts of realism are defensive and reflect his own “conversion” to the earlier artistic style). The concept of realism that thereby emerges is always that with which

modernism has had to break, that norm from which modernism is the deviation, and so forth. It is as though, in spite of everything, only a historical and genetic approach to modernism, which leans fully as much on the story of the emergence of the new phenomenon as on some ahistorical or synchronic description of its structure, could provide the proper account, for which, therefore, the straw man of “realism” was formally necessary.

The proof of this assertion may be found in the peculiar fact that whenever you search for “realism” somewhere it vanishes, for it was nothing but punctuation, a mere marker or a “before” that permitted the phenomenon of modernism to come into focus properly. So as long as the latter holds the center of the field of vision, and the so-called traditional novel or classical novel or realistic novel or whatever constitutes a “ground” or blurred periphery, the illusion of adequate literary history may be maintained. But as soon as our critical interest itself shifts to these last, we become astonished to discover that, as though by magic, they also have every one of them been transformed if not all into modernists, at least into precursors of the modern—symbolists, stylists, psychopathologists, and formalists to a man! That this should happen, in Culler’s hands, to Flaubert is hardly surprising, for the historical peculiarity of Flaubert is that he can be read either way, as old-fashioned realism (now perfected!) or as sheer text. But it is more surprising to see Genette, in the article referred to above, fall victim to this optical illusion:

Thus the predominance of the storytelling function itself proves to be, if not challenged, at least menaced, in a work that however passes for the very epitome of the ‘traditional novel.’ Another step, and the dramatic action will pass into the background, and the storyline lose its signifying primacy to the discourse itself: in a prelude to the dissolution of the novelistic form and the emergence of *literature* in the modern sense of the word. From Balzac to Proust, for instance, it is not so far as one might think. (*VM*, 13)

Barthes cannot himself go quite this far, since he picked Balzac as an example of the “traditional” in the first place; yet his anatomy makes it clear just how much of the modern “text” is already flesh and bone of the older novella, and on the point of separating itself from it. It is with the modernists, indeed, a little like Goering and the Jews (“*I* decide who’s Jewish!”): they are the ones who decide what is modern and what is not, and the privative term of realism is reserved for books they do not happen to be interested in at that moment (the minute they become interested, the modernity of the writer in question will not be long in disclosing itself). The reason for this is not hard to determine: like so many oppositions of this kind, to the negative or straw term has been attributed everything that is error, illusion, and the like. The “realists,” in other words, are supposed to

believe in representationality and the like, it being understood that such a belief is itself a superstition. Thus, it can be attributed to them only if, like the primitives of *participation mystique*, one does not really believe in their existence, and as long as they are held to be, simply, the Other. When they begin to affirm themselves as our equals, categories of otherness are no longer adequate.

It is therefore essential to remove the ethical content from this opposition, and insofar as the human mind seems particularly inclined—in spite of itself—to invest binary oppositions with a moral evaluation, this can often best be done, and the binary opposition historicized, by adding a third (and perhaps even, as we will see, a fourth) term, and restoring the apparently exclusive alternative of realism versus modernism to a whole series of historical terms and forms. Everything changes the moment we envisage a “before” to realism itself: indeed, we have already suggested that “Sarrasine” cannot be fully evaluated formally without some feeling for its value as a kind of pastiche or revival of the older Florentine or Renaissance novella-form (a practice of the “art-novella,” which will then be extensively developed through the nineteenth century up to Chekhov’s decisive break with it). If to this we add a perspective in which the storytelling forms of the feudal age come into view, not to speak of those of primitive or tribal societies, then it becomes difficult to think of nineteenth-century realism as anything but a uniquely historical product, one unthinkable at any other moment in human history; but by the same token, this particular expression of a historical bourgeoisie forfeits its apparent claim to some permanent fulfillment of the categories of bourgeois thinking.

I would want, however, to distinguish this view from the traditional antiquarian type of literary history: for a Marxist historicism, indeed, the presupposition is that none of these forms of the past are of antiquarian interest alone, and that their actuality for us may be demonstrated—indeed, can only be demonstrated—by an analysis that juxtaposes the limits and the potentialities of our own socioeconomic moment with those realized or imposed by the systems of the past, in short, by other *modes of production*. Each moment of the past (or of other cultures) has a very special sentence or judgment to pass on the uniquely reified world in which we ourselves live; and the privilege of artistic experience is to furnish something like a more immediate channel through which we may experience such implicit judgments and attain a fleeting glimpse of other modes of life.

What would such a new historical perspective now do to the ideological judgments the theorists of the text believed themselves able to pass on the older type of “realistic” narrative? For one thing, it allows us to observe such judgments a little more clearly at work in the light of day, and to distinguish between genuine analysis and a kind of knee-jerk application of ready-made categories. One of the most frequent of the latter is indeed the notion of the

open work, to which corresponds a similarly moralizing valorization of critical pluralism:

Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one. (*S/Z*, 5/11–12)

And so forth. Such pluralism is at best a refusal to go about the principal critical business of our time, which is to forge a kind of methodological synthesis from the multiplicity of critical codes; at worst, it is just one more veiled assault on the nonpluralistic (read, “totalitarian”) critical systems—Marxism, for example.

The principal ideological judgments passed by the “ideology of the text” on its counterpart, the “ideology of realism,” reflect two separate themes and preoccupations of Barthes’ own work, older and newer motifs that coexist in *S/Z*. The first of these, which finds its fullest expression in the Brechtian estrangement-effects of *Mythologies*, is what in a characteristic neologism Barthes will denounce as “naturality,” associating it with one of the most characteristic strategies of the bourgeois thought process and of the whole bourgeois way of rewriting the world after its own social and political victory. Hjelmslev’s connotative method proves an apt instrument to detect the tendency everywhere in bourgeois society—from its ads to its works of art—to transform culture into nature, to naturalize history and social phenomena:

The (ideological) goal of this technique is to naturalize meaning and thus to give credence to the reality of the story: for (in the West) meaning (system), we are told, is antipathetic to nature and reality. This naturalization is possible only because the significant data released—or summoned—in a homeopathic rhythm, are carried, borne along, by a purportedly “natural” medium, language; paradoxically language, the integral system of meaning, is employed to systematize the secondary meanings, to naturalize their production and to authenticate the story. (*S/Z*, 23/30)

We have already seen, above, how the naming system of language functions precisely as just such an illusion that social realities are “natural” ones (proper names being in this respect as natural a taxonomic system as the words for the various species). Where Barthes goes much further in his demystification, furnishing us thereby with an object of study that we have not yet seen in quite this light before, is in his account of the *sentence* itself as

the primary vehicle for just such a profoundly ideological process of naturalization:

There is a force in the sentence (linguistic entity) that domesticates the artifice of the narrative, a meaning that denies the meaning. We might call this diacritical element (since it overhangs the articulation of the narrative units): *sentencing*. To put it still another way: the sentence is a *nature* whose function—or scope—is to justify the culture of the narrative. Superimposed on the narrative structure, forming it, guiding it, regulating its rhythm, imposing on it morphemes of a purely grammatical logic, the sentence serves as *evidence* for the narrative. For language (in this case, French), by the way it is learned (by children), by its historical weight, by the apparent universality of its conventions, in short, by its *anteriority*, seems to have every right over a contingent anecdote, one which has begun only some twenty pages back—whereas language has lasted forever. (*S/Z*, 127–28/133–34)

In many ways, however, this mission to track down and to destroy the traces of “naturalness” in our culture is very much part of the private thematics of Barthes himself (“the will to burden signification with all the justification of nature itself provokes a kind of nausea,” he tells us in *Mythologies*¹⁶), and it is the other feature of the ideology of representation—the status of the *subject*—that has been perhaps more widely explored in recent French theory. The most graphic dramatization of the intimate relationship between representation and the concept of the subject has indeed been made by Michel Foucault, in the opening chapter of *The Order of Things*, or rather by his object of study in that chapter, Velázquez himself, in his painting *Las Meniñas*. This work, by common agreement one of the summits in the mastery of the techniques of representation, is thus profoundly exemplary of such representational discourse at the very moment when, transcending itself, it begins to offer its own diagnosis: the viewer is indeed astonished to find himself standing in the place of the royal subject—Philip IV and his queen—whose reflections gaze back at us from a mirror on the distant rear wall of the painted room. *Las Meniñas* thus betrays a double and *constitutive* absence:

that of the painter and the spectator when they are looking at or composing the picture. It may be said that in this picture, as in all the representations of which it may be said to reveal the fundamental essence, the profound invisibility of what one sees is inseparable from the invisibility of the person seeing . . . And indeed, [in *Las Meninas*] representation undertakes to represent itself in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being. But there, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is

its foundation—of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject—the two are the same—has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.¹⁷

Such an account, by insisting on the self-consciousness of representation in *Las Meninas*, would seem in the present context on the point of transforming this “realistic” work into a “modernistic” one. Yet the constitutive link demonstrated here between representation and the repression of the subject will then become the principal feature of poststructuralist diagnosis, and the mediation whereby ideologies (bourgeois versus revolutionary) and artistic discourse (realistic versus modernistic) are linked to psychopathology (neurotic versus psychotic, as in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*).

The paradox of this position is that the structuralist critics of representation are led to denounce the active and in-forming presence of the subject precisely in those texts in which it is repressed: On the one hand, they denounce its forgetfulness of itself, and on the other, they call for its suppression. So the following diagnosis of Barthes takes on unexpected overtones in a situation in which, as we shall see, schizophrenia has become a slogan and a whole ethical and political program:

We may say that, in a sense, ‘objective’ discourse (as in positivist history) [or the realistic novel] resembles schizophrenic discourse; in both cases there is a radical censorship of the utterance, in which negativity cannot be expressed (though it can be felt), and there is a massive reversion of discourse away from any form of sui-reference, or even (in the case of the historian) a reversion towards the level of pure referent—the utterance for which no one is responsible.¹⁸

One would be only too inclined to agree that one of the fundamental preconditions of some representational, or “realistic,” narrative discourse is to be found in the deliberate effacement of the traces of producer and consumer, and that the viewing eye, faced with representational discourse, has a vested interest in ignoring its own presence; yet in the polemic appropriation of this insight by the realism/modernism debate, a curious reversal takes place in which it is henceforth precisely just such a subversion of the subject that is recommended. Here is Barthes on what is exemplary, in this respect, in Flaubert:

Flaubert, however ... working with an irony impregnated with uncertainty, achieves a salutary discomfort in writing: he does not stop the play of codes (or stops it only partially), so that (and this is indubitably the manner of *proof* of his writing) *one never knows if he is responsible for what he writes* (if there is a subject *behind* his language); for the very being of writing (the meaning of the labor that constitutes it) is to keep the question *Who is speaking?* from ever being answered. (*S/Z*, 140/46)

Again, the contradictions that arise from the structuralist attack on the subject seem to me resolvable if they are projected onto a more complicated scheme of periodization and articulated in a more properly historical, rather than an ethical, perspective. The trouble is that the attack on the old bourgeois subject can take two forms: that of the attempt to dissolve the subject altogether, and that is, as we shall see in the case of Deleuze, either an anarchist or a countercultural solution, depending on whether “time’s livid final flame” is conceived of in terms of a political apocalypse or a private druglike fantasmagoria; or the other quite different solution, which would consist of renewing the primacy of the group and of collective life over the bourgeois optical illusion of individual existence, and returning to a view of the individual subject as a *function* of the collective structure, a condition of which, perhaps, the ethnographic descriptions of tribal existence give us the most adequate glimpse.

The same adjustment must be made in the earlier motif of naturality: what is ahistorical about Barthes’ attack on this particular feature of the bourgeois Weltanschauung is the implication that the concept of nature is at all times and everywhere in and of itself reactionary. But clearly there have been moments—the preparation of the bourgeois revolution itself and the attack on the “artificiality” of the feudal order—in which the concept of nature has been a profoundly subversive and contestatory weapon; and clearly the only dialectical way of evaluating such a motif is through analysis of its function in a given historical situation. Nothing is, indeed, more idealistic than the notion that a given thought-form (representationality, for instance, or the belief in the subject or in the referent) is always and under all circumstances “bourgeois” and ideological, for such a position—which seems to me that of the *Tel Quel* group, among others—tends precisely to isolate the form of thought (or its equivalent, the form of discourse) from that practical context in which alone its results can be measured. Ideologies can therefore never be evaluated independently of their function in a given historical situation: Witness, for a dramatic example of this assertion, Koyré’s demonstration of the progressive character of Galileo’s Platonism as opposed to the apparently far more realistic and even materialistic Aristotelianism of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors.¹⁹

A Marxist framework, to be sure, substitutes, for the structuralist opposition between nature and culture, the more dialectical and diachronic one of an opposition between nature and *history*: yet even here the ideological character of “nature” is by no means unequivocal, as may be observed in the works of the very writer from whom Barthes himself first drew his suspicion of naturality, as well as the literary instruments by which to denounce it, namely, Brecht. For even in the Brechtian canon, there is a decided alternation between plays like *Mann ist Mann* and *The Good Woman of Sezuan*, which unmask the historical and constructed origins of seemingly natural

attributes like aggressivity or acquisitiveness, and *Mother Courage*, which emphasizes the *unnatural* character of the seemingly only-too-natural drive to make a profit (this un-Brechtian reversal would then go a long way toward explaining the peculiar and ambiguous status of the latter play in the writer's work). There is indeed a powerful tradition of what I will call the "naturistic strategy" in Marxism itself, one going back as far as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*; with their emphasis on a species being, these works argue, if not for a fixed and immutable human nature in the right-wing sense, then certainly for judgments based on a notion of human potential, of which they demonstrate the contemporary *alienation*. And a communist literature no less powerful than that of Brecht—I'm thinking of the novels of Paul Nizan, particularly *Antoine Bloyé*—draws its force from just such a rhetoric of the natural and the unnatural. Meanwhile, there are signs, particularly in the work of Herbert Marcuse, that in our own peculiarly antinatural society, the concept of nature may once again recover some of its negative and critical virulence as an offensive weapon and a Utopian standard.

Whatever position one takes on these two privileged themes (nature, the centered subject), the "ideology of modernism" can also be seen to confront fundamental problems of historical explanation in its account (when it is willing to offer one) of the *transition* from realism to modernism. The framing and priorities of the commentary form in *S/Z* release this particular Barthes from that historical obligation (which was discharged in a very different way in *Writing Degree Zero*); but one has the impression that poststructuralist *doxa* includes two relatively distinct alternative ways of telling this particular story.

The first is the apocalyptic or prophetic mode, given paradigmatic voice at the climax of the aforementioned work of Michel Foucault, where the impending dawn of some new "structuralist" age is saluted with what will now look like premature enthusiasm. The passage in question was of course composed before May 1968, a moment that seems on the whole to have spelled an end to such Utopian celebrations, at least by *French* intellectuals, who went on in the next decade with diligence to dissolve and liquidate all remaining traces of the legacy of a political Utopianism (from the Sartrean 1950s) as well as of an aesthetic Utopianism (from the twin currents, in the 1960s, of the *nouveau roman* and of the *nouvelle vague* in film). Still, feeble traces of the old realism/modernism paradigm remained to greet the anachronistic victory of the Left in a 1980s France from which Marxism had been triumphantly delegitimated and virtually expunged. Paradoxically (yet in a peculiar replay of the belated and peculiarly French ideological function of romanticism itself, in the 1820s) it is now the conservatives who are the modernists (a stylistic slogan that reduces itself to a kind of internationalist and pro-American celebration of California-type modernization), while the

Socialists are symmetrically positioned within a dreary “realism” to which a whole range of old-fashioned and outmoded attitudes are attributed, which range from traditional French chauvinism and the *esprit de clocher* to traditional French anti-Semitism (since this last is the current code-word for the Soviet Union, it will be clear that such a denunciation of “tradition” also includes traditional, “pro-Soviet,” party politics).

The other, alternative version of the contemporary account of the passage from realism to modernism is not specifically French and can be observed at work in the Culler book discussed earlier: The historical paradigm offered here (but it is extremely widespread) is grounded on the hypothesis of the weakening, throughout the nineteenth century, of the “basic enabling convention of the novel as genre,” namely a “confidence in the transparency and representative power of language” (*U*, 80). The possibility that such hypothetical confidence might itself have been a relatively recent historical development, which then demands explanation in its own turn, is not generally taken into account in such narratives of cultural change, which then tend to describe the crisis in question in terms of an intensifying reflexivity, which is most often at one with irony and/or nihilism. When a writer like Baudelaire or Flaubert becomes “self-conscious,” that is to say, “aware of his images as interpretations, of his words not as the furniture of the world but as devices that, at least for the moment of this particular perspective, are being used to communicate ends,” then the older literary discourse enters a long and terminal crisis, of which canonical modernism can be the only “solution.” On this particular road, then, Culler’s Flaubert, undermining interpretation in the very moment of soliciting it, comes to be seen as a strategic halfway house.

The conception of a linguistic or a formal “self-consciousness” or “reflexivity” has, however, always been part of the explanatory baggage of the ideology of modernism since its inception; although Hegelian in its first inspiration, it has become the unexamined premise of an enormous variety of pseudo-historical descriptions of modernity and survives anachronistically, under its pseudonym “irony,” into the rather different historical narratives of Paul de Man and Hayden White. It does seem to me high time to abandon this particular concept; but as this is not the moment to argue for that more radical act in any great detail, I will limit myself to what seems a more moderate and indeed unassailable suggestion, namely that any such virtually universal presupposition demands systematic reexamination from time to time.

However such literary self-consciousness is to be understood, its functional link with the other specifically modernist conception of “innovation” seems clear enough: An aesthetic reflexivity which, continuing to use older forms, did not, however, in one way or another result in formal change and transformation, would not seem particularly plausible. Leaving aside the

analogies between this way of thinking about “high culture” and the rhythms of fashion and commodity production generally (analogies that can only reawaken our suspicions and doubts about these modernist concepts), we may observe that the modernist paradigm is most often staged in terms of the pathos of the museum or the library, the sheer weight of the cultural past, some excess of literature and its dead texts which by way of a kind of fatigued and disabused sophistication ultimately provoke the dialectical reversal of a “coming to awareness” by literature of itself. It is, for example, symptomatic that Culler systematically avoids any perspective that would lead him into a discussion of the relationship between the new raw material of Flaubert’s commonplaces and *idées reçues* and the equally new saturation of a commodity society by commercial writing and messages of all kinds. His allegorical reading of the theme of stupidity (which we have already touched on in another context) can now be seen to have the secondary function of excluding a sociological perspective of this kind. Even more symptomatic in his characterization of another theme in the novel—what may be taken as Flaubert’s own “sociological” perspective—as

Madame Bovary’s greatest flaw. If there is anything that justifies our finding the novel limited and tendentious, it is the seriousness with which Emma’s corruption is attributed to novels and romances. If this is an attempt to diagnose Emma’s condition, to characterize her alienation, and to explain her fate, it is a singularly feeble one. (*U*, 146)

Culler thereby cuts himself off from what would seem the most promising possibility of linking what the Russian Formalists called the “literary system” proper with those other, distinct, yet still proximate, “systems” of daily life such as those still verbal systems of “popular culture” which are the ancestors of what we would today call the media; but more recent theorizations of what is now called “intertextuality” more successfully manage to incorporate the obvious referencing of other kinds of texts while leaving history and sociology out of it.

Barthes’ version of all this, as I have already observed, does not have to theorize “self-consciousness” in any particularly thematized way (pseudo-historical or otherwise), if only because it so elaborately shows interpretive self-consciousness and hyperreflexive reading concretely at work in what must be their strongest forms; yet another twist of the thermostat, and we are across the line into the “scriptible” itself, whether in the sheer act of a Bouvard-and-Pécuchet kind of copying out of lengthy quotations without comment, as in Derrida’s “commentary” on Sollers’s *Nombres*, or in the writing of new texts—about which, however, since they are “scriptible” rather than “legible,” one can no longer, virtually by definition, say anything at all.

This is the moment, then, to propose a more thoroughgoing modification of the dualistic paradigm of realism and modernism, the “legible” and the “scriptible” as it has been found to underpin critical works of this kind. The attempt to unsettle this seemingly ineradicable dualism by adding a prior third term, in the form of some “classical” or precapitalist narrative—the moment of merchant culture and of a Renaissance-style novella that is neither “realistic” nor “modernistic”—proved to have known only partial success, modifying Barthes’ working categories, but not his fundamental historical scheme. Let us therefore attempt to displace this last in a different way, by introducing a third term as it were at the other end of its temporal spectrum.

The concept of *postmodernism* in fact incorporates all the features of the Barthesian aesthetic, as it informs *S/Z* (surface, “textualization,” intensities of a new affect that surges and fades, decentering of the subject, pulverization of the monumental in favor of fragments and a taste for their momentary configurations, spatialization in place of deep temporality, rewriting rather than interpretation), and presents in addition a threefold explanatory advantage. First, it allows us to situate Barthes’ own text—and “theory” or *theoretical discourse* in general—as themselves manifestations of the postmodern, indeed as a new kind of discourse that knows its historical moment of emergence within postmodernism itself. This proposition then restores its historical content to the exercise in metacommentary we have been pursuing here, for it means that the description of Barthes’ own discursive structure ceases to be a matter of weighing various critical alternatives against their object of study (Balzac), but has a specific cultural and historical object of study of its own right (the postmodernist “theoretical” text).

Meanwhile, the new distinction clarifies Barthes’ otherwise confusing appeals to modernity by separating the classical moment of high modernism—which still retains the centrality of the *auteur* as subject or demiurge, and projects a monumental effort at ultimate reunification in the form of the “book of the world”—from the postmodernist restructuring. As far as I know, Barthes never officially confronted the monumental works of high modernism which he admired (see the reference to *Der Zauberberg* at the conclusion of his “Inaugural Lecture” at the *Collège de France*); the occasional returns to Proust essentially foreground the postmodern features of that author, just as Culler does with Flaubert. Yet the critical practice of a related theoretical group—the film theories of the journal *Screen*—suggest that whereas the works of the great modernist *auteurs* (Bergman, Fellini, Hitchcock, Kurosawa) must be critically devalued owing to the ideology of the modern which informs them (as it equally informs the architecture of Wright or the International Style, with similar results among the younger postmodernist architects), earlier kinds of representational artifacts—in the area of film, this will mean Hollywood and commercial genre

productions—are by no means subject to the same strictures, since in them other (unconscious) forces are at work to subvert the weakly conventional logic of the surface representation. Such possibilities of a radical rewriting of older forms of more conventional storytelling also account for Barthes' own attraction here to Balzac and elsewhere to Jules Verne.

But the concept of the postmodern has a final signal advantage over the various pseudo-historical paradigms we have touched on in the course of this essay, namely to allow a genuinely concrete explanation of such aesthetic and cultural phenomena to emerge as a possibility for the first time. The theory of the postmodern, indeed, is predicated on (or rather indeed, heuristically, confirmed by) a more fundamental periodizing hypothesis about the nature of capitalism itself as a system and a mode of production. According to that economic and social hypothesis, capital has so far historically known three specific mutations, in which a persistence or an identity of the underlying system is maintained throughout moments of expansion (virtual quantum-leaps in the organization of capital), which are also felt as breaks, as the emergence, particularly in culture and the superstructures, of a radically new existential and cultural logic. These three moments can be enumerated as the classical or national market capitalism known to Marx, the moment of monopoly capital or the stage of imperialism (theorized by Lenin), and the permutation, finally, after World War II, into a global form of "multinational" capitalism which has as yet received no adequate designation in its own right (but is the object of an ambitious theorization by Ernest Mandel in his pathbreaking book *Late Capitalism*). To each of these systemic moments "corresponds" (but this word should be taken to designate, not a theoretical solution, but rather a theoretical and historiographic problem and task) the appropriate cultural moment of realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively. These are less to be grasped as "styles"—in the older sense of the great period styles like the Baroque—than as so many cultural "dominants" that inform a whole range of social and existential phenomena beyond the realm of the aesthetic or of culture, a realm which in any case is modified in each of these moments and knows a dialectically distinct "space" within each one.

The development and exploration of this historical hypothesis is, obviously enough, a program that bursts the confines of the present essay. I will conclude it, therefore, with some final remarks on the problem implicitly staged in the two books we have been discussing here, which it seems to me fair to formulate in terms of the relationship between consciousness and form. Indeed, despite the essentially postmodernist content of their aesthetics, both Barthes and Culler retain one fundamental feature of the ideology of modernism proper, which involves something like a reversal of what above we called the Whorf hypothesis, namely the idea that stylistic or linguistic traits reflect epistemological or ideological ones. For

modernism—radical in its rejection of realistic discourse and of the bourgeois world to which the latter corresponds—imagines that if you alter the structure of artistic discourse in a decisive way, the realities to which it corresponds will find themselves thereby similarly modified. Thus, if seeing the world through the old “bourgeois” categories is bad, a change in style will help us to see the world in a new way and thus achieve a kind of cultural or countercultural revolution of its own. And to be sure, if consumer capitalism were a new and qualitatively distinct socioeconomic form in its own right, as many have maintained, something like this would presumably be conceivable, and we would expect the new social form in time to generate its own distinctive kinds of artistic discourse, and to leave the realistic ones behind it like so many dead husks, as antiquated and archaic as the *chanson de geste*, primitive rituals, or Greek tragedy. But what is peculiar about consumer capitalism is that it is merely a second-degree construction upon classical capitalism itself, the latter continuing in a paradoxical coexistence with it, the fundamental laws of classical capitalism (codified by Marx) operative from a global perspective while seemingly invalidated and outmoded if one looks at them within the limits of the national experience of a single advanced country. So it is that we continue to walk the older world of everyday life of classical capitalism while our heads move about in the apparently quite different hallucinogenic atmosphere of the media and the supermarket/suburb; the first of these realities, not unlike the Lacanian signified, is repressed as far as possible under the second, driven under the crossbar of the semiotic fraction, into something that is not altogether an unconscious. This is why our art, that of modernism, is not a new thing in itself, but rather something like a canceled realism, a realism denied and negated and *aufgehoben* in genuinely Hegelian fashion; and what we do with the works that show the functioning of all those realities of capitalism that have not changed substantially since the time of the great naturalists—wage slavery, money, exploitation, the profit motive—is to decree that since they cannot be said to be untrue, they are boring and old-fashioned. But here boredom is the sign of what is to be repressed, and this automatic and indeed visceral reaction to the older art forms betrays the origin of modernism itself in an aestheticizing reaction against the sordid realities of a business civilization, about which we would prefer not even to have our art remind us. So the death of the referent has been greatly exaggerated; at best, it has only gone underground.

Under these circumstances, there are few enough versions of the modernist apologia consequent enough to stand the test. Let us recall Gombrich’s lesson, as a way of radicalizing the literary version of this particular dilemma: In the visual arts, a kind of absolute, or Zenonic, formulation of the problem was reached by asking whether the destruction of perspective by modern painters, and their return to two-dimensionality, could be

imagined as affecting in any way the three-dimensional experience of everyday life of their contemporaries. The appeal to lived perspective, like the appeal to the hard sciences, is to be sure an apparently decisive argument, comparable to Dr. Johnson's appeal to the stone; and in literature, the equivalent argument may seem less binding. For the literary equivalent of the phenomenon of perspective—we have implied as much throughout these pages without as yet saying so outright—is surely narrative itself. Gombrich indeed sees an intimate link between the development of naturalistic techniques in painting and the requirements of storytelling; the modernist attack on realism in literature was at one with its repudiation of plot, and Barthes' fluoroscopy of the text has been useful in implying some of the reasons (operation of the proairetic schemata, organization of plot around enigmas and discoveries, naturality of the narrative sentence, dependence of narrative discourse on some type of effacement of the subject) why this should have been so.

A fundamental work of the newer philology, indeed, confirms the analogy between narrative and perspective by suggesting that the very structure of language itself shows a deep functional vocation for storytelling, which must then be seen, not as some secondary pastime, to be pursued around the fireside when praxis is over, but rather as a basic and constitutive element of human life. Harold Weinrich's *Tempus*, following Benveniste, proposes a comprehensive resolution of the vexed problem of verb tenses through which they are systematically sorted out into narrative tenses and what he calls "discussive" (*besprechend*) ones, those of storytelling (where events have become closed off and may be contemplated at a distance, in themselves) and those of an active relationship to the world in which we must ourselves be drawn into the context along with our listeners and our referents.²⁰ If such a picture of language wins conviction, it can only intensify the peculiarity of a spectacle in which modernist writers seek to amputate language of a good half of its essential organs, to suppress one whole dimension of linguistic and literary experience.

Weinrich, like Gombrich, is resolutely anti-Whorfian, and repudiates the idea that a change in language, any more than a change in style, results from—let alone causes—a change in our phenomenological experience of the external world. This skepticism tends to force both of them back into a relatively conservative view of literature, involving the defense of convention (of the schemata, of the structure of narrative tenses) in and for itself, a road down which we will not follow them. We are, however, fortunate in having at our disposition a counterexhibit, a rather astonishing document that pushes to its ultimate limits the modernistic or textual position outlined above. This is the glorification of schizophrenia (and of the schizophrenic as the "true hero of desire") to be found in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where the final step is taken

and it is asked of life itself and of lived experience that it conform to the account we have given to the text.²¹ For Deleuze and Guattari essentially follow Lacan's description of schizophrenia as a disease of language in which connections have broken down: Continuity in speech, for Lacan, is a function of what he calls "the slippage of signifieds" (*le glissement des signifiés*), in other words, that relative semantic flux that allows us to disconnect a meaning from one word, or signifier, and attach it to its synonym. For Lacan, indeed, the world of the schizophrenic is quite the opposite of meaningless: if anything, it is too meaningful; each instant, like each signifier, is a closed and full meaning in itself, from which it becomes increasingly difficult to lay a bridge to the subsequent moment of time. So the schizophrenic's reality gradually comes to approximate the Flaubertian text as Culler describes it, a formal or syntactical succession through time that does not correspond to any real progression or perspective at the level of its meanings or signifieds. Here also the ultimate implications of Barthes' critique of the proairetic code are fulfilled: There are no longer any names! and the old conventional words and unities have been swept away in a flux of experience in which everything is by definition always new. And no doubt there is a sense in which it can only be a relief to find one's self liberated from the all-too-familiar continuities of ordinary representational, or "realistic," referential living: The analogous effect of drugs is in no small measure also linked to just this abolition of the logic of time, which releases each instant, and the object in it, to glow and radiate a kind of undifferentiated and autonomous energy. We should also mention the historical context in which Deleuze and Guattari's book became, in France, a kind of manifesto: that widespread disillusionment with the Communist party among students and intellectuals after the failure of May 1968, which predictably drove so many of them across the still-political positions of leftism or anarchism into what in this country we would call a depoliticized counterculture, of which *Anti-Oedipus* is one of the basic texts. Still, as the Surrealists discovered in a situation that bore some similarities to this one, it is probably easier to praise madness than to practice it; and one does not become a schizophrenic, no matter how heroic an act that would be, simply by the taking of thought.

Deleuze and Guattari's position, indeed, may be seen as the most extreme working out of that Cartesian maxim from which all bourgeois subjectivism may be said to spring: "always to seek to conquer myself rather than fortune, to change my desires rather than the established order, and generally to believe that nothing except our thoughts is wholly under our control."²² The illusion of freedom and creativity enjoyed by the early modernists was a function of their transitional moment in socioeconomic history, a moment in which features of the new consumer economy, the so-called second industrial revolution, had begun to supersede those of older classical or

Balzacian capitalism. Today, however, when modernism no longer represents this conquest of new material but rather has integrated itself into an economy functionally dependent on it for its indispensable fashion changes and for the perpetual resupplying of a media culture, artists and writers who want to change their styles may well once again come to the conclusion that they must first change the world.

1975–76

Notes

- 1 “The central recommendation [of ethnomethodological study] is that the activities whereby members [of a given social group] produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members’ procedures for making those settings ‘account-able’ ... I mean observable-and-reportable, i.e., available to members as situated practices of looking-and-telling.” Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967, 1. “To treat the cockfight as a text is to bring out a feature of it ... that treating it as a rite or a pastime, the two most obvious alternatives, would tend to obscure: its use of emotion for cognitive ends.” Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, 449.
- 2 Paris: Seuil, 1970; English trans. Richard Miller, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974; quoted with frequent modifications. Future references to this work are denoted *S/Z* and are cited with page references for the English translation and French original respectively.
- 3 Roland Barthes, *Barthes par lui-même*, Paris: Seuil, 1975, 120.
- 4 Roland Barthes, “L’Éffet de réel,” *Communications* 11, 1968, 88.
- 5 Roland Barthes, “Texte,” *Encyclopaedia universalis*, vol. 15, 1973, 1016. The word “semiosis,” derived from Peirce, designates that process of the interpretations of signs whereby, in a properly infinite series, a new sign is proffered as an explanation, interpretation, or translation, of the older one. For an approach to semiotics based on this notion, one that successfully surmounts the strictures made on classical semiotics in the present essay, see Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1976. And see, for an earlier statement on the nature of textuality, Roland Barthes, “De l’œuvre au texte,” *Revue d’esthétique* 25:3, 1971, 225–32.
- 6 The number of codes is not immutable, and Barthes introduces somewhat different ones in “Analyse textuelle d’un conte d’Edgar Poe,” *Semiotique narrative et textuelle*, ed. Claude Chabrol, Paris: Larousse, 1973, 29–54. The concept of a code has also been widely developed in film theory, particularly in the early work of Christian Metz, where, however, we find the same general hesitation shortly to be noted in *S/Z* between “narrative codes” or generic conventions and cultural languages, stereotypes, and “meanings.”

76 THE IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY

- 7 "Vraisemblance et motivation," *Communications* 11, 1968, 5–21. Future references to this work are denoted *VM*.
- 8 See Ernst Hans Goblrich, *Art as Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960, especially 33–62.
- 9 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" *Situations II*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, 181.
- 10 Jonathan Culler, *The Uses of Uncertainty*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1974. Future references to this work are denoted *U*.
- 11 Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961, 85; and see, for further strictures on Flaubert, n. 27, 373.
- 12 Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974, 172.
- 13 Veronica Forrest-Thomson, "The Ritual of Reading *Salamambo*," *Modern Language Review* 67:4, 1972, quoted *U*, 223. And see, for a related study, her "Levels in Poetic Convention," *Journal of European Studies*, 1971, vol. 2.1, 35–51.
- 14 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1972, 148.
- 15 Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. IX: Jensen's "Gradiva" and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1959, 252. Future references to this work are denoted *CW* and are cited with volume and page numbers.
- 16 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris: Seuil, 1957, n.7, 212; and compare his triumphant description of an ideological analysis capable of "despatching codes, one by one, along the strand of the text, their bellies in the air," 100.
- 17 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage, 1973, 16.
- 18 Roland Barthes, "Historical Discourse," *Introduction to Structuralism*, ed. Michael Lane, New York: Basic Books, 1970, 151. The strongest literary statement of such a diagnosis has been made by Françoise Gaillard, who explicitly assimilates the structure of representationality to that of voyeurism (see "La Représentation comme mise en scène du voyeurisme," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 154: 2, 1974, 267–282). Her arguments are, however, weakened by the choice of an example, *Les Diaboliques* of Barbey d'Aurevilly, which like the "Sarrasine" of Barthes, may scarcely be considered an example of nineteenth-century realism at all, but rather a pastiche of older storytelling.
- 19 "Galileo and Plato," *Metaphysics and Measurement*, ed. Alexandre Koyre, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- 20 Harold Weinrich, *Tempus*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964.
- 21 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983.
- 22 René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Laurence Lafleur, New York: Macmillan, 1960, 20.

Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan

The attempt to coordinate a Marxist and a Freudian criticism confronts—but as it were explicitly, thematically articulated in the form of a problem—a dilemma that is in reality inherent in all psychoanalytic criticism as such: that of the insertion of the subject, or, in a different terminology, the difficulty of providing mediations between social phenomena and what must be called private, rather than even merely individual, facts. But what for Marxist criticism is already overtly social—in such questions as the relationship of the work to its social or historical context, or the status of its ideological content—is often merely implicitly so in that more specialized or conventional psychoanalytic criticism which imagines that it has no interest in extrinsic or social matters.

In “pure” psychoanalytic criticism, indeed, the social phenomenon with which the private materials of case history, of individual fantasy or childhood experience, must initially be confronted is simply language itself. Even prior to the establishment of the literary forms and the literary institution as official social phenomena, language—the very medium of universality and of intersubjectivity—constitutes that primary social instance into which the preverbal, presocial facts of archaic or unconscious experience find themselves somehow inserted.¹ Anyone who has ever tried to recount a dream to someone else is in a position to measure the immense gap, the qualitative incommensurability, between the vivid memory of the dream and the dull, impoverished words that are all we can find to convey it. Yet this incommensurability, between the particular and the universal, between the *vécu* and language itself, is one of language itself, is one in which we dwell all our lives, and it is from it that all works of literature and culture necessarily emerge.

What is so often problematical about psychoanalytic criticism is therefore not its insistence on the subterranean relationships between the literary text on the one hand and the “obsessive metaphor” or the distant and inaccessible childhood or unconscious fascination on the other. It is rather the absence of any reflection on the transformational process whereby such

private materials become public—a transformation that is often, to be sure, so undramatic and inconspicuous as the very act of speech itself. Yet insofar as speech is preeminently social, in what follows we will do well to keep Durkheim's stern warning constantly before us as a standard against which to assess the various models psychoanalytic criticism has provided: "Whenever a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false."²

I

In any case, it was Freud himself who, as he did so often, first sensed the methodological problems raised by the application of psychoanalytic techniques to those intersubjective objects which are works of art or literature. It has not sufficiently been observed that his major statement in this area, the essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1907), far from using the identification of literary productivity with private fantasy as a pretext for "reducing" the former to the latter, on the contrary very specifically enumerates the theoretical difficulties such an identification must face. His point is that it is by no means so easy as it might seem to reconcile the collective nature of literary reception with that fundamental tenet of psychoanalysis that sees the logic of the wish fulfillment (or of its more metaphysical contemporary variant, *le désir*) as the organizing principle of all human thought and action. Freud tirelessly stresses the infantile egotism of the unconscious, its *Schadenfreude* and its envious rage at the gratifications of others, to the point where it becomes clear that it is precisely the fantasy or wish-fulfilling component of the literary work that constitutes the most serious barrier to its reception by a public:

You will remember how I have said that the daydreamer carefully conceals his phantasies from other people because he feels he has reasons for being ashamed of them. I should now add that even if he were to communicate them to us he could give us no pleasure by his disclosures. Such phantasies, when we learn them, repel us or at least leave us cold.³

Here again the dream provides a useful confirmation, and anyone who has had to listen to the dream narratives of other people can readily weigh that monotony against the inexhaustible fascination of our own dream memories. Thus, in literature, the detectable presence of self-dramatizing, and most often self-pitying, fantasies is enough to cause a withdrawal from the implied contract of reading. The novels of Baron Corvo may serve as illustrations, or most bestsellers; even in Balzac, a good many thinly disguised wish fulfillments become the object of what is at best amused complicity on the reader's part, but at worst outright embarrassment.⁴

Freud does not conclude, but proposes a twofold hypothesis for exploration as to the nature of the poetic process itself, which he characterizes as

the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others... The writer softens the character of his egoistic daydreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies. We give the name of an *incentive bonus*, or a *fore-pleasure*, to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. (*CW*, IX, 153)⁵

Repression of the private or individual relevance of the fantasy (in other words, its universalization) on the one hand, and the substitution of a formal play for the immediate gratification of wish-fulfilling content on the other—these two “methods,” as Freud calls them, correspond to a dual interpretive system that runs through all his reading of texts, from those of dreams all the way to literary and cultural objects, but is given most striking expression, perhaps, in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*: namely, an account of the wish fulfillment in terms of its content (in other words, the nature of the wish being fulfilled and the symbolic ways in which it may be said to reach fulfillment) side by side with an explanation of the “supplement” of a more purely formal pleasure to be derived from the work’s organization itself and the psychic economy the latter realizes. It is thus perhaps not too far-fetched to see at work in this twofold account of the poetic process the subterranean presence of those primordial Freudian powers of Displacement and Condensation; gratification of the wish by its displacement and disguise, and a simultaneous release of psychic energy owing to the formal shortcuts and superpositions of overdetermination. For the moment, however, we must retain, not Freud’s solution, but rather his formulation of the problem in terms of a dialectic between individual desire and fantasy and the collective nature of language and reception.

It cannot be said that the literary criticism of orthodox Freudianism—even at its best—has followed the example of Freud himself in these reflections; rather, it has tended to remain locked within the categories of the individual and of individual experience (psychoanalyzing, as Holland puts it, either the character, or the author, or the public) without reaching a point at which those categories themselves become problematical. It is rather in some of the oppositional, or heretical, applications of psychoanalytic method to literature that we will be likely to find suggestive hints toward a further specification of the problem itself.

Thus, for example, Sartre may be said to have pioneered a psychobiographical method that cuts across some of the false problems of an

orthodox psychoanalytic and a traditional biographical criticism alike. In both Sartre and Erikson, indeed, the conventional opposition between the private and the public, the unconscious and the conscious, the personal or unknowable and the universal and comprehensible, is displaced and reanchored in a new conception of the psychic and historical situation or context. Now the meaning of Genet's style or Luther's theological propositions is no longer a matter for intuition, for the instinctive sensibility of analyst or interpreter in search of a hidden meaning within the outer and external one; rather, these cultural manifestations and individual productions come to be grasped as responses to a determinate situation and have the intelligibility of sheer gesture, provided the context is reconstructed with sufficient complexity. From an effort at empathy, therefore, the process of analysis is transformed into one of a hypothetical restoration of the situation itself, whose reconstruction is at one with comprehension (*Verstehen*).⁶ Even the problem of evaluation (the "greatness" of Luther's political acts, of Genet's formal innovations) becomes linked to the way in which each articulates the situation and may thus be seen as an exemplary reaction to it. From this point of view, the response may be said to structure and virtually to bring to being for the first time an objective situation lived in a confused and less awakened fashion by their contemporaries. The concept of the context or situation here is thus not something extrinsic to the verbal or psychic text, but is generated by the latter at the very moment in which it begins to work on and to alter it. It should be added that in both Sartrean and Eriksonian reconstructions, the family proves to be the central mediatory institution between the psychic drama and that social or political realm (papal authority for Luther, nineteenth-century class society for Flaubert) in which the psychic drama is ultimately acted out and "resolved."

At least for Sartre, however, this valorization of the situation goes hand in hand with a radical depersonalization of the subject. Here, despite the Lacanian polemic against the Cartesianism of *Being and Nothingness* and against the alleged ego-psychologizing of the psychobiographies and the evident revisionism of Sartre's early attacks on the Freudian concept of the unconscious, it must be observed that another Sartre—that of *The Transcendence of the Ego*—was an important predecessor in precisely that struggle against ego psychology that Lacan and his group systematically waged. In that work, as well as in the chapter on the psyche in *Being and Nothingness* which prolongs it, the ego in the traditional sense—character, personality, identity, sense of self—is shown to be an object for consciousness, part of the latter's "contents," rather than a constitutive and structuring element of it. A distance thus emerges within the subject between pure consciousness and its ego or psyche that is comparable to that separating the subject (*S*) and the ego (*é*) in Lacan's L-schema. Sartre's "Cartesianism" is not properly understood unless the attendant stress on the impersonality of

consciousness is also grasped, on its utter lack of quality or individuating attributes, its “nature” as a mere speck or point without substance or consistency, in terms of which you, I, Luther, Genet, Flaubert, are all radically equivalent and indistinguishable. We are thus entitled to speak of an insertion of the subject here, both in the relationship of the historical figure to his situation and in the project of the psychobiography as a reconstruction of it: the opposition of particular to universal has been transformed into the relationship of an impersonal and rigorously interchangeable consciousness to a unique historical configuration. This said, it must also be noted that the psychobiographical form remains shackled to the categories of individual experience, and is thus unable to reach a level of cultural and social generalization without passing through the individual case history (a survival of the classical existential insistence on the primacy of individual experience that continues to govern both the *Critique de la raison dialectique* and the presentation of nineteenth-century objective spirit—there called “objective neurosis”—in volume III of *L’Idiot de la famille*).

In contrast, the synthesis of Marx and Freud projected by the Frankfurt School takes as its province the fate of the subject in general under late capitalism. In retrospect, their Freud-Marxism has not worn well, often seeming mechanical in those moments in Adorno’s literary or musical studies when a Freudian scheme is perfunctorily introduced into a discussion of cultural or formal history.⁷ Whenever Adorno or Horkheimer found their historical analyses upon a specific diagnosis, that is, on a local description of a determinate configuration of drive, repressive mechanism, and anxiety, Durkheim’s warning about the psychological explanation of social phenomena seems to rematerialize in the middle distance.

What remains powerful in this part of their work, however, is a more global model of repression which, borrowed from psychoanalysis, provides the underpinnings for their sociological vision of the total system, or *verwaltete Welt* (the bureaucratically “administered” world system), of late capitalism. The adaptation of clinical Freudianism proves awkward at best, precisely because the fundamental psychoanalytic inspiration of the Frankfurt School derives, not from diagnostic texts, but rather from *Civilization and Its Discontents*, with its eschatological vision of an irreversible link between development (or *Kultur*, in the classical German sense of the word as technological and bureaucratic “progress”) and ever-increasing instinctual renunciation and misery. Henceforth, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the evocation of renunciation will function less as psychic diagnosis than as cultural criticism; and technical terms like “repression” come to be used less for their own denotative value than as instruments for constructing, negatively, a new Utopian vision of *bonheur* and instinctual gratification. Marcuse’s work can then be understood as an adaptation of this Utopian vision to the quite different condition of the *société de consommation*, with

its “repressive desublimation,” its commercialized permissiveness, so different from the authoritarian character structures and the rigid instinctual taboos of an older European industrial society.

If the Sartrean approach tended to emphasize the individual case history to the point where the very existence of more collective structures becomes problematical, the Frankfurt School’s powerful vision of a liberated collective culture tends to leave little space for the unique histories—both psychic and social—of individual subjects. We must not forget, of course, that it was the Frankfurt School which pioneered the study of family structure as the mediation between society and the individual psyche;⁸ yet even here the results now seem dated, partly owing to precisely that decay of family structure in modern times that they themselves denounced. Partly, however, this relative obsolescence of their findings results from a methodological shift for which they themselves are responsible, namely the change of emphasis—particularly in their American period—from the family as a social institution to more properly psychological concepts like those of the authoritarian personality or the fascist character structure. Today, however, when it is ever clearer just how banal evil really is, and when we have repeatedly been able to observe the reactionary uses of such psychological interpretations of political positions (for example, the student revolt as an Oedipal manifestation), this will no longer do. Frankfurt School Freud-Marxism ended up as an analysis of the threats to “democracy” from right-wing extremism, which was easily transferred, in the 1960s, to the Left; but the original Freud-Marxian synthesis—that of Wilhelm Reich in the 1920s—evolved as an urgent response to what we would today call the problems of cultural revolution, and addressed the sense that political revolution cannot be fulfilled until the very character structures inherited from the older, prerevolutionary society, and reinforced by its instinctual taboos, have been utterly transformed in their turn.

A rather different model of the relationship between individual psychology and social structure from either that of Sartre or of the Frankfurt School may be found in a remarkable and neglected work of Charles Mauron, *Psycho-critique du genre comique*. Mauron’s work cuts across that static opposition between the individual and the collective whose effects we have observed in the preceding discussion by introducing between them the mediation of a generic structure capable of functioning both on the level of individual gratification and on that of social structuration.

Comedy is in any case a unique and privileged type of cultural and psychic material, as the lasting theoretical suggestiveness of Freud’s joke book may testify. Nor is Mauron’s Oedipal interpretation of classical comedy as the triumph of the young over the old particularly novel for the Anglo-American reader (a similar analysis of comedy is to be found in Northrop Frye’s work). Even here, however, the psychoanalytic reading

raises the fundamental issue of the status of character as such and of the categories that correspond to it: are the characters of classical comedy—hero protagonist, love object, split drives or fragments of libidinal energy, the father as superego or as Oedipal rival—all structurally homogeneous with each other as in other forms of representation, or is there some more basic structural discontinuity at work here that the theatrical framework serves to mask?

It is precisely such a discontinuity that Mauron sees as constituting the originality of the Aristophanic form, in contrast to the classical theater of Molière or of Roman comedy. He shows that the fundamental Oedipal analysis can be made to apply to Old Comedy only if the framework of representation and the primacy of the category of character be broken: the place of the love object of Oedipal rivalry is then seen to be taken, not by another individual character, as in the heroines of Molière or of Plautus, but rather by the *polis* itself, that is, by an entity that dialectically transcends any individual existence. Aristophanic comedy thus reflects a moment of social and psychic development that precedes the constitution of the family as a homogeneous unit, a moment in which libidinal impulses still valorize the larger collective structures of the city or the tribe as a whole; and Mauron's analysis may be profitably juxtaposed with the results of the investigation by Marie-Cécile and Edmond Ortigues of the functioning of the Oedipus complex in traditional African society:

The question of the Oedipus complex cannot be assimilated to a characterology, or to a genetic psychology, or to a social psychology, or to a psychiatric semiology, but circumscribes the fundamental structures according to which, for society as well as for the individual, the problem of evil and suffering, the dialectic of desire and demand, are articulated ... The Oedipus complex cannot be reduced to a description of the child's attitudes toward his or her father and mother ... The father is not only a second mother, a masculine educator; rather, the difference between the father and the mother, insofar as it projects that of man and woman in society as a whole, is part of the logic of a structure that manifests itself at several levels, both sociological and psychological ... The principal distinction [between the manifestation of the Oedipal problem in Senegalese society and that of Europe] lies in the form taken by guilt. Guilt does not appear as such; in other words, as the absence of depression and of any delirium of self-denunciation testifies, it does not appear as a splitting of the ego, but rather under the form of an anxiety at being abandoned by the group, of a loss of object.⁹

The source of these modifications is then seen by the Ortigues to be the ancestor cult, into which much of the authority function of the Western father figure is absorbed:

It is the collectivity that [in Senegalese society] takes the death of the father upon itself. From the outset traditional Senegalese society announces that the place of each individual in the community is marked by reference to an ancestor, the father of the lineage ... Society, by presenting the law of the fathers, thus in a sense neutralizes the diachronic series of generations. In effect the death fantasies of the young Oedipal subject are deflected onto his collaterals, his brothers or his contemporaries. Instead of developing vertically or diachronically in a conflict between generations, aggressivity tends to be restricted to a horizontal expression within the limits of a single generation, in the framework of a solidarity and rivalry between collaterals. (*OA*, 304)

The methodological recourse to formally different textual structures, as in Mauron, or sociologically different contexts, as in *Oedipe africain*, thus has the merit of freeing the psychoanalytic model from its dependency on the classical Western family, with its ideology of individualism and its categories of the subject and (in matters of literary representation) of the character. It suggests in turn the need for a model that is not locked into the classical opposition between the individual and the collective, but rather is able to think these discontinuities in a radically different way. Such is indeed the promise of Lacan's conception of the three orders (the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real), of which it now remains for us to determine whether the hypothesis of a dialectically distinct status for each of these registers, or sectors of experience, can be maintained within the unity of a single system.

II

For the difficulties involved in an exposition of the three orders spring at least in part from their inseparability. According to Lacanian epistemology, indeed, acts of consciousness, experiences of the mature subject, necessarily imply a structural coordination between the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. "The experience of the Real presupposes the simultaneous exercise of two correlative functions, the imaginary function and the symbolic function."¹⁰ If the notion of the Real is the most problematical of the three—since it can never be experienced immediately, but only by way of the mediation of the other two—it is also the easiest to bracket for the purposes of this presentation. We will return to the function of this concept—neither an order nor a register, exactly—in our conclusion; suffice it to underscore here the profound heterogeneity of the Real with respect to the other two functions, between which we would then expect to discover a similar disproportion.

Yet to speak of the Imaginary independently of the Symbolic is to perpetuate the illusion that we could have a relatively pure experience of either. If, for instance, we over-hastily identify the Symbolic with the dimension of

language and the function of speech in general, it becomes obvious that we can hardly convey any experience of the Imaginary without presupposing the former. Meanwhile, insofar as the Imaginary is understood as the place of the insertion of my unique individuality as *Dasein* and as *corps propre*, it will become increasingly difficult to form a notion of the Symbolic Order as some pure syntactic web, which entertains no relationship to individual subjects at all.

In reality, however, the methodological danger is the obverse of this one, namely, the temptation to transform the notion of the two orders into a binary opposition, and to define each relationally in terms of the other—something it is even easier to find oneself doing when one has begun by suspending the Real itself and leaving it out of consideration. We will, however, come to learn that this process of definition by binary opposition is itself profoundly characteristic of the Imaginary, so that to allow our exposition to be influenced by it is already to slant our presentation in terms of one of its two objects of study.

Fortunately, the genetic preoccupations of psychoanalysis provide a solution to this dilemma; for Freud founded his diagnosis of psychic disorders, not only on the latter's own aetiology, but on a larger view of the process of formation of the psyche itself as a whole, and on a conception of the stages of infantile development. And we will see shortly that Lacan follows him in this, rewriting the Freudian history of the psyche in a new and unexpected way. But this means that even if they are inextricable in mature psychic life, we ought to be able to distinguish Imaginary from Symbolic at the moment of emergence of each; in addition, we ought to be able to form a more reliable assessment of the role of each in the economy of the psyche by examining those moments in which their mature relationship to each other has broken down, moments that present a serious imbalance in favor of one or the other registers. Most frequently, this imbalance would seem to take the form of a degradation of the Symbolic to an Imaginary level:

The problem of the neurotic consists in a loss of the symbolic reference of the signifiers that make up the central points of the structure of his complex. Thus the neurotic may repress the signified of his symptom. This loss of the reference value of the symbol causes it to regress to the level of the imaginary, in the absence of any mediation between self and idea. (*JL*, 364)

On the other hand, when it is appreciated to what degree, for Lacan, the apprenticeship of language is an alienation for the psyche, it will become clear that there can also be a hypertrophy of the Symbolic at the Imaginary's expense that is no less pathological; the recent emphasis on the critique of science and of its alienated *sujet supposé savoir* is indeed predicated on this overdevelopment of the Symbolic function:

The symbol is an imaginary figure in which man's truth is alienated. The intellectual elaboration of the symbol cannot disalienate it. Only the analysis of its imaginary elements, taken individually, reveals the meaning and the desire that the subject had hidden within it. (A. Vergote, quoted in *JL*, 138)

Even before undertaking a genetic exposition of the two registers, however, we must observe that the very terms themselves present a preliminary difficulty, which is none other than their respective previous histories: thus Imaginary surely derives from the experience of the image—and of the *imago*—and we are meant to retain its spatial and visual connotations. Yet as Lacan uses the word, it has a relatively narrow and technical sense, and should not be extended in any immediate way to the traditional conception of the imagination in philosophical aesthetics (nor to the Sartrean doctrine of the *imaginaire*, although the latter's material of study is doubtless Imaginary in Lacan's sense of the term).

The word "Symbolic" is even more troublesome, since much of what Lacan will designate as Imaginary is traditionally designated by expressions like symbol and symbolism. We will want to wrench the Lacanian term loose from its rich history as the opposite number to allegory, particularly in Romantic thought; nor can it maintain any of its wider suggestion to the figural as opposed to the literal meaning (symbolism versus discursive thought, Mauss's symbolic exchange as opposed to the market system, and so forth). Indeed, we would be tempted to suggest that the Lacanian Symbolic Order has nothing whatsoever to do with symbols or with symbolism in the conventional sense, were it not for the obvious problem of what then to do with the whole classical Freudian apparatus of dream symbolism proper.

The originality of Lacan's rewriting of Freud may be judged by his radical reorganization of this material, which had hitherto—houses, towers, cigars, and all—been taken to constitute some storehouse of universal symbols. Most of the latter will now be understood rather as "part-objects" in Melanie Klein's sense of organs and parts of the body that are libidinally valorized; these part-objects then, as we will see shortly, belong to the realm of the Imaginary rather than to that of the Symbolic. The one exception—the notorious "phallic" symbol dear to vulgar Freudian literary criticism—is the very instrument for the Lacanian reinterpretation of Freud in linguistic terms. For the phallus—not, in contradistinction to the penis, an organ of the body—now comes to be considered neither image nor symbol, but rather a signifier, indeed the fundamental signifier of mature psychic life, and thus one of the basic organizational categories of the Symbolic Order itself.¹¹

In any case, whatever the nature of the Lacanian Symbolic, it is clear that the Imaginary—a kind of preverbal register whose logic is essentially

visual—precedes it as a stage in the development of the psyche. Its moment of formation—and that existential situation in which its specificity is most strikingly dramatized—has been named the “mirror stage” by Lacan, who thereby designates that moment between six and eighteen months in which the child first demonstrably “recognizes” his or her own image in the mirror, thus tangibly making the connection between inner motricity and the specular movements stirring before him. It is important not to deduce too hastily from this very early experience some ultimate ontological possibility of an ego or an identity in the psychological sense, or even in the sense of some Hegelian self-conscious reflexivity. Whatever else the mirror stage is, indeed, for Lacan it marks a fundamental gap between the subject and its own self or imago that can never be bridged:

The important point is that this form [of the subject in the mirror stage] fixed the instance of the ego, well before any social determination, in a line of fiction that is forever irreducible for the individual himself—or rather that will rejoin the subject’s evolution in asymptotic fashion only, whatever the favorable outcome of those dialectical syntheses by which as an ego he must resolve his discordance with his own reality. (*E*, “Le Stade du miroir,” 94)

In our present context, we will want to retain the words “*dans une ligne de fiction*,” which underscore the psychic function of narrative and fantasy in the attempts of the subject to reintegrate his or her alienated image.

The mirror stage, which is the precondition for primary narcissism, is also, owing to the equally irreducible gap it opens between the infant and its fellows, the very source of human aggressivity; and indeed, one of the original features of Lacan’s early teaching is its insistence on the inextricable association of these two drives.¹² How could it indeed be otherwise, at a moment when, the child’s investment in images of the body having been achieved, there does not yet exist the ego formation that would permit him to distinguish his own form from that of others? The result is a world of bodies and organs that in some fashion lacks a phenomenological center and a privileged point of view:

Throughout this period the emotional reactions and verbal indications of normal transitivity [Charlotte Bühler’s term for the indifferentiation of subject and object] will be observed. The child who hits says he has been hit, the child who sees another child fall begins to cry. Similarly, it is by way of an identification with the other that the infant lives the entire spectrum of reactions from ostentation to generosity, whose structural ambiguity his conduct so undisguisedly reveals, slave identified with despot, actor with spectator, victim with seducer.¹⁵

This “structural crossroads” (Lacan) corresponds to that preindividualistic, premimetic, prepoint-of-view stage in aesthetic organization that is generally designated as “play,” whose essence lies in the frequent shifts of the subject from one fixed position to another, in a kind of optional multiplicity

of insertions of the subject into a relatively fixed Symbolic Order.¹⁴ In the realm of linguistics and psychopathology, the fundamental document on the effects of “transitivism” remains Freud’s “A Child Is Being Beaten,” which has had considerable emblematic significance for recent theory.¹⁵

A description of the Imaginary will therefore on the one hand require us to come to terms with a uniquely determinate configuration of space—one that is not yet organized around the individuation of my own personal body, or differentiated hierarchically according to the perspectives of my own central point of view, but that nonetheless swarms with bodies and forms intuited in a different way, whose fundamental property is, it would seem, to be visible without their visibility being the result of the act of any particular observer, to be, as it were, always-already seen, to carry their specularly upon themselves like a color they wear or the texture of their surface. In this—the indifferentiation of their *esse* from a *percipi* that does not know a *percipiens*—these bodies of the Imaginary exemplify the very logic of mirror images; yet the existence of the normal object world of adult everyday life presupposes this prior, imaginary, experience of space:

It is normally by the possibilities of a game of imaginary transposition that the progressive valorization of objects is achieved, on what is customarily known as the affective level, by a proliferation, a fanlike disposition of all the imagination equations that allow the human being, alone in the animal realm, to have an almost infinite number of objects at his disposition, objects isolated in their form. (*Sem*, I, 98).

The affective valorization of these objects ultimately derives from the primacy of the human imago in the mirror stage; and it is clear that the very investment of an object world will depend in one way or another on the possibility of symbolic association or identification of an inanimate thing with the libidinal priority of the human body. Here, then, we come upon what Melanie Klein termed “part-objects”—organs, like the breast, or objects associated with the body, like feces, whose psychic investment is then transferred to a host of other, more indifferent contents of the external world (which are then, as we will see below, valorized as good or as evil).

A trait common to such objects, Lacan insists, is that they have no specular image, which is to say that they know no alterity. “They are the very lining, the stuff or imaginary filling of the subject itself, which identifies itself with these objects.” (*JL*, 219)¹⁶

It is from Melanie Klein’s pioneering psychoanalysis of children that the basic features of the Lacanian Imaginary are drawn: there is, as we might expect for an experience of spatiality phenomenologically so different from our own, a logic specific to Imaginary space, whose dominant category proves to be the opposition of container and contained, the fundamental

relationship of inside to outside, which clearly enough originates in the infant's fantasies about the maternal body as the receptacle of part-objects (confusion between childbirth and evacuation, and so forth).¹⁷

This spatial syntax of the Imaginary order may then be said to be intersected by a different type of axis, whose conjunction completes it as an experience: this is the type of relationship that Lacan designates as aggressivity, and that we have seen to result from that indistinct rivalry between self and other in a period that precedes the very elaboration of a self or the construction of an ego. As with the axis of Imaginary space, we must again try to imagine something deeply sedimented in our own experience, but buried under the adult rationality of everyday life (and under the exercise of the Symbolic): a kind of situational experience of otherness as pure relationship, as struggle, violence, and antagonism, in which the child can occupy either term indifferently, or indeed, as in transitivism, both at once. A remarkable sentence of St. Augustine is inscribed as a motto to the primordality of this rivalry with the imagoes of other infants: "I have myself seen jealousy in a baby and know what it means. He was not old enough to speak, but, whenever his foster-brother was at the breast, would glare at him pale with envy [*et intuebatur pallidus amaro aspectu conlactaneum suum*]." ¹⁸

Provided it is understood that this moment is quite distinct from that later intervention of the Other (Lacan's capital *A*—for *Autre*—the parents, or language itself) that ratifies the assumption of the subject into the realm of language or the Symbolic Order, it will be appropriate to designate this primordial rivalry of the mirror stage as a relationship of otherness. Nowhere better can we observe the violent situational content of those judgments of good and evil that will later cool off and sediment into the various systems of ethics. Both Nietzsche and Sartre have exhaustively explored the genealogy of ethics as the latter emerges from just such an archaic valorization of space, where what is "good" is what is associated with "my" position, and the "bad" simply characterizes the affairs of my mirror rival.¹⁹ We may further document the archaic or atavistic tendencies of ethical or moralizing thought by observing that it has no place in the Symbolic Order, or in the structure of language itself, whose shifters are positional and structurally incapable of supporting this kind of situational complicity with the subject momentarily occupying them.

The Imaginary may thus be described as a peculiar spatial configuration, whose bodies primarily entertain relationships of inside/outside with one another, which is then traversed and reorganized by that primordial rivalry and transitivistic substitution of imagoes, that indistinction of primary narcissism and aggressivity, from which our later conceptions of good and evil derive. This stage is already an alienation—the subject having been captivated by his or her specular image—but in Hegelian fashion it is the kind of alienation from which a more positive evolution is indistinguishable and

without which the latter is inconceivable. The same must be said for the next stage of psychic development, in which the Imaginary itself is assumed into the Symbolic Order by way of its alienation by language itself. The Hegelian model of dialectical history—as Jean Hyppolite’s interventions in Lacan’s first Seminar make clear—remains the fundamental one here:

This development [of the human anatomy and in particular the cortex] is lived as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual as history: the *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal dynamic shifts from insufficiency to anticipation—a drama that, for its subject, caught in the mirage of spatial identification, vehiculates a whole series of fantasies which range from a fragmented image of the body to what we will term an orthopedic form of its unity, and to that ultimate assumption of the armature of an alienating identity, whose rigid structure will mark the subject’s entire mental development. Thus the rupture of the circle in which *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* are united generates that inexhaustible attempt to square it in which we reap the ego. (*E*, “Le Stade du miroir,” 97)

The approach to the Symbolic is the moment to suggest the originality of Lacan’s conception of the function of language in psychoanalysis. For neo-Freudianism, it would seem that the role of language in the analytical situation, or the “talking cure,” is understood in terms of what we may call an aesthetic of expression and expressiveness: the patient unburdens himself or herself; his “relief” comes from his having verbalized (or even, according to a more recent ideology, from having “communicated”). For Lacan, on the contrary, this later exercise of speech in the analytical situation draws its therapeutic force from being as it were a completion and fulfillment of the first, imperfectly realized, accession to language and to the Symbolic in early childhood.

For the emphasis of Lacan on the linguistic development of the child—an area in which his work necessarily draws much from Piaget—has mistakenly been criticized as a “revision” of Freud in terms of more traditional psychology, a substitution of the psychological data of the mirror stage and of language acquisition for the more properly psychoanalytic phenomena of infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex. Obviously Lacan’s work must be read as presupposing the entire content of classical Freudianism, otherwise it would be simply another philosophy or intellectual system. The linguistic materials are not intended, it seems to me, to be substituted for the sexual ones; rather we must understand the Lacanian notion of the Symbolic Order as an attempt to create mediations between libidinal analysis and the linguistic categories, to provide, in other words, a transcoding scheme that allows us to speak of both within a common conceptual framework. Thus, the very cornerstone of Freud’s conception of the

psyche, the Oedipus complex, is transliterated by Lacan into a linguistic phenomenon, which he designates as the discovery by the subject of the Name-of-the-Father, and which consists in the transformation of an Imaginary relationship with that particular imago which is the physical parent into the new and menacing abstraction of the paternal role as the possessor of the mother and the place of the Law. (Meanwhile, we have already seen above how this conception allows the Ortigues to posit a continuing validity for the Freudian notion of the Oedipus complex in a social and familial situation in which many of the more parochial and purely European features of this relationship no longer obtain.)

The Symbolic Order is thus, as we have already suggested, a further alienation of the subject; and this repeated emphasis further serves to distinguish Lacan's position (what we have called his Hegelianism) from many of the more facile celebrations of the primacy of language by structuralist ideologues. Perhaps the link with Lévi-Strauss's primitivism may be made across Rousseau, for whom the social order in all its repressiveness is intimately linked with the emergence of language itself. In Lacan, however, an analogous sense of the alienating function of language is arrested in Utopian mid-course by the palpable impossibility of returning to an archaic, preverbal stage of the psyche itself (although the Deleuze–Guattari celebration of schizophrenia would appear to attempt precisely that). Far more adequately than the schizophrenic or natural man, the tragic symbol of the unavoidable alienation by language would seem to have been provided by Truffaut's film, *L'Enfant sauvage* (The Wild Child), in which language learning comes before us as a racking torture, a palpably physical kind of suffering upon which the feral child is only imperfectly willing to enter.

The clinical equivalent of this agonizing transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is then furnished by an analysis, by Melanie Klein, of an autistic child, which makes it clear that the "cure," the accession of the child to speech and to the Symbolic, is accompanied by an increase, rather than a lessening, of anxiety. This case history (published in 1930 under the title "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego") may also serve to correct the imbalance of our own presentation, and of the very notion of a "transition" from Imaginary to Symbolic, by demonstrating that the acquisition of the Symbolic is rather the precondition for a full mastery of the Imaginary as well. In this case, the autistic child, Dick, is not only unable to speak but unable to play as well—unable, that is, to act out fantasies and to create "symbols," a term that in this context means object substitutes. The few meager objects handled by Dick all represent in a kind of undifferentiated state "the phantasied contents [of the mother's body]. The sadistic phantasies directed against the inside of her body constitute the first and basic relation to the outside world and to reality" (CP, 242). Psychic investment in the external world—or in other words, the

development of the Imaginary itself—has been arrested at its most rudimentary form, with those little trains that function as representations of Dick and of his father, and the dark space or station that represents the mother. The fear of anxiety prevents the child from developing further symbolic substitutes and expanding the narrow limits of his object world.

Melanie Klein's therapy then consists in introducing the Symbolic Order, and language, into this impoverished realm; and that, as Lacan observes, without any particular subtlety or precautions. (*Elle lui fout le symbolisme avec la dernière brutalité, Melanie Klein, au petit Dick! Elle commence tout de suite par lui flanquer les interprétations majeures. Elle le flanque dans une verbalisation brutale du mythe oedipien, presque aussi révoltante pour nous que pour n'importe quel lecteur* [Sem, I, 81].) Verbalization itself heavily-handedly superposes a Symbolic relationship upon the Imaginary fantasy of the train rolling up to the station: "The station is mummy; Dick is going into mummy" (CP, 242).

It is enough: from this point on, miraculously, the child begins to develop relationships to others, jealousies, games, and much richer forms of substitution and of the exercise of language. The Symbolic now releases Imaginary investments of ever new kinds of objects, which had hitherto been blocked, and permits the development of what Melanie Klein in her paper calls "symbol formation." Such symbol or substitute formation is a fundamental precondition of psychic evolution, since it can alone lead the subject to love objects that are equivalents for the original, now forbidden or taboo, maternal presence: Lacan will then assimilate this process to the operation of the trope of metonymy in the linguistic realm,²⁰ and the profound effects of this new and complex "rhetorical" mechanism—unavailable in the preverbal realm of the Imaginary, where, as we have seen, only the rudimentary oppositions of inside/outside and good/bad are operative—may serve to underscore and to dramatize the extent of the transformation language brings to what without it could not yet have been called desire.

We may now attempt to give a more complete picture of Lacan's conception of language, or at least of those features of articulate speech that are the most essential in the structuration of the psyche, and which may thus be said to constitute the Symbolic Order. It will be convenient to consider these features in three groups, even though they are obviously all very closely interrelated.

The first of these groups—we have already seen it at work in the Oedipal phenomenon of the Name-of-the-Father—may be generalized as the naming function of language, something that has the most momentous consequences for the subject. For the acquisition of a name results in a thoroughgoing transformation of the position of the subject in its object world:

That a name, no matter how confused, designates a particular person—this is precisely what the passage to the human state consists in. If we must define that moment in which man [*sic*] becomes human, we would say that it is at that instant when, as minimally as you like, he enters into a symbolic relationship. (*Sem*, I, 178)

It would seem fair to observe that Lacan's attention to the components of language has centered on those kinds of words, primarily names and pronouns, on those slots that, like the shifters generally, anchor a free-floating syntax to a particular subject, those verbal joints, therefore, at which the insertion of the subject into the Symbolic is particularly detectable.

Even here, however, we must distinguish among the various possible effects of these types of words: nouns, in particular the Name-of-the-Father itself, awaken the subject to the sense of a function that is somehow objective and independent of the existence of the biological father. Such names thus provide a liberation from the here-and-now of the Imaginary; for the separation, through language, of the paternal function from the biological father is precisely what permits the child to take the father's place in his turn. The order of abstraction—the Law, as Lacan calls it—is thus also what releases the subject from the constraints of the immediate family situation and from the “bad immediacy” of the pre-Symbolic period.

Pronouns, meanwhile, are the locus for a related, yet distinct, development, which is none other than the emergence of the unconscious itself. Such is indeed for Lacan the significance of the bar that divides signifier from signified in the semiotic fraction: the pronoun, the first person, the signifier, results in division of the subject, or *Spaltung*, which drives the “real subject” as it were underground, and leaves a “representative”—the ego—in its place:

The subject is figured in symbolism by a stand-in or substitute [*un tenant-lieu*], whether we have to do with the personal pronoun “I,” with the name that is given him, or with the denomination “son of.” This stand-in is of the order of the symbol or the signifier, an order that is only perpetuated laterally, through the relationships entertained by that signifier with other signifiers. The subject mediated by language is irremediably divided because it has been excluded from the symbolic chain [the lateral relations of signifiers among themselves] at the very moment at which it became “represented” in it. (*JL*, 129)

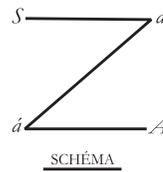
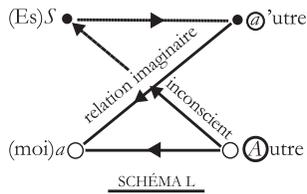
Thus, the discontinuity insisted on by linguists between the *énoncé* and the subject of the enunciation (or, by Humboldt's even broader distinction between language as *ergon*, or produced object, and language as *energeia*, or force of linguistic production) corresponds to the coming into being of the unconscious itself, as that reality of the subject that has been alienated and repressed through the very process by which, in receiving a name, it is transformed into a representation of itself.

This production of the unconscious by way of a primary repression—which is none other than the acquisition of language—is then reinterpreted in terms of the communicational situation as a whole; and Lacan’s redefinition of the signifier, “the signifier is what represents the subject for another signifier,” now illuminates what it may be artificial to call a different form of linguistic alienation than either of the above features, but what is certainly a distinct dimension of that alienation, namely, the coming into view of the inescapable mediation of other people, and more particularly of the Other with a capital *O*, or *A*, or, in other words, the parents (*E*, “La Direction de la cure et les principes de son pouvoir,” 593). Yet here the Law represented by the parents, and in particular by the father, passes over into the very nature of language itself, which the child receives from the outside and which speaks him or her just as surely as he or she learns to speak it. At this third moment of the subject’s alienation by language we therefore confront a more complex version of that strategy which we have elsewhere described as the fundamental enabling device of structuralism in general, namely, the possibility—provided by the ambiguous nature of language itself—of imperceptibly shifting back and forth between a conception of speech as a linguistic structure, whose components can then be tabulated, and a conception of speech as communication, which permits a virtual dramatization of the linguistic process (sender/receiver, *destinaire/destinateur*, etc.).²¹ Lacan’s “Other” (capital *A*) is the locus of this superposition, constituting at one and the same time the *dramatis personae* of the Oedipal situation (but most particularly the father or his substitutes) and the very structure of articulate language itself.

So it is that this third aspect of Symbolic alienation, the alienation by the Other, passes over into the more familiar terms of the accounts of the *chaîne du signifiant* given in Lacan’s mature doctrine,²² which, embattled in a struggle against ego psychology, and emerging from a long polemic with the neo-Freudian emphasis on the analysis of resistances and the strengthening of the subject’s ego, has found its fundamental principle and organizing theme in “a conception of the function of the signifier able to demonstrate the place at which the subject is subordinated to it to the point of being virtually subverted [*suborné*]” (*E*, 593). The result is a determination of the subject by language—not to say a linguistic determinism—which results in a rewriting of the classical Freudian unconscious in terms of language: “The Unconscious,” to quote what must be Lacan’s best-known sentence, “is the discourse of the Other” (*E*, “Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir,” 814, for example). For those of us still accustomed to the classical image of the Freudian unconscious as a seething cauldron of archaic instincts (and inclined, also, to associate language with thinking and consciousness rather than the opposite of those things), the Lacanian redefinition must inevitably scandalize. As far as language is concerned, the references to Hegel have

a strategic role to play in confronting this scandal with the philosophically more respectable idea of alienation in general, and alienation to other people in particular (the master/slave chapter is of course the basic text here). Thus, if we can bring ourselves to think of language itself as an alienating structure, particularly in those features enumerated above, we are halfway toward an appreciation of this concept.

The other half of the way, however, presents the more serious obstacle of our preconceptions, not about language, but rather about the unconscious itself. To be sure, the relationship between the unconscious and the instincts will seem less problematical when we recall the enigma posed by Freud's notion of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* ("ideational representative"), one of those rare moments when, as with his hypothesis of the death wish, Freud himself seems terminologically and theoretically inarticulate.²³ Yet the function of the concept seems clear: Freud wants to avoid giving the impression that instincts or drives (*Triebe*) are conceivable in a pure state, even for the purposes of building a model of the psyche; and his tautological term is meant to underscore the indissociable link, no matter how far back we go in the history of the psyche, between the instincts to be found there and the fantasies or objects to which they are bound and through which alone they must express themselves. What is this to say but that the instincts, indeed, the libido itself, no matter how energetically boiling, cannot be conceived independently of their representations—in short, that, in Lacanian terms, no matter how archaic they may be, the instincts are already of the order of the signifier? So it is that the place *A* of the Lacanian topology indifferently designates the Other (the parents), language, or the unconscious, now termed the "treasurehouse of the signifier," in other words, the lumber-room in which the subject's most ancient fantasies or fragments of fantasy are still stored. Two well-known, if less well understood, graphs illustrate this topology, in dynamic as well as in static forms. The static version is, of course, the so-called L-schema, in which the subject's conscious desire, which she understands as a relationship between the desired object (*a*) and her ego or self (*á*), is mediated by the more fundamental relationship between the real subject (*S*) and the capital *A* of the Other, language, or the unconscious (*E*, 53). In the dynamic version of this topology (the so-called *graphe du désir*), this structure of the subject is as it were put in motion by the movement of desire, considered as a *parole*, or act of enunciation: the inexhaustible fascination of this graph comes from the difficulty of thinking its intersections, in which the speech act of the subject, on its way from sender to receiver, is traversed by the retroactive effect of the "chain of the signifier" traveling, *nachträglich*, in the opposite direction, in such a way that the capital *A* constitutes the source of the fulfillment of both trajectories (*E*, 805–17).²⁴



Two versions of Lacan's *L*-schema. By way of wordplay on the German, *S* is the unconscious (or place of the subject of desire); capital *A* is the Other, the adult, or language itself; and lowercase *a* and *á* are the ego and the object of desire, respectively (note their interesting exchange of positions in Lacan's two versions). *Autre* must obviously be rendered in English with "O," which does not simplify matters. The schema is so-called on account of the *z*-related shape of the *L* in French penmanship, which has the advantage of inscribing the initial of its author (*E*, 53, 548)

Still, it will be observed that even if language can be invested to this degree with the content of the subject's alienations, it remains to square the Lacanian linguistic bias with the predominantly sexual emphasis of psychoanalysis's inaugural period. Even if, in other words, one were willing to grant the phallus provisional status as a signifier, the relationship between language and sexuality remains to be defined, the suspicion lingering that a system that permits you to talk about language instead of sexuality must betray a revisionist, if not a downright idealistic, impulse. The connection is made by way of the distinction between need ("pure" biological phenomenon) and demand (a purely interpersonal one, conceivable only after the emergence of language). Sexual desire is then that qualitatively new and more complex realm opened up by the lateness of human maturation in comparison with the other animal species, in which a previously biological instinct must undergo an alienation to a fundamentally communicational or linguistic relationship—that of the demand for recognition by the Other—in order to find satisfaction. Sexuality thus charts a middle course between physical need and interpersonal demand, satisfying neither and maintained at distance from each by the gravitational pull of both "forces." This alienation also explains why, for Lacan, sexual desire is structurally incapable of ultimate satisfaction: *plaisir*—as the momentary reduction of a purely physical tension—not being the same as *jouissance*, which involves that demand for recognition by the Other, which in the very nature of things (in the very nature of language?) can never be fulfilled. This structural distance between the subject and his or her own desire will then serve as the enabling mechanism for the Lacanian typology of the neuroses and the perversions; and nowhere is Lacan more eloquent than in his defense of the ontological dignity of these primordial malfunctionings of the human psyche:

Hieroglyphics of hysteria, blazons of phobia, labyrinths of the *Zwangsneurose*—charms of impotence, enigmas of inhibition, oracles of anxiety—armorial bearings

of character, seals of self-punishment, disguises of perversion—these are the hermetic elements that our exegesis resolves, the equivocations that our invocation dissolves, the artifices that our dialectic absolves, in a deliverance of the imprisoned sense, which moves from the revelation of the palimpsest to the pass-word of the mystery and the pardon of speech. (*FLP*, 44, translation modified)

Meanwhile, this conception of desire as a protolinguistic demand, and of the unconscious as a language, or “chain of signifiers,” then permits something like a rhetorical analysis of psychic processes to come into being. As is well known, not only is desire a function of metonymy for Lacan, but the symptom is a product of metaphor, and the entire machinery of the psychic life of the mature subject—which consists, as we have seen above, in the indefinite production of substitutes, or, in other words, in Melanie Klein’s “symbol-formation”—may be said to be figural in its very essence, figuration being that property of language that allows the same word to be used in several senses. The correlative of the chain of signifiers is thus the conception of a *glissement des signifiés*, or “slippage of signifieds,” which allows the psychic signifier to be displaced from one object to another. Here once again, the material of the Imaginary serves as a useful contrast by which to define the Symbolic: for not only does the latter, with its slippage of signifieds, know a structural malfunction in the language of the schizophrenic (whose syntagmatic experience of the signifying chain has broken down, on account of a radical *forclusion*, or expulsion of the Other), but it may also be said to have something like a zero degree in the so-called animal languages, which constitute the very prototype of the code proper to the Imaginary, involving no demands on the Other, but simply a fixed one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, between signal and place, from which the more properly human phenomenon of figuration is absent (*FLP*, 44; *E*, 297).²⁵

Displacement of the subject and redefinition of the unconscious as a language, topology and typology of desire and of its avatars—this brief sketch of “Lacanianism” would not be complete without a mention of that third overriding preoccupation of Lacan’s life work, the one that it is most tempting and convenient for lay readers to overlook, namely, the strategy of the analytic situation itself, and in particular the role to be played in it by the analyst’s interventions and the nature of transference. It is clear that in the Lacanian scheme of things, the uniqueness of the analytic situation—its emblematic as well as therapeutic value—derives from the fact that it is the one communicational situation in which the Other is addressed without being functionally involved: the analyst’s silence thus causes the structural dependency of the subject on the capital *A* of the Other’s language to become visible as it never could in any concrete interpersonal situation. So the subject’s gradual experience of his or her own subordination to an alienating signifier is at one with the theorist’s denunciation of philosophies of

the subject and his Copernican attempt to assign to the subject an eccentric position with respect to language as a whole.

We may now ask what, apart from the incidental mention of phenomena like that of animal language, above, can be said to be the place of the Imaginary in Lacan's later teaching; we will have occasion to see that its gradual eclipse in the later work is not foreign to a certain overestimation of the Symbolic that may be said to be properly ideological. For the moment, we may suggest that Imaginary thought patterns persist into mature psychic life in the form of what are generally thought of as ethical judgments—those implicit or explicit valorizations or repudiations in which “good” and “bad” are simply positional descriptions of the geographical relationship of the phenomenon in question to my own Imaginary conception of centrality. It is a comedy we may observe, not only in the world of action, but also in that of thought, where, in that immense proliferation of private languages which characterizes the intellectual life of consumer capitalism, the private religions that emerge around thinkers like the one presently under consideration are matched only by their anathematization by the champions of rival “codes.” The Imaginary sources of passions like ethics may always be identified by the operation of the dual in them and the organization of their themes around binary oppositions; the ideological quality of such thinking must, however, be accounted for, not so much by the metaphysical nature of its categories of centrality, as Derrida and Lyotard have argued, as rather by its substitution of the categories of individual relationships for those—collective—of history and of historical, transindividual phenomena.

This view of ethics would seem to find confirmation in Lacan's essay “Kant avec Sade,” in which the very prototype of an attempt to construct a rationally coherent (in other words, Symbolic) system of ethics by Kant is thoroughly discredited by a structural analogy with the delirious rationality of Sade. By attempting to universalize ethics and to establish the criteria for universally binding ethical laws that are not dependent on the logic of the individual situation, Kant merely succeeds in stripping the subject of his object (*a*) in an effort to separate pleurability from the notion of the Good, thereby leaving the subject alone with the Law (*A*): “Cannot moral law be said to represent desire in that situation in which it is not the subject, but rather the object, that is missing?” (*E*, “Kant avec Sade,” 780). Yet this structural result turns out to be homologous with perversion, defined by Lacan as the fascination with the pleasure of the Other at the expense of the subject's own, and illustrated monotonously by the voluminous pages of Sade.

Whatever the philosophical value of this analysis, in the present context it has the merit of allowing us to conceive the possibility of transforming the topological distinction between Imaginary and Symbolic into a genuine methodology. “Kant avec Sade” would seem indeed to be the equivalent in the realm of moral philosophy of those logical paradoxes and mathematical

exercises that have so disoriented the readers of Lacan in other areas. Thus, for example, we find a properly psychoanalytic reflection on the timing of the analytical situation unexpectedly punctuated by a meditation on a logical puzzle or metalogical paradox (see “Le Temps logique”), whose upshot is to force us to reintroduce the time of the individual subject back into what was supposed to be a universal or impersonal mental operation. Elsewhere the experiment is reversed, and the laws of probability are invoked to demonstrate the Symbolic regularity (in Freudian terms, the repetitive structure) of what otherwise strikes the subject as sheer individual chance. Lacan has, however, explained himself about these excursions, designed, he says, to lead

those who follow us into places where logic itself is staggered by the glaring incommensurability between Imaginary and Symbolic; and this, not out of complacency with the resultant paradoxes, nor with any so-called intellectual crisis, but rather on the contrary to restore its illicit glitter to the structural gap [*béance*] thereby revealed, a gap perpetually instructive for us, and above all to try to forge the method of a kind of calculus able to dislodge its secret by its very inappropriateness. (*E*, 820)

In the same way, “Kant avec Sade” transforms the very project of a moral philosophy into an insoluble intellectual paradox by rotating it in such a way that the implicit gap in it between subject and law catches the light. It is time to ask whether a similar use of the distinction between Imaginary and Symbolic may not be possible in the realm of aesthetic theory and literary criticism, offering psychoanalytic method a more fruitful vocation than it was able to exercise in the older literary psychoanalyses.

III

We cannot do so, however, before first asking whether, alongside that Freudian criticism, of which everyone—for good or ill—has a fairly vivid idea what it ends up looking like, a properly Lacanian criticism is also conceivable. Yet it is here that the ambiguity of Lacan’s relations to his original—is he rewriting him or merely restoring him?—becomes problematic. For at the point of interpretation, either the attempt at a Lacanian reading simply again generates the classic themes of all psychoanalytic literary criticism since Freud—the Oedipus complex, the double, splitting, the phallus, the lost object, and so forth—or else, trying to keep faith with the linguistic inspiration of “L’Instance de la lettre,” it exercises the distinction between metaphor and metonymy to the point where the orthodox psychoanalytic preoccupations seem to have been forgotten without a trace.²⁶ In part, of course, this methodological fluctuation can be accounted for by what we have suggested

above: namely, that on the level of interpretive codes Lacan's position is not one of substituting linguistic for classical psychoanalytic concepts, but rather of mediating between them, and this is clearly a matter of some tact that cannot be successfully realized on the occasion of every text.

But there is another, more structural, side to this problem, which raises the question of the syntagmatic organization of the work of art, rather than the issue—a more properly paradigmatic one—of the interpretive schemes into which it is to be “transcoded” or interpreted. Freud's own two greatest narrative readings, that of Jensen's *Gradiva* and that of Hoffmann's *Sandmann*, turn on delusions that either come to appeasement or culminate in the destruction of the subject. They thus recapitulate the trajectory of the cure, or of the illness, or—ultimately, and behind both—of the evolution and maturation of the psyche itself. We have here, therefore, narratives that formally require the final term of a norm (maturity, psychic health, the cure) toward which to steer their itineraries, whether catastrophic or providential; of that ultimate norm itself, however, the narrative can have nothing to say, as it is not a realm, but rather only an organizational device or term limit.

It would not be difficult to imagine a Lacanian criticism—although I do not know that there has been one²⁷—in which the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic described above played an analogous role in organizing the syntagmatic movement of the narrative from disorder to the term limit of the Symbolic Order itself. The risk of an operation like this lies clearly in the assimilation of what is original in Lacan to the more widespread and now conventionalized structuralist paradigm of the passage from nature to culture; and this is surely the moment to ask ourselves whether the Lacanian emphasis on the Law and on the necessity of the castration anxiety in the evolution of the subject—so different in spirit from the instinctual and revolutionary Utopias of Brown's polymorphous perversity, Reich's genital sexuality, and Marcuse's maternal super-id—shares the implicit conservatism of the classical structuralist paradigm. Insofar as the Lacanian version generates a rhetoric of its own that celebrates submission to the Law, and indeed, the subordination of the subject to the Symbolic Order, conservative overtones and indeed the possibility of a conservative misappropriation of this clearly anti-Utopian scheme are unavoidable. On the other hand, if we recall that for Lacan “submission to the Law” designates, not repression, but rather something quite different, namely alienation—in the ambiguous sense in which Hegel, as opposed to Marx, conceives of this phenomenon—then the more tragic character of Lacan's thought, and the dialectical possibilities inherent in it, become evident.

Indeed, the one sustained literary exegesis that Lacan has published, the seminar on Poe's “The Purloined Letter,”²⁸ suggests that for Lacan, in contradistinction to Freud himself, the norm *can* be the locus of a properly

narrative exploration, albeit one of a uniquely didactic or “illustrative” type.²⁹ Poe’s story is for Lacan the occasion of a magisterial demonstration of the way “a formal language determines the subject” (*E*, 42). Three distinct positions are structurally available in relationship to the Letter itself, or the signifier: that of the king, that of the queen, and that of the Minister. When in the sequel to the narrative the places change, Dupin taking the place of the Minister, who then moves to that previously held by the queen, it is the positions themselves that exercise a structuring power over the subjects who momentarily occupy them. So the signifying chain becomes a vicious circle, and the story of the norm itself, of the Symbolic Order, is not that of a “happy end,” but rather of a perpetual alienation. Obviously, Lacan’s interpretation of the narrative is an allegorical one, in which the signified of the narrative proves to be simply language itself. Once again, the relative richness of the reading derives from the dramatic structure of the communicational process and the multiplicity of different positions available in it; but while more lively because of the musical chairs being played in it, Lacan’s exegesis in this respect rejoins that now conventional structuralist conception of the autoreferentiality of the text that we have shown at work in *Tel Quel* and Derrida, as well as in Todorov’s interpretations (*PHL*, 182–83, 197–201). Read in this way—but as I will suggest later, it is not the only way one can read Lacan’s essay—the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” by its programmatic demonstration of the primacy of the signifier, furnishes powerful ammunition for what must properly be called, in distinction to its other achievements, the ideology of structuralism. (It may rapidly be defined here as the systematic substitution of “referent” for “signified,” which allows one to pass logically from the properly linguistic assertion that the signified is an effect of the organization of signifiers to the quite different conclusion that therefore the “referent”—in other words, History—does not exist). Yet the present context suggests an explanation for this excess charge of ideology, this ideological effect, vehiculated or produced by Lacan’s exposé. Indeed, its opening page, with its polemic repudiation of those “imaginary incidences [which], far from representing the essence of our experience, reveal only what remains inconsistent in it,” makes a diagnosis of an overestimation of the Symbolic at the expense of the Imaginary in its presentation well-nigh inescapable (*E*, 11; *SPL*, 39).³⁰

Strengthened by this detour through Lacan’s own literary criticism, we have thus returned to our hypothesis that whatever else it is, the distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and the requirement that a given analysis be able to do justice to the qualitative gap between them, may prove to be an invaluable instrument for measuring the range or the limits of a particular way of thinking. If it is always unsatisfying to speculate on what a Lacanian literary criticism ought to be in the future, if it is clear that the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” cannot possibly constitute a model for

such criticism—since on the contrary the literary work is in it a mere pretext for a dazzling illustration of a nonliterary thesis—then at least we may be able to use the concept of the two orders, or registers, as a means for demonstrating the imbalance of other critical methods, and of suggesting ways in which they may be coordinated and an eclectic pluralism overcome. So, for instance, it seems abundantly clear that the whole area of image study and image hunting takes on a new appearance when we grasp the image content of a given text, not as so many clues to its ideational content (or “meaning”), but rather as the sedimentation of the imaginary material on which the text must work, as the raw materials it must transform. The relationship of the literary text to its image content is thus—in spite of the historic preponderance of the sensory in modern literature since Romanticism—not that of the production of imagery, but rather of its mastery and control in ways that range from outright repression (and the transformation of the sensory image into some more comfortable conceptual symbol) to the more complex modes of assimilation of surrealism and, more recently, of schizophrenic literature.³¹ Only by grasping images—and also the surviving fragments of authentic myth and delusion—in this way, as that trace of the Imaginary, of sheer private or physiological experience, which has undergone the sea change of the Symbolic, can criticism of this kind recover a vital and hermeneutic relationship to the literary text.

Yet image criticism raises a problem that we have postponed until this time, namely, as a matter of critical practice now rather than abstract theory, how to identify Imaginary materials as such, particularly insofar as the same contents can at different times or in different contexts have been part of an imaginary experience as well as of a symbolic system? Leclaire’s useful example of the bronze ashtray enumerates this gradual shifting of registers, as the initial perception of the shape and the blackened metal surface of the object, of its density in the hand and its slickness for the eye, then is slowly by means of names ranged in the various symbolic systems in which it seems to find a momentary home—first as a functional object (“ashtray”), then as an antique, further as the specimen of a particular style of rural furnishing, and so forth (*RP*, 382). This distinction between the experience of immediate sense perception and the various systems of abstraction into which the name of an object allows it to be inserted has already become familiar to us.

It should, however, be possible to formulate more specific rules for the determination of the respective Imaginary or Symbolic function of a given object, such as the following one: “The same term may be considered imaginary if taken absolutely and symbolic if taken as a differential value correlative of other terms that limit it reciprocally.”³² This excellent formula, which we owe to Edmond Ortigues, should probably not be generalized into the kind of ahistorical system he goes on to offer us, in which the Imaginary becomes the regime of the eye, the Symbolic that of the ear

and of language; in which the “material imagination,” with its fascination with a single sense plenum, is opposed to all those differential systems that are essentially linguistic and social in character. Such an opposition is unfortunately, as we have come to learn, a properly Imaginary one. Yet the formula usefully insists on the tendency of the Imaginary object to absolutize itself, to exclude relationship and to overshadow the perceptual apparatus in a freestanding and isolated way, in contrast to the ways in which elements of Symbolic systems are always implicitly or explicitly embedded in a complex of binary oppositions and subjected to the whole range of what Greimas calls the “play of semiotic constraints.”

The problem with such a definition is that when we reintroduce the subject into such relationships, the proportions change, and what it was useful to designate in terms of the isolation of the single Imaginary object, now becomes a two-term relationship, while the binary systems of the Symbolic must now be understood as introducing a third term into the hitherto duplex logic of the Imaginary:

This is the sense of J. Lacan’s definition of the essence of the Imaginary as a “dual relationship,” an ambiguous redoubling, a “mirror” reflection, an immediate relationship between the subject and its other in which each term passes immediately into the other and is lost in a never-ending play of reflections. Imagination and desire are the realities of a finite being that can emerge from the contradiction between self and other only by the genesis of a third term, a mediatory “concept” which, by determining each term, orders them into reversible and progressive relations that can be developed in language. The whole problem of symbolization lies here, in this passage from a dual opposition to a ternary relation, a passage from desire to the concept. (*DS*, 205)³³

On the other hand, as we have suggested above, to stage the relationship in terms of so radical an opposition is somehow covertly to reintroduce Imaginary thinking itself into a thought that was apparently attempting to overcome it; nor is it really a question of repudiating the Imaginary and substituting the Symbolic for it—as though the one were “bad” and the other “good”—but rather of elaborating a method that can articulate both while preserving their radical discontinuity with each other.

In this perspective, returning now to our critique of current literary methods, it becomes clear that above and beyond image criticism, it is phenomenology itself that must become the object of critical reconsideration, insofar as its fundamental materials of analysis—the lived experience of time and space, of the elements, of the very texture of subjectivity—are drawn almost exclusively from the Imaginary realm. Phenomenological criticism, whose program was heralded by Husserl’s well-known slogan of a “return to things,” clearly had a role to play as a kind of therapeutic corrective to overly intellectualized conceptions of the work of art, as an attempt

to restore the authenticity of lived experience and sensory plenitude to the aesthetic text.

In retrospect, however, the aesthetic developed by the phenomenologists, and in particular by Merleau-Ponty, with its notion of the primacy of perception in the elaboration of the languages of art, would seem to be the very prototype of a theory of the Symbolic conceived almost exclusively from the perspective of the Imaginary. On the other hand, it cannot be said that in its most rigorous form, phenomenological criticism as such has been widely applied in the United States; what has tended to replace it, but sometimes to claim its authority, is the far more obviously ideological interpretation of works in terms of the “self” and its various identity crises. On readings of this kind—which have obviously become the dominant academic interpretive ideology, along with so-called pluralism—readings whose interminable oscillation between the subject, the ego, and the Other reflects the optical illusions of the Imaginary register itself, the full force of the Lacanian denunciation of ego psychology may be allowed to fall.³⁴

We must, however, specify an important variant of this approach, which, framed in protosocial terms, has genuinely political consequences. This approach—the reading of cultural phenomena in terms of otherness—derives from the dialectic of the relationship to the Other in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, and beyond that, from the Hegelian account of the master and the slave in the *Phenomenology*. It is a dialectic that, particularly as developed in *Saint Genet*, seemed to lay the basis for an aggressive critique of the relations of domination—hence, in particular, its extension by Frantz Fanon to the whole realm of Third World theory and of the psychopathology of the colonized and the colonial Other. And something like just such a theory of otherness must surely always be implicit in a politics that for whatever reason substitutes categories of race for those of class, and the struggle for colonial independence for that of the class struggle proper.

Meanwhile, the work of Michel Foucault testifies to the growing influence of a similar theory of otherness in the analysis of culture and history, where it has taken on the more structural form of a theory of exclusion. So, following Sartre’s analysis of criminality in *Saint Genet*, Foucault showed how a society developing a conception of Reason found it necessary to devise one of insanity and abnormality as well, and to generate marginal realities against which to define itself; and his more recent work on imprisonment and incarceration proper rejoins what has become one of the most significant currents of American political reality since Attica, namely, the movement within the prisons themselves.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that “*Saint Genet* is the epic of the ‘stade du miroir’”;³⁵ and political reality, as well as the theoretical framework offered here, suggests that the Lumpenpolitics, the politics of

marginality or “molecular politics” (Deleuze), of which such theories are the ideology and which is in some ways the successor to the student movements of the 1960s both here and in France, is essentially an ethical—when not an overtly anarchist—politics dominated by the categories of the Imaginary. Yet, in the long run, as we will see in our concluding section, an ethical politics is a contradiction in terms, however admirable may be its passions and the quality of its indignation.

Such are, then, some of the forms taken in recent criticism by what we may diagnose as an overestimation of the Imaginary at the expense of the Symbolic. That it is not simply a question of method or theory but has implications for aesthetic production may be suggested by the example of Brecht, whose conception of an anti-Aristotelian theater, an aesthetic that refuses spectator empathy and “identification,” has raised problems that are clarified by our present context. We would suggest, indeed, that the Brechtian attack on “culinary” theater—as well as the apparent paradoxes to which the ideal of “epic theater” gives rise—can best be understood as an attempt to block Imaginary investment and thereby to dramatize the problematical relationship between the observing subject and the Symbolic Order or history.

As for the complementary extreme, the overestimation of the Symbolic itself, it is easier to say what this particular “heresy” or “illusion” looks like since the development of semiotics, whose fundamental program may in this respect be described as a veritable mapping of the Symbolic Order. Its blind spots may therefore be expected to be particularly instructive as to the problems of the insertion of the Imaginary into the model of a Symbolic system. I will here point to only one of them, but it is surely the most important one in the context of literary criticism, namely, the problem of the category of the “character” in a structural analysis of narrative.³⁶

For, as the ideologies of “identification” and “point of view” make plain, “character” is that point in the narrative text at which the problem of the insertion of the subject into the Symbolic most acutely arises. It can surely not be solved by compromises like those of Propp and Greimas—whatever their undoubted practical value—in which the anthropomorphic remnant of a “subject” of the action persists beneath the guise of the “function” or the *actant*. What is wanted is not only an instrument of analysis that will maintain the incommensurability of the subject with its narrative representations—or, in other words, the incommensurability between the Imaginary and the Symbolic in general—but also one that will articulate the discontinuities within the subject’s various “representatives” themselves, not only those that Benveniste has taught us to observe between the first and second pronouns on the one hand and the third on the other, but also, and above all, that discontinuity, stressed by Lacan, between the nominative and the accusative forms of the first person itself. To a certain degree, the

theoretical problem of the status of the subject in narrative analysis is itself a reflection of the historical attempt of modernistic practice to eliminate the old-fashioned subject from the literary text. My own feeling is that you cannot deny the possibility of an adequate representation of the subject in narrative on the one hand, and then continue the search for a more satisfactory category for such representation on the other. If this is so, the notion of some relationship—still to be defined—between the subject and this or that individual character or “point of view” should be replaced by the study of those character systems into which the subject is fitfully inserted.³⁷

In a more general way, however, this dilemma suggests that the most crucial need of literary theory today is for the development of conceptual instruments capable of doing justice to a postindividualistic experience of the subject in contemporary life itself, as well as in the texts. Such a need is underscored by the persistent contemporary rhetoric of a fragmentation of the subject (most notably, perhaps, in the *Anti-Oedipus* of Deleuze and Guattari, with its celebration of the schizophrenic as the “true hero of desire”); but it is not satisfied any more adequately by the (still very abstract) Marxist conviction that the theory as well as the experience of the decentering of consciousness must serve “to liquidate the last vestiges of bourgeois individualism itself and to prepare the basis for some new postindividualistic thought mode to come.”³⁸ At the least, however, and whatever their practical value as analytic machinery turns out to be, the Lacanian graphs of a properly structural “subversion of the subject” allow us in retrospect to measure the anticipatory value, but also the Hegelianizing limits, of such conceptual precursors as the dialectics of *Saint Genet* and of René Girard’s *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, as well as of Sartre’s later concept of “seriality” in the *Critique*, while suggesting future areas for exploration in Bakhtin’s prestructural notion of a properly dialogical speech and the preindividualistic forms of social experience from which it springs.³⁹ It is therefore tempting to reverse Lacan’s polemics (in the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” and elsewhere) and to suggest that at a time when the primacy of language and the Symbolic Order is widely understood—or at least widely asserted—it is rather in the underestimation of the Imaginary and the problem of the insertion of the subject that the “un-hiddenness of truth” (Heidegger) may now be sought.

IV

For Derrida’s accusation is undoubtedly true, and what is at stake, in Lacan as well as in psychoanalysis in general, is truth; even worse, a conception of truth peculiarly affiliated to the classical existential one (that of Heidegger as a veiling/unveiling, that of Sartre as a fitful reclamation from *mauvaise foi*) (*PT*, 81–94). For that very reason, it seems arbitrary to class as logocentric

and phonocentric a thought that—insofar as it is structural—proposes a decentering of the subject, and—insofar as it is “existential”—is guided by a concept of truth, not as adequation with reality (as Derrida suggests), but rather as a relationship, at best an asymptotic approach, to the Real.

This is not the place to deal with Lacan’s epistemology, but it is certainly the moment to return to this term, the third of the canonical Lacanian triad, of which it must be admitted that it is at the very least astonishing that we have been able to avoid mentioning it for so long. Just as the Symbolic Order (or language itself) restructures the Imaginary by introducing a third term into the hitherto infinite regression of the duality of the latter’s mirror images, so we may hope and expect that the tardy introduction of this third term, the Real, may put an end to the Imaginary opposition into which our previous discussion of Lacan’s two orders has risked falling again and again. We must not, however, expect much help from Lacan himself in giving an account of a realm of which he in one place observes that it—“the Real, or what is perceived as such—is what resists symbolization absolutely” (*Sem*, I, 80).

Nonetheless, it is not terribly difficult to say what is meant by the Real in Lacan. It is simply History itself; and if for psychoanalysis the history in question here is obviously enough the history of the subject, the resonance of the word suggests that a confrontation between this particular materialism and the historical materialism of Marx can no longer be postponed. It is a confrontation whose first example has been set by Lacan himself, with his suggestion that the notion of the Symbolic as he uses it is compatible with Marxism (whose theory of language, as most Marxists would be willing to agree, remains to be worked out) (*E*, “La Science et la vérité,” 876).⁴⁰ Meanwhile, it is certain that his entire work is permeated by dialectical tendencies, the more Hegelian ones having already been indicated above, and beyond this that the fascination of that work lies precisely in its ambiguous hesitation between dialectical formulations and those, more static, more properly structural and spatializing, of his various topologies. In Lacan, however, unlike the other varieties of structural mapping, there is always the proximity of the analytic situation to ensure the transformation of such structures back into “moments” of a more process-oriented type. Thus, in the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” which we have hitherto taken at face value as a “structuralist” manifesto against the optical illusions of the signified, other passages on the contrary suggest that the circular trajectory of the signifier may be a little more closely related to the emergence of a dialectical self-consciousness than one might have thought, and project a second, more dialectical reading superimposed upon the structural one already outlined. In particular, the dilemma of Poe’s Minister implies that it is in awareness of the Symbolic that liberation from the optical illusions of the Imaginary is to be sought:

For if it is, now as before, a question of protecting the letter from inquisitive eyes, he can do nothing but employ the same technique he himself has already foiled: leave it in the open. And we may properly doubt that he knows what he is thus doing, when we see him immediately captivated by a dual relationship in which we find all the traits of a mimetic or of an animal feigning death, and, trapped in the typically imaginary situation of seeing that he is not seen, misconstrue the real situation in which he is seen not seeing. (*SPL*, 60; *E*, 30-31)

Even if the structural self-consciousness diagnostically implied by such a passage is a properly dialectical one, it would not necessarily follow that the dialectic is a Marxist one, even though psychoanalysis is unquestionably a materialism. Meanwhile the experience of a whole series of abortive Freud-Marxisms, as well as the methodological standard of the type of radical discontinuity proposed by the model outlined in the present essay, suggests that no good purpose is to be served by attempting too hastily to combine them into some unified anthropology. To say that both psychoanalysis and Marxism are materialisms is simply to assert that each reveals an area in which human consciousness is not “master in its own house”: only the areas decentered by each are the quite different ones of sexuality and of the class dynamics of social history. That these areas know local interrelationships—as when Reich shows how sexual repression is something like the cement that holds the authority fabric of society together—is undeniable; but none of these instinctual or ideological ion-exchanges, in which a molecular element of one system is temporarily lent to the other for purposes of stabilization, can properly furnish a model of the relationship of sexuality to class consciousness as a whole. Materialistic thinking, however, ought to have had enough practice of heterogeneity and discontinuity to entertain the possibility that human reality is fundamentally alienated in more than one way, and in ways that have little enough to do with each other.

What one can do, however, more modestly but with better hope of success, is to show what these two systems—each one essentially a hermeneutic—have to teach each other in the way of method. Marxism and psychoanalysis indeed present a number of striking analogies of structure with each other, as a checklist of their major themes can testify: the relation of theory and practice; the resistance of false consciousness and the problem as to its opposite (is it knowledge or truth? science or individual certainty?); the role and risks of the concept of a “midwife” of truth, whether analyst or vanguard party; the reappropriation of an alienated history and the function of narrative; the question of desire and value and of the nature of “false desire”; the paradox of the end of the revolutionary process, which, like analysis, must surely be considered “interminable” rather than “terminable”; and so forth. It is therefore not surprising that these two nineteenth-century “philosophies” should be the objects, at the present

time and in the present intellectual atmosphere, of similar attacks, which focus on their “naive semanticism.”

It is at least clear that the nineteenth century is to be blamed for the absence until very recently, in both Marxism and psychoanalysis, of a concept of language that would permit the proper answer to this objection. Lacan is therefore in this perspective an exemplary figure, provided we understand his life's work, not as the transformation of Freud into linguistics, but as the disengagement of a linguistic theory that was implicit in Freud's practice but for which he did not yet have the appropriate conceptual instruments; and clearly enough, it is Lacan's third term, his addition of the Real to a relatively harmless conceptual opposition between Imaginary and Symbolic, that sticks in the craw and causes all the trouble. For what is scandalous for contemporary philosophy in both of these “materialisms”—to emphasize the fundamental distance between each of these “unities-of-theory-and-practice” and conventional philosophy as such—is the suborn retention by both of something the sophisticated philosopher was long since supposed to have put between parentheses, namely a conception of the referent. For model-building and language-oriented philosophies, indeed (and in our time they span an immense range of tendencies and styles from Nietzsche to common language philosophy and from pragmatism to existentialism and structuralism)—for an intellectual climate dominated, in other words, by the conviction that the realities we confront or experience come before us preformed and preordered, not so much by the human “mind” (that is the older form of classical idealism), as rather by the various modes in which human language can work—it is clear that there must be something unacceptable about this affirmation of the persistence, behind our representations, of that indestructible nucleus of what Lacan calls the Real, of which we have already said above that it was simply History itself. If we can have an idea of it, it is objected, then it has already become part of our representations; if not, it is just another Kantian *Ding-an-sich* (a formulation that will probably no longer satisfy anyone). Yet the objection presupposes an epistemology for which knowledge is in one way or another an identity with the things, a presupposition peculiarly without force over the Lacanian conception of the decentered subject, which can know union neither with language nor with the Real and which is structurally at a distance from both in its very being. The Lacanian notion of an “asymptotic” approach to the Real, moreover, maps a situation in which the action of this “absent cause” can be understood as a term limit, both indistinguishable from the Symbolic (or the Imaginary) and also independent of it.

The other version of this objection—that history is a text, and that in that case, as one text is worth another, it can no longer be appealed to as the “ground” of truth—raises the issue of narrative fundamental both for psychoanalysis and for historical materialism, and requires us to lay at least the

groundwork for a materialist philosophy of language. For both psychoanalysis and Marxism depend very fundamentally on history in its other sense, as story and storytelling: if the Marxian narrative of the irreversible dynamism of human society as it develops into capitalism be disallowed, little or nothing remains of Marxism as a system and the meaning of the acts of all those who have associated their praxis with it bleeds away. Meanwhile, it is clear that the analytic situation is nothing if not a systematic reconstruction or rewriting of the subject's past, as indeed the very status of the Freudian corpus as an immense body of narrative analyses testifies.⁴¹ We cannot here fully argue the distinction between this narrative orientation of both Marxism and Freudianism and the nonreferential philosophies alluded to above. Suffice it to observe this: that history is not so much a text, as rather a text-to-be-(re-)constructed. Better still, it is an obligation to do so, whose means and techniques are themselves historically irreversible, so that we are not at liberty to construct any historical narrative at all (we are not free, for instance, to return to theodicies or providential narratives, or even to the older nationalistic ones), and the refusal of the Marxist paradigm can generally be demonstrated to be at one with the refusal of historical narration itself, or at least, with its systematic strategic delimitation.

In terms of language, we must distinguish between our own narrative of history—whether psychoanalytic or political—and the Real itself, which our narratives can only approximate in asymptotic fashion and which “resists symbolization absolutely.” Nor can the historical paradigm furnished us by psychoanalysis or by Marxism—that of the Oedipus complex or of the class struggle—be considered as anything more Real than a master text, an abstract one, hardly even a protonarrative, in terms of which we construct the text of our own lives with our own concrete praxis. This is the point at which the intervention of Lacan's fundamental distinction between truth and knowledge (or science) must be decisive: the abstract schemata of psychoanalysis or of the Marxian philosophy of history constitute a body of knowledge, indeed, of what many of us would be willing to call scientific knowledge, but they do not embody the “truth” of the subject, nor are the texts in which they are elaborated to be thought of as a *parole pleine*. A materialistic philosophy of language reserves a status for scientific language of this kind, which designates the Real without claiming to coincide with it, which offers the very theory of its own incapacity to signify fully as its credentials for transcending both Imaginary and Symbolic alike. “*Il y a des formules qu'on n'imagine pas,*” Lacan observes of Newton's laws. “*Au moins pour un temps, elles font assemblée avec le réel.*”⁴²

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism is that it has been conceived as a series of propositions about matter—and in particular the relationship of matter to consciousness, which is to say of the natural sciences to the so-called human sciences—rather than as a set of propositions

about language.⁴³ A materialistic philosophy of language is not a semanticism, naive or otherwise, because its fundamental tenet is a rigorous distinction between the signified—the realm of semantics proper, of interpretation, of the study of the text’s ostensible meaning—and the referent. The study of the referent, however, is the study, not of the meaning of the text, but of the limits of its meanings and of their historical preconditions, and of what is and must remain incommensurable with individual expression. In our present terms, this means that a relationship to objective knowledge (in other words, to what is of such a different order of magnitude and organization from the individual subject that it can never be adequately “represented” within the latter’s lived experience save as a term limit) is conceivable only for a thought able to do justice to radical discontinuities, not only between the Lacanian “orders,” but within language itself, between its various types of propositions as they entertain wholly different structural relations with the subject.

The Lacanian conception of science as a historically original form of the decentering of the subject⁴⁴—rather than as a place of “truth”—has much that is suggestive for a Marxism still locked in the outmoded antinomy of that opposition between ideology and science whose bewildering changes are rung in the various and contradictory models of that relationship proposed by Althusser at various stages of his work. And in view of the use to which we will elsewhere see Althusser put the Lacanian notion of the orders, it is all the more surprising that he should not have profited from a scheme in which knowledge and science, the subject and his or her individual truth, the place of the Master, the eccentric relationship both to the Symbolic and to the Real, are all relationally mapped.

For clearly, in Marxism as well as in psychoanalysis, there is a problem—even a crisis—of the subject: suffice it to evoke on the level of praxis the intolerable alternative between a self-sacrificing and repressing Stalinism and an anarchistic celebration of the subject’s immediate here-and-now. In the area of theory, the crisis in the Marxian conception of the subject finds its most dramatic expression in the contrast between what we may call the German and the French traditions—the Hegelianizing and dialectical current that, emerging from Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*, found its embodiment in the work of the Frankfurt School, and the structural and science-oriented reading of Marx that, combining the heritage of Saussure with the lessons of Mao Tse-tung’s *On Contradiction* (and also with Lacanian psychoanalysis), informs the theoretical practice of Althusser and his group.

The theme of the subject, indeed, clarifies many of the ambiguities of Althusser’s positions. His polemic against that particular ideology of the subject called humanism was to be sure a relatively local one, directed not only against currents in the non- and even anti-Communist Left in France,

but also against some elements of the French Communist party; whereas his polemic against Hegel is clearly intended to forestall the use of the early, Hegelianizing Marx, the Marx of the theory of alienation, against the later Marx of *Capital*.⁴⁵ Neither of these polemics is particularly relevant to the fortunes of Marxism in the Anglo-American world, where Hegel has never been a name to conjure with in the first place, and where the dominant individualism has never flirted very extensively with the rhetoric of humanism. Our present context, however, makes it easier to see the markings of the Imaginary and its distortion in that “idealism” with which Althusser reproaches Hegel, whose conceptual instruments—totality, negativity, alienation, *Aufhebung*, and even “contradiction” when understood in a fundamentally idealist sense—he takes such pains to distinguish from his own discontinuous and structural ones.⁴⁶ To rewrite Althusser’s critique in these terms is to escape the antithesis between that affirmation of a “materialist kernel” in Hegel to which he rightly objects, and his own blanket repudiation, and to evolve a more productive way of handling the content of “idealistic” philosophies. Some such approach, indeed, seems implicit in Althusser’s later conception of history as a “process without a subject” (a polemic aimed at the Hegelianism of Lukács, whose characterization of the proletariat as the “subject of history” is here alluded to).⁴⁷ Yet it must not be thought that this difference has to do with the content of a Marxian vision of history shared by Lukács and Althusser alike; rather, it would seem a question for Althusser of rejecting the use of categories of the subject in the discussion of a collective process structurally incommensurable with them, and with individual or existential experience.⁴⁸ Indeed, the Althusserian emphasis on science is in this respect such an extreme overreaction as to leave no place for that very rich field of study that emerged from Lukács’s tradition and that is customarily designated as the phenomenology of everyday life.

The lasting achievement of the Frankfurt School, meanwhile, lies precisely in this area, and in particular, in its vivid demonstration of the reification of the subject under late capitalism—a demonstration that ranges from Adorno’s diagnoses of the fetishization of aesthetic perception (and of artistic form) all the way to Marcuse’s anatomy of the language and thought patterns of *One-Dimensional Man*. What we must now observe is that the demonstration depends for its force on the hypothesis of some previous historical stage in which the subject is still relatively whole and autonomous. Yet the very ideal of psychological autonomy and individualism, in the name of which their diagnosis of the atomized subject of late capitalism is made, precludes any imaginative appeal back beyond bourgeois civil society to some preindividualistic and precapitalist social form, since the latter would necessarily precede the constitution of the bourgeois subject itself. Inevitably, then, the Frankfurt School drew its norm of the

autonomous subject from that period in which the bourgeoisie was itself a rising and progressive class, its psychological formation conditioned by the then still vital structure of the nuclear family; and this is the sense in which their thought has with some justification been taxed as potentially regressive and nostalgic.

Whereas in France in the 1960s and 1970s, the left-wing celebration of the “end of man” (Foucault) has generated a rhetoric in which it is precisely the so-called autonomous subject (in other words, the ego, the illusion of autonomy) that is denounced as an ideological and a bourgeois phenomenon, and the various signs of its decay—what the Frankfurt School took to be symptoms—are welcomed as the harbingers of some new post-individualistic state of things. The historical reasons for this theoretical divergence—the Frankfurt School’s experience of the quality of consciousness among the subjects of Nazism, the absence from the France of the *société de consommation* of anything like a countercultural “revolution” in daily life of the American type—do not suffice to solve the theoretical problem of the status the subject ought to have for Marxism today.

The solution can only lie, it seems to me, in the renewal of Utopian thinking, of creative speculation as to the place of the subject at the other end of historical time, in a social order that has put behind it class organization, commodity production and the market, alienated labor, and the implacable determinism of a historical logic beyond the control of humanity. Only thus can a third term be imagined beyond either the “autonomous individualism” of the bourgeoisie in its heyday or the schizoid part-objects in which the fetishization of the subject under late capitalism has left its trace, a term in the light of which both these forms of consciousness can be placed in their proper historical perspective.

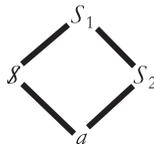
To do so, however, would require the elaboration of a properly Marxist “ideology,” something that will be more fully explored in the following two chapters.

It seems appropriate, however, to conclude this “Lacanian” evaluation of different discourses with a return to Lacan himself, who proposed another kind of typology in his 1969–1970 seminar. As this is very specifically a structural typology—organized around the logical permutations that obtain in relationships to the signifier—the Imaginary no longer plays any role in it (but reappears in the very different dialectical scheme of the “knots” that link the three orders, at the end of Lacan’s career). The system of the “four discourses,” however, is organized around the idea that a distinct discursive structure will appear as each of the four fundamental elements in that relationship is foregrounded and “overemphasized” (it being understood that no real harmony between them is possible that would allow the proper “ratio” and that could therefore be understood as a “solution” to the problem of overemphasis or, in other words, as a kind of norm;

whereas, on the other hand, it is not possible to avoid foregrounding and privileging one of these elements over the others in any given situation). The four terms of this discursive system (along with their specific Lacanian notations) are as follows:

- the signifier as such (S_1),
- the signifying chain (S_2),
- the subject in its division (\mathcal{S}),
- the object of desire (a).

Each unit is defined by its relations to two others:



I will gloss these terms very impressionistically as follows: the “signifier” is the source of meaning; it is what, inside us, seems to be the absent center of reference—the basic private experience, the most charged private word or thing. Yet the signifier is not a reified object that one contemplates for its own sake; its power derives from its capacity and function to organize syntax, the signifying chain, signification for us (this is the sense in which Lacan describes the phallus as the “signifier of desire”). The signifier is thus rarely in that sense identified with a person, whether our self or another; yet, when that does happen, the person in question becomes, as we will see shortly, invested with a strange prestige, that evoked by the word “master” (taken in both its Hegelian and its pedagogical senses).

The “signifying chain,” then, is that specific set of private or public meanings, that pattern or cluster of more provisional and interrelated signifiers, in which our desire is invested and which organizes the content of our psychic life in shifting and provisional (but sometimes long-term) constellations. This is, if you like, a “text,” provided that the term is given the proper metaphorical extensions to such things as my daily routine (familiar and organized to the point of compulsiveness), my habitual emotional reactions (for example, immediate resignation that is then punctuated by fits of revolt or rage), or my “ideology” (now grasped as a relatively routinized system of protonarrative evaluations, as when a reaction to a particularly charged topic—taxes, say, or “big government”—then triggers a familiar mental journey across all my inner obsessions and subjects of complaint).

What is here designated as the “subject in its division” can just as well be described in the more imperfect but more familiar existential terminology of the “subject of desire,” the repressed subject, the authentic source of desire that still from time to time makes its presence felt, penetrating

consciousness in the form of a throb or impulse of a nature unmistakably different from our customary velleities. The term “division,” however, is meant to remind us that this deep, unconscious, authentic “subject” exists only in repressed form and is the structural consequence of primal repression (speech, consciousness), without which it would cease to offer the mirage of some “true” desire or true being; this is to say, of course, that it can never be recovered as such and is a most unreliable space for nostalgia or instinctual Utopianism.

As for the final term, the “object of desire” itself (or lower case *a*), it can of course not be specified, since it is in perpetual modification and substitution for all of us at all times. This is perhaps the moment to say something, however, about the practical wisdom of Lacanianism—whose dead letter, like all forms of practical wisdom, may seem relatively banal—and also about the relationship of Lacanian ethics to the more familiar Socratic kind. Neurotics, Lacan has often said, are people who imagine that happiness exists but that only other people have it. The formula obviously dramatizes what we have called the tragic character of Lacan’s thought, which, closely related to Freudian stoicism, sees the “problem” of desire as being structurally unresolvable, as being forever a problem and an “existential” dilemma in its very nature. There is therefore in such a scheme of things nothing like a “cure” in its pop-psychological sense. What replaces it is a specifically Lacanian version of the “know thyself” that turns precisely on the matter of lower case *a*, or the object of desire, and that is often conventionally expressed by the Lacanians in the form of a question to which there is no correct answer, namely, *Où en es-tu par rapport à ton désir?* (Where do you stand with respect to your desire?) The momentary self-consciousness or “authentic” consciousness such a question seeks to probe or therapeutically awaken demands the coordination between two kinds of “self-knowledge”: what my desire—my “object” *a*—is right now; and how—also right now—I mean to handle it, what I am in the process of doing with it, what position on it I can see myself adopting (resignation, active appropriation, contemplation, repression, and so forth). Even the first of these forms of self-knowledge makes the greatest demands on most of us, who most of the time are never really clear what our desire does happen to be; and we recall, in this context, Lacan’s interpretation of the origins of psychoanalysis as a historical confrontation with hysteria as such, which he describes as a “desire to desire,” a state in which desire—and desiring—has itself become a problem and is no longer “natural.” As for the second kind of self-consciousness measured by the Lacanian question, it should be understood that it does not call for action, but it seeks to reveal or deconceal the practical distance that we already entertain to our object of desire, which is somehow already implicit in the desire itself. Indeed, no “practical” recommendations at all are implied by this ethics, which is an “existential” one in

the sense that it deliberately abandons the subject before the void of the choice itself. Nonetheless, these remarks about the status of the object of desire in Lacan will help us evaluate his conception of the four discourses, whose able résumé by Mitchell and Rose follows:

What matters is the primacy or subordination given by each form of discourse to the subject in its relation to desire. Permutation of the four basic units produces four discourses as follows:

1/ the discourse of the master:

$$\frac{S_1}{\mathcal{S}} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

tyranny of the all-knowing and exclusion of fantasy; primacy to the signifier (S_1), retreat of subjectivity beneath its bar (\mathcal{S}), producing its knowledge as object (S_2), which stands over and against the lost object of desire (a).

2/ discourse of the university:

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\mathcal{S}}$$

knowledge in the place of the master; primacy to discourse itself constituted as knowledge (S_2), over the signifier as such (S_1), producing knowledge as the ultimate object of desire (a), over and against any question of the subject (\mathcal{S}).

3/ discourse of the hysteric:

$$\frac{\mathcal{S}}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

the question of subjectivity; primacy to the division of the subject (\mathcal{S}), over his or her fantasy (a), producing the symptom in the place of knowledge (S_1), related to but divided from the signifying chain which supports it (S_2).

4/ discourse of the analyst:

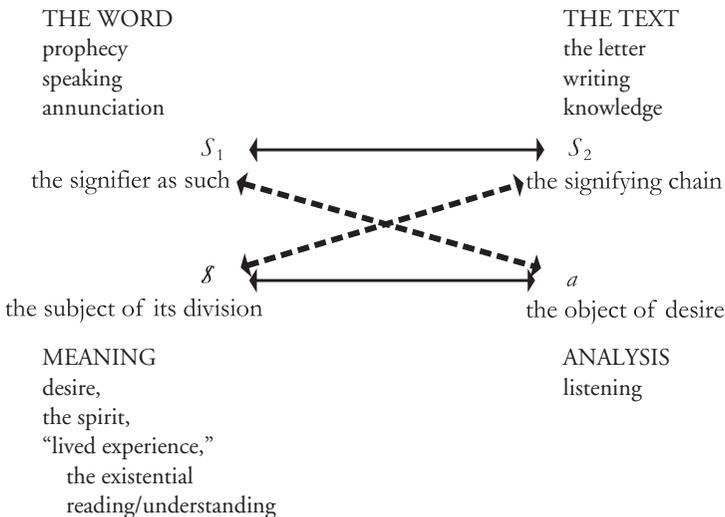
$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\mathcal{S}}{S_1}$$

the question of desire; primacy to the object of desire (a), over and against knowledge as such (S_2), producing the subject in its division (\mathcal{S}) ($a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$ as the very structure of fantasy), over the signifier through which it is constituted and from which it is divided (S_1).⁴⁹

These positions seem to me to have interesting equivalents in that other “unity-of-theory-and-practice” which is Marxism. The recognition involved in the “discourse of the master” is there, of course, that of charismatic authority, and of the historical originality and foundational

innovations of key individuals, from Marx himself and Lenin, to Mao Tse-tung and Fidel Castro. Lacan's scheme makes it clear that this veneration of a freshness of conceptuality and of the authority of the word, or even of prophecy, is to be sharply distinguished from the "discourse of the university"—or, in other words, the authority of the letter, texts, doctrine; the scholastic weighing and comparing of juridical formulas; the concern with coherency and system; and the punctilious textual distinction between what is orthodox and what is not.

Still, these are familiar distinctions. What is more interesting is the second set of positions, in which rather different relationships to desire become identified. The "discourse of the hysteric," for example, as it is described here, seems to me to correspond to a commitment to existential authenticity, to the obedience of Hegel's "law of the heart," and to a repudiation of the letter for the "spirit" when the latter can be identified within us as true meaning and as what we instinctively "know" and recognize. In politics, this stance often corresponds to essentially anarchist positions and to what Lenin uncharitably called "infantile leftism," a revolutionary but also existential purism, in which political acts must also—immediately—constitute political expressions, the expressions of the passions of indignation and justice, which can only be sullied and obscured, and rendered inauthentic and reified, by translation into the instrumental thinking of strategies and tactics.



The "discourse of the analyst," finally, is the subject position that our current political languages seem least qualified to articulate. Like the "discourse of the hysteric," this position also involves an absolute commitment to desire as such at the same time that it opens a certain listening distance from it and suspends the latter's existential urgencies—the illusions of

conscious experience—in a fashion more dialectical than ironic. The “discourse of the analyst,” then, which seeks to distinguish the nature of the object of desire itself from the passions and immediacies of the experience of desire’s subject, suggests a demanding and self-effacing political equivalent in which the structure of Utopian desire itself is attended to through the chaotic rhythms of collective discourse and fantasy of all kinds (including those that pass through our own heads). This is not, unlike the discourse of the master, a position of authority (although those dutifully enumerated as masters above have always possessed extraordinary “analytic” sensitivity to the deepest currents of collective desire, which it was also their task to unbind, to articulate, and to demystify); rather, it is a position of articulated receptivity, of deep listening (*L’écoute*), of some attention beyond the self or the ego, but one that may need to use those bracketed personal functions as instruments for hearing the Other’s desire. The active and theoretical passivity, the rigorous and committed self-denial, of this final subject position, which acknowledges collective desire at the same moment that it tracks its spoor and traces, may well have lessons for cultural intellectuals as well as politicians and psychoanalysts.

1978

Notes

- 1 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, chap. 1 (“Certainty at the Level of Sense Experience”), for the classic description of the way in which the unique experience of the individual subject (sense-perception, the feeling of the here-and-now, the consciousness of some incomparable individuality) turns around into its opposite, into what is most empty and abstract, as it emerges into the universal medium of language. And see, for a demonstration of the social nature of the object of linguistic study, V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York: Seminar Press, 1973.
- 2 Emile Durkheim, *Las Règles de méthode sociologique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1901, 128.
- 3 Sigmund Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. IX: Jensen’s “Gradiva” and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1959, 152. Future references to this work are denoted *CW* and are cited with volume and page numbers.
- 4 It is true that the taboo on biographical criticism ought to make statements of this kind inadmissible; yet, particularly in a period when literary biography is flourishing as never before, it is perhaps time to have a closer look at the ideological function of

that taboo. It should be observed that where the older biographical criticism understood the author's life as a Context, or as a cause, as that which could explain the text, the newer kind understands that "life," or rather its reconstruction, precisely as one further text in its turn, a text on the level with the other literary texts of the writer in question and susceptible of forming a larger corpus of study with them. In any case, we need a semiotic account of the status of what are here designated as "autobiographical" passages, and of the specificity of those registers of a text in which authorial wish fulfillment—in the form of complacency, self-pity, and the like—is deliberately foregrounded.

- 5 The mechanisms outlined here are much closer to the model of *Jokes and the Unconscious*—its object a message and a communication situation—than to that of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.
- 6 For good and for ill, Sartre's theory of language has much in common with that of Dilthey.
- 7 So, for example, in his discussion of the sacrificial dance in Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps*, in which Adorno observes: "The pleasure in a condition that is void of subject and harnessed by music is sadomasochistic. If the liquidation of the young girl is not simplistically enjoyed by the individual in the audience, he feels his way into the collective, thinking (as the potential victim of the collective) to participate thereby in collective power in a state of magical regression." *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomser, New York: Seabury Press, 1973, 159. I am tempted to add that recourse to the hypothesis of a sadomasochistic or aggressive impulse is always a sign of an unmediated and psychologizing ideology (on the other hand, Adorno's use of the concept of "regression" is generally mediated by the history of form, so that regression to archaic instincts tends to be expressed by or to result in regression to earlier and cruder formal techniques, etc.).
- 8 See "Authority and the Family," in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, New York: Seabury Press, 1972, 47–128; and also Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1973, chaps. 3–5. The appeal to the institution of the family as the primary mediation between childhood psychic formation and class realities is also an important feature of the program for a reform of Marxist methodology in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, New York: Vintage, 1968, 60–65.
- 9 Edmond and Marie-Cécile Ortigues, *Oedipe africain*, Paris: Pion, 1966, 301–3. Future reference to this work are denoted *OA* and are cited in the text.
- 10 Serge Leclair, "A la recherche des principes d'une psychothérapie des psychoses," *La Évolution psychiatrique* 2, 1958, 383. Future references to this work are denoted *RP*. A selection of Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966, is now available in English: *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W.W. Norton, 1977. Future reference to this work are denoted *E* and are cited in the text with title and page numbers corresponding to the French edition. Meanwhile, of the five *Seminaire* thus far published in French (I, II, III, XI, and XX), Paris: Seuil, only Volume XI has been translated: Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W.W. Norton, 1978. Future references to this work are denoted *Sem* and are cited with seminar and page numbers corresponding to the French editions. An "authorized" guide to Lacan's thought—

- Anika Rifflet-Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, Brussels: Dessart, 1970—now also exists in English as *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey, London: Routledge, 1977, and A. G. Wilden's pioneering translation *Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1968, has been reissued. Future references to the first of these works are denoted *JL* and are cited in the text with page numbers corresponding to the French edition. Future references to the latter work are denoted *FLP*. The present essay also draws on Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review, 1971. The newer literature on Lacan is too voluminous to list here; of the more personal and biographical accounts that have appeared since Lacan's death in 1981, Catherine Clement, *Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. A. Goldhammer, New York: Columbia, 1983, and Stuart Schneiderman, *Death of an Intellectual Hero*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1983, can be recommended. The quality and interest of the newer American approaches to Lacan can be measured by Ellie Raglund-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1984, and Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1986.
- 11 The fundamental text here is Ernest Jones, "The Theory of Symbolism," *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961; to juxtapose this essay, one of the most painfully orthodox in the Freudian canon, with the Lacanian doctrine of the signifier, which appeals to it for authority, is to have a vivid and paradoxical sense of the meaning of Lacan's "return to the original Freud." This is also the place to observe that American feminist attacks on Lacan, and on the Lacanian doctrine of the signifier, which seem largely inspired by A. G. Wilden, "The Critique of Phallogentrism," *System and Structure*, London: Tavistock, 1972, tend to be vitiated by their confusion of the penis as an organ of the body with the phallus as a signifier.
 - 12 Insofar as this insistence becomes the basis for an anthropology or a psychology proper—that is, for a theory of human nature on which a political or a social theory may then be built—it is ideological in the strict sense of the term; we are thus entitled to find Lacan's stress on the "prepolitical" nature of the phenomenon of aggressivity (see *Sem*, I, 202) somewhat defensive.
 - 13 Melanie Klein, *Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, London: Hogarth Press, 1948, 242. Future reference to this work are denoted *CP* and are cited in the text.
 - 14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Der Begriff des Spiels," *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1965, 97–105.
 - 15 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII: An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 179–204; and compare Jean-Louis Baudry's discussion of the 1911 essay, "On the Mechanism of Paranoia," in his "Ecriture, fiction, idéologie," *Tel Quel: Théorie d'ensemble*, Paris: Seuil, 1968, 145–46.
 - 16 For an analysis of schizophrenic language in terms of part-objects, see Gilles Deleuze, "Préface" to Louis Wolfson, *Le Schizo et les langues*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970.
 - 17 The archetypal realization of these fantasies must surely be Philip Jose Farmer's classic story "Mother," *Strange Relations*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1960, which

- has the additional interest of being a historic document of the psychological or vulgar Freudian Weltanschauung of the 1950s, and in particular of the ideology of “momism” elaborated by writers like Philip Wylie.
- 18 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, book I, part 7, quoted in *E*, 114.
 - 19 See in particular *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Saint Genet*. Neither fully realizes his intent to transcend the categories of “good and evil”: Sartre for reasons more fully developed below; Nietzsche insofar as his philosophy of history aims at reviving the more archaic forms of rivalry rather than dissolving them.
 - 20 See *E*, “L’Instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient,” 515; or, in translation, Jacques Lacan, “The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious,” trans. Jan Miel, *Yale French Studies*, 1966, vol. 36/37, 133. But for a powerful critique of the Lacanian figural mechanism, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Théories du symbole*, Paris: Seuil, 1977, chap. 8, especially 302–305; and for a more general analysis of Lacan’s linguistic philosophy, Henri Meschonnic, *Le Signe et le poème*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, 314–22.
 - 21 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1972, 205. Future references to this work are denoted *PHL* and cited in the text. This is the place to add that, while I would maintain my position on the other thinkers there discussed, I no longer consider the accounts of Lacan and of Althusser given in that book to be adequate: let this chapter and the next serve as their replacements.
 - 22 Its fundamental texts are now available in English: “The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis” or so-called “Discours de Rome” in *The Language of the Self* (see n. 10 above); “The Insistence of the Letter” (see n. 20 above) and the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” *Yale French Studies* 40, 1972, vol. 48, 39–72. Future references to the last of these works are denoted *SPL*.
 - 23 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV: On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1957, 152–153. This is the term Lacan translates as “le tenant lieu de la représentation.”
 - 24 See also J. B. Pontalis’s account of the 1957 and 1958 seminars, *Bulletin de psychologie*, 11: 4–5, 1959–1960, 293; 13: 5, 264–265.
 - 25 Here and elsewhere, Lacan bases a whole phenomenology of Imaginary space on ethological data. It would be suggestive, but not altogether accurate, to claim that the Imaginary and animal or “natural” languages alike are governed by *analog* rather than *digital logic*. See Thomas A. Sebeok, *Perspectives in Zoosemiotics*, The Hague: Mouton, 1972, especially 63–83, and also A. G. Wilden, “Analog and Digital Communication,” in *System and Structure* (see note 11 above), 155–90.
 - 26 The aesthetic chapters of Guy Rosolato, *Essais sur le symbolique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, may serve to document this proposition. They also suggest that our frequent discomfort with psychoanalytic criticism may spring just as much from those ahistorical and systematizing categories of an older philosophical aesthetics in which it remains locked, as from its Freudian interpretative scheme itself. It will indeed have become clear that in the perspective of the present essay all of that more conventional Freudian criticism—a criticism that, above and beyond some “vision” of

human nature, offers the critic a privileged interpretative code and the ontological security of some ultimate content—must for this very reason be understood as profoundly ideological. What now becomes clearer is that the structural oscillation here referred to in Lacanian conceptuality itself—the strategic alternation between linguistic and “orthodox Freudian” codes—often determines a slippage in the literary or cultural analyses of its practitioners whereby the properly Lacanian tension (or “heterogeneity”) tends to relax into more conventional Freudian interpretations.

- 27 But see the chapter on Michel Leiris in Jeffrey Mehlman, *A Structural Study of Autobiography*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1974. Future references to this work are denoted *SS*. See also chap. 3 of Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1981, 151–84, and Christian Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier,” *Screen* 16: 2, Summer 1975, 14–76. With respect to this last, not strictly speaking an analysis of an individual work, it may be observed that the structural discontinuity, in film, between the visual plenitude of the filmic image and its “diegetic” use in the narrative of a given film makes it a privileged object for the exercise of the Lacanian dual registers.
- 28 *E*, 11–41; for the English translation, see n. 22 above.
- 29 See Jacques Derrida, “The Purveyor of Truth,” *Yale French Studies* 52, 1975, especially 45–47. Future references to this work are denoted *PT*. But it might be argued against Derrida that it was Poe himself who first opened up this gap between the abstract concept and its narrative illustration in the lengthy reflections on detection and ratiocination with which the tale is interlarded.
- 30 Derrida’s reading (see n. 29), which emphasizes the moment of “dissemination” in the Poe story (in particular, the generation of doubles ad infinitum: the narrator as the double of Dupin, Dupin as the double of the Minister, the story itself as the double of the two other Dupin stories, etc.), thus in opposition to the Lacanian seminar foregrounds what we have learned to identify as the Imaginary, rather than the Symbolic, elements of Poe’s text. Whatever the merits of the polemic here engaged with Lacan, as far as the tale itself is concerned, there emerges a sense of the tension between these two kinds of elements which suggests that it is not so much Lacan as rather Poe’s text itself that tends toward a suppression of the traces of just this Imaginary “drift” of which Derrida here reminds us, and that it is precisely the “work” of the text itself to transform those Imaginary elements into the closed Symbolic circuit that is Lacan’s own object of commentary. This is why it does not seem quite right to conclude, from such a reemphasis on the Imaginary and “disseminatory,” that “the opposition of the imaginary and symbolic, and above all its implicit hierarchy, seem to be of very limited relevance” (*PT*, 108–109). On the contrary, it is precisely from this opposition that the exegetical polemic here launched by Derrida draws its interest.
- 31 Reread from this perspective, Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay on *Elective Affinities*, “Goethe’s *Wahlverwandschaften*,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, vol. 1, 1972, 55–140, takes on a suggestively Lacanian ring.
- 32 Edmond Ortigues, *Le Discours et le symbole*, Paris: Aubier, 1962. Future references to this work are denoted *DS*.

- 33 The difference between an Imaginary study of the image and a Symbolic one may be dramatized by juxtaposing properly Imaginary works like Gaston Bachelard's *L'Eau et les rêves* (or its equivalent in the Anglo-American criticism of writers like G. Wilson Knight), with the new iconographic studies of the same image patterns, as in Alistair Fowler, "Emblems of Temperance in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II," *Review of English Studies* 2, 1960, 143–49.
- 34 It does not follow that as literary critics and theorists we have any business idly perpetuating the Lacanian polemic in the field of psychoanalytic criticism proper. Rigorous work like that of Ernst Kris or Norman Holland deserves to be studied in its own terms and not in those of some (properly Imaginary) feud between rival standard-bearers.
- 35 *SS*, 182. Mehlman's critique of the limits of Sartre's Hegelianizing conceptual instruments in *Saint Genet* (and most notably of the concept of synthesis) might well have been extended to Hegel himself, whose system in this respect constitutes a veritable summa of the Imaginary.
- 36 See, for example, Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History* 6: 2, Winter 1975, 256–260, and François Rastier, "Un Concept dans le discours des études littéraires," *Essais de sémiotique discursive*, Paris: Marne, 1973, 185–206.
- 37 I have tried to explore the possibility of such an approach in two essays: "After Armageddon: Character Systems in Philip K. Dick's *Dr. Bloodmoney*," *Science-Fiction Studies* 5, March 1975, 31–42; and chap. 3 of *The Political Unconscious*, especially 161–69.
- 38 Fredric Jameson, "On Goffman's *Frame Analysis*," *Theory and Society* 3: 1, Spring 1976, vol. 3.1, 130–31.
- 39 On seriality, see Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971, 247–50. The concept of the dialogical is most fully developed in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevski's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rostel, Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973, 150–69.
- 40 See also the remarks on historiography in the "Discours de Rome" (*FLP*, 22ff, 50; *E*, 260ff, 287). The problem of the function of a genetic or evolutionary set of stages within a more genuinely dialectical conception of historical time is common to both psychoanalysis and Marxism. Lacan's insistence on the purely schematic or operational nature of the Freudian stages (oral, anal, genital) may be compared with the reflections on the proper uses of the Marxian evolutionary schema (savage, barbarian, civilized) in Étienne Balibar, *Lire le capital*, vol. 2, Paris: Maspéro, 1968, 79–226.
- 41 The reproach that patients in analysis do not so much rediscover as rather "rewrite" their pasts is a familiar one, argued, however, most rigorously by Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro, Boston: Beacon, 1971, 246–73.
- 42 Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie," *Scilicet* 2–3, 1970, 75: "Some formulations are not just made up. At least for a time, they fellow-travel with the Real."
- 43 For the most powerful of recent attempts to reinvent this older kind of materialism, see Sebastiano Timpanaro, "Considerations on Materialism," *New Left Review* 85,

May–June 1974, vol. 85, 3–22. The reckoning on Timpanaro’s attempt to replace human history within the “history” of nature comes due, not in his politics, nor even in his epistemology, but rather in his aesthetics, which, proposing that Marxism now “do justice” to the natural elements of the human condition—to death, sickness, old age, and the like—turns out to be nothing more than a replay of existentialism. It is a significant paradox that at the other end of the Marxist spectrum—that of the Frankfurt School—an analogous development may be observed in Herbert Marcuse’s late aesthetics.

- 44 For the most part, these developments on the subject of science have not yet been published; but see *Sem*, 20, *Encore*, 20–21.
- 45 See Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1975, chap. 2.
- 46 As outlined, for instance, in Louis Althusser, “Sur la dialectique matérialiste,” *Pour Marx*, Paris: Maspéro, 1965, 161–224.
- 47 Louis Althusser, *Réponse à John Lewis*, Paris: Maspéro, 1973, 91–98.
- 48 But it would be possible to show that Lukács’s critique of bourgeois philosophy in *History and Class Consciousness* turns precisely on the distinction between referent and signified outlined above, particularly in the systematic demonstration of the inner structural limits of that philosophy which takes the place of a more conventional denunciation of the latter’s “errors” of content.
- 49 Jacques Lacan et al., *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, New York: W.W. Norton, 1985, 160–61, n. 6.

Criticism in History

If Marxism is a system among others, if Marxist literary criticism is a literary *method* among others, then it ought to be possible to spell it out in a relatively straightforward way, or so the objection runs, without that complicated dialectical apparatus, derived as much from Hegel as from Marx, that seems to make such presentations into tortuous affairs of reflexivity and auto-reference at every step of the way. Can we not simply talk about class and history, about ideology, and about the function of a given literary work in a given situation, with a polemic honesty that dispenses with the philosophical refinements? What about Brecht's and Benjamin's defense of *plumpes Denken*—crude thinking? Surely, as all real Marxists know, there is something intolerable about the use of the accusation of “vulgar Marxism” to frighten us away from the real issues and to encourage a kind of intellectual discourse more respectable and more acceptable in the university.

I think that the problem lies in this, that we are always *in situation* with respect to class and ideology and cultural history, that we are never able to be mere blank slates, and that truth can never exist as a static system, but always has to be part of a more general process of *demystification*. This, in its simplest form, is the justification and the essence of the dialectical method; and the proof is that even *plumpes Denken* takes its value from the intellectual positions that it corrects—the overcomplicated Hegelianism or philosophic Marxism for which it substitutes some hard truths and plain language. So *plumpes Denken* is not a position in its own right either, but the demystification of some prior position from which it derives its acquired momentum and of which it comes as a genuinely Hegelian *Aufhebung*, or cancellation/transcendence.

This is why it seems to me at least as important to come to terms with the various critical methods practiced today as to outline the method of the future. Not only is there the evident fact that most of us have been formed in one or the other of those older “methods”; there is the far more basic pre-supposition that the Marxist point of view is secretly present in all those methods—if only as the reality that is repressed, or covertly opposed, the

consciousness that is threatening and that the *mauvaise foi* of critical formalism then projects out of itself as its converse or its nightmare. So we do not have to be defensive about a Marxist literary criticism; that is more properly the stance of those who want to flee history. Nor do we need to suggest that Marxism is an *alternative* to those methods; rather, it is to be seen as their completion, and as the only method that can really finish what it is they all in their various ways set out to do.

Our hypothesis is, then, that all apparently formal statements about a work bear within them a concealed historical dimension of which the critic is not often aware; and it follows from this that we ought to be able to transform those statements about form and aesthetic properties and the like into genuinely historical ones, if we could only find the right vantage point for doing so. The picture is then not one of turning away from the formalizing kinds of criticism to something else, but rather of going all the way through them so completely that we come out the other side; and that other side, for Marxists, is what is loosely known as history. Only to put it that way is to suggest all the wrong things too, and to convey the idea that it is simply a question of substituting one specialized discipline—that of the historian—for another—that of the literary critic. What I have in mind, however, is the point at which a specialized discipline is transcended toward reality itself, the point at which—and this under its own momentum, under its own inner logic—literary criticism abolishes itself as such and yields a glimpse of consciousness momentarily at one with its social ground, of what Hegel calls the “concrete.”

In what follows, I would like to give a sense of this momentary contact with the real, at least insofar as it takes place in the realm of literary studies, and in so doing, to touch on some of the critical methods that have seemed the most rewarding or at least the most prevalent in recent years, and also the most self-contained and mutually exclusive. I would propose in particular to say something about stylistic analysis, about ethical criticism and myth criticism, about Freudian approaches, and about structuralism. No doubt what follows will be by way of a critique of these various methods; yet it is a critique that does not seek to dissolve their relative autonomy, or to abolish any of them as semi-independent methodologies. What I want to show is that none of these modes of interpretation are complete in themselves, and that their appearance of autonomy results from limits and boundaries arbitrarily fixed on the interpretative process. I would like to show that if you prolong any one of these methods even on its own terms, you always reemerge into the historical dimension itself, which thus comes as an implicit or explicit completion of all literary analysis or interpretation. I think in this connection of Serge Doubrovsky's striking description of the Marxist critical process, where he says, “you reach the heart of a text at the very moment you pass beyond it to its social context.”¹ Such a formulation

has the advantage of reminding us that the historical dimension does not come as a merely formal or academic type of completion—it reemerges with a kind of shock for the mind, as a kind of twist or a sudden propulsion of our being onto a different plane of reality. It involves what is properly a transformational process, conversion techniques, a shift in mental perspective that suddenly and powerfully enlarges our field of vision, releasing us from the limits of the various, purely literary methods, and permitting us to experience the profound historicity of their application, as indeed of all mental operations in general.

I

To begin with stylistics, it would seem that as generally practiced today, it tends to fall into two rather distinct and mutually exclusive types of investigation. In what we might call the classical or philological stylistics—that of Spitzer and Auerbach, or Jean-Pierre Richard—the various aspects of a syntax or of a style are understood as so many manifestations or externalizations of a more fundamental and indeed fictive entity—the style of Rabelais or Faulkner, the spirit of the Baroque or of European realism, the genius of place, or whatever. The other stylistics—I take David Lodge's *Language of Fiction* as a convenient example, Riffaterre would be another—deliberately limits itself to the intrinsic effects of the individual work, enumerating the linguistic traits or features characteristic of that work—the vocabulary field, the predilection for certain types of sentence structure and for certain types of verbal patterns over others—and attempts to show how each of these features, or the totality of them, contributes to the construction of the unique effect on the reader that is the aesthetic end or aim of the individual work in question. The distinction between these two antagonistic methods may become clearer if we characterize the second one as essentially a rhetorical analysis—dealing not with a corpus or a period but rather with the properties of discourse in general and of a single verbal object in particular—whereas the first is more properly *stylistic* in its emphasis on the uniquely personal, in the etymological sense of the *stilus*, the inimitable and well-nigh physiological specificity of my own handwriting. How to choose between these two methods, the one idealistic and speculative, the other empirical and analytic?

I would prefer to suggest that each in its own way corresponds to a different view of language and thereby to a distinct historical mode of the latter's development. Rhetoric is an older and essentially precapitalist mode of linguistic organization; it is a collective or class phenomenon in that it serves as a means of assimilating the speech of individuals to some suprapersonal oratorical paradigm, to some non- or preindividualistic standard of *beau parler*,

of high style and fine writing. A profound social value is here invested in spoken language, one that may be gauged by the primacy of such aristocratic forms as the sermon and the verse tragedy, the salon witticism and the poetic epistle.

Style, on the other hand, is a middle-class phenomenon and reflects the increasing atomization of middle-class life and the sapping of the collective vitality of language itself, as the older collective and precapitalist social groupings are gradually undermined and dissolved. Style thus emerges, not from the social life of the group, but from the silence of the isolated individual: hence its rigorously personal, quasi-physical or physiological content, the very materiality of its verbal components.

We may put all this the other way around by reformulating it in terms of the literary public. Rhetoric would then reflect the existence of that relatively homogeneous public or class to which the speaker addresses himself/herself and may be detected by the predilection for standardized formulas and fixed forms and by the continuing influence of the oratorical tradition as codified in classical antiquity. Style is, on the contrary, always an individual and problematical solution to the dilemma of the absence of a public and emerges against the background of that host of private languages into which the substance of the modern work has been shattered.

Such a distinction now permits us a more genuinely historical evaluation of the results achieved by both of the two stylistic or rhetorical methods I have been describing. It also permits us to understand such things as the relative disparity between the English and the French traditions of the novel (and incidentally between the types of literary criticism to which each has given rise). For if the English novel is modernized at a far later date than the French—around 1900, say—this is surely to be accounted for by the vitality of the rhetorical strain in it. The English novel, all the way to Conrad and Ford and beyond, is irrepressibly spoken—elegant or chatty, Ciceronian or intimate—in a way that has no equivalent in the French tradition after the great letter novels, or at least after the death of Balzac. Such narratives (I mean the English) have their readership vividly built into them, and one cannot read them without at once visualizing the drawing rooms and Victorian furniture in which they find their natural setting. The great English novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are thus forms of direct and quasi-immediate social communication and embody an aesthetic essentially oral in character: hence the linguistic priorities in them, which are those of the spoken rather than written composition, and whose sentences are not conceived as precious objects to be fashioned one by one, but rather emerge and disappear with all the permanent provisionality of spoken communication—telling, digressing, repeating, exclaiming, rambling, and apostrophizing. This is to say that in the English tradition the individual prose sentence and the individual prose paragraph have not yet become

dominant literary and stylistic categories in their own right: the spoken period, albeit on a familiar and intimate level, here clearly outweighs the later structures of a more modernistic aesthetic of the art sentence and of the visual text. The rhetorical dimension of the English novel thus only too clearly reflects the British class compromise, in which the older feudal aristocracy is able to maintain its control of the apparatus of the state to the very middle of the First World War by granting privileges to the bourgeoisie at the same time that it appropriates for itself the techniques of the latter's commercial and productive activity.

In France, however, rhetoric in the novel is at one stroke abolished in 1857 with the publication of *Madame Bovary*. Henceforth the novel is no longer the written prospectus of some essentially natural and quasi-oral storytelling, but rather the pretext for the forging of individual sentences, for the practice of style as such. And what was hitherto a cultural institution—the storytelling situation itself, with its narrator and class public—now fades into the silence and the solitude of the individual writer, confronted with the absence of a reading public as with some form of the absence of God. For in the development of France, which has so often seemed paradigmatic of modern political and class history in general, the July revolution of 1830 signals the definitive retirement of the aristocracy from the realm of governmental control, whereas the June massacre of 1848 confirms henceforth permanent antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat. After 1848 in France, therefore, the primacy of the middle classes announces the beginning of that process of social atomization and monadization of which the modern literary language—stylistic rather than rhetorical, profoundly subjectivistic rather than collective—is one ideological reflex among others. Under such circumstances, clearly enough, there can be no stylistic analysis that is not ultimately political or historical in character.

II

If we turn now to what may be called ethical or moral criticism, the Marxist position may well seem paradoxical, if not scandalous, to those trained in some Arnoldian tradition and for whom it goes without saying that literature is always an ethical force and always takes as its subject, or has as its content, ethical choices. And, of course, if everything is a matter of ethics, then clearly enough so is literature. But the proposition that in our time politics and political questions have superseded ethical or moral ones implies a complete transformation of the status of the individual in society: it suggests that we would do better to limit the notion of ethical choices and ethical acts to those situations alone in which individuals face each other as conscious and responsible moral or rational agents, or in which such an autonomous

individual or subject confronts his or her own self or personal development. To put it this way is to realize that in the modern world, and therefore in modern literature as well, there are many experiences and situations that are far more complex than this, where an individual or a character is faced not with an interpersonal relationship, with an ethical choice, but rather with a relationship to some determining force vaster than the self or any individual, that is, with society itself, or with politics and the movement of history; and there are other situations in which that individual confronts the influence of forces and instincts within the former “self” that cannot be assimilated to consciousness in the older sense of autonomous reason. In both these cases, we have left ethical content and ethical criticism behind for a literature and a criticism of a more political or psychological cast, and it follows that a literature for which ethics or moral choices are the principal subject matter will require a fairly stable class context for its development—you cannot explore sophisticated questions of interpersonal relationships in the midst of social upheaval or extreme psychic disintegration.

Thus the very project of an ethical literature is itself socially and historically symptomatic. To take an illustrious example of what no one doubts to be a work with ethical content, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, we may briefly summarize that content under the form of a double lesson. *Middlemarch* teaches us, on the one hand, that as isolated as our individual lives are from each other, they nonetheless continue to exert a mysterious subterranean influence on each other of which we ourselves are scarcely aware. The network of such influences—George Eliot calls it a “stealthy convergence of human lots”—constitutes the very body and reality of the social fabric, hidden except in moments of unusual vision from our everyday awareness.

Dorothea’s full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.²

The other lesson of *Middlemarch* has to do with the reliability of consciousness itself and with the profound difference there is between ideas, concepts, and values that we understand in a purely intellectualized way and those somehow concretely realized for us in our life experience. Only think, in this connection, of the comical disparity between Mr. Casaubon’s universal key to mythology, with its hypothesis of an unbroken tradition from the earliest generations to our own time, and his shattering discovery of the imminence of his own death; think of Dorothea’s initial vapid pietism and of her later, painfully won understanding of the realities to which those

doctrines correspond. Here the novel triumphantly reassumes its function as a demystification of consciousness and as the guardian and the purifier of genuine ethical content.

From a historical point of view, however, such content is to be received with a certain methodological suspicion; or rather, like the interpretation of statutes and ordinances in the legal superstructure, it is first and foremost to be understood negatively. Just as you do not legislate against things nobody does, just as the existence of a given taboo at a certain period in history tends to suggest the prevalence of the crimes against which it is directed, so also no one needs to teach what everybody knows; and ethical doctrines are in this sense to be understood as symptoms of a social situation that calls out for the supplement or the corrective of the doctrine in question. So George Eliot's novelistic construction of a community or a *Gemeinschaft*, her doctrine of the secret interweaving of human existences, stands itself as a symptom of the increasing disintegration of community, of the increasing difficulty her contemporaries have in feeling and experiencing their society as an organic totality. This—rather than the overt political, or I should say antipolitical, attitudes expressed in the book—is the most basic way in which it reflects the realities of its social context.

As for the second major theme of the work, or what we might call the existential dimension of George Eliot, it expresses that distrust of the abstract to be found everywhere in modern middle-class culture, growing more and more pronounced in the present century, and of which existentialism is itself one of the more striking manifestations. Such distrust—a kind of philosophical anti-intellectualism, a growing conviction of the gap between words and real meaning or real experience—arises from the increasing autonomy of culture in the middle-class world. It reflects the disintegration of the older codified social wisdom; a proliferation of private languages and private philosophies that is itself but the reflection of the increasing automatization of private existence; the alienation of language by commercial uses and the commercial media; in short, the division of labor and the structural mystification of the middle classes about their own social reality, a mystification more complex and of a far greater intensity than that obtaining in any previous kind of society. George Eliot's novel, as language, is obliged to work its way back up the current of a debased speech in order to find some original and unsullied content; yet, not that content, but rather the process of linguistic reinvention itself yields the surest clue to the concrete historical reality in question. So we cannot even understand *Middlemarch* in the fullest way without replacing its ethical concerns in their historical situation, without seeing them as a response to an essentially social dilemma, without indeed translating them into political terms of which George Eliot was not always herself aware; and the ethical categories—which are semiautonomous to the degree to which George Eliot

herself considered them ultimates or absolutes, a semiautonomy of moral philosophy and religious problematics that has its source in the English situation, and of which a sociological analysis could be made in its own right—are least of all the final terms of our literary comprehension.

III

With myth criticism it is much the same, except that the myth critic is the prisoner, not of some concrete historical class or in-group situation, as rather of a Utopian vision of his own devising. For myth is the imaginative consciousness of primitive social life, of the archaic or neolithic *Gemeinschaft*; it is a preindividualistic storytelling that seals the unity of the tribe, confirms their common past through the celebration of the heroic founders of culture itself, and unites their individual minds through a shared symbolism and a shared ritual (Durkheim's description of religion). If, therefore, in the modern world we find or seem to find mythic patterns in our literature, this is surely not because the novelist in question has been able once again to tap archaic sources of the imagination or of the collective unconscious, but only because he has experienced the nostalgia for such sources and such origins. Northrop Frye knows this very well, as his insistence on the translation or degradation of myth into literature shows:

The structural principles of a mythology, built up from analogy and identity, become in due course the structural principles of literature. The absorption of the natural cycle into mythology provides myth with two of these structures; the rising movement that we find in myths of spring or the dawn, of birth, marriage and resurrection, and the falling movement in myths of death, metamorphosis, or sacrifice. These movements reappear as the structural principles of comedy and tragedy in literature.³

Or again:

Total literary history moves from the primitive to the sophisticated, and here we glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. If so, then the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folk tale. (*FI*, 12)

What we do not find in Frye, however, any more than we find it in Lévi-Strauss, is some genuinely historical account of how history itself began, how the cold societies were transformed into hot societies, how the mythic storytelling of neolithic life gave way to the literature of the more complex

social forms. (As for Frye's own recent statements about art and society, I would have to characterize them as making room for the *social* function of literature at the expense of its *historical* function. In Ricoeur's terminology, Frye offers us a positive hermeneutic not unlike that of Ernst Bloch, one that stresses the origins of art in the deepest and most primal longings of the collectivity. He does not betray, however, the slightest awareness that hermeneutic can serve another, equally vital but negative, purpose, namely that of demystification—what Ricoeur calls the hermeneutic of suspicion, that of the critique of ideology and of false consciousness. Yet it is precisely that negative hermeneutic that takes as its object historical individuals, and that is alone capable of dealing with and correcting the distortions of the Utopian wish as the latter emerges into the repressive structure of a given concrete situation in history itself.)

Still, I do not mean by this to recommend that we jettison myth criticism, only that we invert its priorities. After all, in such works as those of Bakhtin we find something like a myth criticism whose sound has been turned back on, a myth criticism willing to account historically and socially for its own content and to defend the position that the forms that come out of the older collectivities, the literature of festival and of the saturnalian celebration of a whole community, have precisely the value *for us today* of standing in accusation of our own social life, of constituting a condemnation of the market system as such from which, henceforth, all genuine popular elements have disappeared.⁴ So where Frye tries to mystify us and, implying mythic elements still at work in our own society, uses his doctrine of the literary archetypes to reinforce our sense of the Identity between the literary present and this distant mythical past, and to inspire some sense of the continuity between our psyches and those of tribal peoples, it seems to me equally feasible, and more realistic, to do the reverse, and to use the raw material shared by both myth and literature to stimulate our sense of historical Difference and to help us to an increasingly vivid apprehension of what happens when plot falls into history, so to speak, and enters the force field of modern societies. So what myth criticism ought to be telling us is not that modern writers recreate myths, but rather that they wish they could; and it ought to be explaining the origins of such a compensatory wish in the very structure of modern social life itself.

IV

We must, however, sharply distinguish this kind of archetypal or Jungian or religious myth criticism from the Freudian variety, which has a very different intent and very different implications. Genuine Freudianism is, like Marxism, a materialism, which is to say that it cannot really be assimilated

to the ideal coherence and consistency of a purely philosophical system. It stresses, on the contrary, the contingency and lack of autonomy of consciousness, the scandalous and irrevocable dependency of the mind on something that is irreconcilable with the latter's sense of order and meaning—in the occurrence, on human sexuality itself. It would no doubt be a mistake to speak of *a* Freudian criticism, as though there were only one, or worse yet, as though there existed a single authentic or fully accredited, orthodox variety. Just as Freud himself throughout his career evolved a series of distinct models or hypotheses about the psyche, models not always reintegrated into some definitive synthesis, so a literary criticism inspired by Freud's discoveries finds itself confronted with a very rich series of themes, around any one of which a distinctive interpretative practice might be organized. What I would like to suggest is that most of the methods thus inspired tend to result in literary interpretations that are essentially allegorical, the most representative being no doubt one that sees the various elements of the work as figures for the parts of the psyche—for the id, the ego, and the superego. To say so, however, may appear at first glance to damn Freudian interpretation by association and to burden it with the ignominy that has for so long clung to allegorical interpretation in general, as a kind of artificial refraction of the organic unity of a work into lifeless parts and mechanical personifications.

If, however, you regard allegory in general, and Freudian allegory in particular, as a cultural and historical symptom rather than as one intellectual option among others, this is perhaps no longer quite the case. We may recall, in this context, Adorno's recommendation that we understand the Freudian psychic model as a new *event* rather than a new *theory*; that we understand the Freudian system as a sign of profound new changes and restructurations taking place in Western consciousness in general. So, no doubt, for Freud himself, the Oedipus complex is a constant throughout history, along with the superego and the id, along with repression and sublimation; but in the present context it seems more useful, or at least more interesting, to understand the Freudian vision of the psyche as being itself a reflection of the historic moment when the older autonomous rational consciousness begins to disintegrate, when the subject can no longer be felt as an autonomous and intelligible whole in its own right, can no longer be seen as the responsible agent posited by ethical criticism, but rather begins to project an Other out of itself, and to feel itself surrounded by the dark and inaccessible, yet ultimately determinate, realm of the unconscious. The Freudian psychic model is thus a kind of allegory of the mind, in which consciousness suddenly understands itself in relationship to other hidden absent zones of energy. Such a discovery is tantamount to the realization by consciousness that it is not a complete thing in itself, not really autonomous, not wholly in control or wholly intelligible in its own

terms; but this discovery is just as surely a social event as it is a scientific hypothesis.

Seen in this light, the works that call out for Freudian interpretation reflect through their allegorical structure some fundamental dispersal of the lived experience of consciousness, some fundamental disintegration of the psyche. Such works foretell the end of the age of individualism, and nothing is quite so comparable to the medieval practice of allegory in, say, the *Roman de la rose*, as the great surrealist film of Buñuel and Dali, *Un Chien Andalou*, with its multiple levels, its looping temporal sequences and its use of doubles of the hero to represent the superego and the id. *Un Chien Andalou* shares with the poem of Guillaume de Lorris the conviction that to give a complete picture of the story of love—the central theme of both works—requires us to transcend the subjective point of view of the individual lover, and indeed point of view in general as a literary category, and to present materials—in the one case cultural, in the other psychic—that are largely inaccessible to the lover's own limited consciousness. Yet in spite of the peculiar stylization of such works, in spite of their depersonalized and well-nigh inhuman surface, they represent an attempt to construct a new and intelligible totality upon the ruins of the older individualistic one; they reflect psychic disintegration, to be sure, but at the same time they mark an effort at overcoming that state by the very fact of making it present to us as a complete process.

Freudian interpretation thus designates a fragmentation, but also a reunification of existence. In a situation in which consciousness is now but a minimal zone of our being, and a doubtful one, whose introspection and whose self-knowledge is no longer trustworthy, the Freudian schemes come as larger coordinates within which we may relocate the data of consciousness and correct their distortions. Allegorical criticism of this kind thus corresponds to the structure of a postindividualistic world, one in which neither the older unity of the *Gemeinschaft* nor the newer unity of the autonomous and individualistic bourgeois subject is available.

At the same time such allegory has a political dimension of a far more specific import than the symptomatic character of its form. If indeed we remember the frequency with which, in Freud, the psyche is compared to a city or to a government, it will not be terribly surprising to find that all Freudian interpretation is in its very structure susceptible to expression in political terms, amounting, thus, to a political, as well as a psychic, allegory. Thus Buñuel's "passionate appeal to murder" is also an explosive document of modern anarchism and finds its explicit political expression in his next movie, *L'Age d'or*. Or, to take another familiar illustration, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* is the story of the return of the repressed, the destruction of the psyche by its own rigid mechanisms of censorship, but it is also a prophetic allegory of the internal collapse of the authoritarian Prussian state, in

that respect far closer to *Der Untertan* or *The Blue Angel* than, say, to Kafka or Hofmannsthal. So it is that the allegories revealed by the Freudian method prove to harbor a very explicit political content in their structures themselves at the same time that by their existence as forms they stand as signs of the crippling effects of monopoly capitalism on the consciousness of modern man.

V

When we turn, finally, to structuralism, we may find it equally difficult to isolate some official structural literary method. In actual practice, the literary criticism to which structuralism has given rise tends to fall into two relatively distinct groups. On the one hand, there is what we might call the apolitical branch, or right wing, of the structuralist movement, which through complicated descriptive analyses of individual forms aims at the construction of a grammar and a taxonomy of narrative or plot structures using surface oppositions or deeper quasi-syntactic structures to establish the essential movement of the narrative from contract broken to contract reestablished, from object lost to object restored, from contradiction through mediation to final synthesis.

On the other side of the political spectrum, we find a whole body of work—particularly centering around the literary review *Tel Quel*—that aims at making explicitly political correlations between the forms of discourse—the internal mechanisms of a text, the relative dosage of written and spoken, the reification or process-oriented character of a given style and attitude toward language—and the forms of bourgeois or revolutionary consciousness.

Yet it should be understood that in reality both these kinds of research are post-Marxist and that even the relatively formalistic kinds of structuralism tend to imply correlations between literary and extraliterary structures. Our task here is thus a little more complicated than it was with respect to the other methods we have touched on; for it is here a question, not so much of revealing some historical dimension implicit or concealed in the method, as rather of passing judgment on sociological conclusions already suggested by the critics themselves.

The vices of structural method, however, are not terribly difficult to localize: they arise almost exclusively from strategic and self-imposed methodological limits on the type of statements to be made, from a purely empirical attitude toward the individual text under study, and from a refusal, after the completion of the analytical procedure, to turn the attention back upon the structural method and categories themselves as part of the larger object of study. So what is at issue is not the technique of

structural analysis as such: such techniques have permitted us to isolate the finest mechanisms of plot and narrative with something of that same microscopic precision that the New Criticism taught us to bring to bear on the verbal texture of poetry. What is at issue is rather the nature of the conclusions to be drawn from such research.

To illustrate this with a well-known and widely reprinted essay by Jacques Ehrmann, "The Structures of Exchange in Corneille's *Cinna*," no one can fail to be both impressed and convinced, I think, by the patterns there shown to be present in the very language of tragedy—patterns of giving and taking, receiving, buying and selling, pillage, heaping high with gifts or, on the contrary, the struggle to obtain a just recompense—such are some of the ways in which Corneille and his characters see the consequences of an act.⁵ It is clear that for them acts take place within a complex exchange system in which every move commits your interlocutor to some reciprocal—immediate or mediated—obligation in return. With such an analysis, Ehrmann is of course in the very mainstream of the structuralist tradition, for his model derives from Marcel Mauss's *Essay on the Gift*, an essay whose seminal insights were adapted by Lévi-Strauss to the marriage rules that govern the exchange of women in primitive societies in his study *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which may be said to amount to the first great monument of structuralism as an intellectual and philosophical movement.

What conclusions does Ehrmann go on to draw from the existence of these exchange patterns in the work of Corneille? It is only fair to observe that he refuses to be drawn beyond the limits of a purely literary study of a single isolated text. "A critic who enlarged his investigation to include all the works, or the major works, of an era," he tells us,

would see his goal metamorphosed. At that point, with the goal changed, the nature of his study would change. Instead of being literary, it would be either sociological or anthropological. The question is then raised of knowing at what moment the analysis of literary structures ceases to isolate the aesthetic or literary aspects of an object and moves on to isolate its anthropological and sociological aspects. (*SEC*, 198)

Unfortunately it is not quite so simple as all that, and the anthropological and sociological dimensions of which Ehrmann speaks are already included in his analysis in potential form in the very concept of exchange itself. A category like exchange comes to literary and structural analysis from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and economics and is thus already profoundly comparative in nature. So at that point it does not really matter very much whether the analyst himself refuses, as does Ehrmann here, to take the final step and to assimilate the verbal structures of *Cinna* to those deeper socioeconomic ones—Mauss's potlatch, or the mechanisms of feudal

hierarchy, or the market system of nascent capitalism—that are already latent in the concept of exchange itself. Such assimilation is already implicit in the analysis, and this seems to me indeed the fundamental contradiction of the structural method as such: the comparative nature of its conceptual instruments forces the reader to draw generalizing conclusions that can never be corroborated by the isolated object of a purely empirical type of study.

Even those conclusions, however, are historical in appearance only, for structural theory goes on to assimilate all these varied social forms—potlatch, feudal hierarchy, market system—to some more abstract linguistic or communicational relationship. And with this further development, we find ourselves in a wholly ahistorical realm for which categories such as exchange are seen as *a priori* and universal categories of the human mind and of human society in general.

Still, it is only fair to point out that particularly in the most theoretically sophisticated specimens of structural plot analysis, those of Lévi-Strauss himself, we are offered a somewhat different model of the relationship of literary to extraliterary structures. For Lévi-Strauss, not content to isolate and describe the structures of a narrative, goes on to ask the *function* of such a narrative in the life of the tribe. It then emerges that primitive narrative or myth is yet another form of primitive *thinking*—*pensée sauvage*, or preconscious reasoning; the narrative is an attempt to reconcile irreconcilable contraries, to solve, through a kind of picture language, like a rebus or a dream, the conceptual antinomies or concrete contradictions that haunt the social life of the primitive commune.⁶ Thus narrative becomes once again an act—an act through which tribal people attempt, in the imaginary, to come to grips with their social context and to resolve its most crucial problems. So at length we glimpse a kind of literary analysis that, without even abandoning the purely formal specificity of the work of art itself, may immediately be reformulated in terms of an event in history; a kind of analysis for which the intrinsic and purely formal structures of the work are at one and the same time invested with all the value of a protopolitical act.

VI

Such are then some of the ways in which literary analysis touches the ultimate ground of history itself. And perhaps it will have come to seem that in all this I have been systematically delivering literary criticism over into the hands of the historians and subsuming literary study a little too hastily beneath the more all-embracing discipline of history itself. Yet the history I have in mind is not at all to be confused with the common garden-variety empirical history. To use an offensive but convenient phrase, it is indeed

not “bourgeois historiography” at all, for the latter is not a genuine philosophy of history and does not posit a unified overall meaning to the stages of social development. It will be objected, no doubt, that the very notion of a philosophy of history has been discredited and that the concept of a meaning in history as a whole has been shown to be the solution to a false problem. “Nietzsche” is the signature for this new and widespread philosophical position, which may also be taken as an existential symptom of the extinction of historicity, and of a lived sense of the past and tradition, peculiar to our own social formation. The Marxist “philosophy of history,” however, needs to be sharply distinguished from its traditional predecessors at least to the degree that it stresses breaks and radical discontinuities in history, what I have called historical Difference, fully as much as the continuities and Identities of the older “master narratives.” Just as Marxism is both the end and the fulfillment of philosophy in general, so in much the same way it may be said to be both the end and the fulfillment of philosophies of history, and to demonstrate how the scattered and disparate events of history share common themes and common dilemmas, which link the toil and misery of Neolithic peoples to the most dramatic, as well as the most obscure, struggles of our own age.

A few years ago, it might have been necessary at this point to defend the Marxist vision of history, if not, indeed, to remind people what it was in the first place. Today I doubt if that is any longer really the case. In the past few years, we have witnessed the intellectual and political collapse of that liberal world view that for so long served as an explanation as well as a justification of our economic development and of the aims of our foreign policy. I doubt if there are very many people left today who still believe either in the promise of the older American liberalism or in the theoretical accounts it used to give of the organization of American life. Now that we have come to understand counterinsurgency warfare and neocolonialism, not as freely chosen options of good or evil political leaders, but rather as deeper and more ominous structural necessities of the American system; now that we have been able to observe what is left of the American way of life bombarded and pulverized by the twin corrosive forces of racism and commercialism and indeed to witness the beginnings of the deterioration of the American economic system as a whole; now that we have learned the facts about American responsibility for the beginnings of the Cold War, let alone more recent conflicts—Marxism has once again seemed to many to provide the only intellectually coherent and fully satisfying historical and economic explanation for the things that have been happening to us. It is a totalizing explanation, and this is its formal superiority over all the other partial kinds of accounts—the culture critiques and existential diagnoses, the psychological analyses and the liberal and reformist appeals to the ethics—which use the amount of validity they do contain to obscure the sources of

all those cultural sicknesses in the very economic structure of capitalism itself.

Still, to commit ourselves to a Marxist theory of history is not necessarily to identify the historical themes in terms of which our ultimate interpretation will be made. You will have observed, in particular, the use in the present essay of an interpretative code based on Tönnies's classic concept of the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between the older organic societies and those fragmented and atomistic social agglomerations with which we are familiar in the modern world, with their profound subjectivization and their monadization of individual experience. Such an opposition is already implicit in Hegel and is quite consistent with socialist thought, but unfortunately it is just as consistent with conservative or fascist thought as well, which brandishes a return to the older national or racial *Gemeinschaft*. The trouble with this particular theme as an ultimate description of social reality is that it amounts to a description of that reality from the point of view of the bourgeoisie alone, since it is in the forms of bourgeois life that such social disintegration is taking place. Yet the opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*—one after all between two types of *society*—sometimes strikes me as being far more adequate and far less misleading than some of the psychological and existential concepts, such as that of alienation, which have come increasingly to be thought of as the principal Marxist contributions to modern sociological theory.

As far as alienation is concerned, it has always seemed to me ironic, if not downright comic, that a concept intended by the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to apply to the way in which the labor power of working people was appropriated from them, along with their work satisfaction and the very products of their labor, should have been so enthusiastically adopted by the middle classes of the affluent society as a glamorous and pathetic way of characterizing their own subjective malaise and psychological complications.

The basic terms of any genuinely Marxist interpretation must surely remain those older and more familiar ones of commodity production and of class struggle; and if they tend to summon up specters of the worst excesses of vulgar Marxism or of Soviet dogmatism, I can only point to that brilliant series of works in which only yesterday Adorno showed the commodity form to be at the very heart of twentieth-century modernism.⁷ As for the class struggle itself, its all-informing presence in our private lives as well as in the daily life of our society is the very first lesson that the Marxist textbook has to teach us, and in the absence of such an experience and such a concept there can be no Marxist theory worthy of the name.

Even granting these fundamental themes of Marxism, however, there remains the problem of the proper way of relating a literary analysis to them; and to characterize this very briefly in closing I would like to return for a

moment to the essay of Jacques Ehrmann from which I quoted a moment ago. "I have said," he goes on to tell us there

that I was not interested in looking upon literature as a form of economics. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the phenomenon of literature should be seen as unlike the phenomenon of economics. Using this perspective, it would be as much a question, with the one, of understanding the system established for the exchange of services, merchandise, and women which form the network of communications in ancient and modern collectivities, as it would be, for the other, a question of understanding the system of word and image exchange in literary and artistic communication. The latter system of exchange is, in effect, readily comparable to the former. (*SEC*, 198)

In short, we find evoked here what Lucien Goldmann called homologies, or isomorphisms, or structural parallelisms between various types of social realities. This is indeed the principal sociological method of structuralism and the form that most structuralist versions of Marxism tend to take, involving analogies between the purely literary and verbal structures of the work and the various spheres of the legal system, the political ideology, and the organization of the market obtaining in the period in question.

To return to *Cinna* in this light, we find that for Ehrmann the various events of the tragedy—the gradual elaboration of the conspiracy against the Emperor, the doubts of Cinna himself, torn between his admiration for Augustus and his love for a woman who is the latter's mortal enemy, the Emperor's ultimate gesture of clemency with which the conspiracy is unraveled and the play concluded—all amount to so many stages along a "circuit of gift-giving" that can be buckled and fulfilled only by the supreme magnanimity of Augustus's pardon itself as a kind of absolute gift, self-founding and self-motivated. The play thus constitutes for Ehrmann a kind of narrative dramatization of the structural permutations inherent in the exchange mechanism current at the time of Corneille.

That there can be another and far less static way of relating a literary form to its underlying social reality I would like to demonstrate by reference to the literary sociology of Paul Bénichou in his pathbreaking book *Les Morales du grand siècle*.⁸ For Bénichou the plays of Corneille are the literary and ideological expression of the rebellious feudal nobility of the Fronde—a declining class, suffering increasingly from the centralizing absolutism, first of Richelieu and Mazarin, and then of Louis XIV, and increasingly edged out of positions of power by the parliamentary nobility (drawn from the upper bourgeoisie) as well as by the rising middle class itself. The politics of these great nobles is profoundly contradictory, for their revolt against the crown is born of a deep longing to return to the feudal license of an earlier era, but at the same time, insofar as the king is a *primus inter pares*, they

cannot strike at his power without dealing a blow to their own pretensions as well and sapping the ideological bases of the feudal system as a whole. (And when, a century and a half later, the French Revolution itself began in precisely this way, as a revolt of the nobles against the king, the consequences for those who set it in motion were appropriately disastrous.) In such a situation, therefore, where no real solution is available, an imaginary one is born, a kind of ideological or political wish fulfillment, of which *Cinna* is one of the most striking manifestations. For the dilemma of the nobility could be resolved only if the monarch, maintaining his own legal authority, nonetheless in all his feudal generosity freely turned back to the nobles themselves all those privileges for which they had rebelled against him. Thus the theatrical gesture of Augustus is something more than a mere static reflection of the thought patterns of the baroque Weltanschauung; it is an act charged with significance, which seems to suspend and appease for an instant all the deepest contradictions of the age. For such a point of view, Corneille's tragedy is not some mere document in the correlation between works and social classes, between forms of thought and forms of social life; it is first and foremost an event, one that can be shown to have a precise ideological function at a unique moment in history.

For me, therefore, the method of homologies, while not necessarily false in its results, is static and documentary, and derives ultimately from the history of ideas on the one hand, and from a non-Marxist sociology of literature on the other. I would call instead for a *situational* model of the relationship between a work and its social context, one capable of articulating the central paradox of a Marxist aesthetics: namely, that the force of a work of art is directly proportional to its historicity, that there is indeed no contradiction between our present-day appreciation of a work and its concrete historical content, that the greatness of Corneille is not atemporal, but springs immediately from the force with which his plays reflect the struggles of an event like the Fronde—itself apparently a mere historical curiosity for us today, the convulsion of an extinct class whose values mean nothing to us. Indeed, it will be recalled that it was precisely the Fronde that Lévi-Strauss chose as his example when, at the close of *The Savage Mind*, he undertook to discredit history itself as a mode of knowledge. He there implied that history was a matter of taking sides, and that if such a relationship, which requires a delicate assessment of progressive and reactionary positions within a given historical situation, still makes sense for events of a middle-class era in which we are still ourselves implicated, it becomes senseless when we return to an earlier period whose struggles no longer concern us. And of course the ideals of the Fronde are both progressive and reactionary: reactionary in that they serve the ideological function of enlisting the people of Paris in support of an archaic feudal aristocracy, progressive insofar as they nonetheless foreshadow a revolt against the centralization of

the feudal power itself. Yet the example of Corneille shows that such contradictions have a very special way of coexisting in the literary work, and that as a desperate and vital episode in the long class struggle of human history, it is precisely not in the history books that the Fronde lives on, but rather in the very bones and marrow of literary form itself. With such a vision of the work of art, the techniques of literary criticism find their ultimate ground in historical reality, and literature may be said once again to recover for us its value as a social act.

1976

Notes

- 1 Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963, 15.
- 2 George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956, 613.
- 3 Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963, 33–34. Future references to this work are denoted *FI*.
- 4 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswalsky, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968; and *Problems of Dostoevski's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rostel, Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973. A revised version of the latter work is now available, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984.
- 5 Jacques Ehrmann, "The Structures of Exchange in Corneille's *Cinna*," trans. Joseph H. McMahon, *Yale French Studies*, 36/37, Fall 1966, 169–99. Future references to this work are denoted *SEC*.
- 6 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- 7 See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomser, New York: Seabury Press, 1973.
- 8 Translated as Paul Bénichou, *Man and Ethics: Studies in French Classicism*, trans. Elizabeth Hughes, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971.

Symbolic Inference; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis

What has today for better or for worse come to be known as literary theory may be distinguished from an older, “philosophical” criticism by its emphasis on the primacy of language; and it has come to be widely, if loosely, felt that it is the discovery of the Symbolic in the most general sense that marks the great divide between thinkers and writers who belong to our world and those who speak a historical language we have first to learn. In what follows I will have much to say, at least implicitly, about this proposition, but it is certain that the older, philosophical criticism was content simply to “apply” various philosophical systems to literature in an occasional way, so that we had the curiosities of an existential or a phenomenological criticism, or a Hegelian or a *Gestalt* or indeed a Freudian criticism available on specialized shelves for the philosophically venturesome.

It is clear, however, that in an atmosphere in which technical philosophy—no less than literature itself—is felt to be the emanation of specific powers of language; in an atmosphere in which “literary form,” to gloss a famous title of Kenneth Burke’s, is felt to be a philosophy in its own right, and in which language is itself theory in action; in such an atmosphere the older, philosophical criticisms are as outmoded as the older, philosophical aesthetics or “systems of the fine arts.” Not only does Burke’s pioneering work on the tropes mark him as the precursor of literary theory in this new, linguistics-oriented sense, his Freudo-Marxism itself is the sign of a different structural relationship to the abstractions of technical philosophy than that of many of his contemporaries; and it is a modification then supremely visible in the *Grammar* and *Rhetoric of Motives*, where the older, philosophical systems are piled in one after the other to be melted down and lose their separate identities, much as the old bourgeois selves and individualisms were boiled down and transmuted by Ibsen’s *Button Moulder*.

Paradoxically, however, this displacement of traditional criticism and traditional philosophy by what has come to be known as theory turns out to allow the critic a wider latitude for the exercise of personal themes and the

free play of private idiosyncrasies. The transcendence of the older academic specializations and the heightened appreciation of the inner logic and autonomy of language itself thus make for a situation in which the temperament of the individual critic—if the latter is not too self-indulgently aware of that fact—can serve as a revealing medium for the textual and formal phenomena to be examined. So it is that when we think of the greatest of contemporary critics and virtuoso readers—besides Burke himself the list would probably include Empson and Frye, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Viktor Shklovsky—we thereby instinctively designate bodies of criticism in which the practice of idiosyncratic and sometimes eccentric textual interpretations is at one with the projection of a powerful, nonsystematized theoretical resonance, and this even where the critic himself—Frye and Burke are the obvious examples, but also the Empson of *The Structure of Complex Words* or the Barthes of *Système de la mode*—misguidedly but compulsively submits his materials to a rage for patterns and symmetries and the mirage of the metasytem.

Yet it is not enough to say that Burke's notion of the symbolic act is an anticipation, indeed a privileged expression, of current notions of the primacy of language; seen from a different angle, it allows us to probe the insufficiencies of the latter, which is in so much of today's critical practice little more than a received idea or unexamined presupposition. Indeed, Burke's conception of the symbolic as act or praxis may equally well be said to constitute a critique of the more mindless forms of the fetishism of language, and this to the point where one of the most interesting historical issues raised by his work finds its implicit resolution: I mean the question as to why this immense critical corpus, to which lip service is customarily extended in passing, has had shamefully limited influence in literary studies (the social scientists seem to have been more alert to its implications) and is customarily saluted as a monument of personal inventiveness and ingenuity (in the sense in which I have just spoken of the idiosyncrasies of the great critics) rather than as an interpretative model to be studied and a method to be emulated.

A really full and concrete solution to this particular enigma would of course involve us in a reconsideration and a virtual rewriting of the whole history of our recent intellectual past; in particular it commits us to rectify that falsification of the literary and critical history of the 1930s and 1940s which, an ongoing legacy of McCarthyism, has in our own field never been systematically challenged, even where its sterility is widely recognized. It is to be hoped that a generation of students and scholars no longer hysterical about Stalinism will undertake the task of this fundamental historical revision, which is under way in all of the social sciences but has not even been breathed as a distant and unconfirmed rumor in the human sciences, and most particularly in literature or philosophy.

A very different Burke emerges, indeed, when we have understood that in the period in which his most important work was being elaborated, his stress on language, far from reinforcing as it does today the ideologies of the intrinsic and of the antireferential text, had on the contrary the function of restoring to the literary text its value as activity and its meaning as a gesture and a response to a determinate situation. Thus conceived, literary and cultural criticism takes its place among the social sciences, and the study of language and of aesthetic objects in general recovers something of the dignity it had for the founders of philology when their program foresaw the analysis of literary texts and monuments as a unique means of access to the understanding of social relations. It is from this perspective that I here want to reevaluate Burke's contribution.¹ More specifically, I want to determine whether his work can be reread or rewritten as a model for contemporary ideological analysis, or what in my own terminology I prefer to call the study of the ideology of form—the analysis, in other words, of the linguistic, narrative, or purely formal ways in which ideology expresses itself through and inscribes itself in the literary text.

But this displacement of the terminology of the symbolic by that of ideology will seem arbitrary unless I add a word or two about the concept of ideology it presupposes, and which is clearly construed in a much wider sense than that of sheer opinion, of those extraneous and annoying authorial interventions with which a Balzac or a Faulkner suspend their narratives and indulge some heart-felt prejudice. The view of ideology endorsed here is one that springs from and indeed completes the whole rich development of narrative analysis today. And to put it this way is already to measure something of the distance across which we mean to interrogate Burke's achievement, for it is evident that to reexamine his descriptions of symbolic action in terms of narrative analysis is fundamentally to change the terms and the givens, the coordinates, of the problem and to cut across it in a new way. The older debates, indeed, raised the issue of the status of the aesthetic within the framework of an opposition between truth and poetry, an opposition that tended to box the latter, and literary discourse in general, into categories of fiction or the fictive, the imitated, the unreal, the merely imaginary. But to defend the aesthetic on the terrain of an opposition of this kind was clearly to have surrendered everything in advance and to have resigned one's self to a sandbox conception of literature and culture and their respective efficacy.

When now we substitute the term "narrative" for "fiction," this epistemological false problem disappears, or at least goes out of focus; for it becomes clear, not only that narrative is a specific mode of conceptualizing the world, which has its own logic and which is irreducible to other types of cognition, but also that much of what passes for conceptual or scientific writing is itself secretly narrative in character. If, therefore, narrative is one

of the basic categorical forms through which we apprehend realities in time and under which synchronic and analytic thinking is itself subsumed and put in perspective, we no longer have to be defensive about the role of culture and the importance of its study and analysis. From this point of view, then, Burke's apologia for literature as gesture and ritual—once an uncompromising statement of the active power and social function of the aesthetic—may no longer strike us as being uncompromising enough.

As far as the relationship of ideology and narrative is concerned, however, it may be most useful first to grasp the function of the words "ideology" and "ideological" as the bearers and the signals of a kind of Brechtian estrangement effect to be applied to the operation of literary and cultural analysis itself. To pronounce these words on the occasion of a literary interpretation or a literary or artistic form itself—as when, for instance, John Berger speaks of the "ideology of light" in certain Renaissance paintings, or when the Althusserians denounce the conception for which ideology is mere false consciousness as being itself "ideological"—to use these terms in such a way is less to pass judgments than to reproblematicize the entire artistic discourse or formal analysis thereby so designated.² The term "ideology" stands as the sign for a problem yet to be solved, a mental operation that remains to be executed. It does not presuppose cut-and-dried sociological stereotypes like the notion of the "bourgeois" or the "petty bourgeois" but is rather a mediatory concept: that is, it is an imperative to reinvent a relationship between the linguistic or aesthetic or conceptual fact in question and its social ground. Yet this relationship is not programmed in advance, and indeed there are many strategically different ways in which such a relationship can be projected or formulated, just as, correlatively, there are many distinct ways in which the literary fact itself or, on the other hand, what I have very loosely called its "social ground" can be described and thematized. This is obviously not the place to make an inventory of such possibilities, whose range is great but which have little more in common than the repudiation of the ideology of the "intrinsic" and of the "autonomy" of the verbal artifact. It will have already become clear, however, that the usefulness of the term "ideology" lies—whatever the terms of the solution ultimately decided on—in its exacerbation of the problem, in its capacity to make the reinvention of such a relationship as unavoidable as it is philosophically demanding.

It has therefore seemed to me preferable to describe ideological analysis phenomenologically, in terms of the mental and textual operations it involves, rather than in the framework of any of the specific historical conceptions of ideology available to us. Ideological analysis may therefore be described as the rewriting of a particular narrative trait, or some, as a function of its social, historical, or political context. Still, in the present atmosphere of theoretical sophistication, it is probably futile, if not

regressive, to argue for an ideological analysis of literature in ontological terms by asserting the priority of historical or social or political reality over the literary artifacts produced within it or, in other words, by affirming the ontological priority of the context over the text itself. While such assertions still seem to me to be true and obvious, it is equally certain that we need today to respond to the widespread realization that what used to be called a context is itself little more than a text as well, one you find in history manuals or secondary sources, if not in that unexamined pop history or unconscious collective representation by which groups or classes or nations tend to organize their vision and their reading of individual events. But this does not mean that history is itself a text, only that it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or, in other words, that we approach it only by way of its prior textualization.

This is why it has seemed more satisfactory to me to describe ideological analysis as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that it may itself be grasped as the rewriting or restructuring of a prior ideological or historical subtext, provided it is understood that the latter—what we used to call the “context”—must always be (re)constructed after the fact, for the purposes of the analysis. The literary or aesthetic gesture thus always stands in some active relationship with the real, even where its activity has been deliberately restricted to the rather sophisticated operation of “reflecting” it. Yet in order to act on the real, the text cannot simply allow reality to persevere in its being outside of itself, inertly, at a distance; it must draw the real into its own texture. And the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and in particular of semantics, are to be situated here, in the way in which language and the texts of language carry the real within themselves as their own “intrinsic” subtexts. Insofar, in other words, as symbolic action—Burke will map it out as “dream,” “prayer,” or “chart”—is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling “world” must inhere within it, as the content it has to take up into itself in order to give it form.³ The symbolic act therefore begins by producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back over against it, measuring it with an eye to its own active project. The whole paradox of what we are calling the subtext can be measured by this, that the literary work or cultural object itself, as though for the first time, brings into being that situation to which it is also at one and the same time a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it, encouraging the illusion that the very situation itself did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra- or contextual reality before the text itself generated it. Meanwhile, this simultaneous production and articulation of “reality” by the text is reduplicated by an active, well-nigh instrumental, stance of the text toward the new reality, the new situation, thus produced; and the latter is accompanied immediately by gestures of praxis—whether measurements,

cries of rage, magical incantations, caresses, or avoidance behavior. Now to insist on either of these two dimensions of symbolic action without the other—to overemphasize the way in which the text organizes its subtext (in order, presumably, to reach the triumphant conclusion that the “referent” does not exist) or on the other hand to stress the instrumental nature of the symbolic act to the point where reality, understood no longer as a subtext but rather as some mere inert given, is once again delivered over into the hands of that untrustworthy auxiliary, Common Sense—to stress either of these functions of symbolic action at the expense of the other is surely to produce sheer ideology, whether it be, in the first alternative, the ideology of structuralism or, in the second, that of vulgar materialism.

This said, we must add that the refusal of literary semantics, of the categories of the context or the referent, and the various assertions of the autonomy of the literary text, or the timeless universality of its themes and forms, is not mere opinion either, but is itself a historical phenomenon that reflects the historic process by which in recent times literature and culture have acquired at least a *relative* autonomy. Such aesthetics of the intrinsic thus reflect the realities of artistic production under the market system itself and give expression to the free-floating portability of artistic texts in search of an impossible public, texts released from the social functionality that once controlled their meanings and uses in precapitalist social formations which have now broken down or been dissolved.

From this initial fall, however, from the unavoidable historical reality of a breach between text and context, there can only spring mechanical efforts to reconnect what is no longer an organic whole. So the forced linkages of yesterday’s “interdisciplinary” experiments, in which one whole field of study—in our case, the formal or literary—is somehow wired up to other disciplines, gives way to no less unsatisfactory models, which can be best exemplified by Lucien Goldmann’s “homologies,” in which the structure of the literary text is somehow supposed to be “the same,” at some level of abstraction, as the other related structures of economic exchange, conceptual episteme, class psychology, or whatever. Yet the conception of “levels,” whether within the work or between the work and the extratextual systems that surround it, is unsatisfactory not merely because it projects the model of a merely additive or quantitative juxtaposition, but above all because it does not allow for an active or functional relationship between the text itself and its various conceivable subtexts; rather, its “expressive causality” folds each of these separate levels back into the other in a kind of global identity.

This is then the context, if I may put it that way, in which the power of Burke’s conception of symbolic action can best be appreciated. The notion of language, of the linguistic artifact, as a verbal act is a strategy for going around behind the dilemma we have been describing, and for setting forth at a point before the fall, and positing a place of emergence that precedes the

breach which so many mechanical models have proved unable to heal. *Im Anfang war die Tat*: this place of emergence is that of praxis, or, in other words, of a unity in which subject and object, thing and language, context and projected action, are still at one in the wholeness of a unique gesture. In the act—and this is as true of Sartrean praxis philosophy as of Burke's dramatism, and explains the affinities of both for a certain Marxism—not only is human intention still inseparable from its scene or situation, but language and the mental or structural categories that govern it are still at one with the raw material, the facticity, the data it is in the process of organizing. Hereby, or so it would seem, the false antitheses of an intrinsic and an extrinsic criticism are dispelled, and a new and more adequate conception of the function of literature and its criticism and history can begin to be developed; unfortunately, it is a conception not without some serious new ambiguities in its own right.

This is therefore the moment to evaluate Kenneth Burke's theory of verbal praxis and to reach some judgment as to his contribution to a theory of ideological analysis proper. The lesson I want us to learn and then to unlearn from Burke comes in two stages: the first of these is associated with the word that he, more than anyone else, added to our critical vocabulary, namely, the notion of literary "strategy"; the second inevitably centers on his fundamental theory of dramatism and of the organization of all symbolic action according to the five basic coordinates of Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose.

In one sense, of course, the term "strategy" is itself merely shorthand for that complex of symbolic determinants in their totality; it is the term that governs their relations to each other, that names the provisional hierarchy established between them on the occasion of a given act—the dominance of Agency over Scene, or alternatively of Scene over Agent and Act, that confers to any given act, or analysis of action, its structure and its specific flavor. On the other hand, strategy precedes accomplishment and indeed action or realization itself; thus, since what we have to do with here is a theory of *symbolic* action, there is a sense in which none of the symbolic acts in question can be said to have come to its execution, in which all will have remained forever at the stage of project or sheer intention—a kind of permanently provisional hesitation on the threshold of being that the term "strategy" strategically perpetuates. One of the fundamental ambiguities of the concept of symbolic action is indeed precisely this shifting distance from nonsymbolic or practical or instrumental action itself, which sometimes it seems to want to absorb into itself on the grounds that all action is symbolic, all production is really communication, and from which at other times it seems to ebb and retreat, leaving behind it some inhospitably arid and stony ledge to which all mere practical activity in the world is summarily assigned.

I suppose that it is only since we have witnessed the immense and paradoxical good fortunes of this term “strategy” in all kinds of formalizing critical discourse that we have thus come to sense its own inner ambiguity, to suspect it of harboring some secret strategy in its own right. The problem is that this concept, which so boldly proclaims itself a praxis-word, tends, by focusing our attention on the inner mechanisms of the symbolic act in question, to end up bracketing the act itself and to suspend any interrogation of what constitutes it as an act in the first place, namely, its social and ideological purpose. Thus Burke’s great essay on the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” maps more triumphantly than any textbook illustration of structural or semiotic analysis the transformation systems whereby Keats’s poem prepares a “transcendent scene ... [in] which the earthly laws of contradiction no longer prevail”:⁴

The poem begins with an ambiguous fever which in the course of the further development is “separated out,” splitting into a bodily fever and a spiritual counterpart. The bodily passion is the malign aspect of the fever, the mental action its benign aspect. In the course of the development, the malign passion is transcended and the benign active partner, the intellectual exhilaration, takes over. (*GM*, 461)

Such a description luminously articulates the strategy of Keats’s “alchemy of the word” and isolates its exchange mechanisms and the key moments of its transfer of energies; yet what it takes for granted, what it “brackets” and therefore represses from its critical discourse, is what such an operation could possibly be symbolic of, in the largest sense what it means, the concrete situation or context in which the ultimate identification of truth with beauty and beauty with truth can be seen itself to be the symbolic resolution of some more fundamental social contradiction or ideological antinomy. The concept of “strategy” in Burke’s critical practice thus seems to rule out of bounds the very perspective it began by promising us, namely, the vaster social or historical or political horizon in which alone the symbolic function of those symbolic acts that are the verbal and literary artifacts can become visible to us.

Let me now quickly generalize this critique and apply it to the larger dimensions of the overall theory of dramatism itself. I believe that the Achilles heel of this system is to be located in the shrunken function left over for Purpose in its grandiose mapping scheme (Purpose being, in the *Grammar of Motives*, amalgamated with Agency, and rather summarily dispatched as a kind of providential survival, a mystical or metaphysical “telos”). Here are Burke’s own reflections on this development:

All told, of the five terms, Purpose has become the one most susceptible of dissolution. At least, so far as its formal recognition is concerned. But once we know the logic of its transformations, we can discern its implicit survival; for the demands of dramatism being the demands of human nature itself, it is hard for man, by merely taking thought, to subtract the dramatist cubits from his stature. Implicit in the concepts of act and agent there is the concept of purpose. It is likewise implicit in agency, since tools and methods are for a purpose. (*GM*, 289)

To which one might add that it is evidently implicit in the category of Scene also, inasmuch as Marxism and historical materialism are not very satisfactorily assigned to that particular rubric of the system. The overall problem would appear to be that of the metacategory or metalanguage: Insofar as the five “ratios” are inclusive, they must also include their own fundamental principle as well, which thus proves to govern a set of which it is itself a member.

The consequence of this for practical criticism is that in its application to the texts the category of Purpose turns out to designate two very different things at once. On the one hand, it names the inner logic of the symbolic act itself, its immediate aims and official objectives—in other words, the terms in which it explains its own activity to itself. On the level of kinesics, then, this category would designate the strategic organization of the gesture, the immediate end toward which this particular muscular effort is mobilized; in the case of Keats’s *Ode*, Purpose construed according to this first limited or restricted sense would have to be reconstructed from its *terminus ad quem*, as the intent to overcome the opposition felt to obtain between beauty and truth.

Such an account of the restricted sense of Purpose in the analysis of a gesture or a symbolic act makes it clear that there is also room for a generalized use of the same term that would govern, not the immediate end and inner organization of a given gesture, but rather its place among all the other possible gestures I might have made at that particular moment, and its more general relationship to the other gestures and symbolic acts in course and under way in the historical network of intersubjectivity of which I am myself a part. The restricted concept of Purpose thus stands to this generalized one as an immanent interpretation to a transcendent one, or, to use another opposition that has been central in recent debates on hermeneutics, as the study of the *Sinn*, or “sense,” of a given text, its inner structure and syntax, as opposed to that of its *Bedeutung*, or “meaning,” its “historically operative” significance or function. Only the first operation can be carried out without attention to the situation of the work; I would argue that the second, interpretation proper, is impossible without some preliminary (re)construction of what I have called its subtext.

This is the point at which to admit that such reconstruction, the beginnings of a (re)writing of the subtext of Keats's *Ode*, is in fact also present in Burke's essay; and it may be worth taking a moment to watch this process at work:

"Truth" being the essential word of knowledge (science) and "beauty" being the essential word of art or poetry, we might substitute accordingly. The oracle would then assert, "Poetry is science, science poetry." It would be particularly exhilarating to proclaim them one if there were a strong suspicion that they were at odds ... It was the dialectical opposition between the "aesthetic" and the "practical," with "poetry" on the one side and utility (business and applied science) on the other that was being ecstatically denied. The *relief* in this denial was grounded in the romantic philosophy itself, a philosophy which gave strong recognition to precisely the *contrast* between "beauty" and "truth"...

An abolishing of romanticism through romanticism! (*CW*, 147)

The central interpretative operation in this passage is clearly enough what Burke himself designates as the substitution—or, in our own terms, the rewriting—of "truth" and "beauty" as *science* and *poetry*. This rewriting then furnishes a subtext such that Keats's *Ode* can be seen as its symbolic resolution—what Burke describes with sensory vividness as the "relief" of the concluding affirmation of the poem. What has to be resolved is evidently contradictory—Burke speaks of a "dialectical opposition" between poetry and science, and begins to rewrite the latter even more fundamentally as the "practical," as "applied science" or "utility," "business," and implicitly, although he does not use the word, as capitalism. Still, we must observe that the operation by which this subtext has been constructed remains essentially incomplete. We may indeed formulate a further principle of ideological analysis as follows: the subtext must be so constructed or reconstructed as to constitute not merely a scene or background, not an inert context alone, but rather a structured and determinate situation, such that the text can be grasped as an active response to it (of whatever type). The text's meaning then, in the larger sense of *Bedeutung*, will be the meaningfulness of a gesture that we read back from the situation to which it is precisely a response. The "dialectical opposition" Burke posits here between poetry and science is not yet a situation of that kind. If it is easy enough to see how this opposition might take on the form of a contradiction or an antinomy, a dilemma or a double-bind, a crisis that required some immediate resolution, we must nonetheless conclude that the critic has not been willing to go that far (although, given the urgency of the opposition between science and poetry during the heroic age of the New Criticism, it may be supposed that he felt this opposition to be too familiar to his readers to need any further development).

Indeed, in place of the construction of a subtext in the form of a situation, we find something significantly different, which we can only call a strategy of containment, a substitution designed to arrest the movement of ideological analysis before it can begin to draw in the social, historical, and political parameters that are the ultimate horizon of every cultural artifact. What shuts off the process of mediation and transcoding is the appeal to an entity Burke calls "romanticism," which effectively enough fixes his "ultimately determining instance," or ultimate explanatory code, in the area of the history of ideas, if not in the even more ahistorical area of the psychology of the great world views. Here, too, an examination of the subtext of Burke's own work would reveal "romanticism" as a particularly charged term, a complex of moral, political, and poetic dilemmas whose formulation can be traced back to the attack on Rousseau by which Irving Babbitt dramatized his influential counterrevolutionary position. Yet this specification of the ideological context in which Burke is here working only allows us to admire more intelligently the prestidigitation, the intellectual acrobatics, by which he manages to square this particular circle. The problem posed would then be that of saving the arch-romantic Keats from the inevitable contamination of the romanticism that for the generation of the New Critics vitiated poets like Shelley or Swinburne: the trick is turned by having Keats's romanticism criticize itself, and under its own momentum resolve the very contradictions for which it was itself responsible—"an abolishing of romanticism through romanticism!" Keats can remain a great poet, not merely in spite of, but even because of that romanticism directly responsible for the "dissociation of sensibility" of the bad romantics of his period. In the meantime, from the point of view of ideological analysis, it may be observed that this way of construing romanticism, by projecting a situation that is its own response, seals us off from any further need to consult the historical circumstances of romanticism itself and makes this particular superstructural subtext a kind of autoreferential *causa sui*. We must therefore take the passage just quoted as evidence for a discouraging reversal in Burke's critical strategy: his conception of literature as a symbolic act, which began as a powerful incitement to the study of a text's mode of activity in the general cultural and social world beyond it, now proves to have slipped back over the line and (passing from the generalized sense of the word "Purpose" to its immanent and strategic, restricted sense) now furnishes aid and comfort to those who want to limit our work to texts whose autonomy has been carefully secured in advance, all the blackout curtains drawn before the lights are turned back on.

Still, it is a measure of the ambiguous power of Burke's dramatism that we can use it to study its own strategies of containment and to flush out those concepts external to his own system to which he tends to have recourse when it is necessary to arrest the evolution of his concept of

symbolic action in the direction of a full-fledged analysis of the ideological function of literary and cultural texts. In what follows I want briefly to mention three of these borrowed interpretative devices, three of these local strategies of containment that can be observed at work in Burke's criticism: they are the notion of art as ritual, the appeal to the bodily dimension of the verbal act, and the concept of the self or of identity as the basic theme or pre-occupation of literature in general.

The insistence on the bodily elements, as it were the physiological infrastructure, of the literary work or verbal act—and some such physiological interpretation served as the strategy of containment for the other end of the Keats essay from which I just quoted—needs little comment. Here Burke is the precursor of a kind of analysis that, from phenomenology to structuralism, has become associated with the name Bachelard, and about which it is perhaps enough to distinguish Bachelard's own rather static interpretation, in terms of physical elements or humors, from that more dynamic language of gesture and bodily alchemy that we find in Burke. The rhetoric of the body, however, remains ambiguous: it can inaugurate the celebration of a kind of private materialism, from Bataille and "desire" all the way to certain readings of Bakhtin; or it can lead us dialectically beyond these individualizing and organic limits into some more properly collective apprehension of space and spatiality itself.

The question of ritual, indeed, demands greater attention, insofar as ritual has become, along with myth, one of the great fetishes of present-day American literary criticism and a strategy of containment scarcely restricted to Burke alone. Still, a closer look at the idea of ritual shows that it is scarcely less ambiguous, in its uses and consequences, than that of the symbolic itself. The Cambridge School, and their earliest followers among the literary critics, were indeed concerned to reground tragic and comic drama in the social life of the primitive collectivity. In that context, the interpretation of the work of art in ritual terms dictated its rewriting as a trace or survival of ways in which the primitive collectivity came to the consciousness of itself and celebrated its own social unity. Now the problem arises—and this concept begins to release its dangerous ambiguity—when we seek to transfer this model of the ritual function of primitive art to the culture and the literature of modern societies. The idea of ritual indeed entails as one of its basic preconditions the essential stability of a given social formation, its functional capacity to reproduce itself over time. Ritual as an institution can therefore not be understood except as a function of a society of this kind, as one of the fundamental mechanisms for ensuring the latter's collective coherence and historical perpetuation. It is precisely this precondition, however, that no longer holds for modern society, that is, for capitalism itself; and it would seem to me misguided, not to say historically naive, to attribute a Parsonian stability and functionality of the former primitive

or tribal type to a social formation whose inner logic is the restless and corrosive dissolution of traditional social relations into the atomized and quantified aggregates of the market system. Far from assuming a ritual function, far from ensuring the lawful reproduction of our own social formation over geological ages of time, the greatest aesthetic productions of capitalism prove on the contrary to be the cries of pain of isolated individuals against the operation of transindividual laws, the invention of so many private languages and subcodes in the midst of a reified speech, the symptomatic expressions, finally, of a damaged subject and the marks of his or her vain efforts to subvert and to negate an intolerable social order.

To appropriate the rhetoric and conceptuality of primitive ritual to describe these broken fragments of the artistic discourse of capitalism is therefore a sheerly ideological enterprise. Enough has been said about the concept of ideology, however, to make it clear that such a characterization is not gratuitous invective, but rather designates our function as intellectuals in all its affective ambivalence and implies that we are all ideologues in this sense. Indeed, the example of Burke shows us that the production of an ideology can have a certain grandeur about it, even where it must ultimately be refused; such is, it seems to me, the status of his desperate and ambitious attempt, in *A Grammar of Motives* and *A Rhetoric of Motives*, to endow the American capitalism of the thirties and early forties with its appropriate cultural and political ideology. We are here, after all, in the thick of a New Deal and Deweyan rhetoric of liberal democracy and pluralism, federalism, the "Human Barnyard," the "competitive use of the cooperative," and the celebration of political conflict in terms of what the motto to *A Grammar of Motives* calls the "purification of war" (*GM*, 142). From the nostalgic perspective of the present day, the perspective of a social system in full moral and civic dissolution, what seemed at the time a shrewd diagnosis of the cultural and ideological conflicts of the capitalist public sphere and an often damaging critique of the latter's strategies of legitimation must now come to have implications of a somewhat different kind. The very forms of legitimation have been dialectically transformed, and consumer capitalism no longer has to depend on conceptual systems and abstract values and beliefs to the same degree as its predecessors in the social forms of the immediate past; thus, what tends to strike us today about the *Grammar* and *Rhetoric of Motives* is less their critical force than Burke's implicit faith in the harmonizing claims of liberal democracy and in the capacity of the system to reform itself from within.

I turn, finally, to the concept of the self or the subject in Burke's criticism, a problem that will also serve as a transition to a very brief concluding assessment of the dramatistic system itself. Nowhere do the continental and the Anglo-American critical traditions diverge more dramatically than on this whole issue of the subject, or the ego, or the self, and the value and

reality to be accorded to it. We do not have to go all the way with the current French repudiation of ego psychology and what they call the “philosophies of the subject” to recognize in the American myths of the self and of its identity crises and ultimate reintegration some final trace and survival of that old ideology of bourgeois individualism whose basic features—juridical equality, autonomy, freedom to sell your own labor power—had crucial functions to fulfill in the establishment and organization of the market system. To repudiate that ideological tradition, to valorize the decentering of the subject with its optical illusion of centrality, does not, I would argue, have to lead to anarchism or to that glorification of the schizophrenic hero and the schizophrenic text that has become one of the latest French fashions and exports; on the contrary, it should signal a transcendence of the older individualism and the appearance of new collective structures and of ways of mapping our own decentered place with respect to them.

However this may be, it is clear that the rhetoric of the self in American criticism will no longer do, any more than its accompanying interpretative codes of identity crisis and mythic reintegration, and that a post-individualistic age needs new and postindividualistic categories for grasping both the production and the evolution of literary form as well as the semantic content of the literary text and the latter’s relationship to collective experience and to ideological contradiction. What is paradoxical about Burke’s own critical practice in this respect is that he has anticipated many of the fundamental objections to such a rhetoric of self and identity at the same time that he may be counted among its founding fathers. This last and most important of what we have called his “strategies of containment” provides insights that testify against his own official practice. Witness, for example, the following exchange, in which Burke attributes this imaginary objection to his Marxist critics: “Identity is itself a ‘mystification.’ Hence, resenting its many labyrinthine aspects, we tend to call even the *study* of it a ‘mystification.’” To this proposition, which is something of a caricature of the point of view of the present essay, Burke gives himself a reply that we may also endorse:

The response would be analogous to the response of those who, suffering from an illness, get “relief” by quarreling with their doctors. Unless Marxists are ready to deny Marx by attacking his term “alienation” itself, they must permit of research into the nature of alienation and into the nature of attempts, adequate and inadequate, to combat alienation. (*PLF*, 308)⁵

I have quoted this passage mainly to document Burke’s strange reluctance to pronounce the word “ideology” itself as well as his fundamental hesitation to identify his own study of symbolic forms with any of the available strategies of demystification, or of what we today have come to call,

following Ricoeur, negative hermeneutics, or the hermeneutics of suspicion. For the issue at stake in the imagined exchange from which I have just quoted is not the need, quite appropriately stressed by Burke, for inquiry into the cultural forms of alienation (“the analysis of the ‘strategies’ by which men respond to the factor of alienation and by which they attempt to repossess their world”) so much as it is the status of the category of identity and of the self, which is itself ideological and which can hardly be properly evaluated if we remain locked into the very ideological system, the ideological closure or double-bind, that generates such concepts in the first place (*PLF*, 308).

This is therefore the moment to characterize the ultimate structural distance between Burkean dramatism and ideological analysis proper: Burke’s system has no place for an unconscious, it makes no room for genuine mystification, let alone for the latter’s analysis or for the task of decoding and hermeneutic demystification that is increasingly the mission of culture workers in a society as reified and as opaque as our own. The dramatisitic modes, if I may put it that way, are all categories of consciousness, open to the light of day in classical, well-nigh Aristotelian fashion; the Burkean symbolic act is thus always serenely transparent to itself, in lucid blindness to the dark underside of language, to the ruses of history or of desire. Characteristically enough, confronted with the great forerunners of ideological analysis, the great explorers of the unconscious proper, with Marx or Freud or Nietzsche, Burke’s inclination is simply to apply to their own insights the sorting mechanism of his modal typology.⁶

But now, after our digression on the ego or the subject, we may be in a better position to understand why this is so. The very figure of the drama is itself in this respect infinitely revealing and infinitely suspect: the theatrical spectacle, theatrical space, indeed furnishes the first and basic model of the mimetic illusion, just as it is the privileged form in which the spectator-subject finds itself assigned a place and a center. Drama is then not so much the archetype of praxis as it is the very source of the ideology of representation and, with it, of the optical illusion of the subject, of that vanishing point from which spectacles—whether of culture, of everyday life, or of history itself—fall into place as metaphysically coherent meanings and organic forms.

With the critique of the dramatisitic paradigm and of its anthropomorphism, we return to the fundamental equivocality of the symbolic itself, at one and the same time the accomplishment of an act and the latter’s substitute, a way of acting on the world and of compensating for the impossibility of such action all at once. It is this kind of ambiguity that Burke will himself articulate by shifting italics from substantive to qualifier; much depends, indeed, on whether you think of art as a symbolic *act* or merely as an act that is *symbolic*. Sebastiano Timpanaro has underscored the structural instability

of the analogous Gramscian or Sartrean notion of praxis in much the same terms:

It is necessary first of all to show that a reference to praxis can have quite different meanings, according to whether one is declaring the inability of pure thought to make man happy and free (“The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world differently, the point is to *change* it”), or declaring that knowledge itself is praxis *tout court*. In the latter case, since *to know reality is already to transform it*, one retrogresses from Marxism to idealism—i.e., to a philosophy of *thought as praxis* [or in our present context, of symbolic form as real action], which makes action seem superfluous.⁷

At the beginning of the present essay, I proposed a checklist of the great contemporary critics, the great readers of an age that has discovered the symbolic; what I then neglected to add was that the art and practice of virtuoso reading does not seem to me to be the noblest function, the most urgent mission, of the literary and cultural critic in our time. In a society like ours, not stricken with aphasia so much as with amnesia, there is a higher priority than reading and that is history itself: so the very greatest critics of our time—Lukács, for example, and to a lesser degree, Leavis—are those who have construed their role as the teaching of history, as the telling of the tale of the tribe, the most important story any of us will ever have to listen to, the narrative of that implacable yet also emancipatory logic whereby the human community has evolved into its present form and developed the sign systems by which we live and explain our lives to ourselves. So urgently do we need these history lessons, indeed, that they outweigh the palpable fact that neither critic just mentioned is a good, let alone a virtuoso, reader, that each could justly be reproached for his tin ear and his puritanical impatience with the various *jouissances* of the literary text.

I will therefore regret that Burke finally did not want to teach us history, even though he wanted to teach us how to grapple with it; but I will argue, for the proper use of his work, that it be used to learn history, even against his own inclination. We have, indeed, in recent American criticism, a canonical example of how this can be done, in a confrontation between Burke and one of the few, rare, and neglected American avatars of the Lukácsian or Leavisite preceptor of history—I am referring to Yvor Winters, whose rewriting, in his “Experimental School in American Poetry,”⁸ of Burke’s already classic “Lexicon Rhetoricae”⁹ is a model of how productively to historicize a powerful but nonhistorical set of aesthetic observations, and of the transformation of the purely formal Burkean interpretative scheme into a powerful historical statement. To prolong the symbolic inference until it intersects with history itself—this is, it seems to me, the only way properly to pay homage to the incomparable critical and theoretical energy of which Kenneth Burke gives us the example.

Notes

- 1 Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983, proposes a rather different Burke, a genuine American “Western Marxist” whose stress on the political significance of culture and consciousness anticipates many of the reconstructions of Marxism in Europe after World War II (Sartre, Western Maoism, Marcuse, Fanon, the rediscoveries of Gramsci and Reich). This is a precursor and heroic ancestor whom one would be only too grateful to acknowledge. I continue to think, however, that the texts are objectively ambiguous, and that if they can be also read in the ways enumerated in the present chapter, their political function and authority will never be altogether secure.
- 2 John Berger, *The Look of Things*, New York: Viking, 1974, 115; Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, Paris: Maspéro, 1965, 238–43; and see also Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, London: New Left Books, 1976, 69: “Ideology is not just the bad dream of the infrastructure.”
- 3 Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 1941, 3rd edition (revised), Berkeley: University of California, 1973, 5–6. Future references to this work are denoted *PLF*.
- 4 Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 1945; reprinted Berkeley: University of California, 1974, 462. Future references to this work are denoted *GM* and are cited in the text.
- 5 In fact, certain contemporary Marxisms—most notably those of Althusser and of Lucio Colletti—explicitly repudiate the concept of alienation as a Hegelian survival in Marx’s early writings.
- 6 The point is not the absence of the terms from Burke’s writing, but rather of the type of diagnostic or symptomal analysis to which they correspond. In fact, the concept of the unconscious is discussed at some length in an essay like Kenneth Burke, “Mind, Body, and the Unconscious,” *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, Berkeley: University of California, 1966, 63–80; for Burke’s position on demystification and negative hermeneutics, see “The Virtues and Limitations of Debunking,” *PLF*, 168–90.
- 7 Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, trans. Lawrence Garner, London: New Left Books, 1975, 56.
- 8 Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason*, Chicago: Swallow Press, 1947, 30–74.
- 9 Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 1931; reprinted Berkeley: University of California, 1968, 123–83.

Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography

Certain great verbal hulks there are, vast narrative carcasses stranded in the wastes, infrequently raided by a few daring predators who draw the mammoth tusks or carve off frozen bits of blubber. These are the great narrative histories, of which in our time only a bleeding chunk of Gibbon or Michelet now and again is set before our students, legendary names inferring the vast enormities of text that lie beyond our narrow purview. They seem, indeed, on the point of being followed into extinction by the great three-decker realistic novels on the same period, coaches of the same laborious tempo, whose leisurely rhetoric awakens all the anxiety of the great meals and of conspicuous consumption. In telling us something about the first of these archaic narrative phenomena, Hayden White emboldens us to return to these last in the hopes of surprising those of its secrets still extant; and not the least heartening feature of his example is a refurbished critical machinery, borrowed from literary study in the first place, yet in the process demonstrating unexpected—maybe even, for literary scholars, undesirable—resources and analytic capabilities.¹

Before we show what these are, however, it is best to say what White does not do in his work on the great narrative historians. For one thing, he is not interested in the narrativity of historical discourse, thereby distinguishing himself from approaches like that of Barthes.² Nor can we look to his chapters for what I want to call, in contrast to the relatively surface-level stylistic probe of Barthes, a narrative analysis proper of any one of the histories that are his objects (in other words, an analysis that follows Propp and Lévi-Strauss, and to a certain extent Greimas as well, in focusing on the ordering of the “events” themselves, on *histoire* rather than *discours*). Finally, we must not forget that White’s book engages a polemic in several directions, only some of which are relevant to those of us in literary or cultural studies. For the historians themselves it has a lesson we are supposed to have learned by now, namely, that even empiricism is a theory and the exercise of a model, and that in the present context even the plainest unreflective history—the

sheerest, most “mindless” enumeration of “facts” of an annals or a chronicle—implies a whole metaphysics and constitutes through its mere enunciation a whole philosophy of history in its own right. By a similar token, all “philosophies of history” may be assumed to be narratives *in potentia*; such is at any rate his intent—to efface a meaningless distinction and with it a false problem—in ranging the great theorists and philosophers of history (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Croce) alongside the great narrative historians themselves.

White’s program—a kind of deep-figural analysis of historical narrative—may perhaps be viewed as most attractive by those still laboring among the so-called realistic novels of the nineteenth century, of which we have been told scornfully by structuralists that they are not very *scriptible*, and by Marxists, strengthened by the authority of Brecht, that we do not have to take Lukács’s old-fashioned and maybe even Stalinist taste for them very seriously any longer. White’s work makes the conclusion inescapable that the active and practical, *cognitive* force of his histories is a function, not of their “factuality,” but rather precisely of their narrative *form*; and this is enough to restore its dignity to the study of so-called fiction as well, and to that otherwise belletristic activity of articulating the master form of the realistic (but not only the realistic) novelists in which many of us are engaged without quite knowing what difference it makes.

The shock is even greater when we draw closer to the critical instruments that have become so strangely unrecognizable in White’s hands: so Northrop Frye’s old archetypes—romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire, here much more satisfactorily termed “plotments”—seem familiar enough until we suddenly realize that they have been coordinated with Stephen Pepper’s “world hypotheses” (formism, organicism, mechanism, and contextualism), and, as if that were not enough, further with Mannheim’s political “ideal types” (White retains only anarchism, conservatism, radicalism, and liberalism). It is, of course, this last that is the most alarming novelty: there was never any problem with *Weltanschauungen* just as long as they remained suitably metaphysical and modestly restricted to a purely aesthetic type of apprehension. Indeed, for a long time the term “world” has been available to the literary critic to soak up all the possible *philosophical* projections of a given form, all the while avoiding a more basely cognitive (and historical) treatment of what thereby remains some relatively eternal “tragic sense of life,” “comic spirit,” “satiric vision of a fallen or a degraded world,” and so forth. Now suddenly the forbidden word has been pronounced, appropriately enough by someone from another discipline who was presumably unaware of the properly literary amenities, and it becomes distressingly difficult to avoid consideration of the *ideological* implications of the various forms or archetypes.

It is only at this price—understanding literature not only as a way of organizing and forming experience but as a process of form-giving that is destined to fulfill a historical, ideological, even protopolitical *function*—that literary study today can recover its urgency or sense of mission. Still, the wholesale borrowings from us by other fields (psychoanalysis and structural anthropology yesterday, ethnomethodology today) may serve to revive our spirits; and *Metahistory* in particular strikes me as having three lessons for us, over and beyond what it has to teach in general about its own subject.

The first springs essentially from a reflection on the old distinction between real and fictive narratives, in other words, between history and the novel. The form-giving power of historiography would appear to be enhanced, rather than diminished, by the “factuality” of its content: that is, it is the independent existence of something like a raw material, something like the historical “facts” (*histoire*), that underscores the shaping power of the historical discourse as it imposes on the content what must in the nature of things be only one possible version of those facts. The aesthetics of historiography rests, therefore, on a preliminary hypothesis about the separation, rather than the identification, of form and content; and if such an idea seems scandalous to us, it is because the New Critical attempt to exorcise the distinction was supported mainly by readings of lyrical texts (and even here, primarily of modernistic rather than traditional rhetorical poems). We must therefore explore the possibility that realism in the novel also is a type of discourse in which form and content are precisely not unified, in which—through its very structure—the content of the text is maintained at a certain determinate distance from its form.

Such a distinction would then permit us to emulate *Metahistory* in two further areas: namely, that of a history of forms and that of ideological as well as aesthetic judgments. For if White’s treatment of the nineteenth-century historians is not exactly a history of histories in the diachronic sense (it is something more closely approximating a *combinatoire*, as we will see), nonetheless it offers a suggestive paradigm for dealing with a whole group of variants of a basic narrative structure and thus provides one possible escape from the dead end of the monograph, which has so long dominated the study of the nineteenth-century novel.

Moreover, it is precisely this perspective—in which the various histories are juxtaposed as so many structural variations of each other—that permits judgment, that indeed makes it inevitable. In spite of the “relativism” with which we will wish to reproach him, then, White is only too willing to pass a series of refreshingly hard-nosed judgments on his objects of study, whose ideological strategies his own method makes visible. Thus, “at any place in the historical record where such entities as states, churches, peoples and nations constituted ‘problems’ rather than ‘data,’ [Ranke’s] method could not possibly work” (*M*, 175).

Out of his disillusionment [Burckhardt] forged a theory of society and history which was as accurate in predicting the crises of the future as it was symptomatic of the illnesses that would bring them on. Burckhardt regarded his own withdrawal from the world as an act which absolved him from any further responsibility for the coming chaos. (*M*, 235–236)

Any attempt to interpret Nietzsche's thought as a purer and more consistent form of the conventional ideological positions—Conservative, Liberal, Reactionary, or even Anarchist—must face the fact that, in his conception of history, the prospects of any *community* whatsoever are sternly rejected. (*M*, 372)

“Croce was trying to do for classical Liberalism what Ranke had done for classical Conservatism a half-century earlier—that is, hedge it around with arguments against Radicalism in any form” (*M*, 422). Only his skeptical attitude toward what he sees as Michelet's characteristic emplotment—romance as a form—will disappoint those for whom the historian of the French Revolution is the closest prose equivalent to the Jacobin heroics of Beethoven or the grand and manic hysteria of Berlioz in the music of the period. The other chapters—in particular those of Hegel, Marx, and Tocqueville—can be read with profit by readers interested in any of these thinkers, on condition they are willing to take the time to learn White's combination of codes.

But it is a big condition, and we turn now to this bristling conceptual apparatus, which, like all complicated theoretical machinery, tends in the slower passages to provoke the annoyance we feel when heavy artillery is rolled out to dispatch a few (admittedly choice) specimens of game. It is true that White's synthesis—coordinating, as we have indicated, the classificatory schemes of previous theoreticians like Frye, Pepper, and Mannheim—does not suffer from the hubris of his great predecessor and model Kenneth Burke, whose work strikes us in retrospect as a kind of monstrous *bricolage* designed for the production of nothing less than the philosopher's stone itself. Above and beyond the manner of the two writers, the basic difference between them would seem to lie in the nature of the deep structure in which each grounds his analyses: Burke's “dramatistic” method (measuring the specificity of a given text by its commitment to and emphasis on Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, or Purpose, respectively), although no less time-honored, with its Aristotelian origins, than White's use of an ancient rhetorical tradition, seems somehow far more anthropomorphic to us today, and oddly, anachronistically, resistant to the kinds of hermeneutic “second” or “symptomal” readings to which we have become accustomed since the general diffusion of Marxian, Nietzschean, and Freudian versions of an unconscious. White's “ultimately determining instance,” however, the fourfold system of the tropes, may be said to constitute something like a

linguistic infrastructure and thereby to demand less justification than Burke's hypothesis, or at any rate to be more congenial to the spirit of the age.³

For *Metahistory* is something more than a study of philosophies of history (although it is that too, and no doubt the most important work in the field since Collingwood); it is also a methodological manifesto, a more sustained argument for a *deep-figural* hermeneutic than has been worked out anywhere before now, in spite of the prestige of the Jakobsonian rediscovery of metonymy and the renewal of interest in rhetoric generally, and in spite of the occasional practice of a kind of ad hoc figural analysis by a number of critics here and in Europe. Unfortunately, access to White's methodological thesis is encumbered by the presence of his substantive application of it to his texts, so that we are never really certain whether figuralism is supposed to be a useful aid in analyzing historiography, or whether, on the contrary, historiography and its structures are simply the most convenient objects on which to demonstrate the method. It is rather as though Frye had tried to convey the essentials of his *Anatomy* through the practical criticism of his Blake book.

This double focus probably accounts for White's failure to clear up a number of purely theoretical ambiguities. When we try, for instance, to determine the exact relationship between the four "master tropes" (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) and the other groups of variables (the Frye emplotments, the Pepperian world hypotheses, and Mannheim's ideological types), it remains an open question whether the tropes add yet another system of variables to this already complicated typology, or whether, on the contrary, they express on some deeper level something like the basic spirit or underlying form of those more surface combinations.

The ambiguity was already present in the surface combinations themselves, where the connection between world hypotheses and ideological types seemed a good deal closer than that of either to the choice of emplotment (and here, with the best will in the world, the old distinction between concept and narrative, cognition and fiction, seems again to rear its head). Clearly, there are at work between these various possibilities what White will call "elective affinities," a conservative ideology tending, for instance, to project an organicist *Weltanschauung* or mode of argument, an anarchist or millenarian "mode of ideological implication" tending to find its fulfillment in romance as a form, and so forth. The appended tabulation of these structural affinities or concordances (from *M*, 29, and to which I have added the appropriate tropes as well) will clarify White's method but also the problems it raises.

<i>Mode of Emplotment</i>	<i>Mode of Argument</i>	<i>Mode of Ideological Implication</i>	<i>Trope</i>
Romantic	Formist	Anarchist	Metaphoric
Tragic	Mechanistic	Radical	Metonymic
Comic	Organicist	Conservative	Synecdochic
Satirical	Contextualist	Liberal	Ironic

For, as a matter of empirical critical practice, a model that distinguishes different levels in a text yields interesting results only when these levels are understood as contradicting each other. This is the practical objection to Greimas' (rather than Goldmann's) notion of homology: if the levels are really structurally homologous, they tend to fold back into each other and not much has been gained by the initial analytical distinction. In fact, this is precisely the conclusion White himself reaches (without, however, feeling the need to readjust his model):

The dialectical tension which characterizes the work of every master historian usually arises from an effort to wed a mode of emplotment with a note of argument or of ideological implication which is inconsonant with it. (*M*, 29)

And it is certain that White's method celebrates its triumph in the object lessons in such a demonstration: the brilliant chapter on Tocqueville, for example, suggests that our contemporary fascination with such a writer is a function of his inner cross-purposes, the complexity of his philosophical aims (in Tocqueville's case, "to mediate not only between alternate concepts of society and between the past and present, but between the present and the future as well"), a complexity that realizes itself in the combination of a *tragic* mode of emplotment with a *liberal* ideology and an ultimately *ironic* figural structure (*M*, 206). In a similar way, Hegel is seen as having attempted to coordinate a tragic emplotment of the individual episodes of human history with an essentially comic vision of its overall movement; he achieved this by bracketing "the Metonymical (causal) and Metaphorical (formalist) strategies for reducing phenomena to order within the modalities of Synecdochic characterizations on the one hand and the self-dissolving certitudes of Irony on the other" (*M*, 121). Finally, in his most idiosyncratic chapter, White sees Marx as combining a diachronic view of the base with a synchronic view of the superstructure (a resolution, perhaps, to the Althusserian controversy about the structuralism of *Capital!*), or, in other words, as coordinating a metonymic, mechanistic view of socio-economic causality with an organicist reading of culture and human action, the dominant trope of which—synecdoche—projects an ideal of reunification and a renewal of community beyond the broken fragments of a metonymic present.

These are useful insights, but they leave unresolved what we may characterize as a restricted and a generalized objection to White's conceptual machinery. The first may perhaps be conveyed by way of scoring debating points, as Todorov does when, on a similar occasion, he points out that Frye's system of slots provides for thirteen places of which only five are considered by the critic as having any empirical existence in real literary history.⁴ As far as *Metahistory* is concerned, even if we amalgamate the two related "levels" of *Weltanschauung* and ideology, there remain sixteen different logical possibilities of combining that set of variables with the archetypal one; if we keep the three sets separate from one another, the number of possibilities rises to sixty-four; and if (God forbid!) the four tropes be seen as yet a fourth set of variables (rather than some underlying structure of their combinations), the ultimate possibilities are so staggering as to suggest that something in the machinery has gone haywire.

Now from a practical point of view, White is quite right to ignore such an objection. On the one hand, as we have seen, he suggests that the merely homologous or "univocal" realizations of his typological scheme (in other words, the four baseline possibilities exemplified in the tabulation) are uninteresting and thus without literary or historiographic value. The axiological hypothesis at work here reminds us of the identification by the New Critics of poetic "greatness" with the greatest possible verbal tension or inner complexity. At the other end of the spectrum, he offers what amounts to an empirical observation, namely, that certain combinations simply do not come into being because of basic logical and structural *incompatibilities* between certain of the variables; thus, "a Comic emplotment is not compatible with a Mechanistic argument, just as a Radical ideology is not compatible with a Satirical emplotment," and so on (*M*, 29).

Yet one wonders whether texts, and cultural or superstructural phenomena in general, can be thought of in the same terms as, say, biological organisms that, lacking certain vital organs, cannot survive. In particular, it seems most improbable to me—given the immense explosion in cultural production since the eighteenth century—that there should *not* exist, somewhere, examples of all the structural combinations that White here feels to be unviable. On the contrary, nothing seems more likely than that a little research in the archives should turn up a universal history of some eccentric British civil servant or retired French postman that would constitute precisely that ultimate and unimaginable combination of terms we needed to fill the last vacant slot of our Mendelian table.

Such an eventuality of course raises the whole issue of selective accreditation: if Ranke has been recognized as a cultural object, if, in other words, his particular mode of historical discourse has come to be identified as a subcode in its own right while that of the postman remains the sheerest idiolect, like Swift's baby talk or Fourier's private spelling, then what must

be explained are the social and cultural reasons for the reception of one private language rather than the other into the public realm. (This is not to suggest that the postman will not some day also have his due: weirder private hobbies—think of Vico or Sorel!—have found their way, with time, into the broad daylight of the cultural “mainstream.”)

I have indulged this lengthy imaginary exception, not in order to prove White *wrong* (it would not seem to make much sense to pass such a judgment on a method), but rather to show that his critical procedure has been left incomplete, and that precisely at the point at which it might have become genuinely historical. I would want to argue, indeed, that an operation of this kind—technically called a *combinatoire*—requires three components for its functioning, of which White has given us two alone, namely, the two (or more) sets of variables whose combinations give this piece of machinery its name. What is missing is that mechanism of historical selection—that infrastructural limiting situation—to which it falls, out of the complete range of purely *logical* possibilities, to reject those that cannot empirically come into being in that determinant historical conjuncture. Thus, to use Greimas’ dramatic example, a variant of a given folktale provides for an *actant* who unites both paternal and sacerdotal functions: this particular variant, therefore—while it remains a logical possibility—cannot be empirically realized in Roman Catholic Lithuania owing to the celibacy of priests (what happens is that a new variant is generated in which an older brother who happens to be a priest assumes paternal responsibility for the hero).⁵

Obviously, the missing mechanism is essential, for it alone provides the conceptual link between a purely logical play of variables and resultant forms, and the concrete historical situation in which those possibilities flourish or find themselves excluded from the outset. Its absence goes a long way toward justifying the characterization of *idealism* with which we will want to reproach *Metahistory*—not, indeed, that there is not a wealth of social and political detail here, nor a sense of those historically strategic situations in which White’s historians invent their ideological choices, but that content constitutes an infrastructure only in the context of some older “realistic” or “referential” historiography. To the new, properly “structural” history of histories Hayden White has set out to compose here must surely correspond some new and equally structural conception of the historical rock bottom, and it is difficult to see how the latter could be anything but that limiting situation described above.

Without it, in the best of circumstances, we are left with nothing but a typology, and it is to this, and to the more generalized version of our basic objection, that we now turn. This is not the place to argue our thesis that typology “is always the sign of historical thinking arrested halfway, a thought which, on the road to concrete history, takes fright and attempts to

convert its insights into eternal human essences, into attributes between which the human spirit oscillates.”⁶ Typological operations bear within themselves their own reward, in the form of that frustrating sense of sterility with which we drop the final object into the approximate box in the classification scheme and then wonder what to do next. Yet it will not be too difficult to show that wherever White’s typological or classificatory operation is most interesting, in reality something rather different is at work beneath the surface.

What is abundantly clear from the outset is the advantage White’s fourfold set of tropes gives him over the old dualisms of the Jakobsonian metaphor/metonymy types: compare for instance Barthes’ threefold classification of historical narrativity (metaphoric, metonymic, and reflexive);⁷ compare Lotman’s fourfold classification of cultures into semantic (predominance of relationship symbol/thing, or *grosso modo* metaphorical, in White’s sense), syntactic (or metonymic), and the synthesis or exclusion of both types, respectively.⁸ It is clear that both are locked fatally into a rigid set of alternatives, which just as rigidly generate something that looks like a synthesis or transcendence of them. Less obviously, it is clear that Pepper’s fourfold scheme of world hypotheses allows White to skirt definitive oppositions like those of idealism and materialism, in the name of more complex and purely descriptive accounts of his objects.

The multiplicity of his tropes thus allows him to lend each a relative autonomy that they could not have in a dualistic system (where the two terms are so intimately linked that, as has often been pointed out, a moment of analysis is always reached when metaphor and metonymy turn into each other and become virtually indistinguishable). Each may thus for the purposes of exposition be expressed in terms of something like a meaning (even though the theory of tropes consists precisely in reversing these priorities and in seeing a given “meaning-effect” as a projection of the individual trope in question). So metaphor becomes a kind of naive and inaugural stage of thinking in which the simplest verbal act (word = thing) restores or founds a belief in the referent. Paradoxically, metaphor is the moment of *literality* in speech; metonymy, then, clearly enough designates the breakdown of this initial (and perhaps illusory) metaphorical unity, its fragmentation into a segmented kind of thinking that can only move, mechanistically and contiguously, from one part to the next.

The assimilation of synecdoche to metonymy seems to have been a relatively recent development (Genette attributes it to Dumarsias⁹); to restore the distinction between them as it obtained in the traditional fourfold tropological scheme of the Renaissance rhetoricians is a strategic feature of White’s method. For him, the differentiation is based on the view that metonymy governs a relationship of part to part, whereas synecdoche tends

to focus on the relationship between a part and its whole; synecdoche thus becomes a reintegrative moment and the sign of an attempt to project a new unification as against the fragments of sheer metonymic fission.

Irony, finally—an uneasily different animal from any of the above—marks the coming of the whole tropological system to a stage of consciousness or self-consciousness

in which the problematical nature of language itself has been recognized ... In Irony, figurative language folds back upon itself and brings its own potentialities for distorting perception under question ... The trope of Irony, then, provides a linguistic paradigm of a mode of thought which is radically self-critical with respect not only to a given characterization of the world of experience but also to the very effort to capture adequately the truth of things in language. It is, in short, a model of the linguistic protocol in which skepticism in thought and relativism in ethics are conventionally expressed. (*M*, 37–38)

Such a development, in which it proves possible to effect a qualitative transformation of the inner logic of discourse through a kind of reflection of language upon itself, inevitably suggests affinities with dialectical thinking; and in fact White explicitly identifies the two:

In my view, dialectic is nothing but a formalization of an insight into the tropological nature of all the forms of discourse which are not formally committed to the articulation of a world view within the confines of a single modality of linguistic unity.¹⁰

So both Hegel and Marx may be enlisted in support of a figural method; and indeed a figural reading of the Hegelian philosophy of history suggests convincingly enough that Hegel's four moments of world history "corresponds to the four modes of consciousness represented by the modalities of tropological projection itself" (*M*, 125). Thus, the first great archaic civilizations of the Orient and the Near East embody "the awakening of consciousness to the possibility of Metaphorical apprehension" and are followed in turn by the metonymical reduction of Greek individualism, the abstract and then the concrete synecdochic reconstructions of Rome and Christianity, respectively, and finally the ironic self-consciousness of modern post-theological times (*M*, 125).

In White's reading of Marx, this tropological logic of world history (the Marxian moments of social evolution from primitive communism through slave and feudal economies to capitalism¹¹) is reexpressed on another level in Marx's theory of the four stages in the evolution of economic value and in the emergence of currency:

the Elementary (Isolated, or Accidental) form of value, the Total (or Extended) form, the Generalized form, and the Money form (*Geldform*). In the first form, the value of a commodity is *equated* with the value presumed to exist in some other commodity. In the second, the value of a commodity is, as Marx put it, “expressed in terms of numberless other elements in the world of commodities,” such that the value of a commodity can be expressed in an “interminable series” of different commodities. In the third form, the value of *all* commodities may be expressed in terms of *one* commodity in the series, as when a coat, specific amounts of tea, coffee, wheat, gold, iron and so on, are considered to be “worth” a certain amount of some other commodity, such as linen, so that the common value of all, the amount of labor necessary for their production, can be equated in terms of only *one other commodity*. And, in the fourth form, value comes into being when the specific commodity, gold, is hit upon as the standard by which the presumed value of every commodity can be set and specified. (*M*, 288)

White’s ingenious tropological reading of the Marxian stages of value can be taken as a contribution to a more general current meditation on the applicability of this scheme to other areas, the most notable of these attempts being that of Jean-Joseph Goux, in his *Economie et symbolique*, where the emergence of gold is homologically accompanied by the emergence of political power, of the authoritarian father, of phallogentric sexuality, and of language (which Goux deals with according to the Derridean coordinates of writing and oral plenitude). It is clear that such a scheme is immediately assimilable, *tel quel*, to White’s tropological system, whose adequacy it now remains for us to assess.

We must first observe that the meaning of the individual tropes, if it is not dependent on a static opposition of the metaphor/metonymy type, nonetheless derives from the relationship of each one to the other three: each trope is read *through* its position in the fourfold scheme, and it should be clear by now that that scheme is diachronic, in other words, that each trope is understood as a *moment* within the intelligibility of some larger ongoing process in which it is subsumed. Perhaps this process may be most strikingly dramatized, and *Metahistory* itself placed in perspective, by quoting Hayden White against himself on the occasion of a similar critique he addressed to Michel Foucault.¹² The essence of this remarkable critique is to discredit Foucault’s own ideological view of his research (the latter was offered as a programmatic substitution, for diachronic and dialectical theories of history, of Foucault’s own view of history as a series of discontinuous synchronic systems) and to show that “there *is* a transformational system built into Foucault’s conception of the succession of forms of the human sciences, even though Foucault appears not to know that it is there” (*FD*, 45). The reader of the present article, or of *Metahistory*, will have already guessed the nature of that deeper structure—the tropes!—that White finds

at work in Foucault's four epistemes. In the present context, it is enough to say that after White's reinterpretation we can never read Foucault the same way again. Obviously, however, damaging as it is to Foucault's own position to find itself thus assimilated to a Viconian "linguistic historicism," White's tropological system emerges strengthened from the encounter, which permits it to enlist the works of Foucault (as before him, of Marx and Hegel) as testimony on its own behalf (*FD*, 48).

Yet there is a lesson here which is not without its relevance for *Metahistory* as well: it is that the refusal of genuinely historical thinking carries its own retribution within itself. "Foucault Decoded" offers us, indeed, something like the spectacle of a veritable "return of the repressed," in which diachronic thinking, repudiated, rises up behind the work as a compensation formation in the form of *myth*; and, in fact, mythic thinking is precisely that, the way in which the mind finds itself obliged to deal with time and change when the conceptual instruments of genuine historical thinking are unavailable to it. Myth can be identified by one telltale feature, present not only in Foucault as White rereads him but also in Hayden White himself: that is, the tendency to view change and time in *cyclical* terms. What is more cyclical, indeed, than Foucault's vision of the fall out of a medieval realm of identity, with its redemptive and prophetic hints of the dawn of some new and transfigured, posthumanist and post-Nietzschean era? Or, if you prefer, the cyclical organization of the historical narrative or myth is itself but the vehicle for those theological overtones that lie fatally in wait for any nonmaterialist version of the historical record.

And it is certain that when we draw back from the details of *Metahistory* and attempt to read the larger historical story which its sequence of historians writes out for us, the cyclical pattern becomes unavoidable. It was already in the tropes themselves, whose movement from the naive freshness of metaphor to the disabused skepticism of the ironic mode foretells a return to origins and a reinvention of the tropological cycle. And this is precisely what we find happening in White's story of the development of historiography as it matures from the naiveté of the chronicles to the corrosive skepticism of Enlightenment historians like Hume and Voltaire, thereupon reemerging invigorated and *aufgehoben* into the new and more all-embracing realism of Romantic historiography, only, as the century wanes on, to grow once more weary of itself and at length to taste the doubt of a new ironic stage, in the attacks of Nietzsche and the skepticism of Croce—the supreme defender of historicism being at one and the same time the thinker who "denied that men could judge with any certitude the nature of their own age" (*M*, 398).

This should not be taken as an objection to some underlying (and profoundly ideological) pessimism inherent in the cyclical view of history. On the contrary, the cycle is, for White, even while he identifies his own

metahistorical stance with ironic self-consciousness, the occasion for an ultimate appeal to some imminent overturning of irony itself:

I maintain that the recognition of this Ironic perspective [that of *Metahistory* as well as of “most of modern academic historiography”] provides the grounds for a transcendence of it. If it can be shown that Irony is only one of a number of possible perspectives on history, each of which has its own good reasons for existence on a poetic and moral level of awareness, the Ironic attitude will have begun to be deprived of its status as the necessary perspective from which to view the historical process. Historians and philosophers of history will then be freed to conceptualize history, to perceive its contents, and to construct narrative accounts of its processes in whatever modality of consciousness is most consistent with their own moral and aesthetic aspirations. (*M*, 434)

Like the original version of Sartrean commitment, such a reduction of the forms of self-justification to the unjustified and unjustifiable choices that underlie them cannot but arouse a therapeutic anxiety. White’s own choice may perhaps be detected as the echo, in such passages, of the mountainous wave of the Viconian *ricorso* as, towering, it prepares in its crash to sweep all furiously before it into a new cycle of time. More than Foucault, more than the structural rhetoricians, it is Vico who is the great *absent* from Hayden White’s pages, and with whom he now owes it to us (and to himself) to reach some definitive understanding.

Still, for ourselves we must refuse to admit that history repeats itself, and we must patiently insist that the cyclical vision of *Metahistory* as a whole is an optical illusion generated by the autonomization of a set of phenomena—historiography and theories of history—which is not complete in itself and is intelligible concretely only at the price of its reintegration into the social history of culture as a whole. This is the moment for the reader once again to ponder the crucial warning of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*:

Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.¹³

Even the final “leap of faith” proposed by White does not solve all the problems raised by his treatment of history as narrative. For those groups, indeed, who, like the Marxists, still “believe in the referent,” not only is the issue that of relativism versus some form of absolute conviction; it is also that of the validity of narrative analysis, and implies a good deal of anxiety about the status of a historical reality about which we would be willing to

agree that its historiography is “nothing but” a narrative, “nothing but” a text. *Metahistory* is, however, not the best occasion on which to raise this particular issue, which it presupposes resolved in advance.

1976

Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally written as a review of Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1973. Future references to this work are denoted *M*. The interested reader will find some different and more recent thoughts on *Metahistory* in my foreword to A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987, included in the present volume as chapter 9 of part 2.
- 2 Roland Barthes, “Historical Discourse,” *Introduction to Structuralism*, ed. Michael Lane, New York: Basic Books, 1970. Future references to this work are denoted *HD*.
- 3 An instructive comparison between the two is afforded by Burke’s pathbreaking “Four Master Tropes,” reprinted in the appendix to Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1954.
- 4 Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, 18.
- 5 A. J. Greimas, *Du Sens*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, 254–57. For a fuller description of a *combinatoire*, see my “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre,” chap. 2 of *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1981, 103–50.
- 6 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1971, 93–94.
- 7 *HD*, 52.
- 8 Yuriy M. Lotman, “Statii po tipologii culturey,” *Tartu* 15, 1970.
- 9 Gérard Genette, “La Rhétorique restreinte,” *Communications* 16, Fall 1970, 161.
- 10 *M*, 428; this last phrase alludes to the various subcodes of the sciences.
- 11 It should be pointed out that the *Grundrisse* show that Marx by no means thought of this as an invariable sequence, but that he envisaged the emergence of capitalism precisely in terms of what Julian Steward calls “multilinear evolution.” The myth of Marx as a unilinear evolutionist was developed as part of a general attack on Marxism by anthropologists of the school of Boas, assisted by the relatively simplistic positions of Engels in *The Origins of Private Property, the Family and the State*: see Marvin Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, New York: Crowell, 1968, chaps. 9 and 10, 250–300. For a convenient selection of Marx’s own writings on the subject, see Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, ed. E. Hobsbawm, trans. Jack Cohen, New York: International Publishers, 1965.
- 12 Hayden White, “Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground,” *History and Theory*, 1973, vol. 12, 23–54. Future references to this work are denoted *FD*.
- 13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur, New York: International Publishers, 1972, 47.

Modernism and Its Repressed; or, Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist

The language which provides most of the material for the analysis is a purged language, purged ... of the means for expressing any other contents than those furnished to the individuals by their society. The linguistic analyst finds this purged language an accomplished fact, and he takes the impoverished language as he finds it, insulating it from that which is not expressed in it ... Linguistic philosophy [thereby] suppresses once more what is continually suppressed in this universe of discourse and behavior.

—Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*

During the current lull in American literary studies, when the rhetoric of the New Criticism is as discredited as the ideology of liberalism itself, when archetypal criticism has turned out to be a merely typological or classificatory operation, and the comfortable old pursuits of image-counting and thematics have settled back down in possession of the field, two more recent European models have seemed to have something new to offer. They are, on the one hand, Franco-Italian structuralism, with its methodological codification in semiotics, and on the other, the streamlined Hegelianism of the Frankfurt School, not the least attractive feature of which—for American intellectuals—lies in its capacity to provide a Marxist theory without a Marxist practice.

The trouble is—as ever more numerous translations of these two tendencies have begun to make clear—that the two approaches appear to be mutually exclusive, both in their basic philosophical presuppositions and in their day-to-day critical operations. It is not very difficult to provide a checklist of these incompatibilities: synchronic versus diachronic thought, scientism versus the critique of positivism, the primacy of language versus the primacy of society, the building of small-scale models versus the intuitive, totalizing, transcultural or transhistorical generalization, and so on. What is harder is to find some field or object over which these two “methods” can meet in such a way that their respective explanatory powers can be concretely compared.

Jacques Leenhardt's book on Robbe-Grillet may serve to give us a glimpse of the form such a confrontation might take.¹ A Marxist study of Robbe-Grillet, its dedication reminds us that it was conceived as a prolongation of the work of the late Lucien Goldmann on the *nouveau roman*; yet its language and diagrams are those, linguistics-oriented, of a more recent semiotic research and thus invite the kind of comparison we have proposed when they do not always articulate it. Yet the very framework of the book, already a strategic choice, dramatizes the structural dilemmas involved in the attempt to use both methods at the same time: for its conception as an immense, in-depth exegesis of a single text at once excludes the comparative study of a whole corpus of works that gave Goldmann's literary analyses their scope and authority, at the same time making it impossible to measure the expressive capacity of *Jealousy* against that of the artworks of other historical periods or social configurations, as Adorno himself was inveterately inclined to do, with results so often luminous. Thus—and this from the very outset, owing to the plan of the work itself—we must not expect to find in Leenhardt's study a treatment of the specificity of the *nouveau roman* as a whole, nor an evaluation of its significance as one moment in the development of modernism. Yet these are not, as we will see later, simply additional topics which it is a critic's privilege to ignore or to postpone for some more general consideration, but rather fundamental limitations which return to take their toll on the study's inherent strengths. The latter, however, and in particular the rock-drill constituted by so systematic a depth-sociological reading of this particular novel, have enough explosive potential to make some fairly consequent inroads of their own on the formalistic landscape.

Leenhardt's book suggests yet a further inconsistency between semiotics and critical theory which is perhaps more fundamental than any of those enumerated above and which I would characterize as the attitude toward, and the role played by, the *negative* in both systems. The importance of negation and of the valorization of contradiction or absence in dialectical thinking is well known; while the reduction of negation to what it used to be in predialectical philosophy, namely a mere logical category or the marking of quasi-mathematical valences, is probably also familiar to anyone who has worked with Lévi-Strauss or Greimas. What is perhaps only now becoming clear, in the writings of so-called poststructuralist thinkers like Deleuze or Jean-François Lyotard, is the ideological significance of the refusal of the negative and the profound vocation of the new philosophy to seek a model made up of nothing but positivities: this repudiation of the dialectic, with its valorization of absence and contradiction, now draws renewed authority for its exaltation of the present from a revival of Nietzschean vitalism. Meanwhile, an analogous "positivism" (did not Lévi-Strauss, on a memorable occasion, describe himself as a "mechanical materialist"?) informs the scientific claims of semiotics itself to banish all

traces of the subject, along with the negative from its account of the object itself. The implications of which may quickly be suggested in terms of literary analysis: semiotics is the implicit development of a program explicitly announced in the work of the poststructuralists, namely the attempt to continue to talk of a given phenomenon *without interpretation*, whether it be that of the psychoanalytic diagnosis of a symptom, or of the dialectical reading of a culture in history. Science or schizophrenia, *intensités*, structures or the Freudian death wish—strange bedfellows all temporarily allied against Marx or Freud themselves!

The inextricable relationship of interpretation to the negative may now be concretely measured by what Leenhardt has and has not been able to do with his reading of *Jealousy*. Its superiority to other readings, its incommensurability with them, what is properly scandalous for the orthodoxy of *nouveau roman* scholarship, lies in his demonstration that Robbe-Grillet's novel has content, that it is "about" something and possesses a genuine "referent": in the occurrence, Africa, the colonial situation, imperialism and neo-imperialism, racism, wars of national liberation—realities which it seems incongruous enough to mention in the same breath as the *nouveau roman*, much as though we were to be told that James Joyce was the greatest novelist of the IRA! Yet the complexity of Leenhardt's critical procedure here may be suggested by a distinction between "referent" and "meaning": insofar, in other words, as the aesthetic of *Jealousy* proposes something like a pure play of signifiers, a combination and variation of relatively free-floating sentences, this insistence on the book's "signified," this search for something like its meaning or message might fairly enough be taken as a way of refusing to perceive the work altogether. It is just such wrongheaded or misguided quests for "meaning" which have been stigmatized as interpretation by the most articulate spokesmen for modern art. But when we recall that Jakobson's terminology substitutes the word "context" for that of "referent," we glimpse the possibility of an interpretive operation of a wholly different type, whose specificity even the term "semantics"—insofar as it might also apply to the study of the "signified"—tends to blur, and which might better be characterized as a transcendence of the inner, formal experience of the work or of the signifier by a study of its material and referential *preconditions*. This is, it seems to me, what Leenhardt is up to in a work that juxtaposes travel brochures and sociological treatises on the colonial experience with explorations of the novel's imagery and close attention to the patterns of the banana trees; such heterogeneity is indeed deliberate, and the shock in store for the student of *belles lettres* is not only healthy, it is exemplary, and emblematic of that reversal of work and reader alike which any genuinely materialistic criticism ought to effectuate and to which we will return shortly. Suffice it to say that Leenhardt's approach goes a good deal further than Robbe-Grillet's own program, according to which

the reality which the *nouveau roman* was “about,” and the sense in which it could be considered “realistic,” was simply a shift in the phenomenological experience of the world in our own day, and the subsequent disintegration of categories like those of the subject, of time, of things, and the like; Robbe-Grillet, indeed, makes a case for some profoundly *critical* value of his own novels in the sense of the Frankfurt School, in their narrative demystification of the very categories of the ideology of everyday life.² This suggests a rather peculiar reading of *Jealousy* as standing somewhere between Gide’s *Voyage au Congo* and Voltaire’s *Contes philosophiques*. But if it cannot be stressed enough that a project like that outlined by Robbe-Grillet is an essentially *idealistic* one, in that it takes as its object our thoughts about and experiences of reality rather than the latter’s material origins and causes, its real ambiguity lies, as Leenhardt shows and as we will see shortly, in that concept of a “newer” reality in the name of which the critique of the older one is undertaken.

At any rate, this kind of description of the overall aims of Robbe-Grillet’s narrative technique in general must give way to more specific local traditions in the reading of *Jealousy* itself; and here, it seems to me, Leenhardt’s thesis—necessarily metacritical as well as critical—confronts two main formalistic strategies, or, if you prefer, two versions of the canonical formalist position on the novel, something like a weak and a strong version, or a literal and a figurative, a restricted and a generalized approach. The purer of these positions—Ricardou may be taken as its most vigorous representative—refuses interpretation in the name of the text itself, seen as a process by which the combination of metaphoric and descriptive functions ultimately neutralize expression itself. This process has an inner logic of its own:

In so perfectly closed a set as this book is, a systematic combination of all its elements would ultimately require, along with the disruption of time, the actualization of all their possibilities, which is to say, in particular, of all their contraries. Along with this saturation of relationship, textual space also gives rise to a concept of neutralization: this is indeed the phenomenon in which the cause of the novel’s ultimate return to stillness may be found.³

I suspect, as I have suggested elsewhere, that even this extreme and rigorously absolute formalism is not really as formalistic as it means to be, and that in reality—far from constituting a repudiation of interpretation—it is itself an allegorical interpretation whose “signified” or allegorical key is simply that of language or *écriture* or the text itself.⁴

Even if such a suspicion proves baseless, however, it is undeniably true that the position of Ricardou is too demanding to be maintained for long, and that it tends imperceptibly to slip into another one which this time is

quite openly a hermeneutic with its own specific interpretive content, namely that of psychoanalysis itself. (Derrida may be taken as a textbook illustration of this process, a book like the *Grammatologie* drawing its most fundamental content and persuasive force from that very Freudianism which it was concerned to assimilate to the more formal model of *différance* and trace.) As far as Robbe-Grillet is concerned, this slippage is no doubt facilitated by some deep structural ambiguity within the novels, in which, alongside the endless textual variations of the surface, there rises some more global atmosphere of psychopathology, whether it be child molesting (*Le Voyeur*), a drop in mental functioning characteristic of brain injuries (*Dans le labyrinthe*), or the sadomasochism of the later works, whose more conventional alliance with pornography signals a weakening of some of the more interesting tensions and transgressions of the earlier ones. In the case of *Jealousy*, Leenhardt observes that none of the previous critics have been able to free themselves from the spell of the title and from the immediate first impression that the book must be about a *ménage à trois*:

One is indeed astonished to observe that all the critics, from the most traditionally psychologizing, like Bruce Morrissette, to those, like Jean Ricardou, most rigorously attentive to narrative mechanisms, have discussed this novel in terms of erotic jealousy, of a cuckolded husband, etc. Such wondrous unanimity conveys the power of the myth, none of the critics having been able to transcend it by way of some second-degree recuperation. (*LPR*, 209)

His first task will therefore be an assault on this unspoken primacy of psychological and psychoanalytic interpretation, the relative autonomy of which reflects the profound fragmentation of modern social life into private and public sectors of the psyche, at the same time that—as in the present case—it offers a last-ditch strategy for evading any genuinely historical or social approach to literary material. For the most private and solitary fact remains a *social* one, and the invention of mediations between the psychoanalytic and the political simply demands the enlargement of the frame of reference in such a way that the social character of the psychic phenomenon in question becomes visible. This is, I suppose, why Leenhardt begins his restructuring of the classic psychoanalytic reading of *Jealousy* with what is perhaps its most generalizable version, namely the diagnosis of this novel (and others by the same writer) as an obsessional construction. Such a reading,⁵ in contrast to some of the other Freudian codes available (Oedipus complex, phallic symbols, allegory of the psyche, etc.), is already in itself mediatory by virtue of the phenomenological description inherent in it of the movement of the text: that rhythm according to which the sentences begin to live a compulsive life of their own (“in *Jealousy*, indeed, what is sick or jealous is simply language itself, as a whole” [*LPR*, 131]), suddenly and

obsessively beginning to count all the banana trees in the plantation, to describe the geometrical arrangement of the fields, to enumerate even the most minor deviations from the overall plan of the cultivated area.⁶ The depersonalized autonomy of these sentences thus comes to figure something like those mechanical rituals by which hysterical patients distract themselves from the pressure of anxiety forcing at the conscious mind; yet in itself the account of Anzieu is not inconsistent either with that of Ricardou above—it simply lends it nascent content. And in a more general way, this characterization of the *écriture* of *Jealousy* corrects the abstractness of the two standard views of the *nouveau roman*, as the novel of things (objective version), or of the *école du regard* (subjective version), not only by insisting that both these poles are part of a process, but also and above all by suggesting that this process itself needs explanation as to a determinate phenomenon in its own right.

To describe the process as obsession is indeed to bracket both subject and object and to evoke an operation through which external surroundings are somehow neutralized by a look that is itself wholly depersonalized from the outset; it is therefore not a question of reintroducing a psychopathology of the subject at this point, but rather of making a phenomenological analysis of the Look as a social phenomenon whose meaning is independent of individual psychology. Here Leenhardt uses Sartre against Robbe-Grillet's own critique of *Nausea*, of which the later novelist perspicaciously observes that "the first three perceptions recorded at the beginning of the book are all gained by the sense of touch, not that of sight . . . The sense of touch constitutes, in everyday life, a much more *intimate* sensation than that of sight" (*NN*, 65). In what is a *locus classicus* of modern polemics, indeed, by underscoring the crucial role of smell and tactility and color perception in Sartre's novel, Robbe-Grillet went on to denounce the tragic humanism—the unconscious anthropomorphism, if you like—implicit in Sartre's presentation of a world and of its objects, in which human beings remain, in spite of themselves, inextricably entangled:

Drowned in the depth of things, man ultimately no longer even perceives them: his role is soon limited to experiencing, in their name, totally humanized impressions and desires . . . The sense of sight immediately appears, in this perspective, as the privileged sense . . . Optical description is, in effect, the kind which most readily establishes distances: the sense of sight, if it seeks to remain simply that, leaves things in their respective place. (*NN*, 68, 73)

This demystification of the several senses is of course a fundamental component of Robbe-Grillet's aesthetic program and a key strategic operation in that narrative critique of the ideology of everyday life and perception of which we spoke above. But what if one could evaluate all this in a wholly

different way? What if the pure look, indeed, were rather the vehicle for something like a *will* to power over the external world? What if the very refusal of anthropomorphism and of its tragic spirit (of which we may well agree that it continues to lead an underground life in the classical moment of French existentialism) were itself not altogether innocent and expressed a longing to free one's self from the world and from things that had a protopolitical content of its own? We thus return to Sartre's own analyses of the Look, and in particular that outlined in "Orphée noir" (his preface to Senghor's historic anthology of the *négritude* poets), in which the Look, and the position of the subject which it affords ("the right to look without being looked at"), is denounced as the very element of white supremacy and of the colonial situation. The symbolic significance, or, in other words, the social content, of the act of looking is simply the reaffirmation of my own white skin: an interpretation corroborated by the commanding situation of the manor in the novel, dominating the slope from which, across a protective distance, the objects of the surrounding world can be effectively mastered and visually enumerated to the last detail.

We need a better term than that of mere phenomenological analysis to designate the way in which the historical origins and the repressed situational content of an activity like this one—the special kind of inspection inherent in the obsessive visual survey—are restored to the phenomenon itself, thereby constituting its interpretation and revealing the social significance of what had hitherto seemed a psychological comportment or a mode of perception. This is in fact a sociological version of the Nietzschean genealogy, in which the trace of older concrete situations is revealed through the demystification of a kind of X-ray process within modern "civilized" phenomena that no longer seem to have anything in common with them; so Nietzsche showed how an older aristocratic insolence lives on within the etymology of the impoverished vocabulary of modern value judgments, while the classes of the heroic age itself—conquerors and conquered—continue to live out their disguised struggle, transfigured beyond all recognition by *ressentiment*, in the shabby white collars of the industrial city. This process is now to be understood, however, in a concrete and sociological sense, rather than in that of the Nietzschean myth of history. We would expect as genealogy of the gaze in *Jealousy* to reveal its distant origins in the rationalization and quantification of that first commercial world of the primitive accumulation of capital, and to bear scars of that transformation of the whole world into one immense bookkeeping system which resulted from the spread of money and the expansion of the market economy. By the mid-twentieth century, however, this type of visual inspection has already entered a late and pathological stage, and Leenhardt rightly points out that what psychoanalysis calls obsession in this respect has its exact social and historical equivalent in what he describes as the "morbid geometralization"

of the whole colonial system, that depersonalized fascination with numbers and geometrical arrangements rather than with human beings so characteristic of the pacification strategies of the various colonial and counter-insurgency operations (*LPR*, 54–55). So the apparently purely formal disembodied compulsion of the gaze across the fields has genuine political and economic content which goes far beyond even that of the ideological significance attributed by Robbe-Grillet to his own mode of composition, and this despite the fact that we are never given to witness any overtly oppressive act committed by the “narrator” against the native population, and, indeed, in the virtual absence of the field-workers themselves.

Such a phenomenological or genealogical reading of the act of looking now provides a transition to the more purely thematic content of the novel, and in particular to the omnipresent effect of light and darkness, with their privileged alternation cast by the slats of the jealousy itself. Yet the preceding discussion has put us in a position to understand these “images” (and it would be well for us to admit that the concept of the image as it is used in current literary criticism is deeply problematical) in something other than the standard “symbolic” sense. Leenhardt’s splendid analysis of these materials strikes me as offering a model that may be generalizable to other kinds of literature as well: for him, the thematic imagery of *Jealousy* may be said to be a compensation and a substitution for precisely those more basic realities of the colonial situation and the native population, which, as we have indicated above, have been systematically repressed and excluded in the strict Freudian sense of neurotic denial or *Verneinung* (the Lacanian *dénégation*). In such a replacement sign-system, *light* will clearly continue to be the element of the *colon* himself and the medium of his domination, while its privative, darkness, is as indeterminate and inchoate as the surrounding population itself and expresses fear of the menacing absence through the very vulnerability of the masters and of their mansion in a henceforth invisible world.

Leenhardt’s analysis also suggests, at this point, the relevance and indeed the fruitfulness of semiotic instruments and methodology. He points out, indeed, that what organizes these elements into a complete sign system cannot really be something so banal as an opposition between light and darkness. Rather, the latter is reorganized into a new artificial, and therefore *foregrounded*, sign-system in which the opposite of light is not so much darkness as rather *nature* itself: “Light and nature are thus complementary yet mutually exclusive. We may observe a constant alternation of the two from one end of the novel to the other, in a kind of Manichaeian struggle” (*LPR*, 70). The content of this new sign or thematic unity may then be resolved into a number of constituent elements, among which we can enumerate: the natives themselves and their songs, but also organic life in general, which is itself significantly “repressed,” the larger animals

associated with Africa, and the various emblematic wild flora and fauna all here represented by something like their most disembodied manifestation, namely insects (the *mille-pattes!*), and finally refined out of existence in the form of sounds, so that the final opposition of light and sound knows a rich genealogical content of its own. Here, if anywhere, it would seem to me that the analytic machinery worked out by Greimas finds its proper place and would have much to offer a sociological enterprise of this kind in the way of new insights and corroborative data.

Yet the basic objection to this section seems to me to lie elsewhere, in what might be called the insufficient radicalization of Leenhardt's approach to these thematic materials. For it seems to me possible that the hasty reader may well ignore the fairly complicated model that supports this work, and rather conclude—quite against its whole spirit—that the images of light, sound, nature, and the like are for Leenhardt precisely nothing but those “symbols” of some degraded and transparent allegorical meaning. We thus return, in a misreading of this kind, to a confusion between the “interpretation” of a work's signified and that deduction or deconstruction of its referential preconditions of which we spoke above. Before suggesting how this kind of misunderstanding might be avoided, however, let us follow Leenhardt's account of *Jealousy* on to the point at which it seems to open itself most fully to such objections.

This is, of course, the “political reading” which gives the work its title and which bears essentially on the central triangle itself: the moment, in other words, when the critic must fulfill his promise to transform the apparently psychological material of the novel's plot (the trip to the city of the wife and her lover Franck, the husband-narrator's unnamed fantasies of vengeance and depersonalized waves of jealousy) into phenomena of a sociological order. It is here, perhaps, that the legacy of Lucien Goldmann can most strongly be felt; here also that Leenhardt's reading is most liable to one of the classical objections made to Marxist criticism in general, namely that it is essentially *allegorical* (the “typical” figures standing for the various social classes). For Leenhardt, the two male rivals undoubtedly “represent” two distinct moments of the colonial mentality, in its historical evolution from the stage of classical Western imperialism to that evolved during the decolonization process after World War II, or, in other words, what is henceforth termed neocolonialism. He marshals a good deal of detail to support this reading: the disagreements between the narrator and Franck on the skills of the native population, Franck's table manners (repugnant to the narrator, as is in general the former's physicality and his erotic/aggressive vitality), Franck's own mechanical ability (repairing the truck), finally, the various opinions of and positions taken on the so-called African novel, the discussion of which thus serves to place the characters ideologically. In this connection, the key passage is the long plot résumé of the “novel within the

novel” toward the end of the book, in which the “facts” rewrite themselves in a bewildering and comical series of reversals and contradictions whose inner logic the above hypothesis now clarifies:

The main character of the book is a customs official. This character is not an official but a high-ranking employee of an old commercial company. This company’s business is going badly, rapidly turning shady. This company’s business is going extremely well. The chief character—one learns—is dishonest. He is honest, he is trying to reestablish a situation comprised by his predecessor, who died in an automobile accident. But he had no predecessor, for the company was only recently formed; and it was not an accident, etc. (*LPR*, 137)

The alternatives, in their most extreme form, are clearly the new entrepreneurial-type private corporation and the older government-protected family firm, often assimilated into the colonial administration itself; while from the point of view of emotional investment and dramatic prognosis, the passage hesitates significantly between the death of Franck (the truck in flames, a fantasy already elaborated earlier in the novel) and the historical supersession of the narrator’s own way of life. It is in this sense that the narrative of *Jealousy* ultimately, for Leenhardt, dramatizes the values of the new technological elite which will come to power in the Fifth Republic, marking an attempt to evolve

an ideology corresponding to the technocratic group or class subdivision on the level of production, whose fundamental mission is to overcome both those class antagonisms symbolized by socialist thought as well as the individualism associated with the traditional novel and with right-wing political thought. (*TN*, 36)

So at length—and in spite of Leenhardt’s evident attempt to sidestep the terms of the canonical realism/modernism debate—the classical dilemma of Marxist aesthetics, that of *evaluation*, comes once more slowly into view. The situation, as he states it, is not terribly different from that of the romantic culture into which Marxism itself emerged: a literature “progressive” in its aristocratic critique of capitalism and the nascent business civilization, “reactionary” in its defense of the privileges of a limited group or class. What makes this solution less suitable for the *nouveau roman* is precisely the qualitative transformation of modernism itself, in other words, the need to come to terms not only with the ideology of content, but with that of *form*, of the message inherent in the medium, of the connotative value of experiments with aesthetic perception itself. The older Marxism, that of the thirties, felt itself strong enough to reject the modernistic culture out of hand; yet its strength depended upon the presence of some genuine mass and working-class movement to which it could look for real cultural alternatives, and also upon a cultural field less saturated than it is today

by that palpable practice of modernism which is at one with consumer society itself. For in that second “Great Transformation” which followed World War II (and which, for the U.S., we can perhaps conveniently date from the introduction of television and the simultaneous beginning of the Cold War in 1947), the aesthetic of modernism has triumphantly penetrated every corner of our psychic space and come to seem as unavoidable as cellophane, pollution, or paperback books. What is perhaps less widely understood is the degree to which the very economics of the consumer society, with its emphasis on planned obsolescence and ever more rapid styling and model changes, is intimately dependent on modernism and the new or modernistic sensibility as a laboratory and source of new shapes and patterns.

The ultimate evaluation of “modernism” is thus at one with the diagnosis of the new *société de consommation* itself, and we must surely reject—albeit with regret—the confidence of the Frankfurt School in the continuing negativity and subversive effect of the great modern works of art, voiced as recently as the following statement of Habermas: “Modern art is as little suited to fulfill the political system’s need for legitimation as universalistic value systems ... The critical potentials of art and the powers which it frees for subversive countercultures are unmistakable.”⁷ This illusion may still be possible in Europe, but from the American vantage point surely it is rather Professor Trilling’s distress which reflects the more realistic assessment, when, in *Beyond Culture*, he deplores the waning power of those great and explosively antisocial monuments of the first generation of modernism, when assimilated to the curriculum and transformed into cultural institutions in their own right.

To insist upon the effortless with which the consumer society is able to absorb and co-opt even the negativity of formalistic works like those of Beckett and Robbe-Grillet is not necessarily to suggest that a different type of aesthetic would have some easier situation to face. On the contrary, I would myself tend to go even further and to claim that *all* forms of art, when taken as objects in themselves, are co-optable today, and this holds for art of a revolutionary intent—posters, songs, novels—just as much as for the modernistic ones. Witness, if proof be needed, the burgeoning Brecht-Industrie, which, busily psychologizing those models of political propaganda, transforming them into the objects of scholarly scrutiny and thereby turning the whole corpus itself into some kind of grisly cultural “institution” in its own right, has triumphantly recuperated everything dangerous in Brecht’s plays. (One thinks of the moment in Godard’s *La Chinoise*—its director another prime target for just such co-optation—when the “revolutionary” heroes, effacing one after another the host of theatrical names on their blackboard from Sophocles to Strindberg, at length sadly run an eraser through the lone surviving one of Brecht himself.)

Yet this is so, not because there is no difference between a formalistic and a revolutionary literature, but rather because the very concept of the work of art *qua* aesthetic object is itself a fetishization and an abstraction. What is real is precisely not the isolated script or text itself but rather the work-in-situation, the work-in-performance, in which for a brief moment the gap between producer and consumer, between *destinataire* and *destinateur*, is momentarily bridged, and the twin crisis of a missing public and an artist without social function is temporarily overcome. We need something like a speech act theory on the level of aesthetics itself to shatter the academic reification of the “work of art” and to convince us that the concrete work of art—in other words, Brecht in performance, and by a revolutionary theater group to a politically conscious public—can never be co-opted or shorn of its subversive elements.

This is, of course, why performance arts like the theater are more easily adaptable to a revolutionary aesthetic than is a form like the novel, itself already a reified product of the twin crisis to which we have just alluded. Yet it is precisely this inherent reification of the novel as a thing and a portable object which gives radical criticism its reason for being; and if there is a profound ambiguity about a Robbe-Grillet novel all by itself, that ambiguity may surely be reduced, either in that approximation to a concrete situation of performance which is the academic seminar, or in conjunction with a critical work like that of Leenhardt, which addresses itself to reducing just those ambiguities and to offering precise instructions for the “bon usage” of the modernistic object in question.

What, then, ought those instructions to be, and can we invent a new way of reading in which the requirements of political and historical consciousness and the specific demands of this particular aesthetic form are reconciled, albeit in some new and complex, second-degree mental operation? For it is clear that there can be no question of simply turning *Jealousy* back into one more novelistic presentation—whether naturalistic or revolutionary—of the colonial situation. We have shown, indeed, that while in the sense of the “referent” the novel is surely “about” colonialism, it must immediately be added that it is also trying *not* to be, and that its formal structure must be described precisely as an effort to *repress* that referential content and to defuse the implications of its raw material. Perhaps it would be more adequate to think of this operation in terms of the intentional act of Sartrean *mauvaise foi* rather than the unconscious of classical psychoanalysis: for every reader knows, when reading sentences about banana trees and native servants, insects and tropical drinks on cool verandas, that the narrative “intends” Africa as its ultimate object or referent; the real problem remains that of the use to which that “knowledge” is put.

Here perhaps Cubist painting may furnish a convenient analogy, inasmuch as Cubism also entertains complicated relations with representation

and representationality: the viewer is in the same fashion well aware that his or her gaze “intends” bottles of wine, banjos, flower vases, tables and bread knives; and yet the paintings demand that in some fashion we bracket or suspend that knowledge and attempt to “see” all those objects in some new and utterly unreferential way. They are in other words no longer meant to be stared at as elements of an object-world in their own right, as in Chardin or the great Dutch still lifes; rather, they stand as the last inextinguishable vestiges of reality that must persist as a pretext for the viewer’s pure absorption in the painterly surface. Yet—and it is this critical reversal that Leenhardt’s book seeks to accomplish for *Jealousy*—the fact remains that Cubist paintings also have content, and that content is, if you will, simply the painter’s garret, the *bateau lavoir*, “ma jolie,” Paris 1900, and the situation of the artist himself in it, his patrons among intellectuals and aristocracy, the collectors and the dealers, the Americans, the Third Republic, and ultimately the entire cultural and historical moment itself as it leaves its concentrated trace in the round stain of a wine glass on a deal table.

What we are now in a position to see is that modernistic works are not, as the older Marxism would have it, simply ways of distracting us from reality, and of substituting trivial concerns and encouraging “decadent” values and activities (values we can today recognize as simply those—universally programmed in all of us—of the consumer society itself). Such works are (also?) ways of distorting and repressing reality: they do not speak about something essentially different from the content and raw material of revolutionary art; rather, the same fears and concerns, the same historical perceptions and political anxieties pass through them also, only what they attempt to do is not to express, but rather to *manage* those fears, to disguise them, and drive them underground. Thus, in *Jealousy* itself, the conflict between colonist and colonized is repressed, and its determinant underground reality masked by a more local conflict among the colonists themselves; in classical Marxist theory, we would describe the operation as the substitution, for the conflict between classes, of a secondary or non-antagonistic contradiction within the hegemonic class itself, between two of its tendencies, the older colonial mentality and the newer technocratic one of postindependent neocolonialism.

I would argue that to repudiate these modernistic works of art, or, even more, to exercise, upon the silent and terroristic objects of the museum of modern culture, the dramatic option of iconoclasm, is simply to reconfirm the reified prestige, and as it were the sacred aura, of these fetishized names and reputations. What is needed is rather something on the order of the psychoanalytic *working through*, yet now on the level of political and ideological content. Such a process can be expected to dissolve the reification of the great modernistic works, and to return these artistic and academic “monuments” to their original reality as the private languages of isolated

individuals in a reified society. This is no doubt in many cases to destroy the works themselves in the process: only as a dream is destroyed by analysis, through exhausting its content along with its fascination and leaving a shell or husk to be discarded. It must no doubt also make us more uncomfortably aware of our own vested interest, as academic scholars, in preserving precisely these scholarly “objects of specialization” to which our own professional status is necessarily linked. Yet only through such a process of dereification and of working-through can we restore something of the fragility and the pathos of aesthetic play as it stirs feebly and intermittently within the massive solidification of contemporary culture and media language. “Every masterpiece,” Gertrude Stein once said, “came into the world with a measure of ugliness in it ... the sign of the creator’s struggle to say a new thing in a new way ... It’s our business as critics to stand in front of [Raphael’s Sistine Madonna] and recover its ugliness.”⁸ Ugliness, but also clumsiness, amateurishness, indecision ... all so many sloppy brushstrokes that signal the dissolution of the reified artwork back into its original praxis, that, freeing us from the spell of the artistic commodity, once more permit a just and fraternal evaluation of the real achievement, as well as of the dilemma, of the solitary and subjectivized artist in a capitalist world.

1976

Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally written as a review of Jacques Leenhardt, *Lecture politique du roman: La Jalousie d’Alain Robbe-Grillet*, Paris: Minuit, 1973. Future references to this work are denoted *LPR*.
- 2 Alain Robbe-Grillet, “From Realism to Reality,” *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Grove Press, 1966, 157–168. Future references to this work are denoted *NN*.
- 3 Jean Ricardou, *Problèmes du nouveau roman, essais*, Paris: Seuil, 1967, 143.
- 4 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1972.
- 5 See Didier Anzieu, “Le Discours de L’obsessionnel dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet,” *Temps Modernes*, October 1965, vol. 233, 608–637.
- 6 See, for example, Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Two Novels by Robbe-Grillet: Jealousy and In the Labyrinth*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Grove Press, 1965, 50–54. Future references to this work are denoted *TN*.
- 7 Jürgen Habermas, “The Place of Philosophy in Marxism,” *The Insurgent Sociologist*, winter 1975, vol. 2, 44–45.
- 8 Gertrude Stein, *Four in America*, New Haven, CT: Yale, 1947, vii.

Morality Versus Ethical Substance; or, Aristotelian Marxism in Alasdair MacIntyre

Not unsurprisingly, this Hegelian distinction is underscored in Alasdair MacIntyre's recent *After Virtue*, in such remarks as the following:

A moral philosophy . . . characteristically presupposes a sociology. For every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world.¹

MacIntyre's is far and away the most important and the most brilliant reformulation of the question of the ethical in recent years, a book with which any statement on the subject must necessarily come to terms. It proposes a return to the classical Aristotelian conception of the virtues, which he understands as being inseparable from a realized community, or *polis*, in which those virtues correspond to real social practices and not to either unrealizable imperatives or rules or to Stoic repressions. The move is therefore the Hegelian one in which individual conceptions of morality are dissolved in a vision of collective ethical substance; and indeed for MacIntyre the one great deficiency of Aristotle from any modern standpoint is the absence from classical thought of historicity as such, of the concept of the historical. This is not some personal weakness of Aristotle himself, however, but an inevitable consequence of the social formation or mode of production within which Aristotle did his thinking, and in this MacIntyre's designation of the structural limits of Aristotle's philosophy is at one with Marx's analogous remarks in the first volume of *Capital*. MacIntyre's is therefore a Hegelian Aristotelianism, and finally a Marxian one, insofar as Marx everywhere in this book constitutes the richest ultimate source for MacIntyre's vision of history and of social life.

Indeed, were one to wish to appropriate *After Virtue* for the Marxian tradition, it would be enough to point out that the first section of this book

offers the most probing and devastating analysis of the reification of moral categories under capital that we possess. The conceptual adversaries addressed by MacIntyre—most notably, utilitarianism—are by him explicitly linked to the liberal individualism of the market system (as are a number of his seeming allies in the whole neoconservative or radical Right “return to virtue”).

We can also learn something from MacIntyre’s discussion of the collective or social basis of Aristotelian ethics in the *polis* itself; I am thinking in particular of his demonstration that for the Greeks generally and for Aristotle in particular, the virtues are not rules, commandments, or taboos that one enforces on one’s self by violence. Rather, it is the other way around. The absence of virtue, or the enactment of some active form of evil or vice, constitutes a form of violence done to the community, a failure of one’s commitment to that ongoing collective *project* that essentially defines community:

an offense against the laws destroys those relationships which make common pursuit of the good possible ... The response to such offenses would have to be that of taking the person who committed them to have thereby excluded himself or herself from the community. (*AV*, 142)

There is then a conception here of the group as a collective project, which already begins to suggest some of the newer ways of thinking about group formation toward which our contemporaries seem to be feeling their way—namely, the notion of Utopia as a state of siege, as a permanently beleaguered community, something as vivid in Ursula Le Guin’s idea of a Utopia of scarcity (in *The Dispossessed*) as it is in Sartre’s notion of the “group in fusion” (in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*).

Yet it is precisely from the standpoint of anti-Utopianism that MacIntyre renounces the active part of his Marxian heritage—as well as repudiating the Nietzschean Utopia of the *Übermensch* and indeed all overtly political movements and causes generally. Here the argument is at first linguistic and Wittgensteinian:

Both [Nietzsche and Sartre] saw their own task as in part that of founding a new morality, but in the writings of both it is at this point that their rhetoric—very different as each is from the other—becomes cloudy and opaque, and metaphorical assertion replaces argument. The *Übermensch* and the Sartrean Existentialist-cum-Marxist belong in the pages of a philosophical bestiary rather than in serious discussion. Both by contrast are at their philosophically most powerful and cogent in the negative part of their critiques. (*AV*, 21)

Much the same is implied in his intermittent discussion of Marxism itself, where the projections of future socialist or communist societies are

dismissed as empty of content and thus as nonphilosophical, on the grounds that what one cannot *say* is not to be considered thinking.

Two features of this rejection of the Utopian and the prophetic seem worth noting. The first has to do with the Popperian overtones of the judgment, which would imply that Marxism's vision of the future wanted somehow to be predictive in some "scientific" sense. MacIntyre reasserts the Renaissance and Machiavellian notion of *fortuna* as the predictably unpredictable, the necessarily unforeseeable form of future events, but this in a very different context, a context of the greatest interest to people in the field of cultural studies. For it is a striking feature of MacIntyre's book that it also rehearses one of the newest and most profound tendencies of contemporary thought in general, namely, the increasing foregrounding of narrative itself as a fundamental instance of human understanding (something also dramatically argued in Paul Ricoeur's recent *Time and Narrative*).² The insistence on storytelling is of course a significant component of MacIntyre's Aristotelianism, implying as it does a fundamental relationship between the intelligibility of a life and its social roles and possibilities; but it is also a crucial move in his critique of the increasing reification—that is, denarrativization—of contemporary ethical categories.

The other point to be made about MacIntyre's anti-Utopianism is that it recapitulates one of the great debates within Marxism itself, namely, the critique of Utopian socialism. "They have no *ideals* to realize," cried Marx of the workers at the climactic moment of his address on the Paris Commune; rather, he insisted that we should grasp them at work uncovering and revealing the new forms of cooperative and collective social relationships that had already begun to emerge within the interstices of the capitalist mode of production. For Marx also, then, socialism is a matter of already existent tendencies within our world, rather than of empty visions of the future to be realized on some mode of an ethical imperative (a Kantian position into which, as is well known, the Second International tended to lapse).

MacIntyre's call for a return to the Aristotelian virtues can thus, as he is only too keenly aware, be subjected to the same objections he raises to Marxism as a political movement: namely, whether from within capital it is possible to regenerate a life of social groups, a concrete social fabric, which on his own account is inseparable from the practice of those virtues.

His response, paradoxically and even ironically (given the tone and stance of his book as a whole), entails a kind of enclave theory very consistent with the increasing preoccupation with small-group or micro-politics characteristic of the late 1960s and beyond. "Within the culture of bureaucratic individualism conceptions of the virtues become marginal and the tradition of the virtues remains central only in the lives of social groups whose existence is on the margins of the central culture" (*AV*, 209). Even to the rhetoric of "marginality," this is a rather astonishing statement to find in a

work whose thrust will generally be identified as conservative. It is, however, altogether logical in MacIntyre's framework, since he must be able to identify still surviving social groups approximating the *polis* sufficiently for their practice of the virtues to be concrete rather than projecting ideal and empty moral imperatives. The basic difference between MacIntyre's enclaves and those of 1960s radicalism lies not in the concept, but in the content of those enclaves themselves. Although ethnic and religious communities are noted (see *AV*, 234), it is significant that MacIntyre's central symbolic illustration is drawn from the work of the "last Aristotelian," namely, Jane Austen, in whose novels marriage comes to figure the last space of the older *polis*: "the restricted households of Highbury and Mansfield Park have to serve as surrogates for the Greek city-states and the medieval kingdom" (*AV*, 224).

The entire complex argument of *After Virtue* would have to be ignored or misread for us to see in this emblematic evocation of the hearth yet another symptom of bourgeois "privatization." That it is a symptom of depoliticization, however, is surely undeniable. The other argument mustered against historical materialism is not, indeed, the latter's empty Utopianism, but rather its increasing lack of any kind of Utopian politics: "as Marxists organize and move towards power they always do and have become Weberians in substance, even if they remain Marxists in rhetoric"—it is a telling reproach, but one that assumes that Marxism has in itself no further possibilities of development (*AV*, 103). But Marxism is here merely the marker for *all* contemporary political movements, a sign for the more general absence of any

tolerable alternative set of political and economic structures which could be brought into place to replace the structures of advanced capitalism. For I ... not only take it that Marxism is exhausted as a *political* tradition, a claim borne out by the almost indefinitely numerous and conflicting range of political allegiances which now carry Marxist banners—this does not at all imply that Marxism is not still one of the richest sources of ideas about modern society—but I believe that this exhaustion is shared by every other political tradition within our culture. (*AV*, 244)

It would be a mistake to think that such discouragement does not also characterize the Left today, with its flirtations with various post-Marxisms and its return to a whole variety of Utopian speculations (in this sense, the whole so-called crisis of Marxism is in reality a crisis of Leninism, and it is not a crisis in Marxian "science" but rather in Marxist "ideology," which has everywhere singularly abandoned any attempt to project politically and socially gripping visions of a radically different future).

Jane Austen aside, however, MacIntyre also turns out to be just as Utopian as the rest of us. For in his closing lines yet another vision of the

future is offered, one of a new dark age during which groups of people set about to construct

new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness ... This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict. (*AV*, 245)

To which one is tempted to add, however, that such a St. Benedict, who will undoubtedly have studied the first stammering premonition and prophecy of his role in an ancient text called *After Virtue*, will necessarily by that book be sent back to read Marx fully as much as Aristotle.

1983–84

Notes

- 1 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1981, 22. Future references to this work are denoted *AV*.
- 2 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984.

On Negt and Kluge

Nine years separate *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* and *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, the two collaborative works of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge.¹ What first strikes the “materialist” reader (the reader of physical books, rather than of “ideas”) is the evidence they exhibit of the typographic revolution that—along with the postmodern, the end of the 1960s, and the defeat of the Left—intervenes between them. The first of the two clearly suffers under the constraints of classical discursive form. Its six official chapters, which set out to establish a theory of the “proletarian” public sphere, find themselves forced against their will to produce instead the rudiments of a theory of the bourgeois public sphere. Here everything has already begun to flee into the footnotes and appendices: three “excurses” and some twenty separate “commentaries” now fill up a third of a five-hundred-page volume, into which already a few illustrations begin to emerge.

Elsewhere in the various theoretical zones of the “First World,” new ideologies of the heterogeneous and of Difference have begun to inspire “rhizomatic” notions of form: Deleuzian “plateaus” are being laid out side by side in separate and seemingly unrelated chapters, while the two stark columns of *Glas* dare you to figure out when to jump from one to the other. But even more definitively the discontinuities of Kluge’s stories and films bar any return to the traditional essay or treatise, closing the road with a landslide of rubble (“You can imagine the problem of antagonistic realism in terms of the analysis of the site of an explosion. The explosion scattered objects across a wide area. The force of the explosion, in other words, what really moved, is no longer present . . .” [*GE*, 348]). Benjamin’s “dialectical constellations” or montages—like Pound’s ideograms—seem genealogically to present a family likeness, although in these predecessors the “heap of images” still strongly hints at some *right* way of putting everything together. Yet Kluge’s own aesthetic (and that of *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, which is something of a theoretical film) is decidedly post-Benjaminian rather than post-Brechtian. And (despite Kluge’s long personal association with Adorno), the later volume finds its ancestors in Benjamin’s enormous and

fragmentary *Passagen-Werk*, or at least in what one imagines this last project might have become. Here, for example, is what Kluge says about one of his own films:

[It] does not produce statements but *proportions*; an *object* one can argue with. Our point of departure is the following observation: that there is no immediate form of sense experience, or at least no organized form, that can encompass the various individual areas of work and milieus of production. Only a spurious public sphere offers such order and unity, as in the media ... The question is: how does one proceed with a disordered reality, with mixed experiences? How does one learn in the middle of errors? How do we deal with distorted objective and subjective impressions ... ? You have to take on *reality as raw material* ... Our opinion is that the viewers can use this film to test their own concepts of what is public and what is realistic.²

The segmentation in Kluge's stories, however, is not merely perspectival and cinematographic (a fifteen-minute sequence of experience juxtaposed with a paragraph foreshortening eight years); it also projects qualitative leaps into incommensurable dimensions; this particular reading experience is prolonged in *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, where notes on Marx's "mode of production" (he dozed much of the day on the sofa, with people coming in and out, wrote nasty comments in the margins, strewed his papers with tobacco spots), disquisitions on *Blitzkrieg* and on the *Chanson de Roland*, illustrations drawn from evolutionary theory and the history of automata, anecdotes about Kant, quotes from the letters to Fliess, studies of domestic labor, the history of prices, the politics of the German romantics, on-the-spot readings of fairy tales, succeed each other unpredictably and compete with an extraordinary collection of hundreds of images drawn from medieval manuscripts, films, workers' newspapers, ads, graphs, scientific models, newsreel photographs, pictures of old furniture, science fiction illustrations, penmanship exercises, and the reconstruction of Roman roads or Renaissance battles. The various chapters, sections, paragraphs, notes, and digressions (themselves following a variety of numeration systems) are reclassified typographically, by means of alternate typefaces, frames and blocks, and, most dramatically, black pages with white type that interleaf the more "normal" experiments (sometimes, as with the alternation of color and black and white in the *Heimat* series by Kluge's former cameraman Edgar Reitz, one has the feeling that it is the shift that counts, and not any stable one-to-one correspondence between the content and the mode of representation: Proust already said as much about the alternation of the imperfect and preterit in Flaubert's tenses).

Authority is thus displaced and transformed; reading is still an exercise, a training, a socialization, and a pedagogy, but there is very little of the

terroristic or the disciplinary in this work, nor even the dialectical imperative of the older montage, where, as in Godard, one is still challenged to find or guess the proper standpoint. Here the gaps and leaps suggest an associative process different from our own, or at least trust suggests the existence of such an alternative somewhere that it might be interesting to try to approximate, if not to learn. Indeed, the emphasis on learning is here so ubiquitous that we are willing to entertain the possibility of some Utopian way of establishing relations between themes and exhibits which is not Negt and Kluge's private style or methodological property, but which remains to be invented.

Yet, as Negt and Kluge never tire of reminding us, the experience of production is distinct from and incommensurable with its instruments or its products: political economy, capital logic, deals with this last, but it is more difficult, and fraught with indirection, to seek, as here, to write a "political economy of labor power" (*GE*, 139). This also means that it will be structurally perverse to seek to convey anything about this book by means of the various "theories" it throws up in passing, as we shall have to do here, patiently turning back into a "system" what wanted to be a way of doing things, or even a habit, in some strong, positive sense. Thinking here (including "theory," which throughout this book means Marxism) is therapeutically reduced to a component of action, itself considered as a form of production—as we shall see shortly.

A similar qualification must be registered at this point about language, and in particular about our words for concepts, about which Negt and Kluge have taken some relatively uncanonical positions. One of the ways in which the story of modern thought can be told, indeed, is as an exploration of the consequences of a radical linguistic skepticism, in which Nietzsche's philological sophistication or the Sartrean attack on ordinary language in *Nausea* culminates paradoxically in a philosophical privileging of language in structuralism and poststructuralism that seals the diagnosis and confirms language itself (in forms that range from Western syntax to Kantian grids or discursive epistemes) as a new equivalent of ideology itself and as the source of all error. This formulation is, however, utterly misleading insofar as it implies the possibility of truth (that is to say, of getting outside of language itself). The problem of producing philosophical concepts under these circumstances slowly drifts into the problem of the status of a new "theoretical" language or discourse, about which all one can argue is that it must be radically provisional and must abolish itself in the process. Meanwhile, the equally influential discussions of essentialism and antiessentialism or anti-foundationalism would be better grasped as an indictment of the master linguistic codes rather than of "beliefs," about which no one is very clear whether or not they exist. Fulfilled or unfulfillable, however, the mission of philosophy today seems to be at one with the problem of ensuring the mortality of its language.

A related, yet inverted, impulse is at work in that tradition of German philosophical speculation which Jean Paulhan used to call the “proof by etymology,” the inspection of the roots and radicals of contemporary German for traces of some older and more primal mode of relating to being itself.³ The procedure is defended on the grounds of some more direct, unmixed, unmediated relationship to the tribal language than what survives in the Romance languages or English, for example, and it allows German philosophy to assert its claim to parity with Greece, where Socrates (or Plato) often argued in a similar way, transforming “folk etymology” into an avenue of philosophical reason (a more distant, but related analogy, is to be found in China, where the written character offers similar evidence of older, “truer” meanings). The misuse of such arguments in Heidegger will make their recurrence in the Left thinking of Negt and Kluge perplexing (thinking—*begreifen*—as related to *greifen*, grasping or gripping in the production process [*OE*, 20–22]), until it is understood that it is not “nature,” or “being” to which they appeal, but rather to what Marx called the *naturwüchsig*, or in other words the significantly different structure of earlier, simpler social formations. On the other hand, this “method” need have nothing of the religious solemnity of Heidegger’s stylistic rituals:

In Kluge’s segment of *Deutschland im Herbst*, we already saw Gabi Teichert digging with a spade for German history. These scenes have been transferred to *Die Patriotin*, where digging for the German past and for German history has become the central metaphor. The figurative language of “digging for the treasures of the past” is taken by Kluge absolutely literally, rendering it visually in the concrete image of a physical excavation of the frozen earth. What results is a kind of surrealistic image-pun in the tradition of Buñuel or Karl Valentin, which has the effect of distancing the viewer, who is then brought to observe the eccentric activities of Gabi Teichert less with empathy than with critical skepticism. So also when she translates the knowledge contained in fat historical tomes into sense perception and in that spirit “works on” old folios, something also “literally” illustrated: she dissects the history books with saws, drills, and hammers, and dissolves their pages in orange juice in order to choke them down. She then thus “bores her way into history,” “assimilates history into herself,” etc.—all unrealistic dream images which are grounded on linguistic figures. As she participates in illegal excavations of the old city wall as a part-time archeologist, she hopes to “grasp” [*be-greifen*] the past in the form of the prehistoric utensils, that is to say, to be able to “take hold” of it and to “understand” it all at once.⁴

About such “efforts” to restore the purity of philosophical language, however, whether by way of fresh intervention or linguistic archeology, two further things now need to be observed. Whatever the crisis of philosophical discourse owes to the metaphysical or ontological doubtfulness of language itself, that crisis can also be read in socioeconomic terms as a local result of

intensified commodification, by which abstract philosophical terms (now seen as something like the private property or brand names of their producers) enter the force field of commodity reification, where their increasingly rapid transformation into cultural objects and images equally rapidly undermines the philosophical legitimacy of these terms (along with that of philosophy itself). This is also what is meant when philosophical concepts are described as “outmoded” or “old-fashioned” (a response which would have sounded very strange indeed in traditional philosophy); this seems to be what Paul de Man had in mind when he reflected on the “thematization” which was the fate of philosophical themes and concepts in modern times.

Other solutions remain possible, however, in the contemporary proliferation of ephemeral or provisional theoretical codes and discourses, solutions which do not (in some outmoded or old-fashioned way) propose either the invention of truer codes and discourses or the return to purer ones. Such is, for example, the notion of “transcoding” as a contemporary alternative to traditional philosophical critique. What is implied here is that the various “master terms” or “master codes” govern and name distinct, often contiguous and overlapping zones of the real, such that a systematic alternation between them or comparison of their signifying capacities results not in the emergence of any new linguistic or terminological synthesis, but in a kind of mapping out of the raw materials in which the real consists (Hjemslev’s linguistic “substance”). The process is analogous to the problem of translation in the realm of natural languages, which all project at least minimally distinct cognates of the meaning a translated sentence is supposed to share with its original. What is philosophical about translation is, then, not the effort to reproduce a foreign utterance as the *same*, but rather the deeper experience it affords of the radical differences between natural languages.

Transcoding imposes itself at once with Negt and Kluge’s first book, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (1972), whose title can only be imperfectly translated as *The Public Sphere and Experience*. The motivation for the English equivalent is clear enough, insofar as the substantive *publicity* has already long since been captured by a specialized segment of that larger public domain the German *Öffentlichkeit* renders; while the notion of a “sphere” or “zone”—transferable to other dimensions of social life, such as culture—generates interesting theoretical problems in its own right (which the term would not do in German). Meanwhile, the topic itself can be said in some sense to “belong” to Jürgen Habermas, whose first book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962) offers a history of the emergence of the institutions of the early bourgeois media, including their philosophical and juridical theorization, from a perspective that will remain constant throughout Habermas’s work: namely, that the values of the bourgeois revolutionary period remain universal, so that it would be improper to analyze these

values in terms of the functional ideology of a specific social class. The palpable limits and failures of those values are, therefore, for Habermas not internal or structural, but rather the result of the historical blocking of the bourgeois revolutionary process that has remained incomplete and unrealized. This perspective is not shared by Negt and Kluge, for whom the tendential monopoly of the public sphere in modern times is very intimately related to the class function of the bourgeois concept of the public and to the nature of the institutions that emerged from it. They thus propose and support a radically different type of collective openness and communication, which they call “the proletarian public sphere.”⁵

Transcoding means, however, something more than mere translation. To appreciate the former’s significance, we need to return to the second term of Negt and Kluge’s title, *Erfahrung*, or “experience,” in order to measure the deeper implicit claim that the concept of the “public sphere” governs a far greater area of social life than it does in Habermas. In his early work Habermas tends to reduce the public sphere to the relatively specialized institutions of the nascent media (newspapers, public opinion, “representative” or parliamentary debate, and so forth); his later philosophical development (speech acts, communicative action) makes it clear that he is as suspicious of such phenomenological concepts as experience as anyone on the other side of the Rhine. Negt and Kluge can, therefore, be aligned with anti-structuralist defenses of the notion of experience that range from E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams to Sartre, but with some unexpected differences and modifications, as will become clear when we examine the prolongation of this idea and value in their later work.

What is significant about Negt and Kluge’s extension of the notion of the public sphere, however, is that, while continuing to include the institutional referents of Habermas’s history (in their contemporary forms, such as television), they seek to widen the notion in such a way as to secure its constitutive relationship to the very possibility of social or individual experience in general. The structure of the “public sphere” is now seen as what enables experience or, on the other hand, what limits and cripples it. This structure also determines that fundamental modern pathology whereby “experience” itself is sundered, its unevenly divided halves assigned to stereotypical public expressions, on the one hand, and, on the other, to that zone of the personal and the private which seems to offer shelter from the public and the political at the same time that it is itself a social fact produced by the public and political. At once, therefore, *Öffentlichkeit* becomes something like a “named concept,” in competition with a host of other concepts that range from Freud’s “talking cure” to the very notion and language of “democracy” itself, in its political as well as its social forms. (“Work-place democracy,” for example, now constitutes a central and ineradicable space of the “proletarian public sphere,” and the political stake in transcoding can

now be measured by way of a comparison between the relative weight of the political rhetoric of “democracy” and that of the new discursive space of *Öffentlichkeit*.)

The originality of Negt and Kluge, therefore, lies in the way in which the hitherto critical and analytic force of what is widely known as “discourse analysis” (as in Foucault’s descriptions of the restrictions and exclusions at work in a range of so-called discursive formations) is now augmented, not to say completed, by the Utopian effort to produce a discursive space of a new type. But this redramatizes the philosophical problem of the creation of a new language or terminology in a way that relates it to the very issue of the public sphere itself: for there are social and historical reasons why a new and more adequate philosophical language—which is to say a new *public* language—is lacking. The forms and experiences to which such a language corresponds do not yet exist. The very absence of a proletarian public sphere problematizes the attempt to name it, except in the gaps in our present discourse. This holds true especially for the conception of “work” and of “production” which Negt and Kluge attempt to produce in *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, and which they also describe as a “political economy of labor power [*Arbeitsvermögen*]” (*GE*, 136–143). But even in Marxism these words designate a restricted or specialized zone of human activity: work, labor, or production exist only insofar as they can be “realized” as such (as in “the reproduction of the worker’s labor power”). In the first pages of *Capital* the inaugural separation of use from exchange *value* (and the subsequent use of this term to designate only this last) means that Marx will write a political economy of labor, a capitalogic, and not the anatomy of its demiurgic underside, the anthropology of human productive power attempted here. *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* was in that sense a failure: we set out, Negt and Kluge tell us, to project a proletarian public sphere and found ourselves reduced to writing a critique of the limits of the bourgeois public sphere. *Öffentlichkeit* will, however, return in the later work in the climactic concept of a historically new “commercial-industrial public sphere” (*Produktionsöffentlichkeit*) which is identified with history itself.

The second book, therefore, partially transcends the older one: but it produces a more fundamental discursive challenge to current *doxa*, not merely in its ongoing commitment to the category of experience (including the anthropological dimension of the description of a whole range of bodily, psychological, and cultural “capacities”), but above all in its most unseasonable foregrounding of the category of production itself (which the authors understand in a very different way from fashionable and metaphorical, often cultural, uses of this term in the Althusserian and post-Althusserian period). Is a concept of production absolutized in this way and extended to all of human activity still a “productionist” one in the bad sense? The judgment will be more adequately made, however, on the basis of the success

of the language experiment itself, and on the capacity of a language of production to articulate a wide range of materials normally governed by other languages or codes, most notably the psychoanalytic realm, the area of desire, fantasy, the intimate, the unconscious, but also that very different order of realities which we call history, or historical events (here most specifically German history). We are familiar with cognate experiments in the first of these areas in Deleuze and Guattari (occasionally referred to in these pages). The second area would seem to stand in some conflict with what we have termed the anthropological dimension of this work, in the sense in which philosophical anthropologies (particularly where they posit “aggressivity” or a “will to power” as a component of human nature, as in sociobiology) generally involve an implicit commitment to positivities, thereby setting the violence and the catastrophes of history beyond their reach.

The problem of history is, to be sure, registered in the title of Negt and Kluge’s second work, but not yet the concept of production (nor even that of labor power), which is oddly and substitutively “represented” by the untranslatable word *Eigensinn*. Miriam Hansen has rendered this term in English as “obstinacy,” but also as “autonomy”; Andrew Bowie meanwhile renders it as “willful meaning.”⁶ I will add my own suggestion: “self-will,” which restores the component of ownness or primal property and balances the (perfectly correct) insistence on the arbitrary and the stubborn with the coexisting connotation of an immanent logic, a drive or impulse remaining faithful to itself and pursuing its own autonomous line of force, its own specific trajectory, which is then also, as in Bowie’s reading of the term, its meaning. I gloss the term this way to remove the henceforth misleading overtones of the word “self” in my version. Not that there is no question of “identity” in this work, but that identity—collective or individual—is to be achieved in the future: the self, if you like, of Marx’s *Gesamtarbeiter*, or collective worker, and not of any current or former notion of the construction of the subject (such as the Freudian structure, where, Negt and Kluge suggest, the psychic functions operate in the manner of bourgeois parliamentary representation [*GE*, 382]). It is not, therefore, some primal “self” that has *Eigensinn*, but rather a whole range of historically acquired and developed skills, drives, capacities, each of which makes its own “stubborn” demands and has its own distinct “meaning.” Such forces, however, can be residual or emergent; they often fail to be used to capacity; and their unemployment generates specific pathologies, as does their repression, alienation, or diversion. What also generates social pathology is their multiplicity, which is to say the permanent possibility for contradiction or for a harmful coordination among them. This is, for example, what explains the circumstance (so often dramatized for us by Kluge’s fables) in which a “capacity,” which is a splendid natural force in its own right, may, in the historical

accident of combination with other equally valuable forces, have deathly or indeed deadly effects.

What is implicit in this first appeal to some deeper, more meaningful logic—if not of the human instincts, then at least of the socially and historically constructed human drives and powers—is a repudiation of vanguard Left politics. This is explicit in both of Negt and Kluge’s books. *Eigensinn*, or labor power, labor capacity, becomes something like Gramscian “good sense,” which is inherent in the collectivity and scarcely requires the supplement of intellectual or vanguard political stimulus. That this “good sense” may often seem to require supplement, however, is the effect of a deeper natural conservatism in the human organization, related to the requirements of shelter, protection, and subsistence. A number of pages in both books, indeed, systematically analyze historical crises in the labor movement from this perspective, and such analyses are clearly crucial to Negt and Kluge’s project, which could still, in 1972, appeal to conceptions of cultural revolution, but which in 1981 speaks from a situation of Left discouragement and pessimism. Negt and Kluge nevertheless assert a longer, geological or evolutionary type of hope, a hope which retains from cultural revolution its pedagogical impulse and its drive toward self-formation and self-reconstruction.

Geschichte und Eigensinn is organized around three enormous subsections: “The Historical Organization of Labor Capacity”; “Germany as a Commercial-Industrial Public Sphere [*Produktionsöffentlichkeit*]”; “The Power of Relationship (or Relationality) [*Gewalt des Zusammenhang*].” It will be misleading, but indispensable, to describe these sections as follows: the first sets in place the elements of what I have called Negt and Kluge’s “anthropology,” namely their “political economy of labor power”—something which involves not only the labor process, but evolutionary materials and an interest in the coexistence of a variety of temporal rhythms and cycles (individual, historical, and biological). The second section then attempts to confront the “peculiarities” of German history by way of these new production categories: its formal problem lies, therefore, in the conceptual gap between the language of historical events and a conception of production whose scale and focus is clearly very different from historiography and often felt to be incommensurable with it. The final section—which also includes a disquisition on war as a kind of production, and a lengthy engagement with existential experience and psychoanalytic materials—can best be grasped as the attempt to produce a new active ethical and political value which is also a working analytical concept, namely that of relationship or relationality itself. Theoretical positions emerge in each of these lengthy sections, and I will try to convey some of them, though these positions are not “argued,” as the philosophers might put it, and the form of presentation is no longer that of the philosophical treatise or discursive essay. Rather, we

might describe the book as a kind of conceptual film (if by “film” we have in mind one of Kluge’s own).

The crucial mediating concept in the introductory “anthropological” section—which must be abstract enough to function for a variety of different kinds of materials, but also contain within itself the force of an event (trauma, change, scar, transformation, an irrevocable modification that also generates new future possibilities)—is the still-classical Marxian notion of *Trennung*—separation, division; in Marx, above all, the historical “separation” of the producer from the means of production (as well as from the produced object and from production itself as my own activity). This is for Marx, of course, the central structural feature of the historical catastrophe at the very origin of capitalism, namely so-called “primitive accumulation.” There is, therefore, already in Marx a mediation between a form of production and a historical event. Negt and Kluge will now project this event—primitive accumulation—along with its structural concept—*Trennung*, division and separation—into a more general historical and philosophical one, which designates all the catastrophes of history, most crucially at its beginning and in the destruction of traditional agricultural and communal societies. The concept of separation then becomes available for other kinds of materials: in the traditional Marxist literature, for the division of labor, for the separation between manual and intellectual labor, for the fragmentation of the psyche into distinct “faculties,” and finally for the notion of reification itself (in Lukács, primarily a matter of the “Taylorization” of social life). Here in Negt and Kluge the primary emphasis seems to lie on the separation of the various work powers or capacities from one another, with results that will be clear later on.

It will be objected that such a concept implicitly or explicitly tends to valorize the phenomenon of “unification” on which it necessarily depends. That may be so—and their vision of communal life on the land would certainly seem to provide evidence of historical nostalgia—but Negt and Kluge explicitly repudiate conceptions of the dialectic that aim at restoring some primal unity (“what kind of reality would the reappropriation of something lost have?” [*GE*, 42–44]). Far from perpetuating the longing for reunification, therefore, the fact and the concept of *Trennung* will have the very different effect of generating relationality as such, the ceaseless establishment of new connections and relationships. This, too, has its formal analogy in Marx, in the emergence, from the historical catastrophe of industrial wage labor, of the historically new value and social relationship he calls *cooperation* (*GE*, 192, and see below).

The other concept that emerges from this enlarged and generalized notion of “primitive accumulation” turns on what is thereby accumulated: in this “political economy of labor power” that will be precisely “dead labor,” stored labor, the human labor of the past—a mysterious capital of

human productive activity most dramatically associated in Marx with machinery and industrialization, in which there is a sudden quantum leap in the amassing of the labor time that had characterized previous human history. In its larger deployment here in Negt and Kluge, “dead labor” means tradition generally, cultural capital *and* habitus all together (to use Bourdieu’s terminology), and very much includes the reproduction of acquired characteristics, of archaic character structures, and the historical levels of the psyche. Dead labor is, however, for Negt and Kluge, a baleful concept, which can account for the violences of history and its seemingly cyclical, irrepressible disasters (and which thereby avoids the ideological and anthropological temptation to posit negative forces within “human nature,” such as aggressivity and a will to power).⁷ In this negative inflection of the notion of stored labor they approach the Sartrean idea of the “practico-inert” (developed in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), where human praxis, successfully invested in the transformation of the object world, then “magically” returns upon human beings with an autonomous power of its own, as destructive fate and the now incomprehensible and antihuman “counter-finality” of a history beyond all human control. Any comparison between these two cognate philosophical projections needs to register the difference in emphasis between Sartre’s central category of praxis—as realized human activity of any type—and Negt and Kluge’s notion of labor power or capacity, which stresses potentiality and the subterranean formation and exercise of a variety of capabilities. Sartre’s vision of counter-finality is thereby incomparably more dramatic and vivid than Negt and Kluge’s, but also relatively monolithic, subsuming a whole range of historical disruptions beneath the single named concept. In Negt and Kluge, however, dead labor can have a variety of distinct historical results: in German history, the ur-trauma of the peasant wars, but also the initial disintegration of communal production at the dawn of feudalism, and the great “lost opportunity” of the anti-Napoleonic war of national liberation of 1811.

But the assessment of these historical events involves a reading of the Marxian “modes of production” which must first be put in place. Characteristically, the attention that Negt and Kluge give to the various modes of production will be directed by their interest in the specific capacities and forms of labor power developed in each. Their first schema, then, isolates three different moments of production: agriculture, handicraft, and industrial work (*GE*, 165–210). To specify these as distinct kinds of labor (as well as different historical dominants or moments of social development) is to begin to imagine how capabilities needed and developed in one form might undergo a kind of sedimentation in the succeeding one, leaving traces and scars in layers on subjectivity and the body, on experience, and in history itself. Like a swimmer’s muscles, mobilized during wartime for the digging of trenches, and then used in the postwar era to make a living in circus

acrobatics, historically developed capabilities persist, unused, misused, or readapted, occasionally interfering with each other or symptomatically marking and deforming the gestures current in some new kind of daily life.

Labor on the land is clearly for Negt and Kluge the “natural” form of human social life; or rather (since propositions of this type are alien to their work), it is the oldest form—the foundation, but also the starting point—of the European, and specifically the German, social formation:

We can only measure the comprehensive potentialities of field work by way of their modern transformations. Since all producers today derive, via their ancestors, from the peasant class, there is something like a “peasant in me.” This component of contemporary labor capacity—in a certain respect the latter’s foundation—reveals itself (and reveals itself today, as distinct from its *historical* representations) as *versatile* [*wendig*], working in a *noncompartmentalized* way, developing more concrete visions and intimations of *collective life* than the other, later modes. The subtle component of properly *intellectual* activity follows the logic of a *peasant* or *gardening* mode of production. Labor capacity that aims at emancipatory processes or economic consciousness must necessarily deploy some vision of original property that stems from the history of agriculture. The idea of the “natural” qualities of a product and the development of human measures of time and temporality also derive from that source. In contrast, actual agricultural work in this country today is a subset of the industrial process. (*GE*, 174)

The observation will be misused or misunderstood if it is taken to be the development of a conservative or nostalgic ideological vision of the past. It poses, rather, an empirical question about the actually existing Utopian imagination and, thereby, about the possibility of the development of a political vision of change and action. What is asserted here and throughout is that *Eigentum* designates something more fundamental and necessary than property (the literal meaning of the word) in the juridical sense of forms of private property that come into being historically and can also be abolished. *Eigentum*—now in the more etymological sense of ownness, what belongs to me or us, what informs *Eigensinn*—is not a matter of possession, but of place and space and of our relationship to what Marx called “the body of the earth.” The consequence is that for Negt and Kluge the vision of a purely urban Utopia is impossible.⁸ The Utopian imagination will always have to come to terms in one way or another with the demands of this oldest layer of consciousness or labor capacity. What must then be stressed is not merely that this is also an urgent political issue—for there can be no development of any genuine political movement or praxis without a vision of the future and of radical change—but also that, in the postmodern era, characterized by the atrophy of the historical imagination in general and of the capacity to project the future in particular, the analysis of the way in which the Utopian imagination functions is very much on the agenda.

In contrast, Negt and Kluge's devaluation of handicraft is to be read against a situation in which intellectuals are as a rule strongly drawn to this mode, which seems to offer an idealization of their own professional activities and of writing and cultural production in general⁹ (the authors' more comprehensive discussion of the derivation of the work of intellectuals from more general productive capacities is to be found in the chapter entitled "On certain striking evasions in the functioning of intelligence," [GE, 415–488]). Handicraft can then be seen to project values of *métier* and craftsmanship whose darker side is less often stressed: not merely the extension of labor to non-natural products, nor even the tendential "liberation" from time and space, from the earth and from the seasons, but above all some historically new principle of competition which arises from the work of small producers,

each of whom finds his point of honor in the effort to distinguish his activity from that of everyone else. This principle of competition determines a general expansion of production ... Such tendential expansion is deeply embedded in handicraft, even to the point of self-destruction. The guilds then necessarily try to correct this impulse by a limitation on products and a restriction on the choice of possible trades or callings. (GE, 175)

The very values of craftsmanship itself, then, lead dialectically to competition and to a limitless drive to overproduce commodities, which foreshadows the market system itself and its structure and rhythms.

The craftsman must work at two kinds of things at once: (1) his product and (2) the conviction in his client ... that *his* product is indispensable and *uniquely* useful. This is a conviction the field worker does not particularly need to arouse. But what happens in handicraft labor is that, where painstaking effort is not visible, where the *métier* does not self-consciously make its presence felt, the activity ceases to be thought of as a matter of craftsmanship and stops being a viable profession. Professional honor must be present in the thing, like a payment for it—some first payment, which includes the recognition of its style and specificity, only then to be followed by the second one, in cash. (GE, 176)

Professional jealousies, pride, competition, as well as the limitless dynamic of sheer commodity accumulation are therefore already implicit in this mode as the vices inherent in its virtues.

The industrial mode, and the nature of industrial labor, needs less attention since it has been so carefully examined from Marx himself on down. In a very different spirit from Negt and Kluge, the essentially urban perspective of Sartre often led him to celebrate the anti- and postnatural consciousness generated by work with machinery—an insistence that is clearly an essential feature of any consequent "workerism" or "workerist"

ideology. The specific forms of the alienation of factory work—and in particular its specific divisions, or *Trennungen*—are more vividly reflected in contemporary theory, particularly in Harry Braverman's fundamental analysis of Taylorism and its effects. This kind of analysis, whose relevance for culture and intellectual work has not been lost on contemporary theory, is not particularly stressed by Negt and Kluge, even though they include a striking description of a subsegment of production in a steel mill (*GE*, 202–207). The unique and historically new capacity developed by factory work is, however, cooperation; and the emergence of this new form of labor capacity will then allow Negt and Kluge to stage the final section of their book in terms of the relationality that now issues from it.

Modes of production are, however, generally discussed and debated more historically, in terms of various formations: feudalism, capitalism, the Asiatic mode, and so forth. In order to understand how the preceding discussion can be related to that type of historical category, and also in order to grasp how war can sometimes stand as a grisly caricature of cooperative labor on a national scale, we must now (to borrow one of Negt and Kluge's favorite expressions) pass through the "needle's eye" of German history.

This history has the same starting point as those we have encountered previously, namely the primacy of peasant experience and of the specific capacities developed through labor on the land. Meanwhile, the German experience is determined by the spatial situation of central Europe, which offers all the peculiarities of a land-based and land-locked collectivity. If the word *experience* means anything, however, it designates not merely the kinds of problems and dilemmas or crises confronted, but also what is learned from those repetitive solutions, and what is transmitted in the form of habit and pedagogy. But where are we to find the traces of such experience and the codification of these collective learning processes?

In fairy tales, which are not merely the repository of peasant Utopian wishes ("those who don't believe in fairy tales were never in distress" [*GE*, 619, n. 48]), but also preserve the most characteristic collective experiences of danger or menace, along with the age-old solutions devised to ward them off. In Germany, fairy tales are thus a collective testimony equivalent to, but significantly different from, the myths and sea-based epic legends of the Mediterranean classical world, to which it is instructive to compare them. For the activities, the skills, strengths, and capacities celebrated, preserved, and transmitted by the Greek stories—those well-known "virtues" of shrewdness and cunning, resourcefulness and wiliness, of which Odysseus is the prototype—are the professional attributes of a world of commerce and trade, of merchant ruse and imperial diplomacy—shipboard attributes, augmented by ultimate recourse to the sea, to sailborne flight or the return, at night, with muffled oars. For a peasantry, however, such narratives are problematic and unserviceable: unlike the great ships, "house,

farmyard, and field cannot evade their dangers” (*GE*, 752). Meanwhile, for a peasant storytelling, for which “the dimension of production (or its impoverishment) is the determinant moment,” tales of exploration and maritime adventure may look rather different and find their perspectives inverted.¹⁰ So it is, for example, that the protagonists of the Argonaut myth are, from the Greek standpoint, Jason and his crew, a focus which relegates the peasant experience—the landed population of Colchis—to the position of the Other: they are here the prize and the object of exploitation, the story is not told for them. This radical reversal of a peasant perspective is most evident in the inhumanity and monstrousness with which the figure of Medea herself emerges, a figure who, from the indigenous point of view (compare the roles of Malinche or Pocahantas in the New World), takes on the attributes of the patriot and the guerrilla, of Judith and of the struggles of wars of national liberation. From this perspective the Argonauts are not mere adventurers. Their function is to bring exchange and the market, to spell the doom of the older agricultural and communal system:

various episodes taken together make up the equivalent of what is, for *production*, the separation of labor power from the land and from the commune, namely primitive accumulation. From the perspective of goods distribution or the exchange relationship, there emerges an analogous mark of forced learning, of the introjection by violence. (*GE*, 747)

Within the peasant environment, therefore, and specifically within the world of the German fairy tale, this violence of commerce, this forcible “opening” and threat from without, will be registered in very different narrative forms and will demand the development of very different kinds of essentially defensive skills. In “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids,” a premium is placed on powers of discrimination or judgment:

What the enemy is is no longer clear. It becomes exceedingly difficult to decide whether the flour-covered paw of the wolf or the high-pitched voice belong to the mother, or whether the mother (end or means) may not actually have a pelt covered with flour or a high-pitched voice, and so forth. The mind is thus directed, not toward adventure as such, but rather toward a more decisive question: How can I distinguish the enemy exactly, where are the boundaries between the inside and the outside, between safe and unsafe? All German myths, as testimony of historical experience, take as their content the question about the How of wishes, and tell the story of this central uncertainty: How can we know about the outside from within the inside? ... This also shows *how difficult it was, on the basis of the German relationship to history, to ascertain what was being let inside with Hitler.* (*GE*, 754–755)

The originality of these analyses of Negt and Kluge, which prolong Benjamin's thoughts on collective narrative in *The Storyteller* in new and unforeseeable ways, consists in a hermeneutic which, although registering the function of the tale to reflect the collective situation in a twofold positive and negative way (it both incorporates Utopian hope and inscribes historical catastrophe), now strikes out in a third interpretive path, rereading the text as collective pedagogy, as the transmission not merely of experience, but also of collective vocational training. The instinctive recall of Brecht, which occurs whenever the pedagogical function of literature is invoked in the contemporary period, should not be allowed to distract us from some basic differences in emphasis. The content of Brecht's pedagogy is very different from Negt and Kluge's insistence on the learning of skills and capacities. Brecht's reading of the texts of the past most often stresses bad pedagogy, in the spirit of negative ideological critique (see the splendid sonnets on *Hamlet* and on Kleist). This is not to say that for Negt and Kluge a lesson, even well learned, cannot be without mixed consequences:

The prototypical fairy tale that tries to rework this historical experience [an ideal dream of happiness finds no encouragement in the social facts themselves] in a way propitious for wish fulfillment is "Sleeping Beauty": an evil witch—a witch in any case evil out of disappointment and therefore not merely evil, but also, in some sense, a comrade—has cast princess and castle, including all its inhabitants and workers, in a magic sleep. Impenetrable hedges now surround it. But at the very outset a good witch has also sworn an oath, etc., etc. The main thing is simply to have the patience to endure the thousand-year rhythm in which change takes place. So when it turns out that the prince looks like Bismarck, Hindenburg, Hitler, or Adenauer, it isn't out of stupidity that you make a mistake and believe in the awakening kiss, nor out of lack of experience (some of the princes are obviously very old, others come from distant peripheral areas of the Reich and are very unaristocratic), but rather out of the urgent need to give objective expression (however improbably) to the ongoing immemorial work of wish fulfillment. It must somehow be applied, and applicable. Even if those who pretend to be princes are false a hundred times over. (*GE*, 619, n. 48)

This first strand of analysis of the German situation, therefore—a kind of cultural investigation—retains the significance of the peasant world, whose endemic crises and dangers it confronts with the specific habitus of labor capacity developed in peasant life, which is evidently not altogether equal to the task of overcoming the former.

The same story is then told again, with reference to the various historical modes of production—and in particular in terms of the crisis of feudalism—in a more concrete way, in which historical events and catastrophes now make their formal appearance. Indeed, Negt and Kluge develop a provocative analysis of feudalism (*GE*, 559–565), in which they suggest

that what gives other national situations and histories their productive dynamism—their capacity not merely to “evolve” into capitalism, but especially to generate active political movements of all kinds—is the essentially impure or mixed nature of the feudalisms implanted there. The various feudalisms of Italy, France, and England are never indigenous or autochthonous, but the result of various kinds of foreign intervention: in Italy, the German emperors; in France, the Franks; in England, the Normans. These importations mark the new socioeconomic system in such a way that its own specific internal contradictions cannot take deep root, and it becomes susceptible to radical historical modification and change. But Negt and Kluge follow Marx—in that section of the *Grundrisse* often renamed “precapitalist modes of production”—in seeing feudalism as a dialectical, but nonetheless organic, outgrowth of the communal structure of the German tribes. Feudalism is thereby at home in Germany in a very different way from the Western histories, with the consequence that “the capitalistic principle found no original introjection [*originäre Verinnerlichung*] in our country” (*GE*, 893):

The basic rule is this: where a social formation *originates*, it continues to bear all its contradictions and the radicality (*die Gründlichkeit*) of its emergence within itself. It therefore does not develop systematically into its fullest form, since those very contradictions and radicalities by definition tear apart its absolute principle. In this sense no original prototype, but rather the feudal structure that William the Conqueror and his barons brought with them to England, stands as the most perfect realization of a classic feudal constitution. (*GE*, 562–563)

Replaced within the current “modes of production” debate, the analogy might well be the history of the capitalist mode, whose “indigenous” form in England remained notoriously unaccompanied by any “pure” political development of a triumphant bourgeoisie and a middle-class state (as in France).

However one judges this new theory of “transition,” it will have in Negt and Kluge two different lines of consequence. One has to do with what is often called national character:

In the German configuration of the feudalism/capitalism form, the principle of abstraction [for Negt and Kluge, as for the Marxist tradition generally and Adorno in particular, a more general description of the essentially abstract “logic of capital”] appears as that of uncertainty in the application of power; by the same token, its specific principle of production can be described as an ideal of completeness and thoroughness [*Gründlichkeit*]. (*GE*, 564)

We will return to this habitus, which combines arbitrariness with a compulsive work ethic, shortly.

The other, historical, result of the contradictions in German feudalism is an event: the catastrophe of the peasant wars, the ur-trauma of German history and one of those “resolutions” of class struggle about which Marx was probably thinking when, in the *Manifesto*, he evoked, as an alternate outcome to the “revolutionary reconstitution of society at large,” the possibility of “the common ruin of the contending classes.”¹¹ For this common ruin is very specifically what the peasant wars achieve:

The peasant wars end with the political victory of a coalition made up of city burghers and feudal lords, but from an economic perspective all three of the classes involved in the struggle—peasants, lords, cities—all know defeat. In the future no one of the three classes will ever be able to establish its independent political dominion. Economic and political determinants drift apart. (*GE*, 556)

Negt and Kluge stress the cultural consequences of the catastrophe; and it is logical, in the light of their valorization of the land and of peasant labor, that they should isolate as a supreme symptom the way in which peasant culture is stigmatized and repressed in Germany in the succeeding centuries, giving rise to an artificial culture based on what Bourdieu calls “distinction.” Even the emergent middle classes now want to be “refined,” have manners, transcend the body, and acquire “culture” and “taste” in their new ideological senses. Another fairy tale, “The Three Brothers,” which shows the absurdity of a competition for arbitrary new skills when the upshot will be to live all together in the old home after all, is in this respect cautionary. It dramatizes

the distance that now divides collective life, the simple house on simple soil, from “simple” activity. Simplicity is not so easy to achieve. One’s own soil and collective life correspond rather to a complex psychic structure and remain the high point and the prize towards which all labor power strives. On the human or individual scale, such values then become ever more distant and difficult to realize, and for that reason you have to work ever harder and take more pains. This is very precisely the developmental path of the introversion of labor capacity in Germany. (*GE*, 632)

This is then the point at which the tendential repudiation of peasant culture, the radical turning away from peasant “labor capacity,” and the repression of the “peasant in me,” dialectically generate the German form of that principle of abstraction which has been mentioned above (and which is for Negt and Kluge a virtual *thanatos* or death drive within capitalism as well as German history). The stress is not on the features of some national identity or national character (which then in the pluralism of human cultures and collective identities takes its rather unique and grisly place), but rather on the failure of national identity, and on what they call “national loss” (*Nationalverlust*, *GE*, 538), seen not in terms of a collective psychology, but

as a subset of a general loss in reality itself (see below). There emerges here a specific form of German “inflexibility” that ranges across a host of historical and cultural embodiments, as well as of a variety of linguistic expressions: from the work ethic of painstaking thoroughness (*sich Mühe geben*, *Gründlichkeit*, see above) to the terrible righteousness of Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas (and of Luther and Kant), and, beyond, to the inexorability (*Unerbittlichkeit*) of last-ditch obedience to the state in the last weeks of World War II, or the implacable strategy of the Baader-Meinhof Red Army Fraction in the mid-1970s: *Fiat justitia pereat mundus!* (“Let justice prevail even though the world itself should go under”):

Even if civil society were to dissolve itself with the consent of all its members (for example, if a people who inhabited an island decided to separate and to disperse to other parts of the world), the last murderer in prison would first have to be executed in order that each should receive his deserts and that the people should not bear the guilt of a capital crime through failing to insist on its punishment . . . “It is better that one man should die than that the whole people should go to ruin.” For if justice perishes, there is no further point in men living on earth.¹²

These chilling words of Kant are more deeply and figurally inscribed at the very center of *Geschichte und Eigensinn* in the form of the shortest and most dreadful of all the Grimm fairy tales, “The Willful Child” (*Das eigensinnige Kind*), whose obstinacy, first expressed in disobedience and then in a kind of psychosomatic illness, persists after death (a hand stubbornly emerging from the grave) and must be chastised posthumously by the mother before rest is found. In the German history section, then, the enigmatic *Eigensinn* of Negt and Kluge’s title (interpreted philosophically in our various translations above) now takes on an ironic literalness, not only by formally posing the question of the relationship between history and inflexible self-will in Germany itself, but also by raising issues of the current relationship to the past and the dead in Germany, and in particular the much-discussed question of the “work of mourning” (Freud’s expression, *Trauerarbeit*) needed to exorcise that past (rather than to repress it). For this particular fairy tale, however, the Greek equivalent comes as a rebuke: for the stubbornness of Antigone is a heroic form of political resistance with a social and collective resonance utterly lacking in the German story (*GE*, 765–769). Antigone’s *Eigensinn* remains, to be sure, deadly, but it is a deathly outcome which, as Hegel showed us, is now consecrated as tragedy, which is to say, as contradiction and as the unavoidable blocking of historical development. It has none of the shame that oddly clings to the Grimm tale, where the child seems pathological, but even the mother (in Negt and Kluge, a nurturing, sheltering figure associated with the primal commune) becomes strangely ambivalent and repulsive as she shatters the child’s dead arm with her rod.

What must now, in conclusion, be shown is the way in which in the third section of this book, relationship, relationality as such (*Zusammenhang*), affords a diagnosis of such symptoms, and even a prescription for their transcendence. What must now most urgently be related are those realms which are conventionally dissociated as the public and the private; the political and the psychic; the realm of the socioeconomic, with its language of production, and that of the psychoanalytic, with its language of desire and fantasy. This act of relating will be, as a whole range of currents in contemporary thought testifies, a punctual and discontinuous one, a provisional exchange of energies, a spark struck across boundaries of separation. The older systematic attempts at a formal Freudo-Marxian synthesis, in which Freud's findings were somehow built into Marx to form some new total system, are not replicated here. What underlies the provisionality of the new "relational" approaches is no doubt the feeling that dimensions which are objectively sundered in our social order cannot finally be reassembled and put back together by an effort of pure thought.

Here, too, in one sense, Negt and Kluge prolong and correct Habermas, whose "synthesis" of Marx and Piaget aimed to substitute a cognitive evolution for the discontinuous violence of social revolution.¹³ In Habermas, issues of desire, the unconscious, and sexuality are no longer much in evidence, but Piagetian psychology still affords in his work a kind of bridge between the "objective" historical and social situation and the "subjective factor," the kinds of individual dispositions and mental equipment necessary for social change and for the inauguration of a new stage in social development. In Negt and Kluge, the Piagetian reference is merely one in a constellation of illustrative or analogical materials, along with Freud, evolutionary theory, anatomy, cultural archeology, and the rest. But Habermas's great theme of the cognitive—here transformed into the pedagogical and the formative—is centrally maintained, and offers a Utopian response to the classical Frankfurt School critique of bourgeois "enlightenment" as such (a critique which remained an embarrassment for Habermas himself, since he has been concerned to promote the Utopian possibilities inherent in precisely that bourgeois enlightenment and the bourgeois concept of reason).

As for desire and fantasy, their status in contemporary theory seems to result from the widespread feeling that narrative, image, fantasy, embodied symptom, are no longer mere subjective epiphenomena, but objective components of our social world, invested with all the ontological dignity of those hitherto "objective" social materials presented by economics, politics, and historiography. What is even more significant is that subjective or psychological phenomena are now increasingly seen as having epistemological and even practical functions. Fantasy is no longer felt to be a private and compensatory reaction against public situations, but rather a way of reading those situations, of thinking and mapping them, of intervening in them,

albeit in a very different form from the abstract reflections of traditional philosophy or politics. Deleuze and Guattari's two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (which so often comes to mind in reading this other collaboration) testifies to the richness of such explorations, as does Theweleit's related *Männerphantasien* (both are invoked in these pages). Along with the traditional notion of Reason, however, one of the casualties of this new valorization of fantasy (which surely corresponds both to historical changes in the structure of society and to the media apparatus of late capitalism) is the traditional concept of ideology and ideological analysis (essentially still the false-consciousness, or base-superstructure model, not often appealed to here). Into the breach opened by this loss, a whole range of new "ideologies of desire" have flowed. It is certain that, in the spirit of their anti-vanguard political positions, Negt and Kluge's Utopian work implicitly rejects the negativity of traditional forms of "ideology critique"; it becomes clear, especially when we consider the theoretical collaboration alongside Kluge's own stories and films, that it is the primacy of the "subjective factor" that is here everywhere affirmed, but as a historical fact. Just as Marx ascribed to capital itself a *Heißhunger* (voracious appetite) for the realization of value, so Negt and Kluge identify a comparable appetite and lust for the "private," the "intimate," and the "subjective" in modern society:

Relationships are to be found in all public areas or in areas which have been structured as private enclaves. But the libidinal relationships encapsulated in private contacts in the narrower sense reach the most bewildering levels of intensity of all social relationships ... The disintegration of the traditional public sphere programmed into the current crisis system therefore leads not merely to the strengthening of forces intent on constructing alternate or proletarian public spheres. Its disintegration also simultaneously encounters this other tendency toward the private accumulation of the work of relationship [*Beziehungsarbeit*], a kind of voracious appetite for the work of relationship, the private search for happiness. (*GE*, 877)

This compensatory reading of the subjectification of modern life is, however, complicated in Negt and Kluge by their (properly post-1960s) insistence on the importance of "intimacy" as such: "intimacy is the practical touchstone for the substance of the public sphere" (*GE*, 944). This emphasis now reconnects the materials of *Geschichte und Eigensinn* with the proletarian public sphere, about which it is now affirmed that the latter can only be tested (politically as well as theoretically) by its capacity to handle all the raw material of the private or intimate (or, using our own narrower terminology, to transcode this last).

The earlier work, however, which necessarily dealt extensively with the commodification of fantasy in contemporary media (and also in fascism),

took a somewhat simpler, populist position on the transformation of the subjective in the new proletarian public sphere. Drawing on Basil Bernstein's notion of the "restricted code" of working-class language (which Bernstein sees as essentially situation-specific), and driven by a related critique of the "principle of abstraction" in the bourgeois media, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* stressed the bodily and sensual/sensuous (*sinnlich*) requirements of proletarian consciousness (as well as the ways in which these sensuous necessities are appropriated and displaced by the dominant media).

The emphasis on the body is maintained in the later volume (most strikingly in the Bourdieu-like diagnosis of the repression of a corporeal peasant culture by bourgeois "distinction"), but the analysis of fantasy is far more complexly articulated. Indeed, Negt and Kluge propose at one point a sixfold differentiation of the coordinates or dimensions of social consciousness: horizontal, vertical, functional, irrational, imaginary, and revolutionary (*GE*, 511). The first two of these still designate the immediate, individual possibilities for thinking and mapping out a given situation, observing it from across a wide perspective or, on the other hand, digging into it, reading it diachronically or synchronically, much as in the successive volumes of *Capital* Marx shows that processes can be described either as cycles or as simultaneous interlocking operations.¹⁴ But both *horizontal* and *vertical* dimensions remain bounded by the horizon of the immediate situation. What is structurally not fully perceptible within the set of immediate coordinates—such as, for example, the multifarious prolongations of social institutions and firms whose significance and operations I cannot deduce on the basis of my phenomenological contact with their public facade—falls under the category of the *functional*, which requires a different kind of evidence and different kinds of thinking or analysis:

I must *measure* in order to orient myself; here immediate forms of essential relationship no longer exist unless I can manage to produce them myself. Here, therefore, orientation finds itself dominated by synthetic conducts. Immediate impressions are as misleading as the "obviousness" of hegemonic categories. (*GE*, 513)

The functional is therefore already the place of alienated reality in the strict sense of the term; but it is also the place of scientific analysis and of the correction of appearance and ideological distortion by theory. The next three coordinates, however, clearly move us into the area of the "libidinal," or of fantasy and "subjectivity." Negt and Kluge articulate this whole area in an original and complex way, setting out a threefold system which usefully complicates and differentiates the usual dualisms (such as the Deleuze-Guattari binary opposition between the paranoid and the schizophrenic—the molar and the molecular, the statist and the nomadic—which are

there somewhat too easily assimilated into the value opposition between the fascist and the revolutionary, respectively). The philosophical and psychoanalytic connotations of the often synonymous terms *irrational* and *imaginary* fall away as these words are returned to their original mathematical senses: where *irrational* designates quantities which, although existent, have no objective embodiment in reality (that is to say, they correspond to no *ratios* or integers) and *imaginary* designates negative quantities to be taken into account in computations but which cannot be thought of as corresponding to any particular existent: the distinction would be what obtains between p and *the square root of minus one*, for example.

If the functional is the coordinate of my determination from the outside, the *irrational* is the sum of *direct* answers, compromises (or balancing acts), evasions, furnished by the *antirealism of motives*; the imaginary is then the coordinate of reality loss, historical loss, identity loss, and—something of the greatest interest in the present context—national loss. But if the determination from the outside [the functional] still includes a dimension of human praxis (distorted but continuing to realize itself), i.e., alienated *labor*, inverted *life*, false *consciousness*, including their reification and elaboration on higher levels, and if the irrationality produced by that dimension and its production process is still present within it, the *dimension of the imaginary* is, on the contrary, determined by the becoming unreal of the world and its loss of objectification. Attention exclusively directed to the functional and the irrational, which aims at protesting the loss of natural relations in spatial and temporal contexts and in human arrangements, tends generally to overlook this antidimension of the loss of solid ground and the conjuring into nothingness of real time. The *dimension of the revolutionary*, simultaneously virulent in all the other dimensions, where it has, however, failed to realize itself, stands in the sharpest antagonism possible to this particular dimension of the antiworld and the imaginary: much more sharply than it does to the functional or the irrational, which to be sure set barriers to the revolutionary, but also lend it new substance and content. (*GE*, 511–512)

These distinctions will be clarified in Negt and Kluge's discussion of the concept (which is to say the experience) of "reality," articulated into the axis of determinacy (or indeterminacy) and objectivity (or the dissolution of the boundaries of the object) (*GE*, 343). As the preceding passage suggests, however, the real has not one, but two opposites: the antireal and the unreal. The first is a refusal—through protest and revolt—to accept reality, while the second names a passive, floating relationship to an only feebly cathected phantasmagoric outer world. The point of such distinctions, finally, is to confront and come to terms with the ambivalence of mass political commitment, both that of the past (the Nazi mass movement) and of a present about which everyone seems intent on assuring us that its masses have become mere consumers, or at least definitively depoliticized. The

systematic reinterrogation of Nazism's successful appeal to the working classes—which began in the 1960s (often including a return to Wilhelm Reich's early works on the subject), and which constitutes the central motive power of the Deleuze-Guattari works mentioned above—obviously becomes meaningless when the distinction between reactionary and progressive impulses is abandoned. The problem lies in maintaining this distinction while depriving it of its dualistic tendency. In effect Negt and Kluge maintain the drive toward a Utopian transformation of present circumstances by way of their “revolutionary” coordinate, while articulating what used to be called “reactionary” (on the basis of its effects) into a variety of different coordinates whose constellation varies historically.

As for the present, the authors explain repeatedly that *Geschichte und Eigensinn* emerged directly from the reflections on the labor movement which took up so large a part of their earlier work (*GE*, 389). But although the later volume also concludes with an explicit discussion of aspects of working-class politics, it is clearly pitched at a more general theoretical level and in terms of a longer (not to say more evolutionary) time scale, moving beyond the question of the current situation toward the problems of tradition, collective pedagogy, collective habitus, and the scars of the past. Not the least interesting moment of *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, indeed, involved the lessons of defeat, about which the Left has often enough been pious when not sanctimoniously triumphalistic. Mao Tse-tung, they remind us, describes the *Internationale* in one of his poems as a “tragic song,” a memorial of bloody failures; and the authors quote the closing fragment of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to telling effect: “Stupidity is a scar ... good will turns to evil when it suffers repeated violence.”¹⁵ They add:

Yet social sensibility needs the resistance upon which it works and from which it works itself out in order to constitute itself as experience. Learning processes based on defeat must therefore be undertaken in terms of two distinct kinds of experience: a destructive and an emancipatory one. When only one is present, a mistake in the analysis can generally be detected. (*OE*, 404–405)

Lernprozesse: This word, along with the term *Lebenslauf* (individual life history, as in the title of Kluge's first book of stories), is probably the most insistent terminological signal in Kluge's work, as well as in this collaboration. Life trajectories are those units of passionate, existential experience which have been reduced and compressed into glacial, well-nigh statistical anecdotes by the mass of History itself: a woman fleeing the American bombs and hiding in the cellar of a bombed-out house, a superannuated high school teacher writing a memoir of Charlemagne in the debacle of May 1945, juridical cases, compulsive thefts and flights, postwar survivals in which both rubble and unexpected affluence are equally bewildering for the

subjects in question, who often, in Kluge's stories and films alike, seem quietly aberrant and bereft of the social habits that might have given their movements some stability, even in the absence of individual motivations and ambitions. Anecdote is here what binds the individual to the collective and historical by problematizing the connection: it can scarcely teach lessons, save to raise the supreme riddle of how we learn anything in the first place. In this sense, the one optimistic note in Kluge's first feature film (*Abschied von gestern*)—"You can't learn not to learn"—often seems wildly premature.

Yet it suggests that "learning," whatever it is, is not a conscious or voluntary process, and that some first step consists in discovering what has in fact been learned, in detecting the powers and habits, the capacities (*Arbeitsvermögen*) which have already been accumulated, in the body, in the unconscious, in the collectivity. Relationality—which, as we have seen, is Negt and Kluge's ultimate practical message or slogan—is far from proposing any organic synthesis of those capacities; and indeed their proposal for the making of connections sometimes has a remarkably postmodern ring:

But these multiple languages of the various relationships cannot be reduced to anything unified. Nor do the capacities for autonomy require complete translation in the detail. They can perfectly well accommodate untranslatability and even the incomprehensibility of these various languages among each other, provided the untranslated is grasped as relationship. (*GE*, 1088)

Yet it would be useful to think of relationality (even here) in the light of the value of *Öffentlichkeit* proclaimed in the earlier work—a bringing into the open, an expressing and making public, which cannot quite be reduced either to Habermas's notion of communication, on the one hand, or to the mere establishment of new kinds of institutions, on the other. The relationship, then, between "relationality" and the "public sphere" might best be grasped by way of the blocking of both and the limits and boundaries built into our current social arrangement:

For conveying the rigidity of the social compartmentalization of experience, nothing better occurs to us than the prison. Here we have the institution of the visitors' room: the only point of contact between the realm of experience of those inside and of those outside, even though ultimately each prisoner belongs to both. But in industry provision is not made even for this kind of visitors' cell as a place of exchange of those points of contact which the worker needs, as an organism which exists indivisibly inside and outside all at once. (*GE*, 795, n. 5)

A politics of *Öffentlichkeit* would necessarily begin from this situation and this image, and it would clearly also be a cultural politics in the wider sense

in which Negt and Kluge once used the term *cultural revolution* (oddly, there is very little discussion of culture as such or even specifically cultural production in *Geschichte und Eigensinn*).

Relationality, like “labor capacity,” also means judgment or discrimination (a power which must itself, as in the fairy tale illustrations, be developed in its own right): it involves not merely the assessment of a given force or power in and of itself (craftsmanship, perseverance, courage, etc.), but also of the way in which that power intersects with other forces and the kinds of combinations within which it is applied. Judgment of this kind is a well-nigh juridical matter: above and beyond the “accident” of his personal profession, there is, therefore, a deeper significance in the considerable role played by lawyers, law courts, legal judgments, in the stories and films of Kluge. For a capacity such as “reliability” (*Verlässlichkeit*) is finally, in concrete history, exceedingly ambivalent. Combined with other contradictory “capacities,” the devotion to duty of a bomber pilot or technician can figure in very different kinds of stories: on the one hand, in what seems to be the ur-trauma of Kluge’s stories, the bombing of his own town of Halberstadt on April 8, 1945, when he was thirteen years old;¹⁶ on the other hand, the “unreliability” of the technician who told on Nixon and Kissinger when he discovered that the targets assigned were in fact located on the far side of the Cambodian border (*GE*, 700–703).

In such examples, the whole issue of the personal and of individual and collective pedagogy veers around into the ethical, but in a new way which no longer needs that term and its history, and which redirects our attention from the putative qualities of individual talents and forces it to the more urgent matter of their combinations. *Arbeitsvermögen* thus becomes a new way of raising the issue, not of virtue as such, but of the original Aristotelian “virtues,” of which Alisdair MacIntyre’s book *After Virtue* reminds us that they are multiple and collective, and demand a rethinking of the individualist traditions of conventional moral philosophy.

New learning processes would be required for such a reinvention, for which *Geschichte und Eigensinn* tries to give us some new names. The task cannot even be begun, however, without a vivid awareness that there also exist *Lernprozesse mit tödlichem Ausgang*—learning processes that have deadly outcomes (the title of one of Kluge’s collections of stories). That other outcomes, other learning processes, are at least conceivable is what the present volume asks us to imagine.

Notes

- 1 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972; *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1981. Future references to the former are denoted *OE*; references to the latter are denoted *GE*.
- 2 Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz, "In Gefahr und grösster Not bringt der Mittelweg den Tod," *Kursbuch* 41, 1975, 42–43.
- 3 Jean Paulhan, *La Preuve par l'étymologie*, Paris: Minuit, 1953.
- 4 Anton Kaes, *Deutschlandbilder*, Munich: Text + Kritik, 1987, 48; in English, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- 5 In both books, Negt and Kluge use the term *proletarian* in its most general sense: "Proletarian, i.e., separated from the means of production, designates not merely the labor characteristics of the industrial proletariat, but all similarly restricted productive capacities" (*GE*, 445, n.16).
- 6 And see, on Kluge more generally, Miriam Hansen, "Space of History, Language of Time: Kluge's *Yesterday Girl* (1966)," in *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*, Eric Rentschler, ed., New York: Methuen, 1985, 193–216; "Alexander Kluge, Cinema and the Public Sphere: the Construction Site of Counter-History," *Discourse* 6, 1984, 53–74; and "The Stubborn Discourse: History and Story-Telling in the Films of Alexander Kluge," *Persistence of Vision* 2, Fall 1985, 19–29. See also Andrew Bowie, "Alexander Kluge: An Introduction," *Cultural Critique* 4, Fall 1986, 111–118; "Geschichte und Eigensinn," *Telos* 66, Winter 1985–1986, 183–190; and "New Histories: Aspects of the Prose of Alexander Kluge," *Journal of European Studies* 12, 1982, 180–208.
- 7 "Only in wartime is the abrupt liquification of dead historical labor translated into a real acceleration. The thousand-year-old city of Magdeburg burned down in two days during the Thirty Years War. But as far as the historical process is concerned hardly anything was brought into movement during the Thirty Years War. In particular no social relationship expressed itself in any real way in the burning of Magdeburg." (*GE*, 276)
- 8 Here once again their thought finds some resonance in that of Raymond Williams: The claims of an urban versus a pastoral Utopia have been dramatized most richly in science fiction, particularly in the "debate" between Samuel Delany and Ursula Le Guin. Kluge seems, however, to have modified this anti-urban position in Alexander Kluge, *Industrialisierung des Bewusstseins*, Munich: Piper, 1985.
- 9 As, for example, in Roland Barthes' description of the handicraft aesthetic of the early modern, in particular in Flaubert and Baudelaire. See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Layers and Colin Smith, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- 10 Contemporary studies of the literature of modern imperialism—also essentially a literature of adventure—are very relevant here. See, for example, Edward Said, "Kim, The Pleasures of Imperialism," *Raritan* 7: 2, Fall 1987, 27–64.

- 11 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings*, ed. L. Feuer, New York: Doubleday, 1959, 7.
- 12 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 155–156 (quoted in this form in the story by Alexander Kluge, ‘Hinscheiden einer Haltung,’ *Lebensläufe*, Hamburg: Fischer, 1964, 26).
- 13 Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976.
- 14 Digging, part of the peasant “labor capacity,” is often associated in fairy tales with finding buried treasure: being lucky, where the word for good fortune in German, *Glück*, is also the word for happiness. On happiness itself, see the very remarkable pages in *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, 924–930, which in many ways prolong Adorno.
- 15 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “On the Genesis of Stupidity,” *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 1986, 228–230.
- 16 See, for example, the “second notebook” in Alexander Kluge, *Neue Geschichten*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977, 33–106.

Benjamin's Readings

We have long been aware of the way in which significant writers assemble their own corpus or canon around them, in what it is no longer helpful to think of as influences. So, around Flaubert, a constellation of readings from Apuleius's *Golden Ass* to *Candide*, from the *Quixote* to Sade, makes one imagine some ideal seminar in which the earlier texts would be transformed by reading them through Flaubert's eyes, and his own augmented by this idiosyncratic canon it contains and presupposes all at once. The great modern theorists, meanwhile, also project their own private canon, for one-time, ad hoc use: witness the multiple references of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, which might very nicely be transformed into a whole new undergraduate humanities program. Benjamin, as a critic and theorist now also considered to be a writer, compounds these relationships and seems to dissolve into his multiple readings fully as much as he turns them all into a unique "self" that remains to be defined. It is this syntextual, rather than intertextual, phenomenon—something on the order of symbiosis in biology—that we mean to examine here.

But we must first learn to distinguish between a tradition-oriented canon (whether this tradition is in the service of a conventional Right, as is most frequent, or of a Left or radical movement-building inspiration, as with Raymond Williams, or Lukács, or even the left-modernists such as Kristeva and *Tel Quel* or the surrealists themselves) and a set of relativistically privileged references in which contingency is inscribed from the outset—what could be called a disposable canon and what, in a more Benjaminian avatar, it would be appropriate to refashion into the "constellation" as such. The difference between these two conceptions is not to be grasped in some "belief" in history, as the *Zeitgeist* would vulgarly give us to understand (there are believers and unbelievers on both sides of the divide). Rather, it is in the ways in which interpretive communities are formed, and roles that master codes play in that formation. The second position, for example, holds generally to a position that might, in distant parallel to now ancient structuralist polemics and strategic positions, be characterized as a

commitment to the *arbitrary* nature of the code. It might, then, in contrast be abusive to attribute to the tradition people some natural-law or Cratylist conception of the code; on the other hand, it is not really them that we focus on here, but rather on Benjamin himself, and the way in which he is able (or unable) to coordinate two frames of reference normally thought to be incompatible: the ad hoc cultural baggage of his own idiosyncratic readings and enthusiasms and the seemingly more absolute code of Marxism (through the very center of which, however, this same opposition tends to run). Meanwhile, inasmuch as the Cratylist or tradition-oriented notion of the code has some crucial commitments to representation itself, it is that relatively modernist problem or dilemma that will also be at stake (albeit in a new and unfamiliar way) in Benjamin's practices.

One way into the problem of the codes in Benjamin lies through the works he read and appropriated—and even this strategy comes in two distinct forms. One is tempted to organize the enormous mass of book reviews (collected in vol. 3 of *Gesammelte Schriften*) according to themes, but then those themes would be characteristic of Benjamin and his subjectivity, rather than constitutive of the authors and volumes thus described. We would find ourselves thereby back in some more traditional kind of *auteur*-mapping in relation to Benjamin himself. But if we turn to the works with which he was more durably engaged, and to which he consecrated long program-essays, we face a more interesting problem in modeling appropriation itself and in proposing substitutes and more complex transactions for what used to be called influence.¹ Indeed, the engagement with these works reminds us of the specifically modernist dynamics of reading, which have been compared to a series of secular conversions: the great modernist *auteur* is not a furnisher of individual works in a genre, and one did not simply read a new Faulkner, a new Lawrence, a new Stevens or Pound. Rather, these were all fragments of a monadic totality, which in the period of the consolidation of a properly modernist ideology (in the US after World War II, and in the aestheticizing situation of Cold War intellectuals) it gradually became conventional to describe in phenomenological terms as a specific “world,” with its original temporal and sensory structures. It would seem more appropriate today, in hindsight, to characterize each of these “works” in terms of a distinctive code, which is learned like a foreign language and then provisionally used by the reader to articulate personal experience after the fashion of Lacanian tacking nails. Lévi-Strauss's account of the surplus of signifier (see “The Sorcerer and His Magic” and “The Effectiveness of Symbols”), the way in which shamans or psychoanalysts teach the suffering subject to rearrange its disorganized signifieds under new signifiers, is also a useful reference point (in an alternate “code”) for the process of conversion to those modernist works of art (of which it can then correctly be said, but only in these very narrow analogical limits and to the degree to which

religion itself functions this way, that they function something like spilt religion, or a religion of art). I do not know that a modernist “code”—that is, a fully achieved secular aesthetic system—has in this sense ever been adequately described, although what used to be called “style study” was a beginning approximation (which, as its slogan suggests, limited everything to language itself). Such a model would, however, go a long way toward reconciling the incommensurability that has always been felt between an objective, or structural, analysis of a work and a receptionist one, since the “code” in this sense is very precisely the mediation between these two dimensions. It would necessarily be a comparatist model, since it premises a similar reception at some level for all the “modernist classics” (or rather, it is by way of such a reception that various contemporary writers become promoted into modernist classics of just this type). Finally, and by the same token, the model would hold only for the modern period.

Benjamin offers an interesting occasion for raising such issues, since in him the conversion process is most often synchronic rather than diachronic. Intellectual life in the modern period seemed to demand alienation of this religious type, in that no one can live in cultural and intellectual isolation from such codes, while on the other hand no single code can be dominant any longer. It is possible to convert religiously in some absolute way to an individual code or stylistic “world” (it being understood that modern philosophical systems seem to be of the same type as aesthetic works in this respect), and then we have the phenomenon of disciples or else of scholars devoted lifelong to a single corpus (spectacles either inspirational or dispiriting depending on one’s point of view). But most people in the modern period spent their time passing in and out of the various secular religions and their enthusiasms, offering the image of a trajectory across a range of codes that would have to be examined on the basis of rhythms external to them (that of the rise and fall of political or ideological temperatures, for example), and in any case comparable to the great cycles of fashion.

In the case of Benjamin, however, all these enthusiasms and aesthetic commitments are given to us simultaneously. Not the least interesting problem raised by this writer is how he can hold so many seemingly contradictory affiliations at one time (and how we can then ourselves go about the analysis of such contradictory lines of flight in his work). He himself was occasionally aware of this untheorized multiplicity, and raised it in the form of a problem that was also a whole program: “To encompass both Breton and Le Corbusier—that would mean drawing the spirit of present-day France like a bow and shooting knowledge to the heart of the movement” (*PAH*, 46; *N*, 1a). But, as we shall see, this involves a little more than mere synthesis, or learning from many masters, or absorbing the positive points. Le Corbusier also means for him the beginning work on modern architecture of Siegfried Giedion (whose *Space, Time and Architecture* later became

a kind of manifesto of ideological modernism for US architecture), along with Mayer's book on iron construction: a Utopian vision of glass and steel is present here, along with a great many athletic and therapeutic overtones of the puritanical Corbusian vision (so central an exhibit of loathing in the current turn away from modernism in architecture). To juxtapose this clean consciousness, as brightly lit as a hospital, with the very different therapy of Breton, as that leads down into the unconscious via those protocols of dreams and drugs Benjamin himself practiced as an experiment at one point, is to lay out an equation with variables whose solution is not at all evident, unless it be simply Benjamin himself.

In other instances, Benjamin explicitly worried away at the problem. It was clear to him that the *Arcades Project* had its links with the older Baroque one in at least one way, namely via Baudelaire and the latter's spleen, so often compared to the melancholy of the Protestant Reformation dramatists. What follows is a very interesting set of deductions as to the role played by commodities and commodification in both periods, as the foundation on which this affect is based.² But at this level, we still have to deal here with a juxtaposition of themes whose possible connection with Benjamin's own psychology can be amply speculated on, while he himself just as energetically tried to depersonalize them by magnifying them into a theory of history. It is however not yet paradoxical that Benjamin, specialist in seventeenth-century melancholy, should have been interested in its nineteenth-century varieties.

What finally succeeds in arousing our methodological curiosity is, however, the simultaneous enthusiasm for two writers who seem somehow absolutely to exclude each other, and in far more fundamentally ideological ways than Adorno's gravitationally repellent monads. Such is for example the antagonism between Brecht and Kafka, vividly expressed in person by the former as he demurs from Benjamin's Kafka essay ("Jewish fascism").³ The antagonism, indeed, seems to dramatize some deeper fundamental antinomy in modern cultural thought, if not its reality, namely that which assigns antithetical positions to the political and the subjective or existential, to the didactic and the expressive, to consciousness or agency and to the unconscious. Indeed, while it might be abusive to think of Brecht overhastily as a realist, it is certain that Kafka quintessentially occupies the stereotypical position of the modernist, awakening all of its shadow opposite numbers. To all the mythic and formalist impulses that cluster about Brecht in the West, seeking to reappropriate him as an "existentialist" after the fashion of Esslin's book (or as a great *poet*, instead of a dramatist) may be opposed Brecht's artisanal demand for usefulness:

"I don't accept Kafka, you know," says Brecht. And he goes on to speak about a Chinese philosopher's parable of "the tribulations of usefulness." In a wood there

are many different kinds of tree-trunk. From the thickest they make ship's timbers; from those which are less thick but still quite sturdy, they make boxes and coffin-lids; the thinnest of all are made into whipping-rods; but of the stunted ones they make nothing at all: these escape the tribulations of usefulness. "You've got to look around in Kafka's writings as you might in such a wood. Then you'll find a whole lot of very useful things. The images are good, of course. But the rest is pure mystification. It's nonsense. You have to ignore it. Depth doesn't get you anywhere at all. Depth is a separate dimension, it's just depth—and there's nothing whatsoever to be seen in it." (*UB*, 109–10)

In this working procedure, which chops up the aspects and isolates the usable themes or levels, the quotable chapters or verses, in interrogative fashion, we slowly come upon the basic clue of formal autonomization—the objective property and capacity of modern works to be broken up and used in just this way.

Brecht was himself the idiosyncratic theorist of this deeper formal tendency, a concept underscored by Benjamin in his luminous presentation essays (still among the best introductions to Brecht's idea of an epic theater, from which the poetic commentaries must be sharply distinguished as having a rather different inner rhythm and generic dynamic). It is the concept of the *gestus*, translated as the "quotable gesture":

An actor must be able to space his gestures the way a typesetter produces spaced type. This effect may be achieved, for instance, by an actor's quoting his own gesture on the stage ... Epic theater is by definition a gestic theater. For the more frequently we interrupt someone in the act of acting, the more gestures result. (*I*, 151; *GS*, 2: 536)

How does one reconcile this voluntarist account with the notion that modern life tends objectively, under its own momentum, towards the fragmented, towards that which is "always-already" interrupted (whether by Taylorization, reification, the city, the forcible penetration of capital into the village, or whatever)? It is the great homeopathic strategy that can be detected in very different forms at distant places in the modernist landscape—namely, the decision and the will to choose the inevitable, to affirm what is an irreversible tendency, and, by making necessity into a virtue, to open up a range of possibilities for its possible appropriation. The transformation of the fragment as a result of a socio-historical process into the gesture as an object of didactic inquiry and scientific investigation outflanks the *Zeitgeist*. It short-circuits the temptation to reinvent the pathos of a call for the "reunification" of life (as in Lukács), and it underscores the way in which naturalization has tended to accompany social fragmentation. As a result, not only the intelligible pieces but this very process comes before us as something altogether natural and commonsensical, as what goes without

saying and, utterly self-evident, needs no further comment. The Brechtian estrangement effect will now take its departure precisely from this unnaturalness of the *gestus*, as that starkly reappears when the fragment is held up dripping and streaming in the cold light of day. But the very process which “interrupts”—whether it be the logic of capital itself or the enlightened will of the actor-pedagogue—is also grist for the mill of modernism’s hostility to narrative as such (and Benjamin’s own, as we will begin to see).

It is therefore perhaps not so unexpected that something similar should now transpire in Kafka’s own form-production, as that is uniquely anatomized for us in Benjamin’s great program-essay on the Prague fabulist. It can be detected, not unsurprisingly, at the point at which generically the two oeuvres of Kafka and Brecht intersect, namely in the theatrical itself. In Kafka this significantly surfaces at the moment of the paradisiacal, in the Nature Theater of Oklahoma (in *Amerika*):

One of the most significant functions of this theater is to dissolve happenings into their gestic components. One can go even further and say that a good number of Kafka’s shorter studies and stories are seen in their full light only when they are, so to speak, put on as acts in the “Nature Theater of Oklahoma.” Only then will one recognize with certainty that Kafka’s entire work constitutes a codex of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather, the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings. (*I*, 120; *GS*, 2: 418)

That this objective gesturality in Kafka seems to presuppose a peculiarly impersonal and decentered consciousness (derived, via Rosenzweig, from China and its theater and psyche) is of great, if secondary, interest to us in this context. To put the center of gravity of this crucial Benjamin/Kafka essay in the *gestus* rather than in the relationship of Kafka to a popular Jewish storytelling tradition—this last leading back further in the twin directions of the precapitalist mode of production and of cosmology proper—is at least to estrange this familiar work, which is more often used in evidence for the Zionist or mystical Benjamin than in coordination with his other texts.

Yet Benjamin’s fundamental point lies here, and the concept of the *gestus* will be the crucial mechanism whereby he negotiates the most difficult and delicate transaction in the Marxian approach to a literary text, namely the acknowledgment and ad hoc working coordination of its simultaneous claims to value and to ideological mystification. The two faces of the *gestus*—its visual form and the underside of an interminably glossed set of possible meanings—offer a means of coordination here that is rather different from the equally ad hoc solutions to be found in the essays on Karl Kraus and Eduard Fuchs. Not only do events sort themselves out into a

series of gestures (“each gesture is an event—one might even say a drama—in itself” [*I*, 121; *GS*, 2: 419]) in such a way that the Kafka narrative finds itself imperceptibly transformed into a kind of Eisensteinian “montage of attractions,” itself not unrelated to the peculiarly discontinuous montage form of the Benjamin essay (even before the absence of the scaffolding in the *Arcades Project* allows the building blocks of such an essay to be inspected in their original form). This form also opens up a distance from meaning that can only be filled by interminable commentary, which is itself not inconsistent with absolute incomprehension: “Kafka could understand things only in the form of a *gestus*, and this *gestus* which he did not understand constitutes the cloudy parts of the parables” (*I*, 129; *GS*, 2: 427). This is finally the social meaning of Kafka’s form-production: his possibility of perception and of the micronarrative of the gesture is at one with the omnipresent experience of outside reality pressing in as what cannot be grasped or understood. But when Benjamin gets this far—it yields a picture of Kafka as a kind of privileged recording apparatus who must multiply his vivid notes and sketches in exact proportion to the incomprehensibility of the phenomena they designate—he suddenly refers to an alienation by way of the machine:

The invention of the film and the phonograph came in an age of maximum alienation of men from one another, of immeasurably mediated relationships which have become their only ones. Experiments have proved that a man does not recognize his own gait on the screen or his own voice on the phonograph. The situation of the subject in such experiments is Kafka’s situation. This is what directs him to learning [*Studium*], where he may encounter fragments of his own existence that are still within the context of the role. He might catch hold of the lost *gestus* the way Peter Schlemihl caught hold of the shadow he had sold. (*I*, 137–38; *GS*, 2: 436)

This anticipation of the classic existential figures (Malraux’s anecdote of your inability to recognize your recorded voice, Camus’ image of the man in the phone booth whose voice you cannot hear) serves less to document Kafka’s relationship to the thing they explained and domesticated (by calling it “the absurd”) than to underscore his very distance from them. Meanwhile, the reference to Schlemihl reminds us of one of Benjamin’s most dramatic interpretive acts and reversals, in which, in a discussion of mirror-images and reflections, he suddenly grasps the mirror as the anticipatory fore-form of the modern media (see “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *I*, 230). This then unexpectedly binds the Kafka essay into the later problematic of technology and reproducibility, while a sentence that immediately follows this extract (“it is a storm that blows towards us out of forgetfulness”), anticipating the well-known

cadences of the *Angelus Novus* thesis, now seems to juxtapose Kafka's stubborn and artful notations with the whole question of the cultural history of the human past and its relationship to progress (which the "Theses on History" take up directly).

I want to suggest that these are not to be grasped as thematic connections, although we seem to be unable at first to enumerate them other than in the form of themes. I will try to show elsewhere how simultaneous cross-references of this kind in Benjamin function less to link various topics than to differentiate them. What is underscored here by the incomprehensible appearance of the same topic in two distinct places at the same time is rather the multiplicity of distinct meanings or aspects that can be made to project off distinct faces of the same "seme" or named concept. This already begins to show in a more concrete form, but in the realm of themes and ideas, what Benjamin must have meant by a constellation.

In the relationship of Brecht to Kafka, however, we find a more external, canonical manifestation of this way of constructing the object of study and of linking privileged texts, which are so many objectified codes in their own right. *Gestus* constellates Kafka with Brecht: it makes each one usable in terms of rewriting the other. The Brechtian analytic concept, for example, allows us to reread the modernist Kafka, while at the same time demonstrating the active relevance of Brecht's own didactic and pedagogical forms for the wider intelligence and en-act-ment of a nonpedagogical and expressive modernist literature.

It does yet not seem clear to me that we can *definitively* map the constellations of Benjamin's readings (something in any case implausible in view of the thesis about codes that we are defending in Benjamin's practice). Indeed, that they are largely substitutable constitutes a first answer to the objection (implicit in Scholem, for instance) that since many of these essays were occasional and even commissioned—Benjamin had no particular interest in Leskov, but had to make the job of writing a review of a German collected works interesting for himself, etc.—the presence of this or that particular writer or cultural text would not be primary evidence for anything. Still, it seems to me that a certain formal description of the constellation as such is possible.

Indeed, we have already isolated two features of its structure: a difference in identity (Le Corbusier and Breton as two antithetical incarnations of the modern) and an identity in difference (Brecht and Kafka as antitheses who share the form of the *gestus*). Now we need to examine what I will call a vertical pattern in this corpus of essays, which has to do with the grounding of an otherwise free-floating constellation, with the naturalization of the content of a set of relationships otherwise without content.

The shadow presence within the essays of a kind of linked trilogy or tripartite series has often been acknowledged: this is the movement from "The

Storyteller” across “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” to “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Read as a sequence, this set of three steps or stages offers a relatively coherent message that can be articulated in a series of propositions about the relationship between experience and communication, as these are impacted by technology (or modernization) and find their ratios varied dialectically along with it. A thesis might be constructed from these stages that would have some formal analogies with Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* (to which a lengthy reference is made in “The Storyteller”), bringing the latter up to date as it were with the inclusion, if not of mass culture, then at least of technological realities. But such a thesis, it should be clear, is not “in Benjamin,” who does not argue for propositions or interpretations in this way: it is the effect of a montage, something derived and fully as arbitrary as any conceptual reconstruction of this or that alleged intention attributed to the *Arcades* fragments, which does not mean that it is wrong or uninteresting. In fact, Benjamin solicits this kind of attribution, of conceptual reconstruction and interpretation after the fact, on the part of his reader; he cannot be read without such a retrospective operation, no matter how questionable the results.

It would now seem possible to affirm the existence within the corpus of the great program-essays (of the “middle period”) of yet another shadow trilogy, a much fainter tripartite movement that intersects the one in “The Storyteller” but that deals with ideology rather than modernization, and with belief rather than with the determination of perception by the technological base. This “trilogy” can be called the cosmological series, and it moves from the fundamental essay on Karl Kraus, again through “The Storyteller,” and on to the “Commentary on Brecht’s Poems,” not normally considered to be one of the program-essays as such (owing to its discontinuous form) and neglected in both Brecht and Benjamin criticism. In each of these essays, as we shall see, Benjamin finds his textual investigation moving, as it were, against his own conscious will and intent, toward the identification, as of a watermark, of something like a “great chain of being” in connection with the three very dissimilar texts in question—the pamphlets of Kraus, the tales of Leskov, and the lyrics of Brecht. This ladder of forms, or chain of being, seems to lead down into ontological regions, sedimented layers of a nature under the social phenomena of what, at least in the Vienna of Kraus and the Berlin of Brecht, are urban and thereby historical realities subject to human praxis and accessible to change and modification. What can now be the status of such a ladder of forms and of the Nature, or at least the naturalization, they propose?

The question has two implications: The one for what it may be abusive to call Benjamin’s method has to do with the relationship of the constellations of his objects of study to some ultimate grounding in human nature itself, some ultimate constraint in need and finitude (which would also imply an

ultimate constraint on the mutability of the codes themselves, some ultimate truth of natural law). The other consequence is perhaps but the inversion of this one and concerns ideological analysis as such, something whose relative absence seemed to mark the originality of Benjamin's Marxism and his mode of cultural commentary. It would, however, be a mistake to think it altogether absent: the Second International (as, for example, in the essay on Eduard Fuchs) is not the only object of an explicit ideological critique (in terms of the thematics of progress). Ideological demystification is present, tactfully, in the Surrealism essay, where the well-known distinction between revolt and revolution is firmly objected, in passing. And it is present openly but respectfully in the great Kraus essay, in which the passionate negativity of the satirist (it seems clear that the little fragment called "The Destructive Character" has to do with Kraus, rather than with Brecht himself, as has been claimed) and his later conversion to Catholicism are both objected to be necessary flaws, unacceptable ideological deformations without which, however, Kraus's historic and progressive mission would have been inconceivable.

It is a familiar dialectical trope, whereby the flaw is retrospectively grasped as necessary for the strength, and the ideologically doubtful reread as the ally, of the politically correct and progressive. Yet it would not be genuinely dialectical if one went on to claim that this reinforcement of opposites was always and at every historical conjuncture true and operative. Whatever Brecht's ideological flaws, for example, they do not have to include these Krausian ones of a kind of baroque cum Viennese Catholic nature: Brecht faced a very different political and historical situation from that in which Kraus was formed as a young man.

Leskov's situation was very different from either of these, and it may therefore be useful to start with him. The traditional view of Leskov as a "profoundly Russian" storyteller somehow organically rooted in the peasantry and its superstitions and tales is at least partially estranged and chilled by his commercial and family links to England (in its dry empirical business spirit the very antipode of Slavic peasant mysticism) and by his sympathies with the heretics of Russian orthodoxy (who may in this respect also offer some very distant and heavily Slavic version of what Protestantism meant in the West). These gaps in the "organic" give a Leskov who at the very least constructs his "russianity" (to use a Barthesian expression), who works it up as an art object out of systematic codes rather than expressing it unconsciously like some kind of earth oracle. Meanwhile, this distance—which might well be compatible with the aesthetics of "estrangement"—is more difficult to reconcile with that theory of the conditions of possibility of storytelling and the tale itself which Benjamin has famously offered us in an earlier moment of the essay: namely, its constitutive relationship to the three kinds of social situations in which it variously tends to flourish. These

are all somehow situations of handicraft (so that the practice of handwork clings to the oral narrative “like the potter’s fingermarks on the clay”), but the kinds of stories will vary according to their origins: in a peasant or village milieu, among sailors, or in the mouths of merchants and commercial travelers. This enumeration is surely meant to draw a fundamental line between this kind of narrative production and what is consistent with the psychologies, sensoria, and lifeworlds of people who handle modern machinery—namely, factory workers. Their needs are examined in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”; meanwhile, “The Storyteller” gives us the obverse face of Brecht’s reflections on his theater public, since this handicraft public, closer to the earth itself, is not likely to present itself in his urban theater. Are we to imagine that Leskov’s travels form him into some distant modern analogue of the medieval storyteller outlined in the first part of the essay? Perhaps, if we take into account the mediation of the earth itself (as content) and above all the formal mediation of the requisite irrevocable tenses in the storytelling narrative: “A man who dies at thirty-five proves at every moment of his life to be a man who will die at the age of thirty-five.” This sentence of Moritz Heimann’s is a privileged object of Benjaminian meditation; he denied and affirmed it at the same time. Untrue existentially (at this point a long implicit dialogue opens up between Benjamin and the rather more Kierkegaardian Sartre, who wishes to insist on the irreducibility of the lived moment, in which the future is never visible), it becomes true in commemoration and in the tale. The issue is not only aesthetic or philosophical but also historiographic and political (as in Sartre) and will later, in Benjamin, be staged in competing conceptions of the past. For as passionately as he repudiates bourgeois/social democratic (Second International) conceptions of progress, he just as stubbornly seeks to refute the historicist conception of the isolated moment of the past (“*wie es eigentlich gewesen*”) and to refuse the historicist imperative to recapture the sense the past moment had of itself without any knowledge of its future and its destiny. For us, rather, the fate of the past must be included in our picture of it, as a sadness or a defeat, a massacre, or, on the other hand, a barely perceptible sensing of dawn air. But this is hard to square with the taboo on marginalizing conceptions of the past as decadence or regress and flips the polemic into another, upward spiral. Death is the mark here for narrative irrevocability.⁴ The ambivalence of this conceptual two-way street—is it an existential question of mortality and finitude, of Being itself? or a narrative question of praxis, choice, and construction?—will be the most interesting negotiation we watch Benjamin make in this series.

At any rate, Nature—in the form of organic death—enters the narrative picture at precisely this point, where it becomes clear that storytelling as such, in its classical form, demands naturalization. Unless the events of the

tale are irrevocable, its shape sags; it dissolves into the formless and the non-, anti-, or a-narrative. (Indeed, one way of talking about the modern and what it does to the novel is offered precisely by the examination of what modern freedoms do to the “destiny” of its characters.) But this naturalization means a powerful displacement and shift in focus whereby the social and the historical are once again—as in precapitalist societies—grasped as forms of natural history: the emergent secular politicality of modern times must here again be petrified and struck by the well-nigh apocalyptic light of a ladder of species and forms. Shades of the tragedy book, with its gloomy revival of the cyclical view of human events and human strivings as a dance of death, a funereal pageant!

Leskov's cosmology thus proves to be (using the Russian Formalist term) a “motivation of the device,” a condition of possibility of his storytelling itself, which demands a chain of being that reaches down into the mineral world and the inanimate—one can now tell stories about magical stones!—and up toward the *apokatastasis* (the release of souls into redemption), interpreted by Benjamin as a kind of disenchantment in which suddenly all the earthly beings under the spell of the fallen world suddenly find their voice and begin to “tell their story.” At the height of this summit of forms is found the righteous man himself (the storyteller, who affords counsel) in the form of the hermaphrodite, who reunites this variety by way of the symbiosis of the sexes and the genders. It is an oddly postcontemporary Utopian note to find at the heart of a peasant world view.

But we must be careful how we evaluate this naive cosmology, as dazzling as an *arbol de la vida*, or rather, how we evaluate Benjamin's evaluation. He was theoretically suspicious of narrative as such (the historical continuum or “progress”) and passionately committed to the Enlightenment program of the dissolution of myth. Myth would presumably involve what we have called grounding, the attribution of natural content, or naturalization: the belief in the ontological primacy of a specific code, the laddering that shades down from history and the political into natural law and the forms of being. What distinguishes Benjamin's Enlightenment stance from the more familiar iconoclastic forms of ideology-critique and demystification, however, is his idea that one must go all the way through myth in order to free oneself from it. (This has been interpreted as a specific and original form of collective therapy or cultural revolution.) We must therefore expect his views of cosmology to be both ambivalent and complicated.

Still, the great Kraus essay betrays the more classic lineaments of the operation of ideological demystification, perhaps because this particular case is relatively unencumbered by narrative and finds its center of gravity in the relationship of the writer to language as such, rather than to storytelling. Yet Kraus also needs a form of mythic naturalization in order to fulfill his vocation. This function is provided by an Austrian baroque Catholicism (to

which the Jewish Kraus will later formally convert), which authorizes a paradisiacal conception of a full language, in the light of which its deformations by the modern press can be denounced:

His concept of creation contains the theological inheritance of speculations that last possessed contemporary validity for the whole of Europe in the seventeenth century. At the theological core of this concept, however, a transformation has taken place that allows it effortlessly to fit into the cosmopolitan credo of Austrian worldliness, which made creation into a church in which nothing remained to recall the rite except an occasional whiff of incense in the mists. (*R*, 263; *GS*, 2: 339–40)

What distinguishes Benjamin's ideological analysis of Kraus from those in which the wheat is separated carefully from the chaff, and the superstitious and regressive from the politically correct and useful, is that in order to generate a rich, "historically operative" critique, this ideological vision of linguistic plenitude must pass through the mediation of a whole new personality or psychic structure. It is this mediation that the titles of the three sections of the Kraus essay—namely, "Cosmic Man," "Daimon," and "Monster" (in the German more pointedly rendered as "Allmensch," "Daimon," and "Unmensch")—begin to project. Here the obligation of the ideological underpinning to produce a new agent is clear: the creational vision must now generate that "destructive character" required for the tireless labor of the linguistic diagnostician and prophet of doom that Kraus incarnated for over thirty years. It must now be called upon to explain

the necessity that compelled this great bourgeois character to become a comedian, this guardian of Goethean linguistic values a polemicist, or why this irreproachably honorable man went berserk. This, however, was bound to happen, since he thought fit to begin changing the world with his own class, in his own home, in Vienna. And when, recognizing the futility of his enterprise, he abruptly broke it off he placed the matter back in the hands of nature—this time destructive, not creative, nature. (*R*, 288; *GS*, 2: 365)

To grasp what Benjamin means here, we need to consider the sketch entitled "The Destructive Character" and in a more general way to sense the quotient and reservoir of sheer antisocial power, rage, and internalized violence that any solitary individual needs to summon in order to withstand and assault the massive being of the social order outside. Kraus needed to become a monster in order for his art-for-art's-sake program to be converted into the virtual critique of the media that became the politics of the antifascist era (and beyond). And he could do that by converting his ideology of nature into a *daimon* whose guidance transformed his own personality into a "force of nature."

The new mission of this naturalized force then becomes the invention of a first and fundamental critique of the media. Its originality is the result of a match between the temperament of the writer and the changing demands of the historical situation itself, a match that can only be appreciated as a dialectical irony. For Kraus sets forth as an aesthete, and it is within the well-nigh planetary and gravitational shift from the belle époque to the fascist and antifascist 1930s that his passions and obsessions take on a very different meaning from the one they started out with:

You would have had to grasp the *Fackel* literally, word for word, from the very first issue, in order to foresee that this aesthetically determined journalism was destined, without losing any of its basic motifs, but rather gaining one, to become the political prose of 1930. (*R*, 261; *GS*, 2: 335)

Yet at this ultimate point of the satiric and the prophetic, at which all the corruptions of the age are denounced, we must not neglect reading them in their final form in the music of Offenbach, in whose ultimate artificial and social frivolity nature returns like the repressed, and in which the delirious vision of social nullity and vacuousness wins an aesthetic appearance and turns into the euphoria of play and style (music appearing here at the other boundary of satiric language). This now allows us to superimpose Offenbach on Kraus himself and to insert music into the Benjaminian constellation (just as the caricatures of Daumier and Guys conjugate the historical materialist collector Fuchs with the modernist poet Baudelaire and allow the opening onto visual art).

Yet in both Leskov and Kraus, the ideological appeal to nature, however necessary for their form construction—in Leskov for narrative, in Kraus for the denunciation and regeneration of a damaged and corrupt public language—demands the supplement of ideological critique to become visible as such. Nothing in the work itself, except a certain slight internal distance, identifies the ideological precondition as sheer ideology, thereby allowing the reader to take the proper precautions and to open a further distance in its reception. The third exhibit or panel, the Brechtian one, which consists in a seemingly random set of brief commentaries on thirteen lyrics or songs, does precisely this, by the way it includes the natural within itself.

The untranslatable title and the organization of Brecht's early collection, *Die Hauspostille*, suggests a reworking of a hymn and prayer book for modern urban circumstances. It

objects to much of our morality; it has reservations regarding a number of traditional commandments. It has not the remotest intention, however, of explicitly stating these reservations. It brings them out in the form of variants, precisely, of the moral attitude and gestures whose customary form it considers to be no longer quite fitting. (*UB* 58; *GS*, 2: 562)

This is not to be confused with irony, but it does suggest an operation whereby the traditional is incorporated and indeed is required by the form as the ladder it must both climb and kick away. In these lyrics and songs, “tradition,” variously indicating sin, puritanism, piety, proper behavior, hospitality, patriotism, cleanliness, and pedagogy, is what remains of what I have called the ontological ladder of natural forms. Indeed, in both the preceding exhibits—Kraus as much as Leskov—the acquired conviction of a grounding in nature necessarily became what we would call a religious worldview. But in Brecht’s poems, God himself appears in person, only to be hooted and booed by the “men of Mahagonny.” Here the requirement of treating human history like natural history is not only fulfilled but also examined from all sides and transformed into a new kind of poetic object in its own right. Such is Brecht’s way with the seeming naturalness—or “naturalness”—of emotions and his unique approach to the historically new phenomena embodied in big-city life (another direct link across the entire constellation to Baudelaire himself):

One cannot imagine an observer surveying the charms of a city—its multitude of houses, the breath-taking speed of its traffic, its entertainments—more unfeelingly than Brecht. This lack of feeling for the city decor, combined with an extreme sensibility for the city-dweller’s special ways of reaction, distinguishes Brecht’s cycle from all big-city poetry that precedes it. (*UB*, 61; *GS*, 2: 556–57)

Paradoxically, this turn from the architectural exterior and the detail of the street to the new habitus the former requires and generates is not only consistent with Benjamin’s own approach to the urban (in “On Some Motifs of Baudelaire”); it also allows for a kind of perverse and inverted naturalization of precisely those new urban feelings—of rage and racism, of the psychology of the underground, and of “illegality”—culminating in an astonishing moment in which political graffiti on a wall take on all the “lapidary” naturalness of the Latin classics. Now the actual landscape—the “original” nature of the Romantics, say—betrays the effects of these operations in a peculiarly Brechtian fashion by way of the fading and impoverishment of the decor: the washed-out sky, the pitiful stick-tree all by itself in the empty lot (*UB*, 68–69; *GS*, 2: 566). Meanwhile, in the glorious final poem on Lao-tse’s dictation and promulgation of the Tao, in the moment before he crosses the border into exile and out of the sight of human beings, something crucial is rectified about the vengeful God of the opening poem; something is said about the relationship between revelation, poetry, and friendliness. A most unnatural doctrinal lesson is left behind, namely that the weak can overcome the strong as water wears down solid rock. This is not merely the reversal of the ladder of nature whose structural presence is affirmed in the three constitutive moments of this particular section of the

constellation; it also reads into the record Benjamin's own relationship to nature, being, and religion, as the quintessential city-dweller and Enlightenment skeptic.

This is then something very like the vertical structure of the constellation (as opposed to what we have called syntactical or horizontal oppositions), which responds to the necessity of content and grounding and of the ideology of the natural by including and transforming it—foregrounding it and turning it into a message about itself. One final example now needs to be set forth, namely what might today be described as the relationship within Benjamin of Proust and cultural studies, of modernism and enlightenment, of aestheticism and politics. It turns on Benjamin's systematic appropriation of Proust's motif of waking and sleeping, of remembering and forgetting, for the purposes of the Enlightenment project of "waking up from the nineteenth century"—that is, from bourgeois culture itself, from the superstructure of capitalism.⁵ It is a waking that, as in Benjamin's relations with the mythic generally, he wishes to stage as a full settling of accounts, a passing all the way through to the other side, rather than a revolutionary puritanism and iconoclasm whereby the bourgeois heritage is simply repudiated and destroyed. This form of waking and remembering, whose concept Benjamin finds developed in Proust, constitutes a kind of collective therapy, not to say cultural revolution—a systematic working through and re-experiencing as though for the first time, which, as in Freud, by the completeness of its commitment to the past now at last allows the past to be left behind and more fully forgotten (the dead finally burying their dead).

Though there is no time to develop the particulars and the intricacies of this operation, which has much to do with Proust and with cultural historiography, its formal structure must be underscored. It is a structure that bears some similarities to the conjunction with which we began, namely the odd sharing of a mutual electron between Kafka and Brecht, the way in which the Brechtian concept of *gestus* became the Kafkaesque category of narrative. Here too a Proustian figure becomes a Benjaminian (or at least a nineteenth-century archaeological) methodology. But where in the first instance it was one aesthetic document, one point in the constellation, which thereby managed to link up with another, here it is the entire methodological practice of the constellation that comes into view in conjunction with one of its crucial components. It is a mode of relationship (which it might be better to call automethodological rather than autoreferential) in which a part, while remaining in its place as part, also programs the totality and offers its unexpected manifesto.

We now have a provisional conclusion to draw from these figures. They display the tracings, the afterimage, and the ghostly watermark left by the objective forces of the age, or of the "current situation." We should not too rapidly subjectivize Benjamin's readings by grasping them as the

idiosyncratic “tastes” of an already profoundly idiosyncratic and private reader (what makes Benjamin’s idiosyncrasies epistemologically privileged is precisely his abhorrence for the personal and the subjective as such). Rather, “tastes,” particularly in the modern period, are the way in which the forces of the modern age, passing through the mediation of the aesthetic, show up on the individual sensorium as on a Geiger counter or an EKG. My deeper visceral feelings about Le Corbusier can then be translated back into a whole philosophy of history and a whole political stance on the nature of modern times and modernization—and so for all the others we have here named in passing. And if it is said that it is somehow a remarkable historical accident that a Kafka comes into existence, or if we amuse ourselves by imagining a body of modernist writing of a peculiar, unimaginable type that failed to come into being—thereby failing to give representation to some deeper force of the age, which for that very reason remains unsaid and non-named—then that, too, makes up for the nature of our historical situation, whose contingencies are precisely inevitable in the other sense of the word. It defines our history that a Kafka came into being in it, and the aforesaid unnameable modernist aesthetic failed to do so. It is to that contingent conjuncture of contingencies that the historical consciousness of the present is a reaction and an articulation.

I also want to conclude with a remark about what I called the codes and their essentially historical arbitrariness. Benjamin gives us the suggestive example of a squaring of the circle of the contradiction between relativism and absolute naturality, an example that consists in keeping faith with a nameless referent that can never find adequate figuration, while the representations and codes that simultaneously approximate it are both honored and relativized. Benjamin was utterly non- and antiphilosophical, and I suppose that his constellative transcoding can in no way be thought of as Hegelian. Perhaps it constitutes, rather, an approach to that postmodern spatial dialectic that so many people (most notably Henri Lefebvre) have called for in opposition to the Hegelian temporal one.

But that amounts to hammering Benjamin into an instrument in the struggle for our own present and future. Only a first, provisional lesson can be drawn from these Benjaminian procedures if we substitute “narrative” for “representation” in general. In any case our achieved receptions of any representation seem at the very least susceptible to transformation into narrative and expression in narrative form. Yet it is precisely narrative that wears the least well, that shows its age in the outmoded and merely “fashionable”—sheerly conventional—stories the older generations told themselves (without realizing, often, that these were stories or conventions). This is one of the striking features of our reappropriation of the past, that what separates the usable, the relevant or current, from the detritus of the junk shop, the uncanonizable, is the line between non-narrative and narrative itself.

A structure is reconstructed which we translate into contemporary terms, leaving behind a period narrative that we can no longer stomach and that must be repressed and ignored, if the older text is to be revived without too much guilt or intellectual self-recrimination. Thus the constructed part of a Beethoven sonata is tacitly separated from the cloying period melody that comes to stand for Viennese Enlightenment frivolity, class guilt, and luxury, the self-indulgence of culture at its most gratuitous and intolerable. Or consider Edward Curtis's ambitious Pacific Northwest coast film, in which the last vestiges of the most stunning Kwakiutl myths and rituals are reorganized into the most unlikely "Indian love story," with priestly villains and star-crossed lovers: we hasten to peel off this window dressing and invent a non-narrative relationship to the terrifying thunderbird in the war canoe, beyond all local fashion and late nineteenth-century sentimentalism.

All separable narrative moments of this kind—which include what are sometimes called the unconscious "master narratives" of history at work in the collective imaginary—are by virtue of that reification and separation already implicitly transformed into images, which is to say, into objects. Notoriously images soak up ideological investment of a secondary kind, and on some other level than their former content (for example, notions of the "expansion" of an empire or a system, its fall, or its "maturation" and development).

This objectification strikes kitsch and classic alike; indeed, this is the basis on which both social phenomena are constructed: the reified projection of a kind of cultural object capable of absorbing sheer connotation, whether that of official culture and canonization or the more shabby decorations by which poverty seeks to adorn and conceal itself (most often from itself). In either case, the guilt of culture is here reenacted by way of the hollowness of official institutions or the pitiful failure of art objects to transform the real. (That there is also a truth to culture is presupposed by this effect, which sets in when that truth has been dispelled or neutralized.) It is therefore as though narrative—in the sense of hairstyle and clothing fashion, storytelling conventions, the sheer style of the social imaginary or objective spirit of any given period—inspired what Barthes might have called a veritable nausea of history, a deep visceral disgust with the ephemerality of the past. This is quite different from that genuine nightmare of history we glimpse whenever we begin to sense the permanence of its failures and the irredeemability of the generations upon generations of the dead (even more than the ferocious cruelty of human beings among themselves).

What must now be asserted is the identity between this narrative rubbish—which the past *is*, virtually in its totality—and ideology proper, itself always susceptible to narrative form. This is the point at which we can venture the unlikely proposition that Benjamin's constellations have a family likeness with Althusserian "structural causality," which also seeks to

elude narrative form while retaining the elements of deep referentiality. The Althusserian distinction between science and ideology is supremely pertinent here, for it is hard to see how that “representation of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence,” which he calls ideology, could be anything other than narrative.⁶ It is a position that blocks the free-fall into sheer fictionality, since the elements, the non-narrative components of the representation, are scarcely optional and mark the place of some non-narrative real, an absent referentiality.⁷

One can also try to recode all of this in a kind of mathematical language. It is certain that one of the casualties of a contemporary, properly post-modern nausea in the face of narratives and old-fashioned representations is what is taken to be the Marxian “master narrative” of history, by which is meant the doctrine of the modes of production, which we turn into stories—of the now supremely unfashionable type of “philosophies of history” or “universal histories”—about the way in which one mode gave way to another one, how a “civilization” broke down, how Rome declined, how some other social form will eventually take the place of the current one, and so on. As narrative objects, these historical stories, with their transindividual actors and characters, are then available for all kinds of private libidinal investments, as when depressed individuals pine away thinking imaginary thoughts about existentially unreal entities. The Nietzschean diagnosis of history and its unhealthy effects is obviously strongest at this point. But one would also have to note the period changes in the Marxian “master narratives,” for they are not terribly different in their actualization or in their telling at any particular generational moment from Curtis’s intolerable romance. For the doctrine of modes of production is not a narrative but an axiomatic: it can be used in specific circumstances, at which point it must always be narrativized and represented in a story form that then soaks up and registers all the ephemeral fashions and tastes, the mortal conventions, of the period. The basic elements of what is thus wrongly called “the mode of production narrative” are thus non-narrative, but can only come before us in narrative form.

This is the benefit for us today of Benjamin’s own deep formal suspicions of narrative as such (even as it is embodied in the conventional essay form or in conventional literary history). The upshot—the constellation as such—is not ammunition against history and referentiality but rather a way of sustaining these values against narrative representation, in all its sheer fictionality. The *Arcades* notes and files project the imperative to narrativize, to reorganize them into a representation and a kind of story, at the same time that for tragically contingent reasons they resist any definitive representational form. Yet what this immense ruin does by its sheer immobility and bulk across the landscape was accomplished by the earlier program-essays by sheer momentum, moving too fast for any representation to

harden, turning a work of meditation into a series of rapid transitions that elude the capacity of the mind to retain them and transform them back into an image. Neither of these solutions can work for us: thematized and reified, they are thereby already transformed into a period style and a nauseous historical fashion. But the form-problem they force us to work through—even if we strip away the period names, such as synchrony and diachrony—is bound to be good for us in new and unforeseeable ways.

1992

Notes

- 1 These essays were, until the publication of the *Arcades Project*, the most widely known and influential of his works. Most of them were translated in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1968. Future references to this work are denoted *I* and are cited in the text. Two exceptions are the essay on Karl Kraus, translated in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott, New York, Schocken, 1978, and “Commentaries on Poems by Brecht.” References to the former appear in the text as *R*. The present essay also makes reference to Walter Benjamin, *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Gary Smith, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983. Future references to this work are denoted *PAH*. All English-language references are followed by references to corresponding passages in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7 vols. to date, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972–, henceforth denoted *GS*, or Walter Benjamin, “[Re. the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress],” trans. Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth, *Benjamin*, 43–83, marked *N*, followed by section/page numbers. I have modified the English translation without indication.
- 2 In the *N* file, but also in the very interesting provisional set of aphorisms he extracted from the Baudelaire file under the title “Central Park” (see *GS*, 1: 657–90). For an English-language translation, see Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” trans. Lloyd Spenser, *New German Critique*, 1985, 32–58.
- 3 See the August 31 entry in Walter Benjamin, “Conversation with Brecht,” *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, New York: New Left Books, 1973. Future references to this work are denoted *UB*.
- 4 Benjamin’s conception of the relationship of present to past is governed in part by Riegl’s *Late Roman Art Industry*—by a principled repudiation of the notion of historical decadence: “There are no periods of decline” (*N*, 1.6 and *GS*, 5: 571). The satirical stance of a Kraus, however, is precisely grounded in the belief in contemporary decadence; whence complex tensions in Benjamin’s thought I will examine elsewhere.
- 5 This is Benjamin’s own description of the ambition of the *Arcades Project*; see above all the first reflections in the K file (*GS*, 5: 490ff.).

- 6 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, tran. Ben Brewster, London: New Left Books, 1971, 162.
- 7 On the more general turn away from “linear” (or narrative) causality, Adorno’s thoughts bear reflection: “Causality has similarly withdrawn into totality ... each state of things is horizontally and vertically connected to all the others, illuminates all of them just as it is illuminated by all in turn.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E.B. Ashton, New York: Continuum, 1973, 267. Whether this synchronic or structural causality is fundamentally resistant to narrativization is a matter for debate. In some narrativized or cultural form, transformed into *doxa*, synchronic or constellated causality may some day seem as old-fashioned, in the strong, nauseous sense, as Hegelian universal history.



Foreword to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*

This seemingly neutral review of a vast body of material on contemporary science and problems of knowledge or information proves on closer inspection to be a kind of crossroads in which a number of different themes—a number of different books—intersect and problematize each other. For Jean-François Lyotard's discussion of the consequences of the new views of scientific research and its paradigms, opened up by theorists like Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, is also a thinly veiled polemic against Jürgen Habermas's concept of a "legitimation crisis" and vision of a "noise-free," transparent, fully communicational society. Meanwhile the title of the book, with its fashionable theme of postmodernism provocatively in evidence, opens up this subject matter, at least by implication, in the directions of aesthetics and economics, since postmodernism as it is generally understood involves a radical break, both with a dominant culture and aesthetic, and with a rather different moment of socioeconomic organization against which its structural novelties and innovations are measured: a new social and economic moment (or even system), which has variously been called media society, the "society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord), consumer society (or the *société de consommation*), the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" (Henri Lefebvre), or "postindustrial society" (Daniel Bell). It may also be assumed that this ostensibly technical and impersonal handbook is also a significant move in the development of Lyotard's own philosophical views, whose combative and prophetic voice, familiar to the readers of his other works, will surprise by its relative silence here. Finally, and closely related to this last, *The Postmodern Condition* presents us with significant methodological operations, which, although they draw on a whole very rich contemporary tradition of narrative analysis, nonetheless strike a relatively isolated and unusual note in the whole range of contemporary philosophical research.

Lyotard's official subject matter—the status of science and technology, of technocracy and the control of knowledge and information today—is

perhaps the most familiar material for the American reader, yet it opens immediately and instructively onto all the other themes I have just enumerated. "Doing science," for instance, involves its own kind of legitimation (why is it that our students do not do laboratory work in alchemy? why is Immanuel Velikovsky considered to be an eccentric?) and may therefore be investigated as a subset of the vaster political problem of the legitimation of a whole social order (a theme, which, formulated in that particular code or terminology, is associated with the work of Habermas). Doing "normal" science and participating in lawful and orderly social reproduction are then two phenomena—better still, two *mysteries*—that ought to be able to illuminate one another.

But as the term *crisis* in Habermas's title, as well as the prefix *post* in that of Lyotard, reminds us, legitimation becomes visible as a problem and an object of study only at the point in which it is called into question. As far as science is concerned, this crisis may be taken to be that of which the historical theories of Kuhn or Feyerabend stand as crucial symptoms: it would seem rather less important to decide whether those theories imply that we are now in a position to think or conceptualize scientific research in a very different way from the Newtonian period, or on the contrary that we now actually do science in a different way. At any rate, this "break" now links up with the other thematics of Lyotard's essay by way of an event generally taken primarily to be an aesthetic one, although it has relatively immediate philosophical and ideological analogues: I am referring to the so-called crisis of representation, in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it—projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself. It is in terms of this crisis that the transition, in the history of form, from a novelistic "realism" of the Lukácsian variety to the various now classical "high" modernisms, has been described: the cognitive vocation of science would, however, seem even more disastrously impaired by the analogous shift from a representational to a nonrepresentational practice. Lyotard here ingeniously "saves" the coherence of scientific research and experiment by recasting its now seemingly non- or post-referential "epistemology" in terms of linguistics, and in particular of theories of the performative (J. L. Austin), for which the justification of scientific work is not to produce an adequate model or replication of some outside reality, but rather simply to produce *more* work, to generate new and fresh scientific *énoncés* or statements, to make you have "new ideas" (P. B. Medawar), or, best of all (and returning to the more familiar aesthetics of high modernism), again and again to "make it new": "*Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!*"

However this novel way of relegitimizing contemporary science is

understood or evaluated—and it has many family resemblances elsewhere in contemporary thought¹—it then retrospectively allows Lyotard to sketch a narrative analysis of the older forms of scientific legitimation, whose collapse in our own time imposes such desperate solutions, such remarkable last-minute salvage operations.

The two great legitimizing “myths” or narrative archetypes (*récits*) are also something of a complication, in that they reproduce the denotative argument of the book in a connotative or autoreferential spiral. For the two great myths disengaged by Lyotard and identified as the alternate justifications for institutional scientific research up to our own period—that of the liberation of humanity and that of the speculative unity of all knowledge (qua philosophical system)—are also national myths and reproduce the very polemic in which Lyotard’s own book wishes to intervene. The first—political, militant, activist—is of course the tradition of the French eighteenth century and the French Revolution, a tradition for which philosophy is already politics and in which Lyotard must himself clearly be ranged. The second is of course the Germanic and Hegelian tradition—a contemplative one, organized around the value of totality rather than that of commitment, and a tradition to which Lyotard’s philosophical adversary, Habermas, still—however distantly—remains affiliated. The conflict can be dramatized and magnified if for these names we substitute even more prestigious ones whose philosophical differences are even more sharply articulated: compare, for example, Gilles Deleuze’s influential celebration of schizophrenia (in books like the *Anti-Oedipus*) with Adorno’s no less influential and characteristic denunciations of cultural reification and fetishization. The opposition can also be rotated in a psychoanalytical direction, in which case a characteristically French affirmation of the “decentered subject” or the illusion of the coherent self or ego is set off against more traditional Frankfurt School defenses of psychic “autonomy.”

Still, these traditions are not altogether so continuous or symmetrical as I have just suggested. Lyotard is, after all, writing in the wake of a certain French “post-Marxism,” that is, an enormous reaction on all levels against various Marxist and Communist traditions in France, whose prime target on the philosophical level is the Hegel/Lukács concept of “totality” (often overhastily assimilated to Stalinism or even to the Leninist party on the political level). Lyotard’s own philosophical break with Marxism (he was a member of the important *Socialisme ou barbarie* group in the 1950s and early 1960s)² largely antedates this more recent, rather McCarthyist moment in France (itself since overtaken by the unexpected Socialist landslide of 1981); but it clearly makes for a situation in which Habermas can still stand in for the totalizing and dialectical German tradition, while Lyotard’s own philosophical relationship to the politicized French one has become far more problematic and complex. Indeed, I want to show a little

later on that one significant “libidinal” subtext of the present volume consists of a symbolic effort to clarify this tangled plot as well. At any rate, Habermas’s vision of an evolutionary social leap into a new type of rational society, defined in communicational terms as “the communication community of those affected, who as participants in a practical discourse test the validity claims of norms and, to the extent that they accept them with reasons, arrive at the conviction that in the given circumstances the proposed norms are ‘right,’” is here explicitly rejected by Lyotard as the unacceptable remnant of a “totalizing” philosophical tradition and as the valorization of conformist, when not “terrorist,” ideals of consensus.³ (Indeed, insofar as Habermas will invoke a liberatory rhetoric as well, there is a sense in which, for Lyotard, this philosophical position unites everything that is unacceptable about *both* traditions and myths of legitimation.)

Before examining the position in terms of which such critiques are made, however, we must turn at least parenthetically to the methodological perspective developed here, in which legitimation is secured in terms of master-narratives of the two types already described. The admission to France of such Anglo-American linguistic notions as that of Austin’s “performative” is now largely an accomplished fact (although a rather unexpected development). In a more general way, the linguistic dimensions of what used to be called French structuralism and the seemingly more static possibilities of a dominant semiotics have in recent years been corrected and augmented by a return to pragmatics, to the analysis of language situations and games, and of language itself as an unstable exchange between its speakers, whose utterances are now seen less as a process of the transmission of information or messages, or in terms of some network of signs or even signifying systems, than as (to use one of Lyotard’s favorite figures) the “taking of tricks,” the trumping of a communicational adversary, an essentially conflictual relationship between tricksters—and not as a well-regulated and noise-free “passing of tokens from hand to hand” (Mallarmé on denotative speech). We have already observed Lyotard’s promotion of the “performative” to the very fundamental principle of contemporary science itself; what is even more striking in his methodological perspective, however—indeed to my knowledge he is one of the few professional philosophers of stature anywhere (although Paul Ricoeur and Alasdair McIntyre also come to mind) *formally* to have drawn this momentous consequence—is the way in which narrative is affirmed, not merely as a significant new field of research, but well beyond that as a central instance of the human mind and a mode of thinking fully as legitimate as that of abstract logic.

A lengthy methodological parenthesis defends this proposition, which at once itself becomes a kind of historical narrative in its own right, since—particularly in the context of a discussion of *science*—it is obvious that one of the features that characterizes more “scientific” periods of history, and

most notably capitalism itself, is the relative retreat of the claims of narrative or storytelling knowledge in the face of those of the abstract, denotative, or logical and cognitive procedures generally associated with science or positivism. This parenthesis once again complicates the arguments of *The Postmodern Condition* insofar as it becomes itself a symptom of the state it seeks to diagnose—its own return to narrative arguments being fully as revealing an example of the legitimation crisis of the older cognitive and epistemological scientific world-view as any of the other developments enumerated in the text. Lyotard does indeed characterize one recent innovation in the analysis of science as a view of scientific experiments as so many smaller narratives or stories to be worked out. On the other hand, paradoxically, this revival of an essentially narrative view of “truth,” and the vitality of small narrative units at work everywhere *locally* in the present social system, are accompanied by something like a more global or totalizing “crisis” in the narrative function in general, since, as we have seen, the older master-narratives of legitimation no longer function in the service of scientific research—nor, by implication, anywhere else (for example, we no longer believe in political or historical teleologies, or in the great “actors” and “subjects” of history—the nation-state, the proletariat, the party, the West, etc.). This seeming contradiction can be resolved, I believe, by taking a further step that Lyotard seems unwilling to do in the present text, namely to posit, not the disappearance of the great master-narratives, but their passage underground as it were, their continuing but now *unconscious* effectivity as a way of “thinking about” and acting in our current situation. This persistence of buried master-narratives in what I have elsewhere called our “political unconscious,” I will try shortly to demonstrate on the occasion of the present text as well.

What is most striking in Lyotard’s differentiation between storytelling and “scientific” abstraction is its unexpected modulation towards a Nietzschean thematics of history. In effect, indeed, for Lyotard the fundamental distinction between these two forms of knowledge lies in their relationship to temporality, and in particular in their relationship to the retention of the past. Narrative, whose formal properties become magnified in prosody and in the rhythmic features of traditional tales, proverbs, and the like, is here characterized as a way of *consuming* the past, a way of forgetting: “as meter takes precedence over accent in the production of sound (spoken or not), time ceases to be a support for memory to become an immemorial beating that, in the absence of a noticeable separation between periods, prevents their being numbered and consigns them to oblivion” (*PC*, 6). One recalls the great and still influential essay of Nietzsche’s on the debilitating influence of historiography and of the fidelity to the past and the dead that an obsession with history seems to encourage. The Nietzschean “strength to *forget* the past”—in preparation for the mutation

of the superman to come—is here paradoxically redeployed as a property of storytelling itself, of precisely those narratives, heroic or other, in which we have been taught to see a form of primitive data storage or of social reproduction. What this formulation does very sharply achieve, at any rate, is the radical differentiation between the consumption of the past in narrative and its storage, hoarding, and capitalization in “science” and scientific thought: a mode of understanding that, like the first surplus on the economic level, will little by little determine a whole range of ever more complex and extensive institutional objectifications—first in writing; then in libraries, universities, museums; with the breakthrough in our own period to microstorage, computerized data, and data banks of hitherto unimaginable proportions, whose control or even ownership is, as Herbert Schiller and others have warned us (and as Lyotard is very well aware), one of the crucial *political* issues of our own time.

We thus return to the thematics of science and knowledge in its social form: one that raises issues of social class—is the technocracy produced by such a primacy of knowledge a bureaucracy or a whole new class?—and of socioeconomic analysis—is this moment of advanced industrial society a structural variant of classical capitalism or a mutation and the dawning of a wholly new social structure in which, as Daniel Bell and other theoreticians of the concept of a properly “postindustrial society” have argued, it is now science, knowledge, technological research, rather than industrial production and the extraction of surplus value, that is the “ultimately determining instance”?

In reality, two distinct and overlapping questions are raised simultaneously by these two interrelated theoretical problems, which to his credit Lyotard does not seek here in peremptory fashion to resolve. The problem is finally that of the nature of a mode of production, and in particular the nature of the capitalist mode of production and the structural variations of which it is capable. The question may therefore be rephrased as a question about Marxism: do the categories developed there for the analysis of classical capitalism still retain their validity and their explanatory power when we turn to the multinational and media societies of today with their “third-stage” technologies? The persistence of issues of power and control, particularly in the increasing monopolization of information by private business, would seem to make an affirmative answer unavoidable, and to reconfirm the privileged status of Marxism as a mode of analysis of capitalism proper.

But the question has often been taken to involve a second set of answers or consequences as well, having to do with the end of capitalism, the possibility of revolution, and, first and foremost, the continuing function of the industrial working class as the fundamental revolutionary “subject of history.” It has at least historically been possible for intellectuals and militants to recognize the explanatory power of Marxism as the privileged mode

of analysis of capitalism (including the particular social moment that is our own society) and, at one and the same time, to abandon the traditional Marxian vision of revolution and socialism, mainly out of a conviction that the industrial working class (in any case defined by its relationship to productive technologies of the first and second type, rather than the third, cybernetic or nuclear variety) no longer occupies the strategic position of power in this social formation. A stronger theoretical form of this proposition would then be derivable in the notion that social classes—of the classical type defined by Marxism—no longer function as such today, but are rather displaced by different, non-class formations such as bureaucracy and technocracy (and this would seem to be the position of Lyotard, whose formative political work in the *Socialisme ou barbarie* group turned precisely around the analysis of bureaucracy in the Eastern countries).

The question of social class, and in particular of the “proletariat” and its existence, is hopelessly confused when such arguments conflate the problem of a theoretical category of analysis (social class) with the empirical question about the mood or influence of workers in this or that society today (they are no longer revolutionary, bourgeoisified, etc.). More orthodox Marxists will agree with the most radical post- or anti-Marxist positions in at least this, that Marxism as a coherent philosophy (or better still, a “unity of theory and praxis”) stands or falls with the matter of social class.

What one can at least suggest here is that with Ernest Mandel’s theorization of a third stage of capitalism beyond that of the classical or market capitalism analyzed in *Capital* itself, and that of the monopoly stage or stage of “imperialism” proposed by Lenin, there exists a properly Marxian alternative to non- or anti-Marxist theories of “consumer” or “postindustrial” society today, theories of which Daniel Bell’s is no doubt the most influential. Mandel indeed undertakes to show that all of the features mobilized by Bell to document the end of capitalism as such—in particular the new primacy of science and technological invention, and of the technocracy generated by that privileged position, as well as the shift from the older industrial technologies to the newer informational ones—can be accounted for in classical Marxist terms, as indices of a new and powerful, original, global expansion of capitalism, which now specifically penetrates the hitherto precapitalist enclaves of Third World agriculture and of First World culture, in which, in other words, capital more definitively secures the colonization of Nature and the Unconscious:

This new period [1940 to 1965] was characterized, among other things, by the fact that alongside machine-made industrial consumer goods (as from the early 19th century) and machine-made machines (as from the mid-19th century), we now find machine-produced raw materials and foodstuffs. Late capitalism, far from representing a ‘post-industrial society,’ thus appears as the period in which

all branches of the economy are fully industrialized for the first time; to which one could further add the increasing mechanization of the sphere of circulation (with the exception of pure repair services) and the increasing mechanization of the superstructure.⁴

This description is also quite consistent with the Frankfurt School's conception of the "culture industry" and the penetration of commodity fetishism into those realms of the imagination and the psyche which had, since classical German philosophy, always been taken as some last impregnable stronghold against the instrumental logic of capital. What remains problematical about such conceptions—and about mediatory formulations such as that of Guy Debord, for whom "the image is the last stage of commodity reification"—is of course the difficulty of articulating cultural and informational commodities with the labor theory of value, the methodological problem of reconciling an analysis in terms of quantity and in particular of labor time (or of the sale of labor power in so many units) with the nature of "mental" work and of nonphysical and nonmeasurable "commodities" of the type of informational bits or indeed of media or entertainment "products." On the other hand, the posing of the category of "mode of production" as the fundamental one of Marxian social analysis and the endorsement of a "problematic" that asks such systemic questions about contemporary society would seem to remain essential for political people who are still committed to radical social change and transformation. Indeed, it is precisely as a contribution to this general problematic that Lyotard's little book is valuable, even though, as we shall see shortly, its author by no means counts himself among revolutionaries of the traditional kind.

If the changing status of science and knowledge (and of its experts) leads us to the question about the nature of this mode of production as a system and a functional whole, this second, larger issue returns us, after a considerable detour, to the problem of culture, and in particular of the existence or not of some properly "postmodernist" culture. For although the category of the mode of production has sometimes been misunderstood as a narrowly economic or "productionist" one, its adequate solution clearly demands a structural examination and positioning of the superstructural levels of a given social formation and, most urgently, the function and space to be assigned to culture itself: no satisfactory model of a given mode of production can exist without a theory of the historically and dialectically specific and unique role of "culture" within it.

Here Lyotard's sketch is tantalizing and finally frustrating; for the formal limitation of his essay to the problem of "knowledge" has tended to exclude an area—culture—that has been of the greatest importance to him in his other writings, as he has been one of the most keenly committed of contemporary thinkers anywhere to the whole range and variety of avant-garde and

experimental art today. This very commitment to the experimental and the new, however, determine an aesthetic that is far more closely related to the traditional ideologies of high modernism proper than to current postmodernisms, and is indeed—paradoxically enough—very closely related to the conception of the revolutionary nature of high modernism that Habermas faithfully inherited from the Frankfurt School.

Thus, although he has polemically endorsed the slogan of a “postmodernism” and has been involved in the defense of some of its more controversial productions, Lyotard is in reality quite unwilling to posit a postmodernist stage radically different from the period of high modernism and involving a fundamental historical and cultural break with this last.⁵ Rather, seeing postmodernism as a discontent with an disintegration of this or that high modernist style—a moment in the perpetual “revolution” and innovation of high modernism, to be succeeded by a fresh burst of formal invention—in a striking formula he has characterized postmodernism, not as that which follows modernism and its particular legitimation crisis, but rather as a cyclical moment that returns before the emergence of ever *new* modernisms in the stricter sense.

There is then here reproduced something of the celebration of modernism as its first ideologues projected it—a constant and ever more dynamic revolution in the languages, forms, and tastes of art (not yet assimilated to the commercial revolutions in fashion and commodity styling we have since come to grasp as an immanent rhythm of capitalism itself); to which a later wave of more explicitly left-wing and often Marxist ideologues and aesthetes after World War II will add an explicit *political* dimension—so that the revolutionary aesthetic of the modern will sometimes be grasped by the Frankfurt School, but also by the *Tel Quel* and *Screen* groups, in the more literal sense of critical negation when not of outright social and psychological transformation. Lyotard’s own aesthetic retains much of this protopolitical thrust; his commitment to cultural and formal innovation still valorizes culture and its powers in much the same spirit in which the Western avant-garde has done so since the *fin de siècle*.

On the other hand, it would seem that the assimilation of postmodernism to this older conception of high modernism and its negative, critical, or revolutionary vocation deproblematizes a far more interesting and complex situation, which is part of the dilemma posed by “late capitalism” (or consumer or postindustrial society, etc.) in those other areas of science and technology, production, social change, and the like. Here it seems to me that Habermas—working to be sure within the far more suffocating and McCarthyist atmosphere of the Federal Republic—has a much keener sense of the political stakes involved in this seemingly theoretical matter than Lyotard has been willing to allow for. For Habermas, indeed, postmodernism involves the explicit repudiation of the modernist

tradition—the return of the middle-class philistine or *Spießbürger* rejection of modernist forms and values—and as such the expression of a new social conservatism.⁶

His diagnosis is confirmed by that area in which the question of postmodernism has been mostly acutely posed, namely in architecture, whose great high modernists, the architects of the International Style—Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright—were very precisely revolutionaries in the senses enumerated above: proponents of innovations in form and transformations in architectural space that could be expected in and of themselves to transform social life as a whole and, by replacing political revolution (as Le Corbusier put it), to serve as the latter's substitute (but in that form, the idea is as old as Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Humankind*).⁷ Postmodernism certainly means a return of all the old antimodernist prejudices (as in Tom Wolfe's recent *From Bauhaus to Our House*), but it was also, objectively, the recognition of a basic failure on the architects' own terms: the new buildings of Le Corbusier and Wright did not finally change the world, nor even modify the junk space of late capitalism, while the Mallarmean "zero degree" of Mies's towers quite unexpectedly began to generate a whole overpopulation of the shoddiest glass boxes in all the major urban centers in the world. This is the sense in which high modernism can be definitively certified as dead and as a thing of the past: its Utopian ambitions were unrealizable and its formal innovations exhausted.

This is however not at all the conclusion that Habermas and Lyotard draw from what they think of in their different ways as the postmodernist movement: for both of them, a return to the older critical high modernism is still possible, just as (equally anachronistically) for Lukács, writing in the thick of the high modernist period, a return to some older premodernist realism was still possible. Yet if one is willing—as both Habermas and Lyotard are—to posit the emergence of some new state of social relations (even leaving aside the question of whether this is to be considered a whole new mode of production in its own right or not), then it does not seem particularly daring to posit some equivalent modification in the very role and dynamic of cultural production itself, something indeed one ought to be able to entertain dialectically, without any needless moralizing. Postmodernist architecture, for example, comes before us as a peculiar analogue to neoclassicism, a play of ("historicist") allusion and quotation that has renounced the older high modernist rigor and that itself seems to recapitulate a whole range of traditional Western aesthetic strategies: we therefore have a mannerist postmodernism (Michael Graves), a baroque postmodernism (the Japanese), a rococo postmodernism (Charles Moore), a neoclassicist postmodernism (the French, particularly Christian de Portzamparc), and probably even a "high modernist" postmodernism in which modernism is itself the object of the postmodernist pastiche. This is

a rich and creative movement, of the greatest aesthetic play and delight, that can perhaps be most rapidly characterized as a whole by two important features: first, the falling away of the protopolitical vocation and the terrorist stance of the older modernism and, second, the eclipse of all of the affect (depth, anxiety, terror, the emotions of the monumental) that marked high modernism and its replacement by what Coleridge would have called fancy or Schiller aesthetic play, a commitment to surface and to the *superficial* in all the senses of the word.

It was, however, precisely to the superficial (in all those senses) that a certain French poststructuralism invited us, not excluding the earlier works of Lyotard himself: this is, however, the moment in which aesthetics gives way to ethics, in which the problem of the postmodern (even in its relationship to new forms of science and knowledge) becomes that of one's more fundamental attitude toward the new social formation—the moment, finally, in which what I have called the deeper repressed or buried symbolic narrative of *The Postmodern Condition* comes at length into view.

Lyotard's affiliations here would seem to be with the *Anti-Oedipus* of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who also warned us, at the end of that work, that the schizophrenic ethic they proposed was not at all a revolutionary one, but a way of surviving under capitalism, producing fresh desires within the structural limits of the capitalist mode of production as such.⁸ Lyotard's celebration of a related ethic emerges most dramatically in the context of that repudiation of Habermas's consensus community already mentioned, in which the dissolution of the self into a host of networks and relations, of contradictory codes and interfering messages, is prophetically valorized (*PC*, 4). This view not surprisingly will then determine Lyotard's ultimate vision of science and knowledge today as a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for "instabilities," as a practice of *paralogism*, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous "normal science" had been conducted. The rhetoric in which all this is conveyed is to be sure one of struggle, conflict, the agonic in a quasi-heroic sense; nor must we forget Lyotard's related vision of non-hegemonic Greek philosophy (the Stoics, the Cynics, the Sophists), as the guerrilla war of the marginals, the foreigners, the non-Greeks, against the massive and repressive Order of Aristotle and his successors.⁹ On the other hand, aesthetics sometimes functions as an unpleasant mirror; and we need perhaps at least momentarily to reflect on the peculiar consonance between Lyotard's scientific "free play" and the way in which postmodernist architecture has taught us to "learn from Las Vegas" (Robert Venturi) and "to make ourselves at home in our alienated being" (Marx on Hegel's conception of Absolute Spirit). This is, at any rate, the deepest, most contradictory, but also the most urgent level of Lyotard's book: that of a narrative which—like all narrative—must

generate the illusion of “an imaginary resolution of real contradictions” (Lévi-Strauss).

The formal problem involved might be expressed this way: how to do without narrative by means of narrative itself? On the political and social level, indeed, narrative in some sense always meant the negation of capitalism: on the one hand, for instance, narrative knowledge is here opposed to “scientific” or abstract knowledge as precapitalism to capitalism proper. Yet—as became clear when the narrative legitimations of science itself were evoked at their moment of crisis and dissolution—narrative also means something like *teleology*. The great master-narratives here are those that suggest that something beyond capitalism is possible, something radically different; and they also “legitimate” the praxis whereby political militants seek to bring that radically different future social order into being. Yet both master-narratives of science have become peculiarly repugnant or embarrassing to First World intellectuals today: the rhetoric of liberation has for example been denounced with passionate ambivalence by Michel Foucault in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*; while the rhetoric of totality and totalization that derived from what I have called the Germanic or Hegelian tradition is the object of a kind of instinctive or automatic denunciation by just about everybody.

Lyotard’s insistence on *narrative analysis* in a situation in which the narratives themselves henceforth seem impossible is his declaration of intent to remain political and contestatory; that is, to avoid one possible and even logical resolution to the dilemma, which would consist in becoming, like Daniel Bell, an ideologue of technocracy and an apologist for the system itself. How he does this is to transfer the older ideologies of aesthetic high modernism, the celebration of its revolutionary power, to science and scientific research proper. Now it is the latter’s infinite capacity for innovation, change, break, renewal, which will infuse the otherwise repressive system with the disalienating excitement of the new and the “unknown” (the last word of Lyotard’s text), as well as of adventure, the refusal of conformity, and the heterogeneities of desire.

Unfortunately, the other conjoined value of the book’s conclusion—that of justice—tends, as in all interesting narratives, to return on this one and undermine its seeming certainties. The dynamic of perpetual change is, as Marx showed in the *Manifesto*, not some alien rhythm within capital—a rhythm specific to those noninstrumental activities that are art and science—but rather is the very “permanent revolution” of capitalist production itself: at which point the exhilaration with such revolutionary dynamism is a feature of the bonus of pleasure and the reward of the social reproduction of the system itself. The moment of truth, in this respect, comes when the matter of the ownership and control of the new information banks—the profitability of the new technological and information

revolution—returns in these last pages with a vengeance: the dystopian prospect of a global private monopoly of information weighs heavily in the balance against the pleasures of paralogisms and of “anarchist science” (Feyerabend). Yet that monopoly, like the rest of the private property system, cannot be expected to be reformed by however benign a technocratic elite, but can be challenged only by genuinely political (and not symbolic or protopolitical) action.

1984

Notes

- 1 See for example Louis Althusser's essays in epistemology or, in another national tradition, Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, NY: Princeton, 1979, and Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982.
- 2 See his interesting memoir, Jean-François Lyotard, “Pierre Souyri, Le Marxisme qui n'a pas fini,” *Esprit* 61, January 1982, 11–31.
- 3 Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1975, 105. And see also the more recent Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981, in which the transformation of society is viewed in terms of Piagetian evolutionary stages: Paradoxically the problem here is also that of Lyotard when he confronts the monopolization of information by multinational corporations today—namely that there is no reason to believe such a situation can be solved by peaceful evolution or by rational persuasion.
- 4 Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres, London: New Left Books, 1975, 190–91.
- 5 See Jean-François Lyotard, “Response à la question: qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?” *Critique*, April 1982, 357–67, which is included in this book as an appendix; as well as his interesting book on Marcel Duchamp, Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, Paris: Galilee, 1977.
- 6 See Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981, 3–14.
- 7 For a useful discussion of current postmodernist theories of architecture, see Paolo Portoghesi, *After Modern Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli, 1982.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, with preface by Michel Foucault, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983; reprint of 1977 Viking edition, 456–57.
- 9 See Jean-François Lyotard, “De la force des faibles,” in special Lyotard issue of *L'Arc* 64, 1976, 4–12.

Foreword to Jacques Attali's
Noise: The Political Economy of Music

The present history of music, *Noise*, is first of all to be read in the context of a general revival of history, and of a renewed appetite for historiography, after a period in which “historicism” has been universally denounced (Althusser) and history and historical explanation generally stigmatized as the merely “diachronic” (Saussure) or as sheer mythic narrative (Lévi-Strauss). The richness of contemporary historiography, however, by no means betokens a return to simpler narrative history or chronicle. Rather, the newer work can be seen as the renewal of a whole series of attempts, beginning in the nineteenth century, to write something like a totalizing history of social life, from the “expressive causality” of German *Geistesgeschichte*, or of Hegel himself, to Spengler or even Auerbach—all the way to the “structural causalities” of a Foucault or of the Annales School.

Music, however, presents very special problems in this respect: for while it is by no means absolutely unrelated to other forms and levels of social life, it would seem to have the strongest affinities with that most abstract of all social realities, economics, with which it shares a peculiar ultimate object, which is *number*. The paradox is immediately underscored by the fact that the author of *Noise* is a professional economist; meanwhile, the recurrent phenomenon of child prodigies in music and in mathematics alike perhaps also suggests the peculiarity of the numerical gift, which would seem to demand less practical experience of the world and of social life than does work in other fields.

Yet, to use a well-worn Marxian formula, economics is generally considered to be a science of the base or infrastructure, whereas music traditionally counts among the most rarefied, abstract, and specialized of all superstructural activities. To propose intelligible links between these two “levels” or types of cultural and intellectual phenomena would therefore seem to demand the production of a host of intermediary connections or “mediations” that are by no means obvious or evident.

Max Weber, in whose time such methodological issues began to arise and whose own work poses them with a still unequalled lucidity, told this story in terms of a properly Western harmonic music whose very emergence constitutes an interesting historical problem in its own right (“Why was harmonic music developed from the almost universal polyphony of folk music only in Europe and only in a particular period, while everywhere else the rationalization of music took a different path—usually indeed precisely the opposite one, that of the development of intervals by divisions of distance (usually the fourth) rather than by harmonic division (the fifth)?”).¹ He summarized the complex determinants of the process as follows:

Thoroughly concrete characteristics of the external and internal situation of the Church in the West, the result of sociological influences and religious history, allowed a rationalism which was peculiar to Western monasticism to give rise to these musical problems which were essentially “technical” in character. On the other hand, the invention and rationalization of rhythmical dancing, the origin of the musical forms which developed into the sonata, resulted from certain modes of social life at the time of the Renaissance. Finally, the development of the piano, one of the most important technical elements in the development of modern music, and its spread among the bourgeoisie, had its roots in the specifically “indoor” character of Northern European civilization. (*VJ*, 96)

Weber’s great story, as is well known, the master narrative into which the content of virtually all the research he ever did was reorganized, is that of the emergence of rationalization—so that it is not surprising to find Western music described as one of the peculiar, forced products of this strange new influence (which Weber liked to derive from the rational enclave of monastic life in the Middle Ages). Elsewhere in the same essay he speaks of the “material, technical, social and psychological conditions” for a new style or art or medium; and it is obvious in the passage quoted above that the play of “overdetermination” between these conditions is complex indeed: material influences include, for example, the whole history of technology (and in particular the invention and production of musical instruments). What Weber calls the “technical” factor surely involves script or *notation*, a matter that in music goes well beyond a simple transcription of sounds and whose categories (tones, keys, etc.) will themselves generate and direct musical innovation. Meanwhile, the social realm, through the space of performance itself, simultaneously forms the public for music and its players alike; whereas the “psychological” confronts us with the whole vexed question of content and of ideology, and indeed ultimately the very problem of *value* that Weber’s own historical analyses are explicitly concerned to suspend or to bracket. Weber notes, for instance, the association of “chromatics” with “passion,” but adds:

It was not in the artistic *urge to* expression, but in the technical *means* of expression, that the difference lay between this ancient music and the chromatics which the great musical experimenters of the Renaissance created in their turbulent rational quest for new discoveries, and therewith for the ability to give musical shape to “passion.” (VJ, 96)

In Weber’s brief remarks, it would seem that the word “passion” is meant to name a specific and historically original new form of psychological experience, so that the vocation of the newer music to express it is not, for Weber, a sign of value, but simply an item or feature necessary to complete the historical description.

It might indeed be well to distinguish two versions of the problem that begins to come into view here: one is that of a musical semantics, that is, of a relationship between musical signifiers and historical, social, psychological signifieds; the other is that of aesthetic value proper. Of the first of these Adorno has said:

If we listen to Beethoven and do not hear anything of the revolutionary bourgeoisie—not the echo of its slogans, but rather the need to realize them, the cry for that totality in which reason and freedom are to have their warrant—we understand Beethoven no better than does one who cannot follow the purely musical content of his pieces.²

This seems straightforward enough until Adorno adds what was always the “guiding thread” of Frankfurt School aesthetics: “Music is not ideology pure and simple; it is ideological only insofar as it is false consciousness” (*IS*, 63). The seeming contradiction between these two positions can perhaps be adjusted by a Habermasian appreciation of the universal (that is, nonideological) content of bourgeois revolutionary ideology as such; Adorno will himself complicate the situation more interestingly by factoring in the arrival of an age of aesthetic autonomy: “If [Beethoven] is the musical prototype of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, he is at the same time the prototype of a music that has escaped from its social tutelage and is aesthetically fully autonomous, a servant no longer” (*IS*, 209).³

Yet if the question of musical value seems quite unavoidable when this line of inquiry is prolonged, the dramatic reversal we associate with the Russian Formalists is always possible: content of that kind (a new kind of passion, a new universal revolutionary ideology and enthusiasm, etc.) is itself the result of formal innovation. It is because the music of a given period is able to express new kinds of content that this last begins to emerge—a position which, translated back into linguistics, would yield a peculiar version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It is because language happens to be expanded historically and culturally in certain ways that we are able to think (and speak) this or that new thought.

There is nonetheless a gap between this semantic question about the nature of musical content and the problem of aesthetic value itself—a gap that Weber’s own work registers with implacable lucidity, but that most subsequent historicisms have been at pains to disguise or conceal. There is just as surely a fundamental difference in emphasis as there is a spiritual kinship between Weber’s interpretation of musical evolution in terms of the process of rationalization and Spengler’s program for the morphology of cultures:

The forms of the arts linked themselves to the forms of war and state-policy. Deep relations were revealed between political and mathematical aspects of the same Culture, between religious and technical conceptions, between mathematics, music, and sculpture, between economics and cognition-forms. Clearly and unmistakably there appeared the fundamental dependence of the most modern physical and chemical theories on the mythological concepts of our German ancestors, the style-congruence of tragedy and power-technics and up-to-date finance, and the fact (bizarre at first but soon self-evident) that oil-painting perspective, printing, the credit system, long-range weapons, and contrapuntal music in one case, and the nude statue, the city-state, and coin-currency (discovered by the Greeks) in another were identical expressions of one and the same spiritual principle.⁴

Value here becomes relativized according to the familiar patterns of historicism; and the value of music is then revealed when a larger, totalizing historical reconstruction of this kind allows us to read it as a fundamental expression of this or that basic cultural type. (It is not of any particular significance in the present context that Spengler also includes an ideological evaluation of those cultural types, the Faustian temporal dynamism of the West—including music above all!—being clearly for him “superior” to the spatial and Apollonian mode of Greek culture.)

The Frankfurt School, and most notably Adorno himself, sought escape from this kind of relativism by appealing to a Hegelian conception of aesthetic or formal self-consciousness. The Utopian principle of value for these writers lies in freedom itself and in the conception of music as “the enemy of fate.” Yet Adorno’s other principle of evaluation is that of technical mastery, in which the superiority of a Schoenberg over a Hindemith, say, or a Sibelius, lies in the former’s will to draw the last objective consequences from the historical state in which he found his own raw materials. These two principles, however, are capable, at certain moments in history, of entering into contradiction with one another, and not least, for Adorno, in the supreme moment of the achievement of the twelve-tone system itself:

This technique ... approaches the ideal of mastery as domination, the infinity of which resides in the fact that nothing heteronomous remains which is not absorbed into the continuum of the technique. It is, however, the suppressing moment in the domination of nature, which suddenly turns against subjective autonomy and freedom itself, in the name of which this domination found its fulfillment.⁵

Schoenberg's "moment of truth" is therefore to have replicated the dynamic of a repressive, bureaucratic, and technocratic social order so completely as to offer something like an aesthetic portrait or mirror image of it. Weber himself was unwilling to praise musical rationalization as coming to formal consciousness of the deeper laws of Western social evolution; what was for him merely one historical determinant among others becomes for Adorno the very epistemological function of art itself.

Yet these models of what we may call a musical historicism are all strangely retrospective; at best, they grasp an achieved work, such as that of Beethoven or Schoenberg, as reflecting (and illuminating or revealing) the dynamic of the social system with which it was contemporaneous. The theoretical question of whether such cultural forms simply replicate and reproduce that dynamic—or on the contrary, distance, estrange, and criticize it—is a relatively secondary question, which depends on the problematic itself, which remains, according to Marxian tradition, that of the relations of base and superstructure. No matter that Engels, in his important late letters on historical materialism, tried to insist on a "reciprocal interaction" between the economic and the superstructure: most often such superstructures have in one way or another been taken as reflecting or corresponding to the economic, or at best as lagging behind concrete social development. So Beethoven most richly expresses bourgeois revolutionary ideology, but after that ideology's triumph (and simultaneous failure), and in the mode of an interiorization of more objective, collective, ideological values.

The originality of Jacques Attali's book then becomes clear: he is the first to have drawn the other possible logical consequence of the "reciprocal interaction" model—namely, the possibility of a superstructure to *anticipate* historical developments, to foreshadow new social formations in a prophetic and annunciatory way. The argument of *Noise* is that music, unique among the arts for reasons that are themselves overdetermined, has precisely this annunciatory vocation; and that the music of today stands both as a promise of a new, liberating mode of production, and as the menace of a dystopian possibility which is that mode of production's baleful mirror image.

There are social and historical reasons for the orientation toward the future in Attali's thought, as well as for the bleak bias toward the retrospec-

tive in thinkers like Adorno, whose social and historical pessimism is documented in *Negative Dialectics*. Not only is there Attali's greater sympathy for contemporary music, including that whole area of popular and mass-cultural production which Adorno notoriously stigmatized as "easy music" and "jazz": degraded and schematic commodities mass-produced by the Culture Industry. We must also take into account Attali's economic thinking, as a practicing economist and a close adviser to president Mitterrand and as a central figure in France's current socialist experiment. Attali is also a distinguished scholar, the author of a dozen books whose subjects range from political economy to euthanasia. As varied as these books may seem, they have a common focus and a common problematic: the sense that something new is emerging all around us, a new economic order in which new forms of social relations can be discerned in the interstices of the old and of which new forms of cultural production can often give us the most precious symptoms, if not the prophetic annunciation.

Attali's varied and complex reflections thus rejoin, from a unique perspective (which is, given his political role, a unity of theory and practice in its own right), the now widespread attempts to characterize the passage from older forms of capitalism (the market stage, the monopoly stage) to a new form. This new form of capitalism, in which the media and multinational corporations play a major role, a shift on the technological level from the older modes of industrial production of the second Machine Revolution to the newer cybernetic, informational nuclear modes of some Third Machine Age. The theorists of this new "great transformation" range from anti-Marxists like Daniel Bell to Marxists like Ernest Mandel (whose work *Late Capitalism* remains the most elaborate and original Marxian model of some new third stage of capital).

For the most part, such efforts—including those of French post-structuralists like Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard—have necessarily remained *historicist* in the inevitable positing of distinct *stages* of social development, whether the sequence of the latter is formulated in terms of evolutionary continuities or in those of breaks, ruptures, and cataclysmic mutations. Not all of Attali's own work escapes this temptation; but it is worth noting that one of his most recent syntheses, called *Les Trois Mondes* ("The Three Worlds"), seeks to "delinearize" the description of distinct social stages by modeling each in terms of a distinct "world of representation" such that all three exist in our own time in a kind of synchronic overlap of the residual and emergent. The three worlds of Attali's title are not the more familiar geographical zones of the world system (with the "third world" positioned between the capitalist and the socialist countries), but rather are three distinct theoretical paradigms (ultimately generated by three distinct moments of history and of social organization). The first of these paradigms is that of *regulation*, conceived in mechanical terms of

determinism and reversibility—a theory ultimately linked to the classical market. The second is that of *production*, whose strong form is clearly classical Marxism. The third paradigm Attali calls that of the *organization* of meanings and signs.

The positioning of Marxism as an older world paradigm clearly marks Attali's affinities with certain poststructuralisms and post-Marxisms, at the same time that it expresses the French Socialist party's complicated relationship to its Marxian tradition. But unlike some of the more complacent celebrators of "post-industrial society" in the United States, Attali, as an economist in a socialist France that is in many ways the passive victim of a new (American) multinational order and of a worldwide economic crisis transcending the old nation-states, remains an essentially political thinker intent on discovering and theorizing the concrete possibilities of social transformation within the new system. His Utopianism is thus materialistic and immanent, like that of Marx himself, who observed that the revolutionaries of the Paris Commune of 1871 "have no ideals to realize but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society is itself pregnant."

Not the least challenging feature of Attali's thought lies in his tough-minded insistence on the ambiguity, or better still, the profound ambivalence, of the new social, economic, and organizational possibilities, which he often describes in terms of *autosurveillance*. From one perspective, auto-surveillance marks the penetration of information technology within the body and the psyche of the individual subject: it implies a diffusion of computers on a generalized scale and a kind of passive replication of their programs by the individual, most visibly in the areas of education and medicine. Under autosurveillance, capital and the state no longer have to do anything to you, because you have learned to do it to yourself.

But "doing it to yourself" also implies knowing how to "do it for yourself," and the new technology is at least neutral to the degree that it could also, conceivably, be used for a collective political project of emancipation. Both dystopia and Utopia are thus contained in the new forms as possibilities whose realization only political praxis can decide. For Attali's sense of social transformation is informed by the idea that radical change, the emergence of radically new social relations, is possible only as a result of the preexistence and the coincidence of three basic factors:

a new *technology* capable of reducing the costs of reorganization, *financial resources* (or an accumulation of new capital) available for the latter's utilization, and the existence of a *social group* with both the interest and the power to utilize such financial resources and to put the new technology to work.⁶

The more properly socialist or political component of what might otherwise pass for a technocratic vision of change is secured by the stress on this last factor—on the existence and praxis of a new *groupe moteur* or “subject of history.”

The practical political and economic issues raised by Attali’s other work are very far from being absent from *Noise*, despite its seemingly cultural focus. For one of the most stimulating features of this work is its insistence on grasping history and social life as a totality, in the way in which it offers us a model of the systematic interrelationship of the various levels of economics, technology, political forms, and culture proper. What is even more suggestive, however, in our current social, political, and historical confusion—in which the older strategies for radical social transformation and the older roads to some radically distinct Utopian future have come to seem outmoded or unconvincing—is the prospective nature of his analysis, which stimulates us to search out the future in the present itself and to see the current situation not merely as a bundle of static and agonizing contradictions, but also as the place of emergence of new realities of which we are as yet only dimly aware. Jacques Attali’s conception of music as prophetic of the emergent social, political, and economic forms of a radically different society can thus be an energizing one, whatever our judgment on the detail of his own analysis. In this work, we find, exceptionally in contemporary thought, a new model of the relations between culture and society that valorizes production in the present at the same time that it reinvigorates an enfeebled Utopian thought.

1984

Notes

- 1 Max Weber, “Value-judgements in Social Science,” *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman, trans. Eric Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 95. Future references to this work are denoted VJ. See also Weber’s lengthier discussion in *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, trans. Martindale, Riedel, and Neuwirth, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1958.
- 2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Seabury Press, 1976, 62. Future references to this work are denoted IS.
- 3 On the question of the autonomous status of art, see also in the Theory and History of Literature series, Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, vol. 4, intro. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984.
- 4 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 1, New York: Knopf, 1939, 47.
- 5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomser, New York: Seabury Press, 1973, 66.
- 6 Jacques Attali, *Les Trois mondes*, Paris: Fayard, 1981, 270.

The Theoretical Hesitation: Benjamin's Sociological Predecessor

Ours is an antitheoretical time, which is to say an anti-intellectual time; and the reasons for this are not far to seek. The system has always understood that ideas and analysis, along with the intellectuals who practice them, are its enemies and has evolved various ways of dealing with the situation, most notably—in the academic world—by railing against what it likes to call grand theory or master narratives at the same time that it fosters more comfortable and local positivisms and empiricisms in the various disciplines. If you attack the concept of totality, for example, you are less likely to confront embarrassing models and analyses of that totality called late capitalism or capitalist globalization; if you promote the local and the empirical, you are less likely to have to deal with the abstractions of class or value, without which the system cannot be understood. There are several famous precedents in the diagnosis of this antitheoretical strategy: I think, for example, of Perry Anderson's epoch-making "Origins of the Present Crisis" of 1964, in which he denounced the empiricisms of the Anglo-American tradition as so many defense mechanisms in the face of a world reality in full political and revolutionary upheaval; more recently, of Paul de Man's "The Resistance to Theory," which evokes the terror of the seam between meaning and matter; or of Adorno's late crusade against what he called positivism in general, in other words, the systematic elimination of the negative and the critical, of theory defined as negation, from modern thought and everyday life.

I want to make a much more modest contribution to that debate, one that raises the issue of the evasion of abstraction as such and that also, along the way, asks questions about the unexpected fortunes and prestige of Walter Benjamin, in a period that has seen the discounting of the stock of most of the other radical thinkers and litterateurs of our period. We may suppose, among other things, that Benjamin's good luck (in North America at least) was (like Gramsci's) to have never been fully translated into English until now and thus never to have been fully available as a coherent work, but

rather to have offered the merest and most tantalizing, yet legendary, fragments. I've suggested elsewhere that Benjamin may uniquely fill a pressing need in the reunified Germany of today, which needs literary predecessors and canons not tainted by any of its earlier avatars (from the West German federal republic, through Hitler, back to the Weimar or the Wilhelminian period). As something of a pre-Nazi era exile, Benjamin has something to offer the gaps in the German tradition today that is only enhanced by his complex inner contradictions, whose various poles can be counted on to neutralize each other in an ideologically reassuring fashion.

In the antitheoretical context I have been mentioning, however, a different kind of suspicion comes to mind. I don't fully endorse this doubt but feel it demands expression. For cannot Benjamin himself be enlisted among the ranks of those for whom theory and abstraction are pernicious? Are not the places of theory, in Benjamin, blinded by the transcendental glare of a whole range of mysticisms; while at its other reach, the passion for philosophy as such is replaced by the *fiches* of history, abstraction and concept by quotations and curious, stray facts? And does this movement away from theory not find its climactic expression in the great exchange of letters between Benjamin and Adorno on the form and staging of what I still prefer to call the *Passagenarbeit*? There Adorno tells Benjamin, in effect, that if he wants his readers to draw dialectical conclusions from his various exhibits and montages, then he has to spell them out himself, to articulate his own interpretation and express the content of his dialectic in conceptual language, something Benjamin was unwilling to do for reasons that may well have been aesthetic but that were surely also ideological (and even philosophical).

Alongside this Benjamin, who might, for example, serve as a precursor to the New Historicism, there are others who fit into the theory spectrum in rather different ways. It has always mildly surprised me, for instance, that in this time, which is supremely characterized by its resistance to any and all conceptions of an original or primordial human nature as such, the omnipresent traces of a seemingly humanist doctrine of experience—preserved within Benjamin's very interrogation of the consequences of its loss or breakdown—have not seemed in the least to discredit his work. Such a doctrine presumably lies as an amorphous concept somewhere in-between psychology and metaphysics—neither of them very prestigious fields at the moment, and both very different from psychoanalysis, to which Benjamin's occasional appeals do not carry much conviction and scarcely suffice to undo the associations of the merely psychological. Indeed, in the great symbolic trilogy, which begins with "The Storyteller," passes through the essay on Baudelaire's "motifs," and concludes with "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin evokes a no doubt socially grounded conception of the unity of experience in order to denounce

modern psychic and experiential fragmentation, only to project some future utopian transformation of all this in forms that need not be thought to be organic. Still, it is the premise of some original unity of experience that is bound to arouse suspicions and hesitations, reservations, and perhaps even ideological critique in the present day and age of the nonfoundational and the antiorganic.

So we confront two antithetical yet evidently interrelated phenomena here: a resistance to theory and to the dialectic, accompanied by traces of the unexamined presuppositions of a kind of phenomenological or pre-phenomenological *Lebensphilosophie*. Both perhaps betray a resistance to the philosophical concept, the one in the name of an aesthetic refusal of abstraction, the other in that of a phenomenological commitment to the “concrete.” In the present essay I will not go further with this in the work of Benjamin himself but have felt I could make a useful contribution to the problem by returning to the work of one of Benjamin’s most important precursors and predecessors, in which both of these features are even more strongly marked. I refer, of course, to the work of Georg Simmel, who seems to be knowing something of a revival at the present time, when his incalculable but underground influence in previous intellectual generations of the last century (from the US to Japan) has been altogether forgotten and obliterated.

I should add that I’m not interested in positing any direct influence, although Benjamin attended Simmel’s seminar in 1912. He could later on be dismissive indeed in his reactions to Simmel’s work (as in his letter to Gershom Scholem of December 23, 1917), but his own work on the city equally failed to escape the force field of Simmel’s thought, and he was capable of observing—to Adorno, perhaps as a sly provocation—that it might well be time “to give him his due as one of the forefathers of cultural Bolshevism.”¹ At any rate, it is a comparable rhythm of procedures I wish to draw attention to, a set of hesitations, evasions, theoretical decisions, a relationship to empiricity, that the two thinkers seem oddly to share. I only have space to refer to two texts by Simmel here, one small but classic—the famous essay, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in which anticipations of an already rather Benjaminian *Lebensphilosophie* can be detected—the other an immense morass of a book, *The Philosophy of Money*, in which the very root of a dialectical reluctance that keeps the dialectic alive can be uncovered.

To evaluate Simmel is to measure the stimulation he afforded any number of very different people and thinkers (from the Chicago sociologist Robert Park to Georg Lukács, from Max Weber to Benjamin). He knew this himself: “My legacy will be like cash, distributed to many heirs, each transforming his part into use according to *his* nature.”² I try to imagine this transmission of intellectual excitement, and even of intellectual

productivity, on the order of the awakenings stimulated by French phenomenological existentialism, which showed so many people how to theorize about daily life and the most seemingly unphilosophical items and events. *The Philosophy of Money* thus contained a whole program within its provocative title, namely, that things are already philosophical in and of themselves. They (and we leave “their” contents open: a walk in the city for De Certeau; Raymond Aron’s famous glass of beer, which has evidently been reidentified as a crème de menthe; Sartre’s “look”; Husserl’s mathematical operations; an automotive directional signal in Heidegger; prostitution for Simmel himself) do not require the massive application of external philosophical and interpretive machinery, already bearing as they do an intellectual and philosophical meaningfulness within themselves.

But Simmel must pay a heavy price for this generalized suggestiveness, and it is a toll that contemporary *doxa* has generally been unwilling to identify as such, namely, the refusal of the philosophical system and, in the textual detail of the writing itself, of the jargon and neologisms with which most powerful contemporary philosophies or theories have violently displaced everyday speech and made it over into so many charged names that signify the operation of a specific idiolect. For it is only at this price that theory today marks its commodities with so many logos, and packages its distinctive wares in the strident bazaar of the contemporary public sphere.

But it would be wrong to interpret Simmel’s elaborate qualifications in terms of the familiar liberal mean: neither this nor that, somewhere in between too much and too little. Rather, I think that it is his commitment to the particular that strategically interrupts a traditional philosophical movement towards the absolute of universal or abstract ideas. Unlike empiricism, it does not seek to replace that movement with some radically different positivist orientation; it rather identifies this movement as a process, which it wishes to assign to one specific moment of the inquiry, in order to set in place a change of direction and a new kind of movement in some second moment, which will have been motivated by some new acknowledgment of the rights of the particular. We have here, then, a combination of two distinct thought modes, without synthesis: a mechanical wiring together of two kinds of conceptual machinery; a careful and inveterate, yet provisional, splicing together of two radically different conceptual processes. It is a distinctive way of thinking that can no doubt be clarified by its distinctive historical context, but which, if it does not altogether explain Simmel’s originality, at least lends that originality its unique style.

What is more old-fashioned in Simmel’s sociology can then be identified as a breach in this systematic procedure, a kind of unwitting violation of his own method—even though it is a category mistake he shares with the whole first generation of the theorists of the entity called society, one that persists well on into the canonical Parsonian synthesis itself. This is the insistent

effort—not yet present at all in Hegel, for example, and renounced by all the sociology we think of as contemporary—to deduce the larger social forms from the smaller ones and to build up notions and models of the collective from out of primary accounts of individual actions and immediate face-to-face encounters, as though these “simple” elements and forms, added together and combined in more elaborate ways, would somehow directly yield the forms of the “complex.” But the dialectic already knew, and contemporary thought has rediscovered, some fundamental incommensurability between the individual and the collective—that there was a gap and a leap between the two; that no careful Cartesian procedures could ever build the bridge from the logic of individual experience to that very different logic of the collective and the social; that no ingenious analysis of the social back into its individual components could ever conceptually master the properly dialectical paradox whereby the whole is always more (or less) than its individual parts. The category mistake—the will to maintain a continuity between these two incommensurable dimensions—does not often vitiate the striking power of Simmel’s insights into their concrete and provisional relationships; perhaps, indeed, it was the condition of possibility of such insights and such discoveries. But it envelops his work as a whole with an anthropology and a metaphysic that draw a historically outmoded veil between the contemporary reader and Simmel’s discrete analysis, something his editors have sometimes dealt with by breaking the longer works back up into the essay form he also practiced, as though in untheorized awareness of his own problems and real strengths.

Indeed, one may even see these anthropological underpinnings as a kind of allegory of their own content: “The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society.”³ The inscription of individual psychology, then, into the collective system modeled by a nascent sociology is itself a figure for this attempt and this struggle, which is no longer grasped objectively as the banal tension between this or that real individual and this or that real society but rather as the incommensurability of theories, of those individual phenomenologies of individual experience whose discursive and theoretical fabric it proves difficult to weave into the greater collective structural and theoretical system.

Yet even as an anthropology—which Simmel’s thought sometimes is—the balance struck between these two poles is less banal than one might expect, for the two poles are themselves immediately rethematized in the one place in which Simmel’s work does take on the appearance of something like a system, namely, in that well-nigh metaphysical opposition between life and form (which afforded his student Lukács the title of one of his most significant early works). In those places in which Simmel is willing to spell this thematic out in the form of a philosophical position, if not a

system—and it is characteristic of him that he is generally unwilling to do this, so that the untheorized thematic opposition seeps out laterally and, omnipresent, informs much of the texture of his other work—this is something like a dialectic of objectification, in which the life process requires externalization in order to come to its fullest expression. It thereby objectifies itself in a series of forms, which then begin to constrict it in their increasing rigidity. As they approach most closely to their condition as delimited form, the living impulses that gave rise to them are increasingly stifled. Form must therefore now be opened up and broken in order for some new life creativity to emerge in its turn (and produce a new form). One remembers the shift of registers in Lukács's climactic outcry in *History and Class Consciousness*: “*history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man.*”⁴ If Simmel was never willing to go so far as this, at least we have an acknowledgment, in other cultural essays, that the form modern life strives for may even be an absence of form: “a struggle of life against the form *as such*, against the *principle* of form”; but I think such cultural anarchism was not really acceptable to any of the members of this generation—not to Lukács or to Benjamin, finally, and certainly not to Simmel himself.⁵

I take it that the passage of time has allowed such ideas to congeal into what they visibly were all along, namely, so many ideologies. Vitalism itself is, of course, the strong form of the *doxa* of the period, less a philosophy in its own right, perhaps, than the aesthetic solution to intractable philosophical contradictions, and this whether it takes the form of psychology or expressivism, evolutionism or spiritualism or primitivism. Thus one of the interesting stories of this turn of the last century is the way in which modern thinkers like Lukács and Benjamin—in their very different ways—managed to extricate themselves from a vitalism that they could not but breathe in everywhere during their formative years. Vitalism produced magnificent aesthetic expressions in its day, nor did it preclude the subtlest philosophical reflections of a Bergson. I think it is no longer a current temptation (save perhaps in Deleuze and in the Bergsonian revivals inspired by him); contemporary ecology, for instance, does not seem to need to appeal to the rich orchestral resonance and excitement of the vitalistic for its effects.

But it is not only vitalism as such that I have in mind at this point in the analysis; rather, I want to imply that contemporary antiessentialisms and antifoundationalisms—with which one must have all kinds of sympathy and which my diagnosis of Simmel clearly leans on here—all miss the mark insofar as they are themselves framed in the form of so many philosophical essentialisms and foundationalisms. What is more satisfactory philosophically, I want to suggest, is a repudiation of all forms of ontology and all hypotheses about human nature and human psychology, let alone about metaphysics, in the name of a conception of philosophical language as such.

For it suffices to grasp all philosophical propositions (particular ones, I hasten to add, fully as much as universal ones) as *ideologies* for the analytic perspective to be utterly modified. It is clear enough to me that the repudiation of the term and concept of ideology was not only itself ideological but also premature, for, as we shall see in this reading of Simmel, we will not be able to identify and characterize what is truly original and energizing in his theoretical production without first being in a position to isolate its ideological elements, whose immobilities and static or ontological natures or essences it is precisely the mission of this discourse to set in motion and to redynamize.

Let me give a first illustration of all this by way of a reading of his great essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), whose kinship with some of Benjamin's most famous essays will readily be apparent. The essay begins with a series of what I have called ideological propositions, and in particular with a juxtaposition of the mental state of the city dweller with that of a rural or small-town life. The social situation of the latter is characterized by "lasting impressions, the slightness in their differences, the habituated regularity of their course and contrasts between them," all of which develop a social life based "more on feelings and emotional relationships" (*MM*, 325; *GG*, 188); in contrast, Simmel identifies big-city life with the mental function of Reason, and even of calculation in all its forms, and it should be clear enough even at the outset how profoundly ideological any such allegory of the mental functions and faculties must necessarily be.

On the other hand, everyone will also recognize in this initial characterization the crucial theme of Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller," as well as that of "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire": the historicist proposition—a simpler kind of social life, to which a specific *mentalité* corresponds, alongside a far more complex one, later in chronological and developmental time, to which a radically different constellation of mental properties may be ascribed. Thus, for both Benjamin and Simmel ideology is compounded, for to one profoundly historicist level is added another psychologizing or essentialist one, which we must now examine.

What we find—and what plays a far greater role in late nineteenth-century culture in general than scholars have been willing to investigate—is a whole iconography of nascent laboratory science and, in particular, of experimental psychology. The role of this weird and wholly outdated machinery in the theory and practice of the impressionist painters is well known; meanwhile, Bergson's own work is suffused with the imagery of all these experimental materialisms he so fiercely attacked and analytically undermined—rods, cones, stimuli, irritation, nerves and their movements, attraction and repulsion, magnetisms, light waves, intensities, synapses. Such is the bristling panoply of the nineteenth-century psychological laboratory, whose poetry, often remastered by even more energetic vitalisms,

reaches out even into those modernisms that wish most violently to shake loose its cumbersome baggage. So also in Simmel himself, who characterizes big-city life as an “intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (*MM*, 325; *GG*, 188). Nor is this a merely incidental figure; the whole analysis is intricately indebted to the concept of the stimulus, as we shall see. Much the same could obviously be said of Benjamin, except that the latter had a signal literary advantage over Simmel, namely, that he could draw on Baudelaire, whose characteristic language on these matters—not unrelated, to be sure, to that nascent psychology contemporaneous with him—is certainly far more elegant; for him, the man in the crowd was “a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness.”⁶ Yet the ideological content is much the same; and we generally here confront the picture of a relatively placid organism now increasingly bombarded by the multiple stimuli of the big city, from street crossings to clock time and harried appointments, from “the passing glance” (here in Simmel not eroticized, but rather the bearer of repulsion and loathing) to the classic and henceforth Benjaminian or Baudelairean crowd, or *foule*. It is philosophically prescient of Simmel to have made this side of his pendant or diptych the place of sheer difference and ever more minute differentiation as such, something that should not distract us from the recognition of everything stereotypical about the characterization of its opposite number, the countryside, as a place of identities and the identification of everything with everything else.

Yet this initial hypothesis—multiple stimuli—is little more than the “foundation” on which a series of other characterizations will be based. The identification of the city with Reason is only the most incidental and functional of these, for what he really has in mind is *Verstand*, instrumental or sheerly calculating reason, and behind that, as an even more fundamental form, what he calls intellectualism. This concept is related not only by causality, as we shall see in a moment, but also by connotation to the whole notion of the nervous system, nerves playing a fundamental role in the ideology of this whole period from the “American nervousness” of the 1880s to Proust’s “neurasthenia.” For a big-city nervousness will be developed in two directions, both of which are significantly characterized as blasé or indifferent. On the one hand, indifference results from exhaustion of the nervous centers:

Just as an immoderately sensuous life makes one blasé because it stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all, so, less harmful stimuli, through the rapidity and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, tear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength and, remaining in the same milieu, do not have time for new reserves to form. (*MM*, 329; *GG*, 193)

A passage of this kind might, to be sure, serve as an exhibit for the medical ideologies of the period (which in any case themselves are profoundly complicit with all the other social ones). What interests us here primarily is its inconsistency with the other account Simmel gives us of the blasé mentality, namely, its function as a defense mechanism *against* stimuli. Now, on the other hand, “indifference” is said to be somehow “unnatural” (*MM*, 331; *GG*, 195–96), and it comes to be explained as “a protective organ” that guards “against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten” the city dweller (*MM*, 326; *GG*, 189). We thus move from homology (the blasé as the exhaustion of multiple stimuli) to an attempted negation (in which the blasé attitude holds the stimuli at bay or neutralizes them). The variation still lies in what I will call a vertical model, a relationship of synchronic levels to one another, but it foreshadows a very different structural solution, which I will come to in a moment and which may illustrate Simmel’s creative ability to break out of these initial ideological positions and stereotypes.

At any rate, it is clear that this is what Benjamin appreciated in Simmel’s essay, for he himself abandoned the medical stereotypes of exhausted nerves and only retained the conception of a defense mechanism, which, reinforced by the authority of Freud and Bergson, he then wheeled around in a different direction, to turn it on the question of experience and its expression in narrative form. Simmel was, however, to pursue his own urban diagnosis in a development unique to him, which did not, as far as I know, greatly interest Benjamin, and that is in the area of money as such. For the twin areas of indifference opened up by city life—a protective indifference to other people and a kind of numbing of perception to the qualitative distinctions between things—are insensibly combined and, under the dominance of the second of these forms, come to be identified as the indifference of the monetary form, of sheer equivalence as such. So in a final identification, big-city “intellectualism” (with its precisions and calculations, its clock time, its measurabilities) finds its ultimate form in the money economy as such (and only much later, at the very end of the society, in the division of labor). At this point, and into this breach, all the intricacies of Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money* may be expected to flow, but we have not yet reached the climax of this first section of the essay, which emerges when the metropolis and its multiple stimuli, the intellectualistic and the blasé, equivalence and the money form, are finally *interpreted*, and the word *freedom* is at length pronounced.

Now suddenly the whole structure of the essayistic discourse changes, and we witness a move from an essentially vertical or analytic thinking to a horizontal or oscillating one, which I will characterize as a transformation from the elaboration of an ideological position to the exercise of a kind of dialectical thinking (with all the qualifications we will want to make on the

use of this term, particularly when we come to describe the arrested dialectic of *The Philosophy of Money*). However one wishes to characterize it, the change in thought-mode is striking and inescapable indeed, for the first section of the essay seemed to offer, however reluctantly, a catalogue of alienations, without expressing any particular nostalgia for the opposite term—the simplicity of rural life. (On this score Benjamin is far more ambiguous, or perhaps industrialization in his period had come to seem far more inevitable and inescapable. The wholeness of experience realized in the storytelling of the peasant village or sailors' and travelers' narratives can thus be affirmed without fear of any regression to the pastoral or to older modes of production.)

But where these characterizations of big-city life and its *mentalité* have mildly negative and unpleasant connotations—the loss of qualitative distinctions, the antipathy to other people aroused by their sheer multiplicity, if not by economic competition itself—the sudden introduction of the motif of freedom modulates to the major key and transforms the tonality of the previous, negative descriptions into a philosophical problem in its own right. Now, the specificity of the metropolis and its mental life having been secured, the deeper interest and attention of the reader is shifted in the somewhat different direction of the way in which such negative features can be reconciled with the evidently positive connotations of the concept of freedom.

In short, at this point, the properly dialectical problem of the unity of negativity and positivity arises, and the strategy of the essay must be modified to oscillate from the negative to the positive aspects of urban freedom as such. At this point, even the critique of urban equivalence and intellectualism is drawn into the argument in a new way: no longer outside the description, in the alternate social space of the countryside and the peasantry but now within it and identified with the names of critics such as Ruskin and Nietzsche, whose popularity and readership become a big-city event, the critique of the city being consumed most avidly by the city itself.

This dialectical oscillation is pursued on into “historiosophy” itself, with a brief allusion to the opposition between left-wing ideals of social equality and right-wing glorifications of uniqueness, genius, and the individual personality, only to reach a peculiar moment of neutralization in which both political positions may seem to have been canceled out in favor of a third or contemplative one, which, as he puts it, “transcend[s] the sphere in which a judge-like attitude on our part is appropriate” such that “it is our task not to complain or to condone but only to understand” (*MM*, 339; *GG*, 206). It would be abusive to try to make Simmel over into a political figure (and the *The Philosophy of Money* will make it clearer why this would be a misplaced effort), but I believe that this conclusion of the metropolis essay does not amount to “a plague on both your houses.” Rather, it should be read as an

effort to fulfill and complete the dialectic's first function, namely, the suspension of the moralizing judgment, the transcendence of good and evil, which is to say, the neutralization of some choice between the negative and the positive judgment. But perhaps this suspension of judgment in the face of the unity of the positive and negative may be contrasted with that empty place of judgment Adorno thought he found to have been reserved for the absent reader of Benjamin's great *Arcades* montages.

I would thus be less inclined to see Simmel's contemplative position here as a political symptom than as a hesitation to theorize, to produce the concept. If so, we need to seek the explanation elsewhere, in *The Philosophy of Money* itself (whose first publication in 1900, to be sure, preceded that of "The Metropolis and Mental Life" by some three years). The search will not be lightened by Simmel's methodological decision, in this his *Hauptwerk*, to organize his materials as it were vertically rather than horizontally, or, in other words, following what might be called the Thomas Mann principle ("only the exhaustive is truly interesting"), to say everything all at once, and on the occasion of each separate topic, in such a way that the text itself sometimes strikes one as a carefully lined up series of digressions, linked by the frailest of thematic threads. I think that in fact this is not so, but the method runs several significant risks: first, in the explanatory stance itself, which can quickly arouse the reader's subconscious resentment at being thus condescended to whenever the brilliance of the explanation flags in the slightest; and, second, in the tension thus aroused between what we may call the spatial and the temporal dimensions of this book. We have often heard it said of "modernist" long projects that they cannot be read but only reread; and something of the sort surely holds for *The Philosophy of Money*, where so much initial energy must be expended on the parts themselves—the explanations and digressions—that their sequence and temporal form can only be grasped on some secondary review, at fast-forwarding speed. One has to learn the parts, so to speak, before the whole can be "performed" as some immense Mahlerian continuity.

Add to this a certain perverseness in the adjustment of the subject matter itself. This "philosophy" will deal with everything about money save precisely its economic function as such, which can be left to the economists. It is a decision that will frustrate readers who had hoped this "metaphysical" approach might make economics more meaningful for them, and it will also mislead those like ourselves who are interested in the place of theory as such, which they may be tempted (wrongly, I think) to identify with this immense hole at the very center of the work. In any case, it is surely always a strategic mistake to exclude parts of a topic at the outset for disciplinary reasons; the disciplines and their territorial demarcations are always part of the problem, indeed, part of the content, and ought never to benefit from some blanket amnesty before the fact. It is clear that Simmel would have

been perfectly capable of performing the same kind of logical dissection of economic pseudo-concepts that his contemporary Bergson so thoroughly enacted for the experimental psychology of his time. On the other hand, such misleadings may themselves turn out to have been misled, and we should be willing to entertain the possibility that Simmel's omission of economics as such is less a mark of respect than of contempt, and that the empty place assigned it here will also turn out to be a kind of interpretation in its own right.

At any rate, the arrangement of the material in two sections (of three chapters each, each of those equally subdivided into three sections, whether out of some numerological impulse I cannot say, although the pursuit of such patterns down into the smallest details would certainly also tell us much about Simmel's thought processes) is a perfectly plausible one. It separates our topic into preconditions and consequences, and opens a phenomenological space *avant la lettre* for what, socially, historically, and psychologically, needs to be in place for the money mechanism to come into full play, just as it reserves a dimension of cultural speculation for the after-effects of money on social life and *mentalité* (some of which we have already encountered in very abbreviated form in "The Metropolis and Mental Life"). The first section, then, on money's conditions of possibility, the so-called analytical part, aims "to construct a new storey beneath historical materialism" (*PM*, 56; *PG*, viii). Unsurprisingly, it begins with the question of value as such, whose internal conceptual problems must first be laid in place before the two concluding chapters can take up the problems—more immediately related to money as such—of the "substance" of coinage (must its material intrinsically have value independent of the money function?) and then of the again more philosophical issue of money as a means (and its subsequent effect on the very existence of ends as such).

Yet the style of these investigations is already set in the first chapter, which goes to great lengths not merely to stress the effect of the concept of value as an objectification of our desires but also to underscore its temporal variability, that is to say, its very nature as a distance from the desired object, from desire itself, and from my own subjective desire, a distance that will clearly enough vary with the possibility of consumption. To keep faith, then, with this temporal irregularity in the phenomena of value requires us to respect a certain oscillation in its concept, which must not be allowed to become overly objective, nor overly subjective, but rather variably open and released to this very fluctuation. This is to say that our mode of concept-formation must be adjusted accordingly.

Nor does the logical next step—the discussion of exchange—modify this conceptual state of things. Simmel's treatment of exchange is very different from Mauss's more famous and influential one, which projects a visionary typology of distinct social relationships, as well as from Marx's, which

extrapolates the paradoxes and peculiarities of this form onto the structure of capitalism as a whole. Simmel wants to problematize exchange only in the sense of using its temporality, its nature as a process, to undermine our reified habits of grasping its elements as so many givens or things (in much the same way that the very notion of objectification is supposed to problematize our notion of objects as entities). Thus, “exchange is the representative of the distance between subject and object which transforms subjective feelings into objective valuation”; but if this is what exchange is, then any independent assessment of the subjective or the objective becomes difficult indeed, and even more so if the phenomenon of exchange is a separate one that is the mere “representative” of that process (*PM*, 90; *PG*, 45). “Exchange,” Simmel adds, “is not the mere addition of two processes of giving and receiving, but a new third phenomenon, in which each of the two processes is simultaneously cause and effect” (*PM*, 90; *PG*, 45–46). But this formula is also frustrating: for the welcome anticipation of the transformation of exchange into a phenomenon in its own right (a “representative,” a “third phenomenon”) about which we could finally form some thing-like or substantive concept is then at once dispelled again by the final clause, which returns us to its internal alternation.

At this point, Simmel seems to show his hand; he introduces a topic and a philosophical entity—relativism—which, far from being a precondition of the money economy, would seem to belong rather to its cultural consequences and to offer something like its social meaning. This is not so, I think, but the misinterpretation can only enhance the reading of the work as a whole by adding a question about what that possible meaning might ultimately be, if it is not this one. Let’s keep it in mind; the eventual answer is an astonishing one indeed, as we shall see.

But it is true enough that Simmel never solves the problem of priority here, if indeed he raises it at all: the problem of whether the achievement of a money economy demands the development of a relativistic world view, or the other way round. Presumably they happen simultaneously; furthermore, the search for phenomenological preconditions is not that kind of historical inquiry, even though the historical development of money does get outlined later on, for philosophical purposes (“the historical development of money from *substance* to *function*”) (*PM*, 168; *PG*, 151; my emphasis).

The topic of relativism serves a rather different purpose, which is to train us in the kind of thinking and conceptualization we will need to understand money itself. In other words, we do not only need to link the topic of relativism to that of money in order to understand each of them more fully; we also need to understand how to think relativistically in order to learn how to think money, and the way to do so lies not in some relativistic reduction of the truth content of each of the moments in a relativistic sequence but

rather in maintaining the absolute truth content of each moment until we abandon it for the next one. Simmel's relativism, in other words, does not mean a reduction in "truths" but a multiplication and intensification of them. But perhaps its spirit can be more accessibly conveyed by the now rather stereotypical distinction between a substance-oriented and a process-oriented kind of thinking. It would be fatuous to suggest that Simmel somehow "prefers" the latter; rather, the whole drama of *The Philosophy of Money* lies in the visible demonstration of the imposition of process-oriented thought on the author by virtue of the very nature of his subject matter itself.

In a revealing phrase, indeed, he evokes the way in which, here, "relativity, i.e. the reciprocal character of the significance of criteria of knowledge, appears in the form of succession or alternation" (*PM*, 113; *PG*, 77–78). It is precisely this momentum or temporality that forestalls conceptualization, postponing it indefinitely at the same time that it yields the elements and constituent parts of the concept that cannot be fully elaborated. Before quoting at greater length Simmel's most elaborate theorization of this internal and structural hesitation before theory as such, we probably need to draw on the illustrative material that follows, not least in order to show how this technical problem is intimately related to the conceptual problems posed by money in itself, which might under other circumstances be characterized as antinomies.

For one thing, money is both multiple and infinitely various and, on the other hand, stable and unified as an expression of value; indeed, this philosophical tension between multiplicity and unity will be a central category problem throughout Simmel's immense inventory of monetary phenomena. Thus, at the most abstract level,

money derives its content from its value; it is value turned into a substance, the value of things without the things themselves. By sublimating the relativity of things, money seems to avoid relativity ... Money as abstract value expresses nothing but the relativity of things that constitute value; and, at the same time ... money, as the stable pole, contrasts with the eternal movements, fluctuations and equations of the objects. (*PM*, 121; *PG*, 88–89)

This "dual role—outside and within the series of concrete values—" gives us one way of understanding why the conceptualization of money must always remain somehow incomplete, since its other dimension of existence lies outside the plane to which the theory in question belongs: "money is therefore one of those normative ideas that obey the norms that they themselves represent" (*PM*, 122; *PG*, 90).

Yet the dilemma can be formulated in more concrete or empirical terms than this, as with the notion of scarcity, for example, which can be

meaningful only as a moment and not as an absolute (“scarcity can only become significant above a considerable volume”); or, above all, in the well-known tension between money’s two functions as a measure of value and as a means of exchange (*PM*, 72; *PG*, 20). These functions do not necessarily entail each other; thus, for example, “the function of money in measuring values does not impose upon it the character of being itself a valuable object” (*PM*, 142; *PG*, 115):

In ancient Egypt prices were determined by the *uten*, a piece of coiled copper wire, but payments were made in all kinds of goods. In the Middle Ages price was often determined in money terms, but the buyer was free to pay in whatever manner was convenient. In many places in Africa at the present day the exchange of goods is carried out according to a monetary standard which is sometimes quite complicated, while money itself for the most part does not even exist. The business of the very important Genoese exchange market in the sixteenth century was based upon the standard of the *scudo de’ marchi*. This standard was almost entirely imaginary and did not exist in any actual coinage. (*PM*, 192; *PG*, 181–82)

It is as though here a fourth-dimensional reality intersected the world of three dimensions to leave its incomprehensible traces—impalpable mental categories and antinomies marking the real world in symptomatic ways that cannot be accounted for by commonsense physical or realistic laws. A similar inventory of empirically derivable paradoxes is to be found in the incommensurability of large and small coinage, which turns on the paradoxes involved in thinking quantity as such:

The largest coins even of precious metals are found almost exclusively among less developed peoples where barter still prevails ... The same sentiment about the importance of quantity reserved the privilege of minting the largest coins to the highest authorities, while the smaller coins, though of the same metal, were coined by lower authorities ... Under primitive barter conditions, money transactions took place not for the small needs of everyday life, but only for the acquisition of larger and more valuable objects. (*PM*, 145; *PG*, 119–20)

These phenomena are then philosophically related to the matter of divisibility and the requirement that a monetary standard have the capability of expressing the smallest fractions of value and the multiplicity of valuable objects. They document Simmel’s insistence on the gradual and historical extension and conquest of a universal monetary form as such: “actually, a general money value did not formerly exist at all” (*PM*, 267; *PG*, 279).⁷ Analogous to Marx’s insistence on the universality of wage labor as a condition for understanding capitalism, the historical universalization of money has perhaps an opposite epistemological effect in Simmel, where it may be said that everything that has come to seem natural to us in a money

economy blocks our ability to grasp its conceptual peculiarities. Yet the paradigm case of all these antinomies and incommensurabilities remains, of course, the problem of precious metals and the question about the “real value” of the monetary vehicle (a problem related to those of prices and their fluctuations, and finally to the whole concept of the wealth of nations as such).

After all that has been said, we will not be surprised to find that Simmel’s solution, if it can be called that, is a temporal one, in the spirit of the doctrine of “succession or alternation.” He sets in place the more obvious contemporary solution to the dilemma, namely, the appeal to state power (along with the accompanying requirement of the unification of the national terrain within which the currency is to be respected), without being fully satisfied with this explanation, which of course obliterates the peculiarities of the money phenomenon and transfers the causality to a wholly different, political level. For what Simmel wants to stage here is the contradictory appeal of the two absolute alternatives, neither of which can be satisfactory in itself, but also not completely wrong, namely, the idea that money is wholly conventional (the henceforth standard appeal to “trust” in effect returns us to an explanation in terms of the state) along with the conviction that money must be intrinsically valuable and in practice take the form of this or that precious metal (see *PM*, 99; *PG*, 58). The temporality of the concept will allow both these explanations to be thought within a new kind of conceptualization, which I will wish to relate to the dialectic while distinguishing it from the latter in certain crucial ways.

For money must obviously be somehow valuable, yet the very conception of the value of its “substance” tends to project the whole phenomenon of value onto a quite different, nonmonetary plane (something which modern theory has described, following Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as the exclusion of the material of value from the realm of exchange):

If it is claimed that the value of money consists in the value of its material, this means that its value is embodied in the qualities or powers of the substance which are not those of money. The apparent paradox indicates that money does not necessarily have to be based upon substances that are intrinsically valuable, i.e. valuable in some other respect. It is sufficient if the ability to function as money is transferred to any substance, the other qualities of which are quite irrelevant. (*PM*, 153; *PG*, 130)

In other words, as Simmel will here try to demonstrate by way of ethical and aesthetic examples, what counts is the memory of the preceding stage, and the fact that the monetary value was *once* based on precious metal: “the attraction,” as he puts it quaintly, “that springs simply from the passing of a preceding form of life” (*PM*, 153; *PG*, 131). Value lies in the sequence of

moments, not in the thing itself, and Simmel reaches his most dialectical register when he characterizes this phenomenon as the “influence of not-being on being” (*PM*, 153; *PG*, 131), as also when he later tells us, “Money performs its services best when it is not simply money” (*PM*, 165; *PG*, 146). Meanwhile, in the next chapter, which seeks to localize the structural peculiarity of money in its initial mode of use as a tool, but as a means that can at any moment become a new end in its own right, the appreciation begins to modulate into the language of mediation, which vanishes when we seek to contemplate money in its own right:

Money is the purest reification of means, a concrete instrument which is absolutely identical with its abstract concept ... The tremendous importance of money for understanding the basic motives of life lies in the fact that money embodies and sublimates the practical relation of man to the objects of his will, his power and his impotence; one might say, paradoxically, that man is an indirect being [*das indirekte Wesen*]. (*PM*, 211; *PG*, 206)

All of which perhaps now puts us in a better position to grasp the implications of the lengthy meditation on theory, which I have postponed quoting until now but which can be said to offer Simmel’s own description, not so much of his method, as rather of the conceptual dynamics into which this peculiar object has forced him:

It is necessary to consider our mental existence under two categories that complement each other: in terms of its content and in terms of the process that, as an event of consciousness, carries or realizes this content. The structure of these categories is extremely different. We must conceive the mental process as a continuous flux, in which there are no distinct breaks, so that one mental state passes into the next uninterruptedly, in the manner of organic growth. The contents, abstracted from this process and existing in an ideal independence, appear under a totally different aspect: as an aggregate, a graduated scheme, a system of single concepts or propositions clearly distinguished from one another. The logical connection between any two concepts reduces the distance between them but not the discontinuity, like the steps of a ladder that are sharply separated from each other but yet provide the means for a continuous movement of the body. The relation among the contents of thought is characterized by the fact that the foundations of thought, considered as a whole, seem to move in circles, because thought has to support itself ‘by being suspended’ and has no *pou stv* [Archimedean point] which supports it from outside. The contents of thought provide a background to each other so that each gets its meaning and colour from the other; they are pairs of mutually exclusive opposites and yet postulate each other for the creation of a possible world view. Every particular content becomes the ground of proof for the other through the whole chain of what is knowable. The process of thinking, however, by which this relation is psychologically accomplished, follows a direct

and continuous chronological course; it continues according to its own inner meaning, although the death of the individual brings it to an end. The two categories of our reflection are divided into these two forms, which make knowledge illusory in particular cases but possible in general. Knowledge follows a course of infinite regress, of infinite continuity, of boundlessness, which yet is limited at any particular moment—whereas the contents exhibit the other form of infinity, that of the circle, in which every point is a beginning and an end, and all the parts condition each other mutually. (*PM*, 115; *PG*, 80–81)

The statement is no doubt in itself a kind of ontologization of the thought process and its dilemma, couched, however, in the language of content rather than process. It thereby illustrates the dilemma in question by virtue of its own inability to theorize it on its own terms; the revenge of this particular dualism is to force its own theory to adopt one or the other of its alternatives, both of which are unsatisfactory. If, as in this version, the content is emphasized at the expense of process, the opposition takes on the form of a kind of immense world structure, a sort of cosmic yin and yang; if, on the other hand, processes are emphasized then, as with relativism in the earlier discussion, the truth content of the various terms is lost and a frivolous temporal movement results, in which none of the moments of the process is taken seriously. This is, in effect, the practice of the dialectic without its theory, which is not to say that some stereotypical Hegelian “synthesis” ought to have been evoked at this point. Indeed, the spirit of the latter is perhaps better captured by C. S. Peirce’s doctrine of “thirdness,” or sheer relationality (“firstness” being immediacy, “secondness” being the resistance of an outside),⁸ but we have already noted the way in which “thirdness” has been elided in all of Simmel’s formulations, most dramatically in the omission of the officially economic itself in the overall plan of the work. But “thirdness” would be the very place of dialectical theory as such, and this evasion or elision is what suggests that Simmel’s eminently dialectical thinking finally stops short of its own theory (or, as Hegel might say, does not manage to be equal to its concept). There are, however, other reasons for this, which we need to sketch out briefly in conclusion.

For one thing, the implications of the peculiar conceptual dilemmas that Simmel finds himself confronting again and again are redirected and even recontained by a discursive pathos we have already found at work in the conclusion to “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” a pathos which seals and certifies the impossibility of any resolution to these dilemmas by appealing to the tragic mode as such. In this case it is not, as elsewhere, the impossibility of choosing between life and form that is at stake but rather a somewhat different dialectic, one that anticipates the developments in the second part of Simmel’s work, which explores the consequences of a money economy: “What one might term the tragedy of human concept formation lies in the

fact that the higher concept, which through its breadth embraces a growing number of details, must count upon increasing loss of content" (*PM*, 221; *PG*, 219). This view clearly enough spells the end of the historical optimism projected by the Hegelian attempt at a system; perhaps it also augurs, in a very different way, the culture pessimism of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. What Simmel has immediately in mind here, however, is our old friend "abstraction" or "intellectualization," which played so central a role in the shorter essay on the city and the money economy; and in fact this remark comes as a gloss on a first premonition of the blasé relationship to life that will be one of the central themes of the second half of *The Philosophy of Money*.

In that second part, which we will not deal with in great detail, this register of tragic pathos is also extended to the discussion of freedom as such and its paradoxes, which are analogous. But where the motif of freedom opened up the themes of the essay on the metropolis to some properly dialectical exercise of its negative and positive aspects, here the same logic is enlisted in a litany of the unresolvable (and thereby "tragic") paradoxes of modern freedom, at one and the same time more individualistic and more dependent on the complex networks of an interdependent social fabric. The rhetoric of this entire second section, which may be considered to be Simmel's contribution to a theory of modernity that takes its cue from the centrality of money in modern society, is suffused with the inescapable pathos of the double bind. Money's other juridical and social consequence in the emergence of property is grasped as an enrichment of the self at the same time that its static and object-oriented tendencies are denounced (one of the most interesting features of this discussion lies in Simmel's suggestion, which anticipates Sartrean existentialism, that we should think of ownership as an activity and a process rather than a state; this is, of course, very consistent with the methodological remarks previously quoted) (see *PM*, 322, 304; *PG*, 346, 323). Freedom itself is not only linked to the social division of labor but as a consequence becomes characterized as an "internal division of labour," in which the multiplicity of the older group becomes ascribed to the formerly individual entity who was once nothing but a constituent part of that group (*PM*, 313; *PG*, 333). But this formulation then immediately rehearses yet again the deeper tension between multiplicity and unity that was the drama of the money form itself. Thus the contradiction between individualism and group cohesion "has its origin in the fact that the individual is only one element and member of the social unity, while at the same time being himself a whole entity, whose elements form a relatively closed unity" (*PM*, 350; *PG*, 381). As for abstraction in modern life, Simmel summarizes his position as follows:

We have pointed out in the preceding chapters how much money, on the basis of its general availability and objectivity, none the less facilitates the growth of individuality and subjectivity, how much its unchanging uniformity, its qualitatively communistic character, leads to each quantitative difference becoming a qualitative one. This extension of the power of money that is incomparable with that of any other cultural factor, and which gives equal rights to the most contradictory tendencies in life, is manifested here as the condensation of the purely formal cultural energy that can be applied to any content in order to strengthen it and to bring about its increasingly purer representation. (*PM*, 440; *PG*, 494)

This exceedingly dense and enigmatic passage foreshadows the most interesting subsection of this second part of Simmel's work, which deals with the whole question of styles in modernity, and which deserves a discussion and an appreciation in its own right.

What I must now observe, in conclusion, is that the organization of Simmel's dialectic around the irreducibly empirical form of money, which has enabled the extraordinary richness of his social *Darstellung*, now finally exacts its price, so to speak, in the form of some ultimate limitation and paradoxical constriction. What he was able to project as a pure form out of the phenomenon of money—an absolute unity that is at one and the same time a ceaseless multiplicity of contents and differences of all kinds—now returns to seal his conceptualization of modernity as being inseparable from money and from the money economy as such.

Already he had formally noted the conceptual or categorical kinship of the money form with theological speculations:

It may appear as an irony of history that, as the moment when the satisfying and ultimate purposes of life become atrophied, precisely that value that is exclusively a means and nothing else takes the place of such purposes and clothes itself in their form. In reality, money in its psychological form, as the absolute means and thus as the unifying point of innumerable sequences of purposes, possesses a significant relationship to the notion of God—a relationship that only psychology, which has the privilege of being unable to commit blasphemy, may disclose. The essence of the notion of God is that all diversities and contradictions in the world achieve a unity in him, that he is—according to a beautiful formulation of Nicolas de Cusa—the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Out of this idea, that in him all estrangements and all irreconcilables of existence find their unity and equalization, there arises the peace, the security, the all-embracing wealth of feeling that reverberate with the notion of God which we hold. (*PM*, 236; *PG*, 240)

Now this theological property of the money form seizes on Simmel's thinking itself and determines an ultimate ontological outburst: "Money is the symbol in the empirical world of the inconceivable unity of being, out of which the world, in all its breadth, diversity, energy and reality, flows" (*PM*,

497; *PG*, 567). It is an astonishing climax, accompanied on the level of empirical decoration by a no less revealing remark in passing to the effect that “the roundness of coins which makes them ‘roll’ symbolizes the rhythm of the movement that money imparts to transactions” and by implication the rhythm of Being itself, in its unified yet infinite differentiation (*PM*, 506; *PG*, 578). The greatness of Simmel’s work lies in its ceaseless and varied use of the money form to unearth and conceptually reveal incommensurabilities of all kinds, in social reality fully as much as in thought itself. Money was thus a ladder that he was unwilling to push away after use, and it was well that Benjamin, who learned so much from Simmel, was unwilling to follow him in this immensely productive fascination, which, however, like the coin itself, became a vicious circle in which the sociologist was ultimately trapped.

1999

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin, letter to Theodor W. Adorno, February 23, 1939, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson, ed. Gershorn Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994, 599; see also Walter Benjamin, letter to Scholem, December 23, 1917, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, 106.
- 2 Quoted in Donald N. Levine’s introduction to Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971, xiii.
- 3 Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” *On Individuality and Social Forms*, trans. Edward A. Shils, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971, 324. Future references to this work are denoted *MM*. Georg Simmel, “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben,” *Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung zu Dresden*, Winter 1902–1903, vol. 9, 187. Future references to this work are denoted *GG*.
- 4 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1971, 186. But juxtapose Simmel’s equally significant position: “Money as such is the most terrible destroyer of form.” Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, London: Routledge, 1978, 272; future references to this work are denoted *PM*. Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, 1900; reprinted Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1958, 285. Future references to this work are denoted *PG*.
- 5 “The Conflict in Modern Culture,” *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 377.
- 6 “Un kaleidoscope doué de conscience” in Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols., ed. Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, 2: 692; quoted in Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken, 1968, 175.

- 7 This is the moment to note Simmel's interesting thoughts on Greece, in particular his account of the cultural and philosophical results of an incompletely monetary economy in ancient Greece, which produced an emphasis on consumption rather than, as in modernity, on production (uncertainty of time and the future, compensatory overemphasis on the concept of substance); see *PM*, 323–24; *PG*, 235–37.
- 8 See, for example, Charles Sanders Peirce, *Principles of Philosophy*, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 5, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960, 1: 182–95.

How Not to Historicize Theory

The contention that current attacks on theory are politically motivated remains a topic for further research, as Ian Hunter might put it; that his own complex and often subtle essay “The History of Theory” is very much a skirmish in that campaign cannot be doubted.¹ The essay revives a certain number of the themes crucial to the antitheoretical and specifically anti-dialectical polemic waged within theory itself a few years ago—denunciations of idealism, totalization, teleology and the like—while reidentifying these themes with seemingly novel labels drawn from Hunter’s historical research on what he argues to have been *Rival Enlightenments*, namely, an opposition between “university metaphysics” and “civil philosophy” in eighteenth-century German thought.² This book posits the existence of a historical debate between incompatible traditions, which he there rather obsessively documents and then endows it with contemporary significance, insofar as it leads him to wonder why no one has ever perceived it. He concludes that the triumph of the allegedly metaphysical tradition has been to conceal and absorb if not obliterate the very traces of its civic and juridical opposite number down to our own time. The attack on theory, then, described as the latest inheritor of university metaphysics, can be seen as a strategic part of a more general crusade for the historical rediscovery and acknowledgement of the secular and juridical Enlightenment alternative, which has its role to play today as well, he feels. Indeed, it will be thought that this alternative already has its contemporary analogues in Pocock’s civic humanism as well in Carl Schmitt’s call for a radical disciplinary separation of the political from the ethical or philosophical as a field of study (and action). Both, to be sure, are mentioned in Hunter’s book (with qualifications); but they underscore at least one of the paradoxes of his polemic stance, namely, the hesitation between a denunciation of theory in general (identified as metaphysical and even theological through and through) and the critique of one kind of theoretical position (the metaphysical one) from the standpoint of another (civic and juridical).

At any rate, it will be clear from Hunter's starting point in this ancient history that he is out for game bigger than some mere historical rectification and that, above and beyond current practitioners of theory, his targets include religion, intellectuals, idealism, and the dialectic itself. At the same time his own ideological position expands well beyond the concerns of the professional historian of ideas to embrace the neopragmatism and Anglo-American empiricism and common sense that were the original targets of theory in all its forms and that have miraculously risen from the dead in the current "end of history" and triumph of free-market capitalism and globalization. Far from disabling theory, however, such an unexpected resurrection renews its original vocation to take up the weapons of criticism and to wage the old battles all over again (as one no doubt always must).

To put it this way, however, is to become aware of a singular absence from Hunter's narrative, the glaring omission of the single most significant force in the formation and perpetuation of theory in its contemporary form, and that is the Marxist problematic itself. Not only have all subsequent theoretical trends and tendencies been obliged to confront it (as Hunter's narrative must, without acknowledging it publicly); but, more than that, Marxism energized and perpetuated all of them (very much including the ostensibly anti-Marxian theorizing of writers like Michel Foucault). The proof lies in the demonstrable fact that the so-called (and greatly exaggerated) death of theory was a consequence of the de-Marxification of France in the 1980s;³ indeed, the rallying to Marxism at that moment of the two greatest philosophical minds of the age—Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze⁴—bore incomparable testimony to their dismayed realization that, even as non-Marxists, their own respective lifeworks were profoundly rooted in a Marxist culture on the point of extinction.

But Hunter follows the example of Foucault (who dismissed Marx as a minor Ricardian economist in *The Order of Things*)⁵ in positioning Marxist debates as a passing sideshow in his own ironically named history of theory (which in fact he demonstrates to have been a sterile repetition without history or development). Here Althusser's reading of Marx is itself read as yet another "improvisation" on that "transcendental reduction" that constitutes the crucial symptom of Hunter's diagnosis. His systematic conflation of theory with philosophy then enables him to bypass Marxism altogether (now Terry Eagleton alone figuring the return of this repressed) and to identify the origins of modern theory in the theory and practice of the *epoché* of Husserl, to whom no one ever thought of attributing even the slightest Marxian impulse. It is an ingenious proposal, which manages to sanitize subsequent theory at the same time that it thoroughly discredits it. For there can be no doubt that the passage selected from *The Crisis in the European Sciences* as the paradigm of theory is an impressively delirious one:

We perform the epoché—we who are philosophizing in a new way—as a transformation of the attitude which precedes it not accidentally but essentially, namely, the attitude of natural human existence which, in its total historicity, in life and science, was never before interrupted ... What must be shown in particular and above all is that through the epoché a new way of experiencing, of thinking, of theorizing, is opened to the philosopher; here, situated *above* his own natural being and *above* the natural world, he loses nothing of their being and their objective truths and likewise nothing at all of the spiritual acquisitions of his world-life or those of the whole historical communal life; he simply forbids himself—as a philosopher, in the uniqueness of his direction of interest—to continue the whole natural performance of his world-life; that is, he forbids himself to ask questions which rest upon the ground of the world at hand, questions of being, questions of value, practical questions, questions about being or not-being, about being valuable, being useful, being beautiful, being good, etc. ... This is not a “view,” an “interpretation” bestowed upon the world. Every view about ... “the” world has its ground in the pre-given world. It is from this very ground that I have freed myself through the epoché; I stand *above* the world, which has now become for me, in a quite peculiar sense, a *phenomenon*. (*HT*, 85)

Hunter believes that Husserl has here naively blurted out the dirty little secret of theory in general: it aims not only to get out of the world of daily life and real conflict but also to transform that operation into a specific work on the self, a spiritual exercise that can also serve as a professional admittance test. The transcendental reduction as a symptom thus takes on a diagnostic function as well; it not only serves as the badge of the idealism of theorists and philosophers from Plotinus to Kant and down to our time but also more generally reveals behind idealism the conspiratorial program of religion as such and of Nietzsche's evil ascetic priests.

Before we measure the scope of this interesting indictment, however, it will be necessary to see how Hunter is able to include within it so many contemporary intellectuals and theorists, most of whom probably consider themselves to be materialists very much engaged in the real world of political realities and power relations of all kinds. Such people, engaged in revealing the deeper ideological meaning of various texts or revising the current narratives of historical events and developments, if not in elaborating new political and intellectual programs, will presumably be astonished to learn that theirs is a profoundly idealistic if not religious or mystical activity and, in any case, a form of reduction and sublimation rather than of concrete regrounding and demystification. But the word *deeper* is the giveaway, for it is the depth model in general and all manner of hermeneutic practices that are Hunter's targets here—the reduction, in other words, of facts and historical realities to concepts that have no empirical object, like society, culture revolution, class, language, history, capitalism, and so on. This particular line of attack is enough to link Hunter to the traditional

Anglo-American empiricism that theory set out to demolish in the first place, and indeed the words *positive*, *empirical*, and *research* are here everywhere valorized and emphasized.

But to grasp this antitheoretical counterattack in terms of that positivism and nominalism that Adorno saw at work everywhere in late capitalism is not to exclude the identification of the specific kinds of unworldly concepts and empty abstractions that are the more immediate focus of Hunter's critical attention. In particular, historical periodization and its various theoretical categories offer "an important pointer—to theory's posture of critique adopted in relation to so-called empiricist and positivist sciences" (*HT*, 83). For paradoxically that "abstention from empiricist or positivist knowledges through insight into their sleeping structures" (as that is here characterized [*HT*, 87]) can also be achieved by accounts of the closure of those knowledges—the limits of their presuppositions and of their object-construction as well as of their genesis and dissolution in historical time. This is why Foucault, an ally in Hunter's description of the rise of the phenomenological or hermeneutic attitude (even though, from another perspective, it can be traced back as far as philosophizing itself), suddenly finds himself unmasked as a practitioner of theory when we come to a troublesome concept like the episteme, which offers wholesale aid and comfort to the very forms of antiempirical reductionism Hunter denounces.⁶ Unlike empirical historical investigations, the periodizing of historical structures is here demonstrated to be yet another method of bracketing and relativizing the historical fact, and the most obnoxious of all, as Hunter's peroration makes clear: "it will be necessary to discard the phenomenologically inspired concepts of the 'paradigm' and the problematic, and even Foucault's more historically sensitive concepts of the episteme, discourse, and the historical a priori" (*HT*, 112). To such famous nominalistic pronouncements as "there is no such thing as society" and "the Palestinians don't exist," we should now presumably add the proposition that capitalism doesn't exist either.

Yet although this taboo ought to take care of contemporary theory and its would-be political practitioners of whatever stripe, we do not do justice to the implications of "The History of Theory" if we fail to see that it also implies an indictment of the intellectual as such, which is the burden of the assimilation of theory to a spiritual exercise and of the unmasking of theoretical analysis and interpretation as an idealism and indeed an asceticism of a quasi-religious type. Here, in a well-nigh dialectical reversal, the Enlightenment tradition, virtually formed by its polemics against religion and superstition, ends up reinforcing what it opposes in a new and more insidious form. This is Hunter's version of the secularization thesis, which one thought to have been refuted by Blumenberg in his magnum opus.⁷ Yet it is inevitable that a critique of conceptual closures and periodizing or

disciplinary claustrality should insist in its turn on the continuous in history (or at least in the “history of ideas”) and on the seamless tradition that links older religious practices to the newer theoretical ones.

There is at any rate an ideological continuity that connects Nietzsche’s denunciation of the priesthood to contemporary denunciations of intellectuals and armchair radicals by figures like E. P. Thompson (in *The Poverty of Theory*). Paradoxically this continuity (which is in fact one of situations and contradictions) also links Nietzsche backwards, not only to the Enlightenment attack on religion, but also to the first counterrevolutionary polemics against the French Revolution itself. Its instigators are seen not only as intellectuals inspired by that profoundly Nietzschean motive which is resentment but failed writers and artists as well.

In fact, the description would seem far more accurately and comfortably to fit another discipline, namely aesthetics as such; for it is aesthetics whose object ambiguously hovers between the world it represents and a non-worldly process of representation whose apprenticeship is also very much a kind of spiritual exercise. The irony here is that much of contemporary theory has also involved a critique of aesthetics and posited a sharp distinction between this philosophical preoccupation and the production of art as such; and also much of contemporary aesthetics—enlisted in the most violent critique of cultural studies and theory in general, very much in Hunter’s spirit—is politically committed to the anti-Left status quo, in this country assuming the shape of anti-antiglobalization and in France of the democratic and parliamentary propaganda of the type embodied by Luc Ferry (very much the archetype of the centrist and pro-American status quo position marshalling the philosophical discipline of aesthetics for an outright political message). Equally ironic, it is the people who salute aesthetics, such as Richard Rorty, who are the most consistently opposed to theory and to genuine political art as well, now identified pejoratively as mere culture.

To be sure, when the polemics are themselves waged by intellectuals (a category about which Edmund Burke did not particularly have to trouble himself), a little footwork is necessary to secure one’s own position against the onslaught and to forestall the embarrassing contradiction of the satirist satirized in the prophetic tradition. Thompson, himself a prophet, did not trouble himself about the contradiction either; but Russell Jacoby fills in the gaps with his idea of the public intellectuals, those who, unlike the theory people, write so you can understand them.⁸ This exception to the rule is only partly endorsed by Hunter, who seems content to validate the worth and secular respectability of the practicing (empirical) research historian.

Still, this fallback position does not prevent him from deploying the offensive edge of the public-intellectual argument when his agenda demands it; for that argument was only incidentally a nostalgic lament for the old days of Walter Lippman and the public sphere of the great

newspapers. In fact, for Thompson and Jacoby, who both knew that the disappearance of that public sphere was a historical development not to be repealed by moral and political commitment, it is far more substantially an attack on academic intellectuals. Thompson's own moral indignation (like that of Nietzsche) is authorized by a position outside the university system not necessarily available to his colleagues or political coreligionaries.

But it fits Hunter's agenda because it allows him to endow that modern political intellectual who does theory with a pedigree that reaches back to the Protestant "seminars of conscience" in the seventeenth century (here, indeed, we have an excellent program for "future historical research"). And did not Nietzsche himself teach us, in an earlier version of the theory of work on the self à la Foucault, that the production of the thing we call conscience is the very first creative achievement of "slave ethics" (or in other words the ethics of Christianity)?

The problem with the anti-intellectualism of intellectuals, at least when it comes from the Left, is that it plays directly into the agenda of the Right, whose attribution of revolutionary troublemaking to Left intellectuals we have already noted. Meanwhile, this essentially pro-business agenda has the additional benefit of appealing to the anti-intellectualism of populists and anarchists, not only a popular position today among younger intellectuals, but also, particularly in a country like the United States, a more widely shared and instinctive conviction in the population generally. In that sense, anti-intellectualism is as American as violence or apple pie and worth distinguishing from the social-democratic traditions of Europe as well as of the other Anglo-Saxon countries. In this country, then, it becomes easy to divert and displace political indignation with big business and its governments with a no less politically operative rage at (liberal) intellectuals and the (big) government they are supposedly imposing on us. In short, anti-intellectualism is not, for the Left in this country, a very intelligent strategy.

But it should also be admitted that the social role of the intellectual is ambiguous by virtue of its very structure and in ways that cannot be resolved. Sartre liked to adapt the ominous Stalinist concept of the objective traitor to make this point dramatically; for most often the intellectual never has the possibility, let alone the luxury, of being organic in Gramsci's sense. Rather the intellectual most often comes out of one social class seeking identification with another one, in which he will never be completely accepted or assimilated. To fold back without a trace into the people—however this amorphous collective concept is understood—is the old unrealizable dream of the intellectual, most strikingly embodied in the Maoist return to the factory or countryside, and in the nineteenth-century Russian quest for the peasantry. Contemporary gender and race intellectuals are not really exceptions to this structural unhappy consciousness, for now the original class from which they must seek to break in order to achieve an organic identity is

to be understood as the university itself—hence the political urgency of this supplementary polemic. As for those intellectuals content to remain (or again to become) the spokespeople of their own class of origin, it cannot be said that they are received with any less suspicion by that class either (the dominant one), inasmuch as conversion (that is to say, class treason) is for them also always an objective possibility.

But this more general political polemic carried like a virus within the attacks on theory is also, today, accompanied by a more specific one, consonant with the seemingly apolitical atmosphere of these last decades, which are believed to have passed beyond the end of history. This particular polemic is the *rappel à l'ordre* associated with Rorty's frequent sermons to what he likes to call the cultural Left (generally assimilable to Hunter's academic or metaphysical theory), which invite us to abandon the sterile old political enthusiasms of sectarianism and political activism (read Marxism, communism or socialism, and other forms of a bad Utopian politics) and to embrace a modesty that engages incremental and nonsystemic local issues and reforms that bring with them the bonus of American patriotism and allow the intellectual once again to drape himself or herself in the flags of Whitman or the New Deal. Pragmatism is then the operative mood and concept here, signaling political resignation, the definitive renunciation of the 1960s, and the return to the two-party system and its limits.

Yet, in the context of Hunter's essay, it is worth distinguishing this specifically American situation from what obtains in Britain and in the commonwealth countries, let alone postsocialist ones or in Europe itself. For despite Rorty's own roots in a minoritarian American social democracy, it is worth reminding ourselves that we have never had a viable social democratic movement, let alone even a nominal social democratic government; so that where the appeal to modesty and pragmatism might well offer state or state university employment elsewhere, it must in the US remain sheer rhetoric and the injunction to intellectuals to behave themselves, which is no doubt why Hunter treats Rorty's philosophizing coolly as mere relativism.

But the situation of the academic intellectual is not properly grasped through the steam of moral indignation. Only in the concrete context of the relentless privatization of universities everywhere can the intellectual's political possibilities be appreciated. This is not the place to describe the decline of education and research alike in the university system today but only to point to the subsumption of whole fields and disciplines under the patronage of private business and, as it were, the assimilation to wage labor of the standard nonacademic type of researchers whose work is subsidized by monopolies who set the agenda and are likely to profit from the results.⁹ The displacement of "pure" science by "applied" science today, for example, has widely been noted; what is less often remarked is that theory today flourishes in proportion to its distance from such commodification. Hunter's

diatribe against what he quaintly calls “Christian university metaphysics,” passing through variations on “the Anglo-American academy,” reaches its climactic form in his indictment of “university literature departments” and “the American humanities graduate school” (*HT*, 82, 112, 107, 80). For him, as for Rorty, culture is a mere sandbox and an epiphenomenon of the more serious work of the historian, now identified as alone having practical political significance. Further, and above all, for Hunter the humanities are not, in a business society, truly serious and worth investing in. This distance from capital is what gives real content to the otherwise rather vacuous and narcissistic pathos with which the Frankfurt school expressed its dismay at the ominous shrinkage of any space in which what they called negative or critical thinking could be exercised; their social claustrophobia remains an effective figure for the spread of a universal positivism, hostile to negativity and to theory alike, and constituting the regime of the reified fact, with its protocols and taboos, often reinforced by a regression to the traditional disciplines. Hunter’s call for a return to the fact, in this case the reifications of intellectual history, is a low-level version of just such positivist censorship.

That Marxism is ultimately the target here can be adduced from Terry Eagleton’s apparition at two crucial points in this essay (where one is tempted to identify him as the proverbial specter of communism). In the first of these cameo appearances, Eagleton’s materialism is put into play expressly in order to distinguish him from Derrida on the one hand and Hunter himself on the other. Derrida’s critique of Husserl has been quoted approvingly, despite the notorious role of Derrida in propagating theory in the first place, deconstruction turning out to be fully as much spiritual exercise as what it is concerned to stigmatize as idealism. And then we read this:

In this regard it might look as if Eagleton is better placed to grasp the concrete motivation of the critical attitude than Derrida, for Eagleton ascribes this to history, in fact to the crisis that supposedly occurred when culture was incorporated into late capitalism and lost its autonomy, thereby impelling critical self-consciousness: “It is this critical self-reflection which we know as theory. Theory of this kind comes about when we are forced into a new self-consciousness about what we are doing.” In treating the distrust of empirical knowledges and ordinary experience as something compelled by history, however, Eagleton obscures the contingent character of the requisite acts of self-problematization no less than does Derrida. He turns the program of thought thinking its own conditions into something required of reason by history rather than something required of university students undergoing a certain kind of intellectual formation. (*HT*, 85–86)

Marxism does not, in other words, appeal to the right kind of history, for its causal notion of late capitalism lies outside the field of study itself (“the

history of theory”); it is something external that cannot be dealt with in the same terms. More than that, late capitalism is another one of those claustal or periodizing concepts, like Foucault’s episteme, or Kuhn’s paradigm, that does not correspond to any empirical object (of research), and that is, to use the language of a different kind of attack on theory, totalizing. Somehow, for this sociology of ideas, the students being trained in theory are a legitimate part of the object of study, while the larger historical moment in which they are themselves formed is not. But it is time to observe that, far from being a transcendental reduction, the hermeneutic move from the theoretical students to their concrete positions in a given mode of production is on the contrary a materialist regrounding. To be sure, both positions can appeal to Marx himself; here, once again, is the famous passage from *The German Ideology*:

Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.¹⁰

Indeed, it is easy to see how this position might be marshaled in defense of Hunter’s interpretation of theory, which seeks, behind the abstract philosophical debates of the theorists, to locate the activities of real people, in the event either graduate students being trained by a theoretical guru (in this essay, Stanley Fish) or professors fighting each other for legitimacy or prestige. We may leave aside the doubtful claim that the appeal to individuals is historical inasmuch as the irony of his title derives from the conviction that theory has no history, consisting in simple repetition, in “improvisation,” on a single historical operation. Nor should we linger over the paradoxical fact that this interpretation includes layers of its own and that behind the modern “concrete situation” of the graduate students there lies the deeper embodiment of the Protestant “spiritual exercise.”

What is most surprising is that Hunter does not seem to realize that the structure of his own interpretation can scarcely be distinguished from the very transcendental reduction it seeks to discredit. The reading of theory in terms of its allegedly concrete situation is fully as much an interpretive substitution as Husserl’s *epoché*. He clearly feels that his own interpretant is somehow more solid and substantial than Husserl’s *noemata*, but that is a positivist and empiricist prejudice. Both are constructions, representations that have no empirical object.

Sociologism and the history of ideas are not then more rigorous substitutes for the alleged idealism of theory, if only because the individuals that

are for them the basic intelligible units and building blocks of their interpretive operations are ideological figments and the elements of a whole mythology of individualism as such. The injunction of Marx and Engels is based on the conviction that only collectives, and not their individual components, are historically intelligible and that the modes of production are the key to the dynamics of such collectives. But for the positivists production even in this sense must clearly remain a transcendental abstraction and interpretation in terms of it yet another nonempirical reduction, whose alleged materialism cannot save it from the same critical indictment visited on its idealist opposite numbers.

Still, not to be outdone or silenced, the specter of Marxism, wearing the appearance of Eagleton, resurfaces again for one last time in the evocation of Foucault, someone who, like Derrida, brings a certain grist to Hunter's mill before hopelessly veering off into his own theorizing. Foucault is credited with a useful diagnosis of the nineteenth century, in which "philosophical reflection [is grasped] as performing a work of interrogation and transformation of the empirical sciences" (*HT*, 93). So far so good, and Foucault seems even to demolish Hunter's old adversary Kant by way of the contradiction he excavates between the empirical sciences and a supposedly transcendental philosophy emerging from Kant's unfortunate renewal of that "discipline." Hunter overlooks the critique of the *Geisteswissenschaften* or human sciences that the diagnosis explicitly expounds, not excluding unhappy consequences for the history of ideas itself. But the contradiction will at least become helpful in one last settling of accounts with Eagleton in a seemingly gratuitous footnote: "Eagleton's conception of culture, as both determined by capitalist production processes and as the means of thinking this determination, can thus be treated as a routine symptomatic expression of [Foucault's] conception of man as the 'empirico-transcendental doublet'" (*HT*, 93 n. 28).

Doublet indeed! Have we really solved this problem, which runs from the mind-body dilemma through Cartesian and Spinozan dualisms all the way down to base and superstructure if not the mechanical-materialist mirage of the cognitive brain itself? The traces of this metaphysical raw nerve are to be found in all the dualisms in human history, not least in Hunter's favorite opposition between the material followers of civic philosophy (the juridical discipline) and the obnubilated spiritualists of university metaphysics. The metaphysical dilemma is not itself, however, a metaphysics; but it certainly becomes one when one supposes that it can be or has already been resolved.

I am tempted to find persuasive Colin McGinn's argument that it is the impossibility of representing consciousness that is at the heart of these unresolvable dilemmas; on the other hand, his agnosticism would seem to be little more than another way of resolving them.¹¹ The only truly original

solution, which does not claim to resolve anything but rather to incorporate the dilemma of oppositions and binaries into its very structure and method, remains the dialectic, which posits a permanent gap between subject and object within all our thoughts as well as in reality itself (herein lies its kinship with Lacanian analysis as well as its foundational and inextricable relationship with Marxism itself). From a dialectical standpoint, then, Foucault's "empirico-transcendental doublet" is itself merely an empirical reification of one historical form of a dialectical opposition that is always with us (and that can therefore scarcely be evoked as a presumably devastating critique).

It remains in force, indeed, in the one contemporary theorist who, uncited here, is surely the closest to Hunter's own ideological position despite the way in which both the power and the scope of his work demonstrate the fatal tendency of any serious thinking, against its own best intentions, to form itself into a system, which is to say a philosophy, if not necessarily a theory as such. But Pierre Bourdieu's work—the most complex rationale for anti-intellectualism available today—is as theoretical as it is philosophical. It seeks, in other words, to undermine and discredit all the ideologies in play in the intellectual market today (such is its theoretical vocation) at the same time that it finds itself fatally rationalizing its own disciplinary position as a place of truth—an attempt to square this circle that surely betrays a philosophical commitment to system rather than a theoretical refusal of it.

At this point it will be necessary to say a word about Bourdieu's work, to which so many people today pay lip service (most of them theorists) but which clearly poses far more damaging challenges for theory than Hunter's effort. For this voluminous sociological production is driven by a true class passion, the hatred of the elites and their cultural and intellectual pretensions; and it will not be an ad hominem or biographical impropriety to situate it between the two dichotomous social classes as such, insofar as it is this intermediate stance that enables a vigilant and eternally disabused attention to the class functions and mystifications of elite culture at the same time that it motivates a sympathetic and even nostalgic evocation of the material lives of peasants and workers and, in particular, of their authentic relationship to their own bodies.¹² Here, then, we find a return of the old mind-body opposition with a vengeance (!) as well as an explicit evocation of the dialectic in what is neither a Marxist nor a Hegelian work.¹³

Indeed, Bourdieu's most famous work, *Distinction* (1979), sets out a program for "distinguishing" between the strategies of the two fundamental classes; and the ambiguous title word itself symbolically reenacts the relationship between the formal mechanisms that are meant to differentiate the social classes from each other and the content of that strategy or tactics of snobbery (as when one speaks of "distinguished" table manners) that carries

it out. Cultural distinction then secures the recognition or acknowledgement of class position; and it is in this sense that Bourdieu proposes his most influential theoretical innovation, namely, the notion of cultural capital: what is accumulated as a result of the various practices of cultural distinction in education, clothing, tastes, and so forth (in other words, the social payoff for listening to Mahler rather than to pop classics like Tchaikovsky; unfortunately, preferring Schoenberg to Mahler then places me in the class of intellectuals rather than aristocrats and thereby, as we might suspect, brings all kinds of other problems with it).

The intention behind this contribution to a theory of superstructures (as Lévi-Strauss once described his own theories, which were precisely the object of the critical impulse behind Bourdieu's greatest theoretical work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*) is more effective than its structural mechanism; it reveals culture to be an instrument of class and class consciousness, but only by positing a kind of mechanical parallelism or homology between real capital and that cultural baggage alleged to function analogously with it. To be sure, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu was careful to insist not only on their parallelism but also on the indispensability of both levels (evoking, for example, "strategies" that depend "for their logic and their efficacy on the material and symbolic capital of the social unit in question").¹⁴ The figural transfer is then most arresting when it gives quasi-economic definition to nonobjective powers, as for example in his evocation of "the capital of authority" (or Weber's own figure of the "monopoly of violence" attributed to the legitimate state). There can be no doubt that such linguistic mechanisms restore a welcome social functionality to culture; but they tend to do so at the expense of the significance of the economic or of the infrastructure that serves as the base or tenor of the figure in the first place. In other words, at the same time that the latter alerts sociologists to the class function of culture, it tends to confirm so-called cultural intellectuals in their complacency about the significance of culture and to reassure them that to point to cultural capital is enough to exempt them from any further mention of capital itself.

As for that function itself, it may well seem that Hunter has missed a trick here in failing to point out the usefulness of university metaphysics in the struggle for social prestige as such. Even if one did not choose to indict "the desire to interrupt ordinary life and knowledge in order to rise above it" as a will to climb higher on the ladder of social class (*HT*, 87), it would seem obvious enough that the struggle to legitimate theory was motivated by the attempt of its intellectuals to gain recognition and legitimation in the university system. In fact, Hunter evokes philosophical and intellectual discussion in very much the same polemic terms as Bourdieu himself as a "cultural-political battle in the humanities academy" (*HT*, 95), as a series of "protracted hand-to-hand battles, whose outcomes were never certain"

(*HT*, 103). Battles for what? Hunter must omit the class prestige at stake here in order not to trivialize his own position as one of the university players in that battle, preferring to rationalize it as a struggle for truth, a legitimation Bourdieu never tired of passionately discrediting.

This is not to say that Bourdieu himself has been able any more successfully to legitimate his own practice as a sociologist. An agonizing self-awareness shows up in virtually all of his works, nor is it redeemed by the incomparable reflexivity the sociologist brings to his situation, in “distinction” from the relative detachment of his various garden-variety imitators. For populism is not an adequate squaring of the circle for confronting the Gödel’s law of social class (no foundational position outside the system) or of evading the ideological vision of society as one endless struggle for recognition that can never be resolved, a struggle that must last as long as human history itself, assuaged by no communist Utopias let alone liberal Rawlsian ones.¹⁵ Such a conception of the social then ultimately condemns the sociologist to the same dilemma as that faced by the most implacable of social critics and satirists, namely, that of the satirist satirized, that of the position from which one is entitled to look down with glacial indifference at these interminable mortal struggles. It is a tragic sense of life Max Weber most memorably formulated when he characterized his own vocation in the words “I want to see how much I can stand.”¹⁶

Under those circumstances, to revert to some purely professional defense of sociology as one field among others (the concept of the field is another of Bourdieu’s theoretical innovations) is at best to position the observer both inside and outside of the object of investigation at the same time, in a modern version of Hegel’s “unhappy consciousness.”

Still, Bourdieu’s work is incomparably more disabling for the pretensions of intellectuals in general than Hunter’s is for those of the theorists; and it is worth marking the limits of this sociological exposure—the operation of ideological debunking or muckraking—in a way that acknowledges the therapeutic value of this strategy at the same time that it avoids facile recourse to those old-fashioned values of truth and objectivity that Hunter believes himself to be defending against “postmodern” relativists and nihilists.

Bourdieu is himself conflicted enough about the paradox of truth in relativism to acknowledge the ambiguity of his own positions,¹⁷ which have led some to construe his polite but devastating attack on Derrida and aesthetics (in *Distinction*) as a wholesale disqualification of art itself or at least of high art (not really repaired by his study of the aesthetic field, *The Rules of Art*). But this balancing act is very difficult to sustain: “Nous pouvons reconnaître que l’esthétique de ceux qui sont le produit de la skholè, du loisir, de la distance à l’égard des necessities économiques et des urgencies pratiques” (*R*, 64).¹⁸

The phenomenon is paradoxical because it is dialectical, as I have suggested; but the immediate rhetorical source of this ambiguity—which leads the nondialectical reader to assume that the account of a given object has to be either negative or positive and the judgement of it an ethical stance in terms of good or evil—surely lies in Bourdieu's crucial concept of strategy, which allows him to analyze the phenomena of a given field as though they were the outcome of conscious intentions and conspiratorial planning rather than of the implicit arts of a praxis. If intentional, we may read the works in question as the implementation of the will to preserve the field at all costs; thus, Derrida's deconstruction of philosophical aesthetics turns out to be more deeply motivated by his commitment to save and preserve philosophy as a field, in other words, as a frame of inquiry that is itself not to be undermined.

In fact, this method implies a double standard, a two-tiered approach in which the vested interest of the field or discipline coexists with the content of the analysis itself, in which two kinds of motivation reinforce each other as opposites; the one autoreferential insofar as it perpetuates its own reason for being, the other referential and wholly given over to its engagement in the world itself and in its immediate objects and judgements. This is a more complex form of Hegel's ruse of history, more comparable perhaps to that conundrum with which Eagleton himself left us when he posited the two kinds of ideology—"aesthetic" and "general"—that a given work simultaneously embodies.¹⁹ The descriptive problem that thereby arises is a properly theoretical one, which must coordinate ideology, form, and practice together in a single complex conjuncture.

This is not achieved in any adequate way by Hunter's regression to any purely disciplinary or professional framework. Indeed, we must observe that Bourdieu's theorization of the *champ* or field (along with its concomitant internal theory of the habitus) generates yet another of those claustal abstractions, on the order of the paradigm or the episteme, against which Hunter inveighs. Bourdieu's concept more closely approximates a sense that the emergence of a given *champ* or discipline must itself be theorized in terms of what Luhmann called differentiation, as a historical dynamic of modernity or capitalism, a process of the autonomization of specific differentiating practices and their emergent self-theorization; and in that sense Bourdieu's is only one of the numerous theoretical formulations that have sought to name and conceptualize this epochal development.

This is in any case more perceptible and accessible, more readily subject to conceptualization, ever since the dedifferentiating movement of post-modernity began to reverse this structural trend of modernism and thereby to throw a retrospective light on it. I want to suggest that in that respect theory is itself a form of thinking (and writing) that aims to focus the relationship-in-difference of the various autonomous fields; and in that respect

its vocation has a certain kinship with the movement of postmodernity, even though the practice of theory does not commit it to any celebration of the postmodern or to any repudiation of the modern either. There would certainly be other ways of identifying what is specific to theory as such. I would, for example, myself want to emphasize the function of what I prefer to call theoretical writing as an attempt to foreground the ideological nature of philosophical positions, an impossible attempt which seeks to evade its own ideological motivation without falling into the trap of objectivity or of antiphilosophical empiricism, something it must perpetually fail to do—not because the theorist is outside the world, as Hunter supposes, but for quite the opposite reason. Still, its vocation to resist the heterogeneity of autonomous professional languages and practices also offers an excellent occasion for arguing why today we need, not less, but more theory. But perhaps a more substantive conclusion might be attempted by way of a new look at cynical reason, to which Hunter's paper is a contribution. We may indeed see cynical reason (so named by Peter Sloterdijk in his book on Weimar) as a kind of successor to Adorno's omnipresent positivism; perhaps we might say that cynical reason is a positivism with a mission, with a politics or even a metaphysics.²⁰ For if Adornian positivism was merely a taboo, an injunction to leave out the thinking and interpretation of what is, cynical reason is a whole program for justifying this view of things. It consists in acknowledging that everything is a commodity; in viewing history, where it has any meaning at all, as a series of conspiracies motivated by interest; and finally in denying that anything else, any positive change, is possible (on the grounds of human nature). The commodity theorists not only include the free-market people, who think we can have a better assessment of our priorities and economic possibilities if we set a price on everything, including natural things not normally so assessed, like clean air and emotional payoffs (I have myself been accused of cynicism in my favorable remarks about Gary Becker in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*);²¹ they also include the analysts of commodification, for whom, as for Bourdieu, a career is preeminently a strategy and culture is preeminently capital. The 1960s' attacks on incipient commodification were powered by a vision of radically noncommodified social relations that seems to be unavailable today, rendering the critique of commodification at best a rather complacent affair and at worst a kind of implicit glorification.

But perhaps it is time, if cynical reason is somehow historically unavoidable, for a Utopian reading of it. Some progress has surely been achieved by the cynical elimination of idealistic illusions about human nature, the disabused acknowledgement of a universal motivation by interest, the definitive abandonment of pious hopes for altruism in human behavior and in particular of philanthropy in economic matters. On the individual level, this disillusionment has made for a more complex appreciation of human

action rather than the simplifications of this or that cynical reductionism. This is to say that cynical reason forces us into a more complicated conception of interest than we were obliged to have in an idealist or spiritualist age and not least into rethinking collective interest in new ways (that also reinvigorate the older notions of ideology).

This is why we need not be dismayed by the identification of theory with professionalism and the increasing institutionalization of a postindividualistic life. The conspiracy theories indissociable from cynical reason have indeed a distinguished pedigree reaching at least as far back as Hegel, whose ruse of reason (derived from Adam Smith's invisible hand) posits history as an elaborate conspiracy on the part of the Absolute itself. But we must underscore the point that present-day accusations of professionalism are also conspiracy theories, which understand the disciplines as hyperorganisms with their own internal self-interests, driven to reproduce and perpetuate themselves as bodies and to utilize their individual members, in their own local versions of Hegel's ruse of history, as instruments for achieving that purpose.

Indeed, with the onset of what we call postmodernity and globalization, institutions seem to have taken the place of individuals or at least of our illusions of individuality, at the same time dispelling all the older categories of success and revolt or ambition and alienation. The suspicion of institutions has traditionally turned, not merely on bureaucracy as something unremittingly felt to be legalistic and inhuman, if not corrupt, but above all very precisely on their inevitably conspiratorial procedures. As Brecht put it, "What's breaking into a bank compared with founding a bank?"—while in a time-honored piece of American folk wisdom, it has from time to time also been remembered that business is a conspiracy against the public.²²

The Utopian dimension of institutions is, however, their collective existence and structure. Insofar as conspiracy theory celebrates this collective dynamic and seeks to replace the categories of individual agency with collective ones, it marks a first imperfect step in that direction. Cynical reason, meanwhile, while seeming to strip acts and events of their appearance of disinterestedness, might well pave the way for some ultimate awareness of collective self-interest as such.

Notes

- 1 Ian Hunter, "The History of Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 33, Autumn 2006, 78–112. Future references to this work are denoted *HT*.
- 2 See Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- 3 See Perry Anderson's frank exposure of this situation, about which it has been taboo to speak publicly in France itself, in "Dégringolade," *London Review of Books*, September 2, 2004, 3–9, and "Union Sucré," *London Review of Books*, September 16, 2004, 10–19.
- 4 See the well-known Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York: Routledge, 1994; Deleuze's project *Grandeur de Marx* was cut short by his tragic death.
- 5 See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. pub., New York: Pantheon Books, 1970, p. 261.
- 6 Hunter largely references chapters 9 and 10 of *The Order of Things*. Derrida's attack on Husserl in "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 154–68, is also cited with some approval.
- 7 See Hans Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985.
- 8 See E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, or An Orrery of Errors*, London: Merlin Press, 1995, and Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, New York: Basic Books, 1987.
- 9 See, among many others, Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996; and Masao Miyoshi, "'Globalization,' Culture, and the University," *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998, 247–70, "The University and the 'Global' Economy: The Cases of the United States and Japan," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, Fall 2000, 669–96, and "The University, the Universe, the World, and 'Globalization,'" *Gramma* 13, 2005, 49–68.
- 10 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. pub., Moscow: Progress Press, 1976, 42.
- 11 See for example Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Consciousness in a Material World*, New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 12 See Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris: Les Editions de minuit, 1979, chap. 7, "Le Choix du nécessaire."
- 13 As witness his description of "the theory of practice, or, more precisely, the theory of the mode of generation of practices, which is the precondition for establishing an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification"; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 72.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 70.

- 15 In my opinion, the ultimate derivation from the struggle for recognition in Hegel's master-slave chapter of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the idealistic weak spot in such analyses. Bourdieu's answer to the charge would surely be that the qualification of idealism presupposes an essentially economic separation of the cultural and the material and that this artificial separation disjoins a unity in which the symbolic dimension—cultural capital, recognition, Mauss's gift—is at one with what will only later on be "objectified" as the economic. See for this argument the concluding chapter of Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 159–97.
- 16 Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975, 678.
- 17 "Il est naturel que, dans la mesure où j'ai attiré l'attention, dans mes écrits, sur l'influence de l'origine sociale, je sois constamment exposé à des interrogations personnelles auxquelles je m'efforce de résister, sans doute d'abord pour échapper à toute espèce de revendication de singularité, même négative, et aussi, peut-être, pour défendre l'autonomie, chèrement payée, de mon discours par rapport à la personne singulière que je suis. Ce qui ne signifie pas que cet individu singulier puisse échapper à l'objectivation." Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *Réponses: Pour une anthropologie réflexive*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1992, 175. Future references to this work are denoted *R*.
- 18 See Bourdieu, "Éléments pour une critique 'vulgaire' des critiques 'pures,'" *La Distinction*, 565–85. Bourdieu's vigilant suspicion of aestheticization in philosophy is expressed in characteristic formulations such as this one: "La critique, non de la culture, mais des usages sociaux de la culture comme capital et instrument de domination symbolique, est incompatible avec le divertissement esthète—souvent caché derrière une façade 'scientifique', comme chez Barthes ou *Tel Quel* (sans parler de Baudrillard)—cher à ces philosophes français qui ont porté l'esthétisation de la philosophie à un degré jamais égalé" (*R*, 129).
- 19 See Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, London: Verso, 1998. This is perhaps also the place to observe that for another approach to art these dynamics offer a suggestive anticipation of the dialectic of the social itself; thus Peter Bürger's influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984, defines the avant-garde as such precisely in terms of its growing ("cynical") awareness of art as an institution while the internal structure of modernist forms identifies a process of autoreferentiality as the crucial symptom of their ideological self-justification; see Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, London: Verso, 2002.
- 20 See Peter Sloterdijk, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987.
- 21 See Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991, chap. 8.
- 22 Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*, trans. Ralph Manheim and John Willett, ed. Willett and Manheim, 1928; New York: Arcade, 1994, act 3, scene 9, 76.

... so wird durch ebendenselben dialektischen Prozess jedes Kategorienproblem wieder in ein geschichtliches Problem verwandelt. Allerdings: in ein Problem der Universal—geschichte, die damit ... gleichzeitig als methodisches Problem und als Problem der Erkenntnis der Gegenwart erscheint.

... by the same dialectical process every problem of categories becomes transformed into a historical problem. But (it should be noted): into a problem of universal history which now appears ... simultaneously as a problem of method and a problem of our knowledge of the present.

—Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

II. SYNTAX OF HISTORY

The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller

The sociological treatises of Max Weber form a corpus of narratives peculiarly suited for analytical techniques developed in the study of myths and other types of imaginative literature. Such an approach requires a distance from Weber's work and an attitude toward it quite different from that of official sociology; for the latter naturally enough wishes first to inquire into the accuracy of Weber's descriptions and the validity of the hypotheses he proposes to account for them. In the present study, however, we must from the outset suspend such judgments, which bear on the "referent" of these texts, in order the more clearly to disengage the latter's internal structure.

Surely, in the case of a theoretically sophisticated scholar who in his own writings explicitly discusses the use and functions of models or, as he calls them, "ideal types" in the practice of historiography, there can be no room for the reactions of a scandalized positivism to an approach that, like our own, seems to assimilate sociology and discursive prose to the various other forms of overt or disguised fantasy or storytelling. Still, one can admit the paradox inherent in a search for personal or unconscious, somehow "psychological," structures in the work of a man who aimed at the establishment of sociology as a "value-free" discipline and who struggled to provide a methodological foundation for a genuinely objective and scientific analysis of social institutions. But a growing literature reevaluating Weber from a radical point of view has made it plain that Weber's *Wertfreiheit* was itself a passionate value judgment that has nothing in common with that positivistic and academic type of objectivity to which it has so often been assimilated by Weber's American interpreters.¹ We must therefore initially determine the meaning of this concept, before proceeding to an analysis of the practical work that Weber executed in its name.

I

It cannot be doubted that Weber first evolved the doctrine of *Wertfreiheit* as a weapon in his polemic struggle against politically oriented teaching not so much on the Left as on the far Right and that he had in mind the stridently nationalistic and anti-Semitic lectures of Treitschke in particular. Yet, a notion like that of value-free and objective research cannot but be influenced by the element in which it originates and by the use to which it is put. It is not a matter of indifference for us, therefore, that it is not the product of some neutral atmosphere of scientific research but amounts to the affirmation of one value over others.

It is scarcely surprising, then, that such an arm, such an ideologically strategic concept, could later be trained so effectively against the Left as well; and this is perhaps the moment at which to point out that Weber's anti-Marxism has frequently been misconceived and that much of the material generally supposed to amount to a repudiation of Marxism as a whole (for example, *The Protestant Ethic*) is in fact explicitly directed against vulgar Marxism and against that economism of the Second International to which Engels had himself objected.² I will return to Weber's view of vulgar Marxism in a later section. Here I want to point out that his work on the influence of religious factors on economic development, far from discrediting historical materialism as a theory, can just as adequately be considered a contribution to it.

In reality, Weber's most influential legacy to the anti-Marxist arsenal lay not in some idealistic reaction against a materialism he himself clearly shared with Marx but rather in the strategic substitution, in his own research and theorization, of the political for the economic realm as the principal object of study, and thus, implicitly, as the ultimately determining reality of history. Thus, Weber made of political and social history—the growth of bureaucracies, the influence of the charismatic individual and his function in political institutions—an autonomous field of study that can be examined in relative isolation from questions of economic development. Such a displacement takes the form, in our own time, of the classic strategy by which analyses of capitalism are parried by discussions of political freedom, and concepts of economic alienation and of the commodity system replaced by attacks on party bureaucracy, the “new class,” and the like.

As a statesman and a political theorist, it is certain that Weber was indeed profoundly antisocialist, and his (well-founded) doubts of the capacity of the Social Democratic leadership to govern the nation were only the external and practical reinforcements of a far more deeply held position with which I will try to come to terms in what follows. In this sense Weber is a classic manifestation of all the ambiguity of liberalism in its traditional

nineteenth-century sense: hostile to the Junkers and to Wilhelm II, to nationalistic apologetics of the Treitschke variety, yet himself affirming the ultimate value-giving category of the nation in the face of the class-oriented internationalism of Marxian socialism. Called both the “German Machiavelli” (Meinecke) and the “greatest German of our age” (Jaspers), Weber is a somber and enigmatic figure, whose death at the very outset of the Weimar Republic leaves his historical significance in the transition from the Wilhelminian era to that of Hitler forever in doubt.

Wertfreiheit as a scientific value is surely intimately related, in some way yet to be determined, to those political positions; and it is just as surely related to Weber’s troubled emotional life. For psychoanalysis, Weber has, indeed, all the fascination of the *grand malade*, the illustrious bearer of a neurosis in which intellectual productivity is closely related to the intermittent crippling effects of unconscious forces. The facts of his biography—unusual parental conflict, a four-year period of virtual intellectual paralysis at the very height of an active career, other grave symptoms more recently revealed in Arthur Mitzman’s book *The Iron Cage*—all testify to the presence in Weber of the most serious Oedipal disturbances, arousing, in the words of H. Stuart Hughes, “the paradoxical suspicion that the most probing social theory of our time was the indirect sequel of an *unresolved* neurosis of a classic Freudian type.”³

Yet, Weber’s breakdown is no mere clinical curiosity but must itself be understood in the wider context of a European (and North American) moral crisis that has not yet found its historian. Nothing is indeed quite so striking as the simultaneous appearance, within the various national situations at the end of the nineteenth century, of comparable visions of the crippling of energies, of analogous expressions of a philosophical pessimism that is itself but the intellectual exposition of some more concrete lived experience. One thinks of Flaubert or of the Tennyson of *In Memoriam*; of Hardy or Huysmans; of the “ordeal” of Mark Twain; of the self-imposed dreariness of Tolstoy’s later years; of Ibsen or of Mallarmé’s “sterility.”

These phenomena have all been the objects of intensive study, of course, but only within their various national frameworks, each of which has seemed to dictate its own characteristic mode of interpretation. Thus, in France, the loss of energy is seen as the result of what is essentially a political dilemma: the failure of the Revolution of 1848, and the increasing disillusionment, first with the regime of the Second Empire, and finally with that of the Third Republic itself. In England, on the other hand, it has been customarily thought of in religious or philosophical terms, as a slow withdrawal of the “sea of faith,” as a result of the impact of Darwin and then of triumphant positivism and of the ravages made by the development of natural science in a social milieu organized around the established Church. In Germany and in America, finally, this generalized cultural depression has

most frequently been accounted for economically, by the sudden growth of a brash and uninhibited business civilization, of a “gilded age” in which the materialism and philistinism of the new industrialist find their monuments in the sprawling and unlovely cities of Chicago or Berlin, in which the opposition thus tends to take on the coloration of the aesthete, whether in Thomas Mann’s artists or in the flight of American intellectuals to the older European cities. These modes of explanation are, of course, not mutually exclusive and have moreover often been accompanied by yet a fourth diagnosis, at least for the Protestant countries, namely, that of Victorianism in sexual matters, which gives the age its name and which expresses itself in the triple guise of the authoritarian patriarchal family, the taboo on sexual expression, and the obligatory frigidity of “respectable” women.

No doubt all these factors played their part, but it would seem essential, before evaluating any of them, to look more closely at the nature of the concrete experience they are invoked to explain, which is generally known under its contemporary designation as “spleen,” or “ennui.” To have a complete picture of what happened to Weber, in other words, we would need a thorough phenomenological description of this psychic condition, and to put it this way is to realize that ennui is itself a historical phenomenon, one that does not necessarily have any equivalent in other cultures or indeed at other stages of our own. We must, for instance, make a structural distinction between this late nineteenth-century condition and the Romantic despair of the early years of the century. In the latter, the sufferer withdraws completely from the world, to sit apart in a post of Byronic malediction or to return in the guise of the Satanic outcast and enemy of society. To such a state, the essential gesture of which is *refusal*, either heroic or dejected, the description as well as the diagnosis made by Freud for the condition he called “melancholia” might most fittingly apply:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.⁴

For Freud, such symptoms result from the loss of an object in which the libido has been invested and which has been narcissistically associated with the self:

the testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises—it may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position, not even when a substitute is already beckoning to him. This struggle can be so intense that a

turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis. (*MM*, 165–166)

We may perhaps overhastily suggest that the object thus mourned by the Romantics was the aristocratic world itself, which even the Restoration was unable to bring back to life.

We may thus describe Romanticism as a coming to consciousness of some fundamental loss in shock and rage, a kind of furious rattling of the bars of the prison, a helpless attempt to recuperate lost being by posing and assuming one's fatality in "interesting" ways. But by mid-century this shock is old, and the very object of the loss has been forgotten; the sufferer can no longer remember a situation qualitatively different from his own and assumes, naturally enough, that all life is thus empty. Ennui is thus not so much a form of suffering as an absence of feeling in general, one in which, in a psychic atmosphere as windless and impassive as a Victorian interior, only the passage of time itself is registered, in the absence of any real activity. The fundamental gesture of ennui is not revolt but renunciation, as in the heroes of Henry James and of Fontane: it does not withdraw from the world but remains within it, gazing at its activities with all the narcotic indifference of Alice's Caterpillar, and finds characteristic expression in those lengthy catalogs of the objects of human enterprise through which Flaubert recites the litany of earthly vanities. (In this sense, the triumphant catalogs of a Whitman would be understood as a second-degree recuperation, as the attempt, not unlike that of Nietzsche, to repossess the dead world through an effort of the will, in a kind of manic joy.)

It is equally important, however, to distinguish ennui from that affect most characteristic of our own time, namely, *anxiety*, for the latter is an active principle, and the classic descriptions of Heidegger and Sartre make it clear that anxiety is intimately related to praxis itself and results from a sudden awareness of the self as the unjustified source of all values and of all action, an awareness that can arise only in the moment of choice and not in a situation of generalized inactivity. In this sense, we might schematically understand Romantic despair, ennui, and anxiety as three moments in the same historical process: in which the soul, having first registered its shock and distress at the new and barren world in which it finds itself, begins with a kind of paralyzed detachment to take an inventory of its surroundings, before at length coming to the conclusion that it is itself the very ground of the latter's bustling agitation and the source and foundation of the values on which, as in a void, those activities depend. Such a historical pathology would therefore illustrate the psychic adaptation of man to an increasingly humanized world.

Paradoxically, however, one of the classic descriptions of ennui is not a modern one at all, and Thomas Aquinas's characterization of what he called

“*acedia*” as a “kind of sadness, whereby a man becomes sluggish in spiritual exercises because they weary the body” may illuminate another essential component of the experience in question.⁵ For Aquinas’s terms suggest that ennui, or *acedia*, is not a primitive but rather a very sophisticated reaction, a disease of clerics:

Acedia, according to Damascene, is “an oppressive sorrow,” which, namely, so weighs upon man’s mind that he wants to do nothing (thus acid things [*acida*] are also cold). Hence *acedia* implies a certain weariness of work, as appears from a gloss on Psalms 106, 18, *Their soul abhorred all manner of meat*, and from the definition of some who say that *acedia* is a sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good. (*ST*, pt. 2, question 35, article 1)

Acedia is thus something that happens to intellectuals, and its relationship to the monastic environment takes on renewed significance for us if we recall that, for Weber, monasticism is one of the early forms of rationalization itself. Not the panic of peasants in the face of a new technology, therefore, but rather the weariness of the intellectual specialist, who knows the *how* so well that he comes to doubt the *why*: such is the picture of ennui that emerges from these early accounts, and it may help us make the transition from a phenomenological description of the experience itself to the ways in which traditional philosophical thought has conceptualized it.

The principal form such conceptualization has taken seems to me to be the separation of means from ends, and if such a separation is thought to be a universal characteristic of human beings as plan-making animals, it suffices to relate it to the various forms of human society to realize that they have not always been aware of it as such. In a tradition-oriented society, indeed, where tasks are assigned by birth or by ritual, the internal temporal dissociation within the act itself that characterizes the lag between an aim and its execution is not yet present. The techniques for achieving a given end are themselves sacred, are therefore performed for their own sake and in their own right. Such societies, therefore, lack the abstract concept of an “act” as such, a concept that subsumes under itself the most heterogeneous forms of human exertion; and the latter are felt to be as autonomous and as intrinsically meaningful as the various totemic animals or the various castes according to which their performers are organized.

It is worth noting that even when we reach the birth of philosophical abstraction in classical Greece, the elaborate Aristotelian system of the four causes (material, effective, formal, and final) implies a somewhat different orientation toward activity than our own stark opposition between means and ends.⁶ The Aristotelian concept reflects an artisanal culture and makes a greater place for the concrete situation itself, for the act of making and of handicraft, which, with its inherited techniques, may be seen as a kind of

halfway house between tradition-oriented societies and our own technological one. Thus, for Aristotle, the clay (material cause) still demands to be formed into the pot; the *métier* still has a kind of inner logic, a voice of its own; and the preexisting forms and patterns do not yet have the stark independence of the modern notion of an “end.” Obviously, the modern notion is implicit in the Aristotelian scheme, but it does not yet function with the abstract and depersonalized force it has come to have in the modern secular market culture, in the world of desacralized technique.

Surely the emergence of the modern dichotomous view of action is related to the secularization of action in the modern world in general, to the twin affranchisement from the bonds of tradition that is the result of the French Revolution and the development of the market system. Now, for the first time in human history, the realm of values becomes itself problematical and can be isolated and contemplated independently; now in the new middle-class culture for the first time people weigh the various activities against each other; what we call private life or individualistic subjectivity, indeed, is precisely the distance that permits them to do so and to hold their professional enterprises at arm’s length. Hence, for instance, the originality in the realm of the novel of the “*Quel métier prendre?*” of a Stendhal, whose works explore as it were the atomic weights of the various professional and political regimes as alternate life forms. Yet, such an exploration already implies the existence of a certain ennui: what René Girard has termed the “Romantic lie” of innate passions and inborn vocations has vanished, and to wonder what to do with your life is already to commit yourself in advance to a certain ontological dissatisfaction with any of the ultimate possibilities. Finally, with Stendhal’s admirer Nietzsche, this essential distance from all values permits a theory of Value to come into existence for the first time; but a theory that takes value itself as its object and for which all values are thus from this point of view equivalent, if not interchangeable, implies the existence of a vantage point beyond all values, one that permits the transcendence or the “transvaluation” of all value as such. This is, indeed, the profound relevance of Nietzsche for Weber, for whom, at the same time, ironically, Nietzsche’s diagnosis remains valid:

He who wishes to create new values must be capable of destroying existent values remorselessly: creation passes through destruction, good and evil go hand in hand. But since this creation lies beyond good and evil, the existing moral norms are of no use and only his will to truth can guide the creator in his titanic struggle. *For the will to truth is also a form of the “will to power,”—perhaps even its supreme form* [italics mine]. The task of the true seeker for wisdom is *to valorize values themselves*, a task that prevents him from participating effectively in the material struggle of men among each other. Yet this nonintervention is no sign of weakness. On the contrary. (*WN*, 237)

Fleischmann's account of Weber's essential Nietzscheanism thus confirms the interpretation of *Wertfreiheit*, suggested above, as an active and polemic weapon, as a mode of self-affirmation and of intellectual conquest in the sense of the Nietzschean "will to power."⁷

Once ends have been thus sundered from means, in lived experience and in the theory that reflects it, it is impossible to put the two back together again, to restore the "naive" and primitive, unselfconscious unity of action in the older tradition-oriented cultures; and the emphasis of contemporary philosophy on restoring the concrete, on being in the world, on praxis as a total process, may best be understood against the background of this dissociation. Ennui, which is, as we have said, one of the most characteristic and emblematic experiences of the modern world, can now be seen to presuppose the rift between intention and act as a precondition of its own existence: to know spleen, the sufferer must be able to see activity as pure technical performance without intrinsic purpose or value.

What is paradoxical about such an experience is indeed that it is contemporaneous with one of the most active periods in human history, with all the mechanical animation of late Victorian city life, with all the smoke and conveyance inherent in new living conditions and in the rapid development of business and industry, with the experimental triumphs of positivistic science and its conquest of the university system, with all the bustling parliamentary and bureaucratic activity of the new middle-class regimes, the spread of the press, the diffusion of literacy and culture, the ready accessibility of the newly mass-produced commodities of a consumer civilization. Thus, we are faced with the peculiar impression that life becomes meaningless in direct proportion to people's control of their environment and that a humanization of the world goes hand in hand with a spreading philosophic and existential despair. It is as though the meaningfulness of the world remained intact only so long as some portion of that world—an imperfectly dominated Nature, a blindly theocratic and hierarchical social tradition—hung beyond human reach; as though it were only at the point at which middle-class man was free to make or remake his own world from top to bottom that its fundamental absurdity came home to him.

In this situation, the most original thinkers are clearly enough not those who have not yet glimpsed the new meaninglessness of life; nor yet again those who, having been granted such alarming insight, then set about devising some "philosophy of as if" to paper over the void. Indeed, it can be said that the most interesting artists and thinkers of this period choose and will the very experience of meaninglessness itself, and cling to it as to some ultimate reality, some ultimate truth of existence of which they do not wish to be cheated: "lieber will noch der Mensch *das Nichts* wollen," cried Nietzsche, "als *nicht* wollen." In this sense Weber's *Wertfreiheit* is a passionate refusal of the illusions of meaning itself, a repudiation of all philosophies

which—the Hegelian world spirit and the Marxist dialectic just as much as Christian Providence—seek to convince us that some teleological movement is immanent in the otherwise chaotic and random agitation of empirical life:

Wherever rational empiricism has been able to complete with any consequence the process of the desacralization of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism, the definitive result is a tension with the demands of that ethical postulate that the world be seen as a divinely ordered cosmos in some way oriented towards an ethical meaning.

And having quoted this passage from Weber's *Sociology of Religion*, Wolfgang J. Mommsen goes on to observe: "This is the conviction in which Max Weber resolutely combats all the variously devised philosophies of history of his day ... And it is particularly noteworthy and striking with what sometimes wholly unbridled passion Weber waged this struggle" (*UpD*, 562–563). This attitude, which we may term "heroic cynicism," is evidently something rather different from mere scientific objectivity, and constitutes one of the most interesting aspects of a genuinely consequent conservative position. It is one for which the existent, the status quo, amounts somehow to Being itself, so that revolutionary project as well as naive and nostalgic illusion come to seem equally "unrealistic." It is this vested interest in Being that is in general responsible for the reactionary political views of the majority of the great realistic novelists, and much the same might be said for the sociologist of Weber's stamp: the functional study of society requires you to presuppose that the entire social mechanism is complete and present before your very eyes; the visionaries who want to tinker with it risk invalidating the carefully recorded results of your experimental measurements.

Yet, the pluralism suggested by Weber's (and Nietzsche's) suspension of all values is as far from that tolerant coexistence ritually invoked by modern liberal apologists as was *Wertfreiheit* itself from the dominant fetish of positivistic objectivity. Pluralism for Weber means *pantheism*, not peaceful coexistence but a Homeric battlefield, in which

different gods struggle with one another, now and for all times to come. We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity. Fate, and certainly not "science," holds sway over these gods and their struggles. One can only understand what the godhead is in the one or in the other order.⁸

These various gods are not only the various *Weltanschauungen*, the competing ideologies of the modern marketplace, but also, and above all, the various and unrelated zones and dimensions into which individual life is shattered in the modern world, and which make of the process of living a kind of random sacrificing, now to public, now to private, deities of all shapes and conceptions. This irreconcilable struggle between the heterogeneous values of modern life has the practical result, described at the close of Weber's other great lecture, "Politics as a Vocation," of dividing the realm of *Realpolitik* as irrevocably from the preoccupations of ethics as at the end of the *Baghavad-Gita*, where Arjuna is admonished, in spite of his horror of killing, to return to the battle and "do what must be done."

It now becomes perhaps a little clearer why the "religiously unmusical" Weber was so fascinated by religion itself. The metaphorical language of pantheism used above underscores the way in which, for Weber, the religious phenomenon is the very hypostasis of value in general, value seen from the outside by the man who no longer believes in any values and for whom such living belief has thus become a kind of mystery in the older ritualistic sense. In this Weber takes his place in that modern tradition of an *aesthetic* valorization of religion that may be said to have been inaugurated by Chateaubriand in *Le Génie du christianisme* and prolonged in our own time by such works as Malraux's *Voix du silence*. It is a curious attitude, one that combines something of the allure of a religiously fellow-traveling agnosticism with the secret inferiority-longings of the impotent in matters of belief, and it furnishes as striking a symbol as any other of Weber's concept of scientific research, that uncomfortable *ascesis* and renunciation that permits Value to become visible as an object of study and that results in the characteristic conclusion to the passage quoted above from "Science as a Vocation": "With this understanding, however [the vision of life as a struggle between the gods], the matter has reached its limit so far as it can be discussed in a lecture-room and by a professor."

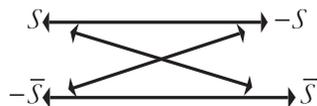
We may therefore conclude that Weber's attitude toward values preeminently constitutes a value in its own right, and that it is the difficulty of maintaining such an inner contradiction that imposes on him that attitude of paralysis, of suspended action and judgment, which is so frequently mistaken for objectivity in the usual academic sense of the term. That *Wertfreiheit* should with Weber's followers resolve itself into simple objectivity is scarcely surprising, for Weber's own tortured and Nietzschean solution could not be maintained for long, or without the greatest personal cost. But this means that we are as fully entitled to inquire into the ideological content of Weber's system as into its scientific validity or the accuracy of its research. Indeed, the mythic structure of that system, or world view, would seem to call for methods that overflow the limits of a purely semantic or cognitive investigation. For the historian and the social scientist are called

on, henceforth, to tell the story of the various “gods” and of their struggles with each other, a story that sometimes, like those told by Nietzsche, involves the mystery of a god’s death. What more fitting object, then, for narrative analysis?

II

Max Weber’s thinking offers a privileged object for what must initially be a purely logical or conceptual analysis, inasmuch as it is explicitly organized into pairs of binary oppositions, albeit of a rare complexity. “When one comes to try to isolate the main *logical* outline of Weber’s analysis,” Talcott Parsons tells us, “the prominence of the pattern of dichotomization is striking.”⁹ As a kind of checklist of such oppositions in Weber, we might recall the most famous of all, that of bureaucracy versus charisma, but also asceticism versus mysticism, *Berufsmensch* versus *Fachmensch*, *Realpolitik* versus ethics, politics versus science, and so forth.

At the same time, the extraordinary intricacies attained by combinations between these various terms—particularly in late Weber, where, as Herbert Marcuse has said, “the method of formal definitions, classifications and typologies celebrates true orgies”—suggests that to try to read Weber term by term, to comprehend each semantic phenomenon in isolation or even in combination with its conceptual opposite number, is an agonizing and, in the long run, sterile enterprise (*IC*, 203). At best, we can hope to transcend the bewildering results of this thinking by isolating those simpler and more central mechanisms from which the types and definitions themselves emerge; and to do so, the accompanying permutational mechanism or “semantic rectangle” developed by Greimas would seem to offer the most useful instrument for sorting out the basic elements that make up Weber’s system:



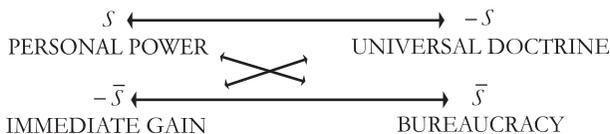
The premise of this schema, which distinguishes between the contrary of a given term S ($-S$, or what we may term “anti- S ”) and its simple negative or contradictory (\bar{S} , or “not- S ”), holds that all concepts are implicitly or explicitly defined in terms of conceptual oppositions. Its advantage lies in the possibility it suggests of generating other supplementary and related elements out of that initial pair of contrary terms. Thus, for example, we observe that the contrary of S , or $-S$ (anti- S), logically possesses a contradictory of its own in not-anti- S (or \bar{S}). Moreover, it should be noted that each side of the rectangle constitutes the possibility of a synthetic term (S united

of *S* itself: some end is clearly sought, although it is not thematized as a value in its own right, but the agent has lost control of his means and his technical equipment for achieving that end. And in the even more interesting case of tradition-oriented behavior, collective, rather than, as in \bar{S} , individual, we find examples of conduct that do not seem to be governed by any visible end or value, although they present observable regularities and may thus be supposed to be intelligible or “rational” in some way. Tradition-oriented conduct is in fact institutionalized behavior whose original aim—endowed by the charismatic act of some leader or value-giver—has been gradually lost from view. It is thus value-rationality gone stale, transformed into something unrecognizable, and proves meaningful or rational in the past only, in the light of that original and obliterated charismatic gesture of which it is the trace and the ruined memorial. Indeed, it would seem that such a term must if anything be understood in a purely formal manner, as one that serves as the beginning of a genuine historical transformation and that thus falls outside the full intelligibility of the elements of the latter. It has within it the arbitrariness of all starting points and may for want of a better expression be described as “sham-cognitive,” as having the appearance only of an explanation or of an intellectual category (for it is clear that, if we had set the frame, the temporal coordinates, at an earlier point in time, what is here called “tradition-orientation” would then become something like the institutionalization of charisma, in other words, a phenomenon closely linked to the later notion of bureaucratization itself, and as such fully comprehensible in rational terms). The next step in an analysis of this kind would evidently be an investigation into the origins of the binary opposition on which this entire conceptual system is based. We have already sketched the historical evolution of the ends-means dichotomy in our opening section; an explanation of Weber’s own personal attraction to such a conceptual opposition is offered in the concluding section of this chapter.

But the very presence, within an apparently static and logical schema, of what amounts to a genuine historical change (in other words, the lapse of what was originally value-oriented action into tradition-oriented action) suggests that Weberian typology, even at its most abstract, as here, conceals a kind of narrative behind its classificatory appearance. We may give as an example of this Weber’s sociology of religion, in which the operative sociological distinction is that between cults organized around the person of the magician and those conducted by a priesthood: “those professional functionaries who influence the gods by means of worship” are thus explicitly contrasted with “magicians who coerce demons by magical means” (*SR*, 28). The student of Weber here recognizes one of his great themes, namely, the contrast between charismatic and irrational forms of life and those rational and collective arrangements of which the modern bureaucracy is the supreme, but not the only, example. At the same time, it would seem clear

that what is at issue in such a distinction is not the mere classification of given religious phenomena into one or the other category, but rather the problem of explaining the historical transition from one form to the other.

The distinction between magician and priest is in fact not the primary one, and when we resolve it into the basic conceptual terms and operations of which it is composed, Weber's ability to construct a historical explanation out of a system of apparently static, classificatory terms will become clearer. The power of the magician is, for Weber, based on the way he combines some uniquely personal or charismatic prestige with the use of magical powers for immediate and individual gain, whether of a spiritual type (salvation) or a material one (rain). To juxtapose the magician with the priest in these terms is to understand that the magician's personal prestige amounts to a claim to a purely individual revelation, whereas the sacramental power of the priesthood is based on its participation in what is given as a universal doctrine. The bureaucratic organization of the priesthood may then be read as the negation of the purely personal and individual power of the magician, and we may tentatively formalize the relationship of these various characteristics to each other as follows:



In such a schema, each historical agent would appear to recapitulate the opposite side of a rectangle, or what Greimas designates as its “deictic” axis: thus the figure of the magician amounts to the synthesis of the two left-hand terms, S and $-S$ (or “personal power” and “immediate gain”), whereas the priesthood unites the two right-hand attributes $-S$ and S (or “universal doctrine” and “bureaucracy”).

But a visual inspection of the semantic rectangle makes it clear that two further logical possibilities remain unfilled, namely, those of the “complex” and “neutral” terms, in other words, the syntheses of S and $-S$, and $-S$ and S , respectively.

These additional conceptual possibilities, indeed, are what permit Weber to explain the historical transformation of religion from its early, magical origins to its later codified and bureaucratic structure: for the complex term logically provided by the system may now serve as the mediator between the two forms. For a realization of this complex term, which unites the characteristics of personal authority with the claim to a universal doctrine, we must turn to the figure of the prophet, one that has a crucial significance for Weber's reading of history. For the prophet (and Weber sees the Old Testament prophecy as the archetype of this sociological function) is essentially the bearer of rationalization itself:

relationship between two states or moments—the “before” and the “after” of the historical transformation. “Every apprehension of meaning,” Greimas tells us,

has as its consequence the transformation of history into permanencies of various kinds: whether we have to do with the inquiry into the meaning of an individual life or into the meaning of a story (or of history itself [both designated by the French word *histoire*]), the inquiry, in other words, the fact that we assume a message-receiving attitude before a linguistic manifestation, has the result that the historical algorisms are felt as states, which is to say as static structures. (*DS*, 104)

In a sense, then, the problem of narrative analysis may be seen as the reverse of that of history; for where history involves some basic conceptual breakthrough to the realities of change and of the diachronic in general, narrative already presupposes some fundamental feeling of change which we are then called on to account for in synchronic and analytic terms. Narrative analysis, in other words, requires us to explain the imaginative illusion of change, of time, or of history itself, by reference to basic components of the narrative line that are bound to be static ones.

We have already seen one way in which this transformational process may be conceived in the mediations provided for by the various combinations inherent in the semantic rectangle. It would seem useful, however, to consider a model explicitly devised to account for narrative transformations as such: a model of this kind, indeed, would seem more appropriate for the analysis of those works of Weber, such as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that deal with historical material similar to that involved in the discussion of the prophet (in other words, the changeover from older to newer religious forms, and beyond them, to a wholly secularized worldview), but that deal with it in an explicitly narrative rather than classificatory and expository manner.

Such a model is available to us in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s much debated formalization of the structure of myth, which he proposes in the following fashion: “It would seem henceforth evident that every myth (taken as the totality of its variants) can be reduced to a formula of the following type:

$$F_x(a) : F_y(b) \cong F_x(b) : F_{-a}(y)$$

where, the two terms *a* and *b* being given along with their functions, a relationship of equivalence is affirmed between two situations respectively defined by an inversion of *terms* and of *relations*, under two conditions: (1) that one of the terms be replaced by its contrary (in the above formalization *a* and $-a$); (2) that a correlative inversion be made between the *function value* and the *term value* of two elements (above *y* and *a*).”¹³ It should be pointed out that if this formula is taken in a purely semantic sense, as the

basic mechanism of the “deep structure” of myth, then no surface narrative movement is implied, and we are dealing simply with an antinomy in which the primitive mind poses the equivalence (\cong) of two apparently contradictory cognitive systems (in Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of the Oedipus myth, kinship and cosmology). If, on the other hand, we use it to deal with narrative events, its advantage is to suggest the ways in which, without the addition of any new terms, some illusion of change and transformation may nonetheless be generated; and this is accomplished by a shifting of valance from positive to negative (transformation of a to $-a$) and an inversion of what was formerly a term into a function and vice versa. I should add that a good deal of experimentation with this use of the formula has led me to specify the following two additional rules of operation, namely: (3) in spite of their designations (x would not seem to have to be related to y in any way), in practice the two functions must always be felt to be opposites of each other; and (4) in the assignment of terms to functions, there must be a kind of asymmetrical harmony between x and b on the one hand, and y and a on the other (such dissymmetry is necessary to generate the illusion of change, inasmuch as the left-hand side of the equation must be felt to be a precarious and unstable situation from which some type of sudden restructuration is bound to emerge).

Let us now try to rewrite, in terms of the formula in question, Weber’s major work on Protestantism, a work that, as is well known, undertakes to give at least a partial explanation of the preparation of the tradition-oriented mentalities of the inhabitants of a feudal peasant Europe for an eventual accommodation to the discipline and delayed gratification inherent in modern industrial labor. The problem is familiar to us from the industrialization in our own time of the Third World, as well as from the stereotypical colonial image of a precapitalist “native” population as lazy, untrustworthy, alcohol-prone, and in general innocent of the European sense of linear time and of the performance principle.¹⁴ Such a contemporary reference, however, helps us glimpse the metaphysical overtones in Weber’s treatment, for whom “rationalization” is not some mere local and historic stage in the development of European capitalism, but rather a kind of impending doom, foretelling the descent of that “iron cage” of ascetic rationalism in which we moderns are condemned to imprisonment for the rest of civilized time (*PE*, 181–182). Such a vision of history is doubtless what lends these dry pages, interlarded with dead theology and the most unbearable scholarly apparatus, their emotional impact: *de te fabula narratur!* Weber’s monograph has about it some of the dizzying pessimism of Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* or of the early novels of H. G. Wells, which, contemporaneous with it, offer the same remorseless gaze into a dwindling future.

The Protestant Ethic aims at demonstrating the intimate relationship between the rationalization of modern life (with its resultant *Entzauberung*,

or desacralization, its transformation into an organized and disciplined market system) and the development of the Lutheran or Calvinistic notion of a *Beruf*, or religiously sanctioned vocation to live ascetically *within* the world itself. The forces of religious sanction and of secularization govern those constitutive elements of human activity that are ends and means, respectively, so that, following the procedure outlined above, we may distribute the basic terms and functions in Weber's thesis as follows:

x = rationalization

y = "religionization," or the conversion into a purely religious value or sanction

a = ends

b = means.

But before showing how these components are combined into a narrative, it is perhaps worth suggesting the way in which narrative analysis can deal with the patently polemic character of Weber's essay. For, like all historical theses, Weber is writing *against* another position; his text is designated to correct some widespread misapprehension of the nature of Protestantism and of its relationship to the business ethic: that misapprehension is, clearly enough, the vulgar or economic Marxist view that the new religious forms are to be seen merely as "reflections" of changes in the infrastructure, in other words, of the newly developing economic forms of market capitalism.¹⁵

That Weber's critique of this view involved something a little more complicated than a mere defense, in the face of vulgar Marxist materialism, of some "idealistic" world view, that *The Protestant Ethic* amounts to something a little more substantive than some idle affirmation of the shaping power of spirit (for example, religious values and concepts) over social history, may be judged by the warning with which his book concludes: "It is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history" (*PE*, 183).

What third position it is that Weber stakes out for himself we will be able to evaluate shortly. I suggest here, however, that what he objects to in the vulgar Marxist account of the rise of capitalism is not its materialism, but rather the naive linearity of the story it has to tell. In terms of narrative analysis, in other words, we here confront the phenomenon of what is currently termed "intertextuality," in which the text under study must be seen in a relationship of tension and superposition to some older text without which the first cannot properly be understood. Thus, the so-called realistic novel is written against some older dominant narrative form, which it has the function of correcting: *Don Quixote* is to be understood against the background

of the romance, Flaubert against that of Balzac and romanticism, and so forth. There is, therefore, where narration is concerned, no such thing as “naive realism,” or rather, the latter always entails an internal and structural repudiation of the narrative conventions, which with its “common sense” it undercuts and structurally subverts (in the history of the novel there is often a class content to such devaluation, the older form connoting the aristocratic paradigm, the “realistic” one embodying the new bourgeois values of materialism, common sense, and money).

Lévi-Strauss’s formula provides us with a useful way of dramatizing the type of story against which *The Protestant Ethic* is directed. For the vulgar Marxist narrative of the development of Protestantism may be seen as one in which, with the increasing rationalization of the infrastructure, with the increasing economic organization, first of ends and then of the means themselves, there takes place a corresponding shift in the superstructure. Thus the older religion of ends and otherworldly values gives way to a new rationalization of the innerworldly means, in other words, to the new religious ideology of Calvinism. To accommodate this historical narrative, we must rewrite Lévi-Strauss’s formula as follows:

$$F_x(a) : F_x(b) \cong F_{-y}(a) : F_{-y}(b)$$

where the rationalization of ends is to the rationalization of means as the secularization of ends (in other words, Protestant, as opposed to medieval, theology) is to the secularization of means, or to the development of the modern secular and bureaucratic state in general. What strikes us about such a formalization is that it lacks that inversion of terms and functions with which Lévi-Strauss sought to convey some sense of a genuine historical leap and of the emergence of something historically and qualitatively new and unexpected. In this sense, then, we may characterize Weber’s objection to the vulgar Marxist position as an aesthetic one, one that detects the weakness of the earlier explanation through flaws in the latter’s narrative construction (and it may be suggested in passing that all historical “revision,” all the “great debates” about historical interpretation, whether of the class basis of the English Civil War, or of origins of the Cold War, or whatever, may be understood in narrative terms in precisely this way).

Returning to the original formula, we are now in a better position to judge the adequacy with which Weber himself conveys the qualitative transformation at stake in this moment of historical change. Thus articulated, Weber’s thesis would find expression as follows: the rationalization of ends [$F_x(a)$] is to the regionalization of means [$F_y(b)$] as the rationalization of means [$F_x(b)$] is to the “nonfinalization” of religion [$F_{-a}(y)$], where the reversals of this concluding expression open up a perspective in which religion, now taken as a term rather than a function, ceases to be felt as an ultimate end or value in its own right. Thus, the prolongation of this

historical event into the secular waste of modern times is inherent in the initial thesis.

Even more crucial is the operative emphasis placed here upon what we have had to call the “religionalization” of means, which is, it seems to me, the central and most original aspect of Weber’s argument. This moment of the formula $[F_y(b)]$ does more than to suggest that religion is not, as the vulgar Marxist analysis had it, some mere reflex of infrastructural change. Indeed, it shifts the emphasis from the relationship between religion and “ends,” or conscious, superstructural values, and draws our attention to the effect of religious change on the organization of the means themselves; the position of this moment in the formula suggests that it is precisely this effect that triggers the historical restructuring at issue. Thus, paradoxically, religionalization becomes itself the principal agent in the process of secularization as a whole.

How this is to be understood in more traditional Weberian language may be conveyed by the following recapitulation of Weber’s argument: by destroying the monastic order, Luther made it impossible to pursue otherworldly ends, for there now no longer exist institutions that sanction withdrawal from the daily world of work. Yet, the result of such an institutional transformation is not, as the vulgar Marxist version would have it, the immediate secularization of means, in other words, of the organization of daily life. Rather, with Calvinism we have to do with a new and more thoroughgoing integration of precisely those means into a religious framework. For Calvin, faced with a separation of ends from means so absolute that the ultimate end or value of life was thrust into otherworldliness and the unknowable, found that only the means, in other words, earthly existence itself, remain as a testing place, as a trial and preparation for the drama of salvation: innerworldly life thus undergoes “a systematic rational ordering of the moral life as a whole” (*PE*, 126). “The process of sanctifying life,” Weber tells us, “could thus almost take on the character of a business enterprise. A thoroughgoing Christianization of the whole of life was the consequence of this methodical quality of ethical conduct into which Calvinism as distinct from Lutheranism forced men” (*PE*, 124–125). This was indeed the view of its contemporaries, such as Sebastian Franck, who “saw the significance of the Reformation in the fact that now every Christian had to be a monk all his life” (*PE*, 121). Thus, we witness here a dialectical reinforcement between what appeared to be the two antithetical positions of rationalization of ends $[F_x(a)]$ and a “religionalization” of means $[F_y(b)]$: something which leads us to a result quite different from what could have been predicted from the linear, vulgar Marxist narrative, the means now becoming *more* rather than less religious, even while the ends grow ever more secularized.

On the right-hand side of the equation the peculiar tension or

disequilibrium thus generated is just as unexpectedly resolved; for Calvinism's increasing rationalization of means, or earthly conduct [$F_x(b)$], results in the sudden permutation of the final term, in other words, in the disappearance of religion itself as an ultimate value from the henceforth totally rationalized and desacralized world of the capitalist marketplace.

Let us now open a methodological parenthesis in order to evaluate the adequacy of the Lévi-Strauss formula in reaching these conclusions. Its advantage over Greimas's schema lay in its claim to deal with diachrony, or, in other words, with the *irreversible* character of narrative and historical change. In fact, however, its principal strength turns out to have been the possibility of comparison that it affords with other narrative versions of the same events, and the way in which it permitted us to dramatize the "intertextuality" of Weber's thesis. What Greimas's relatively static and logical scheme is on the other hand able to demonstrate, what is absent from Lévi-Strauss's formula as it is here worked out, is the hypothesis of some central mediatory figure or institution that can account for the passage from one temporal and historical state to another one.¹⁶ In other words, Lévi-Strauss's formula, operating as it does with something like a deep structure of narrative, shows us the various conceptual elements or data at work as they combine and interact with each other, but does not give us a very adequate picture of their articulation into those basic surface units of narrative that are the latter's *characters* (in history, of course, these are often groups or movements, such as "Protestantism").

If we now seek to evolve some more adequate scheme that will combine the twin requirements of narrative irreversibility, and of figuration or articulation into agents or characters, it becomes obvious that in one way or another Protestantism will itself serve as a kind of mediation between the traditional medieval world from which it emerged and the modern secularized one that it, in its turn, prepared. In the case of the vulgar Marxist narrative against which Weber's is to be understood, this mediation would take the rather banal form of a transitional state in which life is made less religious by a new theological doctrine (Protestantism) that systematically dismantles the traditional medieval religious structures and allows wholly secular ones to take their place.

As against this, Weber's hypothesis recovers something of its original and paradoxical willfulness: the transition from religion to *Entzauberung*, from the medieval to the modern moment, is effected, he tells us, not by making life less religious but by making it *more* so. Calvin did not desacralize the world; on the contrary, he turned the *entire* world into a monastery. We must therefore devise some notation for the difference between this explicit and self-conscious religious investment of life by Calvin and the relatively unthematized and traditionalistic religious framework of medieval life in general (something I have tried to convey by the brackets in the graph that

follows). The basic and constitutive terms of the three overall stages in this historical progression may now be articulated:

	<i>MEDIEVAL</i>	<i>PROTESTANT</i>	<i>MODERN</i>
RELIGIOUS ENDS OR MEANING	[+]	+	—
RATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF MEANS	—	+	+

It would, therefore, appear that the crucial transformation on the level of means from a traditional and nonrationalistic organization to a rational and quantified one in modern times has been effectuated within the framework, or better still, beneath the cover, of an intensified “religionalization” of ends, in other words, by a new thematization of religion on the level of ends or values, by a removal of the brackets.

But we have not yet taken full advantage of the superiority, in the present context, of this scheme over the formula proposed by Lévi-Strauss; for another indication of the inherent structural limitations of the latter may be seen in the way in which it obliged us to telescope into the single term “religionalization of means” what were in fact two distinct moments of Protestantism, the theology of Luther and that of Calvin. In reality, Weber’s text proposes not three, but rather four historical stages, which amount to a virtual *combinatoire* of all the possible logical permutations between ends and means, on the one hand, and innerworldly or otherworldly stances, on the other.

In this light, Weber’s portrayal of Luther, for him still an essentially medieval figure, may be understood in terms of narrative strategy: the importance of Luther lies not in his having brought new content to theology as Calvin will, but rather in his having actualized or thematized what was already implicit in the medieval system, in other words, in his having—in terms of our schematic representation—removed the brackets from medieval religious thought. This is the moment, indeed, to recall Weber’s view of the medieval monastery as an enclave of rationalization within a tradition-oriented world:

In that epoch the monk is the first human being who lives rationally, who works methodically and by rational means toward a goal, namely the future life. Only for him did the clock strike, only for him were the hours of the day divided—for prayer. The economic life of the monastic communities was also rational. (*GEH*, 267)

It is because Luther represents a conscious and indeed agonized renewal of the habituated religious thinking of the Middle Ages that he strikes down

the artificial isolation of monastic life. His aim is thus a regeneration of religious value or end-orientation; but in so doing, without realizing it, he liberates the nascent rationalism of the monasteries, which are now able to spread to all domains of life. To use another set of Weberian oppositions, we may describe the medieval situation before which Luther found himself as one in which innerworldly otherworldliness (the institutional sanction of otherworldliness, in other words, the monasteries) and innerworldly thisworldliness (in other words, ordinary daily secular life in general) coexisted. Luther does not bring anything new to this situation; yet by closing off one of its terms, by destroying the institutional possibility of an innerworldly practice of otherworldliness, he prepares the way for Calvin's more decisive permutation, in which a new otherworldly thisworldliness or, if you prefer, an innerworldly asceticism, comes into being. So it is that the intimate relationship that existed between rationalization of means and regionalization of ends within the monasteries now leaps beyond the containment of the monastic institution into the general conduct of life in the outside world itself, allowing us to rearticulate our basic scheme as follows:

	<u>PROTESTANT</u>			
	<i>MEDIEVAL</i>	<i>LUTHER</i>	<i>CALVIN</i>	<i>MODERN</i>
RELIGIOUS ENDS	+	+	+	-
RATIONAL MEANS	-	-	+	+

There remains to be characterized the final transition to the situation of modern capitalism, and it is here more than anywhere else that Protestantism assumes its function as a "vanishing mediator." For what happens here is essentially that once Protestantism has accomplished the task of allowing a rationalization of innerworldly life to take place, it has no further reason for being and disappears from the historical scene. It is thus in the strictest sense of the word a catalytic agent that permits an exchange of energies between two otherwise mutually exclusive terms; and we may say that with the removal of the brackets, the whole institution of religion itself (in other words, what is here designated as "Protestantism") serves in its turn as a kind of overall bracket or framework within which change takes place and which can be dismantled and removed when its usefulness is over.

Such a picture of historical change—however irreconcilable it may be with vulgar Marxism—is in reality perfectly consistent with genuine Marxist thinking and is, indeed, at one with the model proposed by Marx himself for the revolutions of 1789 and 1848: in 1789, Jacobinism played the role of the vanishing mediator, functioning as the conscious and almost Calvinistic guardian of revolutionary morality, of bourgeois universalistic and democratic ideals, a guardianship that could be done away with in Thermidor, when the practical victory of the bourgeoisie was assured and

an explicitly monetary and market-oriented system could come into being; and in that parody of 1789 which was the revolution of 1848, it was similarly under the cloak of the traditions and values of the great revolution, and of the empire that followed it, that the new commercial society of the Second Empire emerged.

This suggests that we may associate what our chart designates as the realm of ends with the Marxian concept of the superstructure, while that of means constitutes the infrastructure as such. Thus, in both Weber and Marx, the superstructure may be said to find its essential function in the mediation of changes in the infrastructure along the lines we have characterized; and to understand it in this way, as a “vanishing mediator,” is to escape the false problems of priority or of cause and effect in which both vulgar Marxist and the idealist positions imprison us.

But the purpose of the present study is more extensive than this, for it proposes the more general hypothesis that the concept of the vanishing mediator characterizes all of Weber’s sociological and historical thinking and may be seen as the dominant structure of his imagination. Within the material limits of the present essay, however, I cannot illustrate the full range of Weber’s applications of such a concept to the most varying historical materials, from his analysis of the role of Bismarck in the unification of modern Germany to his discussion of the importance of Roman law in the evolution of the modern legal system. I must therefore be content to return to the earlier example of the prophet to demonstrate that the notion of a vanishing mediator articulates the material we discussed there in a more adequate way as well.

For above and beyond his transitional position between the stage of magic and that of the essentially rational religious organization of the priesthood, the prophet may be understood in the present context as a kind of debracketing of the charismatic authority implicit in the traditional institution of the magician. For the prophet, like the magician, requires

charismatic authentication, which in practice meant magic ... [But] the typical prophet propagates ideas for their own sake and not for fees, at least not in any obvious or regulated form ... Thus developed the carefully cultivated postulate that the apostle, prophet, or teacher of ancient Christianity must not professionalize his religious proclamations. (*SR*, 47–48)

What is this to say but that the prophet claims more for himself than the magician? Such a noninstitutionalized affirmation of his own personal powers and vocation is thus at one with the intensification of charisma as a social force:

	<i>MAGICIAN</i>	<i>PROPHET</i>	<i>PRIEST</i>
CHARISMATIC POWER	[+]	+	—
RATIONAL RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION	—	+	+

Yet, what such a historical narrative describes is the “cooling off” or solidification of charisma itself, as the latter—a vanishing mediator in the truest sense of the expression—serves as a bearer of change and social transformation, only to be forgotten once that change has ratified the reality of the institutions.

III

It will be observed that if a single explanatory pattern seems to return again and again throughout Weber’s works, this recurrence can most adequately be accounted for by the fact that, in a sense, Weber dealt over and over again, and in the most varied forms, with only a single sociological phenomenon; or, if you prefer the language of the present essay, he told a single story again and again under the most varying disguises and behind the most disparate appearances. The story is of course that of rationalization, a process Weber finds to be at work in ancient prophecy just as much as in modern bureaucracy, in Prussian agriculture just as much as in Protestant theology. But such an observation merely displaces the problem, for rationalization, surely, is a model rather than an empirical fact, an “ideal type” rather than an observable social institution; and the question of Max Weber’s fascination with this process, which he saw at work everywhere, poses itself anew.

I have already, in the opening section, sketched the cultural and historical context of that experience of the divorce of means from ends that has its objective embodiment in rationalization just as it finds its subjective expression in ennui. Yet, it is certain that the uniquely structured themes of a life and of a work are not simply lifted from the thin air of the social and cultural environment: Sartre is only the most recent to have insisted on the crucial significance of childhood as the moment in which the “ideas in the air,” the culturally available roles and themes, are reinvented, as though for the first time, through the unique medium of an individual existence. For Sartre, the function of psychoanalysis is to provide an instrument of social and historical investigation, one that takes as its privileged object the formation of an individual from out of the contents and materials of that determinate historic family structure within which he develops:

existentialism ... believes that it can integrate the psychoanalytic method which discovers the point of insertion for man and his class—that is, the particular family—as a mediation between the universal class and the individual. The family in fact is constituted by and in the general movement of History, but is experienced, on the other hand, as an absolute in the depth and opaqueness of childhood.¹⁷

Sartre's analysis of the way in which the personality patterns of Flaubert (and the obsessive themes of his work) emerge from an opposition between the personality structures of his parents (personality structures the content of which is essentially sociological) may serve as a model for our present task, which is that of an *interpretation* of the structural description at which we have arrived.

As a nuclear unit, however, the family is a relatively recent institution: The manor or household, Charles Morazé tells us,

had still been a vast collective group at the end of the old regime, and still opened its doors to newly married couples. They had their place at the common table. Several generations and innumerable families of cousins lived happily together under one and the same roof ... The change of habits which took place in the last decade of the eighteenth century led young married couples to set up their own homes. They wished to live in their own houses and to keep themselves. The large number of well-paid jobs opened to them by the widening of social life encouraged this process. The new family broke away from its own folk. It now consisted of the limited group—father, mother, child ... Responsibility fell more and more on the individual ... Each man felt master of his own destiny and responsible for his own children.¹⁸

Such a shrinkage in the primal “scene” of childhood, such a sharp reduction in its vital cast of characters, could not but affect the mechanisms that shape the psyche as well as the symbolism through which the latter deciphers the outside world.

At the same time, the external environment of the bourgeois family is altering no less dramatically: for with the political and socioeconomic triumph of the new class, that class Other in reaction against which the very structures of middle-class identity had come into being—the aristocracy—weakens or disappears altogether, so that the hitherto external aggression of middle-class individuals must now find a new object and be reoriented within the relative autonomy and closure of the new bourgeois nuclear family. In a striking page, Arthur Mitzman draws the consequences of such a reorientation:

I would argue that in the generations before the 1860s it was the arch-repressiveness of the Victorian superego that inspired both the economic triumphs of the European bourgeoisie and its demands for social status and political power.

As long as the bourgeoisie remained politically unsuccessful, there was a certain equilibrium created by the continued deflection of the aggressiveness that was not absorbed by the conquest of nature into the concealed *Ressentiment*, conscious hostility or open struggle against traditional powers. In other words, there was a rationally defensive political outlet for the psychic bile accumulating in the souls of those energetic Victorians, and because the struggle of bourgeois against aristocrat seemed to make sense, the oedipal hostilities and the struggle for release of the shackled, built-in aggressions of the nineteenth-century bourgeois could be rationalized in the name of Progress and Reason. But when the last generation of rebellious bourgeois achieved success in the 1860s and early '70s their descendants, no less repressed and hostile than themselves, were deprived of those glorious visions of terminal conquest by means of which the earlier generations had sublimated their hostilities. Aggressions masquerading as political passions had formerly been unleashed against the aristocracy. But now the older generation of bourgeois politicians ruled either in place of or alongside the conservative aristocracy: revolt against the generation in power no longer permitted the early transference of patricidal aggressions to enemies condemned by Reason and History. (*IC*, 8–9)

These changes in the external situation of the bourgeois family are not without their repercussions on its internal structure as well, and in particular on the development of the role of the mother. The mother or wife was, of course, even in the larger traditional households, the object of an exchange with another bourgeois family, but such an exchange functioned hitherto as alliance between such families against the class enemy. Now, however, and to say so is simply to reinterpret the increasing freedom and status of the bourgeois woman, the wife comes to represent an alternate lifestyle *within* the bourgeois family itself, a different familial tradition, a mode of life that calls the hitherto unquestioned values of the father into question. So the older struggle between the bourgeois patriarch and the oppressive aristocracy tends to reorganize itself into a structural opposition between the two middle-class parents themselves. And it is characteristic of the children of this generation of *grands bourgeois* to take inventory of the anti-thetical parental traits and to think of themselves as problematical or dialectical combinations of the latter (think, for example, of André Gide's appeal to the coexistence of Normandy and the Midi, of Protestantism and Catholicism, within himself, or Thomas Mann's analogous evocations of the contact between the Hanseatic North and the culture of the Mediterranean).

Such was, at any rate, the way in which Max Weber thought about parental influences, for Marianne Weber could only have had her authority for reflections of the following kind from her husband himself:

In those years [of adolescence] it was uncertain whether [Max] would settle for the character type of his father or that of his mother. He already had the obscure feeling that some such choice would lay before him as soon as he took himself in hand and began consciously to work out a personality of his own. On the one hand the mother, in whom the forces of the gospel held sway, in whom loving service and self-sacrifice had become a second nature, yet who lived by uncomfortably heroic principles and mastered her excessive daily chores in a constant ethical tension, punctilious to a fault and relating every meaningful occurrence calmly to the eternal itself. She is so heartily decisive and fresh in the way she masters everyday existence, so joyously open to all the beauty of life—how liberating is her laughter!—but daily she descends into the deeps and is anchored in the otherworldly. By comparison, the father, honorable through and through, wholly disinterested in politics and in the exercise of his office, and clever besides, of an even disposition, warm and friendly when things go according to his wishes, is nonetheless a typical bourgeois, satisfied with himself and with the world. He categorically rejects any acknowledgement of the problematical sides of life. In later years he loved his domestic comfort and withdrew from all suffering and pity. His liberal political ideals could not be realized, and new ideologies, which might have demanded sacrifices of him in the service of this or that cause, failed to attract him.¹⁹

Between the respectfully retouched lines of Marianne Weber's portrait, one can sense the presence of that Oedipal clash which resulted in Max Weber's nervous breakdown and of which Mitzman is able, for the first time, to give us a complete account.²⁰ But Marianne's pages provide rich materials for an analysis of the complex interaction of parental traits in Weber's background. In one sense, the father, as a successful politician, would appear to stand for action, in opposition to the tradition of Protestant inwardness perpetuated by the mother. The lifestyle of the father, as it emerges from the old patrician mercantile class, is one of nonchalance and accommodation and has nothing of that driven, compulsive quality which the mother's sense of conscience and duty enforce. From this point of view, then, the father's activity may be compared to those "bracketed" and tradition-oriented types of behavior in which aims are pursued without any thematization of the values or absolutes involved—in this case, political pursuits for the tradition-sanctioned motives of personal ambition and social prestige. Paradoxically it is the mother, with her family origins in the Prussian bureaucracy, who unites in herself both rationalized work and a religious sense of values. Thus, the "choice" from which Max Weber's own personality may be expected to evolve is far from a simple option between two relatively univocal symbols; and it is perhaps not too farfetched to see the origins of Weber's often exasperating habit of dichotomization in this childhood situation in which, with every clash, he must estimate the configuration of parental values involved. In the present context, however, what interests us

is that the three positions fit very neatly into the scheme we have devised for the analysis of Weberian narrative:

	<i>FATHER</i>	<i>MOTHER</i>	<i>MAX WEBER</i>
ULTIMATE PURPOSEFULNESS OR MEANING	[+]	+	-
COMPULSIVE WORK	-	+	+

Obviously such an equivalence cannot be expected to prove anything or seal an argument for a skeptical reader, for my reading of Weber's family situation is as little empirical, is as fully prestructured, as that of any other kind of text. But I think that I can best anticipate misunderstanding and possible abuse of the present hypothesis by suggesting that the operation I have in mind here is something other and more complicated than what has come to be known, following Goldmann, as the discovery of *homologies* between phenomena of different orders and levels—in the present instance, between the texts of Weber, his biographical experience, and the social structure of the Germany of his time.

Rather, I would argue that we have to do here with a process, one that finds its most fundamental *genetic* expression on the biographical level. This process can be defined as one of self-definition, or it can be described in the more classic terminology of the Oedipus complex; and our formalization of it is designated to articulate the way in which Weber goes about solving the problem that it poses, namely, the requirement for the male child to identify with the father and thus to reproduce the latter's character structure. What the present hypothesis suggests is that this identification is achieved at the price of a transformation of the paternal value system so thoroughgoing as to make the latter virtually unrecognizable. In this appropriation and restructuring it is clearly the mother's value system that serves as catalyst and mediator: the intense and inward sense of values of his mother allowed Weber to see his father's existence as an antithesis, as mere opportunism, routine action in a mechanical and unexamined scheme of things. At this point, then, the hostility and resistance to the father acquires the social meaning of a defense of individualistic "spirituality" and inwardness against bureaucratic routine.

On the other hand, we will understand nothing about this process if we do not grasp the fact that Weber's relationship to his mother was no less ambivalent. Indeed, to attack the father is implicitly to defend what the mother herself stands for, namely value, but also compulsion, enforced work, and obligatory activity dialectically related to the unrealizable and ideal character of the otherworldly ethical values of which she is the emissary. Of the father's heritage Weber rejected the unthematized, tradition-oriented

kinds of activity which he felt essentially to lack value or ethical content; but paradoxically—and this paradox is the very heart not only of Weber’s personal development, but of his work as well—he had to reject the mother’s insistence on ethics as well, or rather, he had to come to terms with what she represented—pure value—in some other fashion than a personal conversion and commitment to it. An early intellectual distrust of ethical programs such as that of Channing—a favorite thinker of Helene Weber—suggests that it was the mother who was associated in Weber’s mind with unpractical “idealism” of the type of socialism that Weber’s heroic cynicism later decisively rejected (*MW*, 120ff.). For what accompanies such idealism, as a kind of psychic punishment, is precisely compulsive work; and Weber’s subsequent breakdown and long psychic paralysis may in this context be seen, not only as self-punishment and guilt for the attack on the father, but equally well as an aggressive act directed against the maternal principle, as a symbolic refusal of the system of values represented by the mother. At any rate, it is clear from Helene Weber’s skeptical attitude toward her son’s illness that she understood it in precisely this way (see *MW*, 275).

So we are to read the scheme outlined above as the way in which Weber used his maternal heritage to transform that of the father, subsequently discarding the mother’s values in their turn when their mediatory function had been fulfilled. The mother’s values permitted Weber to achieve at length a scholarly existence of backbreaking and compulsive labor, but only when they had themselves been liquidated: this was accomplished by their thematization as an object of study in their own right. Thus, it is no accident that Weber is the sociologist of religion *par excellence*, even though remaining “religiously unmusical”; for he could not separate himself from the mother while he was himself personally committed to her religious beliefs. Nor, on the other hand, could he simply liquidate this feature without a trace, given the crucial function of the mother as a mediation in his own development. So the solution is that classic one described by Freud under the term “sublimation”: the fascination with religion remains, but transposed to a “higher” level, in which the type of relationship entertained with the object is no longer that of belief, but rather that of scientific interest.

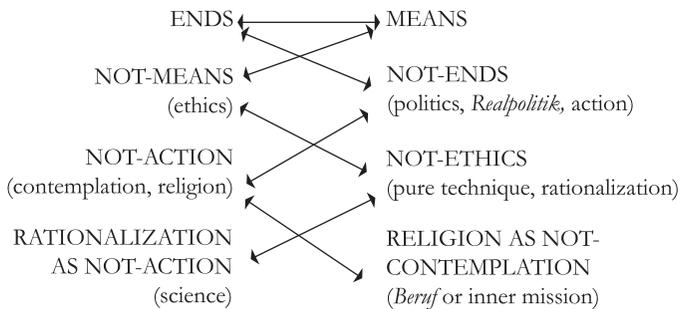
This is, however, not the only, nor even the principal, way in which the process of Weber’s psychic development enters and influences his work; to suggest one way in which such influence may be conceived, I return briefly to Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of those mythological structures the descriptive analysis of which has already furnished some of our analytical instruments and procedures. In his well-known treatment of the Oedipus myth from which I borrowed the narrative formula discussed above, Lévi-Strauss suggests that the mythic narrative results from a conceptual hesitation between two theories of birth, such theories themselves being the

reflection of various irreconcilable modes of tribal or familial organization, which are then projected into a series of episodes that offer the primitive mind the semblance of a solution to the underlying social contradiction or conceptual antinomy.²¹ In the later volumes of his *Mythologiques*, he offers what seems to be a somewhat different description of the nature and function of myths: the latter, he tells us rather elliptically, “signify the spirit that elaborates them by means of the world of which it is itself a part.”²² What this means in the general context of Lévi-Strauss’s thinking is that myths take as their deepest subject the emergence of Culture (and thus of mythic storytelling as well) from Nature, or, to put it even more succinctly, that all myths are myths about *origins*, stories designed to provide answers to such questions as, how did the leopard get his spots? where did fire come from? and so forth. For our present purpose, we may telescope these two definitions and suggest that a myth is the attempt, in the form of a story about origins, to resolve some underlying and apparently irreconcilable contradiction.

In the case of Max Weber, the contradiction in question is evidently enough that between the two parental systems, but it is a contradiction of which he himself is the resolution! The fascination with the mystery of origins then logically takes the form of an inquiry—conscious or unconscious—into the formation of his own personality, into the incomprehensible emergence of something called Max Weber from the massive and apparently timeless parental antinomies. But to be interested in this process is *the same* as being interested in the process of rationalization in general; for Weber’s personality, his espousal—not to say invention—of the very institution of “scientific objectivity,” amounts to the disengagement of rationalized inquiry from the older forms of the two parental activities. It is therefore no accident that Weber’s attention goes in every historical age and in every type of sociological material toward precisely those phenomena that may be considered signs or traces of the rationalization process, for this is the form taken by his own unconscious obsession with his own origins; to put it another way, the very theme of rationalization constitutes the autoreferentiality of Weber’s scientific inquiry, the way in which the historical or sociological narrative designates itself, or, to use Lévi-Strauss’s expression, “signifies” its own powers. Therefore, I do not need to propose a homology between Weber’s character structure and those “external” realities of history and modern social development: it is he himself who links the two in his work, or rather, who uses the first as a way of reading the second. Thus he grasps the social and historical fact of *Entzauberung* by giving it the genetic form of his own personal experience of the same phenomenon; in other words, he objectifies his own private situation by projecting it into that of modern alienation in a purely technical universe, that of the disappearance of the older traditionalistic and charismatic forms of social life. The question—how did I become what I am?—thus becomes enriched and

thematized, “sublimated,” when in the realm of “objective” historical investigation it takes on the form, how did rationalization come about? what are the origins of the modern desacralized world?

We may now conclude by recapitulating the process through which Weber’s basic themes are generated. An expanded version of Greimas’s rectangle allows us to see them as a series of progressive and cumulative negations, each of which projects the previous material as it were onto a different thematic level while at the same time preserving its fundamental unity:



Such a self-generating mechanism dramatizes the agonizing rift in Weber’s life and work between contemplation and action, between meaning and activity, between the fascination with ethics and religion and the theory and practice of politics and organization. But we must not give the impression that these interests are to be understood in any purely personal or clinical way. For it was the basic hypothesis of this concluding section of our study that the fundamental mode of existence of such “themes” is social: the means-ends dichotomy, indeed, we associated with the personality clash between Max Weber’s parents. But this clash merely reflects and dramatizes, embodies on the level of individual existence, a tension that originates on the scale of the social classes themselves. In this sense, each parent can be seen to represent and to individualize a distinct faction in the bourgeoisie of mid-nineteenth-century Germany: for the mother was formed in the values and lifestyle of the Prussian bureaucracy, with its emphasis on service and on a severely interiorized sense of duty; while the father incarnated those older preindustrial mercantile traditions of the type familiar in literature from the *Buddenbrooks* of Thomas Mann. On the level of the social classes themselves, then, the problem of the integration of these two distinct bourgeois traditions is at one with the very unification of modern Germany and its transformation into an industrial world power. The solution of Max Weber, therefore, on the level of individual psychology and the private life, is emblematic of the possible options of a resolution on the plane of social history.

That apparently purely personal solution becomes of even more consequence to the student of German history when we realize that our

manipulation of the semantic rectangle, even in such expanded form, is not yet complete, for we have not yet generated the ultimate agents or characterological categories of Weber's thought—the complex and the neutral terms, respectively. The latter, that ultimate combination of the privative terms of this chain of negations, some final union of “science” on the one hand and a sense of *Beruf*, or “inner mission,” on the other, must surely be what is embodied in Weber's own personal life choice, in what he described so eloquently as “science as a vocation”; and we have already been able to sense the profound ambiguity and tension that invests Weberian *Wertfreiheit*.

But this neutral term is itself dialectically linked to the other combinational possibility available in the Weberian system, to the complex term that would be a synthesis of ends and means, if such a thing were possible, and in which the original rift between the two would be transcended and forgotten. Such a state is to be found in only one moment of Weber's sociology, namely, that of the appearance of the charismatic hero: the nostalgia for the bearer of charisma is surely more than the projection of the ideal father into past and future; it is also and no doubt most fundamentally a vision of the liberated self as well, a self integrated beyond the contingencies of the fallen world of the historical present, in a realm in which meaningful action is once more possible, in which means and ends are at one and henceforth never to be disjoined. Like all wish fulfillments that have never been fully raised to consciousness, however, such a vision was fraught with terrible risks and could never be wholly benign in influence: the subsequent destiny of Germany itself is there to testify to it.

But the charismatic hero remains, for Weber, an ideal. Of the reality, both of his own life and of the historical phenomena he was able to make us see, there survives *The Protestant Ethic*, that ambivalent elegy to the potency of the maternal principle, its introspective structure projected outward until it becomes at length indistinguishable from the dreary bureaucratic landscape of the disenchanting modern world itself.

Notes

- 1 I have found the following studies useful: Herbert Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber," *Negations*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1968, 201–226; Wolfgang I. Mommsen, "Universalgeschichtliches und politisches Denken bei Max Weber," *Historische Zeitschrift* 201: 3, December 1965, 558–612, future references to this work are denoted *UpD*; Eugene Fleischmann, "De Weber à Nietzsche," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 5, 1964, 190–238, future references are denoted *WN*; Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, "Introduction," *From Max Weber*, New York: Oxford, 1958, 3–74, future references are denoted *FMW*; and particularly, Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber*, New York: Knopf, 1970, in future denoted *IC*.
- 2 Compare Weber: "For those to whom no casual explanation is adequate without an economic (or materialistic, as it is unfortunately still called) interpretation, it may be remarked that I consider the influence of economic development on the fate of religious ideas to be very important and shall later attempt to show in our case the process of mutual adaptation of the two took place" (Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, New York: Scribner, 1958, 277, n. 84), future references to this work are denoted *PE*; and Engels: "According to the materialistic conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase" (letter to Joseph Bloch, September 21–22, 1890, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. L. Feuer, New York: Doubleday, 1959, 397–98).
- 3 H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, New York: Vintage, 1961, 298.
- 4 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), *General Psychological Theory*, New York: Scribner, 1963, 165. Future references to this text are denoted *MM*.
- 5 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pt. 1, question 63, article 2, future references to this work are denoted *ST*.
- 6 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*.
- 7 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pt. 2, "Of Self-Overcoming," trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; and *Beyond Good and Evil*, "We Scholars," sec. 211, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- 8 "Science as a Vocation," in *FMW*, 148.
- 9 Talcott Parsons, "Introduction," in Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, xxxix, n. 11. Future references to this work are denoted *SR*.
- 10 A. J. Greimas (with François Rastier), "Les Jeux des contraintes sémiotiques," *Du Sens*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, 135–55, future references to this work are denoted *DS*; translated as "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints," *Yale French Studies* 41, Spring 1968, 86–105. For further discussion of this model, see Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.

- 11 Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1968, 565.
- 12 Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank Knight, New York: Collier Books, 1961, 265. Future references to this work are denoted *GEH*.
- 13 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- 14 “Not only is a developed sense of responsibility absolutely indispensable, but in general also an attitude which, at least during working hours, is freed from continual calculations of how the customary wage may be earned with a maximum of comfort and a minimum of exertion. Labor must, on the contrary, be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling [*Beruf*]. But such an attitude is by no means a product of nature. It cannot be evoked by low wages or high ones alone, but can only be the product of a long and arduous process of education” (*PE*, 61–62).
- 15 Weber’s study (1904–1905) doubtless has as its implicit target Karl Kautsky’s *Vorläufer des Neueren Sozialismus* (1895), rather than Engels’s older work on the *Peasant Wars in Germany* (1850).
- 16 Not that Lévi-Strauss is unaware of the function of mediatory figures (which he explicitly discusses later in the same essay); his formula simply does not seem to accommodate them. But see for an alternate interpretation Elli Kaija Kögäs and Pierre Miranda, “Structural Models in Folklore,” *Midwest Folklore* 3.3, Fall 1962, 137–39.
- 17 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, New York: Vintage, 1968, 68; and for further discussion of Sartre’s treatment of psychoanalysis, see Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971, 214–229.
- 18 Charles Morazé, *The Triumph of the Middle Classes*, Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1966, 82.
- 19 Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: Ein Lebensbild*, Heidelberg: Lamberg Schneider, 1950, 71–72. Future references to this work are denoted *MW*.
- 20 “What seems incontestable is that either on or shortly after his parents’ wedding anniversary he ordered his father out of his [in other words, Max Jr.’s] house to permit his mother and himself the undisturbed enjoyment of one another’s company. It was the first time that Weber had ever revealed to his father the full depths of his bitterness. And he never saw the old man alive again” (*IC*, 152). Weber’s own nervous breakdown, an obvious self-punishment for this half-symbolic, half-real “murder of the father,” began six weeks to the day after the anniversary.
- 21 See *Structural Anthropology*.
- 22 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman, New York: Harper & Row, 1969, 341, translation modified.

Architecture and the Critique of Ideology

How can space be “ideological”? Only *if* such a question is possible and meaningful—leaving aside the problem of meaningful *answers* to it—can any conceptions or ideals of nonideological, transfigured, Utopian space be developed. The question has itself tended to be absorbed by naturalistic or anthropological perspectives, predominantly based on conceptions of the human body itself, most notably in phenomenology. The body’s limits but also its needs are then appealed to as ultimate standards against which to measure the relative alienation either of older commercial or industrial space of the overweening sculptural monuments of the International Style or of the postmodernist “megastructure.” Yet arguments based on the human body are fundamentally ahistorical and involve premises about some eternal “human nature” concealed within the seemingly “verifiable” and scientific data of physiological analysis. If the body is in reality a social body, if therefore there exists no pre-given human body as such, but rather the whole historical range of social experiences of the body, the whole variety of bodily norms projected by a series of distinct historical “modes of production” or social formations, then the “return” to some more “natural” vision of the body in space projected by phenomenology comes to seem ideological, if not nostalgic. But does this mean that there are no limits to what the body, socially and historically, can become, or to the kind of space to which it can be asked to “adapt”?

Yet if the “body” ceases to be the fundamental unit of spatial analysis, the very concept of space itself becomes problematized: What space? The space of rooms or individual buildings, or the space of the very city fabric itself, in which those buildings are inserted, and against whose perceptual background my experience of this or that local segment is organized? Yet the city, it is construed, is space-in-totalization; it is not given in advance as an object of study or analysis, after the fashion of the constructed building. (Perhaps even the latter is not given in this way either, except to the already abstract sense of sight: individual buildings are then “objects” only in photographs.)

It is important to recognize (or to admit) that this second series of questions or problems *remains* essentially phenomenological in its orientation; indeed, it is possible that the vice of our initial question lies there, that it still insists on posing the problem of the relationship of the individual subject and of the subject's "lived experience" to the architectural or urban, spatial object, however the latter is to be construed. What is loosely called "structuralism" is now generally understood as the repudiation of this phenomenological "problematic," of such presuppositions as "experience"; it has generated a whole new counterproblematic of its own, in which space—the individual building or the city itself—is taken as a text in which a whole range of "signs" and "codes" are combined, whether in the organic unity of a shared code, or in "collage" systems of various kinds, in structures of allusion to the past, or of ironic commentary on the present, or of radical disjunctures, in which some radically new sign (the Seagram Building or the Radiant City) *criticizes* the older sign system into which it dramatically erupts. Yet in another perspective it is precisely this last possibility that has been called back into question, and which can be seen as a replication, in more modern "structuralist" language, of our initial question. In all the arts, the new "textual" strategies stubbornly smuggled back into their new problematic the coordinates of the older political question, and of the older unexamined opposition between "authentic" and "inauthentic." For a time, the new mediations produced seemingly new versions of the older (false?) problem, in the form of concepts of "subversion," the breaking of codes, their radical interruption or contestation (along with their predictable dialectical opposite, the notion of "co-optation"). It is the viability of these new solutions that is today generally in doubt: they now are taken to be more Utopianism, only of a negative or "critical" variety. They seemed at first to have repudiated the older positive and nostalgic ideals of a new Utopian—authentic, nonalienated—space or art; yet their claim to punctual negativity—far more modest at first glance—now seems equally Utopian in the bad sense. For even the project of criticizing, subverting, delegitimizing, strategically interrupting, the established codes of a repressive social and spatial order has ultimately come to be understood as appealing to some conception of critical "self-consciousness," of critical distance, which today seems problematic; whereas on a more empirical level, it has been observed that the most subversive gesture itself hardens into yet another form of being or positivity in its turn (just as the most negative *critical* stance loses its therapeutic and destructive shock value and slowly turns back into yet another critical ideology in its own right).

Is some third term beyond these two moments—the phenomenological and the structural—conceivable? Pierre Bourdieu, in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, explicitly attempts such a dialectical move beyond these two "moments," both of which are for him indispensable, yet insufficient: the

concept of “practice”—the social body’s programming by its spatial text, not taken to be the “bottom line” both of everyday experience and of the legitimation of the social structure itself—while offered as just such a solution, has only been “tested” on the much simpler materials and problems of precapitalist space in the Kabyle village. Meanwhile, Henri Lefebvre’s conception of “space” as the fundamental category of politics and of the dialectic itself—the one great prophetic vision of these last years of discouragement and renunciation—has yet to be grasped in all its pathbreaking implications, let alone to be explored and implemented; while Lefebvre’s influential role as an ideologist and a critic of French architecture today must be noted and meditated upon.

It is precisely a role of this kind that yet another logically possible position—faced with the dilemmas we have outlined above—explicitly repudiates: this is the position of Manfredo Tafuri, which in at least some of its more preemptory expressions has the merit of stark and absolute simplicity. The position is stated most baldly in the “Note” to the second Italian edition of *Theories and History of Architecture*: “one cannot ‘anticipate’ a class architecture (an architecture ‘for a liberated society’); what is possible is the introduction of class criticism into architecture.”¹ Although Tafuri’s working judgments—in texts written over a number of years—are in fact far more nuanced and ambiguous than such a proposition might suggest, certain key elements can at once be isolated: (1) The architectural critic has no business being an “ideologist,” that is, a visionary proponent of architectural styles of the future, “revolutionary” architecture, and the like; her role must be resolutely negative, the vigilant denunciation of existent or historical architectural ideologies. This position then tends to slip into a somewhat different one: (2) The practicing architect, in *this* society and within the closure of capitalism as a system, cannot hope to devise a radically different, a revolutionary, or a “Utopian” architecture or space either. (3) Without any conceivable normative conception of architectural space, of a space of radical difference from this one, the criticism of buildings tends to be conflated with the criticism of the ideologies of such buildings; the history and criticism of architecture thus tends to fold back into the history and criticism of the various ideologies of architecture, the manifestos and the verbal expressions of the great architects themselves. (4) Political action is not renounced in such a position, or not *necessarily* (although more “pessimistic” readings of Tafuri are certainly possible). What is, however, affirmed here is consonant with the Althusserian tradition of the “semiautonomy” of the levels and practices of social life: politics is radically disjoined from aesthetic (in this case architectural) practice. The former is still possible, but only on *its* level, and architectural or aesthetic production can never be immediately political; it takes place somewhere else. Architects can therefore be political, like other individuals, but their architecture today cannot

be political (a restatement of proposition 2, above). It follows, then, that: (5) An architecture of the future will be concretely and practically possible only when the future has arrived, that is to say, after a total social revolution, a systemic transformation of this mode of production into something else.

This position, which inevitably has something of the fascination of uncompromising intransigence and of all absolutes, must be understood, as I will try to show below in more detail, first of all within the history of contemporary Marxism, as a repudiation of what the Althusserians called Marxist “humanism” (including very specifically its “Utopian” component as symbolically represented by Marcuse or by Henri Lefebvre himself). Its refusal to entertain the possibility of some properly Marxian “ideology” (which would seek to project alternate futures), its commitment to a resolutely critical and analytical Marxian “science”—by way of a restriction to the operation of denouncing the ideologies of the past and of a closed present—all these features betray some kinship with Adorno’s late and desperate concept of a purely “negative dialectic.” The ambiguity of such a position lies in its very instability, and the way in which it can imperceptibly pass over into a post-Marxism of the type endorsed by the French *nouveaux philosophes* or by Tafuri’s collaborator, Massimo Cacciari. This is to suggest that Tafuri’s position is *also* an ideology, and that one does not get out of ideology by refusing it or by committing one’s self to negative and critical “ideological analysis.”

Yet at this stage, such an evaluation remains at the level of mere opinion and in that form has little if any interest. In what follows I will try to give it more content by examining Tafuri’s work—and most notably his short, widely read, but dense and provocative *Architecture and Utopia*—in three distinct perspectives.² The first must be that of the Marxist context in which it was first produced, a context in which a series of significant but implicit moves may go unrecognized by the non-Marxist or American reader for want of the appropriate background. The second perspective (in no special order) will be that of the discursive form in which Tafuri works, namely historiography itself, and most particularly narrative history, whose formal dilemmas and problems today may be seen as determining (or at least overdetermining) certain of Tafuri’s organizing concepts. Finally, it will be appropriate to reconsider this considerable body of work (now largely available in English) in the context of a vaster contemporary event, which has its own specifically American equivalents (and which is by no means limited to the field of architecture, although the battle lines have been drawn more dramatically there than in any other art)—namely the critique of high modernism, the increasingly omnipresent feeling that the modern movement itself is henceforth extinct; this feeling has often been accompanied by the sense that we may therefore now be in something else, sometimes called postmodernism. It is incidentally a matter of no small significance, to which

we will return, that this second theme—the dawning of some new post-modernist moment or even “age”—is utterly alien to Tafuri himself and plays no role in his periodizing framework or in his historical narrative.

I want to deal first with the second of my three topics, namely that which has to do with historiography, with the problem of writing history, and in this case of writing the history of a discipline, an art, a medium. That there has been a crisis in narrative or storytelling history since the end of the nineteenth century is well known, as is the relationship between this crisis and that other crisis in the realistic novel itself: narrative history and the realistic novel are indeed closely related and, in the greatest nineteenth-century texts, virtually interchangeable. In our own time, this ongoing crisis has been rethematized in terms of the critique of representation, one of the fundamental slogans of poststructuralism: briefly, the narrative representation of history necessarily tends to suggest that history is something you can see, be a witness to, be present at—an obviously inadmissible proposition. On the other hand, as the word itself suggests, history is always fundamentally storytelling, must always be narrative in its very structure.

This dilemma will not bother those for whom history-writing is not an essential task; if you are satisfied to do small-scale semiotic analyses of discrete or individual text or buildings, presumably the problem of the writing of history, the telling of a historical story, will not unduly preoccupy you. I say “presumably” because I think that this problem also leaves its traces on such static analyses, and indeed it seems to be an empirical fact that the issues of history are returning everywhere today, not least within semiotics itself (the history of semiotics, the turn of semiotic analysis to the problem of genres, the problem of a semiotic of historical representation).

However, leaving other people to their concerns, it will be clear that no issue is more central or more acute than for those with some commitment to a dialectical tradition, since the dialectic has always for better or for worse been associated with some form or other of historical vision. For myself, I am much attracted by Louis Althusser’s solution, which consists in proposing, in the midst of the crisis of historical representation and of narrative history, that the historian should conceive her task not as that of producing a representation of history, but rather as that of producing the *concept* of history, a very different matter indeed.

But how is this to be done? Or rather, to be more modest about it, how has this actually been done in practice? From this perspective, it will be of interest to read *Architecture and Utopia* with a view toward determining the way in which it suggestively “produces the concept” of a dialectical history of architecture. But this is a rare enough achievement for one to want, initially, to juxtapose Tafuri’s text with those very rare other realizations of this particular genre or form. I can think of only two contemporary dialectical histories of comparable intensity and intellectual energy: Adorno’s

Philosophy of Modern Music (a seminal text, on which Thomas Mann drew for his musical materials in *Doktor Faustus*), and in the area of the history of literature, Roland Barthes' early and unequalled *Writing Degree Zero*. You will understand that this limited choice does not imply a lack of interest in the contributions that a Lukács, a Sartre, an Asor Rosa, a Raymond Williams, among others, have made to the restructuration of traditional paradigms of literary history. What the three books I have mentioned have in common is not merely a new set of dialectical insights into literature, but the practice of a peculiar, condensed, allusive discursive form, a kind of textual *genre*, still exceedingly rare, which I will call dialectical history.

Let me first single out a fundamental organizational feature that these three works share, and which I am tempted to see as the ultimate precondition to which they must painfully submit in order to practice dialectical thinking: this is the sense of Necessity, of necessary failure, of closure, of ultimate unresolvable contradictions and the impossibility of the future, which cannot have failed to oppress any reader of these texts, particularly readers who as practicing artists—whether architects, composers, or writers—come to them for suggestions and encouragement as to the possibility of future cultural production.

Adorno's discussion of musical history culminates, for instance, in Schoenberg's extraordinary "solution"—the twelve-tone system—which solves all the dilemmas outstanding in previous musical history so completely as to make all musical composition after Schoenberg superfluous (or at least regressive) from Adorno's perspective, yet which at the same time ends up as a baleful replication or mirror image of that very totalitarian socioeconomic system from which it sought to escape in the first place. In Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero*, the well-known ideal of "white writing"—far from being what it often looks like today, namely a rather complacent account of postmodernist trends—stood in its initial historical context and situation as an equally impossible solution to a dilemma that rendered all earlier practices of writing or style ideological and intolerable. Tafuri's account, finally, of the increasing closure of late capitalism (beginning in 1931 and intensifying dialectically after the war), systematically shutting off one aesthetic possibility after another, ends up conveying a paralyzing and asphyxiating sense of the futility of any kind of architectural or urbanistic innovation on this side of that equally inconceivable watershed, a total social revolution.

It would be silly, or even worse, frivolous, to discuss these positions in terms of optimism or pessimism. I will later make some remarks about the political presuppositions that account for (or at least overdetermine) some of Tafuri's attitudes here; what I prefer to stress now is the formal origin of these somber visions of the total system, which, far worse than Max Weber's

iron cage, here descends upon human life and human creative praxis. The strengths of the readings and insights of Adorno, Barthes, and Tafuri in these works are for one thing inextricably bound up with their vision of history as an increasingly total or closed system: in other words, their ability to interpret a given work of art as a provisional “solution” is absolutely dependent on a perspective that reads the artwork against a context reconstructed or rewritten as a situation and a contraction.

More than this, I find confirmation in these books for an intuition I have expressed elsewhere, namely that the dialectic, or powerful dialectical history, must somehow always involve a vision of Necessity or, if you prefer, must always tell the story of failure. “The owl of Minerva takes its flight at dusk”: dialectical interpretation is always retrospective, always tells the necessity of an event, why it *had* to happen the way it did; and to do that, the event must already have happened, the story must already have come to an end. While this may sound like an indictment of the dialectic (or as yet one more post-Marxist “proof” of its irreducibly Hegelian character), it is important to add that such histories of necessity and of determinate failure are equally inseparable from some ultimate historical perspective of reconciliation, of achieved socialism, of the “end of prehistory” in Marx’s sense.

The restructuration of the history of an art in terms of a series of situations, dilemmas, contradictions, in terms of which individual works, styles, and forms can be seen as so many responses or determinate symbolic acts—this is, then, a first key feature of dialectical historiography. But there is another no less essential one that springs to mind, at least when one thinks in terms of historical materialism, and that is the reversal associated with the term “materialism” itself, the anti-idealistic thrust, the rebuke and therapeutic humiliation of consciousness forced to reground itself in a painful awareness of what Marx called its “social determination.” This second requirement is of course what sets off the present texts sharply from old-fashioned Hegelian spiritual historiography, but which in turn threatens to undermine the historiographic project altogether, as in Marx’s grim reminder in the *German Ideology*:

We do not set out from what people say, imagine or conceive, nor from people as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at people in the flesh. We set out from real, active human beings, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain their semblance of independence. They have no history, no development, in their own right; but it is rather human beings who, developing their material production and

relationships, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.³

Now the slogan of “materialism” has again become a very popular euphemism for Marxism. I object to this particular ideological fashion on the Left today: facile and dishonest as a kind of popular-front solution to the very real tensions between Marxism and feminism, the slogan also seems to be extraordinarily misleading as a synonym for “historical materialism” itself, since the very concept of “materialism” is a bourgeois Enlightenment (later positivist) one and fatally conveys the impression of a “determinism by the body” rather than, as in genuine dialectical Marxism, a “determination by the mode of production.” At any rate, in the context that concerns us here—the description of “dialectical historiography”—the drawback of the word “materialism” is that it tends to suggest that only one form of dialectical reversal—the overthrow of idealism by materialism or a recall to matter—is at work in such books.

Actually, however, the dialectical shock, the reversal of our habits of idealism, can take many forms: and it is evident that in the dialectical history of an art its privileged targets will be the idealistic habits we have inherited in thinking about such matters, and in particular Hegelian notions of the history of forms and styles, but also empiricist or structuralist notions of isolated texts. Still, it is best to see how these reversal-effects have been achieved in practice, rather than deducing them a priori in some dogmatic matter. And since none of these works ever raises one key issue of concern to everyone today, it is appropriate to preface a discussion of them with the indication of a fundamental form of contemporary “reversal” which may not leave them unscathed either: namely the way in which contemporary feminist critiques cut across the whole inherited system of the histories of art and culture by demonstrating the glaring absence from them, not merely of women as such, but, in the architectural area, of any consideration of the relationship between women’s work and interior space, and between the domination of women and the city plan itself. For male intellectuals, this is the most stunning materialist reversal of all, since it calls *us* effectively into question at the same time that it disturbingly seems to discredit the very foundations and institutional presuppositions of the disciplines in question.

Indeed, the lesson for us in criticism of this kind may well be, among other things, precisely this: that a materialist or dialectical historiography does its work ultimately by undermining the very foundations, framework, constitutive presuppositions of the specialized disciplines themselves—by unexpectedly demonstrating the existence, not necessarily of “matter” in that limited sense, but rather in general of an *Other* of the discipline, an outside, a limit, the revelation of the *extrinsic*, which it is believed to be

scandalous and unscholarly to introduce into a carefully regulated traditional debate.

Adorno's book perhaps goes least far in this direction: the *Philosophy of Modern Music* operates its particular reversal by shifting from the subject (the great composers and their styles and works) to the object, the raw material, the tonal system itself, which as a peculiar "logic of content" has its own dynamics and generates fresh problems with every solution, setting absolute limits to the freedom of the composer at every historical moment, its objective contradictions increasing in intensity and complexity with each of those new moments until Schoenberg's "final solution"—the unification of vertical and horizontal, of harmony and counterpoint—seems to produce an absolute that is a full stop, beyond which composition cannot go: a success which is also, in genuine dialectical fashion, an absolute failure.

Barthes' reversal is useful because his problematic (which is essentially that of the Sartre of *What Is Literature?*) is the most distant from the rhetoric of materialism and materiality and consists rather in a vision of the nightmare of history as blood guilt and as that necessary and inevitable violence of the relationship of any group to the others which we call class struggle. Both writers—Sartre and Barthes himself—reverse our placid conceptions of literary history by demonstrating how every individual text, by its institutionalized signals, necessarily selects a particular readership for itself and thereby symbolically endorses the inevitable blood guilt of that particular group or class. Only, where Sartre proposed the full Utopian solution of a literature of praxis that would address itself to a classless society, Barthes ingeniously imagines a different way of escaping from the "nightmare of history," a kind of neutral or zero term, the projection of a kind of work from which all group or class signals have been eliminated: white or bleached writing, an escape from group blood guilt on the other side of group formation (which in later Barthes will be reoriented around reception rather than production and become the escape from class struggle into an equally nonindividual kind of *jouissance* or punctual schizophrenic or perverse ecstasy, in *Le Plaisir du Texte*).

This is the moment to observe the temptation of the zero degree solution in Tafuri himself, where it constitutes one, but *only* one, of the provisional working possibilities very sparsely detectable in his pages. A Barthesian reading of Tafuri's account of Mies and the Seagram Building seems more plausible, as well as more historical, than a Heideggerian one, particularly if we attend to the content of Tafuri's pro-Mallarmean celebration of the glacial silence of this building, rather than to its rather Germanic language:

The "almost nothing" has become a "big glass" ... reflecting images of the urban chaos that surrounds the timeless Miesian purity ... It accepts [the shift and flux of phenomena], absorbs them to themselves in a perverse multi-duplication, like a

Pop Art sculpture that obliges the American metropolis to look at itself reflected ... in the neutral mirror that breaks the city web. In this, architecture arrives at the ultimate limits of its own possibilities. Like the last notes sounded by the Doctor Faustus of Thomas Mann, alienation, having become absolute, testifies uniquely to its own presence, separating itself from the world to declare the world's incurable malady.⁴

This is, however, less the endorsement of a Miesian aesthetic than a way of closing the historical narrative, and, as we will see in a moment, of endowing the implacable and contradictory historical *situation* with an absolute power that such desperate nonsolutions as Barthesian “bleached writing” or Miesian silence can only enhance.

Returning for the moment to the strategies of the materialist reversal, we see that Tafuri's use of such strategies is original in that it includes an apology for the primacy of architecture over all the other arts (and thereby of architectural theory and criticism as well); but the apology is distinctly untraditional and, one would think, not terribly reassuring for people professionally committed to this field of specialization. Architecture is for Tafuri supreme among the arts simply because its Other or exterior is coeval with History and society itself, and it is susceptible therefore to the most fundamental materialist or dialectical reversal of all. To put it most dramatically, if the outer limit of the individual building is the material city itself, with its opacity, complexity, and resistance, then the outer limit of some expanded conception of the architectural vocation as including urbanism and city planning is the economic itself, or capitalism in the most overt and naked expression of its implacable power. So the great central European urbanistic projects of the 1920s (the *Siedlungen*, or workers' housing in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Vienna) touch their Other in the seemingly “extrinsic” obstacle of financial speculation and the rise in land and property values that causes their absolute failure and spells an end to their Utopian vocation. But whereas for some traditional history of forms this is an extrinsic and somehow accidental, extraneous fact, which essentially has “nothing to do” with the purely formal values of these designs, in Tafuri's practice of the dialectic, this seemingly extrinsic situation is then drawn back into the dialectic spiral itself and passes an absolute judgment of History proper upon such Utopian forms.

These two dialectical reversals—the judgment on the project of an individual building, text, or “work of art” by the preexisting reality of the city itself—the subsequent judgment on aesthetics of urban planning and ensembles by that vaster “totality” which is capitalism itself—these are only two of the modes of reversal among many in Tafuri's little book; and it is this very richness of the forms of an anti-idealist turn, the dialectical suppleness of Tafuri's use of varied thematic oppositions, which makes his text

both so fascinating and exemplary, and so bewilderingly dense and difficult to read. Other modes of reversal could be enumerated: most notably the unpleasant reminder of the professional status of intellectuals themselves and the ideological and idealistic distortions that result from such status; as well as the thematics of a Keynesian management of the “future”—a kind of credit and planning system of human life—which is one of the more novel sub-themes of this work and of its staging of the critique of modernist Utopianism.

What must be stressed at this point, however, is the way in which the principal “event” of such dialectical histories—the contradiction itself, the fatal reversal of this or that aesthetic solution as it comes to grief against its own material underside—necessarily determines the form of their narrative closure and the kind of “ending” they are led to project. In all three, the present is ultimately projected as the final and most absolute contradiction, the “situation” that has become a blank wall, beyond which History cannot pass. Such an “end of history,” or abolition of the future, is most obvious in Adorno, where it is paid for by the tragic “blind spot” of the philosopher-composer, who must on the one hand systematically reject the “other” of his culture (including the movement of popular or mass culture—contemptuously dismissed by Adorno under the all-purpose term “jazz” or “easy music,” and that whole movement of Third World history and culture, which is the “repressed” of his Eurocentrism); at the same time he must refuse even the development of advanced music beyond his “final stage,” repudiating Stockhausen, electronic music, all the developments of the 1950s and 1960s, with the same stubborn passion that leads him to bracket any conceivable *political* future in *Negative Dialectics*.

We have already examined the more ingenious conception of a “negative way” in Barthes’ ideal of a zero degree of writing or in Tafuri’s passing homage to Mies. What must now be underscored is the constitutive relationship between Tafuri’s possibility of constructing dialectical history and his systemic refusal of what, in *Theories and History of Architecture*, is called “operative criticism.” This type of criticism, most strikingly employed in classical works like Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*, reads the past selectively and places an illusory historical analysis, the *appearance* of some “objective” historical narrative, in the service of what is in reality an architectural *manifesto*, the “normative” projection of some new style, the *project* of future work and future possibilities: “the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structures and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalized” (*THA*, 141)—in short, “ideological criticism [which] substitutes ready-made judgments of value (prepared for immediate use) for analytical rigor” (*THA*, 153). But this judgment on the spurious appropriation of the past in the service of an endorsement of aesthetic action in the present implies that “rigorous” analytical history

must in turn be bought by a stoic renunciation of action and of value, and a well-nigh Hegelian renunciation of all possible futures, so that the owl of Minerva can wing its flight into the past. Tafuri's "pessimism" is thus to be seen as a formal necessity of the generic structure of his text—dialectical historiography—rather than as an "opinion" or a "position" in its own right.

Unfortunately, it must *also* be read as just such an opinion or position; and at this point a purely formal and textual necessity intersects with and is overdetermined by ideology, and becomes the vehicle for a whole set of ideological messages and signals which have real content and which can best be appreciated by way of the Marxian traditions in which they emerge.

It seems to me most convenient to decode these signals in the context of a current and general Left appropriation of the older right-wing "end of ideology" slogans of the late 1950s. In that period, the period of the Eisenhower era and the great American celebration, the "end of ideology" meant not merely the death of Marxism, but also the good news of the end of the classical capitalism anatomized by Marx, and the apparition of some new social order whose dynamics was no longer based on production and associated with social classes and their struggle, but rather on a new principle, which was therefore to be seen in all those senses as "beyond ideology." This new social system will then be named, by the ex-Marxist right-wing theorists of an "end of ideology," most notably Daniel Bell, as "post-industrial society" (others will call it consumer society, media society, consumer capitalism, and so forth); and its dynamic will be characterized by the primacy of knowledge, of scientific and technological know-how, and by the primacy of a new social group (no longer a class in the Marxian sense), namely the technocrats.⁵

For obvious reasons, the Left repudiated this kind of analysis for a number of years, remaining intent on demonstrating that the classical analyses and concepts of Marx's *Capital* were still valid for the period that Bell and others were intent on describing as the dialectical mutation of "post-industrial society." It is clear that something of the force of Bell's theory derived from the optimism of the Eisenhower era, the period of American empire and a global pax americana; and that History itself, better than any left countertheories or critiques, undertakes to pronounce judgment on the "end of ideology," "postindustrial society" thesis and to lay it to rest in our own moment of the return of more classical global economic crisis, worldwide depression, unemployment, and the like.

Paradoxically, however, it was precisely in the intervening years that the Left itself caught up with the thesis of a new historical moment, a radical historical break, and produced its own version of the "end of ideology" thesis. This also had something to do with changes in social atmosphere and temperature, and with the alteration of the quality of life in the advanced

world, that is to say, with mutations in the appearance or surface of social life. It became clear to everyone, in other words, that with consumerism, with the enormous penetration and colonization of the apparatus of the media, with the release of new nonclass social forces in the 1960s—forces associated with race and gender, with nationalism and religion, with marginality (as with students or the permanently unemployed)—something decisive had changed in the very “reality of the appearance” of capitalism. The new Marxian version of the “state” will explain the originality of the features of so-called postindustrial society as a new stage of capitalism proper, in which the old contradictions of capital are still at work, but in unexpectedly new forms. The features enumerated by people like Bell—for example, the primacy of science, the role of bureaucracy—will be retained, but interpreted very differently in the light of a new moment which can be called “late capitalism” or the multinational world system (in the traditional Marxian periodization this would be a third moment of capitalism, after those of classical market capitalism, and the stage of imperialism and monopoly, and could be dated from the immediate postwar period in the United States and the late 1950s in Europe).⁶ Although we do not have time for a detailed discussion of this extremely important new Marxian theory of the contemporary world, we must, before returning to Tafuri, underscore two significant features of that theory.

First, it is the theory of something like a total system, marked by a global deployment of capital around the world (even, on many accounts, reaching into the still far from autonomous economic dynamics of the nascent socialist countries), and effectively destroying the older coherence of the various national situations. The total system also is marked by the dynamism with which it now penetrates and colonizes the two last surviving enclaves of Nature within the older capitalism: the Unconscious and the precapitalist agriculture of the Third World—the latter is now systematically undermined and reorganized by the Green Revolution, whereas the former is effectively mastered by what the Frankfurt School used to call the Culture Industry, that is, the media, mass culture, and the various other techniques of the commodification of the mind. I should also add that this enormous new quantum leap of capital now menaces that other precapitalist enclave within older capitalism, namely the nonpaid labor of the older interior or home or family, thereby in contradictory fashion unbinding and liberating that enormous new social force of women, who immediately then pose an uncomfortable new threat to the new social order.

On the other hand, if the new expansion of multinational or late capitalism at once triggers various new forms of struggle and resistance, as in the great revolts of the 1960s, it also tends to be accompanied by a mood of pessimism and hopelessness that must naturally enough accompany the sense of a total system, with nothing outside itself, within which local revolts and

resistances come to be seen, not as the emergence of new forces and a new logic of a radically different future, but rather as mere inversions within the system, punctual reversals of this or that systemic feature—no longer dialectical in their force, but merely structural(ist). The Marxist response to this increasingly windless closure of the system will be varied: it can take the form of a substitution of the time-scale of the prognosis of the *Grundrisse*, for that, far more imminent, of *Capital* proper. In the *Grundrisse*, indeed, Marx seems to project a far greater resiliency for capitalism than in *Capital* itself, one which better accommodates the unexpected new vitality and dynamism of the system after World War II. The key feature of this position will be the insistence on what is, after all, a classical notion of Marx, namely that a socialist revolution and a socialist society are not possible until capitalism has somehow exhausted all its possibilities, but also not until capitalism has become a worldwide and global fact, in which universal commodification is combined with a global proletarianization of the work force, a transformation of all humanity (including the peasants of the Third World) into wage-workers. In that case, the chances for socialism are relegated into some far future, while the ominous nature of the current “total system” becomes rather positive again, since it marks precisely the quantum progression toward that final global state. But this means, in addition, that not only can there not be socialism in one country, there cannot be anything like socialism in one bloc of countries: socialist revolution is here by definition global revolution or it is nothing. And equally obviously, there can be no emergence of a different social system within the interstices of the old, within this or that sector of capitalism proper. Here, I think, you will have already recognized the perspective that is characteristic of Tafuri’s work: there can be no qualitative change in any element of the older capitalist system—as, for instance, in architecture or urbanism—without beforehand a total revolutionary and systemic transformation.

(Total-systems theory can of course also be explained in terms of the kind of textual determinism already evoked above: the purpose of the theorist is to build as powerful a model of capital as possible, and as all-embracing, systemic, seamless, and self-perpetuating. Thus, if the theorist succeeds, he fails: since the more powerful the model constructed, the less possibility will be foreseen in it for any form of human resistance, any chance of structural transformation.)

Yet the meaning of this stark and absolute position, this diagnosis of the total system of late or multinational capital, cannot fully be grasped without taking into account the alternative position of which it is the symbolic repudiation; this is what may be called neo-Gramscianism, the more “optimistic” assessment of some possible “long march through the institutions,” which counterposes a new conception of some gradualist “war of position” for the classical Leninist model of the “war of maneuver,” the

all-or-nothing seizure of power. There are, of course, many reasons why radical Italian intellectuals today should have become fatigued with the Gramscian vision, paradoxically at the very moment when it has come to seem reinvigorating for the Left in other national situations in Europe and elsewhere. The most obvious of these reasons is the thirty-year institutionalization of Gramsci's thought within the Italian Communist party (and the assimilation of Gramsci, in the Italian context, to that classical form of dialectical thought which is everywhere systematically repudiated by a Nietzschean post-Marxism). Nor should we forget to underscore the structural ambiguity or polysemousness of the basic Gramscian texts: written in a coded language beneath the eyes of the Fascist censor, these texts either can be "translated back" into classical Leninism or, on the contrary, can be read as a novel inflection of Leninism in a new direction, as post-Leninism or a stimulating new form of neo-Marxism. There are therefore "objectively" many distinct Gramscis, between which it would be frivolous to attempt to decide which is the "true" one. I want, however, to suggest that with some Gramscian alternative, the possibility of a very different perspective on architecture and urbanism today is also given, so that the implications of this further digression are not a matter of Marxist scholastics, nor are they limited to purely political consequences.

At least two plausible yet distinct readings of the Gramscian slogan, the struggle for "hegemony," must be proposed at this point. What is at stake is the meaning of that "counterhegemony" which oppositional forces are called upon to construct within the ongoing dominance of the "hegemony" of capital; and the interpretive dilemma here turns on the (false) problem of a materialist or an idealist reading. If the Gramscian struggle, in other words, aims essentially at the *preparation* of the working class for some eventual seizure of power, "counterhegemony" is to be understood in purely superstructural terms, as the elaboration of a set of ideas, countervalues, cultural styles, which are virtual or *anticipatory*, in the sense that they "correspond" to a material, institutional base that has not yet "in reality" been secured by political revolution itself.

The temptation is therefore to argue for a "materialist" reading of Gramsci on the basis of certain key figures or tropes in the classical Marxian texts. One recalls, for example, the "organic" formulations of the 1859 Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*: "new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured within the womb of the old society"; "productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of the antagonism [of all previous history as class conflict]."⁷ One must also note the celebrated figure with which, in passing, the Marx of *Capital* characterizes the status of "commerce" within the quite different logic of the "ancient" mode of production: "existing in the interstices of the

ancient world, like the gods of Epicurus in the *intermundia* or the Jews in the pores of Polish society.”⁸

Such figures suggest something like an *enclave* theory of social transition, according to which the emergent future, the new and still nascent social relations that announce a mode of production that will ultimately displace and subsume the as yet still dominant one, is theorized in terms of small yet strategic pockets or beachheads within the older system. The essentially *spatial* nature of the characterization is no accident and conveys something like a historical tension between two radically different types of space, in which the emergent yet more powerful kind will gradually extend its influence and dynamism over the older form, fanning out from its initial implantations and gradually “colonizing” what persists around it. Nor is this some mere poetic vision. The political realities that have been taken as the “verification” and the concrete embodiment of “enclave theory” in contemporary society are the legendary “red communes” of Italy today, most notably Bologna, whose administration by the Communist party has seemed to demarcate them radically from the corruption and inefficiency of the capitalist nation-state within which, like so many foreign bodies, they are embedded. Tafuri’s assessment of such communes is particularly instructive:

The debate over the historical centers and the experience of Bologna have shown that architectural and urbanistic proposals cannot be put to the test outside definite political situations, and then only within improved public structures for control. This has effected a substantial modification in the role of the architectural profession, even further redimensioned and characterized by an increasing change in the traditional forms of patronage and commissioning ... Although what [the New Left city administrations] have inherited is in a desperate state and the financial difficulties are staggering, one can hope that from this new situation may come the realization of the reforms sought for decades. It is on this terrain that the Italian workers’ movements are summoned to a historical test whose repercussions may prove to be enormous, even outside Italy. (*MA*, 322)

These lines (written, to be sure, in the more favorable atmosphere of 1976) betray a rather different Tafuri than the somber historiographer of some “end of history” who has predominated in the preceding pages.

What complicates this picture, however, is the discovery that it is precisely some such “enclave theory” which on Tafuri’s analysis constitutes the “Utopianism” of the modern movement in architecture; that, in other words, Tafuri’s critique of the international style, the informing center of all his works, is first and foremost a critique of the latter’s enclave theory itself. Le Corbusier, for example, spoke of avoiding political revolutions, not because he was not committed to “revolution,” but rather because he saw

the construction and the constitution of new space as the most revolutionary act, one that could “replace” the narrowly political revolution of the mere seizure of power (and if the experience of a new space is associated with a whole transformation of everyday life itself, Le Corbusier’s seemingly antipolitical stance can be reread as an *enlargement* of the very conception of the political, and as having an anticipatory kinship with conceptions of “cultural revolution” that are far more congenial to the spirit of the contemporary Left). Still, the demiurgic hubris of high modernism is fatefully dramatized by such visions of the towers of the Plan Voisin, which stride across a fallen landscape like H. G. Wells’s triumphant Martians, or of the gigantic symbolic structures of the Unités d’habitation, the Algiers plan, or Chandigarh, which are apocalyptically to sound the knell of the cramped and unsalubrious hovels that lie dwarfed beneath their prophetic shadow. We will shortly enter into the terms of Tafuri’s critique of modernism itself. Suffice it to say for the moment that its cardinal sin is precisely to identify (or conflate) the political and the aesthetic, and to foresee a political and social transformation that is henceforth at one with the formal processes of architectural production itself. All of this is easier to demonstrate on the level of empirical history, where the new enclaves of the International Style manifestly failed to regenerate anything around them; or where, when they did have the dynamic and radiating influence predicted for them by the masters, the results, if anything, were even more depressing, generating a whole series of dismal glass boxes in their own image, or a multiplication of pseudo-Corbusian towers in the desolation of parks which have become the battleground of an unending daily war of race and class. Even the great emblem of the “red communes” can, from this perspective, be read differently: for it can equally well be argued that they are not enclaves at all—not laboratories in which the original social relations of the future are being worked out, but rather simply the administration of inherited capitalistic relations, albeit conducted in a different spirit of social commitment than that of the Christian Democrats.

This uninspiring balance sheet would settle the fate of the Gramscian alternative if the “enclave theory” were its only plausible interpretation. The latter may, however, be seen as an overly reductive and rather defensively “materialist” conception of the politics of space. But it can equally well be argued that Gramsci’s notion of “hegemony” (along with the later and related idea of “cultural revolution”) attempts rather to displace the whole distinction of materialism versus idealism (and, along with it, of the traditional concept of base and superstructure). It would therefore no longer be “idealist” in the bad old sense to suggest that “counterhegemony” means producing and keeping alive a certain alternate “idea” of space, the urban, daily life, and the like. It would then no longer be so immediately significant (or so practically and historically crippling) that architects in the West (with

the possible exception of France)—owing to the private property system—do not have the opportunity of projecting and constructing collective ensembles that express and articulate original new social relations (and needs and demands) of a collective type. The essential would rather be that they are able to form conceptions and Utopian images of such projects, against which to develop a self-consciousness of their concrete activities in this society (it being understood, in Tafuri's spirit, that such collective projects would only practically and materially be possible after a systemic transformation of society). But such Utopian "ideas" are as "objective" as material buildings: their possibilities—the possibility of conceiving such new space—have conditions of possibility as rigorous as any material artifact. Those conditions of possibility are to be found, first and foremost, in the uneven development of world history and in the existence, elsewhere, in the Second and Third Worlds, of projects and constructions that are not possible in the First; this concrete existence of radically different spaces elsewhere (of whatever unequal realization) is what objectively opens the possibility for the coming into being and development of "counterhegemonic values" here. A role is thereby secured for a more "positive" and Gramscian architectural criticism, over against Tafuri's stubbornly (and therapeutically) negative variety, his critical refusal of Utopian speculation on what is not possible within the closure of the multinational system. In reality, both of these critical strategies are productive alternatively according to the situation itself, and the public to which the ideological critic must address herself; and there is no particular reason to lay down either of these useful weapons. It is at any rate worth quoting yet another appreciation of Tafuri—this one, unexpectedly, of the Stalinallee (now the Karl Marx-Allee) in East Berlin—in order to show that his practical criticism is often a good deal more ambivalent than his theoretical slogans (and also further to dispel the feeling that the celebration of Mies's negative mysticism, quoted above, amounts to anything like a definitive position):

However, in the case [of the Stalinallee, in East Berlin] it would be wrong to regard what resulted as purely ideological or propagandistic; in reality, the Stalinallee is the fulcrum of a project of urban reorganization affecting an entire district, establishing an axis of development toward the Tiergarten different from that developed historically. In addition, this plan inverts the logical manner in which a bourgeois city expands by introducing into the heart of the metropolis the residence as a decisive factor. The monumental bombast of the Stalinallee—now renamed Karl Marx-Allee—was conceived to put in a heroic light an urbanistic project that set out to be different. In fact, it succeeds perfectly in expressing the presupposition for the construction of the new socialist city, which rejects divisions between architecture and urbanism and aspires to impose itself as a unitary structure. (*MA*, 332, 326)

Such a text can evidently be used to support either position: the negative one—that such a collective project, with its transcendence of the opposition building/city, is only possible *after* a revolutionary transformation of social relations as a whole—or the more Gramscian one outlined above—that the very existence of such an ensemble in some other space of the world creates a new force field which cannot but have its influence even over those architects for whom such a project is scarcely a “realistic” possibility.

Still, until now we have not considered what kind of “total system” sets limits to the practical transformation of space in our time; nor have we drawn the other obvious consequence from the neo-Marxian theorization of “consumer society” or of the new moment of late capitalism, namely that to such a new moment there may very well correspond a new type of culture or cultural dynamic. This is therefore the time to introduce our third theme or problem, namely that of postmodernism and of the critique of classical or high modernism itself. For the economic periodization of capital into three rather than two stages (that of “late” or multinational capitalism being now added to the more traditional moments of “classical” capitalism and of the “monopoly stage” or “stage of imperialism”) suggests the possibility of a new periodization on the level of culture as well. From this perspective, the moment of “high” modernism, of the International Style and of the classical modern movement in all the arts—with their great *auteurs* and their “Utopian” monuments, Mallarmean “Books of the World” fully as much as Corbusean Radiant Cities—would “correspond” to that second stage of monopoly and imperialist capitalism which came to an end with World War II. Its “critique” therefore coincides with its extinction, its passing into history, as well as with the emergence, in the third stage of “consumer capital,” with some properly postmodernist practice of pastiche, of a new free play of styles and historicist allusions now willing to “learn from Las Vegas,” a moment of surface rather than of depth, of the “death” of the old individual subject or bourgeois ego, and of the schizophrenic celebration of the commodity fetishism of the image, of a now “delirious New York” and a countercultural California, a moment when the logic of media capitalism penetrates the logic of advanced cultural production itself and transforms the latter to the point where such distinctions as those between high and mass culture lose their significance (and where the older notions of a “critical” or “negative” value of advanced or modernist art may also no longer be appropriate or operative).

As I have observed, Tafuri refuses this periodization and we will observe him positioning his critique of the “postmoderns” beneath the general category of a still high modernist Utopianism, of which they are seen merely as so many epigones. Still, in this country and for this public, the thrust of his critique of Utopian architecture will inevitably be associated with the generalized reaction here against the older hegemonic values and norms of the

International Style, about which we must attempt to take an ambivalent and nuanced position. It is certain, for instance—as books like Tom Wolfe’s recent *From Bauhaus to Our House* readily testify—that the critique of high modernism can spring from reactionary and “philistine” impulses (in both the aesthetic and the political sense) and can be belatedly nourished by all the old middle-class resistances which the modern movement met and aroused in its first freshness. Nor does it seem implausible that in certain national situations, most notably in those of the former fascist countries, the antimodernist position is still essentially and unambiguously at one with political reaction, as Habermas has suggested.⁹ If so, this would explain Tafuri’s decision to uncouple a reasoned critique of modernism from the adoption or exposition of any more “positive” aesthetic ideology. In the United States, however, whatever the ultimate wisdom of applying a similar strategy, the cultural pull and attractiveness of the concept of post-modernism clearly complicates the situation in ways that need to be clarified.

It will therefore be useful to retrace our steps for the moment, and however briefly to work through the terms of Tafuri’s critique of modernism as he outlines it for us in *Architecture and Utopia*, where we meet a left-wing version of the “end of ideology” roughly consistent with the periodizations of some new stage of capital that have just been evoked. On this view, ideas as such—ideology in the more formal sense of a whole system of legitimizing beliefs—are no longer significant elements in the social reproduction of late capitalism, something that was obviously not the case in its earlier stages. Thus the great bourgeois revolutionary ideology of “freedom, equality, and fraternity” was supremely important in securing the universal consent of a variety of social classes to the new political and economic order; this ideology was thus also, in Tafuri’s use of the term, a Utopia, or rather, its ideologizing and legitimizing function was concealed behind a universalizing and Utopian rhetoric. In the late nineteenth century—particularly in the French Third Republic (the “Republic of the Professors”)—the rise of positivism, with its militant anticlericalism and its ideal of a lay or secular education, suggests the degree to which official philosophy was still thought to be a crucial terrain of ideological struggle and a supreme weapon for securing the unity of the state; whereas in our own time, until recently, what is generally called New Deal Liberalism (or in Europe, the social democracy of the welfare states) performed an analogous function.

All of this would seem to be in question today. We will want, Adorno says somewhere, to take into account the possibility that in our time the commodity is its own ideology: the practices of consumption and consumerism, on that view, themselves are enough to reproduce and legitimate the system, no matter what “ideology” you happen to be committed to. In that case, not abstract ideas, beliefs, ideologies, or philosophical systems, but rather the

immanent practices of daily life now occupy the functional position of “ideology” in its other larger systemic sense. And if so, this development can clearly serve as one explanation for the waning power of the Utopian ideologies of high modernism as well. Indeed, Tafuri explicitly associates the demiurgic value of architectural planning in the modern masters with the Keynesian ideal of the control of the *future*. In both versions, “Utopia” is the dream of “a ‘rational’ domination of the future, the elimination of the *risk* it brings with it” (*AU*, 52): “Even for Le Corbusier the absolute of form is the complete realization of a constant victory over the uncertainty of the future” (*AU*, 129). It is therefore logical enough that both these ultimate middle-class ideologies or Utopias—Keynesianism *and* high modernism—should disappear together, and that their concrete “critique” should be less a matter of intellectual self-consciousness than simply a working out of history itself.

But “ideology” has a somewhat different focus in Tafuri’s schematic overview of bourgeois architectural thinking from the dissolution of the Baroque to our own time, where these varied aesthetic Utopias are analyzed in terms of something closer to a Hegelian “ruse of reason” or of History itself. Their Utopian form thus proves to be an instrument in the edification of a business system and the new dynamism of capital; whatever content they claimed in themselves, their concrete effects, their more fundamental function, lay in the systematic destruction of the past. Thus the emergence of secular conceptions of the city in the eighteenth century is primarily to be read as a way of clearing away the older culture: “the deliberate abstraction of Enlightenment theories of the city served ... to destroy baroque schemes of city planning and development” (*AU*, 8). In much the same way, the dawn of modernism proper—the moment when ideology is overtly transformed into Utopia, when “ideology had to negate itself as such, break its own crystallized forms and throw itself entirely into the ‘construction of the future’”—this supreme moment of Freud and Nietzsche, of Weber and Simmel, and of the birth of high modernism in all the arts, was in reality for Tafuri a purely destructive operation in which residual ideologies and archaic social forms were systematically dissolved (*AU*, 50). The new Utopianism of high modernism thus unwittingly and against the very spirit of its own revolutionary and Utopian affirmations prepared the terrain for the omnipotence of the fully “rationalized” technocratic plan, for the universal planification of what was to become the total system of multinational capital: “the unmasking of the idols that obstructed the way to a global rationalization of the productive universe and its social dominion became the new historical task of the intellectual” (*AU*, 51). It also became the historic mission of the various cultural avant-gardes themselves, for which, in reality although not according to their own manifestos, “the autonomy of formal construction” has as its deepest practical function “to plan the

disappearance of the subject, to cancel the anguish caused by the pathetic (or ridiculous) resistance of the individual to the structures of domination that close in upon him or her" (*AU*, 73). Whatever avant-garde or architectural aesthetic Utopias thought they were intent on achieving, therefore, in the real world of capital and in their effective practice, those ends are dialectically reversed and serve essentially to reinforce the technocratic total control of the new system of the bureaucratic society of planned consumption.

We may now return to the beginnings of Tafuri's story in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment attempt to think urbanism in some new and more fully rational way generates two irreconcilable alternatives: one path is that of architecture as the "instrument of social equilibrium," and "geometric silence of Durand's formally codified building types," "the uniformity ensured by preconstituted formal systems" (*AU*, 13); the other is that of a "science of sensations" (*AU*, 11), a kind of "excessive symbolism" (*AU*, 13) which we may interpret as the conception of a libidinal resistance within the system, the breakthrough of Desire into the grids of power and control. These two great Utopian antitheses—Saint-Simon versus Fourier, if you like, or Lenin versus Marcuse—are, then, for Tafuri the ideological double-bind of a thinking imprisoned in capitalist relations. They are at once unmasked in Piranesi's contemporaneous nightmarish synthesis of the Camp Marzio and are also, unexpectedly, given a longer lease on life in the New World, where, with the open frontier and in the absence of feudalism, the new urban synthesis of Washington, DC, retains a vitality henceforth forbidden to European efforts.

Interestingly enough, in our present context, these two alternatives also roughly correspond to the analyses of Adorno and Barthes respectively. The first Utopian alternative, that of rationalization, will little by little formulate its program in terms of overcoming the opposition between whole and part, between urban plan and individual architectural monument, between the molar and the molecular, between the "urban organism as a whole" and the "elementary cell" or building blocks of the individual building (Hilberseimer). But it is precisely this "unified field theory" of the macro and the micro, toward which the urbanistic work of a Corbusier strives, which is projected, in Adorno's book, by Schoenberg's twelve-tone system, the ultimate abolition of the gap between counterpoint and harmony, between overall form and the dynamics of the individual musical "parole" or theme. But Schoenberg's extraordinary synthesis is sterile, and in architecture the "unified field theory" destroys the individual work or building as such: "the single building is no longer an 'object'; it is only the place in which the elementary assemblage of single cells assumes physical form; since these cells are elements reproducible ad infinitum, they conceptually embody the prime structure of a production line that excludes the

old concepts of 'place' or 'space'" (*MA*, 105). This Utopian impulse has then ended up rationalizing the object world more extensively and ferociously than anything Ford or Taylor might have done on their own momentum.

Yet the second, or libidinal, strategy is no less "ideological" in its ultimate results: Barthes' intellectual trajectory is complicated, and I will not take the time here to insert him neatly back into this scheme (although I think something like this could be done). Suffice it to observe that, following Benjamin, Tafuri sees this second, libidinal strategy in its emergence in Baudelaire as having unexpected subjective consequences which harmonize with the objective external planification achieved above: "Baudelaire had discovered that the commercialization of the poetic product can be accentuated by the poet's very attempt to free himself from his objective conditions" (*MA*, 92). The new vanguard subjectivity, in other words, ends up training the consumer for life in the industrial city, teaching "the ideology of the correct use of the city" (*MA*, 84), freeing the aesthetic consumer from "objects that were offered to judgment" and substituting "a process to be lived and used as such" (*MA*, 101). This particular strategy now prolongs itself into, and revitalizes itself in, the postmodernist ideologies and aesthetics of the present period, denounced by Tafuri in a memorable passage:

Thus the city is considered in terms of a suprastructure. Indeed art is now called upon to give the city a suprastructural guise. Pop art, op art, analysis of the urban "imageability," and the "prospective aesthetic" converge in this objective. The contradictions of the contemporary city are resolved in multivalent images, and by figuratively exalting that formal complexity they are dissimulated. If read with adequate standards of judgment this formal complexity is nothing other than the explosion of the irremediable dissonances that escape the plan of advanced capital. The recovery of the concept of *art* thus serves this new cover-up role. It is true that whereas industrial design takes a lead position in technological production and conditions its quality in view of an increase in consumption, pop art, reutilizing the residues and castoffs of that production, takes its place in the rear guard. But this is the exact reflection of the twofold request now made to the techniques of visual communication. Art which refuses to take its place in the vanguard of the production cycle, actually demonstrates that the process of consumption tends to the infinite. Indeed, even the rejects, sublimated into useless or nihilist objects which bear a new *value of use*, enter into the production-consumption cycle, if only through the back door.

This art that deliberately places itself in the rear guard is also indicative of the refusal to come to terms with the contradictions of the city and resolve them completely; to transform the city into a totally organized machine without useless squanderings of an archaic character or generalized dysfunction.

In this phase it is necessary to persuade the public that the contradictions, imbalances, and chaos typical of the contemporary city are inevitable. Indeed the

public must be convinced that this chaos contains an unexplored richness, unlimited utilizable possibilities, and qualities of the “game” now made into new fetishes for society. (*MA*, 137, 139)

The power of such negative critiques of ideology (which construe ideology exclusively in terms of “false consciousness”) lies in the assumption that everything that does not effectively disrupt the social reproduction of the system may be considered as part and parcel of the reproduction of that system. The anxieties provoked in almost everyone by such an implacable and absolute position are probably healthy and therapeutic in one way or another. As I have begun to suggest before, however, the real problem in such an analysis lies elsewhere, in the assumption that “social reproduction” in late capitalism takes much the same form as in the earlier period of high modernism, and that what some of us call the “postmoderns” simply replicate the old modernist solutions at lower levels of intensity and originality. Thus Philip Johnson’s “ambiguous eclecticism ends up as mere jugglery” (*MA*, 397); “the work of Louis Kahn and the British architect James Stirling represent two opposite attempts to breathe life into a seemingly moribund art” (*MA*, 400); Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* flattens out the new-critical concepts of ambiguity and contradiction, dehistoricizing them and emptying them of all their tragic (and properly high modernist) tension, with a view toward “justifying personal planning choices rather more equivocal than ambiguous” (*THA*, 213).

Yet there would seem to be a certain inconsistency in the reproach that the newer architects fail to achieve even that tragic tension which was itself considered to be Utopian and ideological in the masters. The other fact of this inconsistency can then be detected in the consonance and profound historical kinship between Tafuri’s analysis of modernism and the onslaughts of the postmodernists, most notably Venturi himself, a critique which goes well beyond the usual themes of the hubris of central planning, the single-function conception of space and the puritanism of the streamlining abhorrence of ornament.¹⁰ Venturi’s analysis, particularly in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), centers specifically on the dialectic (and the contradiction) between the building and the city, between architecture and urbanism, which forms one of the major strands in the historiography of the Italian theorist. The monumental duck of the International Style—like Mallarmé’s *Livre*, like Bayreuth, like *Finnegans Wake*, or like Kandinsky’s mystical painting—proposes itself, as we have already suggested, as a radically different, revolutionary or subversive enclave from which little by little the whole surrounding fabric of fallen social relations is to be regenerated and transformed. Yet in order to stage itself as a *foyer* of this kind, the “duck” must first radically separate itself from that environment in which it stands; it thereby slowly comes to be, by virtue of that very inaugural disjunction,

that constitutive self-definition and isolation, not a building but a *sculpture*. After the fashion of Barthes' concept of connotation, the duck ends up—far from emitting a message with a radically new content—simply designating itself and signifying itself, celebrating its own disconnection as a message in its own right.

Whatever else may be said about the architecture of postmodernism—and however it is to be judged politically and historically—it seems important to recognize that it does not seek to do *that* but rather something very different. It may no longer embody the Utopian ideology of high modernism, may indeed in that sense be vacuous of any Utopian or protopolitical impulse, while still, as the suspicious prefix “post” suggests, remaining in some kind of parasitic relationship with the extinct high modernism it repudiates; yet what must be explored is the possibility that with postmodernism a whole new *aesthetic* is in the process of emerging, an aesthetic significantly distinct from that of the previous era.

The latter—high modernism—can perhaps most effectively be characterized (following Althusser's notion of “expressive causality”) as an aesthetic of identity or of organic unification. To demarcate the postmodernist aesthetic from this one, two familiar themes may serve as points of reference: the dialectic of inside and outside and the question of ornament or decoration. For Le Corbusier, as is well known, “the plan proceeds from within to without” in such a way that the outside of the building expresses its interior; stylistic homogeneity is thus here achieved by unifying these two opposites, or, better still, by assimilating one of them—the exterior—to the other. As for ornament, its “contradiction” with the reality of the wall itself is overcome by the hygienic *exclusion* of the offending term.¹¹ What may now briefly be observed is that Robert Venturi's conception of the “decorated shed” seeks, on the contrary, to reinforce these oppositions and thereby to valorize *contradiction* itself (in a stronger way than his earlier terminology of “complexity” or “ambiguity” might suggest). The philosophical formulation of this very different aesthetic move might be found in the (properly poststructural or postmodernist) idea that “difference relates”: an aesthetic of homogeneity is here displaced, less in the name of a random heterogeneity, a set of inert differences randomly coexisting, than in the service of a new kind of perception for which tension, contradiction, the registering of the incompatible and the clashing, is in and of itself a strong mode of relating two incommensurable elements, poles, or realities. If, as I believe, something like this characterizes the specific internal logic of postmodernism, it must be seen at the very least as constituting an original aesthetic and one quite distinct from the high modernism from which it seeks to disengage itself.

It will no doubt be observed that the symbolic act of high modernism, which seeks to resolve contradiction by stylistic fiat (even though its

resolution may remain merely symbolic), is of a very different order and quality from that of a postmodernism that simply ratifies the contradictions and fragmented chaos all around it by way of an intensified perception of, a mesmerized and well-nigh hallucinogenic fascination with, those very contradictions themselves (contenting itself with eliminating the affective charge of pathos, of the tragic, or of anxiety, which characterized the modern movement). In this sense, no doubt, Marx's early critique of Hegel's theory of religion retains its force for postmodernism: "self-conscious man, insofar as he has recognized and superseded the spiritual world ... then confirms it again in this alienated form and presents it as his true existence; he reestablishes it and claims to *be at home in his other being*."¹²

I must add to this juxtaposition my feeling that *moralizing* judgments on either of these aesthetics are always the most unsatisfactory way to reach some ultimate evaluation of them; my own perspective here is a historicist one, for which any position on postmodernism must begin by being a self-critique and a judgment on *ourselves*, since this is the moment when we find ourselves and, like it or not, this aesthetic is a part of us.

That is, however, not the most important point to be made in the present context. One of the more annoying and scandalous habits of dialectical thought is indeed its identification of opposites, and its tendency to send off back to back seemingly opposed positions on the grounds that both share and are determined and limited by a common problematic, or, to use a more familiar language, represent the two intolerable options of a single double-bind. One is tempted to see something of the sort at work here, in the opposition between Tafuri's cultural pessimism, with all its rigor and ideological asceticism, and the complacent free play of a postmodernism content to juggle the pregiven tokens of contemporary social reality, from which even the nostalgic memory of earlier commitments to radical change has vanished without a trace.

Is it possible that these two positions are in fact the same, and that, as different as they may at first seem, both rest on the conviction that nothing new can be done, no fundamental changes can be made, within the massive being of late capitalism? What is different is that Tafuri's thought lives this situation in a rigorous and self-conscious stoicism, whereas the practitioners and ideologues of postmodernism relax within it, inventing modes of perception in order to "be at home" in the same impossible extremity: changes of valence, the substitution of a plus sign for a minus, on the same equation.

Perhaps, in that case, something is to be said for Lefebvre's call for a politics of space and for the search for a properly Gramscian architecture after all.

Notes

- 1 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia, New York: Harper & Row, 1980, iii; future references to this work are denoted *THA*.
- 2 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 2nd ed., trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980. Future references to this work are denoted *AU*.
- 3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. R. Pascal, New York: International Publishers, 1947.
- 4 Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf, New York: H. N. Abrams, 1979, 342. Future references to this work are denoted *MA*.
- 5 See Daniel Bell, *Postindustrial Society*, New York: Basic Books, 1973; and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York: Basic Books, 1976.
- 6 The most systematic and powerful exposition of this theory is to be found in Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, London: New Left Books, 1978, on which I draw heavily here.
- 7 Karl Marx, *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970, 21.
- 8 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin, 1976, 172.
- 9 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981, 3–18.
- 10 The critique of central planning, as in Peter Blake, as powerful and persuasive as it is, seems to me extremely ambiguous for the following reason: A perfectly correct and well-documented thesis of this kind can *also* be the occasion for the production of, or investment by, a whole ideology or metaphysics, most notably in the binary opposition between intention or plan and tradition or organic growth. This ideology is already present in Christopher Alexander, "A City Is Not a Tree," but its full-blown transformation into a metaphysic can be observed most dramatically in Deleuze and Guattari's "Rhizome" [in *A Thousand Plateaus*]. In this form, of course, it recapitulates the oldest counterrevolutionary position of all, that of Edmund Burke in the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, where Jacobin hubris is countered against the slow and organic growth of social life. On the political level, the left traditions include a number of counterpositions that work against the emergence of such a stark and ideological opposition, especially in concepts of federation and the "withering away of the state" (the Paris Commune), of *autogestion* or workers' self-management, and of council communism. But in the area of architecture or urbanism it is rather hard to see what form such counterpositions might take. Least persuasive, to my mind, is the idea that people will rebuild their own dwellings as they go along (see, for example, P. Boudon, *Lived-In Architecture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972, where the idea that Le Corbusier would have approved of all this, let alone intended it to happen that way, seems most disingenuous indeed). I have been attracted by Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, New York: Oxford, 1978, for a rather different (and highly idiosyncratic) way of cutting

through this ideological double-bind; he *historicizes* the dilemma by transforming “planning” into the unique and historical decision, in 1811, to impose the “grid” on Manhattan. From this single “centralized” decision, then, both the anarchy and the urban classicism (streets and blocks) at once develop.

- 11 A somewhat different example of such homogenizing repression can be found in Venturi’s account of Frank Lloyd Wright’s exclusion of the *diagonal*, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977, 52.
- 12 Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. and trans. T. B. Bottomore, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, 210.

Pleasure: A Political Issue

Something on the order of a subject can be discerned on the recording surface: a strange subject, with no fixed identity, wandering about over the body without organs, yet always remaining peripheral to the desiring-machines, being defined by the share of the product it takes for itself, garnering here, there and everywhere a reward, in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state: “c’est donc moi, c’est donc à moi!” ... The subject is produced as a mere residue alongside the desiring machines: a conjunctive synthesis of consumption in the form of a wonderstruck: “c’était donc ça!” [wow!]

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

At Yekaterina Peshkova’s in Moscow one evening, listening to Isaiah Dobrovein playing Beethoven’s sonatas, Lenin said:

“I don’t know of anything better than the ‘Appassionata.’ I can listen to it every day. Amazing, superhuman music! I always think with a pride that may be naive: look what miracles people can perform!”

And screwing up his eyes and chuckling he added without mirth:

“But I can’t listen to music often, it affects my nerves, it makes me want to say sweet nothings and pat the heads of people who, living in a filthy hell, can create such beauty. But today we mustn’t pat anyone on the head or we’ll get our hand bitten off: we’ve got to hit them on the heads, hit them without mercy, though in the ideal we are against doing any violence to people. Hm-hm—it’s a hellishly difficult office!”

—Maxim Gorki, *Reminiscences of Lenin*

So pleasure, we are told, like happiness or interest, can never be fixed directly by the naked eye—let alone pursued as an end, or conceptualized—but only experienced laterally, or after the fact, as something like the by-product of something else. When taken as an end in its own right, pleasure ceases to be that and imperceptibly transforms itself into something quite different, a passion, one of those great inhuman metaphysical “choices of

being,” celebrated in his own peculiar way by Sade, and crystallized in great archetypal figures such as those of Don Juan or Herr Jakob Schmidt—no longer hedonists at all, these last, but subjects possessed.

I pause here to register another dimension of our topic—namely, history itself, the historicity of our own conjuncture. I am suddenly struck by the fact that no one has mentioned these archetypal (male) quest-figures lately, or any of their accompanying cortege from the portrait gallery of bourgeois individualism, such as the Adventurer. Is it possible that they have disappeared altogether from consumer society, and that their former passions have been reduced or expanded, either into psychopathology—as in the former “gluttony”—or into the badge and sign of microgroup behavior—as in gay promiscuity? At any rate, it becomes clear that the question of the originality of our own situation—consumer capitalism, postindustrial society, or, better still, what Ernest Mandel calls “late capitalism”—will have to be reckoned into any discussion of the relationship between pleasure and politics.

So there is no pleasure in its own right, only pleasurable activities, or something like a fading effect of pleasure after the fact. Yet the word continues to exist, and this suggests yet another qualification in the topic. Will it focus on the experience of the pleasurable, and what that might mean for politics or do to political activity? Or is something else at stake, namely, the *idea* of pleasure, the ideologies of pleasure, the political value of slogans that raise the banner of that abstract idea, about which the familiar question might be debated regarding its subversive power as a revolutionary “demand”? New needs, new demands: at once an influential political ideology from our own immediate past takes shape again in the mind’s eye—the New Left or Marcusean one. According to this, the cultural contradiction of late capitalism is to be grasped in the way in which the consumption system stimulates new needs and new demands, many of them false or spurious to be sure, yet whose dynamic and pressure can no longer be accommodated within the system, whose very mass therefore threatens to blow it sky-high. This politicocultural analysis is part of a larger one, for which, more recently, Rudolf Bahro’s conception of “surplus consciousness” might serve as a motto, signifying the general surplus cultural overproduction of a system that in a new, yet classical, way generates its own Other and negation from within itself. We believed this yesterday: Do we still do so? If not, why not? What has changed all around us since the 1960s to render this particular political strategy—for it was that too—archaic and outmoded?

The reminder at least usefully suggests something else at the same time: that there has been a whole series of Left political or ideological positions on pleasure and hedonism in our recent past, and that we need to confront a few more of those before “deciding” what we really think ourselves. (What we really think may simply be a residue of one of those older ideologies, in

fact). Oddly, the Marcusean position emerges from its own opposite, that other even more influential tradition in Frankfurt School thought which insists on the determinate relationship between commodification and what we may have been tempted to think of as pleasure. How do we distinguish, in other words, between real pleasure and mere diversion—the degradation of free time into that very different commodity called “leisure,” the form of commodity consumption stamped on the most intimate former pleasures from sexuality to reading? This analysis rests on the more general systemic description of a prodigious expansion of late capitalism, which now, in the guise of what has variously been called the “culture industry” or the “consciousness industry,” penetrates one of the two surviving precapitalist enclaves of Nature within the system—namely, the unconscious. (The other one is the precapitalist agriculture and village culture of the Third World.)

The commodification approach raises two questions. The first is an immediately practical-political one: If what people today imagine to be pleasure is nothing but a commodity fix, how to deal with that addiction? Who is to break the news to them that their conscious experience of leisure products—their conscious “pleasure” in consumption—is in reality nothing but false consciousness? Indeed, even further, who has the authority—and in the name of what?—to make such an assessment? What was scandalous about Marcuse’s solution could already be measured by the volume of liberal outrage that greeted *Repressive Tolerance*. From out of the cultural baggage of their own “great tradition,” liberals were horrified to glimpse the outlines of Plato’s Philosopher-King alive and well in consumer society and offering to lay hands on the media and their rights to free speech. For an antiauthoritarian Left, however, which had begun to raise its own questions about the place of truth and the privileges of interpretation, the Marcusean version of Frankfurt School analysis could also at best awaken the proverbial mixed feelings, since in the traditions of the Left the Platonic sage generally bears the rather different name of the revolutionary party.

It is at any rate clear that the problematic of new revolutionary needs and demands and that of the commodification of desires and pleasures are dialectically at one with each other. If the former is an ideological mirage, it is a mirage generated by the correspondingly ideological conception of “degraded” consciousness and of commodified consumption. From a more populist view, indeed, the question might be raised as to whether all that mindless consumption of television images, that self-perpetuating ingestion of the advertising images of things rather than the things themselves, is really all that pleasurable—whether the consumer’s consciousness is really so false and so little reflexive as it dutifully treads the rotating mill of its civic responsibility to consume.

The way to tell the difference between a pleasure and a *fix*, a therapist once said, is that you can do without the former. But this is surely

something the subject is somewhere naggingly aware of, in her heart of hearts. Indeed, the pronoun suggests that the conception of the mindless consumer, the ultimate commodified false consciousness of shopping-center capitalism, is a conception of otherness; that degraded consumption is assigned to women, to what used to be called “Mrs. American Housewife.” The genealogy goes all the way back to the first collective fantasies about suburban life in the 1950s, Philip Wylie’s “Momism,” for instance, and the psychoanalytic terror of a consuming Mom, who not only presided possessively over all the new postwar products but also threatened to eat *you* up as well—a consumption fantasy with teeth in it, according to all the archaic textbooks. As for the exhausted male worker or businessman, according to this stereotype, he has presumably always been more lucid about the worthlessness of the evening images that flicker across his face. But in the raw anti-intellectualism of American capitalism from the outset, was not culture always something worthless and “feminine” in all its forms, from European “high” culture all the way to the substitute gratifications of the pulps and comic books?

What the Frankfurt School theorized in revulsion and historical anxiety as the degradation of culture and the fetishization of the mind has more recently been celebrated, in positive forms, on this side of the Rhine. It is well known that the theorists of a French poststructuralism simply change the valences on the old descriptions of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, so that what used to be denounced as commodification is now offered by Deleuze and Guattari as the consciousness of the ideal schizophrenic, the “true hero of desire.” Behind this peculiar shift lies something more than mere national or generational difference. Both accounts share a secret referent, whose identity they rarely blurt out as such; both aim implicitly to come to terms with the same troubling and preemptory reality. This we can now identify as *American* capitalism, whose historical modifications are, one would think, the determinant of those secondary theoretical ones. From the Manhattan or Hollywood of nascent consumerism and modernization, in which the German refugee intellectuals with some bewilderment retained their central European cultural pride and dialectical self-consciousness, to the “delirious New York” and countercultural California of the 1960s superstate, with its very different gravitational pull over the intellectuals of a diminished Western Europe—much has changed, including pleasure itself and its images and functions.

The most consequent and influential French counterposition on pleasure is, however, associated with another name, that of the late Roland Barthes, about whom some remarks are unavoidably in order. What Barthes was, and what he became, is a complicated and interesting subject, only a little of which can be developed here. But as the trajectory is inscribed in *Le Plaisir du texte* in surcharged fashion, the symbolic meaning of that pamphlet

cannot, I think, really be grasped without something being said about it. The very date of that influential, fragmentary statement—1973—is in retrospect charged with significance. Marking a break dramatized by the emergence of the oil weapon and the onset of a global economic crisis that is still with us (and expressed politically in such different events as the Chilean Coup and in France the “common program” of the Left), the general moment from 1972 to 1974 can be seen as the definitive end of whatever, worldwide, came to be known as the 60s. In the area of culture and theory, this moment was also the occasion for a range of statements and disguised manifestos that all in one way or another repealed that period and its values and urgencies. They called a halt, often in the form of a return to the very moral values the 60s had called into question, as in Lionel Trilling’s very different, yet equally symptomatic *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972). Nothing seems so distant from the moralizing of this last, with its defense of tradition and the canon, and its obligatory great books format, as Barthesian hedonism and Barthes’ own complacent, stubborn commitment to the *instant*, whether of reading or writing, his self-indulgence (here, self-indulgently, transformed into a very *theory* of self-indulgence), his blissful renunciation of the “high seriousness” of the Anglo-American critic’s sense of the moral vocation of criticism itself—“nothing to *say* about the *texte de jouissance*; . . . you can’t talk *about it*, you can’t only talk ‘within’ it, on its own terms, abandoning yourself to a voluptuous plagiarism, hysterically reaffirming *jouissance* in its essential void.”¹

Although it is an attractive alternative to the pieties of Anglo-Saxon cultural elitism—not least because the latter still forms *our* particular institutional horizon—on rereading today, *Le Plaisir du texte* does strike one as oddly defensive. Its polemic targets are no doubt textual puritans rather than the polymorphous and hallucinogenizing partisans of a 60s “authenticity,” against whom Trilling is concerned to draw the line. The more significant feature here is that for both writers, in their very different national situations, these seemingly antithetical adversaries are both fantasized as images and representations of a dominant *Left*—only where for Trilling that *Left* is embodied in the rising tide of the barbarism of a student and black radicalism, for Barthes it takes the form of the *Marxist gendarme*, the more traditional puritanism of the French Communist party and of some orthodox Leninism. In both discussions, then, the ostensible subjects of individual gratification (aesthetic, on the one hand; self-expression or “authenticity,” on the other) prove to be vehicles for some deeper political and ideological position, in which the values of “decorum,” on the one hand, and physical pleasure, on the other, are stimulated and appealed to for confirmation of a repudiation of *Left* politics by two writers whose theoretical methods have had some historical relationship to *Left* philosophical traditions.

Whether the Left has historically been puritanical, or indeed whether there is something in the very essence of revolutionary mentality that somehow forever dooms it to a puritanical stance, are questions central to the present topic but quite impossible to answer empirically. The Lenin story, for instance, shows *his* puritanism to have been tactical: he obviously *liked* Beethoven (on the other hand, that line of inquiry opens up the troubled matter of the refusal of modernism and *its* peculiar pleasures by the orthodox Left). Whoever says pleasure, however, generally means sex, and it is generally around the end of a properly Soviet cultural revolution in the late 1920s (dramatized among other things, in the early 1930s, by the exclusion of Wilhelm Reich and the halt to his experiments with a properly “sexual politics”) that the discussion of Left puritanism turns. Whatever the contributions of a Freudian habit of analysis may be in this area (the deeper unconscious attitudes of Bolshevik leaders themselves, for example), it may not be inappropriate to recall the strategic and tactical dimensions of such turns, which have to do with the very different matter of the key issues and slogans susceptible of mobilizing (or alienating) working-class people. Although this line of discussion does not need to take the condescending framework of some stages theory of consciousness, or to be staged around analysis of the relative backwardness of working-class consciousness on sexual matters—“they’re not ready for women’s or gay liberation or abortion”; “they need further cultural reeducation”—note that precisely those analyses, however condescending, are central to any real discussion of cultural revolution itself, of the programmed habits of subalternity, obedience, and the like, which cultural revolution seeks to dissolve.

But there is a different way of understanding working-class resistance to slogans of a sexual politics (always assuming that such resistance exists “empirically” and is a crucial factor in the construction of political and ideological strategies). That is the class symbolism of such questions. The conception of the primacy of class issues and class consciousness suggests that from a working-class perspective, issues of sexual liberation may be grasped, not on their own terms, but rather as so many class ideologies and as the collective expression of groups (such as middle-class youth) that working-class people identify as the class enemy. This should at least alert us to the possibility that the discussion of pleasure as a phenomenon may not have much to do at all with the rather different discussion of pleasure, sexual liberation, or the Utopian or libidinal body, as a political slogan or value.

It is at least certain that one of the historical merits of Barthes’ booklet was to have legitimized the overt discussion of pleasure as a theme on the Left (along with other somewhat less influential discussions such as Sebastiano Timpanaro’s notion of a “pessimistic hedonism”). Indeed, the interest in such matters is clearly part of a more general feeling which emerged from the 60s that traditional Marxism had failed to address itself to

a whole range of essentially existential issues—death and the meaning of life; the whole realm of the unconscious; religion, the Utopian; the whole area of daily life and its qualities or modes of alienation, and whether a politics of daily life is conceivable; Nature, finally, and the ecological.

I have, however, omitted from this list that political issue in which the most powerful restatement of a Left puritanism for our time has been made; it seems to me frivolous to describe this as an existential issue, although the temptation to do so tells us something about the limits of the existential corrections or completions of Marxism, and about the relationship of existential categories to purely individual experience. The result would seem to be that while feminism may seem an existential issue to *men*, it is a matter of group struggle for women, which is something quite different. At any event, paradoxically, the reintroduction of the “problem” of pleasure on the Left (thematized by Barthes out of a whole French theoretical culture, most notably marked by Lacanian psychoanalysis) now paves the way for an interesting reversal, and for the kind of radical political argument *against* pleasure of which Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” is one of the more influential statements.² Her program—“the destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon”—is based on the theoretical identification of traditional filmic viewing pleasure with the symbolic expression of male power in the “right to look,” a right whose ultimate object becomes the woman’s body, or rather, the woman *as* body. Something of the politics of the article could still, I think, be argued in the older class terms evoked above; the right to look, the defense of sexual liberation, including pornography and the whole culture of the libidinal image as such—these would be slogans attractive to males, but symbolically marked (now in gender, rather than class ways) for women as the practices of the other, of the oppressor, of a form of domination analogous to that of the class enemy. The more theoretical basis for the argument—which rests on the Lacanian account of the constitution of the male subject (in particular the problem of the “mother’s phallus,” the fetish, and so forth)—is menaced by the ahistorical framework of most psychoanalytic approaches, insofar as it may project a perspective in which men’s sexuality will somehow always be formed in this way and always associated with just such scopocratic, fetishizing impulses: Amazonianism or lesbian separatism would then be the only consequent “solution.” For males of good will, meanwhile, the depth-psychological part of the argument may well serve mainly to reinforce that tendency to ideological *examen de conscience*, morbid introspection and *autocritique*, and the guilt trip, which, in an unusual mutation of older religious practices, is so often an attractive way for the isolated Left intellectual to “work out his personal salvation.” (Paradoxically, this last is also the promise of Barthesian hedonism.)

At any rate, if it begins to turn out that the value of “pleasure” as a

political slogan is not merely unattractive to working-class people but also to women, then its ideological effectivity is evidently a rather diminished one. As for Barthes himself, returning to him one last time, the concept of “pleasure”—or more properly of *jouissance*—had a more complicated function, which may be made clearer if we grasp *Le Plaisir du texte* as a return to the issues that had preoccupied him years earlier in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953). The earlier book was still situated within an essentially Sartrean problematic, that of *What Is Literature?* (1947), a problematic to which Barthes gave a very different solution from that of Sartre himself, but which shares the latter’s vision of history as a nightmare of blood guilt. Sartre had shown in his book that the necessary restrictions of all literary languages to the “signals” of local or limited (nonuniversal) groups or publics made all literary practices, in the world as we know it, the symbolic endorsement of the class violence of this or that group against the others. Sartre’s orthodox solution—the endorsement of the proletariat as the last class, as the only possibility for the emergence for the first time in history of a genuinely universal public—is explicitly designated as a Utopian one. Barthes then ingeniously imagined a rather different way of escaping from the “nightmare of history,” namely the projection of a kind of writing from which all group or class signals had been eliminated: white or bleached writing, the practice of a kind of Utopian neutrality, which would enable an escape on this side (*en deçà*) from the collective guilt inherent in the practice of any of the literary signs as such. Ironically, the whitest writing always slowly turned into a literary institution and a practice of literary signs in its own right, over time: Barthes’ contemporaneous example, Camus, no longer looks very neutral to us today, nor do the later practitioners of the then *nouveau roman*.

So it is that in *Le Plaisir du texte*, the operation is staged in a rather different way. It is now through reception rather than production that History may be suspended, and the social function of that fragmentary, punctual *jouissance* which can break through any text will then be more effective to achieve that freedom from all ideologies and all commitment (of the Left as much as of the Right) that the zero degree of literary signs had once seemed to promise. *Atopie* rather than *utopie*: such is the nonplace of Barthes’ *jouissance*, where the dominant ideology of the sentence and of the institution of literature is to be undermined. Unlike the seemingly related *Tel Quel* or Kristevan formulations, however, where such undermining is saluted as a revolutionary act in itself, Barthes is too wisely cynical to wish to describe such moments in more glamorous terms than those of the local resistance of perversion and of the perverse (leitmotifs of his essay) to the contaminations of power. In any case, even the flight from history and politics is a reaction to those realities and a way of registering their omnipresence, and the immense merit of Barthes’ essay is to restore a certain politically symbolic value to the experience of *jouissance*, making it impossible to read the latter

except as a response to a political and historical dilemma, whatever position one chooses (puritanism/hedonism) to take about that response itself.

But one cannot conclude all this without some final evaluation of Barthes himself, so ambiguous a figure. Is it necessary to recall that the early Barthes *was* political, and that he furnished (and books like *Mythologies* continue to furnish) us with critical instruments and weapons of an overtly political capability? What the later Barthes meant, however, can perhaps be formulated as follows (the lesson was really there all along, but became more univocal in the later texts): he taught us to read with our bodies—and often to write with them as well. Whence, if one likes, the unavoidable sense of self-indulgence and corruption that Barthes' work can project when viewed from certain limited angles. The libidinal body, as a field and instrument of perception all at once, cannot but be self-indulgent in that sense. To discipline it, to give it the proper tasks and ask it to repress its other random impulses, is to limit its effectiveness, or, even worse, to damage it irretrievably. Lazy, shot through with fits of boredom or enthusiasm, reading the world and its texts with nausea or with *jouissance*, listening for the fainter vibrations of a sensorium largely numbed by civilization and rationalization, sensitive to the messages of throbs too immediate, too recognizable as pain or pleasure—maybe all this bodily disposition is not to be described as self-indulgence after all. Maybe it requires a discipline and a responsiveness of a rare yet different sort, something like free association (outsmarting the instant defenses of the ego or the rationalizing intellect) or boating, sensing and riding with a minimal current. Maybe indeed the deeper subject is here: not pleasure (against whose comfort and banalities everyone from Barthes to Edmund Burke is united in warning us), but the libidinal body itself, and *its* peculiar politics, which may well move in a realm largely beyond the pleasurable in that narrow, culinary, bourgeois sense.

So gradually the word “materialism” begins to impose itself. I have my own reasons for objecting to the current fashionable Left use of this term as an omnibus slogan. “Materialism” as a term and as a concept is booby-trapped by its functional association with the eighteenth-century bourgeois Enlightenment and with nineteenth-century positivism. Whatever precautions are taken, it always fatally ends up projecting a determinism by matter (that is to say, the individual body or organism in isolation) rather than—as in historical materialism—a determination by the mode of production. It would be better to grasp Marxism and the dialectic as an attempt to overcome not idealism by itself, but that very ideological opposition between idealism and materialism in the first place. The work of both Sartre and Gramsci is there to argue for some position “beyond idealism *and* materialism,” and if one does not like the projected new solution—called “praxis”—then at least it would be desirable to search for something more adequate.

Still, as far as pleasure is concerned, it may readily be admitted that it is materialist: whether or not consciousness (the psychological subject) is always and in all moments of history and modes of production constitutionally and irrecuperably idealistic, the generalization is probably safe *for us*. (At the very least, it renders the ideal of a materialist thinking problematical, professions of materialism being not at all incompatible with idealist habits of mind—quite the contrary!) So the bourgeois monad ceaselessly continues to convert things into the ideas of things, into their images, into their names, until, at a break in the process, suddenly that taboo and unimaginable “outside” breaks the thread for an instant: this fresh, wet air of spring on my face, the sheer metal taste of a musical phrase that is no longer just its own idea but the material vibration and timbre of a physical instrument itself, this “green so delicious it hurts” (Baudelaire), the irreducible mystery of flavor itself, as of roots in the earth, or the flush and comfortable fever of what the great Sartrean description of sexuality calls “in-carnation.” Pleasure is finally the consent of life in the body, the reconciliation—momentary as it may be—with the necessity of physical existence in a physical world. (And then at that point, the materialization of what had formerly been idealistic as well—the materiality of words, once again, and of images; hardest of all, perhaps, of the thinking process itself, of whatever the “mind” is as an activity: the *jouissance* of the great scientific intuitions, perhaps, or of the great “deductions” of the mystery story . . .)

Still, all this remains comfort, and comfortable, in Barthes’ pejorative sense—“house, province, the meal, the lamp, the family in its appropriate place, neither too close nor too far . . . this extraordinary reinforcement of the ego (by fantasy); a padded unconscious” (*PT*, 82). For Barthes, this was still a privatized and Biedermeier middle-class experience, a guilty evasion. Yet we have other class images—Bloch’s celebration of the peasant household, Brecht’s plebeian materialism of the worker’s soup and cigar, and even Marcuse’s “erotization of the work process,” with its reinvention of the old material pleasure of handicraft in an advanced technological age. What can be said of *this* vision of bodily pleasure is not that it is not political, not a Utopian vision of another way of living, but rather that what it solves is my individual relationship with my own body—which is to say with Earth (Heidegger) or with what used to be called Nature—and not that very different relationship between myself or my body and other people—or, in other words, with History, with the political in the stricter sense.

Whence the troublesome unruliness of the sexual question? Is it only that comfortable material question, or is it more irredeemably scandalous—as in sexual “ecstasy” (the strongest translation of the Barthesian *jouissance*), or in that even more somber matter of the will to power in sexual domination? These are harder “pleasures” to domesticate, their political content more easily assimilable to religions, or fascism—yet another “pleasure,” this last!

Therapeutic puritanism thus seems to impose itself again; yet before embracing it, it may be desirable to see what happens if we try to historicize these dilemmas, and the experiences that produced them. Is not, for example, the aesthetics of ecstasy, Barthesian *jouissance*, a properly 60s experience? And if so, would it not be desirable for another moment to explore the historical relations between this new experience—what I will call the “pleasure of the simulacrum”—and its aesthetic objects—henceforth called “postmodernism”—as well as its socially and historically original situation—“consumer society,” media society, multinational or “late” capitalism, the “society of the spectacle”?

Or is the experience so new, and without any historical antecedents or analogies whatsoever? Personally, I have found defamiliarization of Barthes' concepts in *Le Plaisir du texte* of an earlier transitional age, the work of one of the most creative and permanently fascinating of the great class enemies, Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Here already the great Barthesian opposition, where the pleasurable experience of the Beautiful—described as a comfortable and quasi-sexual relaxation of the organism (“that sinking, that melting, that languor, which is the characteristic effect of the beautiful as it regards every sense”³) is set off starkly against the “fearful” experience of the Sublime, which, springing according to Burke from the instinct of self-preservation, causes the body tone to draw together in reaction like a fist, in “exercise or labour; and labour is a surmounting of difficulties, and exertion of the contracting power of the muscles; and as such resembles pain, which consists in tension or contraction, in everything but degree” (*PE*, 135). This last, however, with its train of predictable examples (great buildings or monumental colonnades, darkness, Milton, the Godhead, infinity and also “infinite” ideas including political ones, such as honor, justice, liberty—but not yet, oddly, the inevitable “mountain” of Romantic sensibility) would not at first glance seem terribly compatible with the Barthesian ecstatic—the sudden stab of *jouissance*, the schizophrenic dissolution of the boring old bourgeois ego, *dérive*, the Nietzschean cry, scandal, break, the cleavage of the subject, the swoon, the hysterical affirmation of the ecstatic void—until one begins to note the insistent negativity of these formulations and to recall Barthes' epigraph from Hobbes, in which his own problematic and that of Edmund Burke suddenly and unexpectedly coincide: “The only true passion in my life has been *fear!*”

Fear—the aesthetic reception of fear, its artistic expression, transformation, the enjoyment of the shock and commotion fear brings to the human organism—is, on the Burkean theory of the sublime, the apprehension through a given aesthetic object of what in its awesome magnitude shrinks, threatens, diminishes, rebukes individual human life. How one could *enjoy* such an experience is suggested well enough by the grudging appearance at

the end of Burke's chain of substitutions of the divine itself: "I purposely avoided, when I first considered this subject, to introduce the idea of that great and tremendous Being, as an example in an argument so light as this" (*PE*, 67–68). The machinery of the sacred, indeed, offers one signal method for the transformation of sheer horror (death, anxiety, the meaningless succession of the generations, the fragility and cheapness of life) into libidinal gratification. What if, for this fragile individual human *body* in Burke's scheme of things, we substituted a threatened menace to and dissolution of that other entity (whose construction on the model of the body image is signaled by the so-called mirror stage)—the psychological subject, the *ego*, the personality, the individual identity? Is it possible that the interiorization, the Nietzschean choice, the work of enjoyment, of that second type of fear might well approximate what Barthes designates, in terms that deliberately avoid any suggestion of banal pleurability, *jouissance*?

In that case, the analogy with Burke may have further lessons for us, since Burke's distinction between beauty and the sublime is already on its way to being a structural one: "Immanence versus transcendence" this would have been characterized, in an older philosophical language—beauty being the self-sufficient experience of small-scale objects, the small pleasures of the creation (to develop the religious theme), an experience not dialectically related to that of the sublime but rather simply *different*, distinct from it. (For Burke pleasure and pain are not opposites, but unrelated, self-sufficient experiences in something more like a triad: pleasure, pain, indifference.) The sublime, on the other hand, the pleasures of fear, the aesthetic appropriation of pain, is a rather different matter, a kind of dual or stereoscopic experience, which I would in the present context prefer to call "allegorical." That is, the sublime takes its object as the pretext and the occasion for the intuition through it and beyond it of sheer unfigurable force itself, sheer power, that which stuns the imagination in the most literal sense. (The imagination finds no *figure* for that awesome power in and of itself: even Burke's "idea of God" is a substitution.)

It then becomes a tempting speculation to specify the historical nature of this terrifying force before which the sublime, in a properly Nietzschean affirmation—choose what crushes you!—finds its gratification and its ecstatic surrender. The capital-logicians have recently made the scandalous suggestion that what Hegel called "Absolute Spirit" was simply to be read as the transpersonal, unifying, impersonal, supreme force of emergent Capital itself; one does not dare, without more wide-ranging textual evidence, and under pain of the crassest interpretive dogmatism, affirm anything of the sort for the Burkean intuition (1756). That one can do so for the Barthesian sublime, however, seems to me beyond any question. The immense culture of the simulacrum whose experience, whether we like it or not, constitutes a whole series of daily ecstasies and punctual fits of *jouissance* or schizophrenic

dissolutions—“c’était donc ça! c’est donc moi! c’est donc à moi!”—may appropriately, one would think, be interpreted as so many unconscious points of contact with that equally unfigurable and unimaginable thing, the multinational apparatus, the great suprapersonal system of a late capitalist technology. It is the ecstasy of the machine once again, as in futurism, yet today without any “ideology” of the machine or any nascent representations of the excitements of its first great still physical and perceptible embodiments in the tank or the machine gun (Marinetti) or the factory itself (Diego Rivera, Léger). The idea of the computer subsumes those earlier excitements, but beyond any tangible figure or representation (the physical computer now being little more than a box with its brain wires hanging out).

That there is thus a politics and a historicity of *jouissance* seems clear, as does its fundamental ambiguity as a socially symbolic experience. The point, however, is not to awaken some scarcely dormant Left tendency to moralize such experiences, but rather to draw the lesson of what might be a radically different political use of pleasure as such. I will suggest, then, that the proper political use of pleasure must always be *allegorical* in the sense spelled out above: the thematizing of a particular pleasure as a political issue (to fight, for example, on the terrain of the aesthetics of the city; or for certain forms of sexual liberation; or for access to certain kinds of cultural activities; or for an aesthetic transformation of social relations or a politics of the body) must always involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also at *one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole. Without these simultaneous dimensions, the political demand becomes reduced to yet another local “issue” in the micropolitics of this or that limited group or its particular hobby or specialization, and a slogan that once satisfied, leads no further politically.

This dual, or “allegorical,” focus is indeed what makes for both the uniqueness and the difficulties of Marxism in general as a conception of revolutionary transformation. The dialectic is in itself this dual obligation to invent ways of uniting the here-and-now of the immediate situation with the totalizing logic of the global or Utopian one. So a given economic demand must always be in some sense a figure for a more total revolutionary transformation, unless it is to fall back into economism. So also—to take an example a little more familiar to a public of Left *intellectuals*—a given piece of textual analysis must make a punctual or occasional statement about its object, but must also, at one and the same time, be graspable as a more general contribution to the Marxian problematic. And it must do so, in both instances, without the concrete local occasion turning back into some mere “example” of the “abstract” framework (which it is preferable to call the perspective of totalization). So finally the right to a specific pleasure, to a

specific enjoyment of the potentialities of the material body—if it is not to remain only that, if it is to become genuinely political, if it is to evade the complacencies of hedonism—must always in one way or another also be able to stand as a figure for the transformation of social relations as a whole.

1983

Notes

- 1 Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, Paris: Seuil, 1973, 37–38. Future references to this work are denoted *PT*.
- 2 Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16: 7, Autumn 1976.
- 3 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1968, 123. Future references to this work are denoted *PE*.

Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse

*O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law and statute took at once
The attraction of a country in romance ...*

—William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XI

Not the least unexpected thing about the 1960s was its reinvention of the question of Utopia. “Meagre, stale, forbidding,” the basic texts of the genre had been as desperately unreadable as those of obsolete forms like the masque or the mystery play, their content as irrelevant to consumer society as the draft constitutions and natural or contractual theories of the classics of political science. What had actually become obsolete, however, was a certain type of reader, whom we must imagine just as addicted to the bloodless forecasts of a Cabet or a Bellamy as we ourselves may be to Tolkien, *The Godfather*, *Ragtime*, or detective stories.¹ Such readers become extinct because the level of tolerance for fantasy is suddenly modified by a change in social relations; so in the windless closure of late capitalism it had come to seem increasingly futile and childish for people with a strong and particularly repressive reality-and-performance-principle to imagine tinkering with what exists, let alone its thoroughgoing restructuration.

Meanwhile, even among those with a commitment to social revolution, the classical polemic of Marx and Engels against Utopian socialism, which had long since stigmatized both the word and the thing itself, seemed reconfirmed by books like Charles Reich’s *Greening of America* (1960), whose “critique” of capitalism (Consciousness I) proved on closer inspection to harbor the much more comfortable and reassuring conviction that the essentials of a hallucinogenic future were already latent and stirring, implicit in consumer society itself, and available at the price of one last effort—which, however, turned out merely to be an effort of “consciousness!”

Meanwhile, Reich's minor premise, shared with so many of the post-1848 Utopias, had a much more serious political function, asserting, as it did, that whatever Utopia was and however it might be conceived, it was not to be construed as having anything whatsoever to do with Marxian socialism—which is to say, with any of the existing political movements for social change in the world today.

Still, compared with poor Fourier, with his unanswered ad, the immense commercial success of Charles Reich's bestseller testified to the renewal of a demand for Utopian discourse in the 1960s. It remained for the greatest Utopian thinker of that period to suggest that, given the present-day's unparalleled technological possibilities for the satisfaction of needs,

if critical theory, which remains indebted to Marx, does not wish to stop at merely improving the existing state of affairs, it must accommodate within itself the extreme possibilities for freedom ... the scandal of qualitative difference. Marxism must risk defining freedom in such a way that people become conscious of and recognize it as something that is nowhere already in existence.²

The history of the 1960s testified to the correctness of Marcuse's strategic reassessment of the explosive political force, in that particular social and historical conjuncture, of the Utopian idea and the Utopian impulse, which are therefore not to be denounced out of hand in the name of Marx and Engels's reading of the quite different political conjuncture of the 1840s. That this was not only the opinion of the New Left may be judged by a remarkable observation of Georg Lukács himself on the "unequal rate of development" of contemporary history:

We must essentially compare our situation today with that in which people like Fourier or Sismondi found themselves at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We can only achieve effective action when we become aware that we find ourselves in that situation and when it becomes clear to us that there is a sense in which the development from Fourier to Marx remains, both theoretically and practically, a task for the future.³

If indeed it is so that May 1968, far from being our 1848, was little more than our July Revolution, we must at least allow for the possibility of some revolutionary potential in Utopian works that, like their nineteenth century predecessors, prepare a distant and unimaginable 1848 in a situation that does not even look like a prerevolutionary one.

What is at least certain—however we ultimately decide to evaluate the Utopian impulse itself—is that anti-Utopianism constitutes a far more easily decodable and unambiguous political position: from religious arguments about the sinful hubris of an anthropocentric social order all the way

to the vivid “totalitarian” dystopias of the contemporary counterrevolutionary tradition (Dostoyevsky, Orwell, etc.), Utopia is a transparent synonym for socialism itself, and the enemies of Utopia sooner or later turn out to be the enemies of socialism.

The transition from the 1960s to the 1970s was a passage from spontaneous practice to renewed theoretical reflection, and this is as true in the realm of Utopian discourse as it is elsewhere. It is therefore no surprise that after the reawakening of the Utopian impulse of the previous decade, we should begin to witness the maturation of a whole new generation of literary Utopias, among them the most important Utopian text since the appearance of Skinner’s *Walden Two*, namely Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*.⁴ It may be more paradoxical to suggest that the theoretical fulfillment of this Utopian practice is to be located—alongside the rediscovery and renewed study of the inexhaustible anticipatory “philosophy of the future” of Ernst Bloch—in the area of narrative analysis. Such a term will seem less confining, however, when the multiple intersections of narrative analysis with the various specialized academic disciplines—literary semiotics, ethnomethodology, the anthropological study of myth and the historians’ inquiry into the nature of historiography, even the dawning sense of the “narrative” structure of the experiments of natural science—are understood as blocking out the as yet empty space of a whole philosophy of narrative praxis in which the production of events and of the language that constitutes them promises to provide a more adequate conceptual framework than any of the older purely epistemological systems, as well as the newer communicational ones.

It is at any rate as a fundamental contribution to such a philosophy of narrative, as well as the most extended structural analysis of the Utopian impulse—the gesture itself as well as the genre—yet worked out, that we must read Louis Marin’s *Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces*.⁵ This book, exactly contemporaneous with Le Guin’s novel, and elaborated in the very eye of the hurricane during Marin’s Nanterre seminar in May 1968, prolongs a meditation on the Utopian event itself—“revolutionary *fête* [in which] for a few weeks historical time was suspended, institutions and the Law itself in its totality challenged in and by speech, communication circuits reopened between those who near or far were drawn within it”—until that event, slowly transmuted into a text, at length becomes accessible to narrative analysis (*UJe*, 15/3).

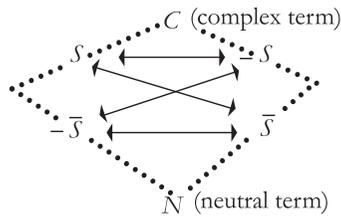
The text thus reconstituted is, however, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, one of those rare works that, whatever its precursors, inaugurates a whole genre, which it names at the same time that it exhausts its whole range of formal possibilities.⁶ It will be most convenient to see Marin’s approach to More in the *Utopiques* as the inversion of Lévi-Strauss’s widely known program for the “structural study of myth.”⁷ For Lévi-Strauss, myth is a narrative process

whereby tribal society seeks an imaginary solution, a resolution by way of figural thinking, to a real social contradiction between infrastructure and superstructure (in the terms of his example of the Oedipus myth, between the tribal infrastructure of the kinship system, and the religious or cosmological systems that seem irreconcilable with it). Lévi-Strauss's relatively unsystematic essay suggests two methodological alternatives for dealing with myth, each of them informed, however, by the conviction that myth is essentially a process of mediation. In the more conventional second half of his presentation, indeed, Lévi-Strauss underscores the role of mediatory characters in the mythic narrative—ambivalent, androgynous, doubly coded figures such as the heavenly twins, the trickster, or the Cinderella/Ash-boy characters, who, by virtue of the reproduction of the antithetical terms of the contradictory situation within themselves, are able to serve as the narrative occasion for the latter's seeming resolution. The originality of the first, lengthy, and largely hypothetical example of the Oedipus legend was to have transcended these more anthropomorphic categories of the individual "character" (even when that character is a mediatory one) and to have proposed a kind of impersonal chemistry of narrative events themselves which decomposes the apparent unity of the individual characters into a bundle of signifying traits just as thoroughly as it dissolves the surface units of the narrative itself. Since *Utopia* is in one sense the very prototype of the narrative without a narrative subject and without characters, the relevance of this second option will be evident.

Marin's work suggests, however, that we may now specify Lévi-Strauss's approach to myth even more sharply, for it becomes clear that the latter understands mediation essentially as an operation bearing on the two "primary" terms of the fundamental contradiction or binary opposition itself, terms we may write for convenience as *S* and $-S$:



But Greimas and others have taught us that this by no means exhausts the logical possibilities and permutational combinations inherent in the simplest binary opposition; not only do the logical contradictories of *S* and $-S$ furnish two more independent terms, but the various axes thus generated (negative and positive deixis, implication, contradictions) suggest that even the most rudimentary "elementary structure of signification" (as Greimas calls his "semiotic rectangle"⁸) is capable of generating a number of quite distinct "mediatory" combinations alongside the one operative in Lévi-Strauss's mythic resolutions, designated in Greimas' system as the complex term *C*:



This logical schema then permits us to identify at a glance the quite different position Marin assigns the Utopian narrative; it is for him the structural inversion of myth in the following sense: whereas the narrative operation of myth undertakes to mediate between the two primary terms of the opposition S and $-S$, and to produce a complex term that would be their resolution, Utopian narrative is constituted by the union of the twin contradictories of the initial opposition, the combination of $-S$ and S , a combination which, virtually a double cancellation of the initial contradiction itself, may be said to effect the latter's *neutralization* and to produce a new term, the so-called neuter or neutral term N .

In what follows we will give a good many examples of such a process, not only in order to give content to what may otherwise seem an extremely abstract proposition about the nature of Utopia, but above all to demonstrate the ways in which this hypothesis about the function of the Utopian operation may serve as a practical method for reading and analyzing the texts themselves. Before going any further, however, it is worth underscoring the polemic implications of such an approach, in particular its relationship to that debate on the nature and ideological function of representation which is one of the key problems in contemporary literary theory.

The problem of representation may be understood in its simplest form in the context of one of the most fundamental of all methodological options or alternatives that face us when we try to confront language or linguistic phenomena. Humboldt already gave striking expression to this option in the Romantic period when he evoked the twin faces of speech as *energeia* and as *ergon*, as creative power and as object created—something like a *natura naturans* and a *natura naturata* (Spinoza) in the linguistic realm itself, and two wholly different modes available to us for constructing any given individual verbal fact or entity. This alternation (which should not too hastily be assimilated to Saussure's opposition of *langue* and *parole*) has then proved to be a powerful instrument of analysis in the form given to it by present-day linguistics as a distinction between *énonciation* and *énoncé*, between the act of enunciation and the completed utterance.⁹

When we now introduce the whole question of representation into this scheme of things, and suggest that a linguistics of the *énoncé* or of the *ergon* tends essentially to grasp linguistic objects as representations, whereas a stress on the creative or process-like character of language tends to undermine

representational categories, we begin to glimpse the ideological coordinates of the problem. It remained for Julia Kristeva to assimilate this linguistic distinction—better still, this distinction between two possible types of linguistics, two whole approaches to the study of verbal and literary phenomena—to the classical Marxian one between the exchange value of commodities in a market system and their use value in pre- or postcapitalist social forms. The primacy of the first of these phenomena imposes a mode of analysis in which categories of exchange are dominant, whether this be Marx’s own study of the operation of surplus value and money in mature capitalism, or a linguistics ideologically related to communication theory and to the perspective of an exchange of completed “speech acts”:

from the viewpoint of social distribution and consumption, and indeed, that of *communication* as well, work is always a value, whether of use or of exchange. In other words: if in communication values are always and inevitably grasped as fragments of crystallized work [from this perspective] work itself can represent nothing above and beyond that value in which it is crystallized.¹⁰

But as Kristeva points out, there is implicit even in the Marxian analysis of capitalism the logical and historical possibility of a very different approach to economic phenomena, an approach which suggests a quite different alternative for the study of language as well:

an other space is conceivable in which work may be apprehended independent of value as such, a space that precedes the manufacture and circulation of commodities in the circuit of communication. There, in that place [*scène*] in which work as yet *represents* no value and is not yet “intentional” [*ne veut encore rien dire*], in other words, as yet has no *meaning*, in that other space it can only be a matter of the relationship between the *body* and systems of energy [*dépense*]. (S, 88)

As is well known, Kristeva goes on to propose a “semiology” based on production to replace, or at least to coexist with, the older “semiology” of communication and representation.

This is not the place to explore the inflection given this program by the work of the *Tel Quel* and the *Screen* groups. Suffice it to say that in this society we can only fitfully break the habit of thinking in terms of finished commodities (reification) along with the habit, so closely related to it, of reading according to categories of representation.¹¹ Whatever the possibilities, therefore, for some genuinely postrepresentational discourse (or “textual productivity,” as Kristeva calls it), we must take a keen interest in those literary or textual phenomena that reveal the tenacity of the hold of the older representational categories on our own thinking and reading; and this is the context in which Marin’s *Utopyques* has a particularly striking lesson for us.

To understand Utopian discourse in terms of neutralization is indeed precisely to propose to grasp it as a process, as *energeia*, enunciation, productivity, and implicitly or explicitly to repudiate that more traditional and conventional view of Utopia as sheer representation, as the “realized” vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal. Nowhere, however, does this seem more instructively difficult to manage than in the reading of a text whose tours and interminable guidebook explanations, whose static descriptions of institutions and geographical and architectural layouts, seem intent on establishing beyond any possibility of doubt or fluctuation the representational coherence and solidity of its object. Marin’s book will then have as one of its fundamental tasks to convince us that it is possible to understand the Utopian text as a determinate type of praxis, rather than as a specific mode of representation, a praxis that has less to do with the construction and perfection of someone’s “idea” of a “perfect society” than it does with a concrete set of mental operations to be performed on a determinate type of raw material given in advance, which is contemporary society itself—or, what amounts to the same thing, on those collective representations of contemporary society that inform our ideologies just as they order our experience of daily life.

Yet the disparity still seems very great between this description of a literary text as a set of mental operations, let alone as neutralization, and our incorrigible tendency to incorporate the Utopian text back into that more conventional category of novels or narratives in which characters travel and do things and stable landscapes, kingdoms, powers, and principalities “exist.” It may thus be useful to point out some of the unexpected advantages presented by this view of narrative as process, in particular a solution to that old (false) dilemma of an “extrinsic” criticism, sometimes erroneously thought of as the problem of the referent, that is, of something “real” somewhere outside the text to which the latter supposedly makes—or better still, fails to make—allusion.

If, however, we try to accustom ourselves to thinking of the narrative text as a process whereby something is done to the Real, whereby operations are performed on it and it is in one way or another “managed” (Norman Holland) or indeed “neutralized,” or under other circumstances articulated and brought to heightened consciousness, then clearly we will have to begin to think of the Real, not as something outside the work, of which the latter stands as an image or makes a representation, but rather as something borne within and vehiculated by the text itself, interiorized in its very fabric in order to provide the stuff and the raw material on which the textual operation must work. In the Utopian narrative, the place of the Real—of that which must first be constituted within the work before it can be dissolved or “neutralized” by the work as process—may be identified by the obsessive references to actuality which seem part of the conventions of such texts, the

perpetual play of topical allusion throughout the narrative which, intersecting the more properly diegetic interest, is constantly on the point of fragmenting the text into an anecdotal and discontinuous series of vertical indicators. Thus, for example, if it is true that Gulliver's capture of the Lilliputian fleet, along with the ensuing diplomatic negotiation, "has reference to the Treaty of Utrecht, which, effected by the Tories, ended the war with France," then Swift's text ought rightly to become an object of scandal for those of us still committed to the ideology of an "intrinsic" criticism (the practitioners of an older kind of literary history would have had no trouble with such a passage—their own difficulties lay elsewhere—while those advancing "beyond" the New Criticism have yet to confront the problem of political allegory head-on, let alone the problem of allegory in general and as such).¹²

Still, there is reason to believe that such footnotes are not the mere cobwebs of topical and long-dead contemporary allusion to be brushed desperately away by the living reader, but rather that some such play of topical allusion is structurally indispensable in the constitution of the Utopian text as such and provides one of the distinctive traits necessary if we are to mark the Utopia off from its generic neighbors in the realm of fantasy or idyll. A regressive pastoral like W. H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1887), which certainly shares Utopian features with the classical works in the genre, is distinguished from the latter primarily by the absence of any of those one-to-one allusions—generally in the form of inversions—that make the reading of Utopias a process of allegorical decipherment. So in Butler's *Erewhon*, machines are evil and illegal precisely because in Victorian England industrial progress is an ideological value presupposed in advance and uncontested; but Hudson's return to some earlier precapitalist form—whether savagery or barbarism—is an appeal to a generalized and global nostalgia, rather than to a precise set of decoding operations. This kind of idyll or fantasy, in other words, is, unlike Utopia, precisely a representation and musters its narrative resources in order to impose the fullness of an image of a different form of life, an image the fascinated contemplation of which includes both anxiety and longing within itself.

The Utopian text does not generally strive for such hallucinatory intensity and on the contrary usually merits our complaints about its transparent literalism and its unimaginative and allegorical aridity. Its topical allusions, while constituting an essential feature of the genre's structure, are nonetheless not without problems of their own, something which will then take us far in understanding the nature of Utopian production. For whereas the text requires this network or texture of topicality within itself to stand as that Real which it will undertake to neutralize, it is at the same time menaced by the wealth of allusions to current events which threatens to dissolve it altogether. All genuine Utopias therefore betray a complicated

apparatus which is designed to “neutralize” the topical allusion at the same time that it produces it and reinforces it. So, for instance, Ursula Le Guin’s novel *The Dispossessed* seems at first glance a fairly straightforward and unproblematical transposition and fictionalization of the contemporary division of our globe today between the so-called Free World (in her book, the wealthy planet Urras) and the socialist bloc (its barren and revolutionary satellite Anarres). This identification is then further confirmed for the reader by Shevek’s introduction to consumers’ goods and consumerism during his visit to Urras. Thus he has to learn the word for “packaging,” since the practice does not exist on his own world (*D*, 176); his trip to the downtown luxury shopping area is a virtual nightmare (*D*, 116–17); at length the very revulsion with commodities becomes a figure for Urras itself: “it is a box ... a package, with all the beautiful wrapping of blue sky and meadows and forests and great cities. And you open the box, and what is inside of it? A black cellar full of dust, and a dead man” (*D*, 305–6). No less transparently are the problems Shevek faces in his homeland—his difficulties in publishing his scientific discoveries, the conformist atmosphere of the scientific institute in which he is attacked for lack of patriotism, the attempt to prevent him from receiving a prize from “propertarian” Urras—read as stereotypical allusions to recently publicized restrictions on intellectuals in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the very conventionality of such allusions and the transparency of the novel’s basic opposition between the reification of consumer capitalism and the political constraints of socialism—far from being a flaw in Le Guin’s novelistic vision—actually define the very specificity of our reading of her Utopian text. To put it a different way, it is only in terms of a more conventionally novelistic and more properly representational standard of literature that her book can be reproached for the poverty of its political concepts and the naiveté of its view of present-day world history; if on the contrary we adopt Marin’s view of the Utopian as process and production, we will see that it is precisely such stereotypicality, and the conventionality of Le Guin’s own liberalism, that constitute the raw material upon which her Utopian praxis must do its work of transformation.

This said, we must observe that such topical reference to the contemporary situation is no sooner posited than it is undermined by a new system of topical allusions incompatible with it. We discover indeed that our initial identification of the twin planets themselves with the “Free World” and the “socialist bloc” becomes difficult to sustain in view of the fact that this division is itself reproduced all over again, but with much greater detail, within the framework of the planet of Urras alone, where, alongside the capitalist state visited by Shevek, there turns out also to be a kind of Soviet Union, represented by the centralized state socialism of Thu, and, in addition to both, an impoverished subcontinent (Benbili) in which the two great

superpowers intervene and which we therefore end up identifying as our own Third World.

Nor does this particular process stop here. Soon even this system of correspondences—once set in place—is discredited by the revelation that within Le Guin's imaginary cosmography, in the intergalactic league (the Ekumen) to which the binary planets of Urras and Anarres themselves belong, the real Earth still exists, a burned-out shell, its ecology blasted by war and pollution and surviving only at the price of a regimentation qualitatively different from that of revolutionary Anarres, whose beneficent scarcity and "clean" austerity it therefore reflects back in the negative image of a baleful and toxic wasteland. At this point, clearly, it can no longer be a question of deciphering the appropriate references so much as of specifying the nature of the apparently contradictory process at work in them.

For this approach to and withdrawal of Le Guin's important novel and from its systems of reference, these identifications with a topical subtext that are also and simultaneously differentiations from it, betray the presence of an essential mechanism at work in all Utopias. In the original one, for instance, topical allusion takes the form of a ghostly double or phantom England that rises up behind the no-place of the island of Utopia in the text, a tangible but intermittent historical nation-state to which the scholarly footnotes, pursuing the chitinous whisper of their commentaries, make insistent reference, reconstructing it as a subtext even as they undermine the last chances of the narrative surface to achieve any "full" representation. But such "explanations"—"the island contains fifty-four city-states" because Tudor England has fifty-three counties, plus the City of London (*U*, 61, n. 7); the Andrus runs sixty miles to the sea because "the Thames 'doth twice ebbe and flowe more than 1x. miles' within twenty-four hours" (*U*, 64, n. 2); the butchers of Utopia work outside the cities because of "'an Acte that noe Butcher slea any maner of beast within the Walles of London'" (*U*, 78, n. 4), etc.—are not to be deplored as the excesses and misguided zeal of some now discredited ideal of literary-historical scholarship, but rather understood as the fitful and symptomatic expression of referential subtext which is an essential and determinate absence or Other within the structure of the Utopian text proper.

In later Utopias, it would seem that this phantom spatial superposition of More's Utopia with the Real England contemporary to him is rearticulated in time and in some sense rationally justified or "motivated" (in the meaning the Russian Formalists gave this word) by the emergence of a wholly new element, namely history itself and the new bourgeois sense of historical change and evolution. Now the Utopian text is not figuratively established across its referential subtext, but rather literally founded and edified on the latter's historical emplacement; and the narrator of *Looking Backward* finds a new and more perfect Boston on the site of the old noisy

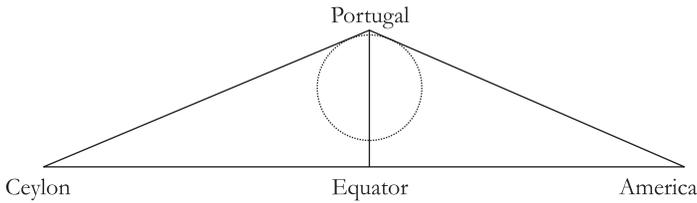
and dirty nineteenth-century industrial metropolis of the same name, whereas the visionary sleeper of *News from Nowhere* is astonished to discover that “England’s green & pleasant fields” have supplanted the endless precincts of the grimy London of old. Only now Bellamy and Morris are under an obligation to provide a historical account of the transition from old to new, or rather from reality to Utopia; and it is here that, with their denunciation of the Utopian socialists’ overemphasis on sheer reason and persuasion and their failure to grasp the antagonisms of political and social dynamics, the founders of Marxism lie in wait for them.¹³

For Marin, however, the historicity of the great nineteenth-century Utopias—which might otherwise, whatever the political oversights of their authors, have seemed to mark some progress in relation to the ahistorical vision of a Thomas More—may equally be taken as a sign of mystification, and as the repression of some more genuine Utopian praxis, insofar as it strains to fill the chinks of the representational surface and to plaster over the basic structure of Utopia as a nonplace and a process of neutralization with the fuller image of some historically realizable and positively imaginable society. This is the sense in which, for Marin, after the elaboration of historical materialism as a rational mode of conceptualizing human society, Utopias as such are no longer possible; in other words, Utopian practice ceases to be an authentic mode of thought. We will return to this assertion shortly.

It is now time to introduce an initial demonstration of the central proposition of *Utopiques*, namely that the basic relationship of the Utopian text to what we have been calling its referential subtext is one of neutralization; or, in terms of More’s *Utopia*, that the island of that name functions as a point-by-point negation or canceling of the historical England itself. When we remember, however, that this latter entity is to be understood as a subtext, itself constructed (and then neutralized) by the Utopian text itself, we will understand that such a proposition is not to be understood in some banal sociological sense. Rather, it is here that Greimas’ semiotic rectangle has a strategic function to play, by allowing us to construe “England” (or rather “Portugal,” its historical ally and surrogate in More’s text and Hythloday’s own country of origin) precisely as a complex term, as the combination or imaginary synthesis of the basic contradictions of More’s time; to this complex term would then reply the echo of the neutral or Utopian one opposite it.

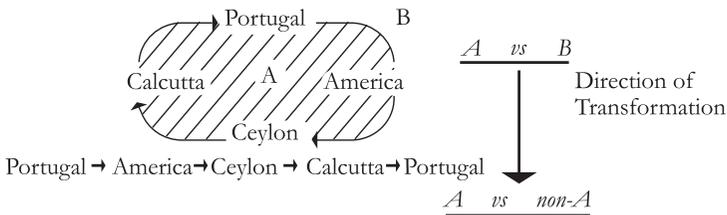
For the moment, however, we can show this only in an external, and as it were geographical, way. As a “place” on the globe, indeed, “England/Portugal” may be said to know two specific contradictories each quite distinct from the other: opposed, on the one hand, by the New World, which is *not* the old one in all the ways enumerable by the Renaissance imagination and elaborated by Renaissance hopes, and, on the other, by Asia, which is

also not Europe, and very particularly not England, but that in the terms of a very different sociohistorical conceptual system. These two contradictory terms constitute something like a positively and a negatively charged opposite of England/Portugal respectively:

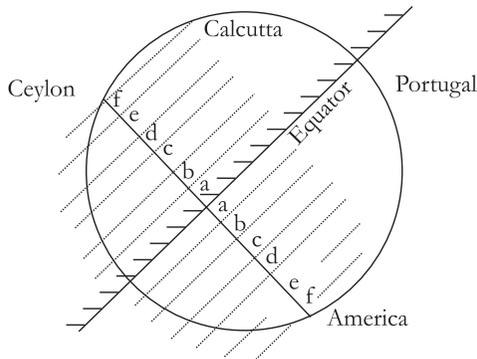


Structure of the toponyms of Raphael's voyages (*UJe*, 71/47)

Hythloday's discovery of Utopia midway between the America in which he has been left during the final voyage of Amerigo Vespucci, and the Ceylon which at length he reaches on the journey home, is therefore the enactment of a complicated figure in which both of these two already negative terms are negated in their turn:



Schematic representation of Raphael's voyage (*UJe*, 66/43)



Multiple diagram of Raphael's travel narrative (*UJe*, 70/46)

This is, however, the very fulfillment of the neuter or neutral term itself:

We know that the blessed isle is located between Ceylon and America, but also that it stands outside the toponymic circuit and outside the trajectory that runs from world to antiworld. It will thus combine—*beyond* all space—circumference and diameter, time and space, history and geography, in a place that will be neither a moment of history nor a sector of the map, a place that will be sheer discontinuity [*écart*]*—*a neuter—where alone the island can become manifest once the travel narrative has demonstrated the perfect equivalence of the two poles equidistant from it: homologous with Portugal and England, belonging to the same hemisphere as Ceylon and America, but distinct from all of these, neither antiworld, nor New World, but simply World other. (*UJe*, 71/47)

II

So far we have been content to grasp neutralization as something like an objective process in its own right, as an “event” that happens to a preexisting structure, or better still, as a restructuration that takes place through the text itself. But of course this is itself only a figure of speech, and looked at more rigorously what we have been calling “neutralization” is a feature, not of the text itself, but rather of our (Marin’s) model of the text. We must now therefore draw back a step and try to understand the mental operations involved in the construction of such a model. To do so, we will temporarily suspend Marin’s reading of More, interpolating a simpler and somewhat more dramatic contemporary illustration drawn from a later chapter of the *Utopiques* that deals with the “Utopia of verticality” of the composer-architect Iannis Xenakis.

The reference is to the so-called cosmic vertical city imagined by Xenakis in 1965 in the form of a two-mile-high self-enclosed building of a type not unfamiliar in other contemporary images of the future (readers of science fiction will, for example, recall Robert Silverberg’s account of daily life inside just such a vertical “utopia” in his novel *The World Inside*).¹⁴

Yet to attempt a narrative exploration of such a future “society” would be to reconfirm the representational status of a verbal construction such as that of Xenakis, or, in other words, to misuse the Utopian text by shifting the focus of our reading from process to the inert end product of some static Utopian image or “vision.” In this sense Marin’s chapter—indeed, as we have already seen, the *Utopiques* in their entirety—is less an analysis of the Utopian text than a set of directions for the latter’s “bon usage,” prescriptions for reading and instructions for the appropriate application of the text to the Real. The example of Xenakis demonstrates that it is less revealing to consider Utopian discourse as a mode of narrative, comparable, say, with novel or epic, than it is to grasp it as an object of meditation, analogous to the riddles or *koan* of the various mystical traditions, or the aporias of

classical philosophy, whose function is to provoke a fruitful bewilderment and to jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualizable consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims, and structural limits. Utopian praxis “is thus, to use Kantian terminology, a schematizing activity of the social and political imagination which has not yet found its concept” (*UJe*, 211/163); yet such preconceptual thinking-in-images—which has its affinities with the dream, with Lévi-Strauss’s mythic thinking, and with Hegel’s notion of the *Vorstellung* as a figural stage of Absolute Spirit—can only be observed in action when we construct a model in which the problems it blindly attempts to solve themselves become visible.

In the text of Xenakis, it is clear that this problem is at one with what may loosely be called the contemporary ideology of the city. But as literary analysts, we cannot commence from this starting point of the text itself, for only the text exists before us and the ideological contradiction it came into being to “solve” remains to be (re)constructed. Our first task as critics, therefore, is to project a contradiction, in other words a set of binary terms, a conceptual opposition, *such that* the literary or figurative text before us may be grasped or reread as the “resolution” (myth) or the “neutralization” (Utopia) of the hypothetical opposition thus posited. Obviously, described in this way, the interpretative process seems to break into two separate steps or stages; and it is clearly artificial and unrealistic to suppose that the interpreter has no idea where he or she is going, no preliminary intuition of the form such a reconstructed contradiction is likely to take. Still, it is useful to stress the process of reconstruction itself, as a corrective to the naive idea that the analyst or the historian can gaze into some “objective” realm of social or national or political ideology and there empirically discover the solution to his or her structural problem. Ideology does exist objectively, but not in the form of a text; like the unconscious, it is therefore not directly accessible to us, but only insofar as we have reconstructed it in what has today come to be called “textual” form, with which the literary text can then be placed in an active relationship of reaction, transformation, reflection, repression, or whatever. To omit the description of this stage—the reconstruction of the referential subtext, the hypothetical textualization of ideology—is to perpetuate the illusion that “sociological” analysis is something one can add on to a structural analysis of texts or not, as one’s own temperament dictates.

In the case of Xenakis, we may feel somewhat freer in our reconstruction of that underlying, absent, social text to which his own Utopian project is a response, insofar as its basic raw materials are very precisely our own anxieties and stereotypes about the contemporary city. Our point of departure for such a reconstruction is the nature of Xenakis’s utopia itself, the fundamental features of that ultimate not-place or nonplace which he invented to neutralize the contradictions of contemporary thinking about the city. We

must therefore try to reorganize the latter in such a way as to articulate our own ideology of the city, our own fuzzy stereotypes and fantasies, into a system of determinate antinomies and aporias into which the thought of Western city-dwellers about their city can be seen to be locked. Xenakis's project, and Utopian discourse in general, will not exactly be understood to be a coming to consciousness of such antinomies and contradictions; it cannot yet be thought to be *critical* in the sense in which the Frankfurt School so described the distanciation and heightened awareness of contradictions afforded by the *negative*. Still, at some lower, still preconceptual level, the "neutralization" of such a contradiction by Utopian discourse may nonetheless be supposed to bring the mind up short before its own ideological limits, in a stunned and puzzled arrest of thought before the double-bind in which it suddenly finds itself paralyzed.

The principal anxiety we have about the city today can probably be best expressed in terms of sheer urban concentration. Here the stereotypes of science fiction usefully document the unconscious agoraphobia of contemporary bourgeois consciousness, with its monitory images of overpopulation and its clogged dystopias of all kinds. From a diachronic perspective, this fear of urban concentration is clearly a twentieth-century variant, a coded or "sedimented" persistence, of that older, ideologically far more transparent, nineteenth-century terror of the mob itself, the revolutionary crowd, which such anxieties thematize in terms of looting and arson, of damage to property (Scott, Manzoni, and Dickens offer rich dramatizations), but whose real credentials for menace are to be sought in the great revolutionary "days" of 1789–94. What interests us in the present context is that this anxiety-fantasy about urban concentration represents a profound structural reversal of the older bourgeois concept of the "freedom of the city" which developed during the revitalization of the city life in the high and late Middle Ages; from this ideological perspective, the city was the place where you went to shake off the constraints of village life, or, even more fundamentally, those of serfdom and the feudal order. Such an ideal of the "free" city is thus at one with the initial strategies of legitimation of capitalism and of the market itself, and the individualism it promises was closely related to the civilizing, beneficent effects of that *douceur du commerce* celebrated by the earlier ideologies of free enterprise.

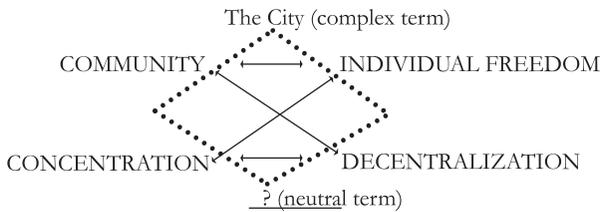
This earlier ideal of the city as a place of individual freedom is therefore at one with the emergence of "individualism" as such and of the bourgeois subject. Its negation by the nightmarish visions of concentration in the mid- and late twentieth century—as in those thronged bodies passing the night indoors on the staircases of the apartment buildings of a privileged elite in the twenty-first-century Manhattan of *Soylent Green*—may be expected to be less a reversal of the ideology of individualism than a confused and figural coming-to-the-surface of the latter's internal contradictions.

For meanwhile, in some other register of our minds and at some other level of collective representation, the city has a quite different ideological function to play and serves as the support for an ideal antithetical to that of bourgeois individualism, lending its content to visions of perfected community or collective existence from the image of the heavenly city of Christian eschatology all the way down to the conception of the commune itself. These two quite different ideologies—that of individualism and that of collectivity—are no doubt in the normal run of things able to coexist without any great discordance in that vast lumber-room of stereotypes and fantasies which Althusser calls the *idéologique*, since ordinarily they serve different functions and are wheeled out for different purposes and on different occasions. But in a crisis their structural incompatibility becomes clear, and the fundamental contradiction about capitalism that they express (the paradox of a collective social form organized on the basis of individual profit) makes its presence felt as a conceptual antinomy. We may dramatize it most simply by observing that the solution most appropriate to assuage the individualistic terror about urban concentration—it is, obviously enough, the idea of *decentralization*—turns out at one and the same time to cancel out that other fundamental vocation of the city to stand as the locus and the figure of collective life.

It should be added that the distinction we have made here between a contradiction in the social infrastructure and the form it takes when it becomes registered in the realm of thought and ideology, or in the superstructure—namely the antinomy—is an essential one, which is crucial if we want on the one hand to refute the reproach of a Hegelian idealism sometimes extended to Marxism itself, and on the other to propose a more adequate solution to the problem raised by the insistence of contemporary historians like Michel Foucault on the fundamental discontinuity of epistemes as they succeed themselves in “history” (*Les Mots et les choses* offered a catalog of such epistemic discontinuities, whereas *The Archeology of Knowledge* proposed their theory). This insistence—and the attack on linear and continuous, “idealistic” historiography that accompanied it—sprang from the conviction that ideology is a closed system, that a given episteme is not something that can be modified or developed or “resolved” or *aufgehoben* according to the conventional stereotype of the Hegelian dialectic; but rather that ideology generates all the logical possibilities and permutations implicit in its structure and is then abandoned, a new episteme gradually taking its place. It is for this reason that we have couched our own description of ideology in terms of antinomies rather than of contradiction, for the latter, subcellared in the deeper structures of mental life, must be understood as betraying its operations through those surface clicks and malfunctionings in which the former consist, and which serve to signal an approach to the conceptual limits or closure of a given ideological system. Such antinomies cannot be

solved or resolved in their own terms; rather, they are violently restructured by an infrastructural praxis, which, rendering the older oppositions meaningless, now lays the preconditions for some new conceptual system or ideology which has no *immediate* link with the preceding one. In this sense, even a social contradiction itself cannot be resolved; it can only be disarticulated and destroyed in its turn and its elements fundamentally reorganized; and this is no doubt the Marxian equivalent for that figure of “death” by which, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel signals that discontinuous jolt from “moment” to “moment” so often wrongly construed as a kind of “synthesis” of the preceding contradiction.

If we now stress its closure as a system, we will find Greimas’ semiotic rectangle a useful instrument for mapping both the content and the logical limits of a given ideology. In particular, it allows us to rearticulate the ideology of the contemporary city in the following manner:



Greimas’ scheme makes it plain that the negation of any single term of this antinomic system locks us only more deeply into the double-bind of the closed system itself. It also suggests the vocation of the as yet vacant neutral term to permit a desperate (and impossible) final attempt to eradicate the contradictions of the system by some extreme gesture. Unexpectedly, this gesture is none other than Xenakis’s mile-high city, which now falls into place as the inconceivable union of the two negative terms of concentration and decentralization. Xenakis’s verticality is thus a tangible squaring of the circle, whose existence as a discourse and a text (but not as an image or a social reality, even a future one) dramatically repudiates the older conceptual dilemma as a flat and two-dimensional effort to think the city on a plane surface, an ideological contradiction locked into the impossible alternatives of point and dispersal. For in some paradoxical, unthinkable fashion, rising out of “centrality” into some other dimension, Xenakis’s cosmic city is *both* decentralized and concentrated all at once, and designates, as a figure, that place in which some future urban conceptuality, the categories of some concrete collective and city life as yet inconceivable to use, remain to be invented.

We cannot leave the example of Xenakis’s Utopia without a final qualification, which deals precisely with this “absence of the concept” in Utopian textualization. Although Marin does not say so (but, for an example of his

own form of ideological analysis, see what has become the best-known chapter of his book, “Disneyland as a Degenerate Utopia”), it is implicit in his historical scheme that in our own time, the critical value of Xenakis’s Utopia—its function as a machine for neutralizing ideological contradictions—does not at all guarantee its immunity from a more properly ideological use as well. Quite the contrary; and Xenakis’s transcendence of an older ideological system proves perfectly consistent with his elaboration of a new one, in the event that we may call the contemporary ideology of communication:

The problems of urban concentration are not going to be solved, writes Xenakis, by the vigorous pencil-slashes of decentralization on a map, nor by advocating the dispersal of the living complexity of Paris into smaller centers which will simply reduplicate its inconveniences, but rather *by energetic attention to the general problem of communication, of exchange and of information in urban agglomerations.* (*UJe*, 328/261; italics mine)

(It is not without interest that the same motif returns in Le Guin’s “solution” to the problem—not merely of urban concentration—but also of the necessary centralization of industrial society as a whole, on Anarres the new decentralized organizational principle being ensured, as in Xenakis’s cosmic city, by computers [*D*, 84–85].) So the Utopian neutralization of the old ideology ends up making a contribution to the production of that new communicational one whose variants may be found in McLuhanism, systems theory, Habermas’s “communications theory of society,” and structuralism, to the degree to which each of these, above and beyond its value as an instrument of analysis, projects a more properly ideological anthropology or theory of “human nature” according to which it is proposed that society be organized.

III

We may now at last return to the full-dress analysis of More’s *Utopia* itself, where Marin’s initial model is enriched with the content of history and complicated by all the discontinuities of a form in the process of emergence. Book One, with its lengthy debate between Hythloday and the courtiers about conditions in England, supplies the raw material and sketches the fundamental social contradictions on which Book Two must perform its work of transformation and neutralization and Utopian production.

The contradiction is already implicit, as Marin notes, in that remarkable and prophetic diagnosis of English social turmoil with which Hythloday justifies his attack on capital punishment, the point being that the diagnosis

is itself heterogeneous and envelops two relatively distinct explanatory systems. On the one hand, Hythloday suggests that the immense increase in the number of beggars—what would today be called a rural lumpenproletariat—is the result of the breakdown of the older feudal manor, that extended social unit which includes, besides the lord and his family, and the peasants and artisans who support them, the feudal retinue which ensures his power. In More's day, indeed, under the twofold pressure of worldwide inflation and royal centralization, the feudal lords find it increasingly expedient to divest themselves of this expensive multitude of soldiers and petty nobility; the latter, suddenly without employment, are thus thrown in the way of highway robbery and brigandage, if not of revolution itself (as in the German peasant wars during the same period). The explicit link More establishes between the social disorder of the countryside and the inner collapse of feudalism as a system has long been appreciated as one of the most original insights of his book.

The trouble is that this initial diagnosis is then reduplicated by a second one of a rather different type: this is the historically and economically crucial indictment by Hythloday of the contemporary movement of enclosure, by which, as is well known, masses of peasants were evicted and transformed into a rural lumpenproletariat of a different type than that rabble of unemployed petty nobles referred to above. But unlike the previous critique, of the inner disintegration of feudalism, this one is a critique of nascent capitalism, and determines a perspective whose distance from the first can most dramatically be measured at the end of Book Two, when Hythloday identifies the vices or transgressions that threaten the Utopian system as such.

For it is too easy to say that the critique of feudal decadence and the denunciation of the various modes of corruption of the market system are both subsumed under a nostalgia for a healthier feudal order which is a coherent class position in its own right. This is not the place to ask whether a genuinely coherent critique of capitalism from a feudal perspective is structurally and ideologically possible. What is certain is that when Hythloday at the end of his description of the island comes to give an account of Utopian virtue, the two quite distinct opposites or vices projected by this ideal value—they are, on the one hand, *pride* and, on the other, *money*—betray their sociological origins in the quite distinct milieux of feudal ostentation and of commerce (thus, Bénichou has shown how later, in the seventeenth century, the humiliation of pride becomes a strategy, if not of the middle classes, then of the *noblesse de robe*, for undermining feudal pretensions).¹⁵ The structural inconsistency between these two ultimate diagnoses may also be expressed as the widening distance between a proto-economic analysis of society and one that remains ethical in the immemorial religious framework of the hierarchy of virtues and vices. What

may at least be allowed is that the distance between two ideologies—between two forms of class consciousness—opens up the empty place in which *Utopia* itself emerges.

For the oscillation between these two explanatory systems itself reflects the conceptual limits of this transitional period (for which no alternative to feudalism or capitalism is yet conceivable) and explains why, in the absence of any genuine historical and social self-consciousness, what has been conceptually unformulizable becomes the raw material and the occasion for a very different type of mental operation, namely what must be called the work of *figuration*.

We are, indeed, at the very heart of Marin's book when we begin to grasp the originality of its demonstration of a "work of figuration" of a different order than that already familiar to us in the analysis of myth or dream. Nor is it without interest to observe the deeper affinities between this aspect of his work and the direction in which some of Althusser's group have evolved, most notably Pierre Macherey, whose pioneering work, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, in particular the chapter on Jules Verne, describes the day in which a given ideology ends up betraying itself and providing its own self-critique through the very process by which it attempts (in vain) to endow itself with literary and narrative figuration.¹⁶

But precisely because we are dealing with figuration, in other words, with preconceptual thinking or discourse, the ideological "contradiction" just outlined cannot be the starting point for our analysis of the text but must rather come as the latter's confirmation and interpretation. Marin's own starting point, indeed, has a unique methodological specific which it owes, less to the more traditional models of figurative analysis already enumerated (Freud, Lévi-Strauss, etc.), than to his work in the field of the semiotics of painting. See in particular his *Etudes sémiologiques*, where his privileged objects of study have been those images already in some way structurally associated with a verbal text, a text either visible within the image itself as motto, script, or emblem, or else implied by it as its historical or mythological source and the classical allusion therewith illustrated.¹⁷ The peculiar duality of registers observable in such visual objects guarantees them against any temptation to collapse one of them back into the other, to see the text as a mere pretext, or, on the other hand, to reduce the visual register to the merely fictional or illustrative. It is indeed Marin's constitution of his object of study as a relationship, or, more precisely, as a structural discontinuity (*écart*), which accounts for the evolution of his more recent work in the direction of those literary texts in which a similar duality of registers can be detected (as in fables or fairy tales which juxtapose the discursive structure of a concluding moral with the quite different narrative texture of the fable proper.)

This duality of the registers of image and text has its equivalent in the structure of More's *Utopia* (and indeed, to varying degrees, in that of all

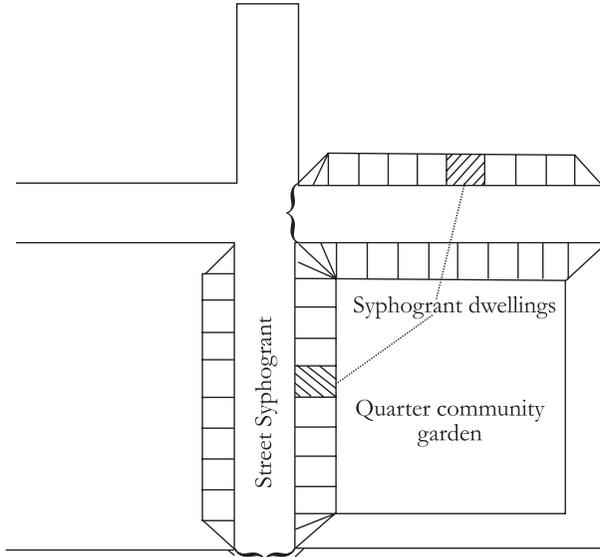
properly Utopian discourse): it is simply the relationship between, and the gap that separates, the *map* of the imaginary nonplace and the verbal *discourse* in which the place and its institutions are recounted. Unlike the painted objects of the *Etudes sémiologiques*, however, the two registers are here both immanent to the verbal text itself, in the sense that the map is not given as an accompanying plate or illustration bound within the volume, but must rather be reconstructed from the data furnished by Hythloday's account. (This immanence is then what accounts for the ingenious reversal of two of the later chapters of *Utopiques*, in which Marin reconstructs the latent verbal text implicit in a series of classical maps of historical places.)

There thus emerges a tension, profoundly characteristic of all Utopian discourse, between description and narrative, between the effort of the text to establish the coordinates of a stable geographical entity, and its other vocation as sheer movement and restless displacement, as itinerary and exploration and, ultimately, as event. This is no doubt a tension present in all travel narrative as such, with which Utopia has an obvious generic kinship. Yet classically the traveler's narrative, which bears within itself the resistant nucleus of some genuinely contingent and irreducible, historical and topographical reality, tends to become a process of transformation whereby the object given, the hitherto unexplored landscape—Nature—is worked over until it can be dissolved and assimilated by the older value systems of some more properly European superego—in other words, Culture.¹⁸ In Utopian discourse, on the contrary, it is the narrative itself that tends to be effaced by and assimilated to sheer description, as anyone knows who has ever nodded over the more garrulous explanatory passages in the classical Utopias. Indeed, one of the basic constraints of the form would seem to be its incompatibility between action or events and that timeless maplike extension of the nonplace itself; in other words, if things can really happen in Utopia, if real disorder, change, transgression, novelty, in brief if history is possible at all, then we begin to doubt whether it can really be a Utopia after all, and its institutions—from a promise of the fulfillment of collective living—slowly begin to turn around into their opposite, a more properly dystopian repression of the unique existential experience of individual lives. (And the same inversion may be detected on the level of the characters, where, to the degree to which the Utopian citizens take on individual specificity, their exemplary value as abstract citizens is undermined and they come to stand as figures for discord, for what is unassimilable to a Utopian harmony that has itself correlatively undergone a dialectical reversal into tyrannical unanimity.)

Nonetheless, even in More the absorption of narrative by description is far from complete; and it is precisely the lack of coincidence between the two that yields the clues and provides the instrument of analysis for Marin's reading. The discrepancy, indeed, between the verbal account of the island

given by Hythloday and its possibilities of geometrical realization leads us to the most important findings of *Utopiques*, which can only be briefly summarized here. These findings bear on the noncongruence of text and geography in the three fundamental areas of Utopian social structure, political organization, and economic activity respectively, the point being that in none of the three can Hythloday's account be perfectly matched, in a one-to-one correspondence, against the "ideal map" projected by the data he supplies. But this is something more than mere sloppiness or imaginative failure: rather, the inconsistencies thereby revealed are systematic, and the structural discrepancies are not random but determinate ones, their absences and lacunae now readable as symptoms of some deeper contradiction within the text.

Foremost among the problems raised by the description of the social structure of Utopia is the difficulty of reconciling the internal organization of its subgroups with the external network of relations they entertain among one another. The attempt to coordinate all of Hythloday's data in this respect results in a kind of imbalance between the division of the quarters into communal groups which share a garden around which they live, and the jurisdiction of their collective dining halls which, drawing their membership from opposite sides of the streets that separate the gardens, thus presumably, but inexplicably, mingle people from two different communities:



Map of a quarter and street (*UJe*, 166/127)

This particular imbalance is then perpetuated in the impossibility of working out the seating plan of the dining halls themselves, where the elders are supposed to be placed at regular intervals between the other citizens in

an attempt to combine a political or administrative structure harmoniously with the more fundamental social and economic structure of the family units. That this is no mere lapse on More's part, but rather to be interrogated as a meaningful symptom, may be demonstrated by the translation of this cartographic dilemma into the more properly conceptual form of an antinomy; for we can read this apparently insignificant failure in technical execution as the ideological difficulty of reconciling a hierarchical social order—based on the authority of the elders within the family group—with the ideal of absolute equality that is supposed to govern the organization of Utopia as a whole.

It will therefore not be surprising to find that this particular contradiction has its equivalent on the level of the overall political organization of the Utopian state itself. The island is a federation of fifty-four city-states, all equal; meanwhile Amaurotum, the capital, and therefore the home of the Prince and the seat of the representative assembly, stands at the exact geometrical center of the island. But how can a federation have a center, and what is still worse, how can a federation of city-states have a Prince? The historical source of this dilemma lies clearly in the centralizing absolutism characteristic of More's own time, in which the monarch increases his own power by proposing himself as an arbiter, "above the parties," of the conflict between the feudal nobility and the city bourgeoisie. On the map, the result is that although the Prince's palace and the national senate are supposed to be located at the exact geographical center of the city of Amaurotum, the city has no center, being divided equally into four identical districts.

These cartographic discrepancies reach their climax on the economic level of the text, which assigns the island's commercial activity to central market for which no place can be found in the strict letter of Hythloday/More's account. When we remember, however, that the lasting historical originality of More's conception of Utopia springs from the radical elimination from it of money as such, it becomes difficult to resist the feeling that this structural absence of the marketplace betrays some deeper contradiction than any of the foregoing and, through the very difficulty it suggests of thinking an exchange system that would somehow be separate from money itself as a medium, designates that fundamental blank or blind spot in the episteme of the time which is the notion of capitalism itself, and which will therefore only gradually be filled in by the developing political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This absence of a theoretical discourse yet to be developed, this figural anticipation, in the form of a blank or gap, of what could not in the very nature of things be conceptualized, is for Marin the very place of origin and inauguratory impulse of the genre itself:

Utopian discourse is the one form of ideological discourse that has anticipatory value of a theoretical kind: but it is a value which can only appear as such *after* theory itself has been elaborated, that is to say, subsequent to the emergence of the material conditions for the new productive forces. (*UJe*, 255/199)

IV

Such, broken, yet carrying within itself that absence of which it is itself but the fragmentary and uneven surcharge, is the Utopian figure. It now remains for us to rewrite the essentials of Marin's account in terms of the latter's production; and as we do so Book One (written later than the description of the island, but evidently generated by the latter as a precondition of its own production) will once more become of interest to us. For above and beyond the incommensurability between the historical reforms proposed by Book One and the Utopian "vision" of Book Two, the reader who has begun to grasp the spirit of Marin's method will find his or her attention jogged and arrested by the insertion, within the discursive texture of the former, of a puzzling and partial Utopian figure—the example of the Polylerites—which seems in some ways an anticipation of the latter on a small and anecdotal scale. Already, then, in the midst of a political debate on historical conditions by "real-life" historical figures, the emergence of a Utopian figure almost in spite of itself would seem a privileged occasion for understanding the process of Utopian production in general.

But to do this, we must go back to the terms of Hythloday's debate with the courtiers, in order to identify that radical insufficiency in it which seems to demand the generation of a Utopian anecdote for its own completion. We have already noted one of the fundamental contradictions of Hythloday's great speech to the Cardinal (the coexistence of the critique of feudalism with a critique of nascent capitalism); it is now worth underscoring a rather different one, which is simply that—already underscored by Marx and Engels in their critique of Utopian socialism—of an overemphasis on the power of rationality in general and a basic and constitutive overestimation of the functional role of rhetoric and persuasion in particular in the historical process whereby an imperfect world may be transformed into a more satisfactory one. Hythloday's appeal to the Cardinal may thus be said to block out the place, and the concrete social and historical situation, of the Renaissance humanists themselves, of whom Max Weber has said that their intellectual program amounted to nothing less than an abortive revolution and the attempt of a certain aristocratic caste to constitute itself as a bureaucratic ruling class on the order of the mandarins in classical China. (Their failure to do so then left the door ajar for the emergence of that more properly middle-class bureaucracy which was to form around the

absolute monarchs of succeeding centuries.) In hindsight, therefore, we may associate the Archimedean space of Renaissance rhetoric and humanist persuasion, that imaginary fulcrum projected outside the two worlds of late feudal England and some Tudor and Stuart bureaucracy to come, as the more general position of the intellectuals as a group, whose tendency to overestimate their own structural role in the political and historical process is familiar to all of us. Yet this permits a somewhat different reading of the qualitative distinction we continue to sense between More's *Utopia* and those only characteristic expressions of the humanist discourse of the period (*The Praise of Folly*, *I Cortegiano*, indeed even *The Prince* itself) with which it otherwise seems to have so much in common: the Utopian figure would in this case be the sign of More's dawning awareness of the inefficacy of those fundamental humanist instruments and categories that are rhetoric and persuasion. *Utopia* would then be generated, not so much by an overestimation of the powers of reason, as rather by an unformulated consciousness of its failure, and by Hythloday's experience (in Book One) of the impotence of discursive argument and disputation in the making or at least the transformation of history.

Such an interpretation finds confirmation in Marin's analysis of the "preliminary Utopia" of the Polylerites. The latter are introduced, it will be remembered, as an answer to the courtier's objections to Hythloday's views on capital punishment, as his "proof" that the replacement of the death sentence by forced labor which he proposes (as a punishment for theft) is in fact practically realizable; this is to say, in our present context, that it is narratable, in other words, capable of narrative figuration. Hence the shifting of gears from a rhetorical presentation to a narrative example.

Nonetheless, there turns out to be a structural inconsistency between the Utopian and anecdotal, narrative "proof" of the example of the Polylerites and that abstract policy whose wisdom and/or practicality it was supposed to document. The Utopian community of the Polylerites, "altogether satisfied with the products of their own land," living "a life more comfortable than splendid and more happy than renowned or famous" (*U*, 31), is in one sense, of course, little more than a pretext for illustrating the effects of the policy Hythloday proposes and for giving a picture of what the convicts themselves would look like, "dressed in clothes of the same color, their hair ... not shaved but cropped a little above the ears, from one of which the top is cut off" (*U*, 32). The real problem is that by Hythloday's own account of the matter there ought not to have been any thieves in this happy land to begin with, so that the very possibility of a just (that is to say, a Utopian) punishment is necessarily at one with the disappearance of the crime it was designed for. We here glimpse a kind of totalizing logic in the imagination of Utopia, a logic which, gathering its own momentum, undermines and discredits all the partial and purely reformist "insights" it was supposed to

generate on its passage through; thus even the use of Utopian materials as illustrations or examples for the reforming argumentation of humanist rhetoric involves a contradiction and drives the text inexorably on into its own paradoxical realization as a full-dress Utopia.

The process may be observed even more strikingly in another feature of the preliminary Utopia of the Polylerites, insofar as this narrative material, as anecdotal and illustrative as it may be, nonetheless presupposes a certain number of preconditions before it can achieve narrative representability or figuration. Chief among these, in the example of the kingdom of the Polylerites, is the textual obligation to reconcile their existence *within* the historical world contemporary with Tudor society (which can alone make them available as a pedagogical or political model for the latter) with that necessary disjunction from the imperfection of existing historical space and historical societies without which the Utopian purity of their customs must remain inconceivable. More squares this circle, as Marin points out, with a trick, which is, however, extremely suggestive in our present context: the Polylerite state is said to be a protectorate of the Persian Empire and thus doubly isolated from the historical world, first by the chain of mountains that surrounds it, but then also, and far more significant, by this permission to exist granted to it by a historical society that undertakes to leave it alone. Shades of Huxley's Pala, its hallucinogenic *bonheur* precariously sheltered from the imminent menace of the Sears-Roebuck catalog! But where Huxley's imagination, having produced his Utopia, must then resign itself to the implacable narrative and historical logic whereby the latter is then once more effaced and reabsorbed into the violence and stupidity of the outside real world itself, More's—generated by an inverse logic inherent even in this tiny Utopian fragment—evolves in the opposite direction of the production of a Utopian text ever less historically dependent, and guaranteed by a set of Utopian boundaries ever more absolute, by a disjunction ever more fundamental and preemptory.

V

This new boundary is, as is well known, the great trench that King Utopus causes to be dug to sunder from the mainland that promontory thereby transformed into the island of Utopia; and it is also the empty atmosphere through which a few ancient spaceships ferry the Odonian settlers to their barren planet, their Utopia of scarcity.¹⁹ The operation is, of course, not only that of disjunction but one of exclusion as well: indeed, the other basic feature of Utopian economics (not touched on above) provides for the location of many of the unpleasant tasks associated with market and commercial activity—such as the slaughter of animals—outside the city's walls. To this

still local mode of exclusion within Utopia corresponds a more global one that governs its relations with the outside world in general: not only is money itself excluded—and then used exclusively in foreign trade and for corrupting enemy governments and the like—but violence itself—embodied by mainland mercenaries hired to fight the Utopians' wars for them—is ejected and then reestablished outside the charmed circle that confirms the Utopian commonwealth. Violence and money—was this not the very alternation we found at work in More's diagnosis of Tudor England, as well as in his ultimate formulation of the twin vices rebuked by Utopian virtue?—the trampling arrogance of the feudal retainers and mercenaries, on the one hand, the silent and invisible solvent of the market system, on the other, as it corrodes the older social forms—twin evils now externally negated by geographical fiat, just as their inner principles have been structurally neutralized by the order of Utopian discourse itself.

This act of disjunction/exclusion that founds Utopia as a genre is also the source of everything problematical about it, and about the position of the "neuter" in general, both within and without the system, an observation post which is, however, unlike the ideologies of science itself and the *sujet supposé savior*, without any real term or position of its own (on the philosophical status of the neuter, see Marin's opening chapter, "Du neutre pluriel et de l'utopie"). In a reflection on Utopian reading that echoes some of the basic hypotheses of the Russian Formalists, Marin writes: "We first ask the question: 'What does this story narrate? What is the object described by this description?' But no sooner have we done so than this initial question is converted into a different one: 'How does the story narrate this object? How can its description go about describing it?' And we end up with the realization that the way in which the story is told is the story itself, that the narrative never in reality narrates anything other than its own narrative procedures [*la manière dont elle s'y prend pour raconter*], these being indeed its truest subject matter" (*UJe*, 151/114–15). From this point of view, then, the Utopian narrative might be described as one that having come into being by a radical act of disjunction, must then summon up all its energies into a "motivation" of that initial disjunction, into an elaborate, endless, impossible demonstration that such unimaginable separation from the inextricable totality of Being of that Real world in which history and indeed the reader exist was in fact "imaginable" in the first place. The ultimate subject matter of Utopian discourse would then turn out to be its own conditions of possibility as discourse. Yet such desperate formalism, and the spectacle of a genre lifting itself up into being by its own bootstraps, is perhaps only the obverse and the corollary of its most genuine chance for authenticity; for it would follow, in that case, that Utopia's deepest subject, and the source of all that is most vibrantly political about it, is precisely our inability to conceive it, our incapacity to produce it as a vision, our failure to

project the Other of what is, a failure that, as with fireworks dissolving back into the night sky, must once again leave us alone with *this* history. This is surely the ultimate sense in which “Utopian discourse accompanies ideological discourse as its converse and designates the still empty place of a scientific theory of society” (*UJe*, 253/198).

1977

Notes

- 1 “From 1886, the year of the Haymarket Riots, until 1896, the year of the restoration of conservative hegemony ... over one hundred works of Utopian fiction appeared.” Jean Pfaelzer, “American Utopian Fiction, 1888–1896: The Political Origins of Form,” *The Minnesota Review* 6, Spring 1976, special issue entitled “Marxism and Utopia,” 114.
- 2 Herbert Marcuse, “The End of Utopia,” *Five Lectures*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, 68–69.
- 3 A. H. Holz, L. Köfler, and W. Abendroth, *Gespräche mit Georg Lukács*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1967, 93.
- 4 Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, New York: Avon, 1974. Future references to this work are denoted *D*.
- 5 Louis Marin, *Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces*, Paris: Minuit, 1973. This work is now available in English as *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1984. Quotations are my translations of the French original. Future references to this work are denoted *UJe* and are cited with page references for the French original and the 1984 English translation respectively.
- 6 All page references herein are to Thomas More, *Complete Works of Thomas More*, vol. 4, ed. Edward J. Surtz and J. H. Hexter, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964. Future references to this work are denoted *U*.
- 7 See the chapter “Structural Study of Myth” in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1963, 206–31.
- 8 See A. J. Greimas and François Rastier, “The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints,” *Yale French Studies* 41, 1968, special issue on “Game, Play, and Literature,” 86–105; and also Frédéric Nef, ed., *Structures élémentaires de la signification*, Brussels: Complexe, 1976.
- 9 The Austin-Searle concept of a “speech act” would appear to belong in the category of the *énoncé*, an already completed and successful transmission of meaning; the confusion this concept sometimes gives rise to is probably attributable to the ambiguity of the term “act,” which has led people to try to assimilate it to the opposite category, of praxis and production, of the emergence of meaning. See Stanley Fish, “How to Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism,” *Modern Language Notes* 91: 5, October 1976, 98–125.
- 10 Julia Kristeva, “La Sémiologie: Science critique et/ou critique de la science,” *Théorie d’ensemble*, Paris: Seuil, 1968, 88. Future references to this work are denoted *S*.

- 11 See Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, 83–222; and for a theory of reification in consumer society, see Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, Geneva: Champ Livre, 1967.
- 12 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Robert A. Greenberg, New York: W.W. Norton, 1970, 36, n. 1.
- 13 It may be conjectured that, after some interrogation, they will allow Morris to pass by. For an important reconsideration of the relationship of Morris (and beyond him of the Romantic tradition) to radical and revolutionary thought, see E. P. Thompson, "Romanticism, Utopianism, and Moralism: The Case of William Morris," *New Left Review* 99, September–October 1976, 83–111 (reprinted as the "Postscript" to E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, New York: Pantheon, 1977).
- 14 Xenakis's description of the cosmic vertical city is published in *Urbanisme: utopies et réalités*, ed. Françoise Choay, Paris: Seuil, 1965, 335–342.
- 15 Paul Bénichou, "La Démolition du héros," *Les Morales du grand siècle*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, 97–111.
- 16 Pierre Macherey, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, Paris: Maspéro, 1966.
- 17 Louis Marin, *Études sémiologiques: Écritures, peintures*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971.
- 18 For a demonstration of this process, see the chapter on the travel narrative of Jean de Léry in Michel de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'histoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- 19 For more on the relationship between Utopia and disjunction, see Fredric Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of Utopian Narrative," *Science-Fiction Studies* 7 (2.3), November 1975, 221–230.

Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism

There is a novel by Iris Murdoch in which one of the characters—an elderly philosophy professor—reminds us of Plato’s conclusions, in the *Phaedrus*, on the use and misuse of language. “Words,” Socrates is there supposed in essence to have said, “words can’t be moved from place to place and retain their meaning. Truth is communicated from a particular speaker to a particular listener.”¹

It is an odd remark for a novelist to have one of her characters make. For, of course, if it is true, there could never be such a thing as a novel in the first place. Literature is presumably the preeminent example of words that *can* be moved from place to place without losing their meaning. What else can possibly be meant by the idea of the autonomy of the work of art—one of the great terroristic fetishes of present-day American literary criticism—if it be not this essential *portability* of all literary language? So what we want to ask ourselves first and foremost is not whether the work of art is or is not autonomous, but rather, how it *gets to be* autonomous; how language—in context, in situation—worldly language—gradually manages to separate itself out, to organize itself into relatively self-sufficient bodies of words which can then be grasped by groups and individuals widely divided from one another in space and in time, and by social class or by culture.

Now, although I do not intend here to attempt an answer to the aesthetic and philosophical problem I have just raised—that of the autonomy of the work of art—I think it may be instructive, as a way of leading into my own subject, to tick off a few of the possible solutions to this problem, by way of seeing whether they do not all lead back—however deviously and indirectly—to the social and historical situations that form the absolute horizon of our individual existences.

For it is clear that if you begin by interrogating the origins of a given form, if you take as your object of study, in other words, not the present-day autonomy of a given form or genre, but rather its *autonomization*, you will always end up observing the emergence of such forms from social life in

general and everyday language in particular; and this is so whether, with Fischer and Lukács,² on the one hand, or with the Cambridge School, on the other, you seek the moment when artistic activity differentiates itself from the unspecialized ritualistic world of primitive social life; or whether, with a writer like André Jolles, in his *Simple Forms*, you seek the key to some specific genre in a determinate speech act within a determinate social situation—thus, for instance, you might seek to understand how the maxim or epigram separated itself out of the conversational life of a certain type of salon society. In both of these ways of studying autonomization, the worldliness of form is of necessity reaffirmed.

But it may be objected that the forms or genres are only initially a part of the practical world of everyday social life: once differentiated from it, they lose all traces of their origins and become in fact quite independent and autonomous linguistic products in their own right. Yet this is to forget, it seems to me, that genre is itself a social institution, something like a social contract in which we agree to respect certain rules about the appropriate use of the piece of language in question. Far from proving the autonomy of the work of art, therefore, the very existence of the generic convention explains how an illusion of autonomy could come into being, for the generic situation formalizes and thus absorbs into the formal structure worldly elements that would otherwise be passed on in the work of art itself, as content.

Even here, however, I imagine that a final position is possible, one which, while admitting the social nature of the generic situations, declares that the old-fashioned genres have ceased in our time to exist and that we no longer consume a tragedy, a comedy, a satire, but rather literature in general in the form of each work, the Book of the world, the text as an impersonal process. The answer here would be, I think, that at that point all the generic situations have been telescoped into one, that of the consumption of Literature itself, which then becomes the hobby of a small group—I won't really call us an elite—centered in the universities and in a few major cultural centers.

What I really want to stress, however, is the way in which our initial question seems to have come full circle. The idea of the autonomy of the work of art—which at first seemed a proud boast and a value to be defended—now begins to look a little shameful, like a symptom into whose pathology one would want to inquire more closely. At this point, then, we are tempted to ask, not whether literary works are autonomous, nor even how art manages to lift itself above its immediate social situation and to free itself from its social context, but rather what kind of society it can be in which works of art have become autonomous to this degree, in which the older social and cultic functions of literature have become so unfamiliar as to have made us forgetful (and this in the strong, Heideggerian sense of the term) of the power and influence that a socially living art can exercise.

A question like this evidently demands that we are able, in some way, to get outside of ourselves and of our own local tastes and literary values, and to see all that with something like a Brechtian estrangement-effect, as though they were the values and the institutions of an utterly alien culture. Were we able to do so, I suggest that we would suddenly become aware of the degree to which a coherent and quite systematic ideology—I will call it the ideology of modernism—imposes its conceptual limitations on our aesthetic thinking and our taste and judgments, and in its own way projects an utterly distorted model of literary history—which is evidently one of the privileged experiences through which we as scholars at least have access to History itself.

When one is the prisoner of such an ideology—or *Weltanschauung*, if you prefer—or paradigm or episteme—how could one ever become aware of it in the first place, let alone patiently undo—or deconstruct—its complicated machinery, through which hitherto we have alone learned to see reality?

I suppose that the first step in doing so is to take an inventory of the things excluded from this ideology, and to make ourselves more acutely aware of the kinds of literary works explicitly rejected from the machine (and which may in many cases not even be classified as Literature at all) such as mass or media culture, lower-class or working-class culture, but also those few surviving remnants of genuine popular or peasant culture from the precapitalist period, and in particular of course the oral storytelling of tribal or primitive societies. Yet to say so is not necessarily to endorse the new-worlds-to-conquer imperialism that has been the spirit of so much of recent Western thought in the cultural realm, for it is not so much a question now of feeling satisfaction at the infinite elasticity and receptivity of our own cultural outlook, but rather of locating the ultimate structural limits of that outlook and coming to terms with its negation, with what it cannot absorb without losing its own identity and wholly transforming itself. For we all know that capitalism is the first genuinely global culture and has never renounced its mission to assimilate everything alien into itself—whether that be the African masks of the time of Picasso, or the little red books of Mao Tse-tung on sale in your corner drugstore.

No, what I have in mind is a more difficult process than that, one that can be completed successfully only by a painful realization of the ethnocentrism in which we are all, in one way or another, caught. And to put it in its most exaggerated and outrageous form, I will suggest that our first task is not to persuade ourselves of the validity for us of these alien or primitive art forms, but rather to attempt to measure the whole extent of our boredom with them and our almost visceral refusal of what can only be (to our own jaded tastes) the uninventive simplicity and repetition, the liturgical slowness and predictability, or else the senseless and equally monotonous

episodic meandering, of an oral tradition that has neither verbal density and opacity, nor psychological subtleties and violence to offer us. Not interest or fascination, therefore, but rather that sense of dreariness with which we come to the end of our own world and observe with a certain self-protective lassitude that there is nothing for us on the other side of the boundary—this is the unpleasant condition in which, I suggest, we come to the realization of the Other which is at the same time a dawning knowledge of ourselves as well.

Now I want to borrow a concept from another discipline in order to explain why this should be so, and, perhaps, indeed, to suggest what might be done about it. This is the concept of repression, which, like so much else in Freud's language, is drawn from the political realm, to which, in the medieval languages, its original purely descriptive sense had already been applied. Yet the notion of repression is by no means so dramatic as it might at first appear, for in psychoanalytic theory, whatever its origins, and whatever the final effect of repression on the personality, its symptoms and its mechanisms are quite the opposite of violence, and are like nothing quite so much as looking away, forgetting, ignoring, losing interest. Repression is reflexive, that is, it aims not only at removing a particular object from consciousness, but also and above all, at doing away with the traces of that removal as well, at repressing the very memory of the intent to repress. This is the sense in which the boredom I evoked a moment ago may serve as a powerful hermeneutic instrument: it marks the spot where something painful is buried; it invites us to reawaken all the anguished hesitation, the struggle of the subject to avert his or her eyes from the thought with which brutal arms insist on confronting him.

Now, of course, I will make only metaphoric use of this concept, for it cannot be any part of my intention here to assess the possibility of some consequent Freud-Marxism or to come to terms with the relationship of Freud's own object of study, namely sexuality, to the cultural phenomena that concern us. I would only observe that Georg Lukács's classic analysis of ideology in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) is very consistent with the description of repression we have just given. Lukács there draws the consequences from his idea that the fundamental category of Marxism is that of Totality, or, in other words, that the fundamental strength of Marxist thinking is its ability—indeed its determination—to make all the connections and to put back together all those separate fields—economics, say, and literature—that middle-class thought had been so intent on keeping apart. It follows, then, that bourgeois ideology, or, in our present terms, the middle-class method of repressing reality, is not so much an affair of distortion and of false consciousness in the sense of outright cynicism or lies (although, obviously there is also enough of that in our discipline to satisfy the most demanding observer), but rather, primarily and constitutively, of

leaving out, of strategic omissions, lapses, a kind of careful preliminary preparation of the raw material such that certain questions will never arise in the first place.

This, then, is the sense in which an exploration of repression or of ideological bias in literary criticism demands an attention to the outer and constitutive limits of the discipline just as much as to the positive acts committed on a daily basis in its name and within its confines. I cannot, however, resist an appeal to a very different kind of authority than that of Lukács, and since I have already pronounced the word, I will agree that this problem is on the whole coterminous with what relatively right-wing and theological current in both France and Germany today have decided once again to call hermeneutics, that is, the whole science of interpretation, the problematics of the encounter with the alien text—whether from the distant past or from other cultures. I will only point out that my own appeal to boredom is not essentially different from that of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Heidegger's principal disciple and the central figure in German hermeneutics, to what he quite deliberately and provocatively calls prejudice, *Vorurteile*, and what we might very quickly describe as the class habits and ideological thought-modes inherent in our own concrete social and historical situation.³ To say that we understand what is other than ourselves through such *Vorurteile*, or situational prejudice, is therefore to reaffirm the dual character of all understanding and to remind ourselves that it can never take place in the void, “objectively” or out of situation, that all contact with otherness is also at one and the same time of necessity a return upon ourselves and our own particular culture and class affiliation that cannot but implicitly or explicitly call the latter into question.

Now let us try to see what this would mean in a practical sense, as a way of assessing the organization of literature as a field of study. I have suggested elsewhere that our habit of studying individual writers one by one, in a kind of respectful stylistic isolation, was a very useful strategy in preventing genuinely social and historical problems from intruding into literary study.⁴ The position I want to defend here is not unlike this one, but for whole periods rather than individual writers. I suggest that the ghettoization of primitive storytelling is an excellent example of this, but the ambiguity of the word “myth,” as loosely brandished in our discipline today, makes primitive storytelling a fairly complicated example to use. Our own myth school—or rather, what it might be clearer to call archetypal criticism—obviously has in mind a very different object of study, and a very different kind of textual satisfaction, than that afforded by the primitive storytellers of, say, the Bororo Encyclopedia. Indeed, whatever the ultimate usefulness of the intellectual brilliance invested in Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*, those four volumes will at least have had the effect of giving us a feeling for those genuinely episodic, molecular strings of events in which the Jungian hero,

wearing all his archetypal masks, must inevitably find himself structurally ill at ease.

So we set aside the problem of myth for one much closer to home, which indeed involves that literature most explicitly repudiated by the practice and the values of the ideology of modernism: I refer to realism itself. And perhaps my point about boredom may now make a little more sense to you, when you think, on the one hand, of the inevitable tediousness for us today, programmed by the rapid gearshifts of television, of the old endless three-decker novels; and when, on the other hand, you heave a sigh at the thought of yet another rehearsal of the tiresome polemics waged in the name of realism, to accept the terms of which is perhaps already to find yourself compromised in advance.

Now obviously I share that feeling too to some degree, and am not interested here in making some puritanical attack on modernism in the name of the older realistic values; I simply want to underscore the limits of the ideology of modernism in accounting for the great realistic works, and to suggest that to prove Dickens was really a symbolist, Flaubert the first modernist, Balzac a myth-maker, and George Eliot some Victorian version of Henry James if not even of Dostoyevsky, is an intellectually dishonest operation that skirts all the real issues.

Modern literary theory has in fact given us what are essentially two irreconcilable accounts of realism. On the one hand, there are the classical apologias for this narrative mode, most dramatically associated with the position of Georg Lukács, but of which Erich Auerbach provides a less controversial and perhaps more patient documentation. For this position, the realistic mode—like the sonata form in music, or the conquest of perspective in painting—is one of the most complex and vital realizations of Western culture, to which it is indeed, like those other two artistic phenomena I mentioned, well-nigh unique. Any reader of Auerbach's *Mimesis* will have retained a vivid picture of the way in which realism slowly takes shape over many centuries by a progressive enlargement and refinement of literary techniques—from the unlimbering of epic sentence structure and the development of narrative perspective to the great plots of the nineteenth-century novels—an expansion of the literary and linguistic recording apparatus in such a way as to make ever larger areas of social and individual reality accessible to us. Here realism is shown to have epistemological truth, as a privileged mode of knowing the world we live in and the lives we lead in it; and for a position of this kind, of course, the modern dissatisfaction or boredom with realism cannot be expected to be taken very seriously.

Yet when we turn to that dissatisfaction itself and to the repudiation of realism in the name of modernism and in the interests of the latter's own developing apologia, we may well find that this other position is by no means dismissed as easily as all that. For the ideologues of modernism do

not indeed seek to refute the Lukács-Auerbach defense of the realistic mode in its own terms, which are primarily aesthetic and cognitive; rather they sense its weak link to be preaesthetic, part and parcel of its basic philosophical presuppositions.⁵ Thus, the target of their attack becomes the very concept of reality itself which is implied by the realistic aesthetic as Lukács or Auerbach outline it, the new position suggesting that what is intolerable for us today, aesthetically, about the so-called old-fashioned realism is to be accounted for by the inadmissible philosophical and metaphysical view of the world which underlies it and which it in its turn reinforces. The objection is thus, clearly, a critique of something like an *ideology of realism*, and charges that realism, by suggesting that representation is possible, and by encouraging an aesthetic of mimesis or imitation, tends to perpetuate a preconceived notion of some external reality to be imitated, and indeed, to foster a belief in the existence of some such common-sense everyday ordinary shared secular reality in the first place. Yet the great discoveries of modern science—relativity and the uncertainty principle; the movement in modern philosophy toward theories of models and various linguistic dimensions of reality; present-day French investigations of the category of representation itself; above all, however, the sheer accumulated weight and habit of the great modern works of art from the cubists and Joyce all the way to Beckett and Andy Warhol—all these things tend to confirm the idea that there is something quite naive, in a sense quite profoundly *unrealistic*, and in the full sense of the word ideological, about the notion that reality is out there simply, quite objective and independent of us, and that knowing it involves the relatively unproblematical process of getting an adequate picture of it into our own heads.

Now I have to confess that I find both these positions—the defense of realism just as much as the denunciation of it—equally convincing, equally persuasive, equally true; so that, even though they would appear to be logically incompatible, I cannot persuade myself that they are as final as they look. But before I suggest a resolution that has seemed satisfactory to me, I want to remind you again of the reason we brought the subject up in the first place. The quarrel we have evoked is more fundamental, it seems to me, than a mere difference in aesthetic theories and positions (or else, if you prefer, such mere differences are perhaps themselves more fundamental than we have been accustomed to think): to be sure, in one sense, they simply correspond to differences in taste—it is clear that Lukács and Auerbach, for whatever reasons of background and upbringing and the like, deep down really don't like modern art. But again: perhaps what we call taste is not so simple either. I want to suggest that these two conflicting aesthetic positions correspond in the long run to two quite different cultures: there was a culture of realism, that of the nineteenth century—and a few of its inhabitants still survive here and there, native informants who provide us

with very useful reports and testimony about its nature and values—and there is today a different culture altogether, that of modernism. Alongside these two, as we suggested earlier, there is yet a third kind, namely what we called in the most general way primitive or at least precapitalist, and whose products—incomprehensible to both modernist and realist aesthetics alike—we call myths or oral tales. So the limits of our own personal tastes have brought us to the point where we can see our need, not to pick and choose and assimilate selected objects from the older aesthetics or cultures into our own, but rather to step outside our own culture—outside the culture of modernism—entirely and to grasp its relationship to the others and its difference from them by means of some vaster historical and supracultural model.

Before I suggest one, however, I have an obligation, even in the most sketchy way, to complete my account of the quarrel between the realists and the modernists: what both leave out, you will already have guessed, is simply history itself. Both positions are completely ahistorical, and this in spite of the fact that *Mimesis* is a history, one of the few great contemporary literary histories we possess, and in spite of the fact, also, that Lukács is a Marxist (that the modernists are ahistorical will probably be less surprising, since after all by and large that is exactly what they set out to be). Briefly, I would suggest that realism—but also that desacralized, postmagical, common-sense, everyday, secular reality which is its object—is inseparable from the development of capitalism, the quantification by the market system of the older hierarchical or feudal or magical environment, and thus that both are intimately linked to the bourgeoisie as its product and its commodity (and this is, it seems to me, where Lukács himself is ahistorical, in not positing an exclusive link between realism and the life of commerce, in suggesting that a wholly different social order like that of socialism or communism will still want to maintain this particular—historically dated—mode of reality-construction). And when in our own time the bourgeoisie begins to decay as a class, in a world of social anomie and fragmentation, then that active and conquering mode of the representation of reality which is realism is no longer appropriate; indeed, in this new social world which is ours today, we can go so far as to say that the very object of realism itself—secular reality, objective reality—no longer exists either. Far from being the world's final and definitive face, it proves to have been simply one historical and cultural form among many others, such that one might argue a kind of ultimate paradox of reality itself: there once was such a thing as objective truth, objective reality, but now that “real world” is itself a thing of the past. Objective reality, or the various possible objective realities, are in other words the function of genuine group existence or collective vitality; and when the dominant group disintegrates, so also does the certainty of some common truth or being. Thus the problem about realism articulates in the

cultural realm that profound ambivalence that Marx and Engels have about the bourgeoisie in history in general: the secularization and systematization that capitalism brought about is both more brutal and alienating, *and* more humane and liberating, than the effects of any previous social system. Capitalism destroys genuine human relationships, but also for the first time liberates humankind from village idiocy and the tyranny and intolerance of tribal life. This simultaneous positive and negative coding of capitalism appears everywhere in the works of Marx, but most strikingly and programmatically perhaps in the *Communist Manifesto*; and it is this very complex and ambivalent, profoundly dialectical assessment of capitalism that is reflected in the notion of the historical necessity of capitalism as a stage; whereas in the literary realm it takes the form of the hesitations just expressed about the realistic mode that corresponds to classic nineteenth-century capitalism, hesitations which can be measured in all their ambiguity by the simultaneous assertion that realism is the most complex epistemological instrument yet devised for recording the truth of social reality, and also, at one and the same time, that it is a lie in the very form itself, the prototype of aesthetic false consciousness, the appearance that bourgeois ideology takes on in the realm of narrative literature.

The model I now want to submit to you derives no doubt ultimately from Engels also, who had it himself from Morgan's *Ancient Society*, who in turn drew it from a still older anthropological tradition. But the form in which I am going to use this model—which in essence is nothing more than the old classification of cultures and social forms into the triad of savage, barbarian, and civilized types—comes more directly from a recent French work that gives us the means of transforming this otherwise purely historical typology into a rather sensitive instrument of practical literary analysis.

Now I should preface all this by saying that I don't intend here to give anything like a complete account, let alone a critique, of this more recent work—the *Anti-Oedipus* of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—around which there has been a great deal of controversy, and whose usefulness for us lies in its reintroduction of genuinely historical preoccupations into the hitherto resolutely a- or antihistorical problematics of structuralism.⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, indeed, give us a vision of history based once more firmly on the transformation of fundamental social forms, and on the correlation between shifts in meaning and conceptual categories, and the various types of socioeconomic infrastructures.

But I must at least explain that, as the book's title, *Anti-Oedipus*, suggests, its official theme is the now familiar one of the reactionary character of Freud's doctrine of the Oedipus complex—a position for which Karl Kraus's famous aphorism might serve as a motto: "Psychoanalysis is that illness of which it believes itself to be the cure." I will content myself with

observing that the violence with which this rather hysterical assertion is argued goes a long way toward making me suspect that Freud must have been right about the Oedipus complex in the first place. The real interest of the book, I would think, lies elsewhere, in its energetic attempt to synthesize a great number of contemporary intellectual trends and currents which have not all been confronted with one another before in quite so systematic a way. Here the alternate title, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, may suggest the approach, and indeed, within these pages, we find, alongside Freud and Marx, in both original and dubbed versions, phenomenological reflections on the body, Mumford on the city, linguistics and anthropological materials, studies of the commodity society, but also of kinship systems, theories of genetic codes, references to modern painting, and all this bathed in the familiarity of the great contemporary literary works like those of Beckett and Artaud, of which, of course, the term “schizophrenic” is meant to furnish both a description and a relatively new literary classification which is of no little practical interest.

Schizophrenia, however, has a more fundamental strategic value for Deleuze and Guattari, one which is very directly related to the historical typology with which we are ourselves concerned. For schizophrenia provides something like a zero degree against which we can assess the various—shall I call them more complex?—forms of human life, and by comparison serves as a kind of base line against which we can then measure and deconstruct the various determinate structures of individual and social reality which in their unending succession make up what we call history. Schizophrenia is, then, for Deleuze and Guattari something like the primordial flux that underlies existence itself; and clinically, to be sure, what characterizes the schizophrenic is this almost druglike dissolution of the bonds of time and of logic, the succession of one experiential moment after another without the organization and perspective imposed by the various kinds of abstract orders of meaning—whether individual or social—which we associate with ordinary daily life. So—to begin to construct our model—we can say that schizophrenia is something like a flux which is then, in the various social forms, ordered into some more elaborate, but also clearly, in one way or another, more repressive structure; to put it in the terminology of Deleuze, we will say that organized social life in one way or another then *codes* this initial flux, organizes it into ordered hierarchical meanings of one kind or another, makes the hallucinatory landscape suddenly fall into meaningful perspectives and become the place of work but also of the kinds of determinate values that characterize a given social order.

Now at this point we come upon our now-familiar triad of savage, barbarian, and civilized societies, and here also the approach of Deleuze and Guattari—this terminology of flux and codes—adds a handle that suddenly makes this rather antiquated piece of historical typology into a relatively

sophisticated item of technical equipment. Let us remember what we needed to have our model do: we needed something like a unified field theory of the various hitherto wholly unrelated bodies of literature, something that would give us a terminology sufficiently responsive to deal in the same breath with primitive storytelling, precapitalist literatures, bourgeois realism, and the various modernisms of the present postindustrial world of late monopoly capital and of the superstate; such a common terminology or unified field theory ought then to allow us to see all these social and literary forms somehow as permutations of a common structure, or at least rearrangements of terms they hold in common.

Now it is clear that Deleuze and Guattari understood Engels's and Morgan's old historical triad in a fairly free and loose way: for Morgan, savagery was the first stage of human social life, which ran from the invention of language to that of the bow-and-arrow; barbarism is the next, more complex stage, in which agriculture and pottery are developed, and which is characterized above all by the use of metals; civilization, finally, begins with the invention of writing. Yet it seems to me that within the purely archaeological confines of the paradigm, there lies a deeper imaginative truth, and this poetic or Viconian vision of human societies is what is used and exploited by Deleuze and Guattari, and what presently interests us. On this view, peoples living in the state of savagery are those we generally call primitive cultures, neolithic tribes, village societies of all kinds, of which, in the golden age of American anthropology in the nineteenth century, the supreme example was the American Indian, and for which, particularly since Lévi-Strauss and *Tristes tropiques*, we have developed a nostalgia that does not shrink from an explicit invocation of Rousseau himself. Now barbarian society is somehow thought to be more complex than that of savagery, but also more dynamic, and, if I may put it that way, more fearsome and dangerous; it is not an accident that with barbarism we instinctively associate cruelty, whether it be on the level of the raids of nomadic predators or of the great and inhuman Asiatic city-states and oriental despotisms; and here cruelty—whether it be that of Attila or of Babylon—is a code-word for a war machine, that is to say, essentially for the poetic truth of metals and metallurgy. When we arrive at length at what is called civilization, it is clear that for Deleuze and Guattari that it is to be measured, not so much by inscriptions as rather simply by the primacy of commerce, by the progress of a money economy and a market system, of organized production and exchange, in short, of what must sooner or later answer to the name of capitalism.

Let me quickly resume their hypothesis: the savage state is the moment of the coding of the original or primordial schizophrenic flux; in barbarism we have, then, to do with a more complex construction on this basis, which will be called an overcoding of it; under capitalism, reality undergoes a new type

of operation or manipulation, and the desacralization and laicization, the quantification and rationalization of capitalism will be characterized by Deleuze and Guattari precisely as a decoding of these earlier types of realities or code-constructions; and finally, our own time—whatever it may be thought to be as a separate social form in its own right, and it is obviously to this question on that we will want to return shortly—our own time is marked by nothing quite so much as a recoding of this henceforth decoded flux—by *attempts* to recode, to reinvent the sacred, to go back to myth (now understood in Frye’s archetypal sense)—in brief, that whole host of recoding strategies which characterize the various modernisms, and of which the most revealing and authentic, as far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, is surely the emergence of schizophrenic literature, or the attempt to come to terms with the pure primordial flux itself.

Now I will try, not so much to explain these various moments, as to show why this way of thinking and talking about them may be of use to us (and if it is not, of course we have been mistaken in our choice of a model, and there remains nothing but to jettison this one and to find some paradigm better able to do the work we require from it).

The application of the terminology of flux and codes to primitive life and storytelling may be overhastily described in terms of symbolism or of Lévi-Strauss’s conception of the “primitive mind,” of that *pensée sauvage* or primitive thought which has not yet invented abstraction, for which the things of the outside world are, in themselves, meanings, or are indistinguishable from meanings. The medieval conception of the world as God’s book, in which, for example, the beasts are so many sentences in a bestiary, is still close enough to this naive coding to convey its atmosphere to us. Yet in the primitive world, the world of the endless oral stories and of the simple and naively or, if you prefer, “naturally” coded flux, none of those things are really organized systematically; it is only when this omnipresent and decentered primitive coding is somehow ordered and the body of the world *territorialized*, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, that we find ourselves in the next stage of the social (but also the literary) order, namely that of barbarism, or of the despotic machine. Here the world-book is reorganized into what Lewis Mumford calls a megamachine, and the coded flux, now overcoded, acquires a center; certain signifiers become privileged over others in the same way that the despot himself gradually emerges from tribal indistinction to become the very center of the world and the meeting place of the four points of the compass; so a kind of awesome Forbidden City of language comes into being, which is not yet abstraction in our sense either, but far more aptly characterized, in my opinion, by that peculiar phenomenon we call allegory, and in which a single coded object or item of the outside world is suddenly overloaded with meaning, lifted up into a crucial element of a new and complicated object-language or overcoding erected on

the basis of the older, simpler, “natural” sign-system. So in the passage from savagery to barbarism, it may be said that we pass from the *production* of coded elements to the *representation* of them, a representation that indicates itself and affirms its own splendor as privilege and as sacred meaning.

Civilization, capitalism, then come as an attempt to annul this barbaric overcoding, this despotic and luxurious sign-system erected parasitically upon the basis of the older “natural” codes; and the new social form, the capitalist one, thus aims at working its way back to some even more fundamental and uncoded reality—scientific or objective—behind the older signs. This changeover is, of course, a familiar historical story, of which we possess a number of different versions, and I have the obligation clearly enough to explain what advantages there are to us—in our practical work as teachers and students of literature—in the one I am proposing here. For we know that the ideologues of the rising bourgeoisie—in that movement called the Enlightenment—set themselves the explicit task of destroying religion and superstition, of extirpating the sacred in all of its forms; they were then quite intensely aware of the struggle to *decode*, even if they did not call it that and even if subsequent generations of a bourgeoisie complacently installed in power preferred to forget the now rather frightening corrosive power of that ambitious effort of negativity and destructive criticism.

So gradually the bourgeoisie invents a more reassuring, more positive account of the transformation: in this view, the older superstitious remnants simply give way to the new positivities of modern *science*; or, if you prefer—now that a model-building science in our own time has seemed a less reliable ally—to the positive achievements of modern technology and invention. But both these accounts—that of the Enlightenment itself and that of positivism—are concerned more with abstract knowledge and control than with the facts of individual existence. From the point of view of our particular discipline, in other words, this positive science- or technology-oriented account of the secularization of the world seems more appropriate to the history of ideas than to narrative analysis. The dialectical version of the story—that of Hegel as well as of Marx and Engels—still seems to provide the most adequate synthesis of these older purely negative or purely positive accounts. Here the changeover is seen in terms of a passage from quality to quantity: in other words, the gradual substitution of a market economy for the older forms of barter or payment in kind amounts to the increasing primacy of the principle of generalized equivalence, as it is embodied in the money system. This means that where before there was a qualitative difference between the objects of production, between, say, shoes and beef, or oil paintings and leather belts or sacks of grain—all of them, in the older systems, coded in unique and qualitative ways, as objects of quite different and incommensurable desires, invested each with a unique libidinal content of its own—now suddenly they all find themselves

absolutely interchangeable, and through equivalence and the common measure of a money system reduced to the gray tastelessness of abstraction.

The advantage now of the addition to this view of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the decoded flux is that we will come to understand quantification, the pure equivalence of the exchange world, henceforth no longer as a reality in its own right, but rather as a process, an outer limit, a secular ideal, a kind of absence of quality that can never really be reached once and for all in any definitive form, but only approached in that infinite and teasing approximation of the asymptote to a curve with which it will never completely coincide. This is why the periodization of the ideologues of modernism, when they talk about the break with the classical novel, or the realistic novel or the traditional nineteenth-century novel, always proves so embarrassing, because, of course, as a positive phenomenon the classical novel is not there at all when you look for it, realism proving to be, as Darko Suvin put it, simply the zero degree of allegory itself.

Now I can give only two brief illustrations of the usefulness of the view for practical criticism of these so-called realistic novels. In the first place, it seems to me that the idea of a decoded flux for the first time gives content to the very formalistic suggestions—in the Jakobson-Tynianov theses on realism, for instance—that each realism constitutes a demystification of some preceding ideal or illusion. Obviously, the prototype for such a paradigm is the *Quixote* of Cervantes, but it would seem to me that the idea of realism as a decoding tends to direct our attention far more insistently to the very nature of the codes thus cancelled, the older barbaric or savage signifiers thus dismantled; this view, in other words, forces us to attend far more closely to the page-by-page and incident-by-incident operations whereby the novel effectuates this desacralization, thus effectively preserving us, at the same time, from any illusion that secular reality could be anything but provisional terminus of the narrative process.

The other point I want to make is the close identity between realism and historical thinking, an identity revealed by the model of decoded flux. It has been claimed—by the tenets of the rise-of-science explanation I mentioned a moment ago—that the new scientific values, particularly those of causality and causal explanation, are responsible for the new perspectivism shown by critics like Auerbach to constitute the very web of the new realistic narrative texture. Let me suggest, on the contrary, that causality is not a positive but rather a negative or privative concept: causality is simply the form taken by chronology itself when it falls into the world of quantification, of the indifferently equivalent and the decoded flux. Angus Fletcher's book *Allegory* (1964) gives us an excellent picture of the literary phenomena that played the role in the older high allegory or barbaric overcoding of what will later become causality in realism: action by contiguity, emanation, magical contamination, the hypnotic and in-gathering spell of a cosmos or spatial

form—all of these must then disappear from the decoded narrative, and the continuity of time must be dealt with in some more secular way, if it is not to decay and disintegrate back into the random sequence of unrelated instants which is the very nature of the primordial schizophrenic flux itself. Historical thinking, causality, is now a way of making things yield up their own meanings immanently, without any appeal to transcendental or magical outside forces; the process by which a single item deteriorates in time is now seen to be meaningful in itself, and when you have shown it, you have no further need of any external or transcendental hypotheses. Thus realism is par excellence the moment of the discovery of changing time, of the generation-by-generation and year-by-year dynamics of a new kind of social history. Realism is at one, I am tempted to say, with a world of *worn things*, things among which, of course, one must number people as well, and those discarded objects that are used-up human lives.

At length, as the nineteenth century itself wears on, we begin to detect signs of a kind of fatigue with the whole process of decoding; indeed, as the very memory of feudalism and the ancient regime grows dim, there appear perhaps to be fewer and fewer codes in the older sacred sense to serve as the object of such semiotic purification. This is, of course, the moment of the emergence of modernism, or rather, of the various modernisms, for the subsequent attempts to *recode* the henceforth decoded flux of the realistic, middle-class, secular era are many and varied, and we cannot hope even to give a sense of their variety here. So I will simply attempt to make one point, which seems to me absolutely fundamental for the analysis of modern literature, and which, to my mind, constitutes the most useful contribution to our future work of the model here under consideration. It is simply this: that it follows, from what we have said, and from the very notion of a recoding of secular reality or of the decoded flux, that all modernistic works are essentially simply cancelled realistic ones, that they are, in other words, not apprehended directly, in terms of their own symbolic meanings, in terms of their own mythic or sacred immediacy, the way an older primitive or over-coded work would be, but rather indirectly only, by way of the relay of an imaginary realistic narrative of which the symbolic and modernistic one is then seen as a kind of stylization; and this is a type of reading, and a literary structure, utterly unlike anything hitherto known in the history of literature, and one to which we have been insufficiently attentive until now. Let me suggest, in other words, to put it very crudely, that when you make sense of something like Kafka's *Castle*, your process of doing so involves the substitution for that recoded flux of a realistic narrative of your own devising—one which may be framed in terms of Kafka's supposed personal experience—psychoanalytic, religious, or social—or in terms of your own, or in terms of some hypothetical destiny of "modern man" in general. Whatever the terms of the realistic narrative appealed to, however, I think it

is axiomatic that the reading of such a work is always a two-stage affair, first, substituting a realistic hypothesis—in narrative form—then interpreting that secondary and invented or projected core narrative according to the procedures we reserved for the older realistic novel in general. And I suggest that this elaborate process is at work everywhere in our reception of contemporary works of art, all the way from those of Kafka down to, say, *The Exorcist*.

And since I mentioned chronology a moment ago, let me briefly use the fate of chronology in the new artistic milieu of the recoded flux to give you a clearer sense of what is meant by the process. It has been said, for instance, that in Robbe-Grillet's novel *Jealousy*, chronology is abolished: there are two separate sets of events that ought to permit us to reestablish the basic facts of the story in their proper order, only they do not: "the crushing of the centipede which, in a novel telling a story, would provide a good point of reference around which to situate the other events in time, is [in fact] made to occur *before* the trip taken by Franck and A., *during* their trip, and *after* it."⁷ Yet it would be wrong to conclude that Robbe-Grillet had really succeeded thereby in shaking our belief in chronology, and along with it, in that myth of a secular, objective, "realistic" reality of which it is a sign and a feature. On the contrary, as every reader of Robbe-Grillet knows, this kind of narrative exasperates our obsession with chronology to a veritable fever pitch, and the absence of any realistic "solution," far from being a return to the older non-causal narrative consciousness of primitive peoples, as in allegory for instance, in fact drives us only deeper into the contradictions of our own scientific and causal thought-modes. So it is quite wrong to say that Robbe-Grillet has abolished the story; on the contrary, we read *Jealousy* by substituting for it a realistic version of one of the oldest stories in the world, and its force and value come from the paradoxical fact that by cancelling it, the new novel tells this realistic story more forcefully than any genuinely realistic, old-fashioned, decoded narrative could.

Now from a sociological point of view it is clear why this had to happen with the breakdown of a homogeneous public, with the social fragmentation and anomie of the bourgeoisie itself, and also its refraction among the various national situations of Western or Nato capitalism, each of which then speaks its own private language and demands its own particular frame of reference. So the modern work comes gradually to be constructed as a kind of multipurpose object, Umberto Eco's so-called *opera aperta* or open form, designed to be used by each subgroup after its own fashion and needs, so that its realistic core, that "concrete" emotion, but also situation, which we call, simply, *jealousy*, seems the most abstract and empty starting point of all, inasmuch as every private audience is obliged to recode it afresh in terms of its own sign-system.⁸

The first conclusion one would draw from this peculiar historical and aesthetic situation is that Lukács (whose limits I hope I have already

admitted) turns out in the long run to have been right after all about the nature of modernism: very far from a break with that older overstuffed Victorian bourgeois reality, it simply reinforces all the latter's basic presuppositions, only in a world so thoroughly subjectivized that they have been driven underground, beneath the surface of the work, forcing us to reconfirm the concept of a secular reality at the very moment when we imagine ourselves to be demolishing it.

This is a social and historical contradiction, but for the writer it is an agonizing dilemma, and perhaps that would be the most dramatic way of expressing what we have been trying to say. No one here, after all, seriously wants to return to the narrative mode of nineteenth-century realism; the latter's rightful inheritors are the writers of bestsellers, who—unlike Kafka or Robbe-Grillet—really do concern themselves with the basic secular problems of our existence, namely, money, power, position, sex, and all those humdrum daily preoccupations that continue to form the substance of our daily lives all the while that art literature considers them unworthy of its notice. I am not suggesting that we go back and read or write in the older way, only that in their heart of hearts—as the Goldwater people used to say—everyone knows that John O'Hara's novels still give a truer picture of the facts of life in the United States than anything of Hemingway or Faulkner, with all their tourist or magnolia exoticism. Yet—yet—the latter are palpably the greater writers. So we slowly begin to grasp the enormity of a historical situation in which the truth of our social life as a whole—Lukács would have said, as a totality—is increasingly irreconcilable with the aesthetic quality of language or of individual expression; of a situation about which it can be asserted that if we can make a work of art from our experience, if we can tell it in the form of a story, it is no longer true; and if we can grasp the truth about our world as totality, as something transcending mere individual experience, we can no longer make it accessible in narrative or literary form. So a strange malediction hangs over art in our time, and for the writer this dilemma is felt as an increasing (structural) incapacity to generalize or universalize private or lived experience. The dictates, not only of realism, but of narrative in general, tend gradually to restrict writing to sheer autobiography, at the same time that they transform even autobiographical discourse itself into one more private language among others: reduced to the telling of the truth of a private situation alone that no longer engages the fate of a nation but merely a single locality; and no longer even for that, but a particular neighborhood—and even that only as long as it still remains a neighborhood in the traditional, ethnic or ghetto, sense; even therein, speaking henceforth only for a specific family, and then not even for its older generations; at length reduced to a single household, and finally, within it, to a single gender. So, little by little, the writer is reduced to so private a speech that it is henceforth bereft of any public consequences

or resonances, so that only symbolic recoding holds out the hope of saying something meaningful to a wider and more heterogeneous public. Yet, as we have seen, that new kind of meaning is quite different from the old one. But in this wholly subjectivized untruth, the modern writer nonetheless in another sense remains profoundly true and profoundly representative: for everyone else is equally locked into his or her private language, imprisoned in those serried ranks of monads that are the ultimate result of the social fragmentation inherent in our system.

Many are the images of this profound subjectivization and fragmentation of our social life, and of our very existences, in the world of late monopoly capitalism. Some strike terror and inspire us with a kind of metaphysical pathos at our condition, like that persona of Lautréamont sealed since birth in an airtight, soundproof membrane, dreaming of the shriek destined to rupture his isolation and to admit for the first time the cries of pain of the world outside.

All are, of course, figures, and it is a measure of our dilemma that we cannot convey the situation in other than a figurative way; yet some figures seem more liberating than others, and since we began with a reference to Plato, let us conclude with a Platonic vision, which was once itself the foundation of a metaphysic, but which now, today, and owing to historical developments quite unforeseeable in Plato's time, seems—like the gravest of all figures and metaphors—henceforth to have been intended in the most *literal* sense:

Imagine [says Socrates], an underground chamber, like a cave with an entrance open to the daylight and running a long way underground. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Behind them and above them a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet-shows ... Imagine further that there are men carrying all sorts of artefacts along behind the curtain-wall, including figures of men and animals made of wood and stone and other materials ...

An odd picture [responds Socrates' listener] and an odd sort of prisoner.

They are drawn from life, I replied. For tell me, do you think our prisoners could see anything of themselves or their fellows save the shadows thrown by the fire upon the wall of the cave opposite?⁹

There are, of course, ways of breaking out of this isolation, but they are not literary ways and require complete and thoroughgoing transformation of our economic and social system, and the invention of new forms of collective living. Our task—specialists that we are in the reflections of things—is a more patient and modest, more diagnostic one. Yet even such a task as the

analysis of literature and culture will come to nothing unless we keep the knowledge of our own historical situation vividly present to us: for we are least of all, in our position, entitled to the claim that we did not understand, that we thought all those things were real, that we had no way of knowing we were living in a cave.

1975

Notes

- 1 Iris Murdoch, *The Unicorn*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1963, 118.
- 2 See, for example, Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, London: Penguin, 1959, or Georg Lukács, *Aesthetik*, Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1963.
- 3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1965, 255–261.
- 4 Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971, 309–326.
- 5 The modernist position is resumed in Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968, and eloquently defended in Nathalie Sarraute, *The Age of Suspicion*, trans. Maria Jolas, New York: George Braziller, 1963. I should add that any really consequent treatment of it would also have necessarily to come to terms with what might be called the left-wing modernism of Brecht or of the *Tel Quel* group.
- 6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe*, Paris: Minuit, 1972; translated as *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983.
- 7 Gerald Prince, *A Grammar of Stories*, The Hague: Mouton, 1973, 23.
- 8 See Umberto Eco, *Opera Aperta*, Milan: Bompiani, 1962.
- 9 Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII, trans. H. D. P. Lee, Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1955, 278–79.

Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate

It is not only political history that those who ignore it are condemned to repeat. A host of recent “post-Marxisms” document the truth of the assertion that attempts to “go beyond” Marxism typically end by reinventing older pre-Marxist positions (from the recurrent neo-Kantian revivals, to the most recent “Nietzschean” returns through Hume and Hobbes all the way back to the Pre-Socratics). Even within Marxism itself, the terms of the problems, if not their solutions, are numbered in advance, and the older controversies—Marx versus Bakunin, Lenin versus Luxemburg, the national questions, the agrarian question, the dictatorship of the proletariat—rise up to haunt those who thought we could now go on to something else and leave the past behind us.

Nowhere has this “return of the repressed” been more dramatic than in the aesthetic conflict between realism and modernism, whose navigation and renegotiation is still unavoidable for us today, even though we may feel that each position is in some sense right and yet that neither is any longer wholly acceptable. The dispute is itself older than Marxism, and in a longer perspective may be said to be a contemporary political replay of the seventeenth century *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, in which, for the first time, aesthetics came face to face with the dilemmas of historicity.

Within the Marxism of this century, the precipitant of the controversy over realism and modernism was the living fact and persisting influence of expressionism among the writers of the German Left in the 1920s and 1930s. An implacable ideological denunciation by Lukács in 1934 set the stage for the series of interconnected debates and exchanges between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno generally referred to as the “realism debate.” Much of the fascination of these jousts, indeed, comes from the internal dynamism by which all the logical possibilities are rapidly generated in turn, so that it quickly extends beyond the local phenomenon of expressionism, and even beyond the ideal type of realism itself, to draw within its scope the problems of popular art, naturalism, socialist realism, avant-gardism, media, and finally modernism—political and nonpolitical—

in general. Today, many of its fundamental themes and concerns have been transmitted by the Frankfurt School, and in particular by Marcuse, to the student and antiwar movements of the 1960s, while the revival of Brecht has ensured their propagation among political modernisms of the kind exemplified by the *Tel Quel* group.

The legacy of German expressionism provided a more propitious framework for the development of a major debate within Marxism than its contemporary French counterpart, surrealism, was to do. For in the writings of the surrealists, and in particular of Breton, the problem of realism largely fails to arise—in the first instance owing to their initial repudiation of the novel as a form. For their principal adversary, Jean-Paul Sartre—the only important writer of his generation not to have passed through surrealism's tutelage, and whose notion of “commitment” (*engagement*) Adorno was later to take as the very prototype of a political aesthetic—the realism/modernism dilemma did not arise either, but for the opposite reason: because of Sartre's preliminary exclusion of poetry and the lyric from his account of the nature and function of literature in general (in *What Is Literature?* [1948]). Thus in France, until that second wave of modernism (or postmodernism) represented by the *nouveau roman* and the *nouvelle vague*, *Tel Quel* and “structuralism,” the terrain for which realism and modernism were elsewhere so bitterly to contend—that of *narrative*—was effectively divided up between them in advance, as though in amicable separation. If the problem of narrative does not loom large in the earlier debate, that is in part because Lukács's principal exhibits were novels, while Brecht's main field of activity was the theater. The increasing importance, in turn, of film in artistic production since the time of these debates (witness the frequent juxtapositions of Brecht and Godard) likewise suggests that structural differences in medium and in genre may play a larger part in compounding the dilemmas of the realism/modernism controversy than its earliest participants were willing to admit.

More than this, the history of aesthetics itself suggests that some of the more paradoxical turns in the Marxist debate within German culture spring from contradictions within the very concept of realism, an uneasily different quantity from such traditional aesthetic categories as comedy and tragedy, or lyric, epic, and dramatic. The latter—whatever social functionality may be invoked for them in this or that philosophical system—are purely aesthetic concepts, which may be analyzed and evaluated without any reference outside the phenomenon of beauty or the activity of artistic play (traditionally the terms in which the “aesthetic” has been isolated and constituted as a separate realm or function in its own right). The originality of the concept of realism, however, lies in its claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status. A new value, contemporaneous with the secularization of the world under capitalism, the ideal of realism presupposes a form of aesthetic

experience that yet lays claim to a binding relationship to the real itself, that is to say, to those realms of knowledge and praxis that had traditionally been differentiated from the realm of the aesthetic, with its disinterested judgments and its constitution as sheer appearance. But it is extremely difficult to do justice to both these properties of realism simultaneously. In practice, an overemphasis on its cognitive function often leads to a naive denial of the necessarily fictive character of artistic discourse or even to iconoclastic calls for the “end of art” in the name of political militancy. At the other pole of this conceptual tension, the emphasis of theorists like Gombrich or Barthes on the “techniques” whereby an “illusion” of reality or *effet de réel* is achieved, tends surreptitiously to transform the “reality” of realism into appearance and to undermine that affirmation of its own truth—or referential—value, by which it differentiates itself from other types of literature. (Among the many secret dramas of Lukács’s later work is surely to be counted the adeptness with which he walks this particular tightrope, from which, even at his most ideological or “formalistic,” he never quite falls.)

This is not to say that the concept of modernism, realism’s historical counterpart and its dialectical mirror image, is not equally contradictory, and in ways that it will be instructive to juxtapose to the contradictions of realism itself.¹ For the moment, suffice it to observe that neither of these sets of contradictions can be fully understood, unless they are replaced within the broader context of the crisis of historicity itself, and numbered among the dilemmas a dialectical criticism faces when it tries to make ordinary language function simultaneously on two mutually exclusive registers: the absolute (in which case realism and modernism veer toward timeless abstractions like the lyric or the comic), and the relative (in which case they inexorably revert to the narrow confines of an antiquarian nomenclature, whose use is restricted to specific literary movements in the past). Language, however, does not submit peacefully to the attempt to use its terms dialectically—that is, as relative and sometimes even extinct concepts from an archaeological past, which nonetheless continue to transmit faint but absolute claims upon us.

Meanwhile, poststructuralism has added yet a different kind of parameter to the realism/modernism controversy, one which—like the question of narrative and the problems of historicity—was implicit in the original exchange but scarcely articulated or thematized as such. The assimilation of realism as a value to the old philosophical concept of mimesis by such writers as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Deleuze has reformulated the realism/modernism debate in terms of a Platonic attack on the ideological effects of representation. In this new (and old) philosophical polemic, the stakes of the original discussion find themselves unexpectedly elevated, and their issues—once largely political in focus—begin to take on metaphysical (or antimetaphysical) implications. Such philosophical artillery is,

of course, intended to increase the defensiveness of the defenders of realism; yet I believe we will not fully be able to assess the consequences of the attack on representation, and of poststructuralism generally, until we are able to situate its own work within the field of the theory of ideology itself.

It is at any rate clear that the realism/modernism controversy loses its interest if one side is programmed to win in advance. The Brecht-Lukács debate alone is one of those rare confrontations in which both adversaries are of equal stature, both of incomparable significance for the development of contemporary Marxism, the one a major artist and probably the greatest literary figure to have been produced by the Communist movement, the other a central philosopher of the age and heir to the whole German philosophical tradition, with its unique emphasis on aesthetics as a discipline. It is true that in recent accounts of their opposition, Brecht has tended to get the better of Lukács, the former's "plebeian" style and Schweikian identifications proving currently more attractive than the "mandarin" culture to which the latter appealed (*CBL*, 16–18).² In these versions, Lukács is typically treated as a professor, a revisionist, a Stalinist—in general "in the same way as the brave Moses Mendelssohn in Lessing's time treated Spinoza as a 'dead dog,' " as Marx described the standard view of Hegel current among his radical contemporaries.

To the degree to which Lukács single-handedly turned the expressionism debate around into a discussion of realism, and forced the defenders of the former to fight on his own ground and in his own terms, their annoyance with him was understandable (Brecht's own animosity toward him comes through particularly vividly in these pages). On the other hand, such meddling interference was at one with everything that made Lukács a major figure in twentieth-century Marxism—in particular his lifelong insistence on the crucial significance of literature and culture in any revolutionary politics. His fundamental contribution here was the development of a theory of mediations that could reveal the political and ideological content of what had hitherto seemed purely formal aesthetic phenomena. One of the most famous instances was his "decoding" of the static descriptions of naturalism in terms of reification.³ Yet at the same time, it was precisely this line of research—itself an implicit critique and repudiation of traditional content analysis—that was responsible for Brecht's characterization of Lukács's method as *formalistic*: by which he meant the latter's unwarranted confidence in the possibility of deducing political and ideological positions from a protocol of purely formal properties of a work of art. The reproach sprang from Brecht's experience as a man of the theater, in which he constructed an aesthetic of performance and a view of the work of art in situation that was in diametric contrast to the solitary reading and individualized bourgeois public of Lukács's privileged object of study, the novel. Can Brecht then be enlisted in current campaigns against the very notion of mediation? It is

probably best to take Brecht's attack on Lukács's formalism (along with the Brechtian watchword of *plumpes Denken*) at a somewhat less philosophical and more practical level, as a therapeutic warning against the permanent temptation of idealism present in any ideological analysis as such, the professional proclivity of intellectuals for methods that need no external verification. There would then be *two* idealisms: one, the common or garden variety to be found in religion, metaphysics, and literalism; the other a repressed and unconscious danger of idealism within Marxism itself, inherent in the very ideal of science itself in a world so deeply marked by the division of mental and manual labor. To that danger the intellectual and the scientist can never sufficiently be alerted. At the same time, Lukács's work on mediation, rudimentary as at times it may have been, can on another reading be enlisted as a precursor of the most interesting work in the field of ideological analysis today—that which, assimilating the findings of psychoanalysis and of semiotics, seeks to construct a model of the text as a complex and symbolic ideological act. The reproach of “formalism,” whose relevance to Lukács's own practice is only too evident, may consequently have a wider extension to present-day research and speculation.

The charge of “formalism” was only one item of Brecht's attack on Lukács's position; its corollary and obverse was indignation at the ideological judgments which the latter used his method to substantiate. The primary exhibit at the time was Lukács's denunciation of alleged links between expressionism and trends within Social-Democracy (in particular the USPD), not to speak of fascism, which launched the realism debate in the German emigration and which Ernst Bloch's essay was designed to refute in some detail. Nothing has, of course, more effectively discredited Marxism than the practice of affixing instant class labels (generally “petty bourgeois”) to textual or intellectual objects; nor will the most hardened apologist for Lukács want to deny that of the many Lukácses conceivable, this particular one—epitomized in the shrill and outrageous postscript to *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*—is the least worthy of rehabilitation. But abuse of class ascription should not lead to overreaction and mere abandonment of it. In fact, ideological analysis is inconceivable without a conception of the “ultimately determining instance” of social class. What is really wrong with Lukács's analyses is not too frequent and facile a reference to social class, but rather too incomplete and intermittent a sense of the relationship of class ideology. A case in point is one of the more notorious of Lukács's basic concepts, that of “decadence”—which he often associates with fascism, but even more persistently with modern art and literature in general. The concept of decadence is the equivalent in the aesthetic realm of that of “false consciousness” in the domain of traditional ideological analysis. Both suffer from the same defect: the common presupposition that in the world of culture and society such a thing as pure error is possible. They

imply, in other words, that works of art or systems of philosophy are conceivable which have no content, and are therefore to be denounced for failing to grapple with the “serious” issues of the day, indeed distracting from them. In the iconography of the political art of the 1920s and 1930s, the “index” of such culpable and vacuous decadence was the champagne glass and top hat of the idle rich, making the rounds of an eternal nightclub circuit. Yet even Scott Fitzgerald and Drieu la Rochelle are more complicated than that, and from our present-day vantage point, disposing of the more complex instruments of psychoanalysis (in particular the concepts of repression and denial, or *Verneinung*), even those who might wish to sustain Lukács’s hostile verdict on modernism would necessarily insist on the existence of a repressed social content even in those modern works that seem most innocent of it. Modernism would then not so much be a way of avoiding social content—in any case an impossibility for beings like ourselves who are “condemned” to history and to the implacable sociability of even the most apparently private of our experiences—but rather of managing and containing it, secluding it out of sight in the very form itself, by means of specific techniques of framing and displacement which can be identified with some precision. If so, Lukács’s summary dismissal of “decadent” works of art should yield to an interrogation of their buried social and political content.

The fundamental weakness in Lukács’s view of the relationship of art and ideology surely finds its ultimate explanation in his politics. What is usually called his “Stalinism” can, on closer examination, be separated into two quite distinct problems. The charge that he was complicit with a bureaucratic apparatus and exercised a kind of literary terrorism (particularly against political modernists, for example, of the Proletkult variety) is belied by his resistance in the Moscow of the 1930s and 1940s to what was later to be known as Zhdanovism—that form of socialist realism which he disliked as much as Western modernism but was obviously less free to attack openly. “Naturalism” was his pejorative code word for it at the time. Indeed, the structural and historical identification for which he argued between the symbolic techniques of modernism and the “bad immediacy” of a photographic naturalism was one of his most profound dialectical insights. As for his continuing party membership, which he called his “entry ticket to history,” the tragic fate and wasted talents of so many oppositional Marxists of his generation, like Korsch and Reich, are powerful arguments for the relative rationality of Lukács’s choice—one, of course, that he shared with Brecht. A more serious problem is posed by the “popular frontism” of his aesthetic theory. That betokened a formal mean between a modernistic subjectivism and an overly objectivistic naturalism, a mean which, like most Aristotelian strategies of moderation, has never aroused much intellectual excitement. Even Lukács’s most devoted supporters failed to evince much

enthusiasm for it. So far as the political alliance between revolutionary forces and the progressive sections of the bourgeoisie went, it was rather Stalin who belatedly authorized a version of the policy that Lukács had advocated in the “Blum Theses” of 1928–29, which foresaw a first-stage, democratic revolution against the fascist dictatorship in Hungary, prior to any socialist revolution. Yet it is precisely that distinction, between an anti-fascist and an anticapitalist strategy, that seems less easy to maintain today and less immediately attractive a political program over wide areas of a “free world” in which military dictatorships and “emergency regimes” are the order of the day—indeed multiplying precisely to the degree that genuine social revolution becomes a real possibility. From our present perspective, Nazism itself, with its charismatic leader and unique exploitation of a nascent communications technology in the widest sense of the term (including transportation and autobahns as well as radio and television), now seems to represent a transitional and special combination of historical circumstances not likely to recur as such; whereas routine torture and the institutionalization of counterinsurgency techniques have proved perfectly consistent with the kind of parliamentary democracy that used to be distinguished from fascism. Under the hegemony of the multinational corporations and their “world system,” the very possibility of a progressive bourgeois culture is problematic—a doubt that obviously strikes at the very foundation of Lukács’s aesthetic.

Finally, the preoccupations of our own period have seemed to reveal in Lukács’s work the shadow of a literary dictatorship somewhat different in kind from the attempts to prescribe a certain type of production which were denounced by Brecht. It is Lukács as a partisan, less of a specific artistic style than of a particular critical method, who is the focus of new polemics today—an atmosphere in which his work has found itself regarded by admirers and opponents alike as a monument to old-fashioned content-analysis. There is some irony in this transformation of the name of the author of *History and Class Consciousness* into a signal not unlike that emitted by the names of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky in an earlier period of Marxist aesthetics. Lukács’s own critical practice is in fact very much genre-oriented, and committed to the mediation of the various forms of literary discourse, so that it is a mistake to enlist him in the cause of a naive mimetic position that encourages us to discuss the events or characters of a novel in the same way we would look at “real” ones. On the other hand, insofar as his critical practice implies the ultimate possibility of some full and non-problematical “representation of reality,” Lukácsian realism can be said to give aid and comfort to a documentary and sociological approach to literature which is correctly enough thought to be antagonistic to more recent methods of construing the narrative text as a free play of signifiers. Yet these apparently irreconcilable positions may prove to be two distinct and equally

indispensable moments of the hermeneutic process itself—a first naive “belief” in the density or presence of novelistic representation, and later “bracketing” of that experience in which the necessary distance of all language from what it claims to represent—its substitutions and displacements—is explored. At any rate, it is clear that as long as Lukács is used as a rallying cry (or bogeyman) in this particular methodological conflict, there is not much likelihood of any measured assessment of his work as a whole.

Brecht, meanwhile, is certainly much more easily rewritten in terms of the concerns of the present, in which he seems to address us directly in an unmediated voice. His attack on Lukács’s formalism is only one aspect of a much more complex and interesting stand on realism in general, to which it is surely no disservice to observe a few of the features that must seem dated to us today. In particular, Brecht’s aesthetic, and his way of framing the problems of realism, are intimately bound up with a conception of science that it would be wrong to identify with the more scientific currents in contemporary Marxism (for example, the work of Althusser and Colletti). For Colletti, science is an epistemological concept and a form of abstract knowledge, and the pursuit of a Marxian “science” is closely linked to recent developments in the historiography of science—the findings of scholars like Koyré, Bachelard, and Kuhn. For Brecht, however, “science” is far less a matter of knowledge and epistemology than it is a sheer experiment and of practical, well-nigh manual activity. His is more an ideal of popular mechanics, technology, the home chemical set, and the tinkering of a Galileo, rather than one of “epistemes” or “paradigms” in scientific discourse. Brecht’s particular vision of science was for him the means of annulling the separation between physical and mental activity and the fundamental division of labor (not least that between worker and intellectual) that resulted from it: it puts knowing the world back together with changing the world, and at the same time unites an ideal of praxis with a conception of production. The reunion of “science” and practical, change-oriented activity—not without its influence on the Brecht-Benjamin analysis of the media, as we will see in a moment—thus transforms the process of “knowing” the world into a source of delight or pleasure in its own right; and this is the fundamental step in the construction of a properly Brechtian aesthetics. For it restores to “realistic” art that principle of play and genuine aesthetic gratification which the relatively more passive and cognitive aesthetic of Lukács had seemed to replace with the grim duty of a proper reflection of the world. The age-old dilemmas of a didactic theory of art (to teach *or* to please?) are thereby also overcome, and in a world where science is experiment and play, where knowing and doing alike are forms of production, stimulating in their own right, a didactic art may now be imagined in which learning and pleasure are no longer separate from each other. In the Brechtian aesthetic, indeed, the idea of realism is not a purely artistic

and formal category, but rather governs the relationship of the work of art to reality itself, characterizing a particular stance toward it. The spirit of realism designates an active, curious, experimental, subversive—in a word, *scientific*—attitude toward social institutions and the material world; and the “realistic” work of art is therefore one that encourages and disseminates this attitude, yet not merely in a flat or mimetic way or along the lines of imitation alone. Indeed, the “realistic” work of art is one in which “realistic” and experimental attitudes are tried out, not only between its characters and their fictive realities, but also between the audience and the work itself, and—not least significant—between the writer and his or her own materials and techniques. The threefold dimensions of such a practice of “realism” clearly explode the purely representational categories of the traditional mimetic work.

What Brecht called science is thus in a larger sense a figure for non-alienated production in general. It is what Bloch would call a Utopian emblem of the reunified and satisfying praxis of a world that has left alienation and the division of labor behind it. The originality of the Brechtian vision may be judged by juxtaposing his figure of science with the more conventional image of art and the artist which, particularly in bourgeois literature, has traditionally had this Utopian function. At the same time, it must also be asked whether Brecht’s vision of science is still available to us as a figure today, or whether it does not itself reflect a relatively primitive stage in what has now come to be known as the second industrial revolution. Seen in this perspective, the Brechtian delight in “science” is rather of a piece with Lenin’s definition of communism as “the Soviets plus electrification,” or Diego Rivera’s grandiose Rockefeller Center mural (repainted for Bellas Artes) in which, at the intersection of microcosm and macrocosm, the massive hands of Soviet New Man grasp and move the very levers of creation.

Together with his condemnation of Lukács’s formalism and his conception of a union of science and aesthetics in the didactic work of art, there is yet a third strain in Brecht’s thinking—in many ways the most influential—which deserves attention. This is, of course, his fundamental notion of *Verfremdung*. It is the so-called estrangement effect which is most often invoked to sanction theories of political modernism today, such as that of the *Tel Quel* group.⁴ The practice of estrangement—staging phenomena in such a way that what had seemed natural and immutable in them is now tangibly revealed to be historical, and thus the object of revolutionary change—has long seemed to provide an outlet from the dead end of agitational didacticism in which so much of the political art of the past remains confined. At the same time it allows a triumphant reappropriation and a materialist regrouping of the dominant ideology of modernism (the Russian Formalist “making strange,” Pound’s “make it new,” the emphasis

of all the historical varieties of modernism on the vocation of art to alter and renew perception as such) for the ends of a revolutionary politics. Today, traditional realism—the canon defended by Lukács, but also old-fashioned political art of the socialist realist type—is often assimilated to classical ideologies of representation and to the practice of “closed form,” whereas even bourgeois modernism (Kristeva’s models are Lautréamont and Mallarmé) is said to be revolutionary precisely to the degree to which it calls the older formal values and practices into question and produces itself as an open “text.” Whatever objections may be made to this aesthetic of political modernism—and we will reserve a fundamental one for our discussion of similar views of Adorno—it would seem most difficult to associate Brecht with it. Not only was the author of “On Abstract Painting” as hostile to purely formal experimentation as was Lukács himself; that might be held to be a historical or generational accident, and simply to spell out the limits of Brecht’s personal tastes.⁵ What is more serious is that his attack on the formalism of Lukács’s literary analyses remains binding on the quite different attempts of the political modernists to make ideological judgments (revolutionary/bourgeois) on the basis of the purely formal characteristics of closed or open forms, “naturalness,” effacement of the traces of production in the work, and so forth. For example, it is certainly the case that a belief in the natural is ideological and that much of bourgeois art has worked to perpetuate such a belief, not only in its content but through the experience of its forms as well. Yet in different historical circumstances the idea of nature was once a subversive concept with a genuinely revolutionary function, and only the analysis of the concrete historical and cultural conjuncture can tell us whether, in the postnatural world of late capitalism, the categories of nature may not have acquired such a critical charge again.

It is time, indeed, to make an assessment of those fundamental changes that have taken place in capitalism and its culture since the period when Brecht and Lukács spelled out their options for a Marxist aesthetics and a Marxian conception of realism. What has already been said about the transitional character of Nazism—a development which has done much to date many of Lukács’s basic positions—is not without its effect on those of Brecht as well. Here it is necessary to emphasize the inextricable relationship between Brecht’s aesthetic and the analysis of the media and its revolutionary possibilities worked out jointly by him and Walter Benjamin, and most widely accessible in the latter’s well-known essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”⁶ For Brecht and Benjamin had not yet begun to feel the full force and constriction of that stark alternative between a mass audience or media culture, and a minority “elite” modernism, in which our thinking about aesthetics today is inevitably locked. Rather, they foresaw a revolutionary utilization of communications technology such that the most striking advances in artistic technique—effects such as those of

“montage,” for instance, which today we tend to associate almost exclusively with modernism as such—could at once be harnessed to politicizing and didactic purposes. Brecht’s conception of “realism” is thus not complete without this perspective in which the artist is able to use the most complex, modern technology in addressing the widest popular public. Yet if Nazism itself corresponds to an early and still relatively primitive stage in the emergence of the media, so does Benjamin’s cultural strategy for attacking it, and in particular his conception of an art that would be revolutionary precisely to the degree to which it was technically (technologically) “advanced.” In the increasingly “total system” of the media societies today, we can unfortunately no longer share this optimism. Without it, however, the project of a specifically political modernism becomes indistinguishable from all the other kinds—modernism, among other things, being characterized by its consciousness of an absent public.

In other words, the fundamental difference between our own situation and that of the 1930s is the emergence in full-blown and definitive form of that ultimate transformation of late monopoly capitalism variously known as the *société de consommation* or as postindustrial society. This is the historical stage reflected by Adorno’s two postwar essays, so different in emphasis from the prewar materials. It may appear easy enough in retrospect to identify his repudiation of *both* Lukács *and* Brecht, on the grounds of their political praxis, as a characteristic example of an anticommunism now outmoded with the Cold War itself. More relevant in the present context, however, is the Frankfurt School’s premise of a “total system,” which expressed Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s sense of the increasingly closed organization of the world into a seamless web of media technology, multinational corporations, and international bureaucratic control.⁷ Whatever the theoretical merits of the idea of the “total system”—and it would seem to me that where it does not lead out of politics altogether, it encourages the revival of an anarchist opposition to Marxism itself and can also be used as a justification for terrorism—we may at least agree with Adorno that in the cultural realm, the all-pervasiveness of the system, with its “culture industry” or (Enzensberger’s variant) its “consciousness industry,” makes for an unpropitious climate for any of the older, simpler forms of oppositional art, whether it be that proposed by Lukács, that produced by Brecht, or indeed those celebrated in their different ways by Benjamin and by Bloch. The system has a power to co-opt and to defuse even the most potentially dangerous forms of political art by transforming them into cultural commodities (witness, if further proof be needed, the grisly example of the burgeoning Brecht-Industrie itself!). On the other hand, it cannot be said that Adorno’s rather astonishing “resolution” of the problem is any more satisfactory: he proposes the classical stage of high modernism itself as the very prototype of the most “genuinely” political art (“this is not a time for

political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead”) and suggests that it is therefore Beckett who is the most truly revolutionary artist of our time.⁸ To be sure, some of Adorno’s most remarkable analyses—for instance, his discussion of Schoenberg and the twelve-tone system in the *Philosophy of Modern Music*—document his assertion that the greatest modern art, even the most apparently un- or antipolitical, in reality holds up a mirror to the “total system” of late capitalism. Yet in retrospect, this now seems a most unexpected revival of a Lukács-type “reflection theory” of aesthetics, under the spell of a political and historical despair that plagues both houses and finds praxis henceforth unimaginable. What is ultimately fatal to this new and finally itself once more antipolitical revival of the ideology of modernism is less the equivocal rhetoric of Adorno’s attack on Lukács or the partiality of his reading of Brecht, than very precisely the fate of modernism in consumer society itself.⁹ For what was once an oppositional and antisocial phenomenon in the early years of the century, has today become the dominant style of commodity production and an indispensable component in the machinery of the latter’s ever more rapid and demanding reproduction of itself. That Schoenberg’s Hollywood pupils used their advanced techniques to write movie music, that the masterpieces of the most recent schools of American painting are now sought to embellish the splendid new structures of the great insurance companies and multinational banks (themselves the work of the most talented and “advanced” modern architects), are but the external symptoms of a situation in which a once scandalous “perceptual art” has found a social and economic function in supplying the styling changes necessary to the *société de consommation* of the present.

The final aspect of the contemporary situation relevant to our subject concerns the changes that have taken place within socialism itself since the publication of the expressionism debate in *Das Wort* some forty years ago. If the central problem of a political art under capitalism is that of co-optation, one of the crucial issues of culture in a socialist framework must surely remain that of what Ernst Bloch calls the *Erbe*: the question of the uses of the world’s cultural past in what will increasingly be a single international culture of the future, and of the place and effects of diverse heritages in a society intent on building socialism. Bloch’s formulation of the problem is obviously a strategic means of transforming Lukács’s narrow polemics—which were limited to the realistic novelists of the European bourgeois tradition—and of enlarging the framework of the debate to include the immense variety of popular or peasant, precapitalist or “primitive” arts. It should be understood in the context of his monumental attempt to reinvent the concept of Utopia for Marxism and to free it from the objections correctly made by Marx and Engels themselves to the “Utopian socialism” of Saint-Simon, Owen, and Fourier. Bloch’s Utopian principle aims at

jarring socialist thought loose from its narrow self-definition in terms that essentially prolong the categories of capitalism itself, whether by negation or adoption (terms like industrialization, centralization, progress, technology, and even production itself, which tend to impose their own social limitations and options on those who work with them). Where Lukács's cultural thinking emphasizes the continuities between the bourgeois order and that which is to develop out of it, Bloch's priorities suggest the need to think of the "transition to socialism" in terms of radical difference, of a more absolute break with that particular past, perhaps of a renewal or recovery of the truth of more ancient social forms. The newer Marxist anthropology, indeed, reminds us—from within our "total system"—of the absolute difference of older precapitalist and tribal societies; and at a historical moment when such an interest in a much more remote past seems less likely to give rise to the sentimentalizing and populist myths that Marxism had to combat in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the memory of precapitalist societies may now become a vital element of Bloch's Utopian principle and of the invention of the future. Politically, the classical Marxian notion of the necessity, during the transition to socialism, of a "dictatorship of the proletariat"—that is, a withdrawal of effective power from those with a vested interest in the reestablishment of the old order—has surely not become outmoded. Yet it may emerge conceptually transformed as soon as we think of it together with the necessity for a cultural revolution that involves collective reeducation of all the classes. This is the perspective in which Lukács's emphasis on the great bourgeois novelists seems most adequate to the task, but it is one in which the antibourgeois thrust of the great modernisms also appears inappropriate. It is then that Bloch's mediation on the *Erbe*, on the repressed cultural difference of the past and the Utopian principle of the invention of a radically different future, will for the first time come into its own, at a point when the conflict between realism and modernism recedes behind us.

But surely in the West, and perhaps elsewhere as well, that point is still beyond us. In our present cultural situation, if anything, both alternatives of realism and of modernism seem intolerable to us: realism because its forms revive older experiences of a kind of social life (the classical inner city, the traditional opposition city/country) that is no longer with us in the already decaying future of consumer society; modernism because its contradictions have proved in practice even more acute than those of realism. An aesthetic of novelty today—already enthroned as the dominant critical and formal ideology—must seek desperately to renew itself by ever more rapid rotations of its own axis, modernism seeking to become postmodernism without ceasing to be modern. Thus today we witness the spectacle of a predictable return, after abstraction has itself become a tired convention, to figurative art, but this time to a figurative art—so-called hyperrealism or photorealism—that

turns out to be the representation, not of things themselves, but of the latter's photographs: a representational art that is really "about" art itself! In literature, meanwhile, amid a weariness with plotless or poetic fiction, a return to intrigue is achieved, not by the latter's rediscovery, but rather by the pastiche of older narratives and depersonalized imitation of traditional voices, similar to Stravinsky's pastiche of the classics criticized by Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music*.

In these circumstances, indeed, there is some question whether the ultimate renewal of modernism, the final dialectical subversion of the now automatized conventions of an aesthetics of perceptual revolution, might not simply be... realism itself! For when modernism and its accompanying techniques of "estrangement" have become the dominant style whereby the consumer is reconciled with capitalism, the habit of fragmentation itself needs to be "estranged" and corrected by a more totalizing way of viewing phenomena.¹⁰ In an unexpected denouement, it may be Lukács—wrong as he might have been in the 1930s—who has some provisional last word for us today. Yet this particular Lukács, if he be imaginable, would be one for whom the concept of realism has been rewritten in terms of the categories of *History and Class Consciousness*, in particular those of reification and totality. Unlike the more familiar concept of alienation, a process that pertains to activity and in particular to work (dissociating workers from their labor, their product, their fellow workers, and ultimately from their very "species being" itself), reification is a process that affects our cognitive relationship with the social totality. It is a disease of that mapping function whereby the individual subject projects and models his or her insertion into the collectivity. The reification of late capitalism—the transformation of human relations into an appearance of relationships between things—renders society opaque: it is the lived source of the mystifications on which ideology is based and by which domination and exploitation are legitimized. Since the fundamental structure of the social "totality" is a set of class relationships—an antagonistic structure such that the various social classes define themselves in terms of that antagonism and by opposition with one another—reification necessarily obscures the class character of that structure, and is accompanied, not only by anomie, but also by that increasing confusion as to the nature and even the existence of social classes which can be abundantly observed in all the "advanced" capitalist countries today. If the diagnosis is correct, the intensification of class consciousness will be less a matter of a populist or ouvrierist exaltation of a single class by itself, than of the forcible reopening of access to a sense of society as a totality, and of the reinvention of possibilities of cognition and perception that allow social phenomena once again to become transparent, as moments of the struggle *between* classes.

Under these circumstances, the function of a new realism would be clear:

to resist the power of reification in consumer society and to reinvent that category of totality which, systematically undermined by existential fragmentation on all levels of life and social organization today, can alone project structural relations between classes as well as class struggles in other countries, in what has increasingly become a world system. Such a conception of realism would incorporate what was always most concrete in the dialectical counterconcept of modernism—its emphasis on violent renewal of perception in a world in which experience has solidified into a mass of habits and automatisms. Yet the habituation that it would be the function of the new aesthetic to disrupt would no longer be thematized in the conventional modernistic terms of desacralized or dehumanizing reason, of mass society and the industrial city or technology in general, but rather as a function of the commodity system and the reifying structure of late capitalism.

Other conceptions of realism, other kinds of political aesthetics, obviously remain conceivable. The realism/modernism debate teaches us the need to judge them in terms of the historical and social conjuncture in which they are called to function. To take an attitude of partisanship toward key struggles of the past does not mean either choosing sides or seeking to harmonize irreconcilable differences. In such extinct yet still virulent intellectual conflicts, the fundamental contradiction is between history itself and the conceptual apparatus, which, seeking to grasp its realities, succeeds only in reproducing their discord within itself in the form of an enigma for thought, an aporia. It is to this aporia that we must hold, which contains within its structure the crux of a history beyond which we have not yet passed. It cannot of course tell us what our conception of realism ought to be; yet its study makes it impossible to us not to feel the obligation to reinvent one.

1977

Notes

- 1 For a complementary analysis of the internal contradictions of the idea of modernism, see Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983.
- 2 See Werner Mittenzwei, "Die Brecht-Lukács Debatte," *Das Argument* 46, March 1968; Eugene Lunn, "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács," *New German Critique* 3, Fall 1974, 12–44. Future references to this work denoted *CBL*; and, for the somewhat earlier period of the review,

- Die Linsenskurve* (1928–32), Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie-Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*, Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971.
- 3 See in particular “Narrate or Describe?” in Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, ed. and trans. Arthur D. Kahn, London: Grosset and Dunlap, 1970, 116–138.
 - 4 For a persuasive yet self-critical statement of such a Brechtian modernism, see Cohn MacCabe, “Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses,” *Screen* 15: 2, Summer 1974, 7–27.
 - 5 “You say that you are communists, people intent on changing a world no longer fit for habitation . . . Yet were you in reality the cultural servants of the ruling classes, it would be cunning strategy on your part to make material things unrecognizable, since the struggle concerns things and it is in the world of things that your masters have the most to answer for.” Bertold Brecht, “Über gegenstandslose Malerei,” vol. 2, *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967, 68–69.
 - 6 See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1968, and “The Author as Producer,” *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, New York: New Left Books, 1973; and for further developments in a radical theory of the media, see Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962; Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media*, trans. Stuart Hood, New York: Seabury Press, 1974; and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972.
 - 7 The more recent French variant on this position—as in the work of Jean Baudrillard—enlarges the model to include the “socialist bloc” within this new dystopian entente.
 - 8 Theodore W. Adorno, “Commitment,” *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: New Left Books, 1977, 194.
 - 9 For a pathbreaking Marxian corrective to Adorno’s reading of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, see Darko Suvin, “Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Marxist Figuration: Open Dramaturgy as Open History,” *The Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition*, ed. Norman Rudick, Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1976.
 - 10 See, for example, the instructive comments of Stanley Aronowitz on the cinema. “Unlike the important efforts of Japanese and European film-makers to fix the camera directly on the action and permit the scene to work ‘itself’ out, American films are characterized by rapid camera work and sharp editing whose effect is to segment the action into one- or two-minute time slots, paralleling the prevailing styles of television production. The American moviegoer, having become accustomed in TV watching to commercial breaks in the action of a dramatic presentation, is believed to have become incapable of sustaining longer and slower action. Therefore the prevailing modes of film production rely on conceptions of dramatic time inherited from the more crass forms of commercial culture. The filmmaker who subordinates the action and the characters to this concept of dramatic time reveals a politics inside technique that is far more insidious than ‘reactionary’

content. When viewed from this perspective, the film-maker such as Howard Hawks, who refuses to subordinate art to the requirements of segmented time, becomes more resistant to authoritarianism than the liberal or left-wing film-makers who are concerned with the humanitarian content of film but have capitulated to techniques that totally reduce the audience to spectators." *False Promises*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973, 116–17.

Marxism and Historicism

I

The relationship of Marxism to historicism is part of a larger problem—that of a properly Marxist *hermeneutic*—which cannot fully be dealt with here. Let us merely observe that the two thematic paths along which this problem is generally approached—that of historicism and that of an interpretive master code—form, along with the third and more distantly related theme of *representation*, the three major polemic and ideological targets of most forms of poststructuralism today, even though full-dress philosophical onslaughts on these three concepts have rarely been mounted. Still, the work of the *Tel Quel* group, Barthes, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, and others, presupposes this polemic at the same time that it contributes locally to this or that aspect of it; whereas the most systematic statement of the repudiation of historicism has been made by Foucault (in *The Order of Things* [1966] and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969]), and the most systematic statement of the repudiation of interpretation is expressed in the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) of Deleuze and Guattari. All these statements, however, presuppose a more basic master text, namely, Althusser's *Reading Capital* (1968), which, owing to its explicitly Marxist framework, is probably less familiar to American readers than other texts in French theory today. Althusser's attacks on Marxist historicism and on classical hermeneutics (which he calls *expressive causality*) are therefore basic reference points in what follows, even if we cannot here engage Althusser's fundamental work directly.¹

As for interpretation, I can only assert here what I will argue more systematically in another place, namely the semantic priority of Marxist interpretation over the other interpretive codes that are its rivals in the theoretical marketplace today.² If indeed one construes interpretation as a rewriting operation, all the various critical methods or positions may be grasped as positing, either explicitly or implicitly, some ultimate privileged interpretive *code* in terms of which the cultural object is allegorically

rewritten: such codes have taken the various forms of language or communication (in structuralism), desire (as for some Freudianisms but also some post-Marxisms), anxiety and freedom (in classical existentialism), temporality (for phenomenology), collective archetypes (in Jungianism or myth criticism), various forms of ethics or psychological “humanism” (in criticism whose dominant themes are the integration of the personality, the quest for identity, alienation and nonalienation, the reunification of the psyche, and so forth). Marxism also proposes a master code, but it is not, as is sometimes commonly thought, either that of economics or production in the narrow sense, or that of class struggle as a local conjuncture or event, but rather that very different category which is the “mode of production” itself, which we may therefore expect to make its appearance at the conclusion of the present argument. For the moment, suffice it to say that the concept of a mode of production projects a total synchronic structure in terms of which the themes and the concrete phenomena valorized by the other methods listed above necessarily find the appropriately subordinate structural position. This is to say that no intelligent contemporary Marxism will wish to exclude or repudiate any of the themes listed above, which all in their various ways designate objective zones in the fragmentation of contemporary life. Marxism’s “transcendence” of these other methods therefore does not spell the abolition or dissolution of their privileged objects of study, but rather the demystification of the various frameworks or strategies of containment by means of which each could lay claim to being a total and self-sufficient interpretive system. To affirm the priority of Marxist analysis as that of some ultimate and untranscendable semantic horizon—namely the horizon of the *social*—thus implies that all other interpretive systems conceal a *seam* which strategically seals them off from the social totality of which they are a part and constitutes their object of study as an apparently closed phenomenon. Thus, for instance, the powerful closed hermeneutic of the Freudian psychic models is unexpectedly and dialectically reopened and transcended when it is understood that such models ultimately depend on the concrete social reality of the family as an institution. As to the final state, in all the poststructuralist critiques of interpretation, in which allegorical rewriting always presupposes some ultimately privileged form of *representation*—in the present instance, presumably, the representation of something called History itself—we can merely assert here that it is precisely in this respect that a Marxist hermeneutic can be radically distinguished from all the other types enumerated above, since its “master code,” or transcendental *signified*, is precisely not given as a representation but rather as an *absent cause*, as that which can never know full representation. I must here limit myself to a formula I have proposed elsewhere, namely that History is not in any sense itself a text or master text or master narrative, but that it is inaccessible to us except in textual or narrative form, or, in other

words, that we approach it only by way of some prior textualization or narrative (re)construction.

These preliminary remarks about the problem of interpretation would therefore seem to have restructured in advance the other related problem that is our official subject here, namely that of historicism, to which we now turn. I will speak in a moment about the curious destiny of this term, which cannot today be pronounced without furtively turning up one's lapels and glancing over one's shoulder. Let us for the moment construe this problem in a more empirical or commonsense fashion as being simply that of our relationship to the past, and of our possibility of understanding the latter's monuments, artifacts, and traces.

The dilemma of any "historicism" can then be dramatized by the peculiar, unavoidable, yet seemingly unresolvable alternation between Identity and Difference. This is indeed the first arbitrary decision we are called on to make with respect to any form or object from out of the past, and it is a decision which founds that contact; so that on the one hand, as with Sartrean freedom, we cannot *not* opt for one or the other of these possibilities (even when for the most part we remain oblivious of a choice made in an unthematized and unreflexive way), while on the other, the decision itself, since it inaugurates the experience, is something like an absolute presupposition that is itself beyond any further philosophical argument (thus, we cannot appeal to any empirical findings about the past, since they are themselves grounded on this initial presupposition). That this is meanwhile an intolerable option may quickly be conveyed by an oversimplified demonstration: if we choose to affirm the Identity of the alien object with ourselves—if, in other words, we decide that Chaucer, say, or a steatopygous Venus, or the narratives of nineteenth-century Russian gentry, are more or less directly or intuitively accessible to us with our own cultural *moyens du bord*—then we have presupposed what was to have been demonstrated, and our apparent "comprehension" of these alien texts must be haunted by the nagging suspicion that we have all the while remained locked in our own present—the present of the *société de consommation* with its television sets and superhighways, its Cold War, and its postmodernisms and poststructuralisms—and that we have never really left home at all, that our feeling of *Verstehen* is little better than mere psychological projection, that we have somehow failed to touch the strangeness and the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own. Yet if, as a result of such hyperbolic doubt, we decide to reverse this initial stance, and to affirm, instead and from the outset, the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of comprehension begin to swing closed and we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as Other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inaccessible.

The status of the classical world has long been paradigmatic of this dilemma. When Greek forms and Latin texts were considered classical for us, what was affirmed was not merely the Identity of these formal languages and sign systems with our own aesthetic values and ideals, but rather also, and through the symbolic medium of the aesthetic experience, a whole political analogy between two forms of social life. We are in a position to grasp this better today, when Greek forms—and the ideal of classical beauty that derives from them and of which the art of Raphael has generally been taken as the supreme embodiment—come to be viewed as insipid and when the temptation arises to rewrite them more “strongly” in terms of Difference. Then the Nietzschean reassertion of the Dionysian and of the orgiastic counterreligion of the mysteries, the ritual studies of the Cambridge School, Freud himself (and Lévi-Strauss’s rewriting of the Oedipus legend in terms of primitive myth), decisive reversals in classical scholarship (such as the work of George Thompson, Dodds’s *The Greeks and the Irrational*, and the newer French classical scholarship), and above all, perhaps, contemporary aesthetic reinterpretations of the Greek fact (such as Karl Orff’s opera *Antigone*)—all converge to produce an alternative Greece, not that of Pericles or the Parthenon, but something savage or barbaric, tribal or African, or Mediterranean-sexist—a culture of masks and death, ritual ecstasies, slavery, scapegoating, phallocratic homosexuality, an utterly non- or anticlassical culture to which something of the electrifying otherness and fascination, say, of the Aztec world, has been restored. That this powerful counterimage is no less conditioned by our own collective fantasies than the *edle Einfalt und stille Grösse* of the Apollonian classicism which it replaced may be deduced from its kinship with other persistent historical motifs, such as the constellation of “totalitarian” fantasies expressed in 1984, images of Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism*, popular representations of Stalinist “bureaucracy” and of the cyclical return (particularly in science fiction) of various images of imperial domination and of archaic power systems. Nonetheless, the content of these new motifs allows us to reevaluate the older vision of the classical world, which now proves to be less a matter of individual taste than a whole social and collective mirror image, in which the production of a new artistic style—neoclassicism—comes to serve as the vehicle for political legitimation; now it is a whole dominant social class, the English aristocratic oligarchy as it persists as a privileged enclave within the hostile environment of industrialization and commerce and the alien element of a brutalized and mentally and corporeally alienated proletariat, which contemplates its own ideal image in and is validated by the culture of a slaveholding aristocratic polis from which only the cultural forms themselves triumphantly survive.

It is clear that these two images of the classical world—that of Identity and that of Difference, that of the harmonious polis and that of the “Orientalism”

of a radically alien form of social life—float side by side as alternative worlds that can never intersect. That both are profoundly ideological visions should not encourage us too rapidly to conclude that a “value-free” and henceforth “scientific” historiography is capable of freeing us from the binary opposition of Identity and Difference, and of piercing such ideological representations in order to replace them with an “objective” account of the realities of the ancient world. Perhaps, on the contrary, we need to take into account the possibility that our contact with the past will always pass through the imaginary and through its ideologies, will always in one way or another be mediated by the codes and motifs of some deeper historical classification system or *pensée sauvage* of the historical imagination, some properly political unconscious. This is at any rate the hypothesis we now want to explore.

II

I begin by suggesting that the traditional “solutions” to the dilemma of historicism are fourfold, and indeed organize themselves into something like a *combinatoire* or structural permutation scheme. It is, however, sufficient to enumerate these possibilities—which I call antiquarianism, existential historicism, structural typology, and Nietzschean antihistoricism—to note that two of these positions amount essentially to refusals or repudiations of the problem itself.

This refusal may be observed most immediately in simple antiquarianism, for which the past does not have to justify its claim of interest on us, nor do its monuments have to present their credentials as proper “research subjects” or furnish appropriate reasons for a passionate commitment to *The Fairie Queene* or to nineteenth-century industrial novels, which now—validated as sheer historical facts with the irrevocable claim on us of all historical fact—lead a ghostly second existence as mere private hobbies. One is tempted to say that this position “solves” the problem of the relationship between present and past by the simple gesture of abolishing the present as such, and that its emblem might well be found in Melville’s “late consumptive usher to a grammar school [who] loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality.” The graduate school anxieties of the first scene of Goethe’s *Faust* sufficiently express the asphyxiating distress of this position, to which Nietzsche’s “Use and Abuse of History” then comes as a fairly predictable dialectical reaction and counterblast.

Yet it should not be thought that the antiquarian position is utterly without theoretical justification, even though such justification may take the form of the repudiation of theory as such. It is in fact the cultural

equivalent and afterimage of a far more powerful ideology in the realm of historiography itself, namely of empiricism proper. It should not be necessary today to rehearse the many powerful indictments that have been made by empirical and empiricist historiography, which can be resumed by the twin diagnosis that the repudiation of theory is itself a theory, and that the concept of the objective "fact" is itself a theoretical construct. I will therefore limit myself to observing that the empiricist position is essentially a second-degree, reactive, critical, or demystifying one, a form of what Deleuze and Guattari conveniently term the "decoding" of preexistent, conventionally received interpretive codes, whether they be those of folk and popular legend (as in ancient historiography), or essentially theological visions of history (as in Enlightenment historiography), of the naive chronicle narratives of the deeds and destinies of the great (as in the nascent social history of the nineteenth century), or of a hegemonic Marxian vision of history in the present day.³ If this is so, however, then empirical historiography or antiquarianism is never a first-degree position in its own right, but rather presupposes for its own vitality as a stance the existence of those other visions of history which its mission lies in subverting.

III

The first theoretical stance toward the past that has genuine content will therefore be what we here call "existential historicism," a term which, now designating an ideological position in its own right and a whole theoretical program rather than a conceptual dilemma, demands, owing to the well-nigh universal stigmatization of these words, some preliminary comment.⁴ The postcontemporary reader can still sense something of the irony of this reversal by juxtaposing Auerbach's celebration of German historicism with Althusser's canonical onslaught on what he understands this term to imply. It will then be seen that something quite different is meant by these two authors, but that the term has, for better or for worse, become an ideological and polemic battleground whose framework must, at least for the moment, be respected.

The poststructural attack on "historicism," which emerges from a no less problematic affirmation of the priority of "synchronic" thought, can best be resumed in my opinion as a repudiation of two related and essentially *narrative* forms of analysis which can be termed the *genetic* and the *teleological*, respectively. This second term may be resumed most rapidly, for it amounts to little more than the reappearance, within a Marxian (and also, today, a post-Marxist) framework of that critique and repudiation of the idea of "progress" which for rather different reasons characterizes bourgeois thought as well from Henry Adams and H. G. Wells down to the anti-

Utopian “end of ideology” thinkers of our own Cold War period. Teleology here designates the belief in any “positive” future or “end of history” in whose name you might be expected to be willing to sacrifice your own present. Salvational, “humanist,” or Stalinist, such spurious images of the future are then denounced as symptoms of an essentially theological (and totalitarian) mode of thought. As desirable as it may be to rid Marxism of any vestiges of a properly bourgeois notion of “progress,” it would seem a good deal less desirable nervously to abandon any Marxian vision of the future altogether (an operation in which Marxism itself is generally abandoned in the process). Meanwhile, if this is what “teleology” means, it will be possible to show that what we here call “existential historicism” does not presuppose it in the least.

As for “genetic” historicism, while it may well be ideologically linked to teleological thought, which can then be seen as the former’s projection and its metaphysic, in its strict form this kind of analysis—which we will examine as a specific trope of a certain nineteenth-century thought—is not necessarily wedded to the idea of the future and of progress either, although there are narrative similarities between the two forms. What teleological thought reads as a narrative progression from a fallen present to a fully constituted future, genetic thought now displaces onto the past, constructing an imaginary past term as the evolutionary precursor of a fuller term that has historical existence. Because the example of nineteenth-century historical linguistics (and Saussure’s revolutionary “synchronic” reaction against it) is well known, I will give the rather different illustration of Bachofen’s reconstruction of some “original” matriarchy, which precedes the patriarchal classical culture evident to us in classical texts and artifacts, and which is, in Bachofen’s hypothesis, affirmed as a genuine historical event or stage: “In all the myths relating to our object of study, we find inscribed the memory of real events which happened to the human race. These are not fictions but historical destinies which people really experienced.”⁵ Bachofen’s theoretical defense of this hypothesis is the exemplary expression of the genetic or “evolutionary” method:

A genuinely scientific epistemology consists not merely in answering the question about the nature of the object. It finds its completion in discovering the source of the object’s emergence and connecting the latter to its subsequent development. Knowledge is only then transformed into Understanding when it has been able to encompass origin, development and ultimate fate. (*M*, 8)

The genetic trope should, however, not be consigned to the ashcan of history without a few preliminary qualifications. For one thing, in spite of the unselfconscious use of the term “origin,” this trope is quite distinct from the characteristically eighteenth-century fascination with absolute

origins (as in the debates about the contractual origin of society, the origin of language, the creation of the universe, or pre-Darwinian evolutionism)—a kind of speculation to which Kant may be said to have put an end once and for all. Nineteenth-century “historicism,” even of the genetic kind, is, in the sense of Edward Said’s convenient distinction, less concerned with absolute origins than with beginnings, and its historical narratives—whatever their ideological inspirations—organize a world of facts from which the problem of origins has been excluded from the outset and in which we must deal instead with more properly Althusserian *toujours-déjà-données*.

On the other hand, it must also be observed that the genetic approach is quite different from the seemingly analogous dilemmas of a more properly structural historiography: the former works with a single term in order artificially to construct a merely hypothetical preliminary opposite term, as in Bachofen’s notion of “matriarchy,” Morgan’s notion of “savagery” and promiscuous group marriage, and the linguistic hypothesis of proto-Indo-European. Structural historiography, on the other hand, works with two already fully constituted terms, such as “feudalism” and “capitalism”; it does not seek to reconstruct the former as an Ur-stage of the latter, but rather to build a model of the *transition* from one form to the other, and this is no longer then a genetic hypothesis but rather an investigation of structural transformations.

Finally, in order to forestall still further confusions, it seems important to affirm, with Althusser, that Marx’s *Capital* is not a genetic construction of this kind but rather a synchronic model. Indeed, even though the reproach of evolutionism generally accompanies that of geneticism, it seems appropriate to observe that Darwin is also—in contrast to earlier evolutionisms or later Darwinianisms—synchronic in this sense, and that the whole scandalous force of the synchronic mechanism of natural selection, as a rigorously “meaningless” and nonteleological process, is lost when it is appropriated for the cornerstone of some vast divine master plan. What must be added to both these affirmations is that such synchronic models do not discredit History in any absolute sense as an object of study and representation, but rather determine a new and original form of historiography, a structural permutation in the latter’s narrative form or trope. It is this new antigenetic form which Nietzsche will then theorize as the *genealogy* (and Foucault as the *archaeology*), namely the narrative reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of any full synchronic form. Thus, to return to *Capital*, Marx’s discussions of commerce and merchant capital, and his analysis of the “stage” of primitive accumulation, are reconstructions of what, once capital is fully emergent as such, can now be rewritten as the latter’s preparatory requirements, it being understood that *within feudalism* these phenomena were not anticipatory of anything, since in that synchronic system capital as such did not yet exist.

With these qualifications, we are now perhaps in a better position to raise the more interesting problems posed by the genetic trope, which do not involve its “truth” or “falsity” but rather arise only after we have decided that this form of thinking is ideological or inadequate. Saussure’s own expression of impatience—“much against my own inclination all this will end up with a book in which I will explain without any passion or enthusiasm how there is not a single term used in linguistics today which has any meaning for me whatsoever”⁶—suggests a more satisfactory way of historicizing the genetic trope, namely to ask ourselves what this particular “meaning-effect” or “understanding-effect” must have been in the first place, and how it was that intelligent people felt satisfied with the kind of historical narrative it provided them. At that point, it might well prove possible to grasp the genetic trope as the conceptual hypostasis and phenomenological projection of a life experience unique to the industrializing nations of nineteenth-century capitalism, of the gradual dissolution of the older precapitalist *Gemeinschaften* of traditional village life and their replacement, within the unity of a single lifetime and a single biographical experience, by the nascent industrial city. For subjects whose life experience thus includes both these terms and spans two distinct social formations—unlike the inhabitants of relatively static precapitalist societies, and unlike those of the postnatural *société de consommation* of the present day—it would not seem farfetched to suppose that the empty form of the genetic trope might have provided a satisfying way of thinking the two terms together and thereby of resolving, by way of something like a conceptual narrative mechanism, the lived contradiction of “modernization” itself, as the bourgeois cultural revolution is often euphemistically termed today. However this may be, such regrounding of the “false consciousness” of the genetic trope in a concrete historical situation has the additional merit for us, in the present context, of suggesting a historicizing operation and a model of a different possible “historicism” which has nothing in common with the genetic approach itself.

IV

With such a model we may now leave genetic or teleological “historicism” behind and examine that quite different theoretical stance which is existential historicism proper. Its theoretical origins may no doubt be fixed in the work of Dilthey, and beyond it, perhaps, in Ranke’s great dictum that “every age is immediate to God” (or, in other words, that every culture is immanently comprehensible in its own terms). The fundamental practitioners of existential historicism are then surely the cultural historians, linguists, and iconologists of the great and now virtually extinct tradition of

German philology, of which Auerbach and Spitzer, and in the history of art, Panofsky and the work of the Warburg Institute, remain the most vital presences in English-language cultural study. But we must not forget to mention the original forms taken by this historicism in other national traditions, most notably in the work of Croce, Collingwood, and the important Spanish variant expressed in that of Ortega and Americo Castro. Yet from an institutional point of view, the most powerful and authoritative monument to existential historicism is not to be found in the official “humanities,” but rather in American anthropology, in the school of Franz Boas, explicitly antigenetic and antievolutionist, in which the range of historical experience open to existential historicism is broadened to include the whole range of “primitive” cultures as such.⁷ This is perhaps also the place to observe that, however “teleological” the form in which Hegel’s histories proper are narrated (as the realization in matter of World Spirit), the much maligned concept of Absolute Spirit cannot accurately be assimilated to some final stage of History, but rather is meant to describe the historian’s mind as it contemplates the variety of human histories and cultural forms.

Such names—in particular that of Boas—should warn us then that existential historicism does not involve the construction of this or that linear or evolutionary or genetic history, but rather designates something like a trans-historical event: the experience, rather, by which *historicity* as such is manifested, by means of the contact between the historian’s mind in the present and a given synchronic cultural complex from the past. This is to say that the methodological spirit of existential historicism may be described as a historical and cultural aestheticism. On the one hand, as in classical German aesthetics itself, all praxis is in this experience suspended (whence the well-known Hegelian formulas of the “Sunday of life,” and the dusk in which Minerva’s owl takes flight). Meanwhile, the quality of rapt attention that existential historicism brings to the objects of its study—texts as expressions of moments of the historical past, or of unique and distant cultures—is essentially that of aesthetic appreciation and recreation, and the diversity of cultures and historical moments becomes thereby for it a source of immense aesthetic excitement and gratification. These twin constitutive strengths of existential historicism are also, as we will see in a moment, the places of its theoretical and ideological flaws. Already, in the face of the well-nigh infinite variety of cultures, it is clear that existential historicism requires some principle of unity in order to prevent its vision from collapsing into the sheer mechanical and meaningless succession of facts of empiricist historiography (where History, as one expert remarked, is just “one damned thing after another”). This principle of unity, or, in other words, the ideological underpinning of existential historicism, is then derived from German *Lebensphilosophie*, in which the infinite multiplicity of human symbolic acts is the expression of the infinite potentialities of a nonalienated human

nature. The experience of historicity then restores something of this richness to a present in which few enough of those potentialities are practically available to any of us.

For existential historicism, then, the past has vital urgency for us, and this urgency, which distinguishes such a stance from that of simple anti-quarianism, surely needs to be retained in any more adequate “solution” to the dilemma of historicism proper. In this sense, whatever its theoretical contradictions, existential historicism must be honored as an experience, indeed, as the fundamental inaugural experience of history itself, without which all work in culture must remain a dead letter. There can indeed be no cultural investigation worthy of the name, let alone any history proper, that does not breathe something of the spiritual enthusiasm of this tradition for the traces that life has left behind it, something of its visionary instinct for all the forms of living praxis preserved and still instinct within the monuments of the past.

Nor does the past itself remain unmodified by this experience. Rather, the historicist act revives the dead and reenacts the essential mystery of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak its mortal speech and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings unfamiliar to it. As I have mentioned the Germans and the Spaniards, the Italians and the English, it may be appropriate to dramatize this astonishing moment of the exchange of forces between present and past through the voice of its supreme French embodiment, and to reread the lines in which Michelet—arriving at the night of August 4, 1789, in his great narrative, at the sudden and irrevocable dissolution of the *ancien régime* and the feudal world, and the unexpected emergence of “modern times”—salutes a past become present once again:

*Que vous avez tardé, grand jour! combien de temps nos pères vous ont attendu et rêvé! ... L'espoir que leurs fils vous verraient enfin a pu seul les soutenir; autrement ils n'auraient pas voulu vivre, ils seraient morts à la peine ... Moi-même, leur compagnon, labourant à côté d'eux dans le sillon de l'histoire, buvant à leur coupe amère, qui m'a permis de revivre le douloureux moyen âge, et pourtant de n'en pas mourir, n'est-ce pas vous, ô beau jour, premier jour de la délivrance? ... J'ai vécu pour vous raconter!*⁸

How late you are in coming, great day! How long our forefathers had to wait for you and dream about you! ... Only the hope their sons would see you sustained them; otherwise they would have cursed life and died at hard labor ... And I myself, their comrade, toiling beside them in the furrow of history and drinking from their bitter cup—what was it that allowed me to relive the agonizing Middle Ages and to emerge alive, if not you, oh glorious day, first day of our freedom? ... I lived but to tell your story!

Yet if the past is thus construed as a *Kerygma*,⁹ as a voice and a message and an annunciation which it is the historian's vocation to sense and to preserve, there must also come a falling cadence as this supreme event begins to fade and normal time returns; so Michelet, evoking that other supreme moment of his history which is the Fête de la Fédération of July 1790—and finding its documents “burning, after sixty years, as though written yesterday ... love letters”—now expresses the pathos of the downward slope and the withdrawal from his vision:

“Ainsi finit le meilleur jour de notre vie.” Ce mot que les fédérés d'un village écrivent le soir de la fête a la fin de leur récit, j'ai été tout près de l'écrire moi-même en terminant ce chapitre. Il est fini et rien de semblable ne reviendra pour moi. J'y laisse un irréparable moment de ma vie, une partie de moi-même, je le sens bien, qui restera là et ne me suivra plus; il me semble que je m'en vais appauvri et diminué. (H, 412)

“So ended the best day of our life.” This sentence, inscribed at nightfall by the fédérés of a village at the close of their narrative—I almost wrote it again myself at the end of the present chapter. It is over, and nothing of the sort will ever happen to me again. I leave here an irreparable moment of my life, a part of myself, which must, I sense, remain behind and follow me no further; it seems to me that I am thereby impoverished and diminished.

Such dramatic outbursts, comparable only to the great trumpet call of *Fidelio* which signals the deliverance from the crypt of the *ancien régime* and the resurrection of the dead, ratify the vocation of the historian as custodian of the past and of the nameless generations of human life that have vanished without a trace. At the same time, there is already in Michelet something that inflects the stance of existential historicism in an unexpected direction, and which may allow us to sense a way out of its contradictions, which can now thereby be more accurately formulated.

For existential historicism, as we have suggested, the experience of history is a contact between an individual subject in the present and a cultural object in the past. Each pole of this experience is thereby at once open to complete relativization: to take up for the moment only the subjectivity of the historian, it is clear that given the tastes and receptivities of the individual subject, an infinity of possible histories is conceivable. It is this threat of infinite relativization which the more properly ideological presuppositions of existential historicism are then called upon to limit and to conjure. These consist, as we have said, in a certain psychology of human nature, or, better still, in a certain anthropology—the notion of some full development of human potentialities, as it is expressed diversely in Schiller, Humboldt, or the early Marx—which, as an ontological presupposition, cannot be satisfactory to us today, no matter how much sympathy we may have for its vision. Here the Althusserian critique of “humanism,” and Althusser's

systematic dissociation of the early—anthropological or “existential”—Marx from the later structural and synchronic model of *Capital*, is powerful and timely; we may in our present context rewrite Althusser’s thematics of “humanism” as a warning that any “anthropology,” any statement about “human nature,” is necessarily and irredeemably ideological. This position can perhaps be grasped most immediately and practically on the polemic level, where it is clear that to any given anthropology or presupposition about human nature, any other may with equally peremptory force be opposed (as, for instance, the Hobbesian view, revived by Robert Ardrey and others, of the innate aggressivity of the human animal).

It should not be thought, however, that this dilemma can be adequately solved by way of the poststructuralist critique of the centered subject: that existential historicism in its canonical form posits the historian as a centered subject of this type is evident (and were it not, the critiques of Hegelian Absolute Spirit from the most varied philosophical standpoints would be enough to demonstrate it). Yet as we have suggested, what is essential in this experience is less the construction of the subject itself than its enthusiasm, the spark of recognition, what would today be called its reception of unique intensities. Quite unexpectedly, therefore, we find, in the midst of the most powerful contemporary celebration of the decentered subject, a call for what can only be called a decentered, “schizophrenic” equivalent to existential historicism:

Klossowski has admirably demonstrated in his commentary on Nietzsche the presence of the *Stimmung* as a material emotion, constitutive of the most lofty thought and the most acute perception. “The centrifugal forces do not flee the center forever, but approach it once again, only to retreat from it yet again: such is the nature of the violent oscillations that overwhelm an individual so long as he seeks only his own center and is incapable of seeing the circle of which he himself is a part; for if these oscillations overwhelm him, it is because each one of them corresponds to an individual other than the one he believes himself to be, from the point of view of the unlocatable center. As a result, an identity is essentially fortuitous, and a series of individualities must be undergone by each of these oscillations, so that as a consequence the fortuitousness of this or that particular individuality will render all of them necessary.” The forces of attraction and repulsion, of soaring ascents and plunging falls, produce a series of intensive states based on the intensity = 0 that designates the body without organs (“but what is most unusual is that here again a new afflux is necessary, merely to signify this absence”). There is no Nietzsche-the-self, professor of philology, who suddenly loses his mind and supposedly identifies with all sorts of strange people; rather, there is the Nietzschean subject who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with history’s various names: “I am all the names of History!” The subject spreads itself out along the entire circumference of the circle, the center of which has been abandoned by the ego. At the center is the

desiring-machine, the celibate machine of the Eternal Return. A residual subject of the machine, Nietzsche-as-subject garners a euphoric reward (*Voluptas*) from everything that this machine turns out, a product that the reader had thought to be no more than the fragmented *oeuvre* by Nietzsche. “Nietzsche believes that he is now pursuing, not the realization of a system, but the application of a program ... in the form of residues of the Nietzschean discourse, which have now become the repertory, so to speak, of his histrionics.” It is not a matter of identifying with various historical personages, but rather identifying the names of history with zones of intensity on the body without organs; and each time Nietzsche-as-subject exclaims: “They’re *me!* So it’s *me!*” No one has ever been as deeply involved in history as the schizo, or dealt with it in this way. He consumes all of universal history in one fell swoop. We began by defining him as *Homo natura*, and lo and behold, he has turned out to be *Homo historia*. This long road that leads from the one to the other stretches from Hölderlin to Nietzsche, and the pace becomes faster and faster. “The euphoria could not be prolonged in Nietzsche for as long a time as the contemplative alienation of Hölderlin ... The vision of the world granted to Nietzsche does not inaugurate a more or less regular succession of landscapes or still lifes, extending over a period of forty years or so: it is, rather, a parody of the process of recollection of an event: a single actor will play the whole of it in pantomime in the course of a single solemn day—because the whole of it reaches expression and then disappears once again in the space of just one day—even though it may appear to have taken place between December 31 and January 6—in a realm above and beyond the usual rational calendar.¹⁰

Schizophrenic historicism does not change the basic terms of the historicist situation, for it still opposes an individual subject (here to be sure an individual “effect of subjectivity” rather than a fully constituted “bourgeois” centered subject) to an essentially collective object. Yet it now allows us to widen the range of effects or intensities that are thereby implied: now not merely enthusiasm of an aestheticizing type, or Nietzschean euphoria and exaltation, but also the whole gamut of quite different *Stimmungen*—dizziness, loathing, depression, nausea, and Freudian decathexis—are to be numbered among the possible modes of some “authentic” contact with the cultural past. In this sense, indeed, our contemporary distance from aesthetic historicism itself may be unexpectedly reevaluated; and the Althusserian exasperation with Michelet’s rhetoric of the resurrection of the dead, the passionate repudiation of the *vecú* and of existential phenomenology as well as of Hegelian “expressive causality,” indeed, the more general malaise and revulsion we may sometimes feel for the supreme and placeless sovereignty with which a (most often Germanic) bourgeois World Spirit dips into the cultures of the past and organizes them into “imaginary museums” for its own delectation—all these feelings signal some electrifying and authentically historical—indeed properly *historicist*—contact with that present of existential historicism itself which has now become but

another moment of our own past and which we live, in the no less vital mode of the negative, or of repulsion.

From this vaster perspective, then, it would seem that only indifference suspends a lived relationship to the past that can be registered in intensities of any conceivable quality; for even boredom, in its strong Baudelairean form, is a way of sensing and living the specificity of certain moments of the cultural past. If this is the case with boredom, however, as a resistance of the organism to culturally alien and asphyxiating forms, we may want to take into consideration the possibility that indifference is itself ultimately also a mode of relationship, something like a defense mechanism, a repression, a neurotic denial, a preventive shutting off of affect, which itself finally reconfirms the vital threat of its object. In that case, the “nightmare of history” becomes inescapable: we are everywhere in relation to it, even in its apparent absences, and the therapeutic Nietzschean “forgetfulness” of history is fully as reactive to the fact of history as is Michelet’s “resurrection.” How are we to understand this “absent cause” (Althusser), to which we cannot *not* react with the whole range of our affective intensities, and which at the same time would seem to be so charged with dread as to make the occasional prospect of its occultation—its repression or its amnesia—come before us like a momentary relief? It does not seem to me that the immemorial record of violence and the most brutal as well as the most intangible forms of domination are sufficient to motivate this mental flight, these ingenious subterfuges. Violence is a sheerly ideological category, as the popularity of this “concept” in American social criticism today testifies; and as for domination, social Darwinism and neofascism make it plain that under certain circumstances this phenomenon can also be contemplated with complacency or even a somber exhilaration. For Marxism, indeed, the categories of power are not the ultimate ones, and the trajectory of contemporary social theory (from Weber to Foucault) suggests that the appeal to it is often strategic and involves a systematic displacement of the Marxian problematic. No, the ultimate form of the “nightmare of history” is rather the fact of labor itself, and the intolerable spectacle of the backbreaking millennial toil of millions of people from the earliest moments of human history. The more existential versions of this dizzying and properly unthinkable, unimaginable spectacle—as in horror at the endless succession of “dying generations,” at the ceaseless wheel of life, or at the irrevocable passage of Time itself—are themselves only disguises for this ultimately scandalous fact of mindless alienated work and of the irremediable loss and waste of human energies, a scandal to which no metaphysical categories can give a meaning. This scandal is everywhere known, everywhere repressed—*un secret de tous connu*. It is, for example, instructive that the text of Tolstoy upon which the Russian Formalists founded their canonical theory of artistic defamiliarization should be a text about work—indeed, contemporary

feminism makes the recognition of this labor as *housework*, women's work, the oldest form of the division of labor, quite unavoidable:

I was cleaning a room and, meandering about, approached the sofa and couldn't remember whether or not I had dusted it. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I could not remember and felt that it was impossible to remember—so that if I had dusted it and forgot—that is, had acted unconsciously—then it was the same as if I had not. If some conscious person had been watching, then the fact could be established. If, however, no one was looking, or was looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.¹¹

This waste of human life—what Tillie Olsen has called the *silences* into which such large parts of so many people's lives, and not merely women's lives, disappear—is evidently not rectified by the self-consciousness by which the Formalists (and perhaps Tolstoy himself) proposed to recuperate it. The whole classical doctrine of aesthetics as play and a nonfinalizable finality, and the persistent ideological valorization of handicraft production, are also desperate attempts to think away the unthinkable reality of alienated labor. The latter finally grounds the phenomenon of reification itself, described, for instance, by the *Tel Quel* group as the “effacement of the traces of production on the object”: yet even here the category of “production” remains a still too tolerable and recuperable one, which in a pinch any modernist would be willing to salute. The deeper hold of reification lies in its promise to obliterate from the object world that surrounds us the dizzying and culpabilizing presence of the stored alien labor of other people.

Neither the complacent aestheticizing contemplation of existential historicism proper, nor the more manic and Nietzschean exaltation of schizophrenic historicism, resolves the fundamental imbalance of such views of historical experience, which oppose the response of an individual subject to the collective realities of any moment of the past. It is precisely at this point that Michelet's inflection of such historicism suggests a rather different solution: in Michelet, indeed, the present of the observer-historian, far from being placeless, is doubly inscribed in the text as a concrete situation. It is above all the present of August 4, 1789, the present of the Revolution, which resurrects the lost “silences” of medieval labor, not through any “objective” historiographic reconstruction, but by the vital *Novum* of praxis; meanwhile the politically committed stance of the historian Michelet during the legitimation crisis of the final years of the July Monarchy, the politically symbolic value of his own historiography which will earn him suspension from the Collège de France on the very eve of the Revolution of 1848, reduplicates this reinvention of the past by an active present and allows Michelet himself to resurrect that very present—the

night of August fourth—which has become his own past. What needs to be stressed here is that we no longer have to do with the contemplative relationship of an individual subject to the past, but rather with the quite different relationship of an objective *situation* in the present with an objective *situation* in the past. Indeed, insofar as Marxism is itself a historicism—not, to be sure, a geneticism or a teleology in Althusser's sense of this word, but rather, as I have termed it elsewhere, an “absolute historicism”—its historical grounding is analogous, and Marx takes pains at various places in *Capital* to underscore the objective and historical preconditions of his discovery of the labor theory of value in a social situation in which for the first time labor and land are fully commodified:

The capitalist epoch is therefore characterized by the fact that labor-power, in the eyes of the worker himself, takes on the form of a commodity which is his property; his labor consequently takes on the form of wage-labor. On the other hand, it is only from this moment that the commodity-form of the products of labor becomes universal.¹²

Marx's “personal” discovery of this “scientific truth” is therefore itself grounded within his system and is a function of the originality of a historical situation in which for the first time the development of capital itself permits the production of a concept—the labor theory of value—which can retroactively “recover” the truth of even the millennia of precapitalist human history:

What Marx's analytical method reveals and concretely demonstrates is the historical character both of the *realities* that thought analyzes and of the *concepts* such thinking constructs to explain them. Marx's method thus excludes from the outset any possibility for theory to *alienate itself speculatively* in its own ideational products by presenting them either as ideal realities without a history of their own or as idealities that refer to a reality that would itself be nonhistorical.¹³

Still, in our present context, there must remain something scandalous about this conjunction between an absolute scientific truth and its enabling situation in contingent, empirical history: the Althusserian resistance to such an absolute Marxist historicism evidently springs from the fear that, as an existential historicism generally, “science” must necessarily thereby find itself relativized. This scandal is perhaps usefully intensified by that contemporary Marxist thinker who has reflected the most consequently on the experience of the past expressed in our quotes from Michelet:

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*, or Ernst Bloch's *Novum*] ... Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the Now which he blasted out of the continuum of history.¹⁴

Benjamin's own version of the resurrection of the past—"Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins"—and his vision of the present—"every second of historical time is the strait gate through which Messiah may enter"—clearly lead us out of existential historicism (and of its well-known "dilemmas") into a different space in which for the first time the missing term—the Utopian future—is pronounced (*I*, 225, 264 [theses 6 and 18 B]).

V

Before we explore this new historical space even in a tentative way, we must return to the enumeration of the more conventional theoretical options on the relationship to the past with which we began. The emphasis of existential historicism on the subject of the historical experience seemed to precipitate the latter's object into an optional heterogeneity and multiplicity of possible pasts and cultures which were distinguished from the random additive multiplicity of empiricist history only by libidinal investment. It is then predictable enough to find a dialectical counterposition emerge in which it is the logic of the historical object, rather than the intensity and authentic experiencing of the historian subject, that organizes our relationship to the past. This hypothetical logic of the historical object then generally organizes itself into a typology whose semic content and mechanism varies with the level of abstraction in which cultures or moments of the past are therein described. Such a typology can take the quite different forms of Dilthey's psychological types (or Mannheim's), of the stylistic oppositions of the great late-nineteenth-century art historians (such as Wölfflin), of the operative mechanisms of the Weberian "ideal types," of Spengler's stylistic classification of cultures, or, in our own time, of Lotman's tropological typology of cultures, which will serve us as our principal exhibit here.¹⁵

It should not be assumed, however, that these classification schemes or *combinatoires*—here all loosely designated as forms of "structural typology"—necessarily express a radically different or incommensurable impulse from those at work in existential historicism. On the contrary, semiotic analysis of such texts generally discloses the operation of "deep" semic oppositions—a kind of historical *pensée sauvage*—which can usually be found to project a whole structural typology of cultures imperceptible at the

surface of the text and disguised or displaced by the emphasis on the sensitivity of the individual historian-subject. The importance of Dilthey was his sensing of the necessary interrelationship between synchronic *Verstehen* and a more general typology of historical moments or cultures (even though he formulated this in the psychological terms of various world views). Meanwhile, it is clear in the work of a historicist like Auerbach that his series of “synchronic” moments is intersected, albeit very imperfectly, by the structural opposition between paratactic and syntactic styles which inaugurates his work and whose historical status is never fully articulated. In much the same way, the “masterpieces” of Boasian anthropology—such as Ruth Benedict’s well-known *Patterns of Culture*—in spite of their ideological stress on the infinite diversity of human cultures, can be shown to be articulated by a cultural classification system that is far from innocent.

Lotman’s work is exemplary for us in the present context because it would seem to have drawn the methodological consequences of this apparently unavoidable, yet generally unformulated, tendency toward typology in existential historicism, and to have projected the most self-conscious and ambitious program for cultural classification that we yet have. (In anthropology proper, such programs are generally hampered by the institutional restriction of ethnological materials to so-called cold or primitive societies; that is, they operate within an unreflected previous and far too global typology which is simply the division between “primitive” and “historical” social forms.) The work of Lotman and his group would appear to take its point of departure in the Marxian problematic of social reproduction; indeed, the initial definition of culture as the “nonhereditary memory of the collectivity” suggests a perspective in which the various possible mechanisms of cultural “storage” will be analyzed in terms of their function to reproduce a mode of production of a determinate type (*SM*, 213). This is not the direction taken by Lotman’s work, however, nor does the preliminary restriction of his studies to the field of Slavic or Russian cultural history compel this perspective, insofar as such materials thereby find themselves reduced to documents from only two modes of production: feudalism and capitalism (I do not know of any cultural-typological work of this school on artifacts from the socialist period proper). Thus, Lotman’s initial definition of culture operates at once to bracket the whole question of the infrastructural function of culture and to determine a framework in which the various cultural mechanisms can be studied in isolation.

These prove essentially to be twofold and to generate a kind of dualistic vision of history. “It is possible to distinguish between cultures directed mainly towards expression and those directed chiefly towards content” (*SM*, 217). Both types of culture—they are explicitly correlated with the medieval-ritualistic and the modern-rationalistic or scientific, respectively—are organized around textual constructions, or better still, around

processes of textualization. But the first type of culture—that organized around the plane of expression—posits a master text (scripture) to which the other texts of culture and social life are assimilated. The basic evaluative mechanism of such a cultural mechanism will be the distinction between “correct” and “incorrect,” and the world will be articulated according to this binary opposition, in which the “true” text or true culture—the culture of belief—is opposed to the false texts and cultures of heresies, superstitions, and the like.

Meanwhile, a certain conception of textuality organizes modern or rationalistic culture as well; but in this case, the opposite of the equivalent “master text” (scientific rationality) is not another heretical text, but merely the nontextualized, entropy, or disorder. Here the reproductive mechanism of culture is not directed toward the replication of the sacred text, but rather toward the imperializing transformation of everything that is as yet a nontext into the new master text of scientific rationality; and the evaluative system of such a mechanism is based on conceptions of rules and method, rather than conceptions of “correctness” or “incorrectness” (an opposition that might be reformulated in terms of the ethical binary of “good” and “evil”).

It is apparent that this global opposition is a more complex expression of the classical linguistic or tropological distinction between metaphor and metonymy associated with the name of Roman Jakobson; the cultural production of a culture organized around a master text or scripture will then be a process of metaphorical ordering, whereas that of a culture of textualizing rules will reveal the mechanism of a kind of metonymic reclamation, in which ever greater quantities of content are drawn into the system. The obvious danger of such a stark opposition lies in its recuperation by this or that “natural” or “metaphysical” dualism; thus, in Jakobson himself, in the inaugural work on aphasia, the temptation is ever present to fold the opposition of these master tropes back into some more “fundamental” division of mental processes, into the analogical and the associative, and beyond that, into specific zones of the brain itself.

Yet tropological classification need not be a dualism, as the variety and multiplicity of tropes and figures in any manual of rhetoric might suggest. In the case of Lotman’s own work, indeed, it will be observed that other types of cultural mechanism, touched on in passing, suggest that this particular tropological opposition need not constrict Lotman’s fundamental project of a “description of cultural universals and the elaboration of a grammar of the ‘languages’ of culture [which] will furnish, it is to be hoped, the bases of that structural history which is one of our future tasks.”¹⁶ On the other hand, a closer inspection of the “exception” noted above—Lotman’s account of neoclassicism—shows that this promise of variety may well be illusory.

Neoclassicism occupies something like an intermediary position between a culture based on a master text and one based on “scientific” rules. Ostensibly a culture of rules and canons, it nonetheless posits an ensemble of classical texts that have the authority of the older sacred master text:

The theoretical models were thought of as eternal and as preceding the actual act of creation. In art, only those texts considered “correct,” that is, corresponding to the rules, were recognized as texts, i.e., having significance ... The bad in art is whatever breaks the rules. But even the violation of the rules can be described, in Boileau’s opinion, as following certain “incorrect” rules. Therefore, “bad” texts can be classified; any unsatisfactory work of art serves as an example of some typical violation. (*SM*, 218–219)

Thus, in Lotman’s view, neoclassicism does not present us with some new and original form of cultural mechanism (or some new trope that would break us out of the dualism of metaphor and metonymy); it is merely a structural permutation of the two older types in which the rationalistic mechanism of cultural and scientific production by rules finds itself organized around the true/false, correct/incorrect, good/bad system of evaluation of an older sacred culture. Nor is there anything particularly surprising in this. Greimas’ semantic rectangle shows us that any initial binary opposition can, by the operation of negations and the appropriate syntheses, generate a much larger field of terms which, however, all necessarily remain locked in the closure of the initial system. The stark and mythical Jakobsonian dualism—as soon as it is articulated into semic variables of the type of Lotman’s “truth” versus “rules”—becomes similarly capable of generating a more complex *combinatoire* or permutation scheme.

At this point, however, it becomes interesting to ask ourselves what further permutations the Lotmanian typology can produce, and in particular how we might describe the missing fourth term of this particular closed system. Very schematically, we may suppose that to a culture that organizes its rules according to ethical or “truth” categories, there might logically be opposed a culture that organized its “truth” categories and its ethics according to rules and methods, that is, a culture that systematically rewrote what used to be ontological categories (being, meaning, goodness, and the like) in terms of the sheerly operational ones of rules of transformation, transcoding, infinite semiosis, and the like. The kinship Lotman has underscored with Foucault’s enterprise, in *The Order of Things*, confirms the suspicion that his fourth and still hypothetical type of culture can be none other than the “structuralist” moment celebrated in prophetic annunciation at the end of Foucault’s work and sociologically unmasked by Jean Baudrillard as the very logic of consumer society itself—an auto-proliferation of signifiers that have freed themselves from the myth and the

ballast of all “natural” signifieds, the moment of metatheory, in which theories generate more theories, and of some new and postmodern, properly “textual” or schizophrenic aesthetic, in which sentences generate other sentences and texts still further texts (see *SM*, 230, n. 5).

The purpose of this hypothetical exercise is not to impute to Lotman a view of history that he might well not wish to endorse, but rather to demonstrate that underlying every such structural typology, whether it is grounded in the mechanism of linguistic tropes or in some other way, there can be found something from which the system was intended to free us, namely a narrative (and perhaps even teleological) “vision” or “philosophy” of history. As far as the tropes themselves are concerned, they are clearly unavailable for the construction of a typology or structural *combinatoire* unless their initial empirical multiplicity has been systematically reduced to some basic generative mechanism; this is indeed what we may observe in such contemporary rhetorical systems as those of the m Group and in Hayden White’s “tropics.”¹⁷ It will therefore come as no surprise to find that, whatever the official terms of this second underlying “system,” it must necessarily be of another order of abstraction than the multiplicity of forms that it is called upon to organize and to order. We must then suspect that, even if this underlying system is described in terms of “master” tropes which organize surface tropes or figures, the status of such master tropes must ultimately be sought in a wholly different system altogether. My own experience suggests that this second, or “deep,” system can always be grasped and rewritten in terms of something like a narrative or teleological vision of history.

Thus the structural attempt to reduce the multiplicity of empirical moments of the past or of other cultures to some fundamental typology or system would seem to be a failure, insofar as the surface categories of such narrative history find themselves smuggled back into the typology to lend it a generally disguised content. Nonetheless, even this apparent failure takes us a step forward, for if such categories are unavoidable, one may at least make a virtue out of necessity and propose a structural system that articulates them explicitly for the first time. As we will see shortly, such a system is that which is projected by the Marxist concept of the “mode of production.”

Meanwhile, we must conclude this discussion of the option of a properly structural typology of history or culture by observing the inevitable: that the emphasis of this position on the logic of the historical object determines an imbalance in that feature which was strongest in the counterposition of existential historicism, namely the position of the historian-subject. The very conception of science—whether it be the “science” of some semiotics-yet-to-be-constructed or another kind—depends for its constitution on the mirage of that placeless scientific subject of knowledge which Lacan has conveniently termed the *sujet supposé savior*. Nonetheless, a certain

reflexivity is posited in Lotman's scheme, insofar as the place of the semiotician is presumably to be reckoned into the metonymic moment of a rationalizing and scientific culture. Yet far from being the structuralist equivalent of some properly dialectical self-consciousness, this kind of reflexivity would seem to confront us with the logical paradox of a class that is a member of itself. The Utopian fourth culture of Foucault—a properly structuralist culture beyond the conventional scientific-rationalistic one—is surely at least partly motivated by the attempt to break out of this bind; yet neither the problem of the historian's place or self-consciousness, nor that of the Utopian moment, can be adequately dealt with within these systems.

VI

We must now mention, *pour mémoire*, the final option—after anti-quarianism, existential historicism, and structural typology—which we have termed the Nietzschean position. Like the first of this series, of which it is in effect the inversion, this final option “solves” the dilemma of historicism by refusing the problem. In effect, for anti-quarianism the problem of the relationship between past and present did not arise, since for it the present had no particularly privileged status. But was it not Hume who suggested that nothing but our own prejudices would be changed by the hypothesis that the world was created a mere instant ago, and that the whole archival and sedimented wealth of the “past's” traces—including Hume's complete works themselves, along with the documents that register this writer's historical “existence”—are nothing but an immense illusionary *trompe l'oeil* built into a synchronous present? Upon the foundation of Hume's paradox, then, there rises the ultimate “position” on the dilemmas of historicism, namely the view that the problem of the past is not a problem for the simple reason that the past does not exist:

What is the object of history? It is quite simply, despite all the elaborations, equivocations, and qualifications of historians and philosophers, whatever is past ... and yet, by definition, all that is past does not exist. To be accurate the object of history is whatever is *represented* as having hitherto existed. The essence of this representation is preserved records and documents. History's object, the hitherto existing, does not exist except in the modality of its current existence, as representations ... What the past *is* is determined by the content of the various ideological forms which operate within the parameters of historical knowledge. The content of the past—its nature, its periods and problems—is determined by the character of a particular ideological form. The particular modes of writing history invest this or that body of representations with the status of a record. Artifacts, washing lists, court rolls, kitchen middens, memoirs, are converted into texts—representations through which the real may be read. The text, constituted as a text by its

reading, is at the mercy of this reading. Far from working on the *past*, the ostensible object of history, historical knowledge works on a body of *texts*. These texts are a product of historical knowledge. The writing of history is the production of texts which interpret these texts.¹⁸

This position, which draws the ultimate conclusion from structuralism's inaugural perception of the incommensurability between synchrony and diachrony, is to the conventional practice of the historian as a modernist—or, better still, a postmodernist, properly textual—aesthetic is to the aesthetic of traditional realistic representation. Indeed, the introduction of the very theme of representation into the discussion throws its terms and givens into a fresh light, subsuming it under an even broader theoretical and philosophical problem. For these writers, for example, Lenin's one great historical work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, is only apparently a work of historiographic representation. Nor does their argument turn on the economic and statistical content of Lenin's text (Arthur Danto demonstrated some time ago that nonnarrative types of historical writing can always be transformed into essentially narrative or storytelling propositions).¹⁹ Lenin's work does not aim in this sense to reconstitute a (more adequate) representation of the past; rather, such apparent representations are part of a theoretical (but also a political) practice in the present, and insert themselves into an ongoing polemic:

Lenin's book is a theoretical demolition of the arguments and evidence of Narodism and evolutionism. "Empirical" material—in fact, statistics and information, collected according to definite problems, by definite techniques, and within definite political and social purposes; Lenin had no illusions or fetishes about their purity—functions in this book as the object of criticism or as a source of illustration of a theoretical point. (*PM*, 323)

To replace this interpretation of Lenin in a more familiar context, we may say that the older view according to which this particular textual signifier stands for and represents a particular signified or even a particular referent is here replaced by the view that the meaning of a signifier is generated by its work on previous signifiers alone. The classical view of this "textual" model of theory is, of course, Althusser's own: theoretical production is neither the representation of some real object nor direct work on the latter. Science

always works on "generalized material" even when the latter takes on the form of a "fact" ... It always works on preexistent concepts, on "*Vorstellungen*" ... It does not "work" on some pure and objective "datum" which would be that of pure and absolute "facts." On the contrary, its business consists in *elaborating its own scientific facts* by means of the critique of *ideological "facts"* elaborated by the more properly ideological theoretical practice that has preceded it.²⁰

Now, however, Hindess and Hirst draw the ultimate conclusion from this position—a conclusion Althusser has not been willing to take himself—and, thereby reproblematising their own important book, provocatively close it with the following declaration:

The study of history is not only scientifically but also politically valueless. The object of history, the past, no matter how it is conceived, cannot affect present conditions. Historical events do not exist and can have no material effectivity in the present ... It is ... the “current situation” which it is the object of Marxist theory to elucidate and of Marxist political practice to act upon. All Marxist theory, however abstract it may be, however general its field of application, exists to make possible the analysis of the current situation. (*PM*, 312)

But if this is what historiography does anyhow—without realizing it, or under the delusion that it is “representing” past realities—then perhaps we can go on writing history as we did before; and it is conceivable that the Humean paradox would change nothing whatsoever in our life in what has become something of a Potemkin present.

Much of the same conclusion can be drawn from more explicitly Nietzschean contemporary versions of this position. Let Jean-François Lyotard, in his attack on current reinventions of Rousseau, serve as the spokesman for this view. Confronted with the polemic appeal to the radical social and cultural *difference* of primitive or tribal society (expressed, in this case, in the work of Jean Baudrillard), Lyotard is willing to take the ultimate step: there never *were* any primitive societies to begin with (“Non, décidément, il faut le dire clairement: il n’y a pas du tout de sociétés primitives ou sauvages, nous sommes tous des sauvages, tous les sauvages sont des capitalistes-capitalisés”).²¹ There has never been anything but capitalism as far as the eye can see in time and space; there has never been anything but the present. Yet Lyotard’s own call for a new “paganism,” for a political revival of the old heterogeneity of the pagan gods (or “intensities”)²²—as well as his strategic reaffirmation of the oppositional underside of hegemonic classical philosophy, his defense of the sophists and the cynics against the dominant Platonic or Aristotelian tradition—suggests much the same “libidinal” practice of the past, and of its “names of history,” whose program, whose “schizophrenic historicism,” we have already seen outlined in Deleuze.

VII

The reader will already have suspected that the Marxist “solution” to the dilemma of historicism outlined here will consist in squaring the circle we

have already traced, in positing a mode of Identity that is also one of radical Difference, and in producing a kind of *structural historicism*, in which the vital and, if one likes, properly libidinal investment of existential historicism in the past is somehow derived from or positioned within a conception of the logic of historical and cultural forms more satisfactory than that proposed by structural typology. We have already suggested that such a conception is to be found in the Marxian notion of the mode of production, whose various forms are conventionally enumerated as follows: hunting and gathering (primitive communism or the horde), neolithic agriculture (or the *gens*), the Asiatic mode of production (or so-called oriental despotism), the polis, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. These distinct forms are no longer to be considered “states” in some linear or evolutionary narrative which would be the “story” of human history, nor are they “necessary” moments in some teleological historical process. The local and empirical “transition” from one of these forms to another—as in the two great *loci classici* of Marxist historiography, the transition from primitive communism to power societies, and the transition from feudalism to capitalism—demands reconstruction, not as a narrative of emergence, but rather, as we have already suggested above, as a genealogy. Meanwhile, each of these synchronic forms designates, not merely a specific type of economic “production” or labor process and technology, but also a specific and original form of cultural and linguistic (or sign) production (along with the determinate place of the other traditional Marxian superstructures of the political, the juridical, the ideological, and so forth). It thus subsumes models like that of Lotman which seek to deal with cultural mechanisms in isolation (leaving aside here the fact that Lotman’s is a model of cultural reproduction rather than of cultural production proper). Nor is there any reason that a contemporary Marxian model of social structure should not make a determinate place for the psychoanalytic “instance”—the construction of a particular “psychoanalytic” subject in this or that mode of production—and for the phenomenological—in particular the phenomenology of space and the organization of *Lebenswelt* or daily life in a given social formation. What needs to be stressed, however, is that all these various “instances” are dialectically modified according to the structural place assigned to them in the various modes of production; there cannot, therefore, be any question of the projection backward into radically different social formations of a concept of “production” drawn from capitalism, any more than a dialectical perspective can accept the ahistorical assumption of certain psychoanalytic schools that the constituted subject, the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, desire, and the like—all theorized from modern or bourgeois psychic materials—remain constant throughout history.²³

As with my initial remarks on interpretation, I cannot do any more here than assert answers to problems about the nature of a mode of production

which I will argue in more detail elsewhere. Chief among such problems is the status of this concept itself, about which it has been observed—in a number of critiques of the formulations of this concept in Althusser and Balibar—that it is something like Spinoza’s “eternity,” a timeless structure which must apparently effortlessly reproduce itself without change across the empirical vicissitudes of human history.²⁴ Nor is the conventional Marxist appeal to the complementary concept of a “social formation”—the empirical historical society or culture in which a given mode of production realizes itself—any more satisfactory as theoretical solution, since it merely reintroduces that empiricism which it was the mission of a dialectical approach to discredit and to replace.

A solution to this problem can be sought in two directions. On the one hand, as we have already suggested, the Marxian concept of a mode of production is essentially a *differential* one, in which the formulation of a single mode of production (as, for instance, Marx’s own model of capital) at once structurally projects the space of other possible modes of production by way of Difference, that is, by a systematic variation in the features or semes of any given initial mode. This is the sense in which each mode of production structurally *implies* all the others. What is important about this from our present standpoint is that the contemplation of any given mode of production (or the replacement of any cultural artifact within its specific mode of production) must always implicitly or explicitly involve a differential relationship to all the others.

But one can also argue this differential interrelationship in a non-structuralizing way: from this second standpoint, the hypothesis of a structural *combinatoire* is unnecessary, since each “more advanced” mode of production includes the earlier ones, which it has had to suppress in its own emergence. These are therefore sedimented within a mode of production like capitalism, in which the earlier forms, along with their own specific forms of alienation and productivity, persist in a layered, “cancelled” fashion. But not only is it vanquished modes of production from the past that thus survive in the “nonsynchronicity” of the present mode; it is also clear that future modes of production are also at work in the present and can be detected most visibly in the various local forms of class struggle.²⁵ If this is so, however, it becomes evident not only that no mode of production exists in any pure state, but also that we need a concept of the same level of abstraction to designate this contradictory overlay and structural coexistence of several modes of production in tension with one another. I suggest that this concept has been made available to us by the Chinese experience, and that this larger form, which subsumes the individual modes of production, be called “cultural revolution,” it being understood that the recent Chinese practice of cultural revolution is merely one distinct historical type of cultural revolution, of which one must assume that there have existed

quite different structural embodiments at all moments of human history (thus, for instance, to draw only on familiar and traditional examples, Bachofen's hypothesis of the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchy is an attempt to thematize a properly *neolithic* cultural revolution; Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic is a contribution to the study of a properly *bourgeois* cultural revolution; and so forth). Let me add in passing that this new unifying category of historical study seems to me the only one in terms of which the so-called human sciences can be reorganized in a properly materialistic way.

Yet it would seem that this system of modes of production and cultural revolutions at best regrounds only one of the options discussed above—that of structural typology or of the logic of the historical *object*—in some more satisfactory and totalizing way, and that we have not yet shown how it is able to provide a more adequate formulation for the problem of the place of the historian-subject, or of the present, as this imposed itself in our counterdiscussion of existential historicism. We have already touched on the way in which Marxism, as an absolute historicism, grounds the possibility of a comprehensive theory of past societies and cultures in the structure of the present, or of capitalism itself. Yet this would seem at best to reinvent some “place of truth,” some ethnocentric privilege of our present as inheritors of world culture and as practitioners of rationalism and science, which is not visibly different from the imperializing hubris of conventional bourgeois science, and which would tend at the same time to confirm the current line of the *nouveaux philosophes* on the innate or intrinsic “Stalinism” of the Marxian worldview.

This ultimate dilemma, which turns on the status of the present and the place of the subject in it, needs to be restructured in three ways. First, we must try to rid ourselves of the habit of thinking about our (aesthetic) relationship to culturally or temporally distant artifacts as being a relationship between individual subjects (as in my *personal* reading of an *individual* text written by a biographical individual named Spenser or Juvenal, or even my personal attempt to invent an individual relationship to an oral story once told by an individual storyteller in a tribal society). It is not a question of dismissing the role of individual subjects in the reading process, but rather of grasping this obvious and concrete individual relationship as being itself a mediation for a nonindividual and more collective process: the confrontation of two distinct social forms or modes of production. We must try to accustom ourselves to a perspective in which every act of reading, every local interpretive practice, is grasped as the privileged vehicle through which two distinct modes of production confront and interrogate each other. Our individual reading thus becomes an allegorical figure for this essentially collective confrontation of two social forms.

If we can do this, I suggest that a second reformulation of the nature of

this contact between present and past will gradually impose itself. We will no longer tend to see the past as some inert and dead object which we are called upon to resurrect, or to preserve, or to sustain, in our own living freedom; rather, the past will itself become an active agent in this process and will begin to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us on the social formation in which we exist. At that point, the very dynamics of the historical tribunal are unexpectedly and dialectically reversed: it is not we who sit in judgment on the past, but rather the past, the radical difference of other modes of production (and even of the immediate past of our own mode of production), which judges us, imposing the painful knowledge of what we are not, what we are no longer, what we are not yet. This is the sense in which the past speaks to us about our own virtual and unrealized "human potentialities," but it is not an edifying lesson or any leisure matter of personal or cultural "enrichment." Rather, it is a lesson of privation, which radically calls into question the commodified daily life, the reified spectacles, and the simulated experience of our own plastic-and-cellophane society; and this not merely on the level of content (as in Marx's familiar opposition of the object world of Greek epic to the contemporary world of the locomotive and the telegraph), but in the very experience of form and linguistic production itself, where the primacy of collective ritual, or the splendor of uncommodified value, or even the transparency of immediate personal relations of domination, at once stigmatizes the monadization, the privatized and instrumentalized speech, the commodity reification, of our own way of life. On this view, then, as for existential historicism, our concrete relationship with the past remains an existential experience, a galvanic and electrifying event, yet one that is far more disturbing and unsettling than in the comfortable aesthetic appreciation of the practitioners of late nineteenth-century historicism. Now, on the contrary, it is the past that sees us, and judges us remorselessly, without any sympathy for our complicity with the scraps of subjectivity we try to think of as our own fragmentary and authentic life experience.

Yet it is not only the past that thus judges us; and with this final rectification we touch at the originality of the Marxist position with respect to the other options that have been evoked above. For if the proper articulation of any concrete mode of production structurally implies the projection of all other conceivable modes, it follows that it implies the future as well and that the hermeneutic contact between present and past outlined here cannot fully be described without the articulation within it of what Ernst Bloch has called the Utopian impulse. Among the conditions of possibility of Marxism itself as a new type of dialectical thought was, as we have indicated above, the commodification of land and labor completed only by the emergence of capitalism; but if this were its only historical precondition, it could

be argued that Marxism as such was merely a theoretical “reflection” of early or classical capitalism. It is, however, also the anticipatory expression of a future society, or, in the terms of our discussion above, the partisan commitment to that future or Utopian mode of production which seeks to emerge from the hegemonic mode of production of our own present. This is the final reason why Marxism is not, in the current sense, a “place of truth,” why its subjects are not centered in some possession of dogma, but are rather very precisely historically decentered; only the Utopian future is a place of truth in this sense, and the privilege of contemporary life and of the present lies not in its possession, but at best in the rigorous judgment it may be felt to pass on us.

The fullest and most terrifying form of a Marxist hermeneutic act can therefore best be conveyed by those great moments in Sartre’s *Condemned of Altona*, when the implacable gaze of the alien and incomprehensible inhabitants of the thirtieth century burns unanswerably upon a present steeped in torture, exploitation, and blood guilt:

*Habitants masqués des plafonds ... décapodes ... siècles, voici mon siècle, solitaire et difforme, l'accusé. Mon client s'éventre de ses propres mains; ce que vous prenez pour une lymphe blanche, c'est du sang ... Répondez donc! Le trentième ne répond plus. Peut-être n'y aura-t-il plus de siècles après le nôtre. Peut-être qu'une bombe aura soufflé les lumières. Tout sera mort: les yeux, les juges, le temps. Nuit. O tribunal de la nuit, toi qui fus, qui seras, qui es, j'ai été! j'ai été.*²⁶

Masked inhabitants of the ceilings ... decapods ... centuries, here is my own century, solitary, misbegotten, the accused. My client disembowels himself before your very eyes; what looks like lymph is really blood ... Answer me! The thirtieth century no longer answers. Maybe there are no centuries after this one. Maybe a bomb blew out all the lights. Everything will be dead: eyes, judges, time. Night. O great court of the night, you who were and always will be, who are—I have been! I have been.

Yet Franz’s appeal to a silent and unimaginable posterity, with all its echoes of a more properly existentialist pathos, is not the only possible figure for this fullest relationship to history. Sartre’s crabs are after all our own grandchildren or great grandchildren, Brecht’s “*Nachgeborenen*”; and it is therefore fitting to conclude with the evocation of a rather different type of political art—Alain Tanner’s film *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*—with its play of postindividual collective relationships around the absent center of birth and of a new subject to come—to convey the sense of a hermeneutic relationship to the past which is able to grasp its own present as history only on condition it manages to keep the idea of the future, and of radical and Utopian transformation, alive.

Notes

- 1 See in particular chaps. 5 and 9 of “The Object of *Capital*,” in Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: New Left Books, 1970. The most systematic critique of “Althusserianism,” including a powerful reaffirmation of the historicist character of Marxism, is that of E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London: Merlin Press, 1978.
- 2 See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1972.
- 3 On this last, see the instructive exchange between J. H. Hexter and Christopher Hill in the *Times Literary Supplement*, October 26 and November 7, 1976.
- 4 The standard works on historicism are Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1922, and Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 1959. Enthusiastic and programmatic endorsements of historicism may be found in Karl Mannheim, “Historicism,” *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Paul Kecskemeti, New York: Oxford University Press, 1952, 84–133, and Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953, 443–448, 473–480, 546–551. The basic structuralist critiques of historicism, besides that of Althusser himself (see note 1 above), are surely those of Claude Lévi-Strauss, “History and Dialectic,” *The Savage Mind*, trans. R. Needham, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966, 245–269; and A. J. Greimas, “Structure et histoire,” *Du Sens*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, 103–16.
- 5 Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975, 103. Future references to this work are denoted *M*.
- 6 Ferdinand de Saussure, Letter to Antoine Meillet, January 4, 1894, *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 21, 1964, 93. And for a fuller discussion of Saussure’s “synchronic” revolution, see my *Prison-House of Language*, 3–39.
- 7 On Boas’s antievolutionism (and its relationship to his anti-Marxism), see Marvin Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, New York: Crowel, 1968, chap. 10.
- 8 Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française*, Paris: Pleiade, 1952, vol. 1, 203. Future references to this work are denoted *H*.
- 9 The *kerygma*, or “message,” is the central category of Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theology; see, for instance, Paul Ricoeur, “Preface to Bultmann,” *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Willis Domingo et al., Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974, 381–401.
- 10 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983, 20–22.
- 11 Leo Tolstoy, *Journal*, February 28, 1897, quoted in Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” *The Theory of Prose*, translated in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1965, 12.
- 12 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin, 1976, 274, n. 4.

- And compare the fundamental observation in which Aristotle's inability to conceptualize the labor theory of value is grounded in the limits of his own mode of production: "Aristotle himself was unable to extract this fact, that, in the form of commodity-values, all labor is expressed as equal human labor and therefore as labor of equal quality, by inspection from the form of value, because Greek society was founded on the labor of slaves, hence had as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labor-powers" (*Capital*, vol. 1, 151–52). A more general historicist theory of the relationship between conceptual abstraction and commodification has been developed in Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel, London: Macmillan, 1978.
- 13 Maurice Godelier, *Horizon: Trajets marxistes en anthropologie*, Paris: Maspéro, 1973, 303.
 - 14 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (thesis 14), *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1968, 261. Future references to this volume are denoted *I*.
 - 15 See Yuriy M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," *New Literary History* 9: 2, Winter 1978, 211–32; future references to this work are denoted *SM*; and Lotman and Uspensky, *Tipologia della cultura*, Milan: Bompiani, 1975. The fundamental critique of Lotman's theory of culture from a Marxist standpoint is that of Stefan Zólkiewski, "Des principes de classement des textes de culture," *Semiotica* 7: 1, 1973, 1–18.
 - 16 Yuriy M. Lotman, "Problèmes de la typologie des cultures," *Social Science Information* 6: 2–3, April–June 1967, 33.
 - 17 J. Dubois et al., *Rhétorique générale*, Paris: Larousse, 1970, and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1979; and see part 1, chap. 6 of the present volume.
 - 18 Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, London: Routledge, 1975, 309, 311. Future references to this work are denoted *PM*.
 - 19 Arthur C. Danto, *The Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
 - 20 Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, Paris: Maspéro, 1965, 187.
 - 21 Jean-François Lyotard, *Économie libidinale*, Paris: Minuit, 1974, 155.
 - 22 See his latest collection, Jean-François Lyotard, *Rudiments païens*, Paris: Unions générale d'éditions, 1978.
 - 23 This familiar objection to Marxist anthropology has been most recently expressed in Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster, St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1975, especially 69–92.
 - 24 See, for example, Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1976, 64–66, and *PM*, 313–320; responses may be found in Louis Althusser, *Elements d'Autocritique*, Paris: Hachette, 1974, and Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza*, Paris: Maspéro, 1979.
 - 25 Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," trans. Mark Ritter, *New German Critique* 11, Spring 1977, 22–38.
 - 26 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Séquestres d'Altona*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, 222–23.

Periodizing the 60s

Nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the 60s and abject public confession of the decade's many failures and missed opportunities are two errors that cannot be avoided by some middle path that threads its way in between. The following sketch starts from the position that History is Necessity, that the 60s had to happen the way it did, and that its opportunities and failures were inextricably intertwined, marked by the objective constraints and openings of a determinate historical situation, of which I thus wish to offer a tentative and provisional model.

To speak of the "situation" of the 60s, however, is necessarily to think in terms of historical periods and to work with models of historical periodization, which are at the present moment theoretically unfashionable, to say the least. Leave aside the existential fact that the veterans of the decade, who have seen so many things change dramatically from year to year, think more historically than their predecessors; the classification by generations has become as meaningful for us as it was for the Russians of the late nineteenth century, who sorted character types out with reference to specific decades. And intellectuals of a certain age now find it normal to justify their current positions by way of a historical narrative ("then the limits of Althusserianism began to be evident," etc.). Now, this is not the place for a theoretical justification of periodization in the writing of history, but to those who think that cultural periodization implies some massive kinship and homogeneity or identity within a given period, it may quickly be replied that it is surely only against a certain conception of what is historically dominant or hegemonic that the full value of the exceptional—what Raymond Williams calls the "residual" or "emergent"—can be assessed. Here, in any case, the "period" in question is understood not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits.

Yet a whole range of rather different theoretical objections will also bear

on the selectiveness of such a historical narrative: if the critique of periodization questions the possibilities of diachrony, these involve the problems of synchrony and in particular of the relationship to be established between the various “levels” of historical change singled out for attention. Indeed, the present narrative will claim to say something meaningful about the 60s by way of brief sketches of but four of those levels: the history of philosophy, revolutionary political theory and practice, cultural production, and economic cycles (and this in a context limited essentially to the United States, France, and the Third World). Such selectiveness seems not merely to give equal historical weight to base and superstructure indifferently, but also to raise the specter of a practice of homologies—the kind of analogical parallelism in which the poetic production of Wallace Stevens is somehow “the same” as the political practice of Che Guevara—which have been thought abusive at least as far back as Spengler.

There is of course no reason why specialized and elite phenomena, such as the writing of poetry, cannot reveal historical trends and tendencies as vividly as “real life”—or perhaps even more visibly, in their isolation and semiautonomy which approximates a laboratory situation. In any case, there is a fundamental difference between the present narrative and those of an older organic history that sought “expressive” unification through analogies and homologies between widely distinct levels of social life. Where the latter proposed identities between the forms on such various levels, what will be argued here is a series of significant homologies between the *breaks* in those forms and their development. What is at stake, then, is not some proposition about the organic unity of the 60s on all its levels, but rather a hypothesis about the rhythm and dynamics of the fundamental situation in which those very different levels develop according to their own internal laws.

At that point, what looked like a weakness in this historical or narrative procedure turns out to be an unexpected strength, particularly in allowing for some sort of “verification” of the separate strands of the narrative. One sometimes believes—especially in the area of culture and cultural histories and critiques—that an infinite number of narrative interpretations of history are possible, limited only by the ingenuity of the practitioners whose claim to originality depends on the novelty of the new theory of history they bring to market. It is more reassuring, then, to find the regularities hypothetically proposed for one field of activity (e.g., the cognitive, or the aesthetic, or the revolutionary) dramatically and surprisingly “confirmed” by the reappearance of just such regularities in a widely different and seemingly unrelated field, as will be the case with the economic in the present context.

At any rate, it will already have become clear that nothing like a history of the 60s in the traditional, narrative sense will be offered here. But historical

representation is just as surely in crisis as its distant cousin, the linear novel, and for much the same reasons. The most intelligent “solution” to such a crisis does not consist in abandoning historiography altogether, as an impossible aim and an ideological category all at once, but rather—as in the modernist aesthetic itself—in reorganizing its traditional procedures on a different level. Althusser’s proposal seems the wisest in this situation: as old-fashioned narrative or “realistic” historiography becomes problematical, the historian should reformulate her vocation—not any longer to produce some vivid representation of History “as it really happened,” but rather to produce the *concept* of history. Such will at least be the gamble of the following pages.

I. Third World Beginnings

It does not seem particularly controversial to mark the beginnings of what will come to be called the 60s in the Third World with the great movement of decolonization in British and French Africa. It can be argued that the most characteristic expressions of a properly First World 60s are all later than this, whether they are understood in countercultural terms—drugs and rock—or in the political terms of a student New Left and a mass antiwar movement. Indeed, politically, a First World 60s owed much to Third-Worldism in terms of politicocultural models, as in a symbolic Maoism, and, moreover, found its mission in resistance to wars aimed precisely at stemming the new revolutionary forces in the Third World. Belden Fields has indeed suggested that the two First World nations in which the most powerful student mass movements emerged—the United States and France—became privileged political spaces precisely *because* these were two countries involved in colonial wars, although the French New Left appears after the resolution of the Algerian conflict. The one significant exception to all this is in many ways the most important First World political movement of all—the new black politics and the civil rights movement, which must be dated, not from the Supreme Court decision of 1954, but rather from the first sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February 1960. Yet it might be argued that this was also a movement of decolonization, and in any case the constant exchange and mutual influences between the American black movements and the various African and Caribbean ones are continuous and incalculable throughout this period.

The independence of Ghana (1957), the agony of the Congo (Lumumba was murdered in January 1961), the independence of France’s sub-Saharan colonies following the Gaullist referendum of 1959, finally the Algerian Revolution (which might plausibly mark our schema here with its internal high point, the Battle of Algiers, in January–March 1957, as with its

diplomatic resolution in 1962)—all of these signal the convulsive birth of what will come in time to be known as the 60s:

Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million *men* and one thousand five hundred million *natives*. The former had the Word; the others merely had use of it.¹

The 60s was, then, the period when all these “natives” became human beings, and this internally as well as externally: those inner colonized of the First World—“minorities,” marginals, and women—fully as much as its external subjects and official “natives.” The process can and has been described in a number of ways, each one of which implies a certain “vision of History” and a certain uniquely thematized reading of the 60s proper: it can be seen as a decisive and global chapter in Croce’s conception of history as the history of human freedom; as a more classically Hegelian process of the coming to self-consciousness of subject peoples; as some post-Lukácsian or more Marcusean, New Left conception of the emergence of new “subjects of history” of a nonclass type (blacks, students, Third World peoples); or as some poststructuralist, Foucauldian notion (significantly anticipated by Sartre in the passage just quoted) of the conquest of the right to speak in a new collective voice, never before heard on the world stage—and of the concomitant dismissal of the intermediaries (liberals, First World intellectuals) who had hitherto claimed to talk in your name; not forgetting the more properly political rhetoric of self-determination or independence, or the more psychological and cultural rhetoric of new collective “identities.”

It is, however, important to situate the emergence of these new collective “identities” or “subjects of history” in the historical situation which made that emergence possible, and in particular to relate the emergence of these new social and political categories (the colonized, race, marginality, gender, and the like) to something like a crisis in the more universal category that had hitherto seemed to subsume all the varieties of social resistance, namely the classical conception of social class. This is to be understood, however, not in some intellectual but rather in an institutional sense; it would be idealistic to suppose the deficiencies in the abstract idea of social class, and in particular in the Marxian conception of class struggle, can have been responsible for the emergence of what seem to be new nonclass forces. What can be noted, rather, is a crisis in the institutions through which a real class politics had, however imperfectly, been able to express itself. In this respect, the merge of the AFL and the CIO in 1955 can be seen as a fundamental “condition of possibility” for the unleashing of the new social and political dynamics of the 60s: that merger, a triumph of McCarthyism, secured the expulsion of the communists from the American labor movement, consolidated the new antipolitical “social contract” between American business

and the American labor unions, and created a situation in which the privileges of a white male labor force take precedence over the demands of black and women workers and other minorities. These last have therefore no place in the classical institutions of an older working-class politics. They will thus be “liberated” from social class, in the charged and ambivalent sense that Marxism gives to that word (in the context of enclosure, for instance): they are separated from the older institutions and thus “released” to find new modes of social and political expression.

The virtual disappearance of the American Communist Party as a small but significant political force in American society in 1956 suggests another dimension to this general situation: the crisis of the American party is “overdetermined” by its repression under McCarthyism and by the “revolution” in the Soviet bloc unleashed by Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign, which will have analogous but distinct and specific equivalents for the European Communist parties. In France, in particular, after the brief moment of a communist “humanism,” developed essentially by philosophers in the eastern countries, and with the fall of Khrushchev himself and the definitive failure of his various experiments in 1964, an unparalleled situation emerges in which, virtually for the first time since the Congress of Tours in 1919, it becomes possible for radical intellectuals to conceive of revolutionary work outside and independent of the French Communist Party. (The older attitudes—“we know all about it, we don’t like it much, but nothing is to be done politically without the CP”—are classically expressed in Sartre’s own political journalism, in particular in *Les Communistes et la paix*.) Now Trotskyism gets a new lease on life, and the new Maoist forms, followed by a whole explosion of extraparliamentary formations of all ideological complexions, the so-called groupuscules, offer the promise of a new kind of politics equally “liberated” from the traditional class categories.

Two further key events need to be noted here before we go on. For many of us, indeed, the crucial detonator—a new Year I, the palpable demonstration that revolution was not merely a historical concept and a museum piece but real and achievable—was furnished by a people whose imperialist subjugation had developed among North Americans a sympathy and a sense of fraternity we could never have for other Third World peoples in their struggle, except in an abstract and intellectual way. Yet by January 1, 1959, the Cuban Revolution remained symbolically ambiguous. It could be read as a Third World revolution of a type different from either the classical Leninist one or the Maoist experience, for it had a revolutionary strategy entirely its own, the *foco* theory, which we will discuss later. This great event also announces the impending 60s as a period of unexpected political innovation rather than as the confirmation of older social and conceptual schemes.

Meanwhile, personal testimony seems to make it clear that for many white American students—in particular for many of those later active in the New Left—the assassination of President Kennedy played a significant role in delegitimizing the state itself and in discrediting the parliamentary process, seeming to mark the decisive end of the well-known passing of the torch to a younger generation of leadership, as well as the dramatic defeat of some new spirit of public or civic idealism. As for the reality of the appearance, it does not much matter that, in hindsight, such a view of the Kennedy presidency may be wholly erroneous, considering his conservatism and anticommunism, the gruesome gamble of the “missile crisis,” and his responsibility for the American engagement in Vietnam itself. More significant, the legacy of the Kennedy regime to the development of a 60s politics may well have been the rhetoric of youth and of the “generation gap” which he exploited, but which outlived him and dialectically offered itself as an expressive form through which the political discontent of American students and young people could articulate itself.

Such were some of the preconditions or “conditions of possibility”—both in traditional working-class political institutions and in the arena of the legitimation of state power—for the “new” social forces of the 60s to develop as they did. Returning to these new forces, there is a way in which their ultimate fate marks the close of the 60s as well: the end of “Third-Worldism” in the US and Europe largely predates the Chinese Thermidor, and coincides with the awareness of increasing institutional corruption in many of the newly independent states of Africa and the almost complete militarization of the Latin American regimes after the Chilean coup of 1973 (the later revolutionary triumphs in the former Portuguese colonies are henceforth felt to be “Marxist” rather than “Third-Worldist,” whereas Vietnam vanishes from American consciousness as completely after the ultimate American withdrawal as did Algeria from French consciousness after the Evian accords of 1963). In the First World of the late 60s, there is certainly a return to a more internal politics, as the antiwar movement in the United States and May 1968 in France testify. Yet the American movement remains organically linked to its Third World “occasion” in the Vietnam War itself, as well as to the Maoist inspiration of the Progressive Labor-type groups which emerge from SDS, such that the movement as a whole will lose its momentum as the war winds down and the draft ceases. In France, the “common program” of the Left (1972)—in which the current Socialist government finds its origins—marks a new turn toward Gramscian models and a new kind of “Eurocommunist” spirit which owes very little to Third World antecedents of any kind. Finally, the black movement in the U.S. enters into a crisis at much the same time, as its dominant ideology—cultural nationalism, an ideology profoundly linked to Third World models—is exhausted. The women’s movement also owed something to this kind

of Third World inspiration, but it too, in the period 1972–74, will know an increasing articulation into relatively distinct ideological positions (“bourgeois” feminism, lesbian separatism, socialist feminism).

For reasons enumerated above, and others, it seems plausible to mark the end of the 60s around 1972–74; the problem of this general “break” will be returned to at the end of this sketch. For the moment we must complete our characterization of the overall dynamic of Third World history during this period, particularly if it is granted that this dynamic or “narrative line” entertains some privileged relationship of influence on the unfolding of a First World 60s (through direct intervention—wars of national liberation—or through the prestige of exotic political models—most obviously, the Maoist one—or finally, owing to some global dynamic which both worlds share and respond to in relatively distinct ways).

This is, of course, the moment to observe that the “liberation” of new forces in the Third World is as ambiguous as this term frequently tends to be (freedom as separation from older systems); to put it more sharply, it is the moment to recall the obvious, that decolonization historically went hand in hand with neocolonialism, and that the graceful, grudging, or violent end of an old-fashioned imperialism certainly meant the end of one kind of domination but evidently also the invention and construction of a new kind—symbolically, something like the replacement of the British Empire by the International Monetary Fund. This is, incidentally, why the currently fashionable rhetoric of power and domination (Foucault is the most influential of these rhetoricians, but the basic displacement from the economic to the political is already made by Max Weber) is ultimately unsatisfactory; it is of course politically important to “contest” the various forms of power and domination, but the latter cannot be understood unless their functional relationships to economic exploitation are articulated—that is, until the political is once again subsumed beneath the economic. (On the other hand—particularly in the historicizing perspective of the present essay—it will obviously be a significant historical and social *symptom* that, in the mid-60s, people felt it necessary to express their sense of the situation and their projected praxis in a reified political language of power, domination, authority and antiauthoritarianism, and so forth: here, Second and Third World developments—with their conceptions of a “primacy of the political” under socialism—offer an interesting and curious cross-lighting.) Meanwhile, something similar can be said of the conceptions of collective identity and in particular of the poststructuralist slogan of the conquest of speech, of the right to speak in your own voice, for yourself; but to articulate new demands, in your own voice, is not necessarily to satisfy them, and to speak is not necessarily to achieve a Hegelian recognition from the Other (or at least then only in the more somber and baleful sense that the Other now has to take you into consideration in a new way and to

invent new methods for dealing with that new presence you have achieved). In hindsight, the “materialist kernel” of this characteristic rhetoric or ideological vision of the 60s may be found in a more fundamental reflection on the nature of cultural revolution itself (now independent of its local and now historical Chinese manifestation).

The paradoxical, or dialectical, combination of decolonization and neo-colonialism can perhaps best be grasped in economic terms by a reflection on the nature of another process whose beginning coincides with the general beginnings we have suggested for this period as a whole. This is a process generally described in the neutral but obviously ideological language of a technological “revolution” in agriculture: the so-called Green Revolution, with its new applications of chemical procedures to fertilization, its intensified strategies of mechanization, and its predictable celebration of progress and wonder-working technology, supposedly destined to free the world from hunger (the Green Revolution, incidentally, finds its Second World equivalent in Khrushchev’s disastrous “virgin lands” experiment). But these are far from neutral achievements; nor is their export—essentially pioneered by the Kennedys—a benevolent and altruistic activity. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, capitalist penetration of the Third World did not necessarily mean a capitalist transformation of the latter’s traditional modes of production. Rather, they were for the most part left intact, “merely” exploited by a more political and military structure. The very enclave nature of these older agricultural modes—in combination with the violence of the occupier and that other violence, the introduction of money—established a sort of tributary relation that was beneficial to the imperialist metropolis for a considerable period. The Green Revolution carries this penetration and expansion of the “logic of capital” into a new stage.

The older village structure and precapitalist forms of agriculture are now systematically destroyed, to be replaced by an industrial agriculture whose effects are fully as disastrous as, and analogous to, the moment of enclosure in the emergence of capital in what was to become the First World. The “organic” social relations of village societies are now shattered, an enormous landless preproletariat “produced,” which migrates to the urban areas (as the tremendous growth of Mexico City can testify), while new, more proletarian, wage-working forms of agricultural labor replaced the older collective or traditional kinds. Such ambiguous “liberation” needs to be described with all the dialectical ambivalence with which Marx and Engels celebrate the dynamism of capital itself in the *Manifesto* or the historical progress achieved by the British occupation of India.

The conception of the Third World 60s as a moment when all over the world chains and shackles of a classical imperialist kind were thrown off in a stirring wave of “wars of national liberation” is an altogether mythical

simplification. Such resistance is generated as much by the new penetration of the Green Revolution as it is by the ultimate impatience with the older imperialist structures, the latter itself overdetermined by the historical spectacle of the supremacy of another former Third World entity, namely Japan, in its sweeping initial victories over the old imperial powers in World War II. Eric Wolf's indispensable *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (1969) underscores the relationship between possibilities of resistance, the development of a revolutionary ethos, and a certain constitutive distance from the more absolutely demoralizing social and economic logic of capital.

The final ambiguity with which we leave this topic is the following: the 60s, often imagined as a period when capital and First World power are in retreat all over the globe, can just as easily be conceptualized as a period when capital is in full dynamic and innovative expansion, equipped with a whole armature of fresh production techniques and new "means of production." It now remains to be seen whether this ambiguity, and the far greater specificity of the agricultural developments in the Third World, have any equivalent in the dynamics with which the 60s unfold in the advanced countries themselves.

II. The Politics of Otherness

If the history of philosophy is understood not as some sequence of timeless yet somehow finite positions in the eternal, but rather as the history of attempts to conceptualize a historical and social substance itself in constant dialectical transformation, whose aporias and contradictions mark all of those successive philosophies as determinate failures, yet failures from which we can read off something of the nature of the object on which they themselves came to grief—then it does not seem quite so farfetched to scan the more limited trajectory of that now highly specialized discipline for symptoms of the deeper rhythms of the "real" or "concrete" 60s itself.

As far as the history of philosophy during that period is concerned, one of the more influential versions of its story is told as follows: the gradual supersession of a hegemonic Sartrean existentialism (with its essentially phenomenological perspectives) by what is often loosely called "structuralism," namely, by a variety of new theoretical attempts which share at least a single fundamental "experience"—the discovery of the primacy of Language or the Symbolic (an area in which phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism remain relatively conventional or traditional). The moment of high structuralism—whose most influential monuments are seemingly not philosophical at all, but can be characterized, alongside the new linguistics itself, as linguistic transformations of anthropology and psychoanalysis by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan respectively—is, however,

inherently unstable and has the vocation of becoming a new type of universal *mathesis*, under pain of vanishing as one more intellectual fad. The breakdown products of that moment of high structuralism can then be seen, on the one hand, as the reduction to a kind of scientism, to sheer method and analytical technique (in *semiotics*) and, on the other hand, as the transformation of structuralist approaches into active ideologies in which ethical, political, and historical consequences are drawn from the hitherto more epistemological “structuralist” positions; this last is of course the moment of what is now generally known as *poststructuralism*, associated with familiar names like those of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and so forth. That the paradigm, although obviously French in its references, is not merely local can be judged from an analogous mutation of the classical Frankfurt School via problems of communication in the work of Habermas, or by the current revival or pragmatism in the work of Richard Rorty, which has a home-grown American “poststructuralist” feeling to it (Pierce after all having largely preceded and outclassed Saussure).

The crisis of the philosophical institution and the gradual extinction of the philosopher’s classic political vocation, of which Sartre was for our time the supreme embodiment, can in some ways be said to be about the so-called death of the subject: the individual ego or personality, but also the supreme philosophical Subject, the *cogito* but also the *auteur* of the great philosophical *system*. It is certainly possible to see Sartre as one of the last great system builders of traditional philosophy (but then at least one dimension of classical existentialism must also be seen as an ideology or a metaphysic: that of the heroic pathos of existential choice and freedom in the void, and that of the “absurd,” more particularly in Camus). Some of us also came to *Marxism* through dialectical elements in the early Sartre (he himself then turning to follow up this avenue in his own later, more Marxian work, such as the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* [1960]). But on balance the component of his work that underwent the richest practical elaboration at other people’s hands as well as his own was his theory of interpersonal relations, his stunning rewrite of Hegel’s Master/Slave chapter, his conception of the Look as the most concrete mode in which I relate to other subjects and struggle with them, the dimension of my alienation in my “being-for-other-people,” in which each of us vainly attempts, by looking at the other, to turn the tables and transform the baleful alienating gaze of the Other into an object for my equally alienating gaze. Sartre will go on, in the *Critique*, to try to erect a more positive and political theory of group dynamics on this seemingly sterile territory; the struggle between two people now becoming dialectically transformed into the struggle between groups themselves. The *Critique* was an anticipatory work, however, whose import and significance would not finally be recognized until May 1968 and beyond, whose rich consequences indeed have not even fully been

drawn to this day. Suffice it to say, in the present context, that the *Critique* fails to reach its appointed terminus and to complete the projected highway that was to have led from the individual subject of existential experience all the way to fully constituted social classes. It breaks down at the point of the constitution of small groups and is ultimately usable principally for ideologies of small guerrilla bands (in a later moment of the 60s) and of microgroups (at the period's end). The significance of this trajectory will soon be clear.

However, at the dawn of the 60s, the Sartrean paradigm of the Look and the struggle for recognition between individual subjects will also be appropriated dramatically for a very different model of political struggle, in Frantz Fanon's enormously influential vision (*The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]) of the struggle between Colonizer and Colonized, where the objectifying reversal of the Look is apocalyptically rewritten as the act of redemptive violence of Slave against Master, the moment when, in fear and the anxiety of death, the hierarchical positions of Self and Other, Center and Margin, are forcibly reversed, and when the subservient consciousness of the Colonized achieves collective identity and self-affirmation in the face of colonizers in abject fight.

What is at once significant is the way in which what had been a technical philosophical subject (the "problem" of solipsism, the nature of relationships between individual subjects or "cogitos") has fallen into the world and become an explosive and scandalous political ideology: a piece of the old-fashioned technical philosophical system of high existentialism breaking off and migrating outside philosophy departments altogether, into a more frightening landscape of praxis and terror. Fanon's great myth could be read at the time, by those it appalled equally well as by those it energized, as an irresponsible call to mindless violence. In retrospect, and in the light of Fanon's other, clinical work (he was a psychiatrist working with victims of colonization and of the torture and terror of the Algerian war), it can more appropriately be read as a significant contribution to a whole theory of cultural revolution as the collective reeducation (or even collective psychoanalysis) of oppressed peoples or unrevolutionary working classes. Cultural revolution as a strategy for breaking the immemorial habits of subalternity and obedience which have become internalized as a kind of second nature in all the laborious and exploited classes in human history—such is the vaster problematic to which, today, Gramsci and Wilhelm Reich, Fanon and Rudolf Bahro, can be seen as contributing as richly as the more official practices of Maoism.

III. Digression on Maoism

But with this new and fateful reference, an awkward but unavoidable parenthetical digression is in order: Maoism, richest of all the great new ideologies of the 60s, will be a shadowy but central presence throughout this essay, yet owing to its very polyvalence it cannot be neatly inserted at any point or exhaustively confronted on its own. One understands, of course, why Left militants here and abroad, fatigued by Maoist dogmatism, must have heaved a collective sigh of relief when the Chinese turn consigned “Maoism” itself to the ashcan of history. Theories, however, are often liberated on their own terms when they are thus radically disjoined from the practical interests of state power. Meanwhile, as I have suggested above, the symbolic terrain of the present debate is fully as much chosen and dictated by the Right as by Left survivors; and the current propaganda campaign, everywhere in the world, to Stalinize and discredit Maoism and the experience of the Chinese cultural revolution—now rewritten as yet another Gulag to the East—all of this, make no mistake about it, is part and parcel of the larger attempt to trash the 60s generally. It would not be prudent to abandon rapidly and without thoughtful reconsideration any of this terrain to the “other side.”

As for the more ludicrous features of Western Third-Worldism generally—a kind of modern exotic or Orientalist version of Marx’s revolutionaries of 1848, who “anxiously conjure up the spirits of [the Great Revolution of 1789] to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes”²—these are now widely understood in a more cynical light, as in Régis Debray’s remark: “In France, the Columbuses of political modernity thought that following Godard’s *La Chinoise* they were discovering China in Paris, when in fact they were landing in California.”³

Most paradoxical and fascinating of all, however, is the unexpected and unpredictable sequel to the Sino-Soviet split itself: the new Chinese rhetoric, intent on castigating the Soviet bureaucracy as revisionistic and “bourgeois,” will have the curious effect of evacuating the class content of these slogans. There is then an inevitable terminological slippage and displacement: the new binary opposite to the term “bourgeois” will no longer be “proletarian” but rather “revolutionary,” and the new qualifications for political judgments of this kind are no longer made in terms of class or party affiliation but rather in terms of personal life—your relationship to special privileges, to middle-class luxuries and dachas and managerial incomes and other perks—Mao Tse-tung’s own monthly “salary,” we are told, was something in the neighborhood of a hundred American dollars. As with all forms of anticommunism, this rhetoric can of course be appropriated by the anti-Marxist thematics of “bureaucracy,” of the end of ideology and social class, and so forth. But it is important to understand how for Western militants

what began to emerge from this at first merely tactical and rhetorical shift was a whole new political space, a space which will come to be articulated by the slogan “the personal is the political,” and into which—in one of the most stunning and unforeseeable of historical turns—the women’s movement will triumphantly move at the end of the decade, building a Yen-an of a new and unpredictable kind which is still impregnable at the present moment.

IV. The Withering Away of Philosophy

The limit as well as the strength of the stark Fanonian model of struggle was set by the relative simplicity of the colonial situation; this can be shown in two ways, first of all in the sequel to the “war of national independence.” For with the Slave’s symbolic and literal victory over the (now former) Master, the “politics of otherness” touches its limit as well; the rhetoric of a conquest of collective identity has then nowhere else to go but into a kind of secessionary logic of which black cultural nationalism and (later on) lesbian separatism are the most dramatic examples (the dialectic of cultural and linguistic independence in Québec province would be yet another instructive one). But this result is also contradictory, insofar as the newly constituted group (we here pick up Sartre’s account in the *Critique*) needs outside enemies to survive as a group, to produce and perpetuate a sense of collective cohesion and identity. Ultimately, in the absence of the clear-cut Manichaeian situation of the older imperialist period, this hard-won collective self-definition of a first moment of resistance will break up into the smaller and more comfortable unities of face-to-face microgroups (of which the official political sects are only one example).

The gradual waning of the Fanonian model can also be described from the perspective of what will shortly become its “structuralist” critique. On this view, it is still a model based on a conception of individual subjects, albeit mythical and collective ones. It is thereby both anthropomorphic and transparent, in the sense in which nothing intervenes between the great collective adversaries, between the Master and the Slave, between the Colonizer and the Colonized. Yet even in Hegel, there was always a third term, namely matter itself, the raw materials on which the Slave is made to labor and to work out a long and anonymous salvation through the rest of history. The “third term” of the 60s is, however, rather different from this. It was as though the protracted experiences of the earlier part of the decade gradually burned into the minds of the participants a specific lesson. In the United States, it was the experience of the interminable Vietnam War itself; in France, it was the astonishing and apparently invincible technocratic dynamism, and the seemingly unshakable inertia and resistance to de-

Stalinization of the French Communist party; and everywhere, it was the tremendous expansion of the media apparatus and the culture of consumerism. This lesson might well be described as the discovery, within a hitherto antagonistic and “transparent” political praxis, of the opacity of the Institution itself as the radically transindividual, with its own inner dynamic and laws, which are not those of individual human action or intention, something which Sartre theorized in the *Critique* as the “practico-inert,” and which will take the definitive form, in competing “structuralism,” of “structure” or “synchronic system,” a realm of impersonal logic in terms of which human consciousness is itself little more than an “effect of structure.”

On this reading, then, the new philosophical turn will be interpreted less in the idealistic perspective of some discovery of a new scientific truth (the Symbolic) than as the symptom of an essentially protopolitical and social experience, the shock of some new, hard, unconceptualized, resistant object which the older conceptuality cannot process and which thus gradually generates a whole new problematic. The conceptualization of this new problematic in the coding of linguistics or information theory may then be attributed to the unexpected explosion of information and messages of all kinds in the media revolution, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Suffice it to remark at this point that there is some historical irony in the way in which this moment, essentially the Third Technological Revolution in the West (electronics, nuclear energy)—in other words, a whole new step in the conquest of nature by human praxis—is philosophically greeted and conceptually expressed in a kind of thought officially designated as “antihumanist” and concerned to think what transcends or escapes human consciousness and intention. Similarly, the Second Technological Revolution of the late nineteenth century—an unparalleled quantum leap in human power over nature—was the moment of expression of a whole range of nihilisms associated with “modernity” or with high modernism in culture.

In the present context, the Althusserian experiment of the mid- to late 60s is the most revealing and suggestive of the various “structuralisms,” since it was the only one to be explicitly political and indeed to have very wide-ranging political effects in Europe and Latin America. The story of Althusserianism can be told only schematically here: its initial thrust is twofold, against the unliquidated Stalinist tradition (strategically designated by the code words “Hegel” and “expressive causality” in Althusser’s own texts), and against the “transparency” of the Eastern attempts to reinvent a Marxist humanism on the basis of the theory of alienation in Marx’s early manuscripts. That Althusserianism is essentially a meditation on the “institutional” and on the opacity of the “practico-inert” may be judged by the three successive formulations of this object by Althusser himself in the course of the 60s: that of a “structure in dominance” or *structure á*

dominante (in *For Marx*), that of “structural causality” (in *Reading Capital*), and that of “ideological state apparatuses” (in the essay of that name). What is less often remembered, but what should be perfectly obvious from any rereading of *For Marx*, is the origin of this new problematic in Maoism itself, and particularly in Mao Tse-tung’s essay “On Contradiction,” in which the notion of the complex, already-given *overdetermined* conjuncture of various kinds of antagonistic and nonantagonistic contradictions is mapped out.

The modification that will emerge from Althusser’s “process of theoretical production” as it works over its Maoist “raw materials” can be conveyed by the problem and slogan of the “semiautonomy” of the levels of social life (a problem already invoked in our opening pages). This formula will involve a struggle on two fronts: on the one hand, against the monism or “expressive causality” of Stalinism, in which the “levels” are identified, conflated, and brutally collapsed into one another (changes in economic production will be “the same” as political and cultural changes), and, on the other, against bourgeois avant-garde philosophy, which finds just such a denunciation of organic concepts of totality most congenial, but draws from it the consequence of a post- or anti-Marxist celebration of Nietzschean heterogeneity. The notion of a semiautonomy of the various levels or instances, most notably of the political instance and of the dynamics of state power, will have enormous resonance (outstandingly in the work of Nicos Poulantzas), since it seems to reflect, and to offer a way of theorizing, the enormous growth of the state bureaucracy since the war, the “relative autonomy” of the state apparatus from any classical and reductive functionality in the service of big business, as well as the very active new terrain of political struggle presented by government or public sector workers. The theory could also be appealed to to justify a semiautonomy in the cultural sphere as well, and especially a semiautonomous cultural politics, of a variety that ranges from Godard’s films and *situationisme* to the “festival” of May 1968 and the Yippie movement here (not excluding, perhaps, even those forms of so-called terrorism that aimed, not at any classical seizure of state power, but rather at essentially pedagogical or informational demonstrations, e.g., “forcing the state to reveal its fundamentally fascist nature”).

Nonetheless, the attempt to open up a semiautonomy of the levels on one hand, while holding them altogether in the ultimate unity of some “structural totality” (with its still classical Marxian ultimately determining instance of the economic), tends under its own momentum, in the centrifugal force of the critique of totality it had itself elaborated, to self-destruct (most dramatically so in the trajectory of Hindess and Hirst). What will emerge is not merely a heterogeneity of *levels*—henceforth, semiautonomy will relax into autonomy *tout court*, and it will be conceivable that in the decentered and “schizophrenic” world of late capitalism the various

instances may really have no organic relationship to one another at all—but, more important, the idea will emerge that the struggles appropriate to each of these levels (purely political struggles, purely economic struggles, purely cultural struggles, purely “theoretical” struggles) may have no necessary relationship to one another either. With this ultimate “meltdown” of the Althusserian apparatus, we are in the (still contemporary) world of micro-groups and micropolitics—variously theorized as local or molecular politics, but clearly characterized, however different the various conceptions are, as a repudiation of old-fashioned class and party politics of a “totalizing” kind, and most obviously epitomized by the challenge of the women’s movement, whose unique new strategies and concerns cut across (or in some cases undermine and discredit altogether) many classical inherited forms of “public” or “official” political action, including the electoral kind. The repudiation of “theory” itself as an essentially masculine enterprise of “power through knowledge” in French feminism (see in particular the work of Luce Irigaray) may be taken as the final moment in this particular “withering away of philosophy.”

Yet there is another way to read the density of Althusserianism, a way that will form the transition to our subsequent discussion of the transformation of the cultural sphere of the 60s, and this involves the significance of the slogan of “theory” itself as it comes to replace the older term “philosophy” throughout this period. The “discovery” of the Symbolic, the development of its linguistic-related thematics (as, e.g., in the notion of understanding as an essentially synchronic process, which influences the construction of relatively ahistorical “structures,” such as the Althusserian one described above), is now to be correlated with a modification of the practice of the symbolic, of language itself in the “structuralist” texts, henceforth characterized as “theory,” rather than work in a particular traditional discipline. Two features of this evolution, or mutation, must be stressed. The first is a consequence of the crisis in, or the disappearance of, classical *canon* of philosophical writings which necessarily results from the contestation of philosophy as a discipline and an institution. Henceforth, the new “philosophical” text will no longer draw its significance from an insertion into the issues and debates of the philosophical tradition, which means that its basic “intertextual” references become random, an *ad hoc* constellation that forms and dissolves on the occasion of each new text. The new text must necessarily be a commentary on other texts (indeed, that dependence on a body of texts to be glossed, rewritten, interconnected in fresh ways will now intensify if anything), yet those texts, drawn from the most wildly distant disciplines (anthropology, psychiatry, literature, history of science), will be selected in a seemingly arbitrary fashion: Mumford side by side with Antonin Artaud, Kant with Sade, pre-Socratic philosophy, President Schreber, a novel of Maurice Blanchot, Owen Lattimore on Mongolia, and

a host of obscure Latin medical treatises from the eighteenth century. The vocation of what was formerly “philosophy” is thereby restructured and displaced: since there is no longer a tradition of philosophical problems in terms of which new positions and new statements can meaningfully be proposed, such works now tend toward what can be called metaphilosophy—the very different work of coordinating a series of pregiven, already constituted codes or systems of signifiers, of producing a discourse fashioned out of the already fashioned discourse of the constellation of *ad hoc* reference works. “Philosophy” thereby becomes radically occasional; one would want to call it disposable theory, the production of a *metabook*, to be replaced by a different one next season, rather than the ambition to express a proposition, a position, or a system with greater “truth” value. (The obvious analogy with the evolution of literary and cultural studies today, with the crisis and disappearance of the latter’s own canon of great books—the last one having been augmented to include the once recalcitrant “masterpieces” of high modernism—will be taken for granted in our next section.)

All of this can perhaps be grasped in a different way by tracing the effects of another significant feature of contemporary theory, namely its privileged theme in the so-called critique of representation. Traditional philosophy will now be grasped in those terms, as a practice of representation in which the philosophical text or system (misguidedly) attempts to express something other than itself, namely truth or meaning (which now stands as the “signified” to the “signifier” of the system). If, however, the whole aesthetic of representation is metaphysical and ideological, philosophical discourse can no longer entertain this vocation, and it must stand as the mere addition of another text to what is now conceived as an infinite chain of texts (not necessarily all verbal—daily life is a text, clothing is a text, state power is a text, that whole external world, about which “meaning” or “truth” were once asserted and which is now contemptuously characterized as the illusion of reference or the “referent,” is an indeterminate superposition of texts of all kinds). Whence the significance of the currently fashionable slogan of “materialism,” when sounded in the area of philosophy and theory: materialism here means the dissolution of any belief in “meaning” or in the “signified” conceived as ideas or concepts that are distinct from their linguistic expressions. However paradoxical a “materialist” philosophy may be in this respect, a “materialist theory of language” will clearly transform the very function and operation of “theory,” since it opens up a dynamic in which it is no longer ideas, but rather texts, material texts, which struggle with one another. Theory so defined (and it will have become clear that the term now greatly transcends what used to be called philosophy and its specialized content) conceives of its vocation, not as the discovery of truth and the repudiation of error, but rather as a struggle about purely linguistic formulations, as the attempt to formulate verbal propositions (material

language) in such a way that they are unable to imply unwanted or ideological consequences. Since this aim is evidently impossible to achieve, what emerges from the practice of theory—and this was most dramatic and visible during the high point of Althusserianism itself in 1967–68—is a violent and obsessive return to ideological critique in the new form of a perpetual guerrilla war among the material signifiers of textual formulations. With the transformation of philosophy into a material practice, however, we touch on a development that cannot fully be appreciated until it is replaced in the context of a general mutation of culture throughout this period, a context in which “theory” will come to be grasped as a specific (or semiautonomous) form of what must be called postmodernism generally.

V. The Adventures of the Sign

Postmodernism is one significant framework in which to describe what happened to culture in the 60s, but a full discussion of this hotly contested concept is not possible here. Such a discussion would want to cover, among other things, the following features: that well-known poststructuralist theme the “death” of the subject (including the creative subject, the *auteur* or the “genius”); the nature and function of a *culture of the simulacrum* (an idea developed out of Plato by Deleuze and Baudrillard to convey some specificity of a reproducible object world, not of copies or reproductions marked as such, but of a proliferation of trompe-l’oeil copies *without originals*); the relation of this last to media culture of the “society of the spectacle” (Debord), under two heads: (1) the peculiar new status of the image, the “material,” or what might better be called the “literal,” signifier: a materiality or literality from which the older sensory richness of the medium has been abstracted (just as on the other side of the dialectical relationship, the old individuality of the subject and his/her “brushstrokes” have equally been effaced); and (2) the emergence, in the work’s temporality, of an aesthetic of *textuality* or what is often described as schizophrenic time; the eclipse, finally, of all depth, especially *historicity* itself, with the subsequent appearance of pastiche and nostalgia art (what the French call *la mode rétro*), and including the supersession of the accompanying models of depth-interpretation in philosophy (the various forms of hermeneutics, as well as the Freudian conception of “repression,” of manifest and latent levels).

What is generally objected to in characterizations of this kind is the empirical observation that all these features can be abundantly located in this or that variety of high modernism; indeed, one of the difficulties in specifying postmodernism lies in its symbiotic or parasitical relationship to the latter. In effect, with the canonization of a hitherto scandalous, ugly, dissonant, amoral, antisocial, bohemian high modernism offensive to the

middle classes, its promotion to the very figure of high culture generally, and perhaps most important, its enshrinement in the academic institution, postmodernism emerges as a way of making creative space for artists now oppressed by those henceforth hegemonic modernist categories of irony, complexity, ambiguity, dense temporality, and, particularly, aesthetic and Utopian monumentality. In some analogous way, it will be said, high modernism itself won its autonomy from the preceding hegemonic realism (the symbolic language or mode of representation of classical or market capitalism). But there is a difference in that realism itself underwent a significant mutation: it became *naturalism* and at once generated the representational forms of mass culture (the narrative apparatus of the contemporary best seller is an invention of naturalism and one of the most stunningly successful of French cultural exports). High modernism and mass culture then develop in dialectical opposition and interrelationship with one another. It is precisely the waning of their opposition, and some new conflation of the forms of high and mass culture, that characterizes postmodernism itself.

The historical specificity of postmodernism must therefore finally be argued in terms of the social functionality of culture itself. As stated above, high modernism, whatever its overt political content, was oppositional and marginal within a middle-class Victorian or philistine or gilded age culture. Although postmodernism is equally offensive in all the respects enumerated (think of punk rock or pornography), it is no longer at all “oppositional” in that sense; indeed, it constitutes the very dominant or hegemonic aesthetic of consumer society itself and significantly serves the latter’s commodity production as a virtual laboratory of new forms and fashions. The argument for a conception of postmodernism as a periodizing category is thus based on the presupposition that, even if *all* the formal features enumerated above were already present in the older high modernism, the very significance of those features changes when they become a cultural *dominant*, with a precise socio-economic functionality.

At this point it may be well to shift the terms (or the “code”) of our description to the seemingly more traditional one of a cultural “sphere,” a conception developed by Herbert Marcuse in what is to my mind his single most important text, the great essay “The Affirmative Character of Culture” (1937). (It should be added that the conception of a “public sphere” generally is a very contemporary one in Germany in the works of Habermas and Negt and Kluge, where such a system of categories stands in interesting contrast to the code of “levels” or “instances” in French poststructuralism.) Marcuse there rehearses the paradoxical dialectic of the classical (German) aesthetic, which projects as play and “purposefulness without purpose” a Utopian realm of beauty and culture beyond the fallen empirical world of money and business activity, thereby winning a powerful critical and negative value through its capacity to condemn, by its own very existence, the

totality of *what* is, at the same time forfeiting all ability to social or political intervention in what is, by virtue of its constitutive disjunction or autonomy from society and history.

The account therefore begins to coincide in a suggestive way with the problematic of autonomous or semiautonomous levels developed in the preceding section. To historicize Marcuse's dialectic, however, would demand that we take into account the possibility that in our time this very autonomy of the cultural sphere (or level or instance) may be in the process of modification; and that we develop the means to furnish a description of the process whereby such modification might take place, as well as of the prior process whereby culture became "autonomous" or "semiautonomous" in the first place.

This requires recourse to yet another (unrelated) analytic code, one more generally familiar to us today, since it involves the now classical structural concept of the *sign*, with its two components, the signifier (the material vehicle or image—sound or printed word) and the signified (the mental image, meaning, or "conceptual" content), and a third component—the external object of the sign, its reference or "referent"—henceforth expelled from the unity and yet haunting it as a ghostly residual aftereffect (illusion or ideology). The scientific value of this conception of the sign will be bracketed here since we are concerned, on the one hand, to historicize it, to interpret it as a conceptual symptom of developments in the period, and, on the other, to "set it in motion," to see whether changes in its inner structure can offer some adequate small-scale emblem or electrocardiogram of changes and permutation in the cultural sphere generally throughout this period.

Such changes are already suggested by the fate of the "referent" in the "conditions of possibility" of the new structural concept of the sign (a significant ambiguity must be noted, however: theorists of the sign notoriously glide from a conception of reference as designating a "real" object outside the unity of signifier and signified to a position in which the signified itself—or meaning, or the idea or the concept of a thing—becomes somehow identified with the referent and stigmatized along with it; we will return to this below). Saussure, at the dawn of the semiotic revolution, liked to describe the relationship of signifier to signified as that of the two sides, the recto and verso, of a sheet of paper. In what is then a logical sequel, and a text that naturally enough becomes equally canonical, Borges will push "representation" to the point of imagining a map so rigorous and referential that it becomes coterminous with its object. The stage is then set for the structuralist emblem par excellence, the Moebius Strip, which succeeds in peeling itself off its referent altogether and thus achieves a free-floating closure in the void, a kind of absolute self-referentiality and autocirculatory from which all remaining traces of reference, or of any externality, have triumphantly been effaced.

To be even more eclectic about it, I will suggest that this process, seemingly internal to the sign itself, requires a supplementary explanatory code, that of the more universal process of reification and fragmentation at one with the logic of capital itself. Nonetheless, taken on its own terms, the inner convulsions of the sign offer a useful initial figure of the process of transformation of culture generally, which must in some first moment (that described by Marcuse) separate itself from the “referent,” the existing social and historical world itself, only in a subsequent stage of the 60s, in what is here termed “postmodernism,” to develop further into some new and heightened, free-floating, self-referential “autonomy.”

The problem now turns around this very term, “autonomy,” with its paradoxical Althusserian modification, the concept of “semiautonomy.” The paradox is that the sign, as an “autonomous” unity in its own right, as a realm divorced from the referent, can preserve that initial autonomy, and the unity and coherence demanded by it, only at the price of keeping a phantom of reference alive as the ghostly reminder of its own outside or exterior, since this allows it closure, self-definition, and an essential boundary line. Marcuse’s own tormented dialectic expresses this dramatically in the curious oscillation whereby his autonomous realm of beauty and culture returns upon some “real world” to judge and negate it, at the same time separating itself so radically from that real world as to become a place of mere illusion and impotent “ideals,” the “infinite,” and so on.

The first moment in the adventures of the sign is perplexing enough as to demand more concrete, if schematic, illustration in the most characteristic cultural productions themselves. It might well be demonstrated in the classical French *nouveau roman* (in particular the novels of Robbe-Grillet himself), which established its new language in the early 1960s, using systematic variations of narrative segments to “undermine” representation, yet in some sense confirming this last by teasing and stimulating an appetite for it.

Because an American illustration seems more appropriate, however, something similar may be seen in connection with the final and canonical form of high modernism in American poetry, namely the work of Wallace Stevens, which becomes, in the years following the poet’s death in 1956, institutionalized in the university as a purer and more quintessential fulfillment of poetic language than the still impure (read: ideological and political) works of an Eliot or a Pound, and can therefore be numbered among the literary “events” of the early 60s. As Frank Lentricchia has shown, in *After the New Criticism*, the serviceability of Stevens’s poetic production for this normative and hegemonic role depends in large measure on the increasing conflation, in that work, of poetic practice and poetic theory:

This endlessly elaborating poem
 Displays the theory of poetry
 As the life of poetry ...

“Stevens” is therefore a locus and fulfillment of aesthetics and aesthetic theory fully as much as the latter’s exemplar and privileged exegetical object; the theory or aesthetic ideology in question is very much an affirmation of the “autonomy” of the cultural sphere in the sense developed above, a valorization of the supreme power of the poetic imagination over the “reality” it produces.⁴ Stevens’s work, therefore, offers an extraordinary laboratory situation in which to observe the autonomization of culture as a process: a detailed examination of his development (something for which we have no space here) would show how some initial “set toward” or “attention to” a kind of poetic *pensée sauvage*, the operation of great preconscious *stereotypes*, opens up a vast inner world in which little by little the images of things and their “ideas” begin to be substituted for the things themselves. Yet what distinguishes this experience in Stevens is the sense of a vast systematicity in all this, the operation of a whole set of cosmic oppositions far too complex to be reduced to the schemata of “structuralist” binary oppositions, yet akin to those in spirit, and somehow pre-given in the Symbolic Order of the mind, discoverable to the passive exploration of the “poetic imagination,” that is, of some heightened and impersonal power of free association in the realm of “objective spirit” or “objective culture.” The examination would further show the strategic limitation of this process to landscape, the reduction of the ideas and images of things to the names for things, and finally to those irreducibles that are place names, among which the exotic has a privileged function (Key West, Oklahoma, Yucatan, Java). Here the poetic “totality” begins to trace a ghostly mimesis or *analogon* of the totality of the imperialist world system itself, with Third World materials in a similarly strategic, marginal, yet essential place (much as Adorno showed how Schoenberg’s twelve-tone system unconsciously produced a formal imitation of the “total system” of capital). This very unconscious replication of the “real” totality of the world system in the mind is then what allows culture to separate itself as a closed and self-sufficient “system” in its own right: reduplicating and, at the same time, floating above the real. It is an impulse shared by most of the great high modernisms, as has been shown most dramatically in the recent critiques of architectural modernism, in particular of the International Style, whose great monumental objects constitute themselves by protecting a protopolitical and Utopian spirit of transformation *against* a fallen city fabric all around them and, as Venturi has demonstrated, end up necessarily displaying and speaking of themselves alone. Now, this also accounts for what must puzzle any serious reader of Stevens’s verse, namely the extraordinary combination of verbal richness and experimental hollowness or

impoverishment in it (the latter being attributable as well to the impersonality of the poetic imagination in Stevens, and to the essentially contemplative and epistemological stance of the subject in it, over and against the static object world of his landscapes).

The essential point here, however, is that this characteristic movement of the high modernist impulse needs to justify itself by way of an ideology, an ideological supplement which can generally be described as that of “existentialism” (the supreme fiction, the meaninglessness of a contingent object world unredeemed by the imagination, etc.). This is the most uninteresting and banal dimension of Stevens’s work, yet it betrays along with other existentialisms (e.g., Sartre’s tree root in *Nausea*) that fatal seam or link that must be retained in order for the contingent, the “outside world,” the meaningless referent, to be just present enough dramatically to be overcome within the language. Nowhere is this ultimate point so clearly deduced, over and over again, as in Stevens, in the eye of the blackbird, the angels, or the Sun itself—that last residual vanishing point of reference as distant as a dwarf star upon the horizon, yet which cannot disappear altogether without the whole vocation of poetry and the poetic imagination being called back into question. Stevens thus exemplifies for us the fundamental paradox of the “autonomy” of the cultural sphere: the sign can become autonomous only by remaining semiautonomous, and the realm of culture can absolutize itself over against the real world only at the price of retaining a final tenuous sense of that exterior or external world of which it is the replication and the imaginary double.

All of this can also be demonstrated by showing what happens when, in a second moment, the perfectly logical conclusion is drawn that the referent is itself a myth and does not exist, a second moment hitherto described as postmodernism. Its trajectory can be seen as a movement from the older *nouveau roman* to that of Sollers or of properly “schizophrenic” writing, or from the primacy of Stevens to that of John Ashbery. This new moment is a radical break (which can be localized around 1967 for reasons to be given later), but it is important to grasp it as dialectical, that is, as a passage from quantity to quality in which the *same* force, reaching a certain threshold of excess, in its prolongation now produces qualitatively distinct effects and seems to generate a whole new system.

That force has been described as reification, but we can now also begin to make some connections with another figural language used earlier: in a first moment, reification “liberated” the sign from its referent, but this is not a force to be released with impunity. Now, in a second moment, it continues its work of dissolution, penetrating the interior of the sign itself and liberating the signifier from the signified, or from meaning proper. This play, no longer of a realm of signs, but of pure or literal signifiers freed from the ballast of their signifieds, their former meanings, now generates a new kind

of textuality in all the arts (and in philosophy as well, as we have seen above) and begins to project the mirage of some ultimate language of pure signifiers which is also frequently associated with schizophrenic discourse. (Indeed, the Lacanian theory of schizophrenia—a language disorder in which syntactical time breaks down and leaves a succession of empty signifiers, absolute moments of a perpetual present, behind itself—has offered one of the more influential explanations and ideological justifications for postmodernist textual practice.)

Such an account would have to be demonstrated in some detail by way of a concrete analysis of the postmodernist experience in all the arts today; but the present argument can be concluded by drawing the consequences of this second moment—the culture of the signifier or of the simulacrum—for the whole problematic of some “autonomy” of the cultural sphere which has concerned us here. For that autonomous realm is not itself spared by the intensified process by which the classical sign is dissolved; if its autonomy depended paradoxically on its possibility of remaining “semiautonomous” (in an Althusserian sense) and of preserving the last tenuous link with some ultimate referent (or, in Althusserian language, of preserving the ultimate unity of a properly “structural totality”), then evidently in the new cultural moment culture will have ceased to be autonomous, and the realm of an autonomous play of signs becomes impossible, when that ultimate final referent to which the balloon of the mind was moored is now definitively cut. The break-up of the sign in mid-air determines a fall back into a now absolutely fragmented and anarchic social reality; the broken pieces of language (the pure signifiers) now fall again into the world, as so many more pieces of material junk among all the other rusting and superannuated apparatuses and buildings that litter the commodity landscape and that strew the “collage city,” the “delirious New York” of a postmodernist late capitalism in full crisis.

But, returning to a Marcusean terminology, all of this can also be said in a different way: with the eclipse of culture as an autonomous space or sphere, culture itself falls into the world, and the result is not its disappearance but its prodigious expansion, to the point where culture becomes coterminous with social life in general; now all the levels become “acculturated,” and in the society of the spectacle, the image, or the simulacrum, everything has at length become cultural, from the superstructures down into the mechanisms of the infrastructure itself. If this development then places acutely on the agenda the neo-Gramscian problem of a new cultural politics today—in a social system in which the very status of both culture and politics have been profoundly, functionally, and structurally modified—it also renders problematic any further discussion of what used to be called “culture” proper, whose artifacts have become the random experiences of daily life itself.

VI. In the Sierra Maestra

The preceding section will, however, have been little more than a lengthy excursion into a very specialized (or “elite”) area, unless it can be shown that the dynamic therein visible, with something of the artificial simplification of the laboratory situation, finds striking analogies or homologies in very different and distant areas of social practice. It is precisely this replication of a common diachronic rhythm or “genetic code” which we will now observe in the very different realities of revolutionary practice and theory in the course of the 60s in the Third World.

From the beginning, the Cuban experience affirmed itself as an original one, as a new revolutionary model, to be radically distinguished from more traditional forms of revolutionary practice. *Foco* theory, indeed, as it was associated with Che Guevara and theorized in Régis Debray’s influential handbook *Revolution in the Revolution?* (1967), asserted itself (as the title of the book suggests) both against a more traditional Leninist conception of party practice and against the experience of the Chinese revolution in its first essential stage of the conquest of power (what will later come to be designated as “Maoism,” China’s own very different “revolution in the revolution,” or Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, will not become visible to the outside world until the moment when the fate of the Cuban strategy has been sealed).

A reading of Debray’s text shows that *foco* strategy, the strategy of the mobile guerrilla base or revolutionary *foyer*, is conceived as yet a third term, as something distinct from *either* the traditional model of class struggle (an essentially *urban* proletariat rising against a bourgeoisie or ruling class) *or* the Chinese experience of a mass peasant movement in the countryside (and also has little in common with a Fanonian struggle for recognition between Colonizer and Colonized). The *foco*, or guerrilla operation, is conceptualized as being neither “in” nor “of” either country or city; geographically, of course, it is positioned in the countryside, yet that location is not the permanently “liberated territory” of the Yen-an region, well beyond the reach of the enemy forces of Chiang Kai-shek or of the Japanese occupier. It is not indeed located in the cultivated area of the peasant fields at all, but rather in that third or nonplace which is the wilderness of the Sierra Maestra, neither country nor city, but rather a whole new element in which the guerrilla band moves in perpetual displacement.

This peculiarity of the way in which the spatial coordinates of the Cuban strategy is conceived has, then, immediate consequences for the way in which the class elements of the revolutionary movement are theorized. Neither city nor country; by the same token, paradoxically, the guerrillas themselves are grasped as being neither workers nor peasants (still less, intellectuals), but rather something entirely new, for which the prerevolutionary

class society has no categories: new revolutionary subjects, forged in the guerrilla struggle indifferently out of the social material of peasants, city workers, or intellectuals, yet now largely transcending those class categories (just as this moment of Cuban theory will claim largely to transcend the older revolutionary ideologies predicated on class categories, whether those of Trotskyist workerism, Maoist populism and peasant consciousness, or of Leninist vanguard intellectualism).

What becomes clear in a text like Debray's is that the guerrilla *foco*—so mobile as to be beyond geography in the static sense—is in and of itself a *figure* for the transformed, revolutionary society to come. Its revolutionary militants are not simply “soldiers” to whose specialized role and function one would then have to “add” supplementary roles in the revolutionary division of labor, such as political commissars and the political vanguard party itself, both explicitly rejected here. Rather, in them is abolished all such prerevolutionary divisions and categories. This conception of a newly emergent revolutionary “space”—situated outside the “real” political, social, and geographical world of country and city, and of the historical social classes, yet at one and the same time a figure or small-scale image and prefiguration of the revolutionary transformation of that real world—may be designated as a properly Utopian space, a Hegelian “inverted world,” an autonomous revolutionary sphere, in which the fallen real world over against it is itself set right and transformed into a new socialist society.

For all practical purposes, this powerful model is exhausted, even before Che's own tragic death in Bolivia in 1967, with the failure of the guerrilla movements in Peru and Venezuela in 1966; not uncoincidentally, that failure will be accompanied by something like a disinvestment of revolutionary libido and fascination on the part of a First World Left and the return (with some leavening of the newer Maoism) to its own “current situation” in the American antiwar movement and May 1968. In Latin America, however, the radical strategy that effectively replaces *foco* theory is that of the so-called urban guerrilla movement, pioneered in Uruguay by the Tupamaros; it will have become clear that this break-up of the Utopian space of the older guerrilla *foco*, the fall of politics back into the world in the form of a very different style of political practice indeed—one that seeks to dramatize features of state power, rather than, as in traditional revolutionary movements, to build toward some ultimate encounter with it—will be interpreted here as something of a structural equivalent to the final stage of the sign as characterized above.

Several qualifications must be made, however. For one thing, it is clear that this new form of political activity will be endowed, by association, with something of the tragic prestige of the Palestinian liberation movement, which comes into being in its contemporary form as a result of the Israeli seizure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, and which will

thereafter become one of the dominant worldwide symbols of revolutionary praxis in the late 60s. Equally clearly, however, the struggle of this desperate and victimized people cannot be made to bear responsibility for the excesses of this kind of strategy elsewhere in the world, whose universal results (whether in Latin America, or with Cointelpro in the United States, or, belatedly, in West Germany and Italy) have been to legitimize an intensification of the repressive apparatus of state power.

This objective coincidence between a misguided assessment of the social and political situation on the part of Left militants (for the most part students and intellectuals eager to force a revolutionary conjuncture by voluntaristic acts) and a willing exploitation by the state of precisely those provocations suggests that what is often loosely called “terrorism” must be the object of complex and properly dialectical analysis. However rightly a responsible Left chooses to dissociate itself from such strategy (and the Marxian opposition to terrorism is an old and established tradition that goes back to the nineteenth century), it is important to remember that “terrorism,” as a “concept,” is also an ideologeme of the Right and must therefore be refused in that form. Along with the disaster films of the late 1960s and early 1970s, mass culture itself makes clear that “terrorism”—the image of the “terrorist”—is one of the privileged forms in which an ahistorical society imagines radical social change; meanwhile, an inspection of the content of the modern thriller or adventure story also makes it clear that the “otherness” of so-called terrorism has begun to replace older images of criminal “insanity” as an unexamined and seemingly “natural” motivation in the construction of plots—yet another sign of the ideological nature of this particular pseudoconcept. Understood in this way, “terrorism” is a collective obsession, a symptomatic fantasy of the American political unconscious, which demands decoding and analysis in its own right.

As for the thing itself, for all practical purposes it comes to an end with the Chilean coup in 1973 and the fall of virtually all the Latin American countries to various forms of military dictatorship. The belated reemergence of this kind of political activity in West Germany and in Italy must surely at least in part be attributed to the fascist past of these two countries, to their failure to liquidate that past after the war, and to a violent moral revulsion against it on the part of a segment of the youth and intellectuals who grew up in the 60s.

VII. Return of the “Ultimately Determining Instance”

The two “breaks” that have emerged in the preceding section—one in the general area around 1967, the other in the immediate neighborhood of 1973—will now serve as the framework for a more general hypothesis about

the periodization of the 60s in general. Beginning with the second of these, a whole series of other, seemingly unrelated events in the general area of 1972–74 suggests that this moment is not merely a decisive one on the relatively specialized level of Third World or Latin American radical politics, but signals the definitive end of what is called the 60s in a far more global way. In the First World, for example, the end of the draft and the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam (in 1973) spell the end of the mass politics of the antiwar movement (the crisis of the New Left itself—which can be largely dated from the break-up of SDS in 1969—would seem related to the other break mentioned, to which we will return below), while the signing of the Common Program between the Communist party and the new Socialist party in France (as well as the wider currency of slogans associated with “Eurocommunism” at this time) would seem to mark a strategic turn away from the kinds of political activities associated with May 1968 and its sequels. This is also the movement when as a result of the Yom Kippur War, the oil weapon emerges and administers a different kind of shock to the economies, the political strategies, and the daily life habits of the advanced countries. Concomitantly, on the more general cultural and ideological level, the intellectuals associated with the establishment itself (particularly in the United States) begin to recover from the fright and defensive posture that was theirs during the decade now ending, and again find their voices in a series of attacks on 60s culture and 60s politics, which, as was noted at the beginning, are not even yet at an end. One of the more influential documents was Lionel Trilling’s *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), an Arnoldian call to reverse the tide of 60s’ countercultural “barbarism.” (This will, of course, be followed by the equally influential diagnosis of some 60s concept of “authenticity” in terms of a “culture of narcissism.”) Meanwhile, in July 1973, some rather different “intellectuals,” representing various concrete forms of political and economic power, will begin to rethink the failure in Vietnam in terms of a new global strategy for American and First World interests; their establishment of the Trilateral Commission will at least symbolically be a significant marker in the recovery of momentum by what must be called “the ruling classes.” The emergence of a widely accepted new popular concept and term at this same time, the notion of the “multinational corporation,” is also a symptom, signifying, as the authors of *Global Reach* have suggested, the moment when private business finds itself obliged to emerge in public as a visible “subject of history” and a visible actor on the world stage—think of the role of ITT in Chile—when the American government, having been badly burned by the failure of the Vietnam intervention, is generally reluctant to undertake further ventures of this kind.

For all these reasons it seems appropriate to mark the definitive end of “the 60s” in the general area of 1972–74. But we have omitted until now

the decisive element in any argument for a periodization or “punctuation” of this kind, and this new kind of material will direct our attention to a “level” or “instance” which has hitherto significantly been absent from the present discussion, namely the economic itself. For 1973–74 is the moment of the onset of a worldwide economic crisis, whose dynamic is still with us today, and which put a decisive full stop to the economic expansion and prosperity characteristic of the postwar period generally and of the 60s in particular. When we add to this another key economic marker—the recession in West Germany in 1966 and that in the other advanced countries, in particular in the United States, a year or so later—we may well thereby find ourselves in a better position more formally to conceptualize the sense of a secondary break around 1967–68 which has begun to surface on the philosophical, cultural, and political levels as they were analyzed or “narrated” above.

Such confirmation by the economic “level” itself of periodizing reading derived from other, sample levels or instances of social life during the 60s will now perhaps put us in a better position to answer the two theoretical issues raised at the beginning of this essay. The first had to do with the validity of Marxist analysis for a period whose active political categories no longer seemed to be those of social class, and in which in a more general way traditional forms of Marxist theory and practice seemed to have entered a “crisis.” The second involved the problem of some “unified field theory” in terms of which such seemingly distant realities as Third World peasant movements and First World mass culture (or indeed, more abstractly, intellectual or superstructural levels like philosophy and culture generally, and those of mass resistance and political practice) might conceptually be related in some coherent way.

A pathbreaking synthesis of Ernest Mandel, in his book *Late Capitalism*, will suggest a hypothetical answer to both these questions at once.⁵ The book presents, among other things, an elaborate system of business cycles under capitalism, whose most familiar unit, the seven-to-ten-year alternation of boom, overproduction, recession, and economic recovery, adequately enough accounts for the midpoint break in the 60s suggested above.

Mandel’s account of the worldwide crisis of 1974, however, draws on a far more controversial conception of vaster cycles of some thirty- to fifty-year periods each—cycles which are then obviously much more difficult to perceive experientially or “phenomenologically” insofar as they transcend the rhythms and limits of the biological life of individuals. These “Kondratiev waves” (named after the Soviet economist who hypothesized them) have, according to Mandel, been renewed four times since the eighteenth century, and are characterized by quantum leaps in the technology of production, which enable decisive increases in the rate of profit generally, until at length the advantages of the new production processes have been explored and

exhausted and the cycle therewith comes to an end. The latest of these Kondratiev cycles is that marked by computer technology, nuclear energy, and the mechanization of agriculture (particularly in foodstuffs and also primary materials), which Mandel dates from 1940 in North America and the postwar period in the other imperialist countries; what is decisive in the present context is his notion that, with the worldwide recession of 1973–74, the dynamics of this latest “long wave” are spent.

The hypothesis is attractive, however, not only because of its abstract usefulness in confirming our periodization schemes, but also because of the actual analysis of this latest wave of capitalist expansion, and of the properly Marxian version he gives of a whole range of developments that have generally been thought to demonstrate the end of the “classical” capitalism theorized by Marx and to require this or that post-Marxist theory of social mutation (as in theories of consumer society, postindustrial society, and the like).

We have already described the way in which neocolonialism is characterized by the radically new technology (the so-called Green Revolution in agriculture: new machinery, new farming methods, and new types of chemical fertilizer and genetic experiments with hybrid plants and the like), with which capitalism transforms its relationship to its colonies from an old-fashioned imperialist control to market penetration, destroying the older village communities and creating a whole new wage-labor pool and lumpenproletariat. The militancy of the new social forces is at one and the same time a result of the “liberation” of peasants from the older, self-sustaining village communities, and a movement of self-defense, generally originating in the stabler yet more isolated areas of a given Third World country, against what is rightly perceived as a far more thoroughgoing form of penetration and colonization than the older colonial armies.

It is now in terms of this process of “mechanization” that Mandel will make the link between the neocolonialist transformation of the Third World during the 60s and the emergence of that seemingly very different thing in the First World, variously termed consumer society, postindustrial society, media society, and the like:

Far from representing a postindustrial society, late capitalism ... constitutes *generalized universal industrialization* for the first time in history. Mechanization, standardization, overspecialization and parcellization of labor, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate into all sectors of social life. It is characteristic of late capitalism that agriculture is step by step becoming just as industrialized as industry, the sphere of circulation [e.g., credit cards and the like] just as much as the sphere of production, and recreation just as much as the organization of work. (*LC*, 387)

With this last, Mandel touches on what he elsewhere calls the mechanization of the superstructure, or, in other words, the penetration of culture itself by what the Frankfurt School called the culture industry, and of which the growth of the media is only a part. We may thus generalize his description as follows: late capitalism in general (and the 60s in particular) constitutes a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism—the last vestiges of noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world—are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment when the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the Third World and the unconscious. The 60s will then have been the momentous transformational period when this systemic restructuring takes place on a global scale.

With such an account, our “unified field theory” of the 60s is given: the discovery of a single process at work in First and Third Worlds, in global economy, and in consciousness and culture, a properly *dialectical* process in which “liberation” and domination are inextricably combined. We may now therefore proceed to a final characterization of the period as a whole.

The simplest yet most universal formulation surely remains the widely shared feeling that in the 60s, for a time, everything was possible; that this period, in other words, was a moment of a universal liberation, a global unbinding of energies. Mao Tse-tung’s figure for this process is in this respect most revealing: “Our nation,” he cried, “is like an atom ... When this atom’s nucleus is smashed, the thermal energy released will have really tremendous power!”⁶ The image evokes the emergence of a genuine mass democracy from the breakup of the older feudal and village structures, and from the therapeutic dissolution of the habits of those structures in cultural revolutions. Yet the effects of fission, the release of molecular energies, the unbinding of “material signifiers,” can be a properly terrifying spectacle; and we now know that Mao Tse-tung himself drew back from the ultimate consequences of the process he had set in motion, when, at the supreme moment of the Cultural Revolution, that of the founding of the Shanghai Commune, he called a halt to the dissolution of the party apparatus and effectively reversed the direction of this collective experiment as a whole (with consequences only too obvious at the present time). In the West, also, the great explosions of the 60s have led, in the worldwide economic crisis, to powerful restorations of the social order and a renewal of the repressive power of the various state apparatuses.

Yet the forces these must now confront, contain, and control are new ones, on which the older methods do not necessarily work. We have described the 60s as a moment when the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of

social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces: the ethnic forces of black and “minority,” or Third World, movements everywhere, regionalisms, the development of new and militant bearers of “surplus consciousness” in the student and women’s movements, as well as in a host of struggles of other kinds. Such newly released forces do not only not seem to compute in the dichotomous class model of traditional Marxism; they also seem to offer a realm of freedom and voluntarist possibility beyond the classical constraints of the economic infrastructure. Yet this sense of freedom and possibility—which is for the course of the 60s a momentarily objective reality, as well as (from the hindsight of the 80s) a historical illusion—can perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another. The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers. With the end of the 60s, with the world economic crisis, all the old infrastructural bills then slowly come due once more; and the 80s will be characterized by an effort, on a world scale, to proletarianize all those unbound social forces that gave the 60s their energy, by an extension of class struggle, in other words, into the farthest reaches of the globe as well as the most minute configurations of local institutions (such as the university system). The unifying force here is the new vocation of a henceforth global capitalism, which may also be expected to unify the unequal, fragmented, or local resistances to the process. And this is finally also the solution to the so-called crisis of Marxism and to the widely noted inapplicability of its forms of class analysis to the new social realities with which the 60s confronted us: “traditional” Marxism, if “untrue” during this period of a proliferation of new subjects of history, must necessarily become true again when the dreary realities of exploitation, extraction of surplus value, proletarianization, and the resistance to it in the form of class struggle all slowly reassert themselves on a new and expanded world scale, as they seem currently in the process of doing.

Notes

- 1 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface" to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- 2 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York: International Publishers, 1969, 15.
- 3 Régis Debray, "A Modest Contribution to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Tenth Anniversary," trans. John Howe, *New Left Review* 115, May–June 1979, 58.
- 4 Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980, especially 31–35.
- 5 Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres, London: New Left Books, 1975. Future reference to this work are denoted *LC*.
- 6 Mao Tse-tung, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters, 1956–1971*, ed. and trans. Stuart Schram, New York: Random House, 1974, 92–93.

Foreword to A. J. Greimas'
On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory

A. J. Greimas is the last of the great thinkers and theoreticians of French structuralism and poststructuralism to be translated into English and presented to the American public, and perhaps in many ways the most difficult and forbidding—bristling with scientificity, as these texts are, and breaking out at all points into that graphics of formalization (equations, schemata, nonverbal symbols of variables and invariables) that always seems to the “humanist” to draw a boundary across which one looks with frustration at the forbidden promised lands of mathematics or symbolic logic, or of musical theory. We need, not one, but many, introductions to this “semiotics”; this volume, which richly and substantially covers the whole range of Greimas’ interests and practical work, is already endowed with an excellent account of the theory, as it were from the inside and on its own terms: an account that makes it clear that Greimas’ pastures belong to us, that they are not on the far side of some hard-scientific discipline but occupy a whole terrain of narrative, meaning, discourse, ideological connotation, which is scarcely distinct from the privileged areas of study of any responsible literary or cultural criticism today, nor either from those areas of the contemporary social sciences and philosophy that have followed us into the great new problematic of representation itself.

What a rather different kind of introduction needs to show, however, is how the interested outsider can navigate this conceptuality and occasionally beach and camp with profit and stimulation within it; my own testimony is that of a fellow traveler of Greimassian semiotics, with a deplorable nonchalance toward its orthodoxies, but also a passionate interest in the ongoing development and dynamic of this new “discipline,” whose capacity to produce fresh problems, and urgent, exciting problems at that, is not the least sign of the deeper truth and rightness of its starting point. Indeed, we have reached a paradoxical moment in the development of this particular semiotics (there are of course many other kinds), in which, some twenty years after the inaugural texts of a kind of research sometimes denounced

as ahistorical and universalizing in some bourgeois analytic scientific fashion, has now begun not merely to reflect on its own history but also and above all to discover the deeper historicity of its own inner logic of development and of the dynamic whereby a local concept, modified at its saturation point and at the moment of diminishing returns, in its turn proves to demand the enlargement and subsequent modification of the entire conceptual field of which it was a part. The consequence is that in Greimassian semiotics, in some intense and original new way, concepts bear a date and are historical in their very essence—not, to be sure, in the crude and multiple chronologies of calendar years, but on the intrinsic calendar of the unfolding of the semiotic problem field itself; and this is something very different from the older “periods” of a philosopher’s thinking (the thoughts of some younger Hegel or Marx, or of the Heidegger before and after the *Kehre*, etc.). Nor is the matter of the inner date, the inner chronological mark, merely to be thought in terms of some vague provisionality, later, more “rigorous” formulations taking the place of earlier hypotheses: in Greimas’ work all the formulations—early and late—are interesting and in some sense “valid” in themselves; only their intelligibility is incomplete without a keen awareness of the “moment” of each, of the time of the problematic as a whole, of the shape and point in the life cycle of this particular exploding galaxy in which that technical term pulsates with its brightest life.

I will put this in a different way and in a different language by saying that the “genius” of Greimas—the privileged form of his intelligence—has always seemed to me to lie in his extraordinary sense of precisely this tendential development of the problem field itself, and in those magisterial “lessons” in which he situates this or that concrete or local analysis, shows what it solves and how it modifies things, and above all designates the directions in which “future work is to be done,” in which future work is *now* to be done—this extraordinary perpetual present of the problematic itself. Not all theory, nor all philosophy, surely, works in this way (although Metz was able to occupy a similar position and do something analogous for a certain extraordinarily productive moment in film theory), and it is not a matter of prophecy either, nor of the fatalistic and hyperlucid sense of limits (“we’re eventually going to have to confront the problem of *nature* again, or base and superstructure, of what used to be called ‘consciousness’”). It would also, in my opinion, be incorrect to detect Authority, and authoritarianism, at work in this “master’s” surveillance of the multiple fields of research and his staying on top of the multiple tempos of research and the minutiae of the various laboratories under supervision. It is not exactly a matter of the inventive parceling out of new thesis topics; nor any willful and arbitrary channeling of the disciples’ energies into the byways closest to the ideologue’s heart (and least menacing for his project). What reigns here, at its best, is what Hegel called *die Sache selbst* and its objective dynamics and

tendencies: Greimas' superintendence is an effacement of self before those and a watchful patience, a nurturing alertness, for their moments of ripeness and their specific, uneven, "semiautonomous" temporalities.

This narrative reading of the semiotic record is thus obviously for me the most exciting way in which to use it. But for most beginners it will equally obviously not be the first one. I must therefore propose more accessible alternatives and will suggest that we bracket the whole question of science and scientificity in Greimas and think of the body of texts that follow, as we do for other "structuralisms" or "poststructuralisms," as a code, an idiolect, a theoretical private language among many others resonating through the airspace of the contemporary public sphere. Let us therefore initially think of the "concepts" of Greimassian semiotics rather as a specific nomenclature, as a fresh and idiosyncratic, arbitrary, violent, often unlovely renaming of a whole space and collection of objects already familiar to us under other names and in different installations or perspectives: actants, narrative contracts, narrative programs, isotopies, modalizations, cataphora, and finally that peculiar act of nomination (the semiotic square) that is less a name than a visual articulation, a new hieroglyph (which then carries its terminology within itself like so many articulated organs: deixis, the complex term, the neutral term, and so on). I will be so bold as to suggest that, besides trying to grasp the conceptual links between all these terms as signs and moments of a whole project, we outsiders or interlopers—who resist the invitation to join the discipline and to "become semioticians," that is, to *convert* to the entire Greimassian code (and to abandon the other ones as so many false religions and false gods)—should also feel free to *bricolate* all this, that is, in plainer language, simply to *steal* the pieces that interest or fascinate us, and to carry off our fragmentary booty to our intellectual caves. The dishonesty of the suggestion (in our current penal code it bears the name "eclecticism") is not as fundamental as it may at first seem, for we will find ourselves obliged, in the fullness of time, to return to the central laboratory complex for conceptual spare parts and missing tools or instruments.

I have omitted, from my list of key terms or favorite neologisms, what is apparently the basic concept of them all, the inaugural terminological complex, the founding nomenclature, the very language of the sign: that bewildering proliferation of syllables that, beginning with the "seme," fans out into "sememes" and "lexemes," and seems to describe some central space around the initial program of a "structural semantics." But just as I believe that the early book bearing this title is absolutely the wrong place to begin one's exploration of Greimas, so also I think that the scholastic problems turning on the seme itself—although constituting both the absolute presuppositions of Greimassian semiotics and its highest and most self-conscious moment of reflection on its own procedures—are also best postponed or suspended and this, not only on account of their

philosophical complexity (and their polemic and intradisciplinary relationship to other contemporary linguistic theories), but also for other reasons, which can be, I think, fairly clearly specified. (As for the matter of a starting point, the more practical one would be the initial text or object of study of this semiotics, which is Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, and the process of "semiotic reduction" to which Greimas, following a classic critique by Lévi-Strauss, subjects it.)

In contrast, the philosophical point of departure of this semiotics and the problem of the sign itself are paradoxical in their very nature, something that has been splendidly formulated by Jean Petitot-Cocorda in an excellent recent book:

Greimassian epistemology is a direct consequence of the fact that its object is the form of meaning and that, in its very presence, meaning is by definition non-objectifiable. Meaning is not a phenomenon available to the senses. *Qua* meaning it is imperceptible. This veritable "foundational aporia" demands the conception of a conceptual-descriptive theory, one that is metalinguistic and a construction, and that is based on undefinables.¹

This is to say that a "semiotic reduction" (as I will call the central operations of Greimassian analysis) aims at rewriting a verbal or linguistic text into more fundamental mechanisms of meaning, as, for example, in the analysis of "modalizations," which *reduce*—a word I wish to use here strongly, and positively—which reduce, then, a given text to the more primary "modes" of wanting, knowing, or doing (*vouloir, savoir, pouvoir*). When such reduction has been achieved, however, all we have are other words and other meanings, another text, a set of terms that, although redolent of an apparently more primary everyday speech and of simpler and more ultimate verbal gestures, are open to all the drift and force fields of philosophy and psychology, that is to say, of texts and linguistic and conceptual operations if anything even more complex than the original verbal object to be thereby "reduced." This infinite regress of the metalanguage across its fatal intertexts is only too well known and is normally "solved," that is, arrested, by the reification of the words we find remaining in that "explanation with which we agree to stop" (Wittgenstein), in other words, by the creation of some new and privileged philosophical or theoretical code or system. This is not, I think, exactly what Greimas does, although it can certainly look that way, and Greimassian semiotics can very easily be misread or misunderstood as one more "system" of some kind. Yet it is not "by means of words that one gets out of words," to paraphrase Ponge. On the other hand, if it helps, we can certainly think "semes" and "sememes" in terms of the slack traditional notion of "thematics," clusters of deeper themes within a conceptual complex, a more subatomic logic of subconcepts at work in the

official “thought,” which then itself finds embodiment (or “manifestation”) in some discursive entity of a verbal kind, which may be a page from a philosophical treatise, but just as easily a cookbook recipe or a short story, or a scientific textbook or whatever. The notion of thematics, however, is unsatisfactory—even if provisionally practical—because it marks a regression from linguistic terminology to a terminology of consciousness and ideas, and also because that mythology of a non- or prelinguistic consciousness then fatally positions us in a “world” in which the subject is divided from the object, and the “themes” from their referent, and in which, therefore, texts, and in particular the texts of culture, are optional and subjective: everyone knows the guilty relief afforded by the discussion of the “themes” of Faulkner, say—the word conveniently sets them all back inside his head like so many private obsessions, comfortably recontained and emptied of their “meaning” (again that problematical word!), transformed into mere psychological projections. It is therefore permissible to begin to grasp this semiotics in terms of the more familiar notions of the various kinds of thematic criticism, provided we ultimately reach that later stage in which we see it rather as a powerful substitute and alternative for such psychologizing methods, with which it is radically incompatible: the semes indeed actively organize the world itself, which is unthinkable in any independence from them.

To put it this way, however, is to find ourselves back in the philosophical and metaphysical perplexities we began by trying to bracket, to avoid, or to postpone. Petitot’s discussion, however, from which I quoted, moves in a different direction by designating the crucial passage in which Greimas himself effects and describes his own decisive swerve:

The production of meaning is meaningful only if it is the transformation of a meaning already given; the production of meaning is consequently a signifying endowment with form [*mise en forme*] indifferent to whatever content it may be called on to transform. *Meaning, in the sense of the forming of meaning, can thus be defined as the possibility of the transformation of meaning.* (DS, 15)

These pronouncements can now be paraphrased as follows: we can ignore the static or philosophical problem of meaning and its relationship to language, along with the infinite regress of metalanguages that seems to result whenever we try to isolate the meaning of a certain verbal complex, only to find ourselves producing yet another text in its place; and the reason we can ignore this problem is that that static moment of the apparent presence of meaning in a text is a mirage or an optical illusion. Meaning is never there in that sense, or rather it is an “always-already-given” (to borrow a different metalanguage) in the process of transformation into another meaning. It is now this process of transformation—of the *production* of meaning—that is

the object of semiotics and its only possible object (meaning as such having proved to be a reification or a deceptive afterimage of some kind). With this step, however, not only has a decisive reformulation of the very problematic of semiotics and signs been made, but a new problem generated, and along with it a whole new field and conceptuality come into being, which is none other than that of *narrative* and narrative theory. (But in this first step “narrative” merely registers the phenomenon of change—transformation, production, modification, etc.—which, falling out of the objects registered by static modes of thought and analysis, is here identified as the scandal of the event, of temporal originality, or even of “catastrophe” [in René Thom’s sense].)

Greimassian semiotics will then become preeminently that school of contemporary theory that argues for something like a primacy of narrativity. Narrativity is here something a little more than a new object of study, or even a privileged, or the privileged, object of study; were this a question of philosophical or metaphysical propositions, the implication would be that of the primacy of narrative as a mode of thinking, or of a claim as to the profound narrativity of all thinking, including the apparently cognitive or specialized-abstract. Such propositions, which find their inspiration in Lévi-Strauss’s path-breaking work on the structure of myth and the nature of *pensée sauvage* (or preconceptual, perceptual “science”), are not the appropriate form in which to characterize the interest and originality of narrative semiotics. Indeed, were one to assimilate such philosophical assertions to semiotics, it might easily be observed that in that case they only seem to hold for early Greimas and that in recent years this semiotics has tended (quite explicitly and programmatically) away from narrativity in the direction of “modalization” (evidently a more cognitive or grammatical, but at any rate a more abstract, focus than that of the whole problematic of events, actors, exchanges, and transfers, which obtained throughout what one may therefore call the “narratological” period of semiotics).

It is better, therefore, to underscore a more complex dialectic in this work between the narrative and the cognitive: in effect, each is used to undermine the seeming primacy or priority of the other when this last is dominant either by virtue of the nature of the text under study or of the drift and tendencies of some dominant methodology. Thus paradoxically, what has been loosely called the priority of narrative was at first staged—in narrative analysis proper, in Lévi-Strauss, in Propp, and in Greimas’ fertile and inaugural rewriting of Propp, and then later in a host of small studies, culminating in the comprehensive and monumental *Maupassant*—as a *reduction* of a properly narrative surface (myth, fairy tale, short story) to a complex interaction of cognitive traits.² Narrative is thereby triumphantly demonstrated to be a form of thinking, but at a heavy price, namely, its rewriting, reduction, or transformation back into abstract thinking and its tokens or

counters. To be sure, in these forms of semiotic analysis, the articulation of cognitive features and their interplay and implication is far more detailed and complex than anything we had hitherto possessed in traditional literary criticism, where the status of the cognitive was at best allowed to include the opinions of the author, the prejudices of the age (including its readership), the operation of enormous and vague Weltanschauungen, the association with some equally vague conception of the “history of ideas,” or the intervention of this or that novel “concept” (most frequently drawn from the history of the sciences—e.g., “entropy”). Rhetorical criticism (Kenneth Burke) elaborately decoded the surface moves of the text, but in a non-narrative fashion, which failed to integrate the extraordinary intuitions of its conception of deep structure (Burke’s “dramatism” in hindsight has much in common with Greimassian “actantial” and “positional” analysis). Meanwhile, although Frye’s archetypal criticism was historically epoch-making in its reassertion of the centrality of narrative as such, one cannot say that cognitive content, as such, emerged as a central problem for this approach. An older Marxist criticism, finally, sought to enlarge the narrow literary conception of “ideas” to include political and social positions (progressive/ reactionary, class ideologies), but in spite of the extraordinary narrative self-consciousness of Marx himself (in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*), it is clear that most of these studies (even those of Lucien Goldmann) worked with a naive view of the dynamics and structure of narrative proper. Of the entire older tradition, therefore, one wants to say—using the language of theater people—that for all its intermittent philosophical brilliancies, it “lacked technique,” and it is precisely this analytic technique that Greimassian semiotics at last triumphantly unveiled and made available.

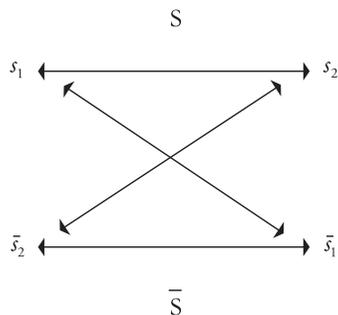
Still, as I have suggested, the reduction of narrative to an intricate microscopic play of semes and sememes (couched in what remains a cognitive language of abstract themes)—far from securing the triumph of some universal metaphysics of narrativity—might well be said to do the contrary and to absorb the last remnants of some seemingly irreducible narrative discourse back into the cognitive. For example, the two seemingly ultimate atomic units of “pure” or primary narrative—that stubbornly anthropomorphic remnant that is the “character” or the “actor,” and that abstractly unthinkable “fact of the matter” that is time, change, event, act, catastrophe—to these ultimate narrative strongholds Greimassian semiotics lays elaborate siege; and virtually the most interesting moment of the semiotic adventure is this particular engagement, which at length—by way of conceptions such as the *actant* and exchange—“reduces” these subjects and verbs, these last bits of narrative grammar, to “effects” of a microsemiotics of a radically different, cognitive order. (As we shall see shortly, the “semiotic square” emerges as the unified field theory of this rewriting procedure.)

Yet it is a two-way street: if narratives are transformed back into something that still distantly resembles a cognitive dynamic, overtly cognitive texts—philosophy, science, and the like—are thereby opened up and made vulnerable to a now more properly narrative analysis. This is the other pendulum swing of the dialectic of Greimassian semiotics, which will now decode and unmask the seemingly abstract, in its various disciplinary discourses, as the covert operation of narrative programs and schemata of all kinds, so that the movement of an abstraction or a concept through rigorous philosophical argument becomes readable and visible as the procession of a “character” through multiple trials and perils, menaced by its conceptual adversaries and aided and abetted by “magical helpers” who are no less mythic than those of Propp’s peasant stories: Kant thereby becomes the first great modern novelist. Even the humble cookbook is unmasked as the locus, not merely of storytelling, but also of alchemical transmutation; and at this point, the very concept of narrative expands to become coterminous with the entire universe of texts itself, without thereby in any way undermining the specificity of the cognitive. For the operation is not to be confused with a (sometimes necessary) work of demystification, wherein a set of ostensible abstractions is shown to be myth or irrational figuration (in all the bad senses): to demonstrate the narrativity of philosophical thinking is not to discredit its conceptual or intellectual claims, if only because, as we have seen, that very much deeper narrative structure can then itself in turn be rewritten as a new form of microthinking or of cognitive microphysics. The essentials of the semiotic position lie, not in some ultimate metaphysical choice between the narrative and the cognitive, but rather in the constant process whereby the one is ceaselessly displaced by the other, until this last, become dominant in its turn, is ripe for its own inverse and reciprocal humiliation. (This accounts for my own reluctance to feel that the swing away from narrativity to theories of modalization represents anything like a final victory, in Greimas’ work, of the cognitive over the narrative.)

Yet this dialectic is visible only if we vigilantly bear in mind the bracketing of the ultimate philosophical problems with which we began—the suspension of the question of a final metalanguage, and the operative “fact of life” of this semiotics that must use a seemingly cognitive language to identify and name “semes” that are, however, neither cognitive nor narrative, but best described, in Petitot’s language, as “nondefinables.” Dialectical language, however, seems to me to offer another practical way out of this philosophical impasse in the concept of the *mediation*, for the process I have been describing would seem most adequately characterized by a ceaseless two-way mediation between two types of language, neither of which can be permitted to become dominant or to take on metaphysical priority. This is why I have also felt that some enlarged version of the traditional concept of *ideology* (which plays only the most limited and mechanical role in

Greimas' texts) might well be appealed to at this point, both as a way of specifying the nature of these semiotic analyses and operations and also as an occasion for evaluating them and suggesting their wider implications. To this end, indeed, I have suggested that ideology, in some more comprehensive sense, be grasped as a twofold or amphibious reality, susceptible of taking on two distinct and seemingly incompatible forms at will, which are very precisely our old friends the narrative or the cognitive. That "ideology" in the narrower sense is a mass of opinions, concepts, or pseudoconcepts, "world views," "values," and the like, is commonly accepted; that these vaguely specified conceptual entities also always have a range of narrative embodiments, that is, indeed, that they are all in one way or another buried narratives, may be less widely understood and may also open up a much wider range of exploration than the now well-worn conceptual dimension of the ideology concept. Yet it was not to replace the cognitive by the narrative that my proposal was made but rather to coordinate both by way of a definition that insisted on their necessary alternation: ideology is then whatever in its very structure is susceptible of taking on a cognitive and a narrative form alternately.

The relevance of these proposals for Greimas' work turns on the whole matter of the so-called elementary structure of signification, or, in other words, the famous "semiotic square," for many of us the supreme achievement of Greimassian semiotics. Here finally we find opened up the "black box" through which narrative is somehow "converted" into cognition and vice versa: finally we have the equations, we can witness the processes of transfer, which need no longer be posited mystically since it is "visible" before us. (I will return to this matter of the visible and of space at the conclusion of the present remarks.) How this can be so, however, obviously demands yet another simplified exercise in the explanatory capacities of the "square," whose canonical form is herewith reproduced:



The enumeration of the advantages of the square can begin at once with the observation that it is a decisive enlargement on the older structural notion of the binary opposition: S_1 versus S_2 is clearly just such a binary opposition, or in the language of philosophical logic a "contrary," that is, a strong

opposition (white versus black, male versus female), but one that the square now reveals to encompass far more than two available positions. It immediately implies, for example, the two supplementary slots of what logic calls a “contradictory,” where S_1 and S_2 are the simple negatives of the two dominant terms, but include far more than either: thus “nonwhite” includes more than “black,” “nonmale” more than “female.” Meanwhile, the two compound or “synthetic” positions of S and \bar{S} offer still greater conceptual enlargements, S standing as a complex or utopian term, in which the opposition of “white” and “black” might be transcended (mestizo, for example), whereas \bar{S} stands as the neutral term, in which all of the privations and negations are assembled (“colorless,” for example). Finally, the transversal axes map the place of tensions distinct from the principal or binary one, while the synthesis hypothetically proposed by uniting the two sides of the square (“white” plus “nonblack”) designates alternative conceptual combinations. The entire mechanism then is capable of generating at least ten conceivable positions out of a rudimentary binary opposition (which may originally have been no more than a single term, e.g., “white,” which proves to be internally defined by a hidden opposition we articulate by promoting the concealed pole “black” to visibility). I have suggested that other traditions may find this schema interesting if they entertain the hypothesis that it constitutes a virtual map of conceptual closure, or better still, of the closure of ideology itself, that is, as a mechanism, which, while seeming to generate a rich variety of possible concepts and positions, remains in fact locked into some initial aporia or double-bind that it cannot transform from the inside by its own means.

However this may be, it seems appropriate to conclude this introduction with an outsider’s observations on the multiple uses and interests of this mechanism. A few initial remarks ought to concern its “proper use,” that is, to offer some warnings about what it can and cannot do. The square does offer, I believe, a kind of “discovery principle,” but of a special type, and it cannot be guaranteed to replace intelligence or intuition. Indeed, insofar as it can often be called on simply to map thoughts and interpretations arrived at in other (seemingly less technical) fashions, it is appropriate at the outset to stress its initial pedagogical function: one can, in other words, very properly use this visual device to map out and to articulate a set of relationships that it is much more confusing, and much less economical, to convey in expository prose, and these humbler pedagogical capacities of the semiotic square may not be the least index of its importance.

As for its heuristic value, however, experience testifies that you must blacken many pages before you get it right and that a number of key decisions intervene in the process. One lists a variety of entities to be coordinated; it is a list that must never be considered final, nor should the nature and nomenclature of the entities be foreclosed. It is desirable (even, on my view,

necessary) that seemingly aberrant or marginal, minor, eccentric entities be enumerated, since it is their place in the scheme of things, and their very presence, which is the most interesting of the problems the square can be called upon to solve.

As for operative decisions or moments, I will mention three that seem to me crucial. The first is the inaugural decision, not merely about the terms of the binary opposition to be expanded and articulated in the square as a whole, but also, and above all, the very order in which those terms are arranged; it makes a fundamental difference, in other words, whether the founding binary is ordered as white versus black, or as black versus white. The square is in that sense not symmetrical but “temporal” or positional, and the placement of the terms (obviously this initial formulation will already imply something like dominant/subordinate, center/margin, self/other), like that of mathematical equations (or the lobes of the brain, or right and left hand), is not indifferent but actively determinant in astonishing ways (that very astonishment playing its own part in the unexpected lessons we find ourselves learning in this process).

The second important recommendation is that the four primary terms (S_1 , S_2 , \mathcal{S}_1 , \mathcal{S}_2) need to be conceived polysemically, each one carrying within it its own range of synonyms, and of the synonyms of its synonyms—none of them exactly coterminous with each other, such that large areas of relatively new or at least skewed conceptuality are thereby registered. Thus, for example, in Hayden White’s conception of “metonymy,” two relatively distinct “semes” are encompassed—that of reduction (scientific or mechanistic explanation, determinism) and that of separation; this term thus includes a fruitful terrain for dialectical slippage, such that its “reductive” aspect may allow it to stand in opposition to the visionary and representational plenitude of “metaphor.”³ Its other “identity”—as sheer disjunction or separation—then allows it unexpectedly to be coordinated with (or against) “synecdoche” as the reintegration of the separated and the construction of new wholes. This will to embrace the slippage within terms is here a practical recommendation, like handicraft rules of thumb or inherited wisdom, but it also opens up a dizzying perspective of the subatomic universes, a prospect of what a very different semiotician, Umberto Eco, following Peirce, calls “infinite semiosis,” in which each of the four primary terms of the square threatens to yawn open into its own fourfold system, down into the infinite divisibility of semiotic nature.

A final warning must be directed to the peculiar nature of the fourth term, the negation of the negation: \mathcal{S}_2 . This must be (when the operation is successful) the place of novelty and of paradoxical emergence: it is always the most critical position and the one that remains open or empty for the longest time, for its identification completes the process and in that sense constitutes the most creative act of the construction. Once again, it is simply

a matter of experience that the first three terms are relatively “given” and demand no great acts of intellection, but the fourth one is the place of the great leap, the great deduction, the intuition that falls from the ceiling, or from heaven. Yet this is something that here can be only mythically conveyed, as in that system of apocalypses foretold by Mayan religion, which, fourfold in a relatively universal fashion, only springs apart from Western paradigms unexpectedly in its fourth moment. The world, for the Mayans, will end in fire, as for us; a second time around, the world will be destroyed by water, as for us; yet a third time, and it will be destroyed by air (hurricanes). And it will also be destroyed a fourth time ... by jaguars! (which, formerly the stars in the heavens, take on their new carnivorous form and drop upon the earth to devour the human race). So also with J. G. Ballard’s early and haunting end-of-the-world tetralogy: by water (*The Drowning World*), by fire (*The Burning World*), by air or hurricane (*The Wind from Nowhere*), and then ... by turning into crystal (*The Crystal World*)!

The semiotic square is thus not static but dynamic: the significance of positionality within it is only one index of the way in which it can just as easily be considered to map a temporal process as to register a conceptual blockage or paralysis; indeed, the latter can most often be grasped as the very situation that motivates the former, namely, the attempt, by rotating the square and generating its implicit positions, to find one’s way out of the conceptual or ideological closure, out of the old or given—into which one is locked—somehow desperately to generate the novelty of the event, or of breakthrough, or of the *Novum*. Yet to see the square as the very image of closure itself tends to encourage some pessimism about the possibilities of escaping from it in any other way than the Hegelian one: one does not resolve a contradiction; rather, by praxis, one alters the situation in such a way that the old contradiction, now dead and irrelevant, moves without solution into the past, its place taken by a fresh and unexpected contradiction (which may or may not be some advance on the older aporias or ideological imprisonment).

Yet the very gestalt properties of the square—its capacity to be indifferently static or dynamic—are what accounts for its powerful mediatory capacity: it can, in other words, “reduce” a narrative in movement to a series of “cognitive” or ideological, combinatory positions; or it can rewrite a cognitive text into a desperate narrative movement in which new positions are generated and abandoned, and in which terms ceaselessly amalgamate in order to achieve the release of this or that ideal synthesis, and release from their warring and antagonistic, structural-fragmentary nature.

I have offered elsewhere illustrations of possible “applications” of the square to problems of narrative analysis: these unorthodox efforts may serve to suggest ways in which the two planes of narrative—“characters” or, better still, *systems* of characters, and cognitive complexes or contradictions—can

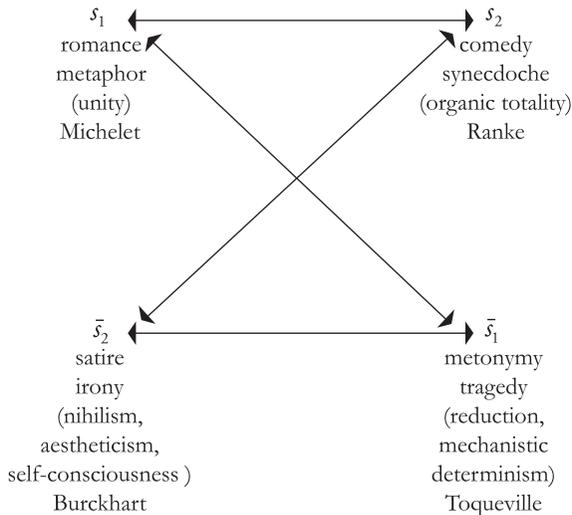
be coordinated and transcoded into one another.⁴ Here I will briefly sketch a sample of the analysis of a “cognitive” or theoretical text, Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, which is to be sure in a way pre-prepared, insofar as this text is itself already organized around a fourfold set of categories: the four tropes of Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Irony. This first system of categories is then multiplied by three more: a typology of world views, drawn from Stephen Pepper (Formism, Mechanicism, Organicism, and Contextualism); Frye’s “emplotments” (Romantic, Tragic, Comic, and Satirical); and finally Mannheim’s categories of ideology (Anarchist, Radical, Conservative and Liberal). In practice, it may be suggested that this set of, as it were, vertical layers in fact tends to amalgamate into two groups of coordinated features: the tropes and Pepper’s “world hypotheses” function as alternate languages for the same characteristics, whereas the “emplotments” and the “modes of ideological implication” also tend to function synonymously. Yet within each of the two groups (which roughly correspond to the structure of a given history and to its metaphysical connotation, or reception, respectively), we already find that creative slippage I have referred to, the possibility of passing from one term to another by way of a shift in these levels (the earlier example of Metonymy illustrates a shift from the tropological sense of this “term” to its conceptual, or world-hypothetical, sense). What remains an open question is whether the two groups of categories need always function in unison, or whether one might not imagine a dissonance, that is, a contradiction, between say, the tropological mechanism and the emplotment or ideological message. This is something White seems to foresee, without, however, drawing any explicit conclusions from the possibility.⁵

White’s book seeks to do (at least) two things: first, to reassert the historical and cognitive claims of the so-called philosophers of history (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche), who have, in the traditional canon of historiography, been assigned a lower and more amateurish status by the historians themselves, in contrast to “real” or practicing historiographers, of whom this book deals with four (Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt). What *Metahistory* in fact achieves is a good deal less modest than this, since the thrust of the argument tends toward the assertion that in fact the philosophers of history are *better* historians than the historiographers. How the text generates this position will then be one of the questions an articulation by the semiotic square needs to answer.

The other function of *Metahistory* (which is specifically limited to the nineteenth-century “historical imagination”) is to demonstrate not merely the relevance of the conceptual typologies already enumerated but their *cyclical* function, in a rhythm that begins in naive Metaphor or Romanticism, passes through the negative or Metonymic, Mechanistic stage of reduction, begins to reclaim a larger totalizing construction in the new

unities of Synecdoche, and finally, in the moment of Irony, comes to a self-consciousness of its own linguistic or tropological procedures that signals a new crisis of the historical imagination and may be expected, by way of the great Viconian *ricorso*, to swing around again into a fresh belief, a fresh Metaphoric or Romantic moment with which the cycle can begin all over again on a heightened level. Indeed, it is this rebirth of historiographic belief that White calls for in his concluding pages, which speak out of the moment of Irony and its crisis. What is peculiar, however, is that the moment of Irony, *Metahistory*, takes two distinct forms: the crisis of the nineteenth century reaches as it were two distinct paroxysms simultaneously—the “bad” Irony of Burckhardt, serene and aestheticizing (the “philosophy” of Croce is in effect a more elaborate double of this position), and the “good” or strong Irony of Nietzsche from within which Hayden White clearly speaks (even though Hegel and Marx were to have been “rehabilitated” more or less on equal grounds with the author of the *Genealogy of Morals*). These intricate moves are, however, not random ones, nor are they in any way the “mere” results of the personal opinions or ideological predilections of the metahistorian; the pattern is indeed a very logical one, which can be clarified and articulated by the operation of the semiotic square as the various possible terms and positions of *Metahistory* are mapped onto it.

The diagram attempts to respect as much as possible the combinatory richness and intricacy of the text, very specifically including what I have called the slippage within the terms, that is their multiple semic content or the copresence of various levels and codes within each:



What should be clear from this initial mapping onto the semiotic square is that the four historians each present, in all their differences, the spectacle of unison between all the levels, and that indeed it is this very absence of inner

tension or contradiction that accounts for the author's evaluations of them: itself a form of irony, not to say contempt, save in the case of Toqueville, where a certain tragic honesty carries conviction, but where, it should be noted, this univocal position also ultimately disintegrates under its own momentum into a Burckhardt-type irony and nihilism, which itself—as yet another univocal ideological position—then is subjected to the full force of the metahistorian's Irony. This last must therefore be of a different type, and it is precisely the advantage of the semiotic square to hold open other conceivable positions, which have not yet been secured in our diagram, and which are the so-called compound terms, the complex and neutral terms *S* and *Œ*, and the deictic axes in which the lateral sides of the square also designate possible syntheses. Before demonstrating those, however, it is worth noting the strategic function, already referred to, involved in the choice of an initial binary opposition. The story, as anyone would naturally tell it, and as Hayden White himself initially maps it in his diagram of the levels in *Metahistory*, is one in which an initial Metaphoric consciousness disintegrates into a Metonymic or negative moment of determinism and random mechanistic causality.⁶ That negative crisis is then—on anyone's stereotypical narrative paradigm—slowly overcome by Synecdochic reconstruction, only to be sapped and vitiated by a new kind of disintegration and a new kind of crisis—that of Ironic self-consciousness, and of the sense that even the Synecdochic solution was itself only fictional and linguistic—at which point, as I have already said, the entire system turns over and swings back into a new cycle of Metaphoric reaffirmation.

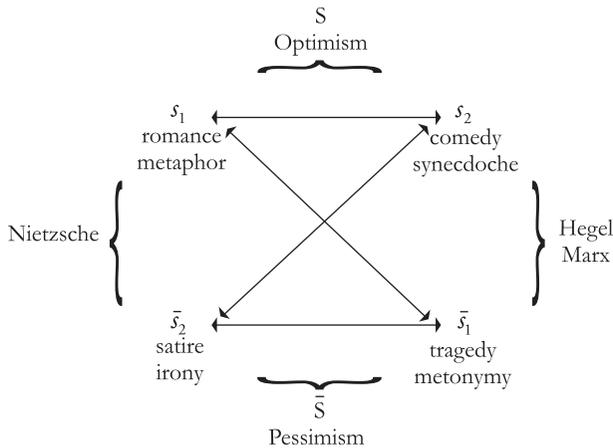
But this corresponds neither to the order of the chapters nor to the combinatory logic of the work itself, in which Romance is followed by Comedy, and Metaphor by Synecdoche, rather than by Metonymy. Thus, we have mapped the semiotic square around a quite unexpected binary opposition, not the familiar one of Metaphor versus Metonymy, but some new constitutive tension between Metaphor and Synecdoche—a tension that must necessarily be conceptualized as the antagonism between two forms of *unity*, an initial Metaphoric or representational one (Michelet's great ecstatic moments of national unity in the the Revolution and more specifically of the "*fêtes de la Fédération*" of June 1790) and a Synecdochic one, the construction of more "artificial" social unities, built up from their separate parts, in the form of Ranke's *institutions* (church, nation, etc.). The point I wish to stress is that the square *will not work* any other way (the reader may now wish to test this assertion by experiment) and that only this arrangement of the terms will generate the essentials of *Metahistory*, a book about which we have therefore learned something new, namely, that its deepest subject, the fundamental contradiction it is concerned to resolve, is not that of meaning versus non-meaning, or belief versus causality (Metaphor versus Metonymy: the traditional way of mapping the

nineteenth-century “crisis of faith”), but rather the tension between two incompatible visions of the social, neither of which (ecstatic revolutionary spontaneity and the slow permanency of the great social institutions) seems satisfactory.

I must also add a word about the question of the “fourth term,” also raised earlier. It is clear that, although the word itself is scarcely fresh or surprising, Irony is the great magical term on which the text turns and that its combinatorial mechanisms aim fully as much at *producing* this extraordinary “position” from across a wide range of meanings and uses (the slippage in this fourth term is far greater than in any of the others) as they simply register it as an object of study and one attitude among others.

We may now rapidly conclude the mapping of the square, whose complex and neutral terms can be loosely designated as historical Optimism and Pessimism respectively, a language whose slackness need not detain us long, since both are clearly logically impossible positions that the movement of the work rejects (*S* is a conceivable but impossible synthesis, *S* is merely the empty wiping out of that content and the place of the global, mechanical negations of both terms of the initial opposition). It is therefore to the lateral (or deictic) syntheses that we turn our attention. Here indeed the great “philosophers of history” find their positions, which have been generated by the inner logic of the square itself. Both Hegel and Marx, White tells us, achieved syntheses of Tragedy and Comedy: history is a comedy, all of whose individual moments are tragic. Nietzsche, meanwhile, begins with an identification of Tragedy and Comedy, which luminously eclipse each other and in their indistinction give rise to something else, which will be an Ironic sense of the powers of language that now once again releases the great Metaphoric energies. (Note how it is very precisely the semiotic slippage between Romance and Metaphor that enables this ultimate moment to be something more than a mere synthesis of Romance and Satire.) With this, the combinational movement of the book is exhausted and a message emerges: the priority of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche over the “univocal” historians, and after that, perhaps, the more tentative priority of Nietzsche over the other two positions insofar as Nietzsche “includes” their moments of Tragedy and Comedy and then projects further new and original possibilities, Metaphor and Irony (properly linguistic or reflexive moments), out of the earlier pair.

Returning now to the nature of the semiotic square itself, it seems clear that its emergence from the dynamic of Greimassian semiotics betokens some profound spatiality in the system in general. This is something that has been recognized by Petitot in the book already mentioned, which sets out indeed to achieve nothing less than a grounding of Greimassian semiotics in the spatial (he calls it positional or topological) premises of René Thom’s



catastrophe theory. What interests me is not the viability of that enterprise, nor how one might resolve this persistence of the irreducibly spatial within semiotics in some new and enlarged philosophical system, but rather the historical fact of its emergence in our society, where it is by no means the only example or symptom of a period intellectually given over to space in a way radically different from the preceding generation of the modernists, in thrall to temporality. All the structuralisms are deeply spatial in one way or another, and not merely in their rhetoric or modes of presentation (although the fact, previously mentioned, that we find these diagrams today more pedagogically convincing and persuasive than the corresponding linguistic expressions and developments of them is surely not insignificant either). Alone of the great philosophers, Henri Lefebvre has posited a genuine new philosophy of space, and this on a historicist basis, namely, the tendential spatialization of late capitalism (and, one might wish to add, using a concept not foreseen in Lefebvre's work, of the *postmodern*). That Greimassian semiotics should be "true" in some sense (or at any rate, pragmatically, richly usable and full of practical development) and at the same time stand as a profound historical symptom of the nature of the age I find no difficulty in reconciling: the latter—the structure of the late capitalist global system—constituting something like the conditions of possibility for the conceptualizing and articulation of the new theoretical system. Perhaps this may also offer yet another new and unexplored terrain for the development of semiotics itself: not the semiotics of space, already a local region of Greimassian semiotics in which work is currently being done, but the space and spatialization of semiotics itself and the dynamics of this new positional or topological horizon of meaning and of our thought. At any rate, it is an honor for me to be associated with this first panoramic view of the semiotic adventure to be presented to the English-speaking public.

Notes

- 1 Jean Petitot-Cocorda, *Morphogénèse du sens*, Paris: PUF, 1985, 273. This concept is taken by Greimas from Hjelmslev. Future references to the above title are denoted DS.
- 2 A. J. Greimas, *Maupassant: The Semiotics of Text*, trans. Paul Perron, Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Co., 1988.
- 3 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1973. The interested reader will note some modifications of my own position on this classic work since the first publication, in 1976, of "Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography," reprinted as chap. 6 in part 1 of this volume.
- 4 See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981, 165ff. and 253ff.; or "After Armageddon: Character Systems in *Dr. Bloodmoney*," *Science-Fiction Studies* 2, March 1975, 31–42.
- 5 Thus, for example: "Certainly the greatest philosophers ... resist reduction to the archetypes provided by Pepper. If anything their thought represents a mediation between two or more of the kinds of doctrinaire positions which Pepper outlines" (*Metahistory*, 13 n.7); or: "The dialectical tension which characterizes the work of every master historian usually arises from an effort to wed a mode of employment with a mode of argument or of ideological implication which is inconsonant with it" (*Metahistory*, 29).
- 6 White, *Metahistory*, 29.

On the Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity

The issue of radical evil—particularly for those for whom evil is a theological concept, and worse yet, for those for whom the concept of evil is itself the root of all evil—needs to be sorted out into three distinct topics: the experience of guilt as the deeper accompaniment of human existence; the current ethical (and ideological) concern with limits and finitude; and finally the (equally current) anxiety about irrepressible violence, which it might be better to specify (if we really need to) as violence to the other, which is to say also, about the other as the occasion for violence. All of these topics are in these forms metaphysical; their boundless abstraction and timelessness needs to be closed back in by social and historical content, something that would clearly threaten to remove them from the philosophical domain altogether, were not the very fact of such philosophical abstraction itself a historical issue to be faced socially.

It is easy enough to see how concepts of otherness issue (as in Levinas) from the social and historical experience of ethnic minorities; it is a little more difficult to grasp (one of the themes of the following reflections) how the social equally exploits the initially meaningless fact of biological gender for its own purposes. Current anxieties about violence are, however, surely to be analyzed, not in terms of human nature, nor even of nihilism, so much as in relationship to the corrosive effects of late capitalism on all inherited social systems and on all forms of social legitimation, very much including its own. The realities of violence are not particularly controlled by a return to this or that anthropology, whether it posits the inherent aggressivity of some putative human nature or on the other hand this or that psychological repression or deviation of a “better” kind: if one wants to be constructivist about it, then it is preferable to affirm, with the Brecht of *Mann ist Mann*, that people can be turned into anything, and to take it from there.

Finitude, meanwhile, is an exceedingly suspicious category in the current anti-Utopian climate, where it is called upon, among other things, to reinforce market rhetoric and to encourage the renunciation of revolutionary

politics and the collective project of social transformation, while co-opting the ecological discourse of the Promethean destruction of nature. But surely it would be just as Promethean to develop a correct collective exploitation of natural energies?

Guilt is, however, our primary theme here, for it seems inescapable in any comprehensively experienced human destiny and yet unacceptable in any theological formulation, which is to say in any formulation at all, since a nontheological conception of guilt has never seemed plausible. Heidegger tried to offer one, but had to fall back on the mere empirical fact of our feeling of guilt ("the call of conscience"), which then at once flips over dialectically into a thesis about the human condition as such. In Sartre, the fact of guilt remains but is perhaps more satisfactorily secularized as the unjustifiability of our own (my own) existence: when the conductor asks for it, I have no ticket, even though everyone else seems to have one. But this still posits a conductor, and the requirement of justifiability as given in advance.

Nor is it satisfactory to derive guilt from some related yet independent phenomenon, such as sexuality, for that would amount to displacing the problem of substantialism and transferring the implication of some human "essence" from guilt itself to the sexual drive. What seems certain is that guilt has always been able to reinforce itself by leaning ("enclitically," as Freud might say) on sexuality, and the reverse also often seems to be true. In what follows, I want to see sexuality not as an autonomous phenomenon with some fundamental phenomenological meaning of its own, but rather as a phenomenon that must always mean something, even though the meaning is always constructed after the fact, and in the service of a host or system of other meanings, and which must always somehow conjoin with another, equally unstable and unpredetermined phenomenon in order to take on the appearance of a fact as such. This is the sense in which, as with guilt, it would be vain to try to decide whether sexuality was evil or (much more rarely) good, but also to deplore the recurrence of such attempts at decision as are inherent in the very structure of this phenomenon, which must mean something even though it cannot, and which thus perpetually solicits judgment and ethical evaluation even where this last is impossible, thereby reinforcing ethics itself and lending it the content of its own lack.

St. Augustine offers a particularly privileged place in which to interrogate this process of construction. With him are traditionally associated two kinds of historical origination: the first is the invention of the modern autobiographical text; the second is a grim form of determinism and of the affirmation of the absolute sinfulness of human beings since the Fall, which is less often openly acknowledged to be the fundamental moment of the invention of "modern" or Western sexuality as well as something both guilty and obsessive and, we are told, radically different from the way

sexuality has been lived and theorized in other cultures. The title of Augustine's autobiographical text, *Confessions* (which does not yet have its modern institutional sense here), suggests a link between these two inventions. Meanwhile, the contemporary theoretical concern with the autobiographical text on the one hand and the construction of the subject or subjectivity on the other—along with the postcontemporary *doxa* of the formative power of textuality itself, as though the autobiographical text could very well itself construct subjectivity as such—tend to encourage the introduction of Western subjectivity or the Western subject as a third term in this investigation, between the new discourse and the promotion of a new way of looking at sexuality that is also necessarily a new kind of sexuality in itself.

A reading of Peter Brown's biography *Augustine of Hippo* (1967), however, suggests that Augustine was also original in yet another way from these: for in the hindsight of the great ideological struggles of the 60s and 70s we can now suddenly recognize in Brown's Augustine the quintessential political intellectual, and in particular the turncoat or apostate on the order of the American Trotskyists of the Cold War.¹ Augustine was first a sympathizer of what we would today call the extreme or extraparliamentary Left (taking the pagans of his period to constitute something of an ideological Right). The Manichaeans (of which he was for a while one), indeed, practiced and preached an implacable secession from Roman (or as we would now say, bourgeois) society: their doctrine of the absolute evil of the body and sexuality constituted a practical and literal negation of that society, insofar as the cessation of sexual intercourse would clearly enough spell the end of the world as such. Augustine was tempted by this intransigence and absolutism, this implacable refusal to compromise with actually existing society, as that was organized around the family; and one may assume that he had sympathy with the Manichaean emphasis on sexuality, even though his own personal experience of sexuality was, so to speak, a positive one. What unites these opposing practical evaluations of sexuality, however, is the way in which sexuality becomes both the very center of life and its most fundamental concern. After that displacement and reorganization, it does not matter much whether you condemn or welcome it.

Augustine's official conversion to Christianity then brings a practical modification that eventually requires a theoretical revision; for his entry into the Church means a commitment to precisely that social fabric, including the family of the church believers and the institution of marriage with its implications about sexuality, that the Manichaean ideology repudiated absolutely. Augustine now passes from an extreme left minority opposition to a position within the state itself and an adhesion to society as such (or at least to its Christian population). But in his case, the apostasy is not seen as a simple changeover of ideological allegiances, but is most often presented to

us as an “evolution” or “development” in his own thought. This is because—although, as is so often the case with ex-communists, the Manichaeans now become the principal ideological enemy and are understood to pose the most fundamental danger to the Church as such—his reply to them takes the form of absorbing and preempting some of their own program, co-opting the antisexuality impulses for the benefit of the Church. Augustinism, the doctrine of absolute determinism and also of the sexual nature of the Fall, will square this circle and constitute the very special ideological invention of this particular late Roman intellectual.

What is less clear from this account (which relies on Peter Brown’s biography) is the symbolic meaning and significance of the sexual motif itself and the social basis for its ideological centrality. This is something that Brown’s new work, *The Body and Society* (1988), now luminously clarifies, as we shall see in what follows, which may also be considered an extended book review.² But several questions remain.

One has to do with the way the conceptual inventions and solutions of a mere intellectual can be understood as modifying the entire culture and life practices of a population (not to speak of contaminating the inheritance of innumerable generations of what we now sometimes call “the West”). The recourse to “genius” or intellectual or philosophical brilliance is an idealistic convention that has nothing illuminating to offer social history. On the other hand, any general theory about such influence will be speculative, even though one is always necessary as a conceptual and methodological starting point.

The other question has to do with the constitution of the intellectual as such. It is immediately obvious, even confining ourselves to the West, that Augustine’s intellectual landscape, Greek as well as Roman, swarms already with all the flora and fauna of what we call intellectuals today and that he can scarcely be thought to be a pioneer in that sense. But Augustine’s ideological mission, and the uncanny resemblance of his discursive struggles to those within the Left in modern times, makes it tempting to explore the possibility that as an ideological turncoat and defector, locked in a fundamental struggle within an ideology or world view itself locked in struggle with an older one, Augustine pioneered some of the features of the modern intellectual that may not have been in evidence in the life practices of the Stoa, for example, or of the Babylonian priesthood or the Chinese mandarin elite. For to the structure of his ideological mission must also be added that this period generally is the one in which the Catholic priesthood, by way of the institution of celibacy, has begun socially to differentiate itself from the laity: it knows competition from the various monastic traditions (which are not yet orders exactly) and at the same time has begun since Constantine to be associated with state power, so that its doctrinal debates are also immediately bureaucratic ones. For all these reasons, then, Augustine’s trajectory is

likely to be suggestive and enlightening to us today, and endows Brown's new history with an additional kind of interest.

It should be added that it also places in perspective the various contemporary efforts, such as Foucault's abortive one, to produce a "history of sexuality"; and with this topic we return to the fundamental question at issue here, namely what sexuality may be thought to be that so many people have conceived of writing histories of it. If a narrative can be organized around sexuality as such—in other words, no matter whether "sexuality" is a kind of actant or agent, or on the other hand a result, situation, dilemma—it must be constituted as *something*, as a kind of object, in order for its metamorphoses to be thus tracked. This is, I think, something rather different from what Foucault had in mind when he formed the project of showing the emergence of a (modern? Western?) concept of sexuality that corresponded to a newly sexualized subjectivity: unfortunately, what remains of his attempt is a brilliant demonstration of the breakdown of the Greek or classical sexual practices, followed by a very traditional idealistic account of the "influence" of Christianity on the emergent new ones.³ In older histories of ideas, from Hegel on into the modern history of science, ideas and concepts, which have their bottom line in religion considered as a cultural formation, are always the ultimately determining instances, something Foucault avoided in his other histories by nimble footwork and prestidigitation, but which is here only too painfully evident.

What seems, rather, to have been influential in these final volumes of Foucault's life work is the ideological motif whereby *repression* is definitively (and rather perversely) consigned to the infernal region reserved for outworn and idealistic *doxa*; but also a prophetic new theme in which Foucault unexpectedly reinvents at least one constructivist variety of ethics—*le souci de soi*, probably modeled on Greenblatt's *self-fashioning*—in which the counterclaims of radicals and traditionalists today, queer theory on the one hand and the revival of the older philosophical disciplines (very much including ethics and political theory) on the other, have seemed to enjoy a miraculous reconciliation.

Foucault's abortive trilogy, however, does not overtly claim to make a statement about modern sexuality, nor even to offer phenomenological materials for its eventual history, which demands that we be able to separate the concept of sexuality from some unnamed yet unavoidable reality (whether one wishes to call it an instinct in Freud's very rigorous sense or not) that can be conceptualized and theoretically positioned in a great variety of ways, from relatively more *naturwüchsige* conventions, where it is an activity among others, to a charged and valorized centrality in which everything of significance in life must pass in one way or another through its circuits. Meanwhile, the culturally constructed value accorded to sexuality can also be borrowed and invested in the construction of other kinds of values,

such as political symbolism or class consciousness (as for example, when nineteenth-century workers, or twentieth-century racial minorities, are considered to be sexually other in an association with the bestial or the animalic). Yet clearly enough these two kinds of constructions, that of the “meaning” of sexuality in and of itself and that of its symbolic role in other social realms of ideology and practice, are closely associated and interdependent. Meanwhile, this view also presupposes a point of departure for which, either “ontologically” or in reality, sexuality has no pregiven significance, even though something corresponding to it is always present in human reality and always imperiously demands interpretation or the construction of that significance. In other words, on this view, not even Freud is “right” exactly, however much we are inclined to choose Freud’s as our own contemporary construction of sexuality, and however much his doctrine of instinct as unbound representations may correspond to the entry point adopted here.

Yet Freud gave us the crucial clue, when speaking of that prescient dream analysis of an obscure tribe of Indians, who had discovered that all dreams had sexual meanings ... except for the sexually explicit dreams themselves, which meant something else! Is it possible, by the same token, that sexuality as an overt theme always bears an ideological message of a secondary kind that concerns anything but sexuality? At any rate, I take it that something like this is what also marks Peter Brown’s starting point in *The Body and Society* when, evoking the classical context, he tries to demystify our stereotypes of Roman licentiousness (as does Foucault) by insisting strongly on the way in which, for the ancients, sexuality was a space in which a master demonstrated his fitness to rule (to rule either household or empire) by exercising restraint and discipline over his own physical inclinations.

This pagan code of sexual behavior and moderation will continue to be that of moderate Christians later on, from Paul himself to Clement and long after (*BaS*, 51, 134–135). However, the point about the analysis of any ideology—and the various doctrines relating to sexuality will be seen to be so many ideologies, or, if you prefer, components of distinct ideologies—is that its symbolic significance is not given in itself, intrinsically, like a belief whose positive content may be evaluated on its own merits, but lies very precisely in its reactive character, and can only be deciphered in terms of what it opposes or resists, seeks to displace or to modify. Seen from this perspective, sexual doctrines take on non-sexual social meanings: indeed, we will see that these meanings, which officially turn on the matter of “salvation,” in fact all rehearse dilemmas about the form of society itself. We will thus be led to argue that religion is a figural form whereby Utopian issues are fought out (in the absence of “scientific” or secular political codes)—in contradistinction to Weber’s notion that religions essentially manage the fear of death, which ends up privileging an existential and indeed a

metaphysical conception of human nature as the bottom line for sociology. But the foundation of sociology should surely be the social itself, and the sociality of such drives and impulses, not some non- or antisocial human experience on which the social (in this case religion as a collective institution) is supposedly founded.

The crucial historico-philosophical issue at stake in the analysis of early Christian sexuality lies in the historiographic dilemma presented by periodization generally, namely that of the break, the radical discontinuity, or alternatively the continuity and deeper identity to be established between any two periods. Is Christian sexuality—which is to say our own, modern sexuality, with its burden of sin and guilt, its obsessive nature, its omnipresence and enforcement of notions of the unclean—radically different from the practices of ancient Rome and thus of the classical world in general? Or in other words, since, as we have seen, Christian sexuality is a figure for contemporary “Western” but now worldwide “Americanized” sexuality, is a sexuality radically different from our own conceivable, whether in the past or in the future?

Foucault’s was the most revealing struggle with this unanswerable narrative dilemma: unanswerable in several ways, since on the one hand the positing of continuity or break is a methodological decision in the void that precedes all interpretation of the record and the evidence (and makes the latter’s interpretation possible for the first time); but unanswerable also since, to deprive sexuality of this omnipresent modern power and meaning by positing it as radically other and different is to assign it a secondary or marginal position in human life and therefore to make it into something very different from what we call “sexuality.” Foucault understood this very well, and therefore sometimes described his project as the history of the emergence or the invention of “sexuality” as such (in the way in which others will also speak of the invention of “homosexuality”): but this way of speaking about it then tends fatally to thrust the now foregrounded construct “sexuality” into the realm of the history of ideas, where it has become a kind of concept, rather than an ambiguous reality both distinct from and at one with the idea or the interpretation that a culture makes of it and then lives in its practices.

More than that: Foucault’s temperamental inclination to what he grandly baptized transgression makes for a good deal of arbitrariness in these deliberately depersonalized pages, where he seems to have realized that he was drawing much more closely to his own personal experiences than ever before, and where his reputation now threatened to make any statement on such dangerous terrain into a kind of program or personal manifesto—something not really defused by reflexivity, as when he claims here to be dealing with the emergence of ethics as well. He need not have been wrong about that (although the ethical extends back into the classical materials he

had to deal with), but to say so does not prevent this ostensible history from looking like a new ethics in our own climate of reaction, as I have already observed.

Arbitrariness and perversity (as opposed to perversion), however, here mean something as predictable and inveterate as the refusal of what is taken to be current *doxa*: thus Foucault opposed the humane bourgeois philanthropic psychiatry of the early nineteenth century in favor of spatial segregation (and even capital execution, as in the famous pages on Damians); he ruled out the dominant modern concept of “repression” and hermeneutics generally, which proved none too easy to do without when it came to his own attempt to evoke resistance in a carceral world in which the latter seemed unthinkable. Here, in his late volumes, it is an inevitable reflex that he should at once repudiate the conventional notion that Christianity brings with it a wholly new and repressive attitude toward a sexuality that in classical times was either serene or orgiastic and Neronian (depending on one’s stereotype).

Foucault will therefore at once insist that the repressive—the inclination to master the sexual impulses and to valorize abstinence and control—was no less present in classical antiquity. He thereby creates a supplementary problem for himself, since his theme—the historical originality of Christian sexuality—thereby risks disappearing altogether, and since his very project of chronicling the “emergence” of something called sexuality demands the form of a break and a discontinuity that it is ironic and startling to witness him here renouncing (even though, or perhaps because, he had himself become something of the very theoretical and master philosopher of the break as such and of the historiographic discontinuity).

Brown solves this problem better than Foucault, but perhaps because he is not working at the same historico-philosophical distance, at the same level of grand abstraction, as his master: the latter’s project of distancing and defamiliarizing sexuality, indeed, still took the form of doing something new with this unitary named concept and experience; whereas Brown can shatter it (to use Foucauldian rhetoric) and divide it up into a multiplicity of ideological practices that no longer seem appropriately housed under the generality that in Foucault still bears their name.

In particular, Brown’s solution is more persuasive, when it comes to the very first moment in the differentiation of pagan and Christian sexuality. Paganism meant the affirmation of mastery over the self, the Empire, the family, and the woman: so far so good, and Foucault and Brown are at one in this account, which explains why a certain mastery over one’s sexual impulses will also here be part of the arsenal of classical masculinity. But Brown’s topic is not merely sexuality, it is asceticism and abstinence as such, a far more thoroughgoing repression of the body than anything to be found either in Marcus Aurelius or in the classically oriented Christians of the day,

such as Clement of Alexandria. Thus, however propitious ascetic attitudes may find the relative sexual sobriety of the classical pagan ideal, another supplementary interpretation is needed for this new step, which is very far from being a simple intensification of the older practices.

Sociologists of small group formation—which very much includes the emergence of sects in the early stages of a world religion—have observed the functional presence of characteristic forms of content that both affirm solidarity with the new small group and in effect “burn the bridges” to the old society and old institutions.⁴ It is clear that total abstinence and continence constitutes just such a content, whereby the dust of the old, fallen society, of “Babylon,” is shaken off the feet and at the same time the practitioner is marked as radically different and unsociable, as someone beyond the pale. It seems indeed that during the second and third centuries after Christ, the Roman world was riddled with just such patterns of secession, its cities filled with people who opted out in one way or another and left the social institutions, some of them believing that the end of the world was approaching.

This plausible explanation of the form of the behavior of certain believers in the early Christian period does not, however, fully account for its content and, in particular, for the symbolic choice of sexuality as a realm in which such a statement of secession can best be made. Looked at in this way and from the standpoint of this kind of question, Roman or classical attitudes toward sexuality do not seem particularly relevant: that Roman mastery or restraint includes a specifically medical ideology, a belief in the debilitating influence of sexual intercourse and its capacity to drain the subject of power (“The fiery body was a fragile reservoir from which vital energy might leak away. Its fires had to be carefully banked up if they were to last. Frequent sexual activity was frowned upon”), does not particularly prepare the terrain for the extremes of Christian renunciation in this period, which seem to have wholly different motivations (save in classically minded thinkers like Clement) (*BzS*, 18). Indeed, Foucault, who most strongly predicates his analysis of classical sexuality on just such notions of power and mastery (so that the essential contradiction in such an ideology is unsurprisingly to be found not in heterosexual practice, but in the problem of the submission of the partner of the same sex, who ought in principle to be a mirror image of such mastery), is led to identify the disintegration of the classical system in the new and more equal status of women in late Roman society, which clearly poses a threat to the operation of the classical sexual system as a whole. But how to explain this new status of women (if it is to be given the value of a cause)? The most obvious solution that proposes itself is that of Simone de Beauvoir, for whom the juridical status of women determines their social role; yet the heightened juridical status of women in Roman society (as opposed to Greece or Oriental societies) surely preceded Christianity and ought to have been operative in the earlier period.

Brown's explanations, more satisfying, return to the dynamics of small groups and emergent sects. In one, external sense, of course (the one that links sexuality with procreation), to abstain from sexuality is more than symbolically to bring about the end of the "present age" and of the world itself; such abstinence amounts to more than a sign or mark of difference—it is itself a powerful and active weapon in the literal and physical undermining of society as such; and Brown's pages are haunted by a science-fictional vision, an anticipation of some dark ages, in which countryside is deserted and the city falls silent, as in his remarks on John Chrysostom (at a later period and a rather different, post-apocalyptic context):

John elevated the Christian household so as to eclipse the ancient city. He refused to see Antioch as a traditional civic community, bound together by a common civic patriotism, expressed by the shared rhythms of collective festivity. He made no secret of the fact that he wished the theater, the hippodrome, even the busy agora, to fall silent forever. The Antioch of his dearest hopes was to be no more than a conglomeration of believing households, joined by a common meeting-place within the spacious courtyards of the Great Church. He wished the doors of the Christian house to swing to, shutting out the murmur of a late classical metropolis. To him, the public life of Antioch was a "Devil's garbage tip," piled high outside the simple walls of Christian houses. (*BaS*, 313)

How much the more intense is such radical secession, which saps the fabric of the ancient social system, in a period in which the end of the world is felt to be imminent and there is no longer any point in the preservation of even "Christian households" or marriages and families! Here radical abstinence is both an expression of the hope of the millennium and an act designed to bring it about.

Still, this is only one of the levels of significance of chastity taken as a symbolic act in its own right (and a relatively external one, which has more to do with the consequences of sexuality than with its inner essence). A further meaning returns us to the dynamics of ideology as a move in a cultural struggle between groups: this one has to do with Roman asceticism, but in quite the reverse of the approach that sought for continuities between such classical sobriety and the even more pronounced repudiation of the body in certain Christianities. For on the new view, it is precisely this general similarity or family likeness between the two sexual ideologies that demands some more radical differentiation, at least on the part of the extreme Christian sects. It is in order to affirm the break with classical Stoicism, in order to endow the new practices with what today is called a sense of "identity," that the Christian groups push forms of classical restraint so far that their effects are reversed, and what was to lend the household and the family something of the dignity of the Empire itself now

undermines both and threatens to extinguish them: self-control no longer has the same kinds of associations and connotations when it aims at the achievement of radical self-mutilation and the utter obliteration of “natural” and inevitably recurrent impulses.

Yet we observe here a textbook example of the forms that ideological struggle with the class enemy tends to take: an appropriation of the other’s privileged thematic space, a radical reversal of its meanings and oppositions, a process whereby a preexisting symbolic act is inverted.

But it is not only from and against the pagans that these early Christians must symbolically and ideologically differentiate themselves: it is also against the Jews and against Judaism, from which their own religion springs. Indeed, Judaism seems to have exerted its own kind of fascination over the earliest converts: “[It] was pagan converts, and not the local Jews, who put pressure on Paul to adopt Jewish customs. They wished to become like Jews, rather than creatures condemned to ritual invisibility” (*BaS*, 59). But this is the period of the diaspora, in which exiled Jewish communities must very strongly reorganize themselves around the emergent institution of the rabbi as social leader: “with the destruction of the Temple and the strengthening of the synagogue and the house of study, Judaism was fast on its way to becoming a religion of the book and of the sanctified, married household” (*BaS*, 61). Under these circumstances and in this specific new historical context, there can be no question of a privileging of abstinence and renunciation for a Judaism that needs to flourish by way of large families and patriarchal order. Such abstinence, then, is for the early Christians doubly overdetermined: for in the new context, it can also mean radical differentiation from Judaism as well and from the new Jewish form of society. Sexual extremism then includes the bonus of this double differentiation, from pagans and Jews alike.

But now it becomes interesting to set this system in motion and to introduce historical time into its operation: for it transpires that there are rhythms and cycles, not to say fashions, in asceticism; and these cycles are strictly correlated with the political climate of the not-yet-converted Empire, and in particular with its systematic and gruesome campaigns of persecution against the Christian minorities. For in this period there exists a more potent way of making the world end, and a more vivid sign of ideological and group commitment, than sexual abstinence and renunciation; and that is martyrdom itself, which becomes periodically available to the faithful. “Thus, continence, though a marked feature of Christian prophecy, remained a secondary feature; it was a preoccupation that tended to rise to the fore in Christian literature at times when the prospect of violent death was less immediate” (*BaS*, 69). Continence is thus a substitute for an unavailable martyrdom, in a situation in which you do not wish to wait for the state and its rigors but can take the initiative yourself. It is thus symbolic

martyrdom and self-chosen immolation: and at the same time it furnishes a kind of individual test or trial whereby the believer's commitment can be challenged, with results that are finally as public as any capital execution. This symbolic substitution thus initiates the space of self-examination, which will be so crucial in the "construction of subjectivity," even though it here remains in rudimentary or virtual state.

For the realm of subjectivity is here occupied by a rather different (and still very exterior and objective) kind of phenomenon, namely the state of prophecy. It has an instrumental relationship to sexual abstinence in the sense in which, along with fasting and sleep deprivation, the latter places the body in a situation receptive to visions and prophetic efflatus: it is a cleansing process that enables the spiritual transfiguration of which prophecy is a sign. Yet this instrumental use of sexual asceticism stands in contradiction with the obsessive denial and violent repression that began to emerge in the use of continence as a reliable instrument for destroying the world itself, and which will become, after the end of the waiting period, the principal ideology of the sexually extreme sects.

We have thus here, in the early period, a number of levels of significance, or, if another terminology is preferred, several different types of libidinal investment that coexist with respect to the use of this particular ideological or fantasy apparatus that is the interpretation of chastity, or the interpretation of sexuality that gives rise to the desire called chastity. These investments include a social or analogical pole, in the expectation of the imminent end of the world; and a moral or individual one in the purification of the self with a view toward prophecy. In class terms, the motif becomes a means of differentiating early Christians from pagans or Jews of the same period; while formally or narratively, the enforcement of continence takes the shape of a test and can also substitute for martyrdom in periods of calm and tolerance (I am tempted to say in "nonrevolutionary periods" as opposed to those in which public tumult around such issues is productively articulated).

But any synchronic analysis of an ideologeme such as this one is also a moment in a historical configuration that is subject to change; moreover, that change sometimes results from effects and achievements forthcoming within the system itself, and it is precisely this kind of unintended change that is most often called dialectical. Two of the crucial results of continence, for example, have to do with inheritance, for in these extreme situations of renunciation and chastity (and at least until the end of the world) there will be no heirs to whatever property the individual saints in question may still have. This issue, along with the damage to the institution of the family as such, will obviously constitute the fundamental objection (the word is perhaps too weak) of what we may call worldly or centrist Christians to this sexual or extrafamilial extremism.

On the other hand, the problem undergoes a dialectical inversion when it is a question of women's or widows' inheritance: that type of fortune, which tends to be appropriated by the Church itself, now determines a more positive evaluation of celibacy as far as women are concerned. Meanwhile—whatever the traditional juridical status of women in classical Rome and its effect on their social powers—the possession of such fortunes available to the Church, along with the new kind of equality with men that the practice of celibacy brings with it, leads to fundamental changes in the social situation itself in which these practices evolve (*BaS*, 145ff., 150, 332).

Now we need to look at some new meanings of sexuality before confronting the problem “produced” by Foucault about the relationship between sexuality in its increasingly modern sense and the constitution of an (equally modern) subjectivity. From the positions already outlined—as the hope of an immediate end of the world (read: an impending revolution, Utopia) recedes—what may at least be called political sects if not outright parties begin to emerge, whose likeness to extreme left sectarianism in modern times I wish very much to stress. Like these last, such sexual sectarianism is based not merely on ideological commitment, not merely on a choice of Christianity (or revolution) as a collective solution, but also on a passionate and personal impatience for individual reward or fulfillment, for a present taste of future satisfactions: here the *pur et dur* militant lives morally in his own present and by way of his own practices what everyone will live in Paradise (compare the Western Maoist repudiation of Soviet bourgeois and corrupt lifeways, and the refusal of the extraparliamentary Left to join bourgeois governments or to participate in alliances within the system, to “govern” under fallen prerevolutionary conditions). Brown's analysis of these varied sects (complicated by the cultural differences articulated by geography: the extremism of Syrian Christianity in general, as opposed to that of Italy, Alexandria, or North Africa—all differentiated culturally from one another) is very relevant here indeed. It raises the question of intellectual inheritance, in the links groups like the Marcionites and the Encratites have with the older Gnostic philosophies; and also that of social determination, in the rise of Manichaeism and its rivalry with orthodox Christianity in the West. It has been suggested (by analysts of Islam, I believe) that all these groups steer an uneasy ideological course between polytheism (toward which Manichaeism would clearly tend) and the kind of insipid deism of the classical period (which is threatened most explicitly by Arianism). But at least some of the enthusiasm for these protopolitical movements will depend on the investment of energies they offer: for young activists with purist and dogmatic political obsessions, sexual extremism offers satisfactions and a sectarian following that would not be available by a conversion to the norms of an institutional Church after the fashion of Augustine. Sexuality here becomes the acid test of this kind

of extreme commitment; the achievement of continence becomes a matter of immediate individual (“spiritual”) gratification at the same time that it can stand as an equally immediate publicly verifiable sign of political commitment.

On the other hand, the new stabilization—the resumption of the boring old time of daily life and the social routine (what Gregory of Nyssa will call “tainted time”)—opens up some rather different possibilities for continence, namely the ultimate emergence (over several centuries) of an institutional double standard in which celibacy can be practiced by the clergy (and needs to be, fulfilling other institutional requirements, in particular that of differentiating priests from the faithful generally) while the followers can continue to reproduce and live in families, under whatever strict codes for restraint and practices are devised in the new situation (*BaS*, 297).

Before we get that far, however, we must observe the emergence of yet a third social and institutional possibility in the Desert Fathers themselves, a third possibility then projecting itself into the far future in the form of the orders, as those are distinguished from both clergy and laity alike. This is a specific exploration of the possibilities of continence in and for itself, in a situation in which, as Brown puts it, a “particular form of heroism, linked to a particular form of sexual renunciation—the preservation of a virgin state in the strict sense— ... increasingly caught the imagination of all Christians” (*BaS*, 159). The philosophical developments that run parallel to this, in Origen and then in Plotinus and neo-Platonism, tend not only to produce small study groups, rather than sects on the one hand or collective movements (or even institutions) on the other; but also to deflect the sexual emphases toward the grossness of the body in general, in such a way as to give the matter of food and eating, particularly the devouring of animal flesh, an equally central role (this subtheme itself merits attention for, later on, when these have acquired a more open social significance, eating will be recoded in terms of poverty, want, and famine, and new versions of Adam’s fall will circulate, in which the apple will stand for greed “in a famine-filled world”—or even more interestingly as “a hot lust for land” and for property—as opposed to Augustine’s definitive sexual reading of the first disobedience, in *On Marriage and Concupiscence*) (*BaS*, 220, 336).

The desert now represents a new space beyond the “present age”—neither city nor village, neither this world nor the next, a new kind of imaginary scene that then ends up restructuring the Imaginary itself:

The myth of the desert was one of the most abiding creations of late antiquity. It was, above all, a myth of liberating precision. It delimited the towering presence of “the world,” from which the Christian must be set free, by emphasizing a clear ecological frontier. It identified the process of disengagement from the world with a move from one ecological zone to another, from the settled land of Egypt to the desert. It was a brutally clear boundary, already heavy with immemorial associations. (*BaS*, 216)

This new space now opens up a positive term in which the opposition between worldliness and continence can develop: it puts an end to a situation in which a refusal of worldliness remains a mere will to negation within a single framework that can only be resisted by the image of its absolute coming to an end in apocalypse. The new space of the desert, nonworldly yet real, now puts an end to a dilemma that hitherto offered no solution “other than through drastic rituals that promised total transformation, through the formation of small, inward-looking groups of the redeemed; or ... in third-century Syria, through adopting the disturbing rootlessness of the religious vagabond” (*BaS*, 216).

Thus, the new space—now within the world, rather than outside it, or in the future—will eventually allow asceticism to be institutionalized (in various ways, as we shall see). Such institutionalization will obviously be judged as a compromise, a capitulation or a sellout by the “extreme left” groups of sexual absolutists. It will also allow the attitudes toward sexual renunciation to be slightly modified: Augustinism is here foreshadowed not merely by the “sharpened awareness of sexual fantasy ... sexual desire (being) now treated as effectively coextensive with human nature” (*BaS*, 230); but also in the practice of self-examination and introspection that result from the lifelong necessity for this heightened vigil, and for the tangible occasion of keeping track of sexual thoughts that are clearly stimulated by the very act of searching for them, thereby very much contributing to a “construction of subjectivity” in some new and modern sense, which at one and the same time goes hand in hand with the latter’s institutionalization.

Yet the emergence, in the form of the desert, of a competing real space to that of the fallen social world itself also leads to novel evaluations and interpretations of sexuality that will develop in wholly new directions in the centuries to come. In particular the practice of collective confession (“The inner world must be turned inside out. Nothing must linger in it that could not be placed unhesitatingly before others” [*BaS*, 231]), will now mark sexual experiences as the very locus of the private, the secret, the personal as such: “the continuance of sexual dreams and emissions served to warn the monk ... of the presence within his heart of a more faceless lingering desire—the wish to possess experiences of his own” (*BaS*, 231). We are well placed in the contemporary period, after a renewed examination of the construction of subjectivity and selfhood as a form of private property par excellence (William James), to grasp the historic originality of this first emergence of the private or personal realm, and its immediate coincidence with images of property. Such a figural connection will then almost at once in the same period allow a modulation in the meaning of abstinence, toward some new social solidarity with the poor, with those who have nothing. Continence can now become, not heroism or the election of the pure revolutionary group, but rather a form of social poverty. Indeed, the working

out of a real social space from which to confront that of the world—and its resultant institutionalized double standards and compromises—not merely enables, but positively demands a new investment of signification in the practices of continence, which must now, as opposed to fallen sexual practices, mean something more articulated than a mere absolute or extremist blanket refusal.

So it is, for example, that in Gregory of Nyssa we find a well-nigh existential view of the function of fallen sexuality that is reminiscent of certain contemporary critiques of consumerism. For him, the passion for the world (which continence rebukes and overcomes) can be analyzed as an occultation of death and the death anxiety:

It was by the accumulation of wealth, by the retaining of power, above all, by marriage and the search for direct and palpable in the form of sons and daughters, with all the social arrangements which dynastic continuity implied for members of the upper classes, that human beings sought to remedy the discontinuities inflicted on them by death. (*BaS*, 301)

Gregory's is thus already a reinterpretation of sin in terms of class; but only partially so. And this may also be the moment in which to repeat some reservations about Max Weber's supremely influential and pioneering sociology of religion in general: despite the rich variety of his typology, he is led in several places to the (perhaps sociologically impossible) definition of religion as having in general the social function of offering institutional consolation for death in suffering. (It should be noted that his studies of ascetic practices, unlike the ones here considered, do not go around behind the emergence of modern sexuality and raise the issue of the meaning and historical originality of this last.) But this way of positioning the ultimate need for religion outside the diverse historical manifestations of the social results, as does Gregory's analogous (but perhaps more subtle) viewpoint, in an ambiguously existential reading. Suffering is a social phenomenon, which is susceptible to class analysis; death is an absolute or existential matter, which transcends the historical altogether. Thus an emphasis on this last will lead out of sociology and history into something that is after all in the strictest sense the domain of religion itself (which was, however, the phenomenon to be interpreted). An emphasis on suffering as a social phenomenon, however, permits a determination in terms of historical and cultural variables.

Thus the tradition itself tends to take two distinct forms. On the one hand, and as it were in preparation for the Augustinian climax, Gregory's subtle analyses of human or "tainted" time offer rich existential documents:

The present human experience of time was an experience of “tainted” time. It was a factious time, created within the self by unrelieved anxieties. It showed itself in the form of a perpetual, unquiet “extension” of the soul into an unknown and threatening future. For Gregory, the clock whose tick measured off most inexorably and most audibly the passing of tainted time was the clock of marriage. He saw human time as made up of so many consecutive attempts to block out the sight of the grave. (*BaS*, 297)

This is virtually the Heideggerian *Sorge* (or existential “care”) *avant la lettre*, and offers new hermeneutic instructions for decrypting the movements of subjectivity, the paradox being that such forms of close interpretive attention also end up *producing* the very “subjectivity” they are supposed to measure and analyze.

On the other hand, we have new kinds of demotic readings of the Fall in terms of property itself, most notably in terms of food:

It was widely believed, in Egypt as elsewhere, that the first sin of Adam and Eve had been not a sexual act, but rather one of ravenous greed . . . In this view of the Fall, greed and, in a famine-ridden world, greed’s blatant social overtones—avarice and dominance—quite overshadowed sexuality. (*BaS*, 220)

And later, in the sixth century, the author of *The Book of Degrees* believed that

Adam had fallen because he had looked around him in Paradise with a hot lust for the land. He wished to possess its rich soil. He had wished, through property, to replace God as creator. He had set about creating economic wealth by labor, and had wished to pile up the physical wealth of progeny by intercourse. (*BaS*, 336)

This powerful counterinterpretation, so modern in its reading of sexuality in terms of categories of property and economic production, is clearly out-trumped and finally vanquished by the triumphant hegemonic thought of Augustine, for whom sexuality becomes the mode of explanation rather than the thing to be explained, and in whose canonical works subjectivity as such displaces the social and the economic.

It is an ideological triumph that must surely be accounted for by the social victory of the Church and the requirements of its new institutionalization. (Thus, Ambrose will invent Mariolatry as a way of justifying the centrality of the theme of virginity in the later ideological developments.) In general, however, what confronts any institutionalized political body—whether the Catholic Church or the Communist Party—is the requirement of making a large place for all those ordinary humans who are not saints and cannot live by extremes and absolutes, and also of ideologically expelling

those groups whose extremism and absolutism risk alienating this or that fundamental component of their larger social and class compromise. The sexual extremists, on the one hand, and these newly emergent spokesmen for the poor on the other, are both excellent examples of the kinds of tendencies any centrist power structure will necessarily have to fend off and if necessary excommunicate.

But such strategic necessities are not mere matters of power or politicking; they require ingenious and original ideological solutions, of which, for this period, it is Augustine who is the supreme figure. It is widely understood that Augustine is the virtual inventor (and “only begetter”) of that unique sexual puritanism that distinguishes Christianity from the other religions; this doubtful achievement, along with the gloomy fatalisms of Augustinian predestination (equally an original conceptual achievement of this fertile ideologue), have led it to be supposed, in the stereotypicality of the popular mind, that Augustine must necessarily be counted among the radicals.

Nothing is, however, further from the truth: if he comes to seem the very epitome of the modern intellectual as such, this is because of the way in which Augustine is called upon to invent the practices of the intellectual for the first time (owing to the triumph of the Church) associated with state power. (He is the first, in the attack on Donatist heresy, to call down the forces of institutional violence and physical repression upon his ideological enemies, whom the state literally wipes out.) But to grasp Augustine as a political intellectual (rather than as a philosopher or theologian, or a “writer”) is to grasp him as a kind of centrist or compromiser, and thereby to understand the functionality of his doctrine in a more satisfactory way than seems offered by the history of ideas or of *Weltanschauungen*. For from this perspective, it is the very radical or extremist appearance of that doctrine that enables practical compromises to take place.

That radical appearance, of course, he is able to derive from his Manichaean formation, which trains him in the deployment of a whole rhetoric of the evils and sinfulness of physicality. What needs to be repudiated, in the Manichaean perspective, is the threat to Trinitarian monotheism posed by this world view’s vision of the eternal struggle between good and evil, between the spirit and the flesh, with its undesirable Utopian implication that the triumph of the spirit is somehow conceivable (in a Gnostic scenario): for such Utopian perspectives always lead to political activism and to political extremes. Augustine, however, will come to represent the newly emergent status quo of the institutional Church, and the fundamental thrust of his ideological polemics—against all kinds of adversaries, who differ as greatly among themselves as the Manichaeans do from the Pelasgians, or the Arians from the Donatists—remains throughout the repression of extrainstitutional political activism.

The Manichaean tradition will allow Augustine to single out the terrain of the fallen body itself as a field of ideological struggle. His originality is to have seen that the stark opposition between the condemnation of the flesh in Gnosticism and Manichaeism and its affirmation as God's creation (later: the Pelasgians and Julian) could be cut across and resolved in a new way by the foregrounding of sexuality as such, that is to say, in contemporary terminology, by its very production or construction as a new kind of phenomenon: "the indirect and momentous result of Augustine's emphasis on the psychological momentum behind the sexual drive was to destroy the neat compartments with which Christians of an earlier age had tended to contain the anxieties raised by the sexual components of the human person" (*BaS*, 418–19). The term "psychological" must also be retained, for it is the link between sexuality and "psychology" or subjectivity that is very centrally "part of the solution" here, so that the necessity of confronting ideological enemies whose positions are in themselves essentially contradictory will lead to a novel solution that opens up a novel kind of space: as opposed to that of the end of the world in the early centuries, that of a new inner world or subjectivity that is also a kind of absence of the world (even though it leaves this last virtually intact).

For Augustine must on the one hand oppose the Donatists, who stand for the notion of a perfectible community of the true faithful or elect: even if this is no longer as in earlier centuries the extremist ideology of the sectarian small group, as Brown argues (*AH*, 218–19), it still threatens the very vocation of the Church as a mediatory institution in a necessarily imperfect world—yet it is precisely to that vocation that Augustine is committed. He must therefore argue for necessary imperfection on the level of human collectivities.

Yet the conventional ideological countermove to this one is also fraught with ideological peril and must equally be resisted: that consists, clearly enough, in repositioning perfectibility in the individual, a solution which the Pelasgians will propose. But this leads to a different kind of extremism and Utopianism, and threatens to undermine the institutional Church in a different but no less alarming way, by awakening a thirst for the purely individual extreme solution. Sexuality can now also solve this problem, by way of its unique constitution by Augustine as that privileged space in which the Fall is detectable and the corruption of the Will alone visible. For sexuality—quite literally, by way of involuntary erection and equally involuntary impotence—can always be appealed to demonstrate that our will is corrupt and necessarily and constitutively imperfect (*BaS*, 416–17).

Paradoxically, this allows Augustine to assert—both with and against Pelasgian optimism—that the body before the Fall, including prelapsarian sexuality, was essentially good, since it was God's creation: the Gnostic and Manichaean temptation to spiritual mysticism is thereby at once excluded.

Meanwhile the fallen Will also explains why Donatist conceptions of a perfected community are also vain, and therefore why, on both individual and collective planes, an institution like the Church is required to supplement human frailty.

The price to be paid for this remarkable solution is a twofold one: on the one hand, now sexuality will exist in and of itself and not as the mere sign of something else, and this is what is meant by its “production” or “constitution,” its autonomization (*BaS*, 432–33). For in earlier periods sexuality is always allegorical of the cosmos in one way or another (and in ways wildly differing among themselves): it does not exist contingently in its own right, but is always pressed into service as a symbolic expression of other, more autonomous, metaphysical themes. But the thematics of the Fall and of Will do not function in this way in Augustine. Rather, these last come themselves to be symbolic expressions of the new entity called sexuality:

In Augustine’s mind, sexuality served only one, strictly delimited purpose: it spoke, with terrible precision, of one single, decisive event within the soul. It echoed in the body the unalterable consequence of mankind’s first sin. It was down that single, narrow, and profound shaft that Augustine now looked, to the very origins of human frailty. (*BaS*, 422)

Paradoxically, this seeming extremism of an obsessive focus on the new sexuality as such then allows Augustine to revert to the worldly tolerance of late Roman or pagan restraint and compromise in sexual practices, particularly for the married (*BaS*, 426). Thus, as so often in the ideological realm, the extremist rhetoric masks a practical consent to the status quo.

Along with sexuality, however, there comes into being that other new thing, which has been signaled by the very language of the private or of subjectivity as such. For the other price to be paid, or if you prefer the other name for this particular price to be paid, is the opening up of an inward space in which contradictions that cannot be resolved in practical reality can somehow be conjured: the space of a new inwardness, which the existence of sexuality as a permanent threat will also bring into being. For the kind of self-examination that began to be organized by the Desert Fathers will here shed the ambiguities that invest it when it is a question for locating doubtfully identified sins, and will now offer a foolproof area for the organization of a check that always infallibly brings into being the very object it is supposed to search for. To look for sexual temptations is tantamount to creating or producing them, to awakening them there even where they did not previously appear. Sexuality now allows the practice of a permanent self-examination, which itself also predicates the permanent existence of that new thing called the Self, of which Augustine is notoriously the inventor. Sexuality guarantees the omnipresence of a fallen Will that can equally

permanently be addressed by attention to a verifiable yet inward Self, all the while in the outer social world the double standard of Church and laity, congregation and the monastic orders, is set in place. In this deeper and more fundamental, in all senses more original and originary, "subjective turn," we can find verified the conviction everywhere present in modern political culture that the preoccupation with the subjective necessarily withdraws creative energies from the social and from praxis and ends up ratifying the status quo of a fallen and corrupt "present age."

The modern intellectual is constituted at precisely this point, with the mission equally precisely to constitute the Self as such, as an ideological solution. On the other hand, it is also from this same perspective that we may look back at the sorry history of sexual politics and sexual extremism, as these are acted out in the various forms of an ideal of continence or radical abstinence. The story of sexuality as a semiautonomous instance raises the seemingly Foucauldian question of what things would be like once sexuality (like humanism and "man") again disappeared (and indeed the question of whether it is exactly this that we have in mind today as we approach such questions historically). But it also raises the question of the intellectual as such and sharpens the dilemma whose intolerable alternatives take the form of the compromise of the turncoat and the apostate on the one hand (whose first momentous figure is Augustine himself) and of the absolute or purist politics of the extremist sects on the other.

1996

Notes

- 1 Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, Berkeley: University of California, 1967. Future references to this work are denoted *AH*.
- 2 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Future references to this text are denoted *BaS*.
- 3 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols., trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1980. Future references to this work are denoted *HS*.
- 4 Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970, quoted in Michael A. Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985, 190.



Space and Congestion: Rem Koolhaas and *S, M, L, XL*

Quantity has had a bad name for some time, despite Engels's first law of dialectics (or was it Hegel's? or Stalin's?)—the transformation of quantity into quality. Whatever is good about this or that individual big thing always seems to get explained by reference to some other feature, and not its sheer magnitude. Meanwhile, sheer numerousness—multiplicity as such—is often filed away in some other category, as though demography were not subject to the same thought processes as Mount Everest or the Pacific Trench. Yet the face of Deng Xiaoping, intent and pedagogical, on the inside endpaper of Rem Koolhaas's impressively square and massive new tome reminds us that lots of people are fully as “sublime” in Kant's sense as mountain ranges, giant hotdogs, nonstop dancing records, or the age of the universe.

As its title suggests, *S, M, L, XL* is something of a manifesto for bigness, as well as being a rewriting of *Learning From Las Vegas* in an utterly new nonhumanist idiom.¹ But bigness is so familiar and banal that it doesn't seem to explain anything any longer: to solve the mystery of Koolhaas's work—buildings as well as books—by saying that it is big (or great) simply because he wants to think big and build big constructions—simply because he wants to promote bigness—is not very satisfying somehow. Could you have a small thought of bigness, for example? Or can you think big by the mere taking of a thought? Strange reflections that end up having some family likeness to the ontological proof of the existence of God (who exists simply because “existence” is a necessary component of your idea of His perfections in the first place).

It would be as misleading to describe *S, M, L, XL* as a record of the achievements of Rem Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) as it would be to call it a marvelous picture book (albeit of non-coffee table format); although there is a little of both those things in it. Perhaps—not really about architecture at all in the first place—it is a bravura performance by the invisible cameraman (Bruce Mau), who has

chosen Rem's work as the pretext for his own delirious (and very satisfying) bookmaking. But you might equally well think of it as an architectural autobiography, or even (on the other hand) a cunning exercise in planned chaos (among other things, many other things, a book without an index or table of contents!).

There runs through it the institutional thread all the disciplines are supposed to have learned to respect: In this case, what is the architectural profession today? Is architecture in some radically new kind of crisis? How to characterize the role or mission of the architect today (after modernism, for example)? A nonarchitect may well initially be more interested in the architect's point of view on daily life: not so much what the architect does as an architect (the opening shots of office space production or project graphs do that, however) but rather what the world looks like narratively and novelistically when it is an architect who is moving through it (indeed, the cover tells us that *S, M, L, XL* is a novel: which is just about as misleading as the other characterizations I tried out at the beginning of this paragraph). Not the architect as hero, as in Ayn Rand: but the architect's experience of the passing or insignificant detail. Are the reading notes Rem's own (or OMA's), for example? Is one supposed to read dutifully through all of these? They are, to be sure, all very interesting; but they are there essentially to give you something else to do with yourself when the principal business of the page, visual or textual, has lost your attention for the moment. As in Rem's buildings, these are among the multitudinous other things, large or small, that are *also* supposed to be going on, and that we mistakenly call—which I have mistakenly called—"chaos", but that we had also better no longer call "complexity" either, since that is too formal and modernist a word for the way we live now or the way Koolhaas thinks we ought to reconcile ourselves to living: although "reconcile" is surely too mild a word for what he has in mind.

At any rate, whatever the point of view this "architectural novel" happens to confront, the focus is not on beautiful buildings or on epiphanies; rather, there is a separation between two dimensions, on the one hand the micro-categories of noneventful everyday time. The novelist or dramatist normally uses space as a stage or scene for an Event to happen in. Here, spatiality not being reserved for the unusual or exception, we need a different set of categories: "Nothing ever happens here, yet the air is heavy with exhilaration."

On the other hand, a macronarrative that we are asked to learn: getting the contract! Competition, the program, whether we win or lose out ("Dear Diary, do we want to win this competition or not?")—it is the success or failure plot of the bestseller, the privileged narrative form of the market and big business, yet here oddly inflected in a variety of new directions. The book is a success story; OMA does finally go to Lille, the small projects barrel forward into twenty-first century urbanism. Yet the really stupendous

things here are “failures” unbuilt (at least so far): the Zeebrugge Sea Terminal, the Très Grande Bibliothèque, the Karlsruhe Art and Media Center, each unfolding over fifty or sixty pages, according to a new type of narrative form—the description of the project, a slide show in real life that becomes something better than a film within a book itself: while at length, a conception of the city begins to evolve in which the building of buildings like this slowly ceases to be the Ayn Rand type of “success” to the degree to which this enormous manifesto finds itself scandalously arguing for the wholesale tearing down of everything every twenty-five years or so, at which point the competitions, getting the contract, etc., stop looking like the architectural specification of some more general success-or-failure story (what they might have looked like in Zola, for example), and now somehow seem on the point of offering a new paradigm altogether that we do not yet seem fully to understand or to imagine the application of. To put it another way, this is a vanguard operation without the avant-garde vision or mission; a powerfully future-oriented material imagination without a future in any traditional sense of the word; Dystopia as Utopia, perhaps, but at an intensity that dissolves the usual overtones or connotations of both those words all at once.

At any rate, this is no conventional narrative or logbook of projects; rather it envelops and includes all those, along with cartoons, collages of images, journal entries, and even narrative “myths” of the Platonic type. Like its predecessor, *Delirious New York* (published in 1978; and this year reissued, but without its delirious illustrations, and also cannibalized in part within *S, M, L, XL*), it wishes to be a “retroactive manifesto” that rewrites the past according to another, hitherto unnoticed, only recently excavated, agenda, a rediscovered Habermasian “unfinished project” that can now be pursued and continued. Yet it is also a record of the discontinuous historical situations that succeed each other as convulsively as small-medium-large and unexpectedly turn a past into the anticipation of what used to be an impossible future. This is the face of bigness, about which Koolhaas has said that he wrote it up historically in the US because there was no conceivable possibility of putting it into practice in an ancient Europe and small-scale Holland: suddenly, with the new Europe and a new post-urbanistic urbanism, the aesthetic that had been “cryogenically” preserved like a time capsule in *Delirious New York*:

Bigness emerged like a sudden iceberg from the mist of deconstructivist discourse and imposed itself as a political, economic, artistic necessity—to defrost earlier ambitions and to explore the redesign and demystification of architecture, this time experimenting on ourselves. With the cluster of the Very Big Library ... ZKM [the Karlsruhe project] ... and the Zeebrugge terminal, it seemed that the impossible constellation of need, means, and naiveté that had triggered New York’s “miracles” had returned.

Besides Manhattan, however, there are two other significant influences on this act of the spatial imagination: the Berlin Wall and John Portman's Atlanta, alongside which—as the slide show of what are already more momentous than individual buildings expands into dimensions that wish to displace and cancel ordinary conceptions of city space or of urbanism as such—full-dress essays make their appearance, on Singapore or La Défense, on the Bijlmermeer housing development in Amsterdam or on globalization as such.

Globalization is indeed the other crucial historical force of which *S, M, L, XL* wishes to be the document and the record, if not the symptom: Mies's travels and exile, here fantasmatically narrated as the adventures of the material components of the Barcelona Pavilion through the vicissitudes of the War years—the evocation of Japan as the space of otherness and construction beyond Europe or the US—these are still relatively static expressions and evocations of a new global situation that consists in sheer relationship, in action at distance, in overlapping global force fields, or international “gene splices,” as Koolhaas himself puts it. Architects today work in a frenzy of international travel (Michael Graves's forty buildings in Japan are indeed offered as something of prototype for chaos itself), but at that level, we have to do merely with an interesting biographical fact, or an exhausting one, as the case may be. It is the sheer existence of Japan or the US that changes the situation of the architectural new Europe, whether you travel to them physically or not, whether or not you sample their cultural styles (in fact, Japanese megastructures of the 1950s and 60s are detonators as crucial for Koolhaas as the New York skyscrapers about which he has so eloquently and pointedly written). We cannot (yet) map out the interrelationships of late capitalist globalization with anything like the figurative distinctness of the older modernist foreign affairs.

So *Delirious New York* was already to be grasped as a transcultural event, a theory that was itself the result of transnational contact, or of the cross-wiring of two radically different local situations, that of Manhattan and that of a Holland preeminently characteristic of Europe in general (smallness, classical monuments you cannot remove). Its argument involved a unique repositioning of Freedom and Necessity, along with a brutal severing of the expressive links architects have traditionally attempted to maintain between outside and inside, core and envelope: a problem exacerbated by the enormous proportional increase in the service space required by large buildings. Koolhaas's reading of the lessons of the past selects two crucial features of Manhattan's evolution for our attention in the more desperate urban and architectural contemporary situation: the laying out of the street grid in 1811, and the invention of the elevator in the 1850s; both, in very different ways, supply a purely mechanical limit or developmental technique that allows one to ignore this relationship altogether. This is not yet another

version of the conception of art so many modernists were fond of reviving: the constraints (for example of a certain verse form) that forced the artist who embraced them into genial invention—the advantages of making a virtue out of necessity. Here what is meant is the liberating power of forgetting about the necessity altogether; once you have your rigid city blocks, once the elevator allows you to build upward without having to respect the old limits of nature, the sky's the limit, and you can indulge a different kind of (delirious) freedom.

It is this “lesson of bigness” that *S, M, L, XL* now extrapolates into urbanism itself, or rather the former urbanism: for here what is effaced is precisely that tension constitutive of the whole architectural tradition hitherto—the incommensurability between thoughts about an individual building and thoughts about the urban fabric as a whole, if it really ever was one. Koolhaas has many outrageous things to say in this spirit, which ought to scandalize us; which need to be scandalous or we will not be getting our money's worth. If you don't see how the proposal for a Lite Urbanism undermines all the classical values we have been trying to associate with what remains of the city, then these texts have gone flat and the projects themselves stand littered about us like so many open bottles of stale beer.

The projects are not the answer, for one thing; and to point to the artistic grandeur of the Sea Terminal or the Trés Grande Bibliothèque as a consolation prize for what Koolhaas proposes to do to the city in general would amount to a containment and a neutralization of this text and its virulence: a trivialization dressed up in the art appreciation trappings of yesteryear.

The attack on “humanism” has lost its programmatic appeal in recent years (except for Jesse Helms); but perhaps we can revive it one last time in order to measure the enormity of the destruction Koolhaas proposes and the ideological achievement of his thoughts of bigness here taken to their logical conclusion. To be sure, Le Corbusier (in his Plan Voisin) rehearsed the sheer triumphalism of the modernist New by suggesting that “Paris” might be scraped away (Rem's expression) and replaced by several rows of gigantic skyscrapers. The supreme impertinence was also a Pyrrhic victory: “the notion of a new beginning—starting from scratch, the tabula rasa—had been taboo ever since Le Corbusier's ... operation closed the book on the question of the new beginning for generations to come.” The coming into being of La Défense now changes the picture insofar as it *saves* rather than *destroys* Paris (Rem *dixit*: “each ‘eyesore’ realized there has prevented an invasion of the center”). But now comes the subversive proposal: “How many of these buildings deserve eternal life? ... we analyzed this question in numerical terms and discovered that if we laundered the site in five-year increments by simply erasing all buildings over the age of twenty-five, vast areas would gradually be liberated” (older buildings “of merit” or “of sentimental value” being preserved “as a kind of twentieth-century acropolis”).

We need to be attentive to the language here: “vast areas would be liberated” ... The emphasis finally, and the radical innovation being staged here, lies in the idea of the “area”; not the prospect of putting some newer building in the place of a still fairly new one ... (and then of repeating the process twenty-five more years down the line), but in the laying open of a strip or a band (“the beach beneath the sidewalk,” as the students of May 1968 liked to put it, in a wall slogan dear to Koolhaas), a band or strip that can then coexist and be dramatically juxtaposed to strips or bands of different textures and characteristics, as in the rotations of medieval agriculture. It is a design and a program that OMA then dramatically proposed to carry out in their idea for a new city at Melun-Sénart. As with the Manhattan grid, the idea was not to imagine new forms of architectural being, but rather “to abstain from architecture”:

Through [a] process of elimination, we arrived at an almost Chinese figure of void spaces that we could protect from contamination by the city ... and then we said, “the rest we will surrender to chaos.” ... Together, the bands define an archipelago of residue—the islands—of different size, shape, location ... A system of bands ... inscribed on the site like an enormous Chinese figure ... instead of a city organized through its built form, Melun-Sénart will be formless, defined by this system of emptiness that guarantees beauty, serenity, accessibility, identity regardless—or even *in spite of*—its future architecture.

Suggestive formal ideas, these—and surely it is the idea of new forms that we crave, and whose short supply tends to be masked by the profusions of late capitalism and the postmodern (a word used only once here, although very affirmatively). But we have to chasten this aesthetic excitement with the reminder that for Koolhaas the city of the future is not the new Rotterdam or the sight line out from Napoleon’s Arc de Triomphe: it is Singapore, along with the prophecy of innumerable Asian neo-cities of the future, patterned on the Singapore model. This is the sense in which East Asia is to *S, M, L, XL* what the domain of the American skyscraper was to *Delirious New York*: even Koolhaas’s terminal notation about the island city-state (“Singapore mantra: don’t forget to confirm your return flight”) authorizes us to mix in a quotient for grimness here. It is a grimness we need to retain for the final summing up of this multipaged journey, the supreme manifesto on the so-called Generic City in which it is affirmed, among other things, that the contemporary airport is the exemplary microcosm of the new urban form, as well as “its strongest vehicle of differentiation.” Those who follow contemporary fashion in denigrating the “placelessness” of the contemporary airport (along with the contemporary motel) will find this just the right note to approach the concentrated scandal of “The Generic City,” which has a whole checklist of impertinences in store for us.

“The Generic City presents the final death of planning. Why? Not because it is not planned . . . But its most dangerous *and* most exhilarating discovery is that planning makes no difference whatsoever.”

“Each Generic City is a petri dish—or an infinitely patient blackboard on which almost any hypothesis can be ‘proven’ and then erased . . .” The infinite sequence of these hypotheses is in and of itself the richness of the Koolhaas/OMA conception of chaos, which the Generic City is designed to liberate. Anything goes: we have been liberated by the grid or the band, Rimbaud’s Commune revised: “*Il faut être absolument postmoderne.*” But to do so means not abolishing history (for I fear that *S, M, L, XL* is history in the making, as they say), but the nostalgia for history:

Regret about history’s absence is a tiresome reflex. It exposes an unspoken consensus that history’s presence is desirable. But who says that is the case? A city is a plane inhabited in the most efficient way by people and processes, and in most cases the presence of history only drags down its performance.

Fair enough, and a Utopian reminder to boot. Probably we will all need a little time to decide if this is the way we really want to wake up out of the well-known “nightmare.” What is undeniable is that the authority with which Koolhaas speaks (in so many different graphic voices) springs from the resonance of a future within these projects and ideas. Is OMA an avant-garde movement, and have we not been taught (ever so recently) that a belief in innovation and in the future, in the *Novum*, is a characteristic of modernism and of avant-garde movements, which is no longer available to us?

Most recently, the tired regret about history without a future has been countered by enthusiasm for a future without history. My own feeling is that the enthusiasm needs to be separated from the theory (which is generally only the former’s rationalization) and examined in its own right. The tangible works and theories of works that we are offered here can only enhance and intensify the activity of the observer. Koolhaas offers us lessons in how to break down the doors of impossible situations, how to turn dilemmas and contradictions into sources of new productivity. We need be in no hurry to classify OMA’s projects as a style or an aesthetic (particularly since it was the end of those things that spelled the dilemma and the block in the first place); let us first read this big book as the mimesis of radical choice, decisiveness, cutting through the knots, inventing new solutions—that is, as a story that must always exhilarate.

Notes

1 Rem Koolhaas et al., *S, M, L, XL*, ed. Barbara Steiner, Köln: Taschen, 1997.

2 This article first appeared in *The Village Voice*, May 7, 1996, 17ff., and was published without page references.

Future City

The *Project on the City* assembles research from an ongoing graduate seminar directed by Rem Koolhaas at the Harvard School of Design; its first two volumes—the *Great Leap Forward*, an exploration of the development of the Pearl River Delta between Hong Kong and Macao, and the *Guide to Shopping*—have just appeared in sumptuous editions from Taschen.¹ These extraordinary volumes are utterly unlike anything else one can find in the print media; neither picture books nor illustrated text, they are in movement like a CD-ROM, and their statistics are visually beautiful, their images legible to a degree.

Although architecture is one of the few remaining arts in which the great *auteurs* still exist—and although Koolhaas is certainly one of those—the seminar which has produced its first results in these two volumes is not dedicated to architecture but rather to the exploration of the city today, in all its untheorized difference from the classical urban structure that existed at least up until World War II. Modern architecture has been bound up with questions of urbanism since its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century beginnings: Siegfried Giedion's modernist summa, *Space, Time and Architecture*, for example, begins with the Baroque restructuring of Rome by Sixtus V and ends with the Rockefeller Center and Robert Moses's parkways, even though it is essentially a celebration of Le Corbusier. And obviously Le Corbusier was both an architect and, with the Radiant Cities, Chandigarh, and the plan for Algiers, an "urban planner." But although the *Project* testifies to Koolhaas's commitment to the question of the city, he is not an urbanist in any disciplinary sense; nor can the word be used to describe these books, which also escape other disciplinary categories (such as sociology or economics) but might be said to be closest to cultural studies.

The fact is that traditional, or perhaps we might better say modernist, urbanism is at a dead end. Discussions about American traffic patterns or zoning—even political debates about homelessness and gentrification, or real-estate tax policy—pale into insignificance when we consider the immense expansion of what used to be called cities in the Third World: "In 2025," we are told in another Koolhaas collective volume,

the number of city-dwellers could reach five billion individuals ... of the thirty-three megalopolises predicted in 2015, twenty-seven will be located in the least developed countries, including nineteen in Asia ... Tokyo will be the only rich city to figure in the list of the ten largest cities.²

Nor is this a problem to be solved, but rather a new reality to explore: which is, I take it, the mission of the *Project on the City*, two further volumes of which are so far projected: one on Lagos, Nigeria, and one on the classical Roman city as prototype.

Volume One of the *Project, Great Leap Forward*, interprets the prodigious building boom in China today—almost nine thousand high rises built in Shanghai since 1992—not so much in terms of some turn or return to capitalism, but rather in terms of Deng Xiaoping's strategy to use capitalism to build a radically different society: *infrared* rather than *red*:

The concealment of Communist, red ideals ... to save Utopia at a moment when it was being contested on all sides, when the world kept accumulating proofs of its ravages and miseries ... INFRARED©, the ideology of reform, is a campaign to preempt the demise of Utopia, a project to conceal nineteenth-century ideals within the realities of the twenty-first century.

Those who believe that the market is a reality, anchored in Nature and in Being, will have difficulty grasping such a proposition, which from their perspective will be dispelled either by an outright conversion to capitalism or by economic collapse. But consider the architectural perspective: we witness thousands upon thousands of buildings constructed or under construction which have no tenants, which could never be paid for under capitalist conditions, whose very existence cannot be justified by any market standards. We here follow the outlines of housing communities in the Pearl River Delta area which are being projected for a future quite unlike those researched by Western speculators or banks and funding institutions in the capitalist world. Indeed, the four communities explored here are something like four different Utopian projections: Shenzhen, a kind of alternate or double of Hong Kong; Dongguan, a pleasure city; Zhuhai, a golfing paradise; and the old center, Guangzhou (Canton), a kind of strange palimpsest, in which the new is superimposed on an already existing traditional economic center. It is an extraordinary travelogue into the future, and gives a more concrete sense of China today and tomorrow than most guidebooks (and many real tours).

I. Proteus Goes Shopping

The *Guide to Shopping* is something altogether different, both in style and intent. Consumption is, to be sure, a hot topic, but this is no conventional study of it. Indeed, the question of what this book is—an extraordinary picture book; a collection of essays on various urbanistic and commercial topics; a probe of global space from Europe to Singapore, from Disney World to Las Vegas; a study of the shopping mall itself, from its first ideologues all the way to its most contemporary forms—corresponds to the more general ambiguity of its object. Even if we stick to the initial characterization of that object as “shopping,” what kind of categorization is that? Is it a physical one, involving the objects to be sold? Is it psychological, involving the desire to buy the objects in question? Or architectural, having to do with the spatial originality of those malls—which, famously, trace their ancestry back to Walter Benjamin’s nineteenth-century arcades; if not, as some of the time charts in this book suggest, back to the 7000 BCE “city of Çatalhöyük founded for the trade of commodities,” or perhaps the “invention” of the retail trade in Lydia in the seventh century BCE? Or are we talking here about the globalization of consumption (consumerism)? Or the new trade routes and production and distribution networks involved in such globalization? (Or the businessmen who organize those?) And what about the new technologies evolved for commerce since Çatalhöyük? The prodigious increase in size of the merchandizing companies and conglomerates, some of them larger than many foreign countries? What about shopping and the form of the contemporary city—if there is one? Significantly, Koolhaas’s collective project changed its name from the “Project for what used to be the city” to the plainer and more optimistic *Project on the City*. To which may be added the question: Is a new kind of space emerging—control space, junk space? And what does all this imply for the human psyche and human reality itself? (The first theoretician of advertising, Edward Bernays, was Freud’s nephew.) What does it imply for the future and for Utopia?

I am probably forgetting some of the other modulations of this protean topic; but it will be clear that it mobilizes, alongside the obvious (and obviously anticipated) areas of architecture and urbanism, such heterogeneous disciplines as psychoanalysis and geography, history and business, economics and engineering, biography, ecology, feminism, area studies, ideological analysis, classical studies, legal decisions, crisis theory, etc. Perhaps this kind of immense disciplinary range is no longer quite so astonishing in a postmodern era, in which the law of being is de-differentiation, and in which we are most interested in how things overlap and necessarily spill across the disciplinary boundaries. Or, if you prefer, in the postmodern the distinction between the old, specialized disciplines is constitutively effaced

and they now fold back on each other, in the most interesting studies—from Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* to Caro's *Power Broker*; from *Empire* to *Rembrandt's Eyes*; from Benjamin's *Arcades* to the *Geschichte und Eigensinn* of Negt and Kluge; let alone *S, M, L, XL* or even *Space, Time, and Architecture*. Theory is here mostly eschewed (although Baudrillard is mentioned once, I believe), but you must not let that tempt you into thinking that this is a non-theoretical piece of cultural journalism, let alone a coffee-table picture book. It is, as the enumeration above might also suggest, a collective volume; although not in the sense that experts of the various disciplines mentioned above are somehow judiciously assembled and their contributions sampled in turn. This makes it embarrassing for a reviewer to single out specific names, although Sze Tsung Leong has the most, and also the most philosophically reflective, chapters, with Chuihua Judy Chung a close follow-up for more concrete discussions. As for Koolhaas, his role seems to have been mostly organizational (that is to say, like certain versions of the deity, nowhere and everywhere all at once) save for an astonishing appearance in his own name, which will be discussed at the proper moment.

II. After the Mall

I will try to put the theory back into all this, but it would first be better to work through some of the detail of the layers or strata of the book, whose alphabetical table of contents is quite misleading in this respect and, thus, a veritable *tour de force* in its own right. For a few previews on the mall are the way in here: they will return, far more developed, in a variety of contexts later on. But it is as though the shopping mall is the spatial and architectural wedge into this immense topic. Few forms have been so distinctively new and so distinctively American, and late-capitalist, as this innovation, whose emergence can be dated to 1956; whose relationship to the well-known decay-of-the-inner-city-rise-of-the-suburb is palpable, if variable; whose genealogy now opens up a physical and spatial prehistory of shopping in a way that was previously inconceivable; and whose spread all over the world can serve as something of an epidemiological map of Americanization, or postmodernization, or globalization. So the mall focuses the inquiry and serves as the frame for the prodigious enlargement of all this later on. Meanwhile, pages of chronologies, color-coded cross-referencing systems and innumerable thematic indexes already train us in the rhizomatic form of that enlargement; while a first set of comparisons between retail areas all over the world, and between national GDPs and retail revenues of the top corporations, help us begin to map the process in our minds and to form a picture, not only of the relative hierarchies of globalization, but also of a

view of “shopping” that will shortly become, dare I say, not merely a political but also a metaphysical issue.

At once, however, we are pulled up short, and a fundamental difference between this work and the proliferation of new and excellent cultural-studies volumes on shopping, malls, consumption, and the like, becomes clear. Before we even get to the thing itself, we come upon the mall in crisis, losing money and tenants, and on the verge of replacement . . . by what? Benjamin took his snapshot of the nineteenth-century arcade at the moment of its decay—and thereby developed a whole theory about history: that you could best understand the present from the standpoint of an immediate past whose fashions were already just a little out of date. Crisis puts us on notice that we have here to do not merely with the archeology or prehistory of shopping, nor even its present, but rather its future. Whatever the future of the mall as such, however, “‘there’s lots of trash out there.’ Many cavernous old malls are dinosaurs that can’t compete with the convenience of drive-up value retailers in power centers or strips”—to which one now needs no doubt to add eBay.

Something has evidently happened to the preconditions for the existence of malls in the first place. But what were those preconditions? As in Aristotelian causality, they come in a variety of forms and shapes: the physical or engineering preconditions are staged for us at once, in the very first letter of this ABC of shopping: namely, air-conditioning—to which we will return shortly in a more appropriate place. As for the prehistory, we have certainly been treated, in recent years, to a host of interesting predecessor forms, if not generally going as far back as Çatalhöyük. Most notably the arcade itself, essentially developing in the early nineteenth century and reaching *its* crisis in the 1850s and 60s—exactly the moment when the next form comes along: the modern department store, whose emergence Zola immortalized in *Au bonheur des dames* (*Ladies’ Delight* is a fictionalized version of real-life names like *Au printemps* and *La Samaritaine*, which have also been exhaustively studied in recent years, for their urbanistic as much as their commercial consequences: for one thing, they are roughly contemporaneous with Haussman’s immense transformation of Paris). As for our form—now falling into decay in its turn?—we will come to it in a moment; indeed we will even put names and faces to it. Like a novel or a poem, it actually has an inventor or author, although the inventor of a whole genre is a more appropriate parallel; something one does not come across very often.

III. Delirious Technologies

First, we leap ahead to measure the scope and transformations of this protean form—into airports, for example, which have now, all the new

ones, also become shopping malls; into museums; finally into the city itself. The older city center—blighted by suburbs and the new supermarkets, and then the malls themselves—now, with postmodernity and gentrification, catches up: not only by housing huge new malls within itself, but by becoming a virtual mall in its own right. Indeed, something fundamental begins to happen to it (as is fitting in a volume from the *Project on the City*):

In 1994 the mall officially replaced the civic functions of the traditional downtown. In a New Jersey Supreme Court case regarding the distribution of political leaflets in shopping malls the court declared that “shopping malls have replaced the parks and squares that were ‘traditionally the home of free speech,’” siding with the protesters “who had argued that a mall constitutes a modern-day Main Street.”

But if “this return of shopping to the city has been nothing short of triumphant,” the authors find themselves obliged to add: “To be saved, downtowns have had to be given the suburban kiss of death.”

Back now to preconditions: could the barcode itself—the Universal Product Code—be one of these? Analyze its functions, and one begins to see how the statistics it immediately provides the retailer transform the whole structure of inventory, resupplying, marketing, and the like. Brand names may well be more of a cultural consequence of this kind of shopping than a precondition, for their zones, the flagship boutiques, mark “the sacred precincts of the last global religion—capitalist consumerism.” They also underscore a new kind of dynamic, itself consumerized under the Singapore logo “co-opetition,” which celebrates the tide that lifts everybody’s boats, including those of the competitors.

But with this we are off on a tour of the world, or rather shopping’s world tour as it touches one spot after another and gets transformed by the local culture. Singapore is an old fascination of Koolhaas’s (see *S, M, L, XL*), but its dynamics remain an extraordinary object lesson—not only in development, but also in the way in which a city-state fits first into the region and then into the world itself. The Crystal Palace takes us back to origins once again (and to the signature of an individual, Joseph Paxton). The Depato, or Japanese department store, flings us, if not into the future, then at least into an extraordinary cultural mutation, intimately connected with the logic of Tokyo’s growth along the various private railroad lines that fan out from the world’s third largest city. And finally: Disney himself. For no study of any innovations in this area can be complete without a comprehensive recognition of everything—all the various things, from a new urbanism to a new kind of shopping, a new kind of globalization, a new kind of entertainment industry, even a new kind of Utopia itself—that Walt invented. Indeed, perhaps Disney and Disneyfication is better studied in this new

comparatist and globalized context than as a sport or typically American singleton.

But what about the mall itself, its space for example? There is a psychology of space in the mall—the patch, the corridor, the matrix—just as there is an ecology of the thing. And here the preconditions flow back in with a vengeance: not only air-conditioning and its very interesting history (more zany inventors and creative and obsessive dreamers), but also the escalator—the elevator had been a crucial operator in Koolhaas's early book on the skyscraper landscape, *Delirious New York*—with its momentous consequences for shopping space and building possibilities; this whole rich section takes up some thirty pages. And also, somewhat later on, the skylight and the sprinkler system; not to speak of the way the new space can hide its service systems out of sight—and not even to mention the precursor “technologies”: counter, display window, mirror, and mannequin.

But let us get on into the ideologies of the matter, for here at last we rise from the body to the soul: poor Jane Jacobs, for example, is cast as something of a Hegelian ruse of history in her own right for defending the fundamental features of a true city experience against the various urban and architectural modernisms, and thereby enumerating “the ingredients by which shopping could stand in for urbanity and creat[ing] a ‘city lite’ that became the model for resuscitating America’s ailing downtowns.” This seems a little harsh, but it is certain that Jacobs—credited by many architects and urbanists as triggering the postmodern revolution in their field—is no anti-capitalist and lays a good deal of stress on (small) business.

But with Victor Gruen we are at origins (we can’t call it “ground zero” any more; what about Harold-Bloomian genius?). For the mall was his brainchild, and it is certain that our experience of contemporary American space or non-space is to a certain degree disalienated by finding out that someone had the idea for all this, and that it is not just some weird accumulation of market-historical accidents but the result of human production. To stress Gruen’s achievement, however, is also at once to set off the canonical reaction and to recall, voluntarily or not, how few of the great modernists ever designed such things, let alone theorized them in the first place (whereas they have become a staple of the postmodernists). It is also to impose some reflection on that contemporary *auteur* who is the garish or mass-cultural equivalent of all these loftier aesthetic projects, and a true phenomenon in his own right: Jon Jerde, builder of Horton Plaza in San Diego and much else. The high art/mass culture split becomes unavoidable here too, as much as in every other contemporary cultural field.

But just as we are about to reflect a bit on that, and to go on to other related global phenomena—the Lippo Group in Indonesia; a return to the old Venturi-Scott-Brown notion of “learning from Las Vegas,” and a rich interview with the authors; feminism too (women and shopping are an

old and scurrilous topic); artificial landscapes; the relation of all this to psychology and psychoanalysis; the European resistance to the mall and its Americanizing consequences; and many other interesting topics raised by the second half of the alphabet—suddenly we come upon a black hole, generating prodigious energies in all directions.

IV. Down with the Junkspace Virus

It is Rem Koolhaas's contribution, "Junkspace," an extraordinary piece of writing that is both a postmodern artifact in its own right, and, a whole new aesthetic perhaps, if not a whole new vision of history. In the light of this serried text, we must pause and rethink the entire project. But first we have to look at the writing itself, whose combination of revulsion and euphoria is unique to the postmodern in a number of instructive ways. We knew Koolhaas was an interesting writer—in this, comparable to any number of distinguished contemporary architects; his books, in particular *Delirious New York* and *S, M, L, XL*, combine formal innovation with incisive sentences and characteristically provocative positions. But no single text in those books prepared us for this sustained and non-stop "performance" of the built space, not just of the contemporary city, but of a whole universe on the point of fusing into a kind of all-purpose indeterminate magma.

This goes much further than the querulous culture-critical complaints about standardization (or Americanization). It starts with junk as the classical *remainder* (what is left over after the dialectic, or after your psychoanalytic cure): "If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet." Very soon, however, Junkspace becomes a virus that spreads and proliferates throughout the macrocosm:

angular geometric remnants invading starry infinities; real space edited for smooth transmission in virtual space, crucial hinge in an infernal feedback loop ... the vastness of Junkspace extended to the edges of the Big Bang.

But this by itself could be little more than Baudrillard or television theory—the critique of virtuality as a promise (like the passing critique of Deleuzian "flows"): the point of the exercise is rather to find synonyms, hundreds upon hundreds of theoretical synonyms, hammered one upon the other and fused together into a massive and terrifying vision, each of the "theories" of the "postmodern" or the current age becoming metaphorical to the others in a single blinding glimpse into the underside:

Junkspace exposes what previous generations kept under wraps: structures emerge like springs from a mattress, exit stairs dangle in didactic trapeze, probes thrust into space to deliver laboriously what is in fact omnipresent, free air, acres of glass hang from spidery cables, tautly stretched skins enclose flaccid non-events.

As a tendency, Junkspace has been around for some time, at first unrecognized; again, like a virus undetected:

Architects thought of Junkspace first and named it Megastructure, the final solution to transcend their huge impasse. Like multiple Babels, huge superstructures would last through eternity, teeming with impermanent subsystems that would mutate over time, beyond their control. In Junkspace, the tables are turned: it is subsystems only, without superstructure, orphaned particles in search of framework or pattern. All materialization is provisional: cutting, bending, tearing, coating: construction has acquired a new softness, like tailoring.

It would be too simple to say that architecture and space are here metaphors for everything else, but this is no longer architectural theory, nor is it a novel whose point of view is that of the architect. Rather it is the new language of space which is speaking through these self-replicating, self-perpetuating sentences, space itself becoming the dominant code or hegemonic language of the new moment of History—the last?—whose very raw material condemns it in its deterioration to extinction:

Aging in Junkspace is nonexistent or catastrophic; sometimes an entire Junkspace—a department store, a nightclub, a bachelor pad—turns into a slum overnight without warning: wattage diminishes imperceptibly, letters drop out of signs, air conditioning units start dripping, cracks appear as if from otherwise unregistered earthquakes; sections rot, are no longer viable, but remain joined to the flesh of the main body via gangrenous passages.

These alarming “Alzheimer-like deteriorations” are realizations of the nightmare moments in Philip K. Dick, when reality begins to sag like a drug hallucination and to undergo vertiginous transmutations, revealing the private worlds in which we are trapped beyond time. But these moments are no longer terrifying; they are in fact by now rather exhilarating, and it is precisely this new euphoria that remains to be explained.

V. Empire of Blur

To be sure, Koolhaas means no more than perpetual renovation, and not only the tearing down of the old but also the perpetual recycling to

which the once noble (and even megalomaniacal) vocation of the Master Builder has been reduced: “Anything stretched—limousines, body parts, planes—turns into Junkspace, its original concept abused. Restore, rearrange, reassemble, revamp, renovate, revise, recover, redesign, return—the Parthenon marbles—redo, respect, rent: verbs that start with *re*—produce Junkspace.” This is the disappearance of all the “originals” no doubt, but along with them, of History itself:

the only certainty is conversion—continuous—followed, in rare cases, by “restoration,” the process that claims ever new sections of history as Junkspace. History corrupts, absolute history corrupts absolutely. Color and matter are eliminated from these bloodless grafts; the bland has become the only meeting ground for the old and the new.

We are henceforth in the realm of the formless (Rosalind Krauss, out of Bataille); but “formlessness is still form, the formless also a typology.” It is not quite the “anything goes” of the new generation of computer-generating “blob architects” (Greg Lynn, Ben van Berkel): “in fact, the secret of Junkspace is that it is both promiscuous *and* repressive: as the formless proliferates, the formal withers, and with it all rules, regulations, recourse.” Shades of Marcuse and repressive tolerance?

Junkspace is a Bermuda triangle of concepts, a petri dish abandoned: it cancels distinctions, undermines resolve, confuses intention with realization. It replaces hierarchy with accumulation, composition with addition. More and more, more is more. Junkspace is overripe and undernourishing at the same time, a colossal security blanket that covers the earth in a stranglehold of care ... Junkspace is like being condemned to a perpetual Jacuzzi with millions of your best friends ... A fuzzy empire of blur, it fuses high and low, public and private, straight and bent, bloated and starved to offer a seamless patchwork of the permanently disjointed.

There are no doubt still “trajectories” with their magical moments:

Postmodernism adds a crumple-zone of viral *poché* that fractures and multiplies the endless frontline of display, a peristaltic shrink-wrap crucial to all commercial exchange. Trajectories are launched as ramp, turn horizontal without any warning, intersect, fold down, suddenly emerge on a vertiginous balcony above a large void. Fascism without dictator. From the sudden dead end where you were dropped by a monumental, granite staircase, an escalator takes you to an invisible destination, facing a provisional vista of plaster, inspired by forgettable sources.

There are also, in this churning pseudo-temporality of matter ceaselessly mutating all around us, moments of rare, of breathtaking beauty: “railway stations unfold like iron butterflies, airports glisten like cyclopic dewdrops,

bridges span often negligible banks like grotesquely enlarged versions of the harp. To each rivulet its own Calatrava.” But such moments are scarcely enough to compensate for the nightmare, or to make the hallucinations all worthwhile. Cyberpunk seems to be a reference to grasp at here, which—like Koolhaas, only ambiguously cynical—seems positively to revel in its own (and its world’s) excess. But cyberpunk is not really apocalyptic, and I think the better coordinate is Ballard, the Ballard of the multiple “end-of-the-worlds,” minus the Byronic melancholy and the rich orchestral pessimism and *Weltschmerz*.

For it is the end of the world that is in question here; and that could be exhilarating if apocalypse were the only way of imagining that world’s disappearance (whether we have to do here with the bang or the whimper is not the interesting question). It is the old world that deserves the bile and the satire, this new one is merely its own self-effacement, and its slippage into what Dick called kipple or gubble, what Le Guin once described as the buildings “melting. They were getting soggy and shaky; like jello left out in the sun. The corners had already run down the sides, leaving great creamy smears.” Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.

VI. Breaking Back into History

But I think it would be better to characterize all this in terms of History; a History that we cannot imagine except as ending, and whose future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here. The problem is then how to locate radical difference, how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia. The problem to be solved is that of breaking out of the windless present of the postmodern back into real historical time and a history made by human beings. I think this writing is a way of doing that or at least of trying to. Its science-fictionality derives from the secret method of this genre, which in the absence of a future focuses on a single baleful tendency, one that it expands and expands until the tendency itself becomes apocalyptic and explodes the world in which we are trapped into innumerable shards and atoms. The dystopian appearance is thus only the sharp edge inserted into the seamless Moebius strip of late capitalism, the punctum or perceptual obsession that sees one thread, any thread, through to its predictable end.

Yet this alone is not enough: a breaking of the sound barrier of History is to be achieved in a situation in which the historical imagination is paralyzed and cocooned, as though by a predator’s sting; no way to burst through into

the future, to reconquer difference, let alone Utopia, except by writing yourself into it, but without turning back. It is the writing that is the battering ram, the delirious repetition that hammers away at this sameness running through all the forms of our existence (space, parking, shopping, working, eating, building) and pummels them into admitting their own standardized identity with each other, beyond color, beyond texture, the formless blandness that is no longer even the plastic, vinyl or rubber of yesteryear. The sentences are the boom of this repetitive insistence, this pounding on the hollowness of space itself; and their energy now foretells the rush and the fresh air, the euphoria of a relief, an orgasmic breaking through into time and history again, into a concrete future.

Such is then the secret of this new symbolic form, which Koolhaas is not the only one of our contemporaries to mobilize (but few do it better). To come back now slowly, to reenter as in a decompression chamber the more prosaic world of shopping that was the takeoff point for this delirious adventure, is also to search for the occasion, for what triggered it off, what provoked such a monumental and truly metaphysical reaction. It was in fact given to us early on, in an offhand sentence of Sze Tsung Leong, at the end of a more restrained and focused account of the commercial transformation of the globe which is, after all, the topic of the present volume: "In the end, there will be little else for us to do but shop." The world in which we were trapped is in fact a shopping mall; the windless closure is the underground network of tunnels hollowed out for the display of images. The virus ascribed to Junkspace is in fact the virus of shopping itself; which, like Disneyfication, gradually spreads like a toxic moss across the known universe. But what is this shopping we have been on about for so long (and the authors even longer)?

Theoretically, it comes in many packages (and predictably we can shop around for our favorite theoretical version or brand-name). The tradition of Western Marxism called it "commodification," and in that form the analysis goes back at least as far as Marx himself, in the famous opening chapter of *Capital* on commodity fetishism. The nineteenth-century religious perspective is Marx's way of foregrounding a specifically superstructural dimension in the market exchanges of capitalism. He understood "the metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" of the commodity as the way in which the labor relationship is concealed from the buyer (the "shopper"?), and he thereby grasped commodification as an essentially ideological operation, a form of false consciousness which has the specific function of masking the production of value from the (bourgeois) consumer. Georg Lukács's philosophical classic, *History and Class Consciousness*, the inaugural text of so-called Western Marxism, develops this analysis on the larger plane of the history of philosophy itself, resituating commodification at the center of the more general overall social process of mental as well as physical reification.

After World War II, however, the ideological orientation of this theme takes a somewhat different turn, at a moment when the sale of commodities and luxury items beyond those of simple subsistence or social reproduction becomes generalized throughout the increasingly more prosperous First World areas of Western Europe and the United States (and eventually Japan). At this point, the Situationists and their theoretician Guy Debord invent a new perspective on commodification in their dictum that “the final form of commodity fetishism is the image.” This is the takeoff point for their theory of so-called spectacle society, in which the former “wealth of nations” is now grasped as “an immense accumulation of spectacles.” With this perspective, we are much closer to our current assumptions (or *doxa*), namely that the commodification process is less a matter of false consciousness than of a whole new lifestyle, which we call consumerism and which is comparable rather to an addiction than a philosophical error or even an ill-advised choice of political parties. This turn is part of the more contemporary view of culture as the very substance of everyday life (itself a relatively new postwar concept, pioneered by Henri Lefebvre).

The images of the *Guide to Shopping* are thus images of images, and should thereby enable a new kind of critical distance, something they do conceptually by returning the notion of the commodity to its original situation in the commercial exchange. What we do with commodities *qua* images, then, is not to look at them. The idea that we buy images is already a useful defamiliarization of the notion; but the characterization whereby we *shop* for images is even more useful, displacing the process onto a new form of desire and situating it well before the actual sale takes place—when, as is well known, we lose all interest in the object as such. As for consumption, it has been volatilized altogether in this perspective, and, as Marx feared, has become altogether spiritual. Materiality is here a mere pretext for our exercise of the mental pleasures: what is any longer particularly material in the consumption of an expensive new car one drives around the local streets and has washed and polished as frequently as one can?

“In the end, there will be little else for us to do but shop.” Does this not reflect an extraordinary expansion of desire around the planet, and a whole new existential stance of those who can afford it and who now, long since familiar with both the meaninglessness of life and the impossibility of satisfaction, construct a lifestyle in which a specific new organization of desire offers the consumption of just that impossibility and just that meaninglessness? Indeed, perhaps this is the right moment to return to the Pearl River Delta and Deng Xiaoping’s postmodern socialism, in which “getting rich” no longer means actually making the money, but rather constructing immense shopping malls—the secret of which lies in the fact that to shop does not require you to buy, and that the form of shopping is a performance

which can be staged without money, just as long as its appropriate spaces, or in other words Junkspace, have been provided for it.

2003³

Notes

- 1 Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, and Sze Tsung Leong, eds., *Great Leap Forward*, Harvard Design School *Project on the City*, Köln: Taschen, 2002, and *Guide to Shopping*, Harvard Design School *Project on the City*, Köln: Taschen, 2002.
- 2 Rem Koolhaas, *Mutations*, Barcelona: Actar, 2001.
- 3 This article first appeared in *The New Left Review* 2, May–June 2003, and was published without page references.

Marc Angenot and the Literary History of a Year

As I wanted to say something about an unusual nineteenth-century literary history—a uniquely idiosyncratic literary and cultural history of the nineteenth century—I found myself wishing that I could also say something a little more general about literary histories and also about the nineteenth century. I have been interested in literary history as a form or genre for some time, without being able to observe the crystallization of a theory, or to discern the outlines of a model. I found myself reflecting on a number of key texts—Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero*, Adorno’s *Philosophy of Modern Music*—that I wanted to call dialectical histories or historiographies, without it being clear (to me) how the concept of the dialectical was meant to function: Was it to be a methodological signal about a certain procedure such histories always needed to perform on the preexisting stereotypes of history that they came into the world to correct, reverse, overcome, or undermine in one way or another? But then in that case these were to be thought of as exemplary texts, which could be imitated by other historians and replicated for other historical periods and other kinds of historical content. Leaving aside the question of whether the dialectic should really be thought of in that way as a method at all, I also wondered whether we needed copies of these unique narratives exactly, even if it should prove possible to reproduce them at all. For what tends to make all theoretical or philosophical questions of genre boring and intolerably old-fashioned is the persistence in them of the schema of the universal and the particular, or the general and the individual, or, worse yet, the genus and the species. But ours is an age peculiarly allergic to universals—whether for all that it is a nominalist age exactly is another question. At any rate, problems, which like this generic one invite us to rehearse the old formulas of the universal and the particular without challenging them in any way, tend to be discarded en route like so much excess baggage, if not ties that choke or unnecessary overgarments. Was the nineteenth century more inclined to

give universals the benefit of the doubt than we are? It is a question that might well go to the heart of the matter, and one to which I will return.

The solution to the question of literary history will only come at the price of disposing of this issue of generic universals in one way or another. I have always appreciated Claudio Guillen's idea that the genres form unique historical conjunctures, and that texts are not to be classified in individual generic categories like items dropped in a box, but rather that each unique text is to be grasped as an individuality presided over by a generic constellation like so many stars in the sky.¹ The genre is not a classification scheme but an idea; the text comes into a world in which that idea also has a certain prestige and needs to be reckoned with. Thus, the individual text is "about" the generic idea, just as it is also "about" a certain number of other things. But how you negotiate this "about" is another problem altogether.

I would like to short-circuit the model of the universal and the particular in a different way, or rather I want to suggest that these unique historiographic performances that interest me are characterized by just such a capacity and that they somehow all do exactly that: they neutralize the concept of universals by problematizing the practice of historiography as such, without abandoning it altogether. For the latter is the one kind of solution to our problem that will do us no good, namely, a principled repudiation of historical narrative altogether, on the grounds that we cannot think of any way of justifying it philosophically. What distinguishes these literary histories formally is that they call into question, absolutely and by their own practice, the very notion of doing literary history at all, but they do so by way of a literary historiography that does not provide a model and cannot be repeated. There is a rhetorical term for this, I believe: the *hapax legomenon*, which designates a category for which there exists only a single item or specimen, a universal for which there is only one particular. Such literary histories give you history, and then they acknowledge the problem as such—that of historiography, that of universal genres, but they do away with it by historicizing it, and by offering one final historical narrative that explains why the problem can never be solved, that is to say, why no model of literary history can be given, why you cannot imitate this one, which however *is* a kind of literary history. In short, they show us how you can have it both ways: find the very notion of literary history problematized as the age always thought it should be, and yet have a historical paradigm in the process.

If this way of doing literary history (and of not doing it) makes any sense at all, then we probably need to add on another generic question. For the lowest level of all literary history is the manual, which, sewn together with a few thread-bare concepts about influences and the evolution of forms, essentially furnished names, titles, and dates. Even in an age that has problematized the name (death of the author) and the title (textualization of the older "work of art")—what it has done with the date may well be the

topic of this discussion—even under such conditions, we probably still need to look things up from time to time. Will these lofty new self-destructing metahistories do that for us, and can they be put to basely practical uses of that kind? I think so, at least selectively, and I imagine that the “facts” they furnish along these lines also have something to do with the problem of the canon, or at least that they furnish counter-canons, alternate canons, alternate lists and dates, that problematize the categories of all those things as well and foreground the historical construction of such literary and cultural “facts” in the first place.

So much for literary history, at least for the moment; now we need to see if we can say something about the nineteenth century, which may in fact be the same topic, since the past, the various pasts, resolve themselves more or less into little more than that, provided you understand the literary in the largest sense of documentation, archives, and the like. Yet this is one specific archival past among many, and we ought to find something specific and distinctive to say about it. It is true that twentieth-century history—even twentieth-century literary history—has tended to eat away at this idea of a nineteenth-century one until there seems to be very little left of the latter. When you enlarge the notion of modernity, for example, you end up drawing a whole collection of formerly nineteenth-century phenomena into it, which now come to be seen as incomplete or emergent precursors or ancestors of their full twentieth-century forms: in the same way, industrialization—so nineteenth-century a thing once upon a time—comes to be seen as a preparatory stage for Fordism, if not post-Fordism altogether, while the emergence of the nineteenth-century press now comes to seem but a pallid foreshadowing of our own “media,” Napoleon III a feeble anticipation of the great modern twentieth-century dictators, the various arts of the last century little more than a trial run for the triumphant moderns of the beginning of our own.

It was not always so. Here is Ezra Pound on *Ulysses*:

The end, the summary, of a period, that period is branded by La Tour du Pin in his phrase “age of usury” ... The *katharis* of *Ulysses*, the joyous satisfaction ... was to feel that here was the JOB DONE and finished, the diagnosis and cure was here. The sticky molasses-covered filth of current print, all the fuggs, all the foetors, the whole boil of the European mind, had been lanced.²

I believe that Kenner somewhere marvels at this characterization of *Ulysses*, and we might want to as well; but there is the disgust with the nineteenth century, which begins with Balzac and at once reveals itself to be an immense junk shop full of dusty or broken objects, mildewed textiles, antiquated furniture that has to be thrown out, insalubrious dank passageways that have to be torn down to let the sun in, eccentric people and publishing

houses full of cranky and eccentric books and ideas, for which a satire very different from the joyous and social seventeenth- and eighteenth-century kind was needed: this century then seems to end with Celine's *Mort à crédit*; while most French characterizations of it will project the nineteenth century as the century of that object of disgust par excellence, the *bourgeoisie* and its mode of values and way of life.

Alongside this, I would like to set a rather different exhibit, Roland Barthes' well-documented taste for the nineteenth century and its leisurely "realistic novels," a nostalgia for this extraordinary bourgeois century and its secular furnishings and occupations, which reminds us that in France the nineteenth century may be thought to have outlasted formal chronology for very long indeed, perhaps all the way to the onset of the Fifth Republic. I am unable to say which camp Walter Benjamin belongs in, who certainly gave a whole decade of his last years to a virtual immersion in this nineteenth century from which, however, he also claimed he longed to awake: "This imminent awakening stands like the wooden horse of the Greeks within a Troy of dreams."³ One has the same question to pose to the Surrealists, whose *marché aux puces* is itself one immense nineteenth century in which the Balzacian talisman is perhaps to be found, and then lost again. But does anyone still need to awaken from the nineteenth century? And do we still need to lance the boil of its sickening, nauseating bourgeois culture? I do think that this remains the best way to live with the nineteenth century: this impossibility of indifference, this obligation to feel either nostalgia or disgust, if not both alternately and in rhythms that somehow define the present for you as well.

At any rate, the book I want to talk about in this article very much keeps faith with this unavoidable alternation: it is the *1889* of Marc Angenot, a cube of some 1,200 pages printed in Montréal in the centenary year of the title, and therefore perhaps not so well known as it ought to be, nor so readily available in American libraries. But it is already, I believe, a classic if anything ever was, and an intervention which, if it does not exactly "blast open the continuum of history" in Benjamin's revolutionary spirit, then at least makes it impossible for us to go on living with this late nineteenth century in the traditional way (if there ever was a traditional way).

As for the form of this literary history, however, it belongs to an identifiable if uncommon sub-genre that we may call "the story of a year." Of its various exemplars, I only want to mention here James Chandler's recent book on 1819, the Peterloo year, which has the formal interest for us of a reflexive history: he argues, indeed, that the very idea of a dated situation, the concept of a "year" as a category in its own right and a specific marker of cultural history as such, dates from precisely this "year" which is his subject.⁴ We will eventually want to ask ourselves whether anything of this reflexivity, this auto-designation, characterizes Angenot's own work. On

one level the question merely has to do with the year itself: is it a decisive year, as the year of Peterloo certainly was, or is it merely representative, and might one not have dipped into the stream of time a thousand days earlier or later? It is certain that many interesting things happen in Angenot's year: the centenary of the French Revolution, for example, and the Universal Exposition; the opening of the Eiffel Tower and the flight and suicide of General Boulanger; across the Channel the mystery of Jack the Ripper, and closer to home the first publications of two unknown writers, Henri Bergson with *Les données immédiates de la conscience*, and Maurice Barrès with *Un homme libre*; the double love-death suicide at Meyerling of the Archduke Rudolph of Habsburg and his lover; and the appearance of one of the climactic novels of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, *La bête humaine*. Enough to fill up any year, you will say, particularly if as is customary we add that it is the year of birth of Charlie Chaplin, Adolf Hitler, Martin Heidegger, and Jean Cocteau; but precisely something similar could be said about any year, I am afraid; every year is crammed full of just such astonishing and forgotten, yet unforgettable, *actualité* (a concept to which we will return). So we must presumably be careful not to reify the date in question, not to allow our arbitrarily chosen methodological frame to turn into this or that watershed, turning point, beginning, or ending of something.

We must also distinguish Angenot's year from other such stories by an implacable methodological decision. *1889*, subtitled "*un état du discours social*," concludes a scholarly project that involved reading every text published in France during that period, including a systematic review of journals and periodicals, parliamentary debates, the Belgian press, a sampling of cookbooks, and so on and so forth (I forgot to say that 1889 was also the year that saw the first *bande dessinée*). Angenot's decision, however, analogous to Barthes' in *Système de la mode*, excludes everything that is not written and printed: thus, the concept of "*discours social*" is distinguished from "cultural studies" generally by its omission of cultural practices and non-linguistic "texts" of all kinds (although the words that go with the music allow Angenot a first significant probe of the "café concert"). I think that this methodological choice also ties him closely to the surface of "*la chose imprimée*": attitudes, conscious and unconscious, are certainly revealed throughout these analyses, but "objective spirit" (or what Sartre liked, for the nineteenth century, to call "objective neurosis") is never allowed to organize itself into an autonomous and free-floating social object of some kind, even though the terminology of ideology, *doxa*, hegemony, and the like is certainly pressed into service, and we will want to examine it shortly.

At any rate, a project of this magnitude would certainly seem to qualify Angenot for the medal of a "hero of social discourse," if one existed. The

Italians call an *uomo coraggioso* a heroic trencherman, who is able, like Herr Jakob Schmidt or the climbers of Mount Everest, to put away anything in front of him, simply because it is there. The Chinese meanwhile respect and envy the strong stomach, the infinite reading capacity and experience, of the mandarin: a commitment perhaps more ambiguous in the West, where it can also be an occasion for disgust and nausea, as Angenot's opening invocation of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* suggests. But as I recall, Bouvard and Pécuchet, while occasionally exhausted, astonished, or in despair, never themselves feel nausea at their task: a reaction reserved for author and reader, as it perhaps is in the case of *1889*, which lances the boil of nineteenth-century ideology as comprehensively as Pound thought *Ulysses* did, yet another *coupe synchronique* which takes on a somewhat different interest in this context.

For this is perhaps the modernist, rather than the postmodern, strategy: to let history define itself as a totality of the cross-section, an immense yet ultimately limited inventory of "everything that is the case." Postmodern cultural historiography tends rather to be fancifully diachronic, I would think, and by the choice of an outlandish theme—Virilio's take on velocity, let us say—to pick out a chronological trajectory as bizarre as any García Márquez family tree. These trajectories are anti-representational with a vengeance, and I am tempted to say that their very power depends on the arbitrariness of their theme or starting point; to them also applies Angenot's denomination of the artifact, the construction or modeled entity, a characterization which for him holds for any partial or limited corpus:

Tout travail historique qui isole un champ culturel, un genre, un complexe discursif fût-ce en réinscrivant à l'arrière-plan l'esquisse d'une culture globale—produit un *artefact* dont l'apparente cohésion résulte d'un aveuglement aux flux interdiscursifs qui circulent et aux règles topographiques qui établissent, sous diverses contraintes, une coexistence générale de scriptibles.⁵

On the other hand, we may also wonder whether the synchronic method does not equally determine false perspectives of its own, most notably the baleful Foucauldian totality, in which the positing of the airtight system projects a well-nigh nightmarish closure.

But let's first outline Angenot's account of the preoccupations of this particular year, which begin, unsurprisingly, with French chauvinism and xenophobia, with the concept of the national language and all the legitimations and illegitimizations that entails—accents and foreigners, illiteracy and cultural distinction, the narcissisms of class amid the universalizing of fetishisms of the "*grande nation*" (as those significantly range from revolutionary republicanism to older and newer forms of reaction), along with fear of Germany contempt for "*perfide Albion*," malaise in the

face of Americanization (a word already in use in that period, apparently), along with the whole iconology of imperialism—higher and lower races, the “*mission civilisatrice*” and so forth (Angenot instructively reminds us that the first opposition to Jules Ferry’s imperialism comes from the right rather than the left). This sink of unwholesome representations inspires some mixed feelings on which I want to dwell for a moment. First of all, I would have liked to have all this identified from the outset as bourgeois culture par excellence, at the first truly secular moment of the first truly bourgeois state (leaving Holland aside): surely all the French literature of interest to us (at least since the Revolution) has always held precisely this bourgeois culture in scorn and loathing—even Flaubert, who found so much of it within himself, was able to repudiate it by way of self-loathing. But I think that Angenot’s position (like the more global Foucauldian one I alluded to) forbids him to acknowledge any negativity or critique or distance which would somehow fill outside the system. To be sure, he cannot take a diachronic nor even a sociological view of this mass of textual data, and must therefore omit the interpretive identification I have offered between a certain culture and a certain social class. But more than that—and the example of Flaubert could certainly be pressed into service for this alternative view—the possibility of negating the system is either programmed into the system itself and thereby remains part and parcel of it, or it is a retrospective illusion, obvious enough for us today but not available to the contemporaries.

Meanwhile, what of that retrospective viewpoint which is necessarily ours, and for which most of this constellation of attitudes—lumped together no doubt as “nationalism”—will be caricatural and scarcely invite sympathy or comprehension? Republicanism itself—the Jacobin tradition—has not had a very good press in recent times; and as for Left attitudes or even what Americans call liberal ones—Angenot has an unpleasant surprise in store for us in his companion volume, *L’Utopie collectiviste*, which patiently elaborates the analogous interrelated stupidities of the Second International in the same period.

I want to add something else, however, which is that this first anatomy of French cultural “identity” (as we might say nowadays) is for Angenot not merely a set of ideologies among others; it is the very subject position of all the enunciations that make up the “social discourse” of 1889. And it occurs to me that literary or cultural histories rarely begin in this fashion, with an account of the collective or hegemonic subject-position: we are generally given some facts of social history, some of the ideas “in the air,” a few of the great debates and the great cultural issues or problems; but the collective space from which such judgments and acts and works flow remains empty and indeterminate, unless we decide to objectify and externalize it, and identify it with a ruling class we can again see from the outside. Meanwhile,

a deep and inveterate, dare I say patriotic, populism has generally prevented American intellectuals from painting so absolute a picture as this one of universal *bêtise*.

Now I want to go on to sketch in the three basic directions in which this immense historiographic tour de force develops: they are a general sense of twilight and decline, in this *fin de siècle*; a perplexed awareness of the increasing saturation of social space with media information, in this period of newspapers and what Angenot calls "*publicistique*"; and finally an omnipresent and dominant form of thinking and writing which he calls "*le romanesque général*," and which narrativizes information and reality in some well-nigh universal fashion and which is novelistic, not because it comes from novels, but rather, the other way round, because the very rich novelistic production of the period feeds on it as its raw material and transforms it ceaselessly into its own cultural commodities.

The decline of the West, and more significantly and urgently the decline of France itself and the innumerable threats to French civilization and culture, is for Angenot (and long before Spengler) the dominant of 1889, a kind of collective cultural hypochondria (we will see shortly why the medical figure is not a gratuitous one here). We may of course want to observe that things are no different today and to hazard the guess that some such collective national self-doubts were endemic in France ever since the loss of the race with England. Angenot's characterization of the causes for this collective anxiety, of the situation to which it is a response—and it should be understood that strictly speaking, according to the premises of the analysis of "social discourse," he cannot posit a cause, but merely reconstruct the situation on the basis of so many symptomatic discourses—is a loosely Deleuzian one. If I am more hesitant about his use of the word "deterritorialization" it is on the one hand because of the more joyous and liberatory feeling the word seems to have among Deleuzians, and on the other because it is not clear to me whether it means much more than secularization, Weberian *Entzauberung*, or whatever other sociological cliché one wishes to summon up for the malaise that is inspired by developing capitalism and commodification. Nor does it have to mean any more than that, since the word is simply meant to designate the inaccessible and itself enigmatic or mysterious source of a generalized anxiety which, as an effect, is more palpable in these texts than any supposed cause. Or rather, the litany of supposed and hypothesized causes makes up the very substance and fabric of this social text, for which Angenot coins the word "*anxiogène*." The inventory is rich and savorous, the etiologies range from racial degeneracy to neurasthenia, from "symbolism" to syphilis, from the press and political venality to various "modern" technological developments (such as cremation, a hot topic in this period). The anti-Semitism has a field day, laying the groundwork for the Dreyfus case, only a few short years down the road,

but anti-clericalism is also highly developed, along with the predictable emergence of a secessionist Roman Catholic culture, even more intensely aware of “decadence” than the secular culture all around it. Here we may make a link with the conception of the novelistic or the narrative: for the conception of decline offers the interpretive framework in which all kinds of facts and events, scandals, new cultural movements, fashions, ideas and pronouncements, can be read and understood. Reality—but as we shall see in a moment, it would be more accurate to say “actuality”—is scrutinized for the signs of decay, and it is only in terms of this rewriting, this larger historical dramatization and narrativization, that things find their most satisfying meanings. This emergence of the category of the “signs of the times,” this obsessive symptomatology of current events and social developments—this is, I think, one of the phenomena Angenot has in mind when he invokes “le romanesque général.”

At the same time, the omnipresent feeling of this “decadence” offers an instructive context for new kinds of literary or cultural interpretation. Consider, for example, the list of figural synonyms that proliferate in order to translate all the shades of this feeling: “*gâchis*,” “*crise*,” “*nuit*,” “*crépuscule*,” “*chute*,” “*abîme*,” “*effondrement*,” “*dissolution*,” “*chaos*,” “*catastrophe*,” etc. (1889, 37–45). If one considers “high literature” to be a working-over of this primal raw material of ideology as which Bakhtin described social language itself, a transformation of that raw material into a tangible object (as Althusser suggested), not merely an object of what used to be called “aesthetic value,” but also an object on which a critical position can be taken and which can offer itself for analysis—then perhaps new perspectives became available for a rethinking of this period. Mallarmé’s great shipwreck, for example, the immense “*nauffrage*” of his poetic hero, can in that case be taken less as a questionable and melodramatic symbol of some kind, part of the poetic bric-à-brac of the *fin de siècle*, and something closer to a working-over of just this ideology of the shipwreck and the catastrophe so deeply inscribed in the language and collective ideology of this anxious period: yet something a little more than a mere remedy against anxiety, no doubt, and perhaps a little less than a full-blown ideological analysis or self-awareness. Meanwhile, on an even more massive scale, no one can doubt the kinship with the pattern of baleful heredity that gives Zola’s Rougon-Macquart cycle its organizational pretext: whether any critical distance can also be attributed to this fundamental *idéologème* of decline and fall is a question to which we must also return further on.

Heredity, symptomatology: so many symptoms of the *fin de siècle* Weltanschauung we are tempted to say, without asking ourselves whether the word “symptom” is not itself profoundly symptomatic. And indeed the other omnipresent feature of the ideology of decline lies in the prestige of medical discourse as a privileged mode of interpretation throughout this

whole period. The balefulness of the medical is something we have long since learned, from Foucault and so many others: that it rests on apprehensions about the body and sexuality has also become obvious, so that it may be less popular to observe that such apprehensions are no longer quite so important in our culture: “le dispositif de *médicalisation* de l’exégèse sociale qui est bien soutenu par l’hégémonie 1889, n’a plus grand avenir—mais d’autres autorités technocratiques prendront la relève” (1889, 1112). We are thus again confronted with the outmoding to the point of caricature of what contemporaries must have taken to be an existential characteristic and an “evidence” of daily life: what are we to do with errors of this kind, which are scarcely amenable to any imaginative act of the historical understanding?

The medical is at any rate a cluster of ideologemes which can in one way be studied in relative isolation: indeed, Angenot has devoted a spin-off volume, called *Le cru et le faisandé*, to just that, and it is one of his best and most readable texts. Here, however, he has a methodological warning for us:

Il m’a semblé ... que les caractères du discours médical sur l’hystérie par exemple ne sont pas intéro-conditionnés ni intelligibles dans leur immanence. L’hystérie (le discours de Charcot et d’autres sur l’hystérie) parle d’autre chose que d’un désordre neuropathologique, de même que les discours de la polissonnerie boulevardière parlent d’autres choses encore que d’Eden prostitutionnel et de chronique du demi-monde. Ainsi encore, le discours de terreur sur la masturbation, orchestré par les médecins, se lira dans un intertexte ou, par “déplacement et condensation,” il se fait homologue de la grande angoisse économique du gaspillage, de la dette publique, du déficit budgétaire, de la logorrhée des esthétiques décadentes, etc. (1889, 1080)

These mobile allegories, in which figures from one field offer themselves as tangible bodies for the spirits of another, at the same time that—as with the medical doctrines of “suggestion”—they do double duty as certified “scientific” explanations, Angenot has theorized in terms of discursive “migrations,” which one could ideally be in a position to map out according to their seasonal or sectorial rhythms (1889, 903). Clearly the medical sector is here and in this period a privileged one, which we cannot examine further in detail, save to add this interesting footnote on the development of the notion of the unconscious:

Ce qui me semble se produire en 1880–1890, date à laquelle la notion dans son imprécision devient “à la mode” chez les savants, c’est que “l’inconscient” va se séparer de “l’instinct,” de l’activité végétative (dont il est encore proche chez von Hartmann) de ce que chez l’individu relève de l’*espèce* dont il est membre, ou encore du “moi d’habitude” (Condillac), pour se mettre à désigner cette *chose* que relevant l’hypnose, la suggestion, “un monde d’affections purement vitales” dont

“nous ne percevons que le retentissement” car elles sont “hors du *moi*, mais le *moi* sympathise avec elles” (pour reprendre les termes de Maine de Biran dont les Français, par chauvinisme, font un précurseur). (1889, 421–22)

The privilege indeed of the medical figuration lies in the migration along with it of various levels of the body itself: thus on the one hand the dense realities of the individual body come to reinforce and to solidify the more disembodied figures of economic or social phenomena, while at the same time the concrete anxieties about the individual body itself add urgency to the more general national ones. Angenot points out that the omnipresent “Darwinism” of this period is scarcely drawn from Darwin himself, but rather from a long tradition of “social Darwinism” *avant la lettre* from Hobbes to Spencer: at any rate, it is certain that lived experiences of bodily illness, fever, deterioration, and even occasional convalescence, add power and content to the vaster collective and narrative fantasies of social Darwinism and a general crepuscular and entropic mood (1889, 876).

But now we face a significant problem: one which is both empirical, in the sense of the historical data themselves, and theoretical, in terms of our models. For is this not—this belle époque which is also a *fin de siècle*—the well-known apotheosis of the bourgeois doctrine of progress, of triumphant Victorianism and of Utopias of wonderworking machinery in the far future, the golden age of European supremacy nourished—in different degrees by the different nation-states to be sure—by the certainty of infinite perfectibility and a historical telos as straight as an arrow? How then to imagine the coexistence of this euphoric doctrine of the bourgeoisie as the very goal and end of history with the other darker visions that Angenot documents in so much detail, and which seep, omnipresent, throughout all the fields and divisions of labor of “social discourse”? It will be too easy, but not at all wrong, to pronounce the word dialectic and to posit some profound “identity of identity and non-identity” between these two registers of value, which can only seem incompatible to the logician and the positivist; on the other hand the appeal to the dialectic is not meant to shut down explanation in some premature and facile way, but rather to authorize the invention of new models; and this is, I believe, what we find in Angenot. It will come as no surprise that in a work of this range, which seeks to organize so varied an array of contents, the theoretical interventions must be punctual and concentrated, intent on sorting out the irrelevant meanings of a term like “ideology” or marking references to theoretical authorities from Bakhtin to Bourdieu, but above all to the Montréal school of “social discourse” of which the present work is something like a monument.

I will, at the risk of greatly oversimplifying it, hazard my own version of Angenot’s theoretical solution to the problem we have raised—progress versus decadence—which involves I believe a crucial distinction between

ideology—which is to say ruling class ideology—and hegemony in this textual sense of the omnipresent *doxa*, the “totalité du dicible, du narrable, de l’argumentable d’une société donnée ... [le] réseau complexe de relations interdiscursives [qui]enserre tout énoncé, tout récit et leur donne du sens” (1889, 627). In addition, it should be noted that hegemony, in this sense, knows its own dual logic of identity and difference, “deux tendances ... [dont] l’une rassemble des facteurs de cohésion, de répétition métonymique de recurrence, de cointelligibilité, l’autre des facteurs de spécialisation, de dissimulation, de migration par avatars ... ” (1889, 1096). This use of the term hegemony will perhaps surprise those who thought of Gramsci’s idea in terms of social power rather than culture strategy: it suffices to recall Angenot’s insistence on the policing function of hegemony generally, which controls not merely the channels of communication but the very forms of expression themselves and rules on what can alone be said. Hegemony in this form, as the Foucauldian omnipresent system, is really at one with the totality of social discourse in the sense in which nothing other than itself could possibly have been enunciated there.

In that case, ruling class ideology will be something somewhat different, and perhaps not altogether coterminous with discourse at all, and something closer to those mythological entities the sociologists used to call “values.” In the present instance, we have to do with the great official ideologies of Jacobinism and republicanism and of progress. These are the class ideologies of a triumphant bourgeoisie, and they offer positive visions of the world (and indeed, I am tempted to say, properly Utopian ones, on which other future and different Utopias will nonetheless have to draw). But they do not in that sense inform everyday discourse:

... la *doxa* reflète les luttes de classes sous forme de leurs résultantes et occultations dans les discours. L’idéologie dominante, officielle, est au contraire chargée d’une *mémoire*, de la préservation “religieuse” des plus anciens et plus légitimes préceptes idéologiques de la classe régnante, avec un bricolage, une mise à jour toujours précaire. L’idéologie dominante récapitule et adapte partiellement l’ontogenèse évolutive des forms idéologiques de cette classe (esprit des Lumières, jacobinisme, libéralisme, humanitarisme quarante-huitard, saint-simonisme, positivisme ...). Elle doit enfin remplir synchroniquement sa fonction de légitimation du pouvoir et de ses politiques. Elle a des monopoles, dans l’appareil scolaire par exemple et joue un rôle d’apparat qui lui conserve un statut officiel. Mais elle a aussi une lourdeur spécifique, elle est constamment pénétrée par la *doxa* et obligée de composer avec elle et ses thèmes chargés d’actualité. Le rapport entre l’idéologie dominante et les effets déstabilisants de l’hégémonie est d’autant plus problématique que l’idéologie républicaine doit à la fois consolider et remotiver des thèses anciennes tout en faisant face à des “temps obscurs” où son amour de la Patrie est contesté par les forces nationalistes-boulangistes, son

prétendu souci d'égalité par la montée des socialismes, des syndicalismes (sinon du féminisme) et son axiomaticque du progrès par le concert décadentiste des lettres et des sciences. (1889, 732)

We are familiar with the prevailing narrative of bourgeois ideology, whose most influential versions can be found in Lukács's work on the one hand and in Sartre's *L'Idiot de la famille* on the other: both posit the ways in which the universalizing doctrine of the Revolution—"liberté, égalité, fraternité"—which permits the class alliances that bring the bourgeoisie to power—is increasingly undermined and ideologically discredited by the emergence of a new class whose presence will become inescapable by the time of the Revolution of 1848. This narrative, which underscores the failure of nerve, the internalized guilt, and the symbolic self-maceration of ruling class or bourgeois intellectuals after 1848, is less effective in dealing with the persistence or survival of the ruling class ideology: Angenot's more complex model thus has some advantages in accounting for the ideological double-bind of the period, certain both of its destiny—progress—and of its fate—decadence. Meanwhile, we must also recall the oft-quoted remarks of Marx about the bourgeois revolutionaries of 1848. This is itself a two-stage narrative in which the revolutionaries of 1789 are filled with anxiety about the historical originality of their situation and their project, and give themselves courage by wearing ancient revolutionary costumes, while those of 1848 imitate this masquerade as a kind of fancy-dress ball and simulate, not the historical confrontation with the New, but rather the affect that resulted from it: a representation of revolutionary anxiety rather than the thing itself.

This is, I believe, the sense in which Angenot can deny the word ideology in its positive sense to the textual hegemony of 1889: ideology is in that sense the consciousness of a rising class, the ensemble of its values, its slogans, its Utopian visions, and there can thus be a genuinely bourgeois ideology only as long as the bourgeoisie remains an active social class in that sense. But this is no longer the case in the period in question here:

La vision du monde crépusculaire avec son pathos anxiogène, son ressentiment, ses mandats de reterritorialisation, *tient lieu* d'une idéologie bourgeoise (qu'on ne trouve guère esquissée que dans le saint-simonisme) qui aurait *aimé* et glorifié l'Effet-Capital jusque dans ses conséquences. L'hégémonie thématique qui domine en 1889 prétend aimer de tout son cœur ce que la "société moderne" vient fatalement désagrèger, dégrader, déconstruire. Amatrice de progrès, mais atterrée par les décadences et les morbidités, nostalgique des axiologies pré-capitalistes, la vision du monde fin de siècle se présente comme une vaste *dénégation* qui cherche à réinstaurer dans la "superstructure" ce que le capitalisme a pour vocation et dissoudre. (1889, 350)

This is also the sense in which Angenot reinterprets his own findings in the light of the question of modernity:

La modernité, perçue dans ses dominantes culturelles opérantes, c'est le retour obstiné, bien que métamorphique, des mêmes résistances [au moderne], avec toutes sortes de formations de compromis qui neutralisent le novum en feignant de lui faire place. Le discours social "moderne" reste une dénigration du monde moderne. (1889, 1112)

The discursive complex of this period then, with its various modernisms, is a substitute for bourgeois ideology and a systematic defense against modernity as such.

In principle, this new and more complex theory of ideology (and its distinction from hegemony) ought to open up new perspectives on the periods that follow this one, whose modernities have so often been understood to cancel this era out and indeed to break their oppressive ties with this nineteenth century altogether. Whether Angenot's synchronic form allows us to glimpse those perspectives is a question we will only be able to raise after returning to his story rapidly to set in place its other two basic themes, that of the omnipresence of journalism and "publicistique," and that of the dominance of the "romanesque général," the narrative or novelistic paradigm.

The conception of the latter owes much to the work, no longer widely read or influential, I think, of Charles Grivel, and participates in a more general poststructuralist suspicion of narrative that ranges from the general anti-communist critique of Marxian ideas of a telos of history all the way to *Screen* magazine's denunciation of the ideological effects of Hollywood-type storytelling. I do prefer the latter to the former, not so much because I want to defend providential conceptions of history in general (I agree with Angenot that "telos" generally means the teleological perspective of a specifically bourgeois notion of progress), but rather because I think that it is in the reduction of events to their individual dimension (as in Hollywood) that the vice of such storytelling lies. The collective also demands its forms of narrative, and it will have been clear that I want to consider *1889* itself as a kind of narrative of a new type. But this is, I think, not Angenot's view, for whom the "*gnoséologie*" of the "generalized novelistic" is an "apparatus of resistance to other cognitive procedures":⁶

Je pense que le "romanesque" a été dominant au XIXe siècle. Le discours social classique avait été oratoire; le XXe siècle devait être structural, nomothétique et relativiste ... Les champs scientifiques en 1889 mettent de l'avant un paradigme—expérimental, moniste, organiciste, évolutionniste. Il faudrait toute une étude pour montrer combine le texte savant demeure cependant perméable à la narration expressive romanesque. (1889, 198)

The stakes of this particular form of *Ideologiekritik* need to be spelled out: it offers a research program of the greatest interest, particularly at a moment when the pendulum of intellectual fashion has begun to swing back towards some generalized valorization of narrative as such. At the same time, it directs our attention toward the contamination of nineteenth-century discourse in general by the narratives of journalism, to which I will return in a moment. But it would also seem to harbor a deeper hidden indictment of the aesthetic itself, insofar as one identifies that with narration (we will examine the analysis of poetry later on in connection with journalism). Space permitting, this would be the place to stage a debate about the work of Zola, so supremely representative, particularly in Angenot's account, of the *doxa* of contemporaneous social discourse. And it is certain that *La bête humaine*, with its multiple allusions to precisely the actualities of 1889, seems to fulfill the doubtful program Angenot ascribes to the novelist of this period:

Le roman canonique fonctionne comme fournisseur bénévole de prestigieuses narrations anxiogènes répondant aux inquiétudes dominantes. Dans sa logique globale, il est au service du dispositif d'interprétation de la conjoncture, *ancilla doxae*. Dans la topologie interdiscursive, le roman opère la met en connexion d'une série de thèmes journalistiques venus de faits divers par exemple, et de thèses et axiomes venus d'ésotérismes médical, philosophique et scientifique. Il s'agit de connecter l'actualité transitoire et la vérité éternelle. Le regard romanesque, en concurrence avec le regard médical et neurologique, *voit* alors une société de détraqués roulant vers toutes les déchéances et confirme ainsi que tout le monde redoute. (1889, 836)

This is no doubt very much the sense in which the Zola of *La bête humaine* can also show “un joli flair doxique, la littérature à la mode n'étant souvent qu'un cocktail habile de *topoi* régulés par une protestation crépusculaire et confusionniste” (1889, 900). But then this text no longer presents much similarity to the novel admired by Deleuze and Barthes and by Michel Serres (and for which I myself have a great fondness, I should add). I hope the divergence does not revive the ancient aesthetic problematic, however, in which literary value somehow derives from its unpredictable, that is to say, its natural energies (Kant's notion of genius): as we learn the detail of the period ever more closely, Zola's text seems to grow more and more transparent; we recognize more and more of its borrowings from actuality and the essential banality of its content. Zola's own intentions then take on form and seem to denounce their own vulgarity and sensationalism, and what was at first a kind of strange and inhuman, meteoric apparition dissolves into a host of the most futile and obvious literary gestures. This is then contextualization with a vengeance, in which the contextualized

object ends up being completely volatilized by the ever more completely researched context and by our own fuller knowledge. In that case, the task of the historian is truly to obliterate the past, to work through it in such a way that we no longer have to repeat it, very much in the spirit of Freud's talking cure, and to free us in a joyous and Nietzschean forgetfulness. Let the dead bury the dead: we shall see in a moment whether poetry fares any better.

And indeed with this particular novelist we are in any case very close to that immense new continent of journalism and of "publicistique" about which 1889 also has so much to tell us: the new bourgeois "public sphere," not as it ought to have been, but as it really was. The statistics document an explosion in publications during this period, less in terms of book publishing (which showed a 20 percent increase over the preceding twenty years) than in newspapers and periodicals: thus, from thirty-six daily papers in Paris in 1870, the augmentation is such that by the year 1889 there are some 135, plus all kinds of specialized or ephemeral periodicals. Angenot takes an inventory of the division of labor represented by the genres of papers and their various kinds of "columns," as well as the pressures on and tendencies of this writing (1889, 1104). The bulk of his extensive treatment of the press is, however, divided into what may be called the objective and the subjective dimensions of time phenomenon.

Objectively, what must be described is the way in which the press produces a whole new set of categories (or constructs them, if you prefer a less historical language): these categories are not directly ideological, nor are they purely imaginary or arbitrary. Rather, they offer "schemata" (to use the Kantian term) for organizing experience as such and for deciphering the world. Henceforth, indeed, the interpretation of the world, the understanding of it, is condemned to pass through such categories (and this obligation, which cannot be circumvented, is another feature of the concept of hegemony). Thus, "la publicistique produit deux entités discursives corrélées, l'Actualité du *Temps* et du *Journal des Débats* n'est pas celle de la 'presse à un sou'"; and by the same token, as we still know very well today the struggle to characterize public opinion is often more important than the attempt to "influence" it, if indeed that notion has any coherent meaning when we are dealing with what Sartre would call a "serial" phenomenon par excellence (1889, 505). As for *Actualité*, the power to determine and classify what happens as such is a more subtle and intangible, yet perhaps even more significant new force that reaches even more deeply into private life and has its say in the way people tell themselves their own biographical stories: "L'Actualité est ce qui produit la rencontre inattendue sur une table de dissection doxique de réel imprévisible et de la nécessité idéologique" (1889, 597–98). Indeed, it seems possible that the novel (whose external links with the press we have seen in naturalism, but which also mutates into a new psychological or intuitive genre in this period) will discover a whole

new and perhaps more modern vocation when it begins to take as its deeper content the very categories of Experience and Event as such. As for the more obvious public forms of such categories, we need only think of the concept of the “*Affaire*,” as, along with the “scandal,” it organizes information from the social sphere (“en 1889, huit affaires ayant toutes une composante de mystère et d’horreur occupent les journaux”), to grasp the shaping power of this new form of writing (1889, 611).

Its subjective dimension would then be constituted by the awareness people in general have of its historical novelty: that is to say, their willingness to act on the basis of what is perceived as a fundamental change. But how to decide whether this is a subjective or objective matter? In one of the most interesting episodes of his exploration, indeed, Angenot comes to the matter of poetic production in this period, which can itself be thematized as it were objectively and subjectively, in the explosion of little magazines and esoteric presses on the one hand, and in the quality and themes of the poems on the other. The picture one gets from Angenot’s materials is one of an increasing saturation of public space by the public discourse of journalism and “publicistique” such that there is no longer any room for poetry as an autonomous discourse, or rather that poetry must open a space for itself: a hermetic space, outside the public sphere (or claiming to stand outside it), and ideologically disdaining everything marked popular or public (without that disdain necessarily taking on political and aristocratic or anti-popular overtones).

The model is the one with which we have become familiar in Bourdieu’s sociology, namely that the primal driving force of every intellectual activity is to secure an institutional space in which it can exist and perpetuate its existence: once it thus rationalizes its own specialized activities (rationalization being used here in a non-Weberian and psychological sense), once it can motivate its own existence, then it can turn its attention to the content with which it is allegedly concerned. The Bourdieu approach is thus more than a mere sociology of the intellectuals themselves, but also cuts deep into the structure of the various specialized discourses. That is, for example, the spirit in which Angenot describes the related crisis of philosophy, whose traditional concerns have now been replaced by the rise of experimental psychology in a neighboring discipline, so that little more than a watered down Kantian ethics is left over for the philosophers until Bergson appears, with the splendor of the rising sun, and signals the possibility of a counter-attack on experimental psychology in general and thus of an eventual *reconquista*.

Poetry cannot pull it off in quite the same way, although its situation is equally imperiled:

Vers 1880, le discours social ne produit plus rien (ni épique, ni vision d'avenir, ni tragique même) qui puisse être reconnu par le poète comme potentiel de sublime. Le problème est alors de savoir *ce qui reste* à faire. Car la poésie, malgré son haut degré de discrimination sélective, se nourrissait du discours social. Il ne restait en effet que l'aventure de la folie ou l'autoreprésentation de la forme. (1889, 818)

This diagnosis, however, would seem rather to hold for literature in general; the poets themselves need to pursue a more specifically linguistic strategy and to talk themselves into believing that they can locate some nonsocial linguistic space, some pure language outside of social discourse:

Le mandat qu'en tâtonnant se donnaient ceux que Verlaine appelait "les symbolos, les décardards," consistait à créer dans le discours social quelque chose qui *eût l'air* de n'en pas souvenir. Si l'on veut voir une telle opération dans sa diversité révélatrice, il faut considérer globalement non seulement l'hermétisme de Mallarmé, mais aussi les "floopetteries" du *Décadent*, la wagnérisation de la prose de Péladan, les pastiches de la Pléiade chez les zélateurs de "l'École romane," les divers procédés, "abstrus et abscons," de travestissement du discours social qui, dans leur concomitance manifestent la crise des lettres et la quête d'une autarcie, impossible et nécessaire, du poétique. La poésie rompt les ponts non par subversivité, mais par fidélité à son mandat *traditionnel* que menace ce que Mallarmé allégorise comme "Le Journal." (1889, 817)

For anyone who, like me, wishes to grasp literature and its forms in relation to the situation it confronts at a given historical moment, such an analysis is plausible indeed, and I don't wish to question it. But I do think it is important to point out that, in the very spirit of the Bourdieu analysis and in the light of the practical preconditions and requirements of his own project, Angenot has to think and show this. If the poets were, in other words and as it were, in real life, to be granted some space and some language *outside* social discourse, then the very constructural principle of 1889 would be called back into question: "le discours social" would no longer be a totality, and could no longer function as an absolute horizon.

But it certainly does so, and we need only to observe, as proof, the fateful reemergence of the august theological language that always tends to accompany the glimpsed emergence of that unrepresentable thing, the totality itself:

"*In eo movemur et sumus,*" dit Saint Paul: en lui nous évoluons et nous sommes. Le discours social est le médium obligé de la communication et de la rationalité historique, de même qu'il est instrument du prestige social pour certains, au même rang que la fortune et le pouvoir. En lui se formulent et se diffusent tous les "sujet imposés" (Bourdieu) d'une époque donnée ... Pour quiconque ouvre la bouche ou prend la plume, le discours social et *toujours déjà là* avec ses genres, ses thèmes et ses préconstruits. Il va falloir se faire entendre à travers cette rumeur, ce

brouhaha, cette facticité omniprésente. Nul ne peut se flatter de parler dans un vide, mais toujours en réponse à quelque chose. On songera à cet “*et ego*,” moi aussi j’ai quelque chose à dire, si perceptible chez les “jeunes poètes,” résolu à produire coûte que coûte de l’inouï. (1889, 1087)

Thus with a grand historical gesture, we find ourselves back in the universal stupidity of Flaubert, the ineluctable dizziness at human imbecility, the inevitable nausea of the social world and the world of speech itself:

Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And universal Darkness buries all.⁷

This perspective then inevitably exacerbates a question whose relevance it disputes in advance, and that is the question of the *novum*, of possible innovation, of the chance to say something new, or (at least for the historian) to glimpse something new in the process of emergence. I have said that for Angenot the glimpse of novelty is a retrospective illusion: we know which seeds have grown and which have not, but this is a knowledge denied the contemporaries locked in their present of time.

There is an exception to this historical closure, and it suggests that if the better cannot be identified here, then at least the worst can be identified: this is the solidification of any number of the elements of this *doxa* into a proto-fascism to come. It is a crystallization that will take place, unsurprisingly, around the name of Maurice Barrès, and what is constitutive of this grim *novum* is unexpectedly the falling away of all the pathos of the ideology of decline, at the same time that all its historical assumptions are retained, but now cynically and joyously:

“Simon et moi nous comprîmes alors notre haine des étrangers, *des barbares*.” Il le dit, mais ne dogmatise pas; il affiche la désinvolture d’une composition humoresque, en digression et fragments. C’est le contraire de l’enquête systématique des poussifs naturalistes. Barrès réclame un lecteur qui ne se prend pas pour un imbécile, qui devine autant qu’il lit. Le *mépris* forme l’*ethos* du roman et c’est un sentiment nouveau en littérature. Mépris des femmes, par exemple, mais sans avoir à le dissimuler derrière de poussièreuses argumentation évolutionnaires ... En tout cela, Maurice Barrès c’est la *nouveauté*, un nouveau chant, cynique et allègre ... Le texte de Barrès représente la véritable originalité. (1889, 842)

It is a breath of fresh air that will not particularly cheer the contemporary reader, a lone example of “subversion” and undermining that will not particularly help revitalize those concepts.

In conclusion, I want to deduce another place of the *novum* and the modern, of historical change, which is not identified in the text as such. I have already suggested some of the formal contradictions involved in the

choice of a single year: in particular the problem of reconciling its representative status with the inevitable uniqueness of its contents. The perspective of Flaubertian satire serves to transform that existential uniqueness. Occasionally, in a kind of science-fictional mode, names from the future are invoked—Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Musil—which can alternately serve as examples of method and of “le recensement et l’interrogation accablée des ‘idées reçues,’” but also, no doubt, of the fresh air to be breathed in when we break this stifling historical window, and reach . . . what? A new age? An age of critical and satiric self-consciousness? (1889, 1111, 1085) Yet this startles one by positioning self-consciousness or reflexivity in another temporal world, an alternate universe: later on, over the horizon of our sight, which has been so oppressively limited to this year and this age, this nineteenth century. I wish therefore to ask two questions, the first of which has to do with “modernism” in its more Anglo-Saxon sense and with the classical modernists in question. Is it possible that if we knew as much about their archive and their context as Angenot knows about 1889, the texts of Proust or Joyce or Musil would also be observed to disintegrate into a tissue of stupidities and commonplaces, those of Joyce into masses of the most obvious intentions? Is it enough that the writers of this later modernist generation shun Zola’s lust for the sublimation of the *fait divers* into literature, and his untimely (or even unholy) avowal of “la parenté qui existe aujourd’hui entre le reportage et le roman” (1889, 785)? But surely the *doxa* of an age can suffuse the literary text in many other ways than in that of overt allusion; and in any case, the fascination with the new realm of “actuality” is surely itself to be thought of as a kind of dawning self-consciousness. Angenot himself quotes any number of sources indeed who fasten on the journalistic phenomenon—grasped as a historical novelty and innovation—for further proof of the decline of the West (1889, 1095). Is it only this insertion into the “romanesque” of the period that deprives the writers of 1889 of their credentials as self-conscious critics and observers of the tendencies of the age?

Meanwhile, insofar as here finally “le discours social” is inseparable from the mass “de l’imprimé,” which is to say, of journalism, is this not a secret autoreferentiality of Angenot’s text itself to have thus designated its own precondition, its own conditions of possibility and production? These questions are not merely the desperate objections one grasps at in order to find something critical to say about an achieved project of this magnitude; they are also the desperate attempts to keep the lid from closing, to forestall the grim closure of the synchronic and the definitive imprisonment in the past. Must literary history make antiquarians of all of us? Or does 1889 in reality not perform the more Nietzschean function of letting us forget the nineteenth century once and for all?

Notes

- 1 See Claudio Guillen, *Literature as System*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 1971, and also *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- 2 Ezra Pound, *Kulchur*, New York: New Directions, 1938, 96.
- 3 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Boston: Belknap Press, 2002, 495.
- 4 James Chandler, *England in 1819*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998. See also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997; and Ray Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, New Haven, CT: Yale, 1981.
- 5 Marc Angenot, *1889: un état du discours social*, Québec City: Le Préambule, 1989, 1083; future references to this work are denoted *1889*.
- 6 *1889*, 197.
- 7 Alexander Pope, "The Dunciad," *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 1, ed. David Damrosch, New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999, 2557.

On “Cultural Studies”

The desire called Cultural Studies is perhaps best approached politically and socially, as the project to constitute a “historic bloc,” rather than theoretically, as the floor plan for a new discipline. The politics in such a project are, to be sure, “academic” politics, the politics within the university, and, beyond it, in intellectual life in general, or in the space of intellectuals as such. At a time, however, when the Right has begun to develop its own cultural politics, focused on the reconquest of the academic institutions, and in particular of the foundations and the universities themselves, it does not seem wise to go on thinking of academic politics, and the politics of intellectuals, as a particularly “academic” matter. In any case, the Right seems to have understood that the project and the slogan of Cultural Studies (whatever that may be) constitutes a crucial target in its campaign and virtually a synonym for “political correctness” (which may in this context be identified simply as the cultural politics of the various “new social movements”: antiracism, antisexism, antihomophobia, and so forth).

But if this is so, and Cultural Studies is to be seen as the expression of a projected alliance between various social groups, then its rigorous formulation as an intellectual or pedagogical enterprise may not be quite so important as some of its adherents feel, when they offer to begin the Left sectarian warfare all over again in the struggle for the correct verbal rendering of the cultural studies party line: not the line is important, but the possibility for social alliances that its general slogan seems to reflect. It is a symptom rather than a theory; as such, what would seem most desirable is a cultural-studies analysis of Cultural Studies itself. This also means that what we require (and find) in the recent collection *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, is merely a certain comprehensiveness and general representativity (something forty contributors would seem to guarantee in advance), and not the absolute impossibility of the thing being done some other way or staged in a radically different fashion.¹ This is not to say that absences from or gaps in this collection, which essentially reprints the papers delivered at a conference on the

subject held in Urbana-Champaign in Spring 1990, are not significant features deserving of comment, but the comment would then take the form of a diagnosis of this particular event and the "idea" of Cultural Studies it embodies, rather than of a proposal for some more adequate alternative (conference, "idea," program, or "party line"). Indeed, I should probably lay my cards on the table at once and say that, as important (indeed, as theoretically interesting) as I think it is to discuss and debate the matter of Cultural Studies right now, I don't particularly care what ultimate form the program ends up taking, or even whether an official academic discipline of this kind comes into being in the first place. That is probably because I don't much believe in the reform of academic programs to begin with; but also because I suspect that once the right kind of discussion or argument has taken place publicly, the purpose of Cultural Studies will have been achieved anyway, regardless of the departmental framework in which the discussion has been carried out. (And I specifically mean this remark to have to do with what I take to be the most crucial practical issue at stake in the whole matter, namely the protection of the younger people writing articles in this new "field," and their possibility of tenure.)

I guess I also have to say, against definitions (Adorno liked to remind us of Nietzsche's dismissal of the attempt to *define* historical phenomena as such), that I think we already know, somehow, what Cultural Studies is, and that "defining" it means removing what it is not, removing the extraneous clay from the emergent statue, drawing a boundary by instinct and visceral feel, trying to identify what it is not so comprehensively that finally the job is done whether a positive "definition" ever ends up emerging.

Whatever it may be, it came into the world as the result of dissatisfaction with other disciplines, not merely their contents but also their very limits as such. It is thus in that sense postdisciplinary; but despite that, or perhaps for that very reason, one of the crucial ways in which Cultural Studies continues to define itself turns on its relationship to the established disciplines. It may therefore be appropriate to begin with the complaints from allies in those disciplines about the neglect by an emergent Cultural Studies of aims they consider fundamental; eight further sections will deal with groups; Marxism; the concept of articulation; culture and libido; the role of intellectuals; populism; geopolitics; and, in conclusion, Utopia.

It's Not My Field!

The historians seem particularly perplexed by the somewhat indeterminable relationship of the cultural people to archival material. Catherine Hall, the author of one of the more substantive pieces in this collection—a study of the ideological mediation of English missionaries in Jamaica—after

observing that “if cultural history isn’t a part of cultural studies, then I think there’s a serious problem,” goes on to say that “the encounter between mainstream history and cultural studies in Britain has been extremely limited” (CS, 272, 271). That could, of course, fully as much be the problem of mainstream history as of Cultural Studies; but Carolyn Steedman goes on to examine the matter more pointedly, suggesting some basic methodological differences. Collective versus individual research is only one of these: “Group practice is collective; archive research involves the lone historian, taking part in an undemocratic practice. Archive research is expensive, of time and of money, and not something that a group of people can practically do, anyway” (CS, 618). But when she tries to formulate the distinctiveness of the Cultural Studies approach in a more positive way, it comes out as “text-based.” The cultural people analyze handy texts, the archival historian has to reconstruct, laboriously, on the basis of symptoms and fragments. Not the least interesting part of Steedman’s analysis is her suggestion of an institutional, and more specifically educational, determinant in the emergence of the “text-based” method:

Was the “culture concept” as used by historians ... actually invented in the schools, between about 1955 and 1975? In Britain, we do not even have a social and cultural history of education that allows us to think that this might be a question. (CS, 619–620)

She does not, however, say in which discipline such a research question might properly belong.

Steedman also suggestively names Burckhardt as a precursor of the new field (no one else does), and she briefly engages with the New Historicism, whose absence from these pages is otherwise very significant indeed (save for a moment in which Peter Stallybrass denies having any kinship with the rival movement). For the New Historicism is surely basic competition and, on any historical view, a kindred symptom with Cultural Studies in its attempt to grapple analytically with the world’s new textuality (as well as in its vocation to fill the succession to Marxism in a discreet and respectable way). It can of course be argued that Cultural Studies is too busy with the present and that it cannot be expected to do everything or to be concerned with everything; and I suppose there is a residual afterimage here of the more traditional opposition between the contemporary concerns of students of mass or popular culture and the tendentially backward-gazing perspective of literary critics (even where the canonized works are “modern” and relatively recent in time). But the most substantial pieces in this collection—besides Catherine Hall’s essay, these include Lata Mani’s study of widow-burning, Janice Radway’s essay on the Book-of-the-Month Club, Peter Stallybrass’s investigation of the emergence of Shakespeare as an

auteur, and Anna Szemere's account of the rhetoric of the 1956 Hungarian uprising—are all historical in the archival sense and *do* tend to stand out like sore thumbs. They ought to be welcome guests, so why does everyone feel awkward?

Sociology is another allied discipline, so close that translation between it and Cultural Studies seems at best difficult if not altogether impossible (as Kafka once observed about the analogous kinship of German and Yiddish). But did not Raymond Williams suggest in 1981 that “what is now often called ‘cultural studies’ [is better understood] as a distinctive mode of entry into general sociological questions than ... a reserved or specialized area” (quoted, *CS*, 223)? Still, this cross-disciplinary relationship seems to present analogies with that to history: “text-based” work over here, professional or professionalized “research” over there. Simon Frith's complaint is emblematic enough to be quoted in full:

Now what I've been talking about up to now is an approach to popular music which, in British terms, comes not from cultural studies but from social anthropology and sociology (and I could cite other examples, like Mavis Bayton's [1990] work on how women become rock musicians). One reason I find this work important is because it focuses on an area and issue systematically (and remarkably) neglected by cultural studies: the rationale of cultural production itself, the place and thought of cultural producers. But what interests me here (which is why this paper is now going to be a different narrative altogether) is something else: compared to the flashy, imaginative, impressionistic, unlikely pop writing of a cultural studies academic like, say, Iain Chambers, the dogged ethnographic attention to detail and accuracy is, as Dick Hebdige once remarked of my sociological approach in contrast to Chambers', kind of dull. (*CS*, 178)

Janet Wolff suggests more fundamental reasons for this tension: “The problem is that mainstream sociology, confidently indifferent if not hostile to developments in theory, is unable to acknowledge the constitutive role of culture and representation *in* social relations” (*CS*, 710). Only it turns out that the feeling is mutual: “Poststructuralist theory and discourse theory, in demonstrating the discursive nature of the social, operate as license to *deny* the social” (*CS*, 711). Quite properly, she recommends a coordination of both (“an approach which integrates textual analysis with the sociological investigation of institutions of cultural production and of those social and political processes and relations in which this takes place” [*CS*, 713]); but this does not do away with the discomfort still felt in the presence of the beast, any more than Cornel West's suggestion that the main advantage of Cultural Studies is that familiar old thing called “interdisciplinary” (“cultural studies becomes one of the rubrics used to justify what I think is a highly salutary development, namely interdisciplinary studies in colleges

and universities" [CS, 698]). This term spans several generations of academic reform programs, whose history needs to be written and then reinscribed in it in some cautionary way (virtually by definition it is always a failure): but one's sense is that the "interdisciplinary" effort keeps taking place because the specific disciplines all repress crucial but in each case different features of the object of study they ought to be sharing. More than most such reform programs, Cultural Studies seemed to promise to name the absent object, and it does not seem right to settle for the tactical vagueness of the older formula.

Perhaps, indeed, it is *communication* that is the name required: only Communications programs are so recent as to overlap in many ways (including personnel) with the new venture, leaving only communications technology as a distinguishing mark or a feature of disciplinary separation (rather like body and soul, or letter and spirit, machine and ghost). It is only when a specific perspective unifies the various items of study of communications as a field that light begins to be shed, on Cultural Studies as well as on its relations with Communications programs. This is the case, for example, when Jody Berland evokes the distinctiveness of Canadian communications theory as such: nor does this merely amount to some homage to McLuhan and his tradition and precursors, but emerges in a more contemporary form, in her paper, as a whole new theory of the ideology of "entertainment" as such. But she also makes it clear why Canadian theory is necessarily distinct from what she euphemistically refers to as "mainstream communications research," by which US communications theory is meant (CS, 43). For it is clearly the situation of Canada in the shadow of the US media empire that gives our neighbors their epistemological privilege and, in particular, the unique possibility of combining spatial analysis with the more traditional attention to the media:

The concept of "cultural technology" helps us to understand this process. As part of a spatial production which is both determinant and problematic, shaped by both disciplinary and antidisciplinary practices, cultural technologies encompass simultaneously the articulated discourses of professionalization, territoriality, and diversion. These are the necessary three-dimensional facets of analysis of a popular culture produced in the shadow of American imperialism. In locating their "audiences" in an increasingly wider and more diverse range of dispositions, locations, and contexts, contemporary cultural technologies contribute to and seek to legitimate their own spatial and discursive expansion. This is another way of saying that the production of texts cannot be conceived outside of the production of spaces. Whether or not one conceives of the expansion of such spaces as a form of colonialism remains to be seen. The question is central, however, to arriving at an understanding of entertainment that locates its practices in spatial terms. (CS, 42)

What Berland makes clear is that attention to the situation of theory (or the theorist or the discipline) now necessarily involves a dialectic:

As the production of meaning is located [by Anglo-American media theory] in the activities and agencies of audiences, *the topography of consumption is increasingly identified as (and thus expanded to stand in for) the map of the social*. This reproduces in theory what is occurring in practice. (CS, 42)

The dramatic introduction of a geopolitical dimension, the identification of a certain cultural and communicational theory as Canadian, in sharp opposition to a hegemonic Anglo-American perspective (which assumes its own universality because it originates in the center and need not mark itself nationally), now radically displaces the issues of the conference and their consequences, as we shall see at greater length later on.

On the other hand, it is unclear what kind of relationship to an emergent Cultural Studies is being proposed here. The logic of collective or group fantasy is always allegorical.² This one may involve a kind of alliance, as when the labor unions propose working together with this or that black movement; or it may be closer to an international treaty of some kind, like NATO or the new free trade zone. But presumably "Canadian communications theory" is not intent on submerging its identity altogether in the larger Anglo-American movement; equally clearly, it cannot altogether universalize its own program, and ask for a blanket endorsement by the "center" of what is necessarily a situated and "dependent" or "semi-peripheral" perspective. I suppose that what emerges here is then the sense that at a given point the analysis in question can be transcoded or even translated: that at certain strategic junctures a given analysis can be read, either as an example of the Cultural Studies perspective, or as an exemplification of everything distinctive about Canadian communications theory. Each perspective thus shares a common object (at a specific conjuncture) without losing its own specific difference or originality (how to name or better to describe this overlap would then be a new kind of problem specifically produced by "Cultural Studies theory").

Nothing better dramatizes this overlap of disciplinary perspectives than the various icons brandished throughout these pages: the name of the late Raymond Williams, for example, is taken in vain by virtually everyone and appealed to for moral support in any number of sins (or virtues).³ But the text that repeatedly resurfaces as a fetish is very much a book whose multiple generic frameworks illustrate the problem we have been discussing here. I refer to the study of English youth culture by Paul Willis (not present at this conference, incidentally) entitled *Learning to Labor* (1977). This book can be thought of as a classic work in some new sociology of culture; or as a precursor text from the "original" Birmingham School (of which more below);

or yet again as a kind of ethnology, something which now lights up as an axis running from the traditional terrain of anthropology to the new territory claimed by Cultural Studies.

Here, however, what enriches the interdisciplinary “problematic” is the inescapable sense (it may also be so for the other disciplines, but can there equally well be overlooked) that if Cultural Studies is an emergent paradigm, anthropology itself, far from being a comparatively “traditional” one, is also in full metamorphosis and convulsive methodological and textual transformation (as the presence of the name of James Clifford on the Cultural Studies roster here suggests). “Anthropology” now means a new kind of ethnology, a new textual or interpretive anthropology, which—offering some distant family likeness with the New Historicism—emerges fully grown in the work of Clifford and also of George Marcus and Michael Fischer (with the appropriate acknowledgment of the precursive examples of Geertz, Turner, and others). “Thick description” is then evoked by Andrew Ross, in his pioneering work on New Age culture: “the more exhaustive, or deep, ‘ethnographic’ study of cultural communities that has produced one of the most exciting developments in recent cultural studies” (*CS*, 537); while the very rhetoric of thickness, texture, and immanence is justified by a memorable period of John Fiske, which has the additional merit of bringing out some of the practical stakes of the debate (which are far from boiling down to a battle of mere disciplinary claims and counterclaims):

I would like to start with the concept of “distance” in cultural theory. Elsewhere I have argued that “distance” is a key marker of difference between high and low culture, between the meanings, practices, and pleasures characteristic of empowered and disempowered social formations. Cultural distance is a multidimensional concept. In the culture of the socially advantaged and empowered it may take the form of a distance between the art object and reader/spectator: such distance devalues socially and historically specific reading practices in favor of a transcendent appreciation or aesthetic sensibility with claims to universality. It encourages reverence or respect for the text as an art object endowed with authenticity and requiring preservation. “Distance” may also function to create a difference between the experience of the art work and everyday life. Such “distance” produces ahistorical meanings of art works and allows the members of its social formation the pleasures of allying themselves with a set of humane values that in the extreme versions of aesthetic theory, are argued to be universal values which transcend their historical conditions. This distance from the historical is also a distance from the bodily sensations, for it is our bodies that finally bind us to our historical and social specificities. As the mundanities of our social conditions are set aside, or distanced, by this view of art, so, too, are the so-called sensuous, cheap, and easy pleasures of the body distanced from the more contemplative, aesthetic pleasures of the mind. And finally this distance takes the form of

distance from economic necessity; the separation of the aesthetic from the social is a practice of the elite who can afford to ignore the constraints of material necessity, and who thus construct an aesthetic which not only refuses to assign any value at all to material conditions, but validates only those art forms which transcend them. This critical and aesthetic distance is thus, finally, a marker of distinction between those able to separate their culture from the social and economic conditions of the everyday and those who cannot. (*CS*, 154)

But the contents of the present volume do not particularly bear out Ross's claim, except for his own lucid study of that uniquely ambiguous "interpretive community" which is the new yuppie culture of the New Age people; whereas Fiske's clarion call does not so much lead us down the road to anthropology as an experimental discipline (and mode of writing), as to a whole new politics of intellectuals as such.

Indeed, Clifford's own paper—a description of his exciting new work on the ethnology of travel and tourism—already implicitly redefines the polemic context by offering a displacement of the traditional ethnographic conception of "fieldwork": "ethnography (in the normative practices of twentieth-century anthropology) has privileged relations of dwelling over relations of travel": this squarely redefines the intellectual and the anthropologist-ethnographer-observer as a kind of traveler and a kind of tourist, and it now at once rewrites the terms of this conference, whose attempt to define that thing called Cultural Studies—far from being an academic and a disciplinary issue—in fact turns on the status of the intellectual as such in relationship to the politics of the so-called new social movements or microgroups (*CS*, 99).

To put it this way is to make clear the discomfort necessarily triggered among many of the other participants by Clifford's "modest proposal": far from being mere "tourists" or even travelers, most of them want to be true "organic intellectuals" at the very least, if not something more (but what would that "something more" be exactly?). Even the cognate notion of the exile or neo-exile, the diasporic intellectual invoked by Homi Bhabha (whose remarks on the Rushdie affair—"Blasphemy is the migrant's shame at returning home"—struck me as being extraordinarily pertinent and suggestive), proposes an intermittency or alternation of subject and object, of voice and substance, of theorist and "native," which secures an equally intermittent badge of group membership for the intellectual that is not available to the white male Clifford (or to the present reviewer either) (*CS*, 62).

Social Groups: Popular Front or United Nations?

But the desire called the organic intellectual is omnipresent here, although it is not often expressed as openly as it is by Stuart Hall himself when, in one of the grandest Utopian moments of the conference, he proposes the ideal of “living with the possibility that there *could* be, sometime, a movement which would be larger than the movement of petit-bourgeois intellectuals” (CS, 288). Here is what Hall says about Gramsci in this respect:

I have to confess that, though I’ve read many more elaborated and sophisticated accounts, Gramsci’s account still seems to me to come closest to expressing what it is I think we were trying to do. Admittedly, there’s a problem about his phrase “the production of organic intellectuals.” But there is no doubt in my mind that we were trying to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce an organic intellectual. We didn’t know previously what that would mean, in the context of Britain in the 1970s, and we weren’t sure we would recognize him or her if we managed to produce it. The problem about the concept of an organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historic movement and we couldn’t tell then, and can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found. We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope (to use Gramsci’s phrase from another context) that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjuncture ever appeared. More truthfully, we were prepared to imagine or model or simulate such a relationship in its absence: “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” (CS, 281)

The Gramscian notion, however, whose double focus structurally includes intellectuals on the one hand and social strata on the other, is most often in the present collection and in the present context not interpreted as a reference to alliance politics, to a historic bloc, to the forging of a heterogeneous set of “interest groups” into some larger political and social movement, as it was in Gramsci and still seems to be in this formulation by Stuart Hall.

Rather, its reference here seems universally to be that of the “identity politics” of the new social movements or what Deleuze calls microgroups. Certainly Cultural Studies has widely been felt to be an alliance space of just this kind (if not exactly a movement in the Gramscian sense, unless you understand its academic ambitions—to achieve recognition and institutional sanction, tenure, protection from traditional departments and the New Right—as a politics, indeed the only politics specific to Cultural Studies as such).⁴ Thus, it welcomes together feminism and black politics, the gay movement, Chicano studies, the burgeoning “postcolonial” study groups, along with more traditional aficionados of the various popular and mass cultures (they can also, in traditional academia, be counted as a kind of

stigmatized and persecuted minority), and the various (mostly foreign) Marxist hangers-on. Of the forty-one (published) participants, there is a relatively even gender distribution (twenty-four women, twenty-one men); there are twenty-five Americans, eleven British, four Australians, two Canadians, and one Hungarian and Italian, respectively; there are thirty-one white people, six black people, two Chicanos, and two Indians (from the subcontinent); and there seem to be at least five gay people out of the forty-some. As for the disciplines or departments themselves, they seem to fall out as follows: English takes the lion's share with eleven, as might have been predicted; Communications, Sociology, and Art History are distant runners-up with four each; there are three representatives of Humanities programs; two each from Women's Studies, Cultural Studies proper, History of Consciousness, and Radio, Television, and Film; while Religion and Anthropology have one representative each.

But these (admittedly very impressionistic) breakdowns do not reflect the group, subgroup, or subcultural ideological positions very accurately. As opposed to only four "traditional" feminist papers, for example, there are at least two gay statements. Of the five black statements, one also raises feminist issues (or rather, it would be more accurate to say that Michele Wallace's paper is a statement of a black feminist position as such), while two more raise national questions. One of the two Chicano papers is also a feminist statement. There are ten recognizably mass-cultural or popular-cultural topics which tend to displace emphasis from "identity" issues to media ones.

I indulge this exercise as much to show what seems to have been omitted from the Cultural Studies problematic as what is included in it. Only three papers seem to me to discuss the issue of group identity in any kind of central way (while Paul Gilroy's attack on the slogan, which he translates as "ethnic absolutism," is best examined in another context, below); and of those only Elspeth Probyn's intricately referenced essay makes a stab at a theory of collective identity or at least of collective enunciation, as such: asking us "to go beyond discrete positions of difference and to refuse the crisis mode of representation ... to make the sound of our identities count as we work to construct communities of caring" (*CS*, 511). Such sounds seem to be rather wild ones, however, as when we are told "how images of the self can work successfully to annoy, to enervate discursive fixities and extra-discursive expectations" (*CS*, 506).

But the papers by Kobena Mercer and by Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg are already en route toward something rather different from classic identity theory. Mercer, indeed, opens a path-breaking exploration into the way in which the 60s image of black militancy was able to serve as a suggestive and a liberating model for the politics of other groups; while Sanchez-Tranquilino displaces the more psychological or philosophical

problematic of “identity” back onto the social matter of nationalism: “What is at issue in this resurrection of the *pachuco* in the late 1970s is ... the representation of ... militancy through the articulation of the *pachuco* into the politics of identity of a *nationalist* movement. The problems here are the problems of all nationalisms ... ” (CS, 562)

Maybe so: but the nationalisms—let’s better say the separatisms—are not present here: feminist, lesbian, gay separatisms are not represented as such, and if there are still any black separatisms left, they are certainly not here either; of the other ethnic groups, only the Chicanos are here, to represent themselves and perhaps stand in for some of those other movements (but not for the more traditional national *ethnies*, whose problems are interestingly different from these, as witness the debates about Greece as a minor culture⁵); while the “postcolonials” tirelessly make the point (as in the Homi Bhabha essay already referred to) that the diasporic fact and experience is the very opposite of one of ethnic separatism.

This is to say, then, that this particular space called Cultural Studies is not terribly receptive to unmixed identities as such, but seems on the contrary to welcome the celebration (but also the analysis) of the mixed, per se, of new kinds of structural complexity. Already Bakhtinian tones were invoked to dispel the monologic (and is not cultural separatism the longing for a certain monological discourse?): Clifford wishes “not to assert a naive democracy of plural authorship, but to loosen at least somewhat the monological control of the executive writer/anthropologist” (CS, 100), while Stalleybrass’s remarkable piece on the invention of “Shakespeare” replaces the modern “single author” with a “network of collaborative relations,” normally between two or more writers, between writers and acting companies, between acting companies and printers, between composers and proofreaders, between printers and censors such that there is also no single moment of the “individual text” (CS, 601). The problematic of the *auteur* then reminds us to what degree the narrative notion of a single, albeit collective, agency is still operative in many garden-variety notions of “identity” (and indeed returns on the last page of this anthology in Angela McRobbie’s stirring invocation of the mission of Cultural Studies in the 1990s to act “as a kind of guide to how people see themselves ... as active agents whose sense of self is projected onto and expressed in an expansive range of cultural practices” [CS, 730]). But that isolationist conception of group identity would at best open up a space for Cultural Studies in which each of the groups said its piece, in a kind of United Nations plenary session, and was given respectful (and “politically correct”) hearing by all the others: neither a stimulating nor a very productive exercise, one would think.

The “identities” in question in the present volume are, however, mainly dual ones: for them black feminism is the paradigm (but also Chicana

feminism, as in Angie Chabram-Dernersesian's lively essay). Indeed, I'm tempted to suggest that Cultural Studies today (or at least that proposed by this particular collection and conference) is very much a matter of dual citizenship, of having at least a dual passport, if not more of them. The really interesting and productive work and thought does not seem to happen without the productive tension of trying to combine, navigate, and coordinate several "identities" at once, and several commitments, several positions: it's like a replay of Sartre's old notion that the writer is better off having to address at least two distinct and unrelated publics at the same time. Once again, it is in Stuart Hall's reflective and wide-ranging remarks (as one of the precursors or founding figures of the older, Birmingham "Cultural Studies") that the necessity for living with these tensions is affirmed as such (*CS*, 284). To be sure, in this particular passage he means the tension between text and society, between superstructure and base, what he calls the necessary "displacement" of culture out of the social real into the imaginary. But he had also before that recalled the tensions involved in multiple ideological influences and commitments, to Marxism but also to feminism, to structuralism or the "linguistic turn," as so many distinct forces of gravity, which made up the richness of the school to respond to, rather than to achieve the final synthesis, iron out the contradictions, and flatten these multiple operations out into a single program or formula. The tensions between group identities, one would think, offer a more productive field of force than the interdisciplinary ambivalences discussed earlier, but all this then threatens to be flattened out and defused in a rather different way by the competing disciplinary formula of postmodernism and its version of pluralism, a topic which is here on the whole systematically avoided and eluded, for a reason that now becomes obvious.

Cultural Studies as a Substitute for Marxism

To stage a frontal assault on postmodernism as such, indeed, and to argue for the philosophical necessity of a Cultural Studies that was something other than a postmodern celebration of the effacement of the boundaries of high and low, the pluralism of the microgroups and the replacement of ideological politics with image and media culture, would require a reassessment of the traditional relationship of the general Cultural Studies movement with Marxism that evidently exceeded the ambitions of the present conference. Marxism is there for the most part evidently understood as yet another kind of group identity (but then of a very tiny group indeed, at least in the US) rather than as the kind of problematic—and problem!—which Stuart Hall evokes ("the questions that Marxism as a theoretical project put on the agenda ... questions [which] are what one meant by

working within shouting distance of Marxism, working on Marxism, working against Marxism, working with it, working to try to develop Marxism”) (*CS*, 279). Yet it would be all the more important to come to grips with these issues, insofar as, in the US, Cultural Studies, as Michael Denning has argued for its precursor and competitor American Studies, can equally well be seen to be a “substitute” for Marxism as a development of it.⁶ But not even Raymond Williams’s strategic British reformulation of Marxism as “cultural materialism” receives attention here (nor have the Americans shown much anxiety in general about the problem of avoiding “idealism”); nor is the political will implicit in the Birmingham group fully as much as in Williams generally in much evidence in these pages, about which it needs to be stressed again and again (for both) that Cultural Studies or “cultural materialism” was essentially a political project and indeed a Marxist project at that. When foreign theory crosses the Atlantic, it tends to lose much of its contextual political or class overtones (as witness the evaporation of so much of that from French theory). Nowhere is this process more striking, however, as in the current American reinvention of what was in Britain a militant affair and a commitment to radical social change.

The usual American anti-Marxian litanies are, however, in the current volume only occasionally and perfunctorily intoned. A systemic transformation (which they do not, however, want to call “postmodern” for some reason) is evoked with gusto by Sanchez-Tranquilino and Tagg:

As long as the Museum could be conceived as an Ideological State Apparatus ... it was possible to imagine another place, another consciousness ... Now, with the undermining of these categories and logics, both sides seem to have been flung out or sucked into a gravity-less space ... Such forms of sociological explanation have themselves been caught in the internal collapse of the discipline they claim to critique. (556–57)

There is fortunately very little of the silliest of the usual claims, that Marxism is antifeminist or excludes women; but “high feminism” also seems enveloped in another familiar reproach, namely that Cultural Studies does not do Grand Theory anymore (“in which massive, world-historical problems are debated on such a level of generality that they cannot possibly be solved”): a reproach that is specifically directed against Marxism, but seems also to secure the fairly thoroughgoing evacuation of any number of other grand theories and grand names besides feminism—psychoanalysis, Lacanianism, deconstruction, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida, Virilio, Deleuze, Greimas, etc. (with Raymond Williams—but no longer with Gramsci, Brecht, or Benjamin—an exception, and one of the still minimally operative icons of the new movement) (*CS*, Morris, 466).

Still, it seems possible that as the noisiest detractors of “grand theory” are

the Australians, this particular move may owe something to the idiosyncratic and anarchist roots of Australian radicalism. It is, indeed, from Australia that another even more sinister variant of this otherwise harmless anti-intellectualism comes, in Tony Bennett's specifically political and "activist" critique of Marxism. After hastening to except the "new social movements" from his own reformist structures on political activity, he describes his position as follows:

What it *is* to argue against are ways of conducting both of these aspects of political processes [alliances and single-issue politics], and of connecting them to one another, in ways which anticipate—and are envisaged as paving the way for—the production of a unified class, gender, people, or race as a social agent likely to take decisive action in a moment of terminal political fulfillment of a process assigned the task of bringing that agent into being. And it is to do so precisely because of the degree to which such political projects and the constructions which fuel them hinder the development of more specific and immediate forms of political calculation and action likely to improve the social circumstances and possibilities of the constituencies in question. (CS, 32)

Laclau/Mouffe versus Gramsci? Versus Lenin? Bennett versus Laclau/Mouffe? The frame of reference is impossible to determine, particularly since no one (on the Left) has ever believed in any "unified class, gender, people, or race" in the first place (and certainly not Gramsci, who has been summarily sent packing in the preceding pages as being no longer "of much service politically") (CS, 29). Bennett's is a genuine "thought of the other," busy tracking down and denouncing the ideological errors of all these enemies on the Left in the shrillest traditions of Althusserian hectoring. Nor does he seem to realize how obscene American Left readers are likely to find his proposals on

talking to and working with what used to be called the ISAs rather than writing them off from the outset and then, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, criticizing them again when they seem to affirm one's direst functionalist predictions. (CS, 32)

The invitation to stop mouthing Marxist slogans (grand theory) and to enter the (presumably vaguely social-democratic) government may have some relevance in a small country with socialist traditions, but it is surely misplaced advice here (and in any case quite impossible to fulfill). The tone of this essay, given pride of place for alphabetical reasons at the very opening of the volume, is remarkably misleading as to the spirit of the collection as a whole; what is more distressing is the ignorance it betrays about the structural differences of the various national situations today, one of the strong themes of the present volume and paradoxically one which the Australian

contributors themselves play a central role in establishing, as we shall see shortly.

But this particular formulation by Bennett leads on to the fundamental anti-Marxian stereotype, for the passage quoted can readily be translated back into the hoariest of all negative buzzwords, “totalization”—namely some kind of totalitarian and organic homogenization to which the “Marxists” are supposed to subject all forms of difference. In Sartre, however, this originally philosophical term simply meant the way in which perceptions, instruments, and raw materials were linked up and set in relationship to each other by the unifying perspective of a project (if you don’t have a project or don’t want one, it obviously no longer applies). I’m not sure whether this concept projects a model exactly (or is constructed according to the image of one); but I suspect it would not matter much, since conceptions of *relationship*—however they attempt to keep their terms distinct and separate—tend to slip into images of an undifferentiated mass. Witness the fortunes of the at least pop-philosophical concept of the “organic” which once designated the radical difference in function between the various organs (one of Marx’s fundamental figures in the *Grundrisse* was that of “metabolism”), but now seems to mean turning them all into the same thing. The “organic” has thus, along with “linear history” (a construction I believe we owe to McLuhan), become one of the fundamental post-structural indices of error (at least until “totalization” came along). Of course, one can stop using these words for tactical reasons (and to abridge lexical and philological explanations such as this one); but surely on any dispassionate view the present collection is crammed full of various acts of totalization which it would serve no good purpose to track down and eliminate unless your aim is to return to that kind of simon-pure, solid-color theorization which has, in connection with the politics of an unmixed identity, been argued to be incompatible with the essentially mixed nature of Cultural Studies in the first place.

Articulation: A Truck Driver’s Manual

These acts of totalization are, however, camouflaged by a new figure, which—unlike the Sartrean coinage of totalization itself—has a respectable poststructural theoretical correctness about it (and which, like all figures, displaces the terms of the old one just slightly). This is the omnipresent concept of *articulation*, about which we urgently need a lexical entry in some larger ideological dictionary of the objective spirit of the period. Derived, like “organic,” from the body as a reference, it rather designates the bony parts and the connections of the skeleton, than the soft organic organs (and perhaps the rigor and mechanical quality plays some part in its current

favor), but is then quickly transferred to speech, as in a very allegory of the "linguistic turn" itself. My sense is that we owe its compulsive use to Althusser (whose influence may then have had some effect on Foucault's even more compulsive figures of segmentation and spatial divisibility), with generalization via Ben Brewster's elegant English-language reinvention, and Poulantzas's political extensions, along with Pierre-Philippe Rey's anthropology, thence to Hindess and Hirst, and on into a generalized theoretical lingua franca, shortly to be rejoined by such current favorites as "to erase," "circulation," "constructed," and the like. What is less often remembered is that Althusser actually found this seemingly Althusserian and structuralist-sounding word in Marx himself, and specifically in the great unfinished program essay of August 1857 which was to have served as the introduction to the *Grundrisse*.⁷

Here *Gliederung* designates the articulation of the categories (and realities) of production, distribution, and consumption among each other (in this form it is a suggestive model whose application remains to be explored). Meanwhile, it is important to stress the well-nigh independent and extraordinarily rich development of the concept of articulation by the Birmingham School itself, at a crucial moment in its history when the intersections of race, gender, and class became an urgent theoretical problem. Catherine Hall's formulation is here canonical:

I don't think that we have, as yet, a theory as to the articulation of race, class, and gender and the ways in which these articulations might generally operate. The terms are often produced as a litany, to prove political correctness, but that does not necessarily mean that the forms of analysis which follow are really shaped by a grasp of the workings of each axis of power in relation to the others. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to do such work because the level of analysis is necessarily extremely complex with many variables in play at any one time. Case studies, therefore, whether historical or contemporary, which carefully trace the contradictory ways in which these articulations take place both in historically specific moments and over time, seem to me to be very important. (*CS*, 270–71)

Perhaps the suggestion of what theory ought to be ("we do not yet have a theory") gives a little too much aid and comfort to those who are allergic to "grand theorizing," since one would have thought that the concept of articulation as referenced here is already very precisely a theory in its own right. It implies a kind of turning structure, an ion-exchange between various entities, in which the ideological drives associated with one pass over and interfuse the other—but only provisionally, for a "historically specific moment," before entering into new combinations, being systematically worked over into something else, decaying over time in interminable half-life, or being blasted apart by the convulsions of a new social crisis. The

articulation is thus a punctual and sometimes even ephemeral totalization, in which the planes of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality intersect to form an operative structure. Here is a fuller statement by Stuart Hall:

The unity formed by this combination or articulation, is always, necessarily, a “complex structure”: a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities. This requires that the mechanisms which connect dissimilar features must be shown—since no “necessary correspondence” or expressive homology can be assumed as given. It also means—since the combination is a structure (an articulated combination) and not a random association—that there will be structured relations between the parts, i.e., relations of dominance and subordination. (CS, 579–80)

In reality, a whole poetic is implicit in such analytic terminology, since the very “representation” of such complexes is always problematic. It is not merely the structure of the complex that is not given in advance (as, for example, whether race or gender happen to come first, which one stands as some provisional ultimately determining instance to the other); it is also the language in which the “elements” and their connections are to be described which must be invented. Descriptions of articulation are thus also necessarily autoreferential in that they must comment on and validate their own linguistic instruments—only preserving the flimsiest and most tenuous survival of an older figural content (the joints or bones operating together, the mechanical sense of sheer connection as such).

Articulation thus stands as the name of the central theoretical problem or conceptual core of Cultural Studies, exemplified over and over again in this volume where it is less often foregrounded as such. It can be sensed at work in Constance Penley’s rather more Freudian (and also Marxian) notion of lack, contradiction, substitution, and compensation-formation, when, in her essay on women’s *Star Trek* porn, she places on the agenda

the fact that the women fans can imagine a sexual relation only if it involves a childless couple made up of two men, who never have to cook or scrub the tub, and who live three hundred years in the future. I would also argue that *Star Trek* fandom in general is an attempt to resolve another lack, that of a social relation. *Trek* fan culture is structured around the same void that structures American culture generally, and its desire too is that fundamental antagonisms, like class and race, not exist. (CS, 495)

But here the public/private or social/sexual articulation is grasped as a kind of dualism that folds the description back into more familiar Freudo-Marxisms like that of Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus*. One can also represent articulation in terms of models and suggestive influences, as in Kobena Mercer’s piece on the 60s (already mentioned), in which the

black movement and the very ideological and libidinal structure of black militancy is articulated as a "signifying chain" that can be reproduced in other constituencies. (That it is also a "reversible connecting factor"—and can be rewired back into original new forms of racism—is another point he makes forcefully, in a timely rebuke to a certain omnipresent Cultural Studies triumphalism.) But articulation also implies and indeed grounds allegory as its fundamental expressive structure: thus Janice Radway reminds us of the way in which mass or popular culture has consistently been fantasized as feminine: the rotating allegorical structures of collective fantasy are surely in fact the basic text of any approach to articulation as symptom or as political program (*CS*, 513). But these dynamics of articulation will not be clarified until we more fully grasp the consequences implicit in seeing culture as the expression of the individual group.

Culture and Group Libido

For culture—the weaker, more secular version of that thing called religion—is not a "substance" or a phenomenon in its own right; it is an objective mirage that arises out of the relationship between at least two groups. This is to say that no group "has" a culture all by itself: culture is the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one. It is the objectification of everything alien and strange about the contact group: in this context, it is of no little interest to observe that one of the first books on the interrelationship of groups (the constitutive role of the boundary, the way each group is defined by and defines the other), draws on Erving Goffman's *Stigma* for an account of how defining marks function for other people: in this sense, then, a "culture" is the ensemble of stigmata one group bears in the eyes of the other group (and vice versa).⁸ But such marks are more often projected into the "alien mind" in the form of that thought-of-the-other we call belief and elaborate as religion. But belief in this sense is not something we ourselves have, since what we do seems to us natural and does not need the motivation and rationalization of this strange internalized entity; and indeed the anthropologist Rodney Needham has shown that most "cultures" do not possess the equivalent of our concept, or pseudo-concept, of belief (which is thus unmasked as something the translators illicitly project back into nonimperial, noncosmopolitan languages).

Still, it happens that "we" also often speak of "our own" culture, religion, beliefs, or whatever. These may now be identified as the recuperation of the Other's view of us, of that objective mirage whereby the Other has formed a picture of us as "having" a culture: depending on the power of the Other, this alienated image demands a response, which may be as inconsequential

as the denial whereby Americans brush off the stereotypes of the “ugly American” they encounter abroad, or as thoroughgoing as the various ethnic revivals whereby, as in Hindu nationalism, a people reconstructs those stereotypes and affirms them in a new cultural-nationalist politics: something which is never the “return” to an older authentic reality but always a new construction (out of what look like older materials).

Culture must thus always be seen as a vehicle or a medium whereby the relationship between groups is transacted. If it is not always vigilantly unmasked as an idea of the Other (even when I reassume it for myself), it perpetuates the optical illusions and the false objectivism of this complex historical relationship (thus the objections that have been made to pseudo-concepts like “society” are even more valid for this one, whose origin in group struggle can be deciphered). Meanwhile, to insist on this translation-program (the imperative to turn concepts of culture back into forms of the relationship between collective groups) offers a more satisfactory way of fulfilling the objectives of the various forms of a sociological Heisenberg principle than does the current individualistic recommendation to reckon back in the place of the observer. In reality, the anthropologist-other, the individual observer, stands in for a whole social group, and it is in this sense that his knowledge is a form of power, where “knowledge” designates something individual, and “power” tries to characterize that mode of relationship between groups for which our vocabulary is so poor.

For the relationship between groups is, so to speak, unnatural: it is the chance external contact between entities which have only an interior (like a monad) and no exterior or external surface, save in this special circumstance in which it is precisely the outer edge of the group that—all the while remaining unrepresentable—brushes against that of the other. Speaking crudely then, we would have to say that the relationship between groups must always be one of struggle or violence: for the only positive or tolerant way for them to coexist is to part from one another and rediscover their isolation and their solitude. Each group is thus the entire world, the collective is the fundamental form of the monad, windowless and unbounded (at least from within).

But this failure or omission of a plausible, let alone a “natural” set of attitudes whereby group relations might be conducted means that the two fundamental forms of group relationship reduce themselves to the primordial ones of *envy* and *loathing*, respectively. The oscillation back and forth between these poles can at least in part be explained by prestige (to use one of Gramsci’s categories): an attempt to appropriate the culture of the other group (which as we have already seen in effect means inventing the “culture” of the other group) is a tribute and a form of group recognition, the expression of collective envy, the acknowledgment of the prestige of the other group. It seems likely that this prestige is not to be too quickly reduced

to matters of power, since very often larger and more powerful groups pay this tribute to the groups they dominate, whose forms of cultural expression they borrow and imitate. Prestige is thus more plausibly an emanation of group solidarity, something a weaker group often needs to develop more desperately than the larger complacent hegemonic one, which nonetheless dimly senses its own inner lack of the same cohesion and unconsciously regrets its tendential dissolution as a group as such. "Groupie-ism" is another strong expression of this kind of envy, but on an individual basis, as members of the dominant "culture" opt out and mimic the adherence to the dominated (after all that has been said, it is probably not necessary to add that groupies are thus already in this sense potential or proto-intellectuals).

As for group loathing, however, it mobilizes the classic syndromes of purity and danger, and acts out a kind of defense of the boundaries of the primary group against this threat perceived to be inherent in the Other's very existence. Modern racism (as opposed, in other words, to postmodern or "neo" racism) is one of the most elaborated forms of such group loathing—inflected in the direction of a whole political program; it should lead us on to some reflection on the role of the stereotype in all such group or "cultural" relations, which can virtually by definition not do without the stereotypical. For the group as such is necessarily an imaginary entity, in the sense in which no individual mind is able to intuit it concretely. The group must be abstracted, or fantasized, on the basis of discrete individual contacts and experiences which can never be generalized in anything but abusive fashion. The relations between groups are always stereotypical insofar as they must always involve collective abstractions of the other group, no matter how sanitized, no matter how liberally censored and imbued with respect. What it is politically correct to do under such circumstances is to allow the other group itself to elaborate its own preferential image and then to work with that henceforth "official" stereotype. But the inevitability of the stereotypical—and the persistence of the possibility of group loathing, racism, caricature, and all the rest it cannot but bring with it—is not thereby laid to rest. Utopia could therefore, under those circumstances, only mean two different kinds of situations which might in fact turn out to be the same: a world in which only individuals confronted one another, in the absence of groups; or a group isolated from the rest of the world in such a way that the matter of the external stereotype (or "ethnic identity") never arose in the first place. The stereotype is indeed the place of an illicit surplus of meaning, what Barthes called the "nausea" of mythologies: it is the abstraction by virtue of which my individuality is allegorized and turned into an abusive illustration of something else, something nonconcrete and nonindividual. ("I don't join organizations or adopt labels," says a character in a recent movie. "You don't have to," replies his friend, "You're a Jew!") But the liberal solution to this dilemma—doing away with the stereotypes

or pretending they don't exist—is not possible, although fortunately we carry on as though it were for most of the time.

Groups are thus always conflictual; and this is what has led Donald Horowitz, in the definitive study of international ethnic conflict, to suggest that although what he takes to be Marxism's economic or class account of such conflicts is unsatisfactory, Marx may have unwittingly anticipated a fundamental feature of modern ethnic theory in his notion of the necessarily dichotomous structure of class conflict as such: ethnic conflicts, indeed, are for Horowitz always tendentially dichotomous, each side ending up incorporating the various smaller satellite ethnic groups in such a way as to symbolically reenact a version of Gramscian hegemony and Gramscian hegemonic or historic blocs as well.⁹ But classes in that sense do not precede capitalism and there is no single-shot Marxian theory of "economic" causality: the economic is most often the forgotten trigger for all kinds of noneconomic developments, and the emphasis on it is heuristic and has to do with the structure of the various disciplines (and what they structurally occult or repress), rather than with ontology. What Marxism has to offer ethnic theory is probably, on the contrary, the suggestion that ethnic struggles might well be clarified by an accompanying question about class formation as such.

Fully realized classes, indeed, classes in and for themselves, "potential" or structural classes that have finally by all kinds of complicated historical and social processes achieved what is often called "class consciousness," are clearly also groups in our sense (although groups in our sense are rarely classes as such). Marxism suggests two kinds of things about these peculiar and relatively rare types of groups. The first is that they have much greater possibilities for development than ethnic groups as such: they can potentially expand to become coterminous with society as a whole (and do so, during those unique and punctual events we call revolutions), whereas the groups are necessarily limited by their own specific self-definition and constitutive characteristics. Ethnic conflict can thus develop and expand into class conflict as such, whereas the degeneration of class conflict into ethnic rivalry is a restrictive and centripetal development.

(Indeed, the alternation of envy and loathing constitutes an excellent illustration of the dialectic of class and group in action: whatever group or identity investment may be at work in envy, its libidinal opposite always tends to transcend the dynamics of the group relationship in the direction of that of class proper. Thus, anyone who observed the deployment of group and identity hatred in the recent Republican National Convention—the race and gender hostility so clearly marked in the speeches and the faces of characteristic "cultural counterrevolutionaries" like Pat Buchanan—understood at once that it was fundamentally class hostility and class struggle that was the deeper stake in such passions and their symbolisms. By the

same token, the observers who felt that symbolism and responded to the Republican Right in kind can also be said to have had their smaller group-and-identity consciousness "raised" in the direction of the ultimate horizon of social class.)

The second point follows from this one, namely that it is only after the modulation of the ethnic into the class category that a possible resolution of such struggles is to be found. For, in general, ethnic conflict cannot be solved or resolved; it can only be sublimated into a struggle of a different kind that *can* be resolved. Class struggle, which has as its aim and outcome not the triumph of one class over another but the abolition of the very category of class, offers the prototype of one such sublimation. The market and consumption, that is to say, what is euphemistically called modernization—the transformation of the members of various groups into the universal consumer—is another kind of sublimation, which has come to look equally as universal as the classless one, but which perhaps owes its success predominantly to the specific circumstances of the postfeudal North American commonwealth and the possibilities of social leveling that arose with the development of the mass media. This is the sense in which "American democracy" has seemed able to preempt class dynamics and to offer a unique solution to the matter of group dynamics discussed above. We therefore need to take into account the possibility that the various politics of Difference—the differences inherent in the various politics of "group identity"—have been made possible only by the tendential leveling of social Identity generated by consumer society, and to entertain the hypothesis that a cultural politics of difference becomes itself feasible only when the great and forbidding categories of classical Otherness have been substantially weakened by "modernization" (so that current neoethnicities may be distinct from the classical kind as neoracism is from classical racism).¹⁰

However, this does not spell a waning of group antagonisms but precisely the opposite (as can be judged from the current world scene), and it is also to be expected that Cultural Studies itself—as a space in which the new group dynamics develop—will also entail its quotient of the libidinal. The energy exchanges or ion formations of "articulation" are not, indeed, likely to take place neutrally, but to release violent waves of affect—narcissistic wounds, feelings of envy and inferiority, the intermittent repugnance for the other's groups. And in fact this is precisely what we observe to be at work in some of the most remarkable papers in the present collection.

Thus, in one of its most dramatic moments, Douglas Crimp traces a liberal-tolerant practice of AIDS cultural politics through to the point at which it becomes clear that the photographic and video documentation in question, ostensibly intended to inspire pity and sympathy for what are always called the "victims," in reality constitute "*phobic* images, images of the terror at imagining the person with AIDS as still sexual" (*CE*, 130). This

liberalism, then, comes with a price, namely the possibility for the liberal middle-class sympathizer to omit an imagination of the sick person as a sexual being; the implication is that a liberal tolerance for gays and lesbians generally requires this more fundamental imaginative repression of awareness of sexuality as such. Here the sexual or gender plane lends a powerful anticathexis or loathing to the social one, and enables a development of mass reaction and hatred that can be mobilized well beyond this particular target group and made available for alliance politics of a different and more alarming type.

For loathing and envy are very precisely the affective expressions of the relations of groups to one another, as has been argued above: insofar as the object of Cultural Studies can be defined as the cultural expression of the various relationships groups entertain with each other (sometimes on a global scale, sometimes within a single individual), the semiotics of disgust and of group envy ought to play a larger part here than it does. In that respect, the central exhibit is a remarkable article by Laura Kipnis, whose title “(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*,” does not make it clear enough that one of its central theses has to do with the way in which—following the spirit of Bourdieu’s *Distinction*—class consciousness here borrows the trappings of physical repugnance:

the transcoding between the body and the social sets up the mechanisms through which the body is a privileged political trope of lower social classes, and through which bodily grossness operates as a critique of dominant ideology. The power of grossness is predicated on its opposition from *and to* high discourses, themselves prophylactic against the debasement of the low. (CS, 376)

But Kipnis goes even further than this (and than Bourdieu himself) in the way in which, as is appropriate in dealing with a class consciousness that is by definition a relationship and a form of struggle, she takes on the intricate matter of the “subject positions” involved in this act of cultural aggression (in which, at least for openers, women are allegorized as gentility and high culture and men, by way of what Jeffrey Klein calls “a blue-collar urge” [CS, 391], as lower class):

there is the further discomfort at being addressed as a subject of repression—as a subject with a history—and the rejection of porn can be seen as a defense erected against representations which mean to unsettle her in her subjectivity. In other words, there is a violation of the *idea* of the “naturalness” of female sexuality and subjectivity, which is exacerbated by the social fact that not all women *do* experience male pornography in the same way. (CS, 380)

But this analysis of intercollective subjectivities and subject positions leads us virtually to the borderlines of a whole new field, which is no longer either

anthropology or sociology in the traditional sense, but which certainly restores to culture its hidden inner meaning as the space of the symbolic moves of groups in agonistic relation to each other. One other essay, bell hooks's "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," occupies this area as its own; its account of the visceral fear of white people in the black imagination has something of the vividness of a work of art in its own right (not necessarily the highest compliment in the present context, I realize).

Yet such a new field is neither so accessible nor so easy of realization as I may have unwittingly suggested: there are barriers, and they are not automatically overcome even by the least self-indulgent introspection or the most controlled autobiographical exploration. To see what these are we need to return to Marxism again (indeed, the preceding section constituted a description of the forms taken by totalization in Cultural Studies). What has not yet been said is the role played by social class in Cultural Studies as currently constituted, which may not be an altogether obvious one, although it has been hinted at in passing.

Free-Floating Intellectuals

Class here essentially takes two forms, in addition to the shifting and aleatory participation of a class "factor" in the various cultural constellations in question (as when class reappears in Kipnis's analysis of a pornographic cultural object, or is fantasized according to a gender allegory). The first form in which class reappears here, charged with an anxiety that is omnipresent in these pages, is through the inconspicuous backdoor of the role of the intellectual as such. Simon Frith designates it with some uncharitable bluntness when he says, "From my sociological perspective, popular music is a solution, a ritualized resistance, not to the problems of being young and poor and proletarian but to the problems of being an intellectual" (*CS*, 179). Nor is the professional reference to a "sociological perspective" an idle one, for it conveys a very different conception of the relationship of the intellectual to society than anything Cultural Studies could envisage (when indeed it is willing to conceptualize this embarrassing question), namely, what I am tempted to call "the tragic sense of life" of the great sociologists, from Weber and Veblen to Bourdieu—that glacial disengagement from social phenomena as such which is the very condition of the sociologist's disabused knowledge and which excludes any activist participation in the social—indeed any political commitment in the usual sense—on pain of losing the very insights, the very power of demystification, paid for by just this epistemological separation from the human.

This is, I believe, a "bourgeois" (or pre-Marxist) view of the matter, but it expresses the conviction of a very real truth, which is none other than the

“Heisenberg principle” of the status of the intellectual as observer, the sense that it is precisely that status—itsself a social reality and a social fact—that intervenes between the object of knowledge and the act of knowing. Such sociology is in any case constituted by a passion for seeing through the ideologies and the alibis which accompany the class and group struggles of the social and entangle those in ever higher levels of cultural complexity; if now we become aware that such lucidity as to the real mechanisms of social relationship demands the price of a single white lie, a strategic blind spot in the area of the intellectual, the occupation of everything that is social about our own observer’s viewpoint itself, the renunciation of social commitment, the attempt to surrender social knowledge from action in the world, indeed the very pessimism about the possibility of action in the world in the first place, will come to seem an act of atonement for this particular (structural) original sin. For the intellectual is necessarily and constitutively at a distance, not merely from her or his own class of origin, but also from the class of chosen affiliation; even more relevant in the present context, she is also necessarily at a distance from the social groups as well; and the ontological security of the militants of the new social movements is deceptive, who were able to feel that because they were women, blacks, or ethnics, as intellectuals they counted as members of those “peoples” and no longer had to face the dilemmas of the classic intellectual with his Hegelian “unhappy consciousness.” But we now know this is impossible, particularly since the question of the intellectual has been rewritten in the new paradigm as the problem of representation as such, about which there is some agreement that it is neither possible nor desirable. On the older paradigm, however, the intellectual was most lucidly conceived of as what Sartre called an “objective traitor,” an impersonal and unintentional Stalinist crime for which no solution can be found, but only expiation or bad faith. Where Sartre was always closest to Marxism was in this conviction that when you cannot resolve a contradiction, it is best and most authentic to hold onto it in wrenching self-consciousness; or at least, that is preferable, as anything else always is, to repression and the artificial working up of this or that form of good conscience. This is not inconsistent with a Utopian position, in which, with Stuart Hall, we can try to act as though the group whose “organic intellectual” we try to be already existed; or, remembering that other remark of Gramsci that “everyone is an intellectual,” we can also suffer the class and blood guilt of the contemporary intellectual situation, in the hopes of some future abolition of classes altogether, and thus, with them, of everything now conflicted about the smaller groups now buffeted by the force field of class struggle.

In the light of this dilemma, Foucault’s ad hoc invention of the category he calls “the specific intellectual” seems trivial; while beyond it, the old Maoist solution itself seems a tragic impossibility, in which by going back to

the factory or the field the intellectual is promised some reimmersion in the group which will cleanse him of that particular original sin which is the crime of being an intellectual. But this is also called populism, and it remains very much alive, not least in these pages. The negative symptom of populism is very precisely the hatred and loathing of intellectuals as such (or, today, of the academy that has seemed to become synonymous with them).¹¹ It is a contradictory symbolic process not unlike Jewish anti-Semitism, since populism is itself very precisely an ideology of intellectuals (the "people" are not "populist"), and represents a desperate attempt on their part to repress their condition and to deny and negate its facts of life. In the Cultural Studies area, it is of course the name of John Fiske that has primarily been associated with a certain populist stance toward culture:

Politics have never been far below the surface in my attempt to think critically about the relationships between dominant and subordinated habituses in cultural theory. I hope we can narrow the gap and increase the travel between them because by doing so I believe we can help change the relationship between the academy and other social formations, in particular those of the subordinate. Many of those living within such subordinated formations find little pertinence between the conditions of their everyday lives and academic ways of explaining the world. It is in none of our interests to allow this gap to grow any wider, particularly when we consider that many of the most effective recent movements for social change have involved allegiances between universities and members of repressed or subordinated social formations. (*CS*, 164)

Here and throughout a few hardy souls dare to express the opinion that academics are also people; but no one seems particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of undertaking an ethnology of *their* culture, fearing perhaps rightly the anxieties and the dreariness of such self-knowledge, which Pierre Bourdieu has unremittently pursued in France (but after all there is a way in which populism and anti-intellectualism are a specifically—one even wants to say an exceptionally—American matter). The primary reproach to Fiske's work lies elsewhere, and seems to turn very precisely on the ambiguity of culture or the superstructure about which Stuart Hall warned, on its tendency, as an object, to displace itself away from the social, to reaffirm its semi-autonomy, "to instantiate a necessary delay ... something decentered about the medium of culture ... which always escapes and evades the attempt to link it, directly and immediately, with other structures" (*CE*, 284). Fiske's work builds on this very gap, affirming the presence of economic oppression and social exploitation, at the same time that it reads culture as a set of "resources to fight against those constraints" (*CS*, 157). The fear is not only that, as with Marx's supposedly infamous view of religion, that fight may be only an imaginary one;¹² it is even more the suspicion that it is the intellectual himself who may here be using the celebration

of mass culture as a ritual to conjure his particular structural “distance” and to participate, like Edward Curtis, in the dances and solidarity of the ethnic tribe itself. (Interestingly, one of the really interesting “textual” studies in this collection, William Warner’s paper on *Rambo*, affirms the operativity of pain in this mass-cultural text, as a way in which the American public assuages its guilt at the loss of the war by way of images of the physical suffering of its hero; in general, a little more attention to the “negative emotions,” in popular culture as well as in its analysis, would have enhanced the credibility of this volume.)

But it is Michele Wallace who raises these issues most sharply in her exploration of the ironies of representation in the micropolitics of Cultural Studies: after repudiating the claims of others to “represent” black feminism, and after describing the tensions within it between subversion and institutionalization (or commercial stardom, as in the actors of *The Color Purple*), she goes on to problematize the thing itself, following Gayatri Spivak’s famous query, “Can the subaltern speak?”:

What I am calling into question is the idea that black feminism (or any program) should assume, uncritically, its ability to speak *for* black women, most of whom are poor and “silenced” by inadequate education, health care, housing, and lack of public access. Not because I think that black feminism should have nothing to do with representing the black woman who cannot speak for herself but because the problem of silence, and the shortcomings inherent in any representation of the silenced, need to be acknowledged as a central problematic in an oppositional black feminist process. (CS, 663)

This modesty, along with Cornel West’s forthright call to the participants to recognize and acknowledge themselves as *American* intellectuals (and to take up the burden of American cultural history, which, along with “American Studies,” is also strangely absent here), may offer the most satisfactory way of working through or working out the dilemma of the cultural intellectual.

It is, however, not the only one, and surely the most innovative treatment of the intellectual in this conference lies in the new model of the intellectual as “fan”: “Some of the most exciting work being done in Cultural Studies, as you know, is ethnographic, and positions the critic in some respects as a ‘fan’” (CS, Ross, 553). It is at least a somewhat more attractive image and role than that of the “groupie” of 60s vintage, and implies the transformation of group or ethnic identity (to which the “groupie” was attracted as a moth to the flame) into practices and performances which one could appreciate like a not unparticipatory spectator. This surely reflects the properly postmodern transformation of ethnicity into neoethnicity, as the isolation and oppression of groups is lifted up (in a properly Hegelian *Aufhebung*,

which preserves and cancels that at one and the same time) into media acknowledgment and the new reunification by the image. But it is not an unproblematical solution either: for the new fan is something like a fan of fans, and both Constance Penley, in her account of *Star Trek* culture, and Janice Radway, in her classic book on the romance, are careful to document the distance that has to be overcome between the "real" fans and their academic ethnographer. Simon Frith goes even further than this: "if, as is variously suggested in this book, fans are 'popular' (or organic) intellectuals, then they may well have the same anxieties about being fans (and take comfort from the same myths) as the rest of us" (CS, 182). This is to underscore a peculiarly Derridean turn in the transformation of the "people" into "fans": where the first of these was a primary substance, calmly persisting in its essence, and exercising a powerful gravitational effect on the insubstantial intellectuals who fluttered near it, the new version opens up a hall of mirrors in which the "people" itself longs to be a "people" and be "popular," feels its own ontological lack, longs for its own impossible stability, and narcissistically attempts, in a variety of rituals, to recuperate a being that never existed in the first place. That would, to be sure, lead us on to a more psychoanalytic view of groups and ethnic conflict (perhaps along the lines proposed by Slavoj Žižek), but it would also considerably dampen the enthusiasm of populist intellectuals for a collective condition not much better than their own.

All of which supposes that the "people" in question still somehow refers to that television-watching, beer-drinking population of middle-to-lower-class jobholders (or unemployed) who, black or white, male or female, are generally fantasized to constitute some larger fundamentally ethnic social reality. But what if it were otherwise? Indeed, Meaghan Morris remarks ominously, "This process does not extend to involvement with the one figure who in fact remains ... quite unredeemably 'other'—the bureaucrat" (CS, 465). Andrew Ross, meanwhile, seems at various moments in his contribution to realize that what is more ambiguous, for a Cultural Studies public, about his own object of study ("New Age technoculture") is that the New Age people may not really any longer be "popular" in this populist sense, but rather, far more fatefully, *middlebrow*. (Indeed, the originality and importance of Janice Radway's work-in-progress on the Book-of-the-Month Club lies in its promise to show the very construction of the middlebrow as such, and the social and political function of that construction as a kind of repression or displacement of the popular). Finally, in one of the truly chilling and comical moments in this conference, Ian Hunter describes just this ultimate First Contact with the bureaucratic Other:

The problem with aesthetic critique—and with cultural studies to the degree that it is still caught in its slipstream—is that it presumes to comprehend and judge these other cultural regions from a single metropolitan point, typically the university arts faculty. To travel to these other regions though—to law offices, media institutions, government bureaus, corporations, advertising agencies—is to make a sobering discovery: They are already replete with their own intellectuals. And they just look up and say, “Well, what exactly is it that you can do for us?” (CS, 372)

Populism as *Doxa*

One cannot, however, leave the matter of populism without a final, more general complaint, which touches on a few of the theoretical and verbal rituals of this ideology. Raymond Williams’s *Keywords* being so crucial a reference throughout, it might be desirable to think of a companion volume, to be called *Buzzwords* (and which one imagines looking, for our era, something like Flaubert’s twin *Dictionary of Received Ideas* and *sottisier* of commonplaces). Failing that, one might propose as a form of philosophical hygiene that for ten years or so we simply stop using the two words, *power* and the *body*. Nothing is more disembodied than such references to the body, except where, as in Laura Kipnis’s article on *Hustler* already referred to, or in Douglas Crimp’s, it generates some real visceral effects; materialism is scarcely achieved by the corporeal litany, which seems if anything to be a sop thrown to the (admittedly) materialist culture of the masses under Bourdieu’s watchful eye. The materialism of the body is the eighteenth-century mechanical materialism and is fashioned on the medical model (whence the role of Foucault in both these obsessional conducts); it should not be confused with a historical materialism that turns on *praxis* and on the mode of production.

But in a more general way, we must be very suspicious of the reference to the body as an appeal to immediacy (the warning goes back to the very first chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*); even Foucault’s medical and penal work can be read as an account of the construction of the body which rebukes premature immediacy. In any case, structuralism and psychoanalysis both work energetically at the demystification of the illusions of bodily intimacy most strongly suggested by “desire”; the theme of torture does not refute this but rather confirms it by making the wordless individual bodily experience the most isolated of all and the most difficult to access. But the fascination today with pornography, torture, and violence is the sign of the loss of that immediacy and the longing for the impossible physically concrete, rather than the proof by the *Zeitgeist* that it lies all around us ready to hand: in fact what lies all around us are rather images and information

stereotypes of the body, which are themselves the most powerful source of interference when it comes to a full phenomenological approach to the body itself. This last is therefore a theme that is always to be historically problematized, and never taken as an interpretive code in its own right, at least not for us, here and now.

As for *power*, about which it is frequently suggested in these pages that it is what Cultural Studies is all about ("share a commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power"), it is an even more dangerous and intoxicating slogan for intellectuals, who thereby feel themselves closer to its "reality" than they may actually be (*CS*, Bennett, 23). My sense is that interpretations in terms of power must come as punctual demystifications, de-idealizations, and involve thereby a certain shock, a painful rebuke to our own habits of idealization in the first place. Certainly the realm of culture is a privileged space for such shock effects, for given the amphibiousness of the superstructures (and that tendency to be displaced away from their context of which Stuart Hall spoke), the revelation, at this or that historical point, that culture is socially functional, that it stands in thrall and service to the institutions, and that its veneer of the aesthetic or of leisure time, the restorative or even the Utopian, is false and a lure—this kind of timely reminder can only be a healthy one, particularly for cultural intellectuals. But if everything is power, then we neither require that reminder, nor can it retain any of its demystificatory force (which also had the benefit of calling us into question as intellectuals in the process). In that case "power" is as satisfactory an explanation as the "*vertu dormitive*" of opium; if it is everywhere, then there is not much point talking about it (Foucault could do so only because as a historian he sought to trace out the *emergence* of a new scheme of modern power). What is indeed the advantage in stigmatizing the power of that corporate bureaucrat who made his unexpected appearance in these pages a moment ago? Wouldn't it be more useful to look at the structure of the multinational corporations themselves, with a view toward determining the mode of influence and production of a properly corporate culture? But there is a confusion when the individual experience of domination, in acts of racism or *machismo*, authoritarianism, sadism, conscious or unconscious personal brutality, is transferred to social phenomena which are a good deal more advanced and complicated than that: Konrad and Szelenyi indeed pointed out some time ago that the realm of experience of capitalist cultural production is a relatively old-fashioned or underdeveloped, retrogressive enclave within late capitalism.¹³ It hearkens back to the entrepreneurial moment, elsewhere in corporate society long since vanished and present only as nostalgia (the yuppie rhetoric of the market is thus a cultural symptom which demands textual analysis in its own right). It is therefore not surprising that a kind of feudal picture of personal domination and

subordination is sometimes carried over into the faceless corporate universe; but in that case it is a text to be analyzed, rather than an interpretive code still useful in the deciphering of other contemporary social texts (forms of personal or symbolic brutality, however, probably tending to reflect an absence of power in the social sense, rather than its acting out).

But by way of this anachronism, a whole liberal political theory and ideology then pours into Cultural Studies (and other disciplines); for the rhetoric of “power” carries a good deal more in its baggage—a repudiation of economic analysis, for example, a kind of forthright anarchistic stance on the thing itself, the unholy marriage between the heroism of dissidence and the “realism” of “talking to the institutions.” The problematic of power, as systematically reintroduced by Weber and then much later by Foucault, is an anti-Marxist move, designed to replace analysis in terms of the mode of production. That opens up new fields and generates rich and fascinating new material, but users should be aware of its secondary ideological consequences, and intellectuals should above all be wary of the narcissistic intoxications of its knee-jerk invocation.

The Geopolitical Imperative

This is then the moment, not merely to say what ought to be done in the void left by these two buzzwords, and in the ideological loose ends at which the critique of populism may well leave us, but also to show how in fact many of the papers in this collection are already moving in just that direction.

This is the fundamentally spatial dimension of Cultural Studies (already underscored by Jody Berland), which can at first be sensed in the discomfort with American parochialism and exceptionalism tactfully voiced by some of the foreigners. Thus Stuart Hall, who pronounces himself “dumbfounded”:

the enormous explosion of cultural studies in the US, its rapid professionalization and institutionalization, is not a moment which any of us who tried to set up a marginalized Centre in a university like Birmingham could, in any simple way, regret. And yet I have to say, in the strongest sense, that it reminds me of the ways in which, in Britain, we are always aware of institutionalization as a moment of profound danger. (*CS*, 285)

And we have already seen some of the Australians reflecting on the different meaning and significance of cultural institutions in the US (which unlike their own are mostly private), without necessarily drawing differential consequences (but see also Graeme Turner on Australian and Canadian differences) (*CS*, 644–645). To talk about it this way seems to introduce the

theme of the nation as such (which indeed becomes a significant preoccupation here), but that may be too restricted and misleading.

It is rather a specific global constriction that Meaghan Morris has in mind in a splendid and illuminating outburst:

This exchange makes me realize that I haven't been explicit enough about why "Eurocentrism" should worry me at a rudimentary level at a conference like this. It's a restlessness I have, rather than a position I can expound, and maybe it came through in my speech rather than in the text of my paper. I'm restless about the map of cultural studies being constructed at this conference, about what's not *on* that map, rather than what is. We've talked about local and global relations in a world where Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, or Indonesia simply don't exist, certainly not as *forces* in emergent structures of world power. The one time I heard somebody mention the Pacific Rim, it turned out to be a way of talking about relations between North and Central and South America—another way of staying on the American land mass, not a way of crossing the ocean. I'm not making a plea for inclusiveness, it's just that certain globalizing structures have potential, if "only" on the economic level, to affect people's lives everywhere in the future, and they aren't "centered" now in quite the same old *doubled* way (UK/USA, or USA/USSR), that traditional critiques of Eurocentrism sometimes Eurocentrically assume. To ignore this seems to me to be a political error. (CS, 476)

There is much to be said about this moment, in some ways one of the climaxes of the conference. One might remark that "Eurocentrism" does not quite seem the word anymore for what is surely an American parochialism: even if informed by European canonical perspectives (and very much imbued with the return of the repressed of a scarcely unconscious Anglophilia—after the Francophilia of the preceding moment of high theory), these are now the perspectives of an American NATO view of the world for which the old Europe is not much more significant for us than Birmingham for the new US Cultural Studies. Europe and Britain are surely live-wire issues for the Australians, and even the Canadians here, more than they are for the Americans; and perhaps this is a deeper undertone and implication of Meaghan Morris's reproach, that we are not sufficiently worried about our European and Oedipal link, we are too complacent about it. But in the same sense the new Pacific Rim culture she celebrates here may be a different kind of liberation for Australia than for Americans intent on at least sharing it with the Japanese. And she dismisses Latin America, an oversight remedied by Donna Haraway, whose picture of an analogous Pacific culture it is instructive to juxtapose at this point:

I grew up in a town in Colorado where I thought the Atlantic Ocean began somewhere in Kansas and that anything that happened East of Kansas City counted as the East Coast. And I know Cornel grew up in California, but I think maybe you've been in the East too long. Paul's Atlanticist reformulation of African heritage, African culture, and African-Americans reformulated a lot of issues for me. But it's a California statement I want to make. It has to do with seeing the world in relationship to Latin America, Central America, Mexico, living in conquest territory so that it almost seems like Quebec is part of California rather than part of the world you're talking about. It's the sense of the Pacific. I think of Bernice Johnson Reagon's speech on coalition politics which took place at a West Coast women's music festival and is an absolutely canonical text in US feminism and in the constructions of the category, "women of color," but also of a feminist cultural politics and a vision of a new world cultural politics. None of this is caught by the tendency to build the world as black/white and America/Britain, with a little bit of Australia and Canada thrown in. This particular global mapping leaves out these really crucial questions. (CS, 703)

All of which may seem to confirm the Clifford view of Cultural Studies as a model based on travel and tourism: but this would be to neglect deeper and more interesting tensions, those for example expressed in a sharp exchange between Morris and Paul Gilroy, whose remarkable proposal to acknowledge and reconstruct a properly black Atlantic culture seems on first glance to present some symmetrical analogies to the Pacific Rim vision. But Gilroy has a somewhat different agenda: "The specificity of the black Atlantic can be defined on one level through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (we have already seen that Gilroy's is an explicit repudiation of the "politics of identity" or of cultural separatism) (CS, 194–195). But Gilroy can (and must) resist the divisive pull of a celebration of British or US cultural exceptionalism (even when that is staged in terms of the exceptionalism of Black-British or African-American culture): the great floating decentered archipelago of the Caribbean is there to authorize such resistance. Perhaps, however, the Australians and the Canadians cannot so easily jettison the determinant problem and category of the nation, as Jody Berland thinks:

The reason I refused the idea of identity in terms of a historical tradition in the struggle around communications was that, in Canada, it's both impossible and compulsory to talk about the problem of identity. It's a complete double-bind: one has to talk about it constantly because it's a problem, but you can't talk about it because as soon as you start you're in danger of imposing a singular definition on something which isn't singular at all. (CS, 52)

The discomfort seems to have to do in part with the words "nation" and "national," which evidently still vehiculate the baggage of the older autonomous nation-state and give rise to the apprehension that one is still talking about the national culture, the national *topoi* (as Morris calls them in her interesting sketch of the Australian version of these), the national allegories, in a kind of separatist or cultural-nationalist way. For that structural allergy of Cultural Studies to the "unmixed" which I mentioned above, this is clearly decisive, and it plays a greater role in Gilroy's reaction than in Morris's remarks. But it should be added that autonomy is the great political question of the postmodern age: communism itself foundered on the impossibility of autarchy (even of socialism in several countries) in the multinational era. We should thus see nationalism, not as the vice and the toxic symptom of the immediate post-World War II era, but rather as itself a kind of nostalgia for a social autonomy no longer available for anyone; while "nation" today ought to be used as the word for a term within a system, a term which ought now always to imply relationality (of a more than binary type). Indeed, it is the need for some new relational discourse on these global and spatial matters which makes itself felt through such uneasy debates.¹⁴ The new requirement is not—as with the multiple subject-positions and, as it were, the internal structural problems of cultural identity—a matter of articulation, so much as it is one of the superposition of incommensurable dimensions. Morris quite rightly asks us "to think of cultural studies as a discipline capable of thinking the relations between local, regional, national, and international frames of action and experience," but the word "representation" might be even more suggestively substituted for the notion of merely "thinking" those relations (*CS*, 470). It is then curious that she should so insistently refuse the model offered by David Harvey in his splendid *Condition of Postmodernity*: it need not be the final word on anything, to be sure, but it is one way of mapping the new global system from which we can begin (indeed, she says herself that her alternate models "use similar economic arguments to Harvey's"), but maybe the Marxism is just a bit too much; and perhaps it is Eurocentric as well (*CS*, 474)? (Indeed, in one remarkable moment she seems to be attributing the seemingly feudal battle cry "For England and Marxism!" to Terry Eagleton, something the Irish comrades need never hear about [*CS*, 455].) Still, hers is far and away the richest and most stimulating discussion both of a national cultural self-representation and of the urgent international dimensions still missing from Cultural Studies: it is embarrassing that none of the Americans thinks any of these thoughts (which Clifford, to be sure, echoes in a more reflective/contemplative way).

Conclusions and Utopia

It is time to sum up the lessons of this book (the lessons I have learned from this book): something best done in the form of future tasks, of an agenda, although not necessarily an agenda for “Cultural Studies” in the narrower institutionalized or would-be disciplinary sense we have also seen emerging from this collection. That agenda would include groups, articulation, and space; and it would also open a new entry (so far mostly blank) for commodification and consumption. The phenomenon of group struggle—in bell hooks and in Mercer, for example—reminds us that, no less than for class, cultural texts, when properly decoded, can always be expected to constitute so many messages in this symbolic process, and to stand as so many distinct strategic or tactical moves in what is an enormous agon. It is therefore clear that the hermeneutic appropriate to social class also demands to be applied here, in a situation in which stable cultural objects, works, or texts, are to be rewritten as dialogically antagonistic moves in struggle between groups (which very specifically includes the achievement of group consciousness as one of its aims), moves which tend to express themselves affectively in the form of loathing or envy.

This methodology no longer seems quite so useful when, as in so many of the contributions here, the phenomenon of group relationship is interiorized, and becomes a matter for mixed feelings, multiple subject positions, productive schizophrenia, or unhappy co-consciousness: it being understood that all these things can characterize the collective condition of a group as well. Here, then, the model of articulation seems again to reimpose itself, and we pass from the dialectical (in the case of intergroup struggle) to the structural, in this particular field which is that of group interrelationship, intra-group phenomena, or the construction of larger molar group units. The poetics of this moment also seems relatively distinct from that of the first one, where a text could be translated into a symbolic and strategic value which it possessed simultaneously with its surface value or organization. Here translation takes the form of transcoding, or synonymy within a given term: for it is the possibility of any given term to bear several distinct meanings at the same time that allows the sharing of a text between several distinct codes (and the groups whose language they constitute). Here group connection is enabled by the transfer of a crucial seme or atom, which binds the codes together momentarily by way of its own polysemousness.

But these first two zones of meaning and analysis are still safely contained within “Cultural Studies,” now understood as some vast Popular Front or populist carnival. The third dimension emerges only when we reach the edge of that and look out upon the true Other, the bureaucrat or corporate figure who stands in late capitalism itself and its now global institutions. It is because this Other can no longer be assimilated into the structures

previously described that relations with it must be modeled on an external or spatial mode, and demand a kind of geographical analysis for which we have as yet no particularly adequate language (my implication that it will turn out to be neither dialectical nor structural is little more than an impression and a possible starting point). This is then the moment when our own social role and status as intellectuals returns with a vengeance, since it is a role which is mediated by geopolitics, its value conferred by the world system itself and by our positioning within it. It then returns upon our individual readings and analyses to enforce a new requirement of geographic reflexivity or geopolitical self-consciousness, and to demand the validation of some account of the "national" situation from within whose standpoint the analysis has been made: it being understood that "national" is now merely a relational term for the component parts of the world system, which might also be seen as the superposition of various kinds of space (local and regional as well as national, the geographical bloc as well as the world system itself). In that case, US Cultural Studies, as here, would have to sign its address a little more self-consciously to its contributions.

But who says the US says global capitalism itself, and the move on into the culture of that, and the dynamics of that truer Other than any of the microgroups at play here, demands the return to some form of commodity analysis, of which—save for Jody Berland's suggestive pages on the ideology of "entertainment"—there is little enough trace here. Perhaps, in a kind of populist way, it is felt that to treat these cultural products as commodities about to be swept off in the purely formal process of consumption is somehow to demean them and to diminish their dignity, to overlook their other social and group functions (outlined above). But that need not be the case for an analysis of the right complexity, although it is certain that for consumption, as a culture and a collective form of addiction, the act of consumption is an empty one, indifferent to the specific contents of a given object and thus relatively unpropitious for an analysis that would want to do it justice in substantive detail. Still, conflict, alienation, reunification, what used to be called the inauthentic, have to be given their due; nothing truly interesting is possible without negativity; error or ideology, false appearance, are also objective facts that have to be reckoned back into truth. The standardization of consumption is like a sound barrier which confronts the euphorias of populism as a fact of life and a physical law at the upper reaches of the spectrum.

Beyond that lies Utopia, also secretly at work everywhere in these pages, wherever the most obscure forms of enjoyment and group celebration or narcissism are to be found. But it must also be named, without which its half-life decays with unbelievable speed on exposure to the smog-filled light and polluted air of current reality. Donna Haraway names it here, in an essay of such range and complexity that I cannot do it justice here, let alone

in these concluding pages: suffice it to say that in an immense wheeling and slowly rotating movement, she designates a succession of radically Other or alternative spaces to aspects of our own—the rainforest to our social space; the extraterrestrial to our physical one; the biomedical microcosm to our still conventional bodies; and the science-fictional macrocosms to our still conventional minds. Let these Utopias then move as a kind of starry firmament over this collection, as indeed over Cultural Studies in general.

1993

Notes

- 1 Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, 1992. Future references to this work are denoted CS.
- 2 As in “the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism”: see Jane Gallop, *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory*, New York: Routledge, 1992, for a more elaborate exploration of the allegorical models by way of which an emergent feminism has sought to tell itself the story of that emergence.
- 3 One must also mention Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen & Co., 1979, which more than any other single work invented the style and stance repeatedly adopted in the present conference.
- 4 See in particular the rather triumphalist program article by one of the organizers of the present conference: Cary Nelson, “Always Already Cultural Studies,” *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 24: 1, 1991, 24–38.
- 5 Fredric Jameson, “Commentary,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 8, 1990, 135–139.
- 6 Michael Denning, “‘The Special American Conditions’: Marxism and American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 38: 3, 1986, 356–380.
- 7 See the 1857 Preface to the *Grundrisse*; as well as Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: New Left Books, 1970, 174ff., 207. I am indebted to Perry Anderson and Ken Surin for their assistance in this hit-and-run genealogy; Jose Ripalda Crespo assures me that the history of the concept beyond Marx is banal and lost in the night of medieval scholasticism. Meanwhile, the latest and most familiar use of this term, the remarkable anatomy of alliance politics, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 1985, 105ff, does not attribute the concept historically (it is, however, not to be found in Gramsci). Finally, I am told by both Michael Denning and Andrew Ross that the fundamental image whereby this was always conveyed in Birmingham—shades of the locomotive of history!—was what in Britain is called the “articulated lorry.”
- 8 Harald Eidheim, “When Ethnic Identity Is a Social Stigma,” *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Fredrik Barth, Boston: Little, Brown, 1969, 39–57. See also Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*, New York: Columbia University Press,

1989, which breaks new ground in analyzing the succeeding figures of the Other in the Renaissance (in which the Other is an infernal being, on the level with gold and spices), the Enlightenment (in which the Other is pagan and "unenlightened" in the specific sense of being ignorant of "unknown causes"), and in the nineteenth century (where the Other is positioned backward at an earlier point in historical time).

- 9 Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 90–92. And see also the interesting survey of the concept of "national character" in Perry Anderson, "Nation-States and National Identity," *London Review of Books* 9, May 1991, 3–8.
- 10 Etienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, London: Verso, 1991, 17–28.
- 11 See for example Constance Penley's telling remarks on the popular feeling that intellectuals—in this case, feminists—are somehow upper-class: "The slashers do not feel they can express their desires for a better, sexually liberated, and more egalitarian world through feminism; they do not feel they can speak as feminists, they do not feel that feminism speaks for them" (CS, 492).
- 12 But it is important to stress, as Cornel West does, that religion (and in particular fundamentalism) is a very large and basic component of American mass culture, and in addition, that it is here decidedly underanalyzed and underrepresented,
- 13 Gyorgy Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.
- 14 That this also holds for cultural production as such is suggested by Simon Frith's work on music culture; for example, "the tension in this world is less that between amateurs and professionals ... than between local and national reference groups" (CS, 176).

The End of Temporality

After the end of history, what?¹ No further beginnings being foreseen, it can only be the end of something else. But modernism already ended some time ago and with it, presumably, time itself, as it was widely rumored that space was supposed to replace time in the general ontological scheme of things. At the very least, time had become a nonperson and people stopped writing about it. The novelists and poets gave it up under the entirely plausible assumption that it had been largely covered by Proust, Mann, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot and offered few further chances of literary advancement. The philosophers also dropped it on the grounds that although Bergson remained a dead letter, Heidegger was still publishing a posthumous volume a year on the topic. And as for the mountain of secondary literature in both disciplines, to scale it once again seemed a rather old-fashioned thing to do with your life. *Was aber war die Zeit?*

What is time? A secret—insubstantial and omnipotent. A prerequisite of the external world, a motion intermingled and fused with bodies existing and moving in space. But would there be no time, if there were no motion? No motion, if there were no time? What a question! Is time a function of space? Or vice versa? Or are the two identical? An even bigger question! Time is active, by nature it is much like a verb, it both “ripens” and “brings forth.” And what does it bring forth? Change! Now is not then, here is not there—for in both cases motion lies in between. But since we measure time by a circular motion closed in on itself, we could just as easily say that its motion and change are rest and stagnation—for the then is constantly repeated in the now, the there in the here ... Hans Castorp turned these sorts of questions over and over in his own mind.²

In any case, neither phenomenology nor Thomas Mann offered promising starting points for anything calculated to fire the imagination.

What clearly did so, however, was the spatial alternative. Statistics on the volume of books on space are as alarming as the birthrate of your hereditary enemy.³ The rise of the intellectual stock of architecture accompanied the

decline of *belles lettres* like a lengthening shadow; the opening of any new signature building attracted more visitors and media attention than the newly published translation of the latest unknown Nobel Prize winner. I would like to see a match between Seamus Heaney and Frank Gehry, but it is at least certain that postmodern museums have become at least as popular as the equally postmodern new sports stadia and that nobody reads Valéry's essays any more, who talked about space beautifully from a temporal point of view but in long sentences.

So the dictum that time was the dominant of the modern (or of modernism) and space of the postmodern means something thematic and empirical all at once: what we do, according to the newspapers and the Amazon statistics, and what we call what we are doing. I don't see how we can avoid identifying an epochal change here, and it affects investments (art galleries, building commissions) as much as the more ethereal things also called values. It can be seen, for example, in what has happened to what used to be called the *système des beaux arts* or the hierarchy of the aesthetic ideal. In the older (modernist) framework, the commanding heights were those of poetry or poetic language, whose "purity" and aesthetic autonomy set an example for the other arts and inspired Clement Greenberg's paradigmatic theorization of painting.

The "system" of the postmodern (which claims not to have one) is uncodified and harder to detect, but I suspect it culminates in the experience of the space of the city itself—the renovated and gentrified posturban city, the new crowds and masses of the new streets—as well as from a music that has been spatialized by way of its performance frameworks as well as of its delivery systems, the various boomboxes and Walkmans that inflect the consumption of musical sound into a production and an appropriation of sonorous space as such. As for the image, its function as the omnipresent raw material of our cultural ecosystem would require an examination of the promotion of photography—henceforth called postmodern photography—from a poor relation of easel painting into a major art form in this new system of things.

But such descriptions are clearly predicated on the operative dualism, the alleged historical existence, of the two alternatives. The moderns were obsessed with the secret of time, the postmoderns with that of space, the "secret" being no doubt what André Malraux called the Absolute. We can observe a curious slippage in such investigations, even when philosophy gets its hands on them. They begin by thinking they want to know what time is and end up trying more modestly to describe it by way of what Whitman called "language experiments" in the various media. So we have "renderings" of time from Gertrude Stein to Husserl, from Mahler to Le Corbusier (who thought of his static structures as so many "trajectories"). We cannot say that any of these attempts is less misguided than the more obvious

failures of analytic cubism or Siegfried Giedion's "relativity aesthetic."⁴ Maybe all we do need to say is contained in Derrida's laconic epitaph on the Aristotelian philosophy of temporality: "In a sense, it is always too late to talk about time."⁵

Can we do any better with space? The stakes are evidently different; time governs the realm of interiority, in which both subjectivity and logic, the private and the epistemological, self-consciousness and desire, are to be found. Space, as the realm of exteriority, includes cities and globalization, but also other people and nature. It is not so clear that language always falls under the aegis of time (we busily name the objects of the spatial realm, for example), while as for sight the inner light and literal as well as figurative reflection are well-known categories of introspection. Indeed, why separate the two at all? Did not Kant teach us that space and time are both a priori conditions of our experience or perception, neither one to be gazed at with the naked eye and quite inseparable from each other? And did not Bakhtin wisely recombine them in his notion of the chronotope, recommending a historical account of each specific space-time continuum as it jelled or crystallized? But it is not so easy to be moderate or sensible in the force field of modernism, where Time and Space are at war in a Homeric combat. Indeed, each one, as Hegel said about something else, desires the death of the other. You have only to look again at those pages in which the bard of Davos goes to the movies:

They even took Karen Karstedt to the Bioscope Theater in Platz one afternoon, because that was something she truly enjoyed. Being used to only the purest air, they felt ill at ease in the bad air that weighed heavily in their lungs and clouded their minds in a murky fog, while up ahead on the screen life flickered before their smarting eyes—all sorts of life, chopped up in hurried, diverting scraps that leapt into fidgety action, lingered, and twitched out of sight in alarm, to the accompaniment of trivial music, which offered present rhythms to match vanishing phantoms from the past and which despite limited means ran the gamut of solemnity, pomposity; passion, savagery; and cooing sensuality.

... The actors who had been cast in the play they had just seen had long since been scattered to the winds; they had watched only phantoms, whose deeds had been reduced to a million photographs brought into focus for the briefest of moments so that, as often as one liked, they could then be given back to the element of time as a series of blinking flashes. Once the illusion was over, there was something repulsive about the crowd's nerveless silence. Hands lay impotent before the void. People rubbed their eyes, stared straight ahead, felt embarrassed by the brightness and demanded the return of the dark, so that they could again watch things, whose time had passed, come to pass again, tricked out with music and transplanted into new time. (*MM*, 301–302)⁶

Under these circumstances, the best we can do in the way of synthesis is to alert ourselves to the deformation of space when observed from the standpoint of time, of time when observed from the standpoint of space. The great structuralist formula itself—the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic—may be offered as an illustration of the second deformation and is always accompanied by a label that warns us not to confuse the diachronic with time and history nor to imagine that the synchronic is static or the mere present, warnings most often as timely as they are ineffective.

Even if such a shift from a temporal to a spatial dominant be acknowledged, however, it would seem momentous enough to demand further explanation; the causal or historical hypotheses are here neither evident nor plausible. Why should the great age of Western imperialism, for example—beginning with the conference of Berlin in 1885, it is more or less contemporaneous with the flourishing of what we call modern art—be any less spatially impressionable than that of globalization today? By much the same token, why should the stressed and harried followers of today's stock market listings be any less temporally sensitive than the residents of the first great industrial cities?

I want to suggest an account in terms of something like existential uneven development; it fleshes out the proposition that modernism is to be grasped as a culture of incomplete modernization and links that situation to the proposition about modernism's temporal dominant. The argument was suggested by Arno Mayer's *Persistence of the Old Regime*, which documents a counterintuitive lag in the modernization of Europe, where, even at the turn of the last century and the putative heyday of high modernism, only a minute percentage of the social and physical space of the West could be considered either fully modern in technology or production or substantially bourgeois in its class culture.⁷ These twin developments were not completed in most European countries until the end of World War II.

It is an astonishing revision, which demands the correction of many of our historical stereotypes; in the matter that concerns us here, it will therefore be in the area of an only partially industrialized and defeudalized social order that we have to explain the emergence of the various modernisms. I want to conjecture that the protagonists of those aesthetic and philosophical revolutions were people who still lived in two distinct worlds simultaneously; born in those agricultural villages we still sometimes characterize as medieval or premodern, they developed their vocations in the new urban agglomerations with their radically distinct and "modern" spaces and temporalities. The sensitivity to deep time in the moderns then registers this comparatist perception of the two socioeconomic temporalities, which the first modernists had to negotiate in their own lived experience. By the same token, when the premodern vanishes, when the peasantry shrinks to

a picturesque remnant, when suburbs replace the villages and modernity reigns triumphant and homogeneous over all space, then the very sense of an alternate temporality disappears as well, and postmodern generations are dispossessed (without even knowing it) of any differential sense of that deep time the first moderns sought to inscribe in their writing.

It is an explanation, however, which does not yet include the macro-economic level of the world system and its temporalities. Imperialism and colonization must evidently have their functional relationship to the uneven development of town and country in the metropolis itself, without imposing any particularly obvious priority of time over space. And as for globalization, it was precisely on the strength of some new spatial dominant and some new experience of spatiality that its structural distinction from an older imperialism had been argued in the first place.

But one of the fundamental determinants of that new experience can be found in the way imperialism masks and conceals the nature of its system, a structural camouflage to which the “communicational rationality” of globalization no longer has to resort (its opacities are of a different type altogether). For one thing, the imperial powers of the older system do not want to know about their colonies or about the violence and exploitation on which their own prosperity is founded, nor do they wish to be forced into any recognition of the multitudinous others hidden away beneath the language and stereotypes, the subhuman categories, of colonial racism.⁸ “Not so very long ago,” remarked Jean-Paul Sartre in a famous phrase, “the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives.”⁹ Later on, I will argue that the momentous event of decolonization, the “transformation” of these natives into men, is a fundamental determinant of postmodernity; the gendered term also reminds us that this story could also be told in terms of the other half of the human race and of the liberation and tendential recognition of women in this same period.

As far as modernism is concerned, however, the epistemological separation of colony from metropolis, the systematic occultation of the colony from metropolis, the systematic occultation of the colonial labor on which imperial prosperity is based, results in a situation in which (again using a Hegelian formula) the truth of metropolitan experience is not visible in the daily life of the metropolis itself; it lies outside the immediate space of Europe, in the colonies.¹⁰ The existential realia of the metropolis are thus severed from the cognitive map that would alone lend them coherence and reestablish relationships of meaning and of its production. The new daily life is thereby rendered at best enigmatic and at its most extreme absurd (in the philosophical sense), while abstract knowledge of the colonial situation and its worldwide economic structure necessarily remains abstract and specialized; the colonial laborers and producers have no direct experience of the

“advanced” world for which their exploitation is responsible. Modernism can be positioned as a reproduction of the abstractions to which metropolitan phenomena have been reduced at the same time that it seeks to recomplete those afterimages in a formal way and to restore (but also purely formally) something of the life and vitality, the meanings, of which they have been deprived.

If something like this faithfully characterizes the situation of modernism and the incomplete modernization that it expresses, then it becomes clearer how that situation changes when we pass from imperialism to present-day globalization. What could not be mapped cognitively in the world of modernism now slowly brightens into the very circuits of the new transnational cybernetic. Instant information transfers suddenly suppress the space that held the colony apart from the metropolis in the modern period. Meanwhile, the economic interdependence of the world system today means that wherever one may find oneself on the globe, the position can henceforth always be coordinated with its other spaces. This kind of epistemological transparency no doubt goes hand in hand with standardization and has often been characterized as the Americanization of the world (if not its Disneyfication). The attribution is not misleadingly incorrect but omits the way in which the new system also transmits oppositional tendencies and their messages, such as the ecological movement; paradoxically, like the anti-globalization movement itself, these are political developments predicated on the damage done by globalization at the same time that they are themselves enabled by it.

At any rate, this new transparency of the postmodern world system (which resorts to new techniques of distortion by way of a suppression of history and even, as we shall see, of time and temporality itself) now also explains the shift from the abstract and initiatory forms of modernism to what look like more popular and representational kinds of art and writing (and music) in postmodernity, a shift often and widely considered to be a return to realism and figuration. But I think that postmodernism is not really figurative in any meaningful realist sense or at least that it is now a realism of the image rather than of the object and has more to do with the transformation of the figure into a logo than with the conquest of new “realistic” and representational languages. It is thus a realism of image or spectacle society, if you will, and a symptom of the very system it represents in the first place.

Yet these forms are clearly more popular and democratic (or demotic), more accessible, than the older hermetic “high modernisms,” and this is perfectly consistent with the thesis of an immense expansion of culture and of cultural literacy and the cultural realm itself in the postmodern period. The place of culture and its consumption is radically different in the new global dispensation than it was in the modernist period, and one can register

a different kind of transnational flow of imagery and music, as well as of information, along the networks of a new world system.

So far, however, we have not yet set in place the mediations that are capable of linking up these two levels of the individual subjectivities (of the artists as well as of the dwellers in the everyday) and of the larger macro systems as those move from an old-fashioned colonial administration of vast territories by means of armies and bureaucracies (essentially by the Europeans and to a lesser extent by the United States and Japan) to some new organization of power and exploitation in the form of transnational corporations and banks and by way of capital investment. Each of these descriptive levels contains its own structural contradictions, but there are other tensions and dissonances that emerge only when we seek to relate the two. This is the sense in which the dialectic of the local and the global has seemed to displace traditional oppositions between the public and the private, if not (in the era of the “death of the subject”) those most ancient and classical ones of all, between the particular and the universal, if not indeed between the subject and the object itself.

Such mediations are presentational techniques fully as much as they are empirical facts; they furnish the tropes for innumerable postmodern histories or newer historical narratives and are to be found in abundance in the varied investigations of what is called Cultural Studies. We might, for example, have dramatized the waning of concepts and representations of production by way of the displacement of old-fashioned industrial labor by the newer cybernetic kind, a convulsive shift in our cognitive mapping of reality that tends to deprive people of their sense of making or producing that reality, to confront them with the fact of preexisting circuits without agency, and to condemn them to a world of sheer passive reception. To insist on the mediation of the labor process is thus to dispel the banal and apolitical conception of a service economy but also to insist on the epistemological and cultural consequences of this shift, consequences insufficiently foregrounded by the current language of some opposition between “Fordism” and a newly “flexible” capitalism.

For myself, I have long felt that one of the most effective mediations to be constructed between the cultures of postmodernity and the infrastructure of late capitalist globalization was to be found in the peculiar phenomenon of finance capital, as that has been revived and transformed in present-day society where for most people it seems to loom larger than production itself, at least on their television screens.¹¹ Finance capital suggests a new type of abstraction, in which on the one hand money is sublimated into sheer number, and on the other hand a new kind of value emerges, which seems to have little enough to do with the old-fashioned value of firms and factories or of their products and their marketability. The recent business failures like Enron seem to suggest that the value of a given stock cannot long be

separated from the profitability of the firm it is supposed to “represent” or express, but I think they demonstrate the opposite, that under the conditions of finance capital stock value has a decidedly semiautonomous status with respect to its nominal company and that, in any case, postmodern “profitability” is a new category, dependent on all kinds of conditions unrelated to the product itself, such as the downsizing of employees at the demand of banks and investment institutions and the draining of the company’s assets (sometimes fatally) in order to inflate dividends.

This new kind of abstraction can be correlated with postmodernism in art along the lines suggested above, namely, that the formal abstractions of the modernist period—which corresponded to the dialectic of value of an older monopoly stage of capitalism—are to be radically distinguished from the less palpable abstractions of the image or the logo, which operate with something of the autonomy of the values of present-day finance capital. It is a distinction between an object and its expression and an object whose expression has in fact virtually become another object in its own right.

Most significant for us in the present context, however, is the impact of the new value abstractions on everyday life and lived experience, and this is a modification best articulated in terms of temporality (rather than image theory). For the dynamics of the stock market need to be disentangled from the older cyclical rhythms of capitalism generally: boom and bust, accumulation of inventory, liquidation, and so forth, a process with which everyone is familiar and that imprints a kind of generational rhythm on individual life. This process, which also creates the impression of a political alternation between Left and Right, between dynamism and conservatism or reaction, is of course to be sharply distinguished from the far longer cycles of the so-called Kondratiev waves, fifty- or sixty-year periods that are as it were the systole and diastole of the system’s fundamental contradiction (and that are, by virtue of their very dimensions, less apparent to those biological individuals we also are). From both these temporal cycles, then, is to be distinguished the newer process of the consumption of investment as such, the anxious daily consultation of the listings, deliberations with or without your broker, selling off, taking a gamble on something as yet untested (one imagines a Whitmanesque list opening up, expansive, celebratory, reveling in the ideology of democratic “participation”). The narrowing and the urgency of the time frame need to be underscored here and the way in which a novel and more universal microtemporality accompanies and as it were condenses the rhythms of quarterly “profit taking” (and is itself intensified in periods of crisis and uncertainty). The futures of the stock market—whether in the literal and traditional sense of investments in crops and other seasonal goods not yet in existence or in the more figurative sense of derivatives and speculations on the company reports and the exchange listings—these “futures” come to be deeply intertwined with the way we live our

own individual and collective futures generally, in a period in which careers are no longer stable and layoffs a seemingly inevitable hazard of professional and managerial as well as proletarian levels of society.

By the same token, the new rhythms are transmitted to cultural production in the form of the narratives we consume and the stories we tell ourselves, about our history fully as much as about our individual experience. It is scarcely surprising that the historical past has diminished accordingly; to be sure, the recent past is always the most distant in the mind's eye of the historical observer, but deficiencies in the high school history books are scarcely enough to account for the alarming rate at which a somewhat more remote past is in the process of being evacuated—the media's "exhaustion" of its raw material of events and information is not alien to the process. Any modification of the past, no matter how minute, will then inevitably determine a reorganization of the future, but the keenest observers of the immediate postwar period (in the moment of what may now be called late modernism) can scarcely have anticipated that wholesale liquidation of futurity of which the revival of Hegel's "end of history" was only an intellectual symptom.¹² Confusion about the future of capitalism—compounded by a confidence in technological progress beclouded by intermittent certainties of catastrophe and disaster—is at least as old as the late nineteenth century, but few periods have proved as incapable of framing immediate alternatives for themselves, let alone of imagining those great Utopias that have occasionally broken on the status quo like a sunburst. Yet a little thought suggests that it is scarcely fair to expect long-term projections or the deep breath of great collective projects from minds trained in the well-nigh synchronic habits of zero-sum calculation and of keeping an eye on profits.

Such propositions seem to imply or posit a fundamental gap or dialectical leap between older and newer forms of communication. Leaving aside the question of technological determinism, there is still an argument to be made about the radical distinction between informational conduits from the telephone back to the semaphore or the smoke signal, whose infrastructure can be found as deep as the astonishing reaches of the Neolithic trade routes and the cybernetic technologies of the present, whose novelties and innovations play a basic causal role in any definition of the postmodern (on any social level). I do think it is possible to devise a phenomenological description of the communicational act that registers such differences and their structure. On the telephone people can no doubt give tips on future developments and place tentative orders, but these messages must still coexist with the body of paper itself—the bills of exchange or lading, the weight of documents, the very bundles of paper money itself, as the last makes its cumbersome way laboriously around the world. Speculation on such bills is another matter; it is no longer a question of buying things but rather of juggling whole labor forces. One can electronically substitute one entire

national working class for another, halfway around the globe, wiping out industry after industry in the home country and dissipating accumulated months of value-producing labor overnight. By the same token, the very bills themselves can quickly be reduced to worthless scraps by trading against the currency in question and reducing its former value to the approximate zero of undesirability on the world's currency markets. But this is something new and it again documents the wholesale replacement of the old subject-object relationship, the logic of reference, with a new one, which might better be called the semiotic or, indeed, the logic of the signifier.

I put it this way to underscore another fundamental symptom of the process, which is the projection out of the new media of a whole new set of ideologies appropriate to their dynamics, namely, the new communicational and linguistic or semiotic philosophies that have in the twentieth century seemed to consign several thousand years of traditional philosophical history to obsolescence on the grounds that it left out the centrality of language. This is probably not the right way to handle the matter of truth and error in philosophy, but for the moment it is sufficient to shake ourselves into a certain (truly philosophical) wonderment at the extraordinary proliferation of theories of communication, which (no doubt, like everything else, from Nietzsche on) have come to dominate official thinking today, not merely in philosophy, but also in sociology, in political philosophy, and perhaps even in biology and evolution, with their notions of DNA as a code and of the virus as a messenger.

At least, indeed, from the first stirrings of the notion of intersubjectivity in the 1920s all the way to Habermas and the full-blown structuralisms,¹³ what I will call the ideology of communication has come to blanket the field and to discredit any philosophical representations that fail to acknowledge the primacy and uniqueness of language, the speech act, or the communicational exchange. Yet any linguistic philosophy ought to be in an excellent position to grasp the purely representational (dare one even say aesthetic) nature of philosophy and its systems and propositions and minimally to conclude that they cannot exactly be correct or incorrect. One would not want to deny its moment of truth to the communicational philosophies either, provided it is understood that they have discovered those truths as the latter were in the process of historical development and emergence. Communicationality has emerged as the central fact of world society in the course of a historical process, the very one to which we have been referring here, namely, the transfiguration of capitalism into its third, late or post-modern stage. What one must say is not that ideologies of communication are somehow true in the absolute (or by virtue of "human nature," as the speaking animal) but rather that they have become true historically to the degree to which contemporary capitalism is increasingly organized on a communicational basis.

But to position language at the center of things is also to foreground temporality, for whether one comes at it from the sentence or the speech act, from presence or the coeval, from comprehension or the transmission of signs and signals, temporality is not merely presupposed but becomes the ultimate object or ground of analysis. What I have here been calling space therefore risks becoming a misnomer. Always and everywhere we have rather to do with something that happens to time; or perhaps, as space is mute and time loquacious, we are able to make an approach to spatiality only by way of what it does to time.

Predictably, the “end of temporality” is one of those things, and we need to begin the inventory of its forms. I read into the record, for example, the reaction of an astute listener to an earlier version of these speculations: “In Japan,” she said, “the cellphone has abolished the schedule and the time of day. We don’t make appointments any more, we simply call people whenever we wake up.” Older habits of clock time are thereby eclipsed, the “signifier” of the single day called into question; some new non-chronological and nontemporal pattern of immediacies comes into being. We might have also mentioned the streamlining of television news whereby, apparently for the benefit of a new youth public, current events are provided throughout the program in a “crawl” that summarizes the latest current events, so precious time need not be wasted in waiting for the coverage in question. Impatience is probably not the right word for this promotion and transfiguration of the synchronic (any more than *entertainment* has much explanatory value when dealing with the appeal of mass culture). But the phenomenon does redirect us to the existential level of the matter, which in contemporary theory takes the form of the study of the quotidian or of everyday life.

During the structuralist period, the existential, the realm of so-called lived experience (*expérience vécue*), was deliberately displaced and marginalized, if not discredited altogether, as an essentially “humanist” inquiry, whose organizing categories, from “alienation” to “experience” itself, were philosophically flawed and complicitous with the various ideologies of the subject, the ego, and consciousness. Structuralism has come and gone; this particular debate has dried up altogether (along with the very denunciation of humanism itself, which could still come in handy from time to time) without having produced much in the way of conceptual results, as though in the meantime experience itself (or what used to be meant by it in reality) had also evaporated.

Yet Althusser had one suggestive thing to say about time, which may be retained as a productive starting point (whatever consequences it was meant to have in his own arguments). This is the proposition that each mode of production generates its own unique and specific temporality; the premise no doubt posits the primacy of labor time, implying that the temporality of

a given type of production has a more general influence on the way time is conceptualized and lived in the rest of the society.¹⁴ It is a proposition we are probably generally inclined to take for granted when it comes to the difference between an agricultural society and an industrial one, but the principle here invites us to subtler differentiations for a whole range of distinct modes of production and, in particular, to construct mediations between the labor process generally and the more specific “structures of feeling” (to use Raymond Williams’s inspired formula) that can be detected at work in cultural expressions and everyday life.

The Althusserian suggestion is, to be sure, dangerous to the very degree to which it promotes a lapse into that very historicism he was concerned to denounce, some Spenglerian conflation of the various levels of a given historical period, in which a specific form of temporality becomes the hallmark of everything from architecture to statecraft, from mathematics to artistic style. Rather than a period style, therefore, it seems more desirable to stage the “end of temporality” as a situation faced by postmodernity in general and to which its artists and subjects are obliged to respond in a variety of ways. This situation has been characterized as a dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place.

We can grasp this development more dramatically by thinking our way back to an age in which it was still possible to conceive of an individual (or existential) life as a biographical destiny. Destiny is to be sure something you can only perceive from the outside of a life, whence the idea, classically formulated by Mallarmé, that existence only becomes a life or destiny when it is ended or completed: “*Tel qu’en Lui-même enfin l’éternité le change,*” as the poet put it in his evocation of a particularly blighted destiny.¹⁵ Yet it is doubtful whether antiquity itself registered this radical transformation from the being-for-itself to the being-for-other-people (to use Sartrean terminology), from personal consciousness to the alienation of destiny. The Greeks seem to have felt death more as a dialectical passage from quantity to quality:

Then learn that mortal man must always look to his ending,
And none can be happy until that day when he carries
His happiness down to the grave in peace.¹⁶

And perhaps the Christian insistence on the determining effect of the final moment (as in Dante) reflected something of the same sense of the belated unification of life and fate or destiny.

But save for extraordinary moments of violence and irony—such as the great political assassinations beloved of the media—my own feeling is that

we do not live life in this classical fashion any longer. Whether it was ever authentic to see one's self as shaped by fate, whether Athenian tragedies that coordinate a blinding present of time with a revelation of destiny are to be taken as signs of a relationship to Being we ought to envy, modern existentialism has certainly taught a very different lesson; its insistence on our temporal imprisonment in the present discredits ideas of destiny or fate and renders the ancient view of biography alien to us. Perhaps we have come to associate the classical perspective with the violence and brevity of life in the ancient city-state, or perhaps our own attitudes on the subject are conditioned by the modern American concealment and sanitization of death. At any rate, this shift in conceptions of destiny and existence seems sufficient to qualify modern existentialism—the sense of a unique subjectivity and a unique existence in the present—as one plausible beginning for what we will characterize as the reduction to the present in postmodernity.

But the function of this existential reduction was still a relatively positive and progressive one in the modern period, and the account of existentialism in terms of death is to that degree a misleading one, despite Heidegger's (and Nazism's) formation in the carnage of World War I and Sartre's relationship to the German occupation of France in World War II. What the innumerable holocausts of this period deconceal (to use an existential neologism) is not so much death and human finitude as rather the multiplicity of other people; it is the spectacle of that multiplicity of lives that is then starkly revealed by the horrors of the trenches or the mass executions and not some metaphysical condition to be brooded over by priests and philosophers or impressionable adolescents.

This is why we must link the positive political content of modern existentialism with demography rather than with modern warfare and must identify its fundamental moment of truth not so much in the slaughter of the world wars as in the movement of decolonization that followed them and that suddenly released an explosion of otherness unparalleled in human history. Here too no doubt the first experience of the masses of the industrial big cities offered a foreshadowing of this world-historical turning, yet those masses (a nation within the nation, as Disraeli famously called them) were still contained and concealed behind reassuring categories of caste and class, just as the subsequent incorporation of foreign colonies can be made acceptable in the mind of the colonizers by a variety of categories of race and biological inferiority. It is the explosive fact of decolonization that now sweeps these comfortable categories away and confronts me with an immense multitude of others, which I am called upon to recognize as equals or as freedoms.¹⁷ But in our present context the point to be made has to do with the impact of this recognition on the experience of the bourgeois self, for it is the proliferation of all these innumerable others that renders vain and inconsequential my own experience of some essence I might be, some

unique life or destiny that I might claim as a privilege (or indeed as a form of spiritual or existential private property). The stripping away of that form of temporality—the security of the ego or the unique personal self—is comparable to the stripping away of universals in a nominalist age; it leaves me alone with my unique present, with a present of time that is anonymous and no longer belongs to any identifiable biographical self or private destiny. It is surely this demographic plebeianization of my subjectivity that is the achievement of existentialism and that is prolonged into the post-structuralist campaign against the so-called centered subject, a progressive direction as long as the reduction to the present is conceived in this essentially political way and not translated back into interesting new forms of subjectivity as such.¹⁸

But this is precisely what happens in the postmodern period, where the reformulation of depersonalization in terms of time (along with the failure of the worldwide revolutionary movements) leads to renewed privatization. I want to illustrate this process by way of two unrelated philosophical positions that both in one way or another posit a reduction to the present of which they are symptoms fully as much as theories. The first is the notion of “ideal schizophrenia” developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus*, the other, less well known, is that of the aesthetic of suddenness (*Plötzlichkeit*) proposed and elaborated by the distinguished German critic Karl Heinz Bohrer (editor of the *Merkur* and a conservative polemicist of rare quality).

The presentation of the ideal schizophrenic as the “true hero of desire” by Deleuze and Guattari is argued largely on the strength of the perpetual present attributed to this “conceptual personage” (although Guattari was a psychiatrist, the ideal schizophrenic in question here is not the clinical patient or psychotic sufferer but rather a sublimated composite of the latter’s traits, which are in any case perpetual possibilities for any form of human reality). This absolute present is then a new kind of freedom, a disengagement from the shackles of the past (the family and, in particular, Freud’s conception of the Oedipus complex) as well as from those of the future (the routine of the labor process under capitalism). The schizophrenic is here opposed to the ego-fortress of the paranoid, the source of all fascisms and authoritarianisms, and thus becomes a political ideal as well as an ethical one. Deleuze tells us that he abandoned this notion of ideal schizophrenia in the face of the tragedies and devastation of the drug culture in the 1970s; he replaced it by a more interestingly collective concept, the nomadic horde or guerilla band, which is of relevance here only if you diagnose anarchism as a kind of political or collective reduction to the present.¹⁹

As for Deleuzian schizophrenia, however, the diagnosis is an ambiguous one and turns on the difficulty of distinguishing a critique from a projection. Insofar as the freedom from time is just that reduction to the present

we have been examining, what looks like a critique of our social order and the conceptualization of an alternative to it (in the *Anti-Oedipus*) turns out in reality to be the replication of one of its most fundamental tendencies. The Deleuzian notion of schizophrenia is therefore certainly a prophetic one but it is prophetic of tendencies latent within capitalism itself and not the stirrings of a radically different order capable of replacing it. Indeed, it is questionable whether Deleuze was ever interested in theorizing any alternative social order as such.²⁰

Besides the nomadic horde, I believe that another concept in the toolkit of late Deleuze can be seen as a variation on the ideal schizophrenic, and that is the enormously influential—and also relatively incomprehensible—theme of virtuality, which has been saluted as the first original philosophical conceptualization of the computer and cyberspace. This is as it were a different way of making the present self-sufficient and autonomous and independent in quite a different fashion from those dimensions of past and future from which the earlier concept also wanted to escape. But here the formative reference is to Bergson and not to the clinic; we will return to the consequences of this shift in registers in a moment.

Turning now to Bohrer, whose work is quite independent of the French poststructuralist context and is inspired both by German Romanticism (and classical German philosophy) as well as by the still suspect writer on whom he wrote his first book (Ernst Jünger), his conception of “suddenness” is an openly temporal one and posits a theory of the specificity of the aesthetic on the basis of its “sudden” independence from past and future and of the emergence of a new temporal form beyond history.²¹ It is an argument clearly indebted to Nietzsche but just as significantly to Adorno, in whose tradition Bohrer also paradoxically stands. The concrete analyses and readings are of the greatest interest, but two other points need to be made about this position that very explicitly proposes a reduction of the aesthetic to the sheerest present of time (it is not always clear whether Bohrer means thereby to characterize the aesthetic in a general way or to limit his theory to the more specifically modernist experience of art).

The first point to be made is the (equally explicit) identification of “suddenness” or the aesthetic instant with violence as such and in particular with what we may call the aesthetic violence of Ernst Jünger. We may leave ideological judgments out of the discussion; we may even agree that this view of the aesthetic tends to translate violence into a specific form of temporality (under which a variety of nonviolent phenomena may also be ranged) rather than to translate the aesthetic itself into violence after the fashion, say, of the sacrificial violence of Bataille. Still, the association of violence and an aesthetic reduction to the present will prove to be significant, as I will show in a moment.

The other remark to be made about this aesthetics, explicitly directed

against history and the political historicism of writers like Walter Benjamin, is simply this: even the possibility of stepping, for an “instant,” outside of history is a possibility that is itself profoundly historical and has its properly historical preconditions.

But about both Deleuze and Bohrer in their very different ways, it is now necessary to observe the following: whenever one attempts to escape a situatedness in the past and the future or in other words to escape our being-in-time as such, the temporal present offers a rather flimsy support and a doubtful or fragile autonomy. It thus inevitably comes to be thickened and solidified, complemented, by a rather more metaphysical backing or content, which is none other than the idea of eternity itself. Indeed, if one traces Deleuzian virtuality back to its source in Bergson and in the strangest of all modern idealistic texts, *Matter and Memory*, one finds this temporal doubling of the present explicitly identified as eternity, as what is out of time altogether. In Bohrer’s case the reduction to the present becomes rather the Nietzschean one and finds its justification in the eternity of the famous eternal return. But in both these instances, getting out of time always overshoots the mark and ends up in a nontemporality I doubt we can accept today.

It is only fair to add that this position also comes in as it were a materialist version, promoted by certain contemporary feminisms and with a decidedly radical or progressive character. For the reduction to the present, from this perspective, is also a reduction to something else, something rather more material than eternity as such. Indeed, it seems clear enough that when you have nothing left but your temporal present, it follows that you also have nothing left but your own body. The reduction to the present can thus also be formulated in terms of a reduction to the body as a present of time.

This move explains the proliferation of theories of the body nowadays and the valorization of the body and its experience as the only authentic form of materialism. But a materialism based on the individual body (and encountered again in contemporary research on the brain and the philosophy of mind and on drugs and psychosis) is to be identified as a mechanical materialism descended from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment rather than a historical and social materialism of the type that emerged from Marx and from a properly historical (nineteenth-century) world view. I hope it will not be misleading for me therefore to criticize this materialist emphasis on the body today as being fully as ideological as the timid spiritualisms I have already mentioned in connection with eternity. The confusion stems from the fact that ideologies of the body are for the most part politically progressive ones, and we can readily appreciate the kinds of realities they are concerned to denounce, beginning with torture and rape and running the gamut of all the forms of bodily suffering and abuse to which the present age

has quite properly become sensitive. To criticize such a politics then places one in the same paradoxical situation occupied by a critique of the ideology of human rights, a position people assume to mean that you are somehow against human rights, whereas it is the concept of human rights as a political category and a political strategy that is thereby under discussion.

The problem with the body as a positive slogan is that the body itself, as a unified entity, is an Imaginary concept (in Lacan's sense); it is what Deleuze calls a "body without organs," an empty totality that organizes the world without participating in it. We experience the body through our experience of the world and of other people, so that it is perhaps a misnomer to speak of the body at all as a substantive with a definite article, unless we have in mind the bodies of others, rather than our own phenomenological referent. It is hard to see how theories of gender could support such a one body reference, which would seem rather to have its ideological kinship and prolongation in current trauma theory.

Yet it is less the correctness or incorrectness of such theories that we are concerned with here; indeed, I have already suggested that these are not the right categories with which to judge any intellectual position today, which must rather be evaluated in terms of the worldly experience it organizes and reflects as well as the ideological function it serves. In the case of the reduction to the present and to the body alike, it is more important to underscore the ways in which all these theories replicate the deeper tendency of the socioeconomic order itself, which is a nominalistic one that seeks, in its uniquely historical "death of the subject," to reduce the historical dimensions of existential experience as such. This is a diagnosis, however, that must not ground its political program in archaic forms or encourage nostalgia about the value of an older bourgeois "centered subject" to which we can never return.

But the general argument for this historical tendency of late capitalism needs to be completed by the juxtaposition of these philosophical and ideological symptoms with properly cultural ones, and it seems inevitable to make a first approach to the latter by way of mass culture and in particular in the form of current action films. One can indeed argue that such films have very recently indeed become a genre in their own right, with a canon one can find recapitulated on television every week of the year in replays of their most successful specimens—*Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Cliffhanger*, *Terminator*, and so on—their relative antiquity not seeming to bode well for the future and development of this new genre. Indeed, this very devolution of a newly emergent genre is part of the story I will want to tell here, for it suggests the effects of an internal contradiction, which may or may not prove fatal. The alternate characterization of such films as violence pornography may simply be another expression of their form problem, which demands that they minimally evade the absolutely episodic nature of sexual

pornography, whose intermittent closures are allowed to be a good deal more final.

Yet this internal contradiction also makes for considerable difficulty in the choice of a representative illustration. What was to be demonstrated, as a consequence of the reduction to the present and to the body, was in other words the tension between the construction of a plot (overall intrigue, narrative suspense) and the demand for a succession of explosive and self-sufficient present moments of violence. The discussion of Bohrer, indeed, had the merit of showing that there is a privileged relationship between violence as content and the closure or provisional autonomy of a temporal form. The demonstration would now have to show how the succession of such moments gradually crowds out the development of narrative time and reduces plot to the merest pretext or thread on which to string a series of explosions (much like a trailer or preview, as I've suggested elsewhere). But this means, for all practical purposes, that the better a given film suits our purposes here in the context of the present argument, the worse it has to be (it being understood that I have also excluded established genres, such as the horror film, which have their own distinctive histories and whose generic structure has evolved specifically to respond to analogous form problems).

Fortunately, however, it cannot be denied that even in the realm of action films (especially in the realm of action films?) some are better than others, and few prove my point as effectively as Jon de Bont's 1994 *Speed*, about which I will try to show that, contrary to expectation, its title does not designate temporality or velocity, nor change in time, nor even repetition any longer, but rather the absence of temporality altogether. It is a film in what I hope to be excused for calling three movements, organized around elevators, a city bus, and a subway respectively, but most of us probably only remember the bus ride, which occupies roughly half the movie and whose initial premise—that there are buses in Los Angeles in the first place—will offer an inaugural paradox. But the motif of the bus is crucial to the enterprise, for clearly enough any solution to this particular form problem demands that the formal requirement for nonstop action effects somehow be locked into place. On the level of something approaching a zero degree of plot, this requirement is ingeniously secured by the mechanism of the bomb, which is activated as soon as the bus goes over fifty miles an hour and programmed to detonate if it should slacken to something under that speed thereafter. The speed-control mechanism is thus itself already an allegory of the new form, which must never slow down at its own generic peril.

I should add that the rest of the plot, organized around the madman and his motivations, is rather to be considered a narrative compensation and what the Russian Formalists called "motivation of the device" than any genuine narrative material. Indeed, I take it as axiomatic that whenever mass culture resorts to maniacs—whether these be serial killers

or “terrorists” of various kinds—it is by definition plugging its own gaps and holes with material that can by definition not really be “motivated” because it is—equally by definition and in advance—labeled as the nonrational and the incomprehensible. One has to go back to Robert Musil’s Moosbrugger, the serial killer of *The Man without Qualities*, to find a madman we are expected somehow to “understand,” while as for terrorists, as soon as we do understand their motivation, they become political activists and can no longer be used as self-explanatory plot devices in mass culture.

Yet behind the narrative device of the bomb’s mechanism there lies an even more fundamental formal principle of such films, and that is something like a unity of place or, at least, a confinement within a closed space of some kind. The defining framework can be a high-rise building, an airport, an airplane, a train, an elevator, or, as here, a city bus. It can even approximate a whole city (as in *Earthquake*) or indeed the earth itself as the meteor approaches. But the closure is formally essential in order to render escape impossible and to ensure the absolute saturation of the violence in question, like the walls within which a proper explosion can best be realized. Something peculiar then follows from this requirement; the closure now becomes allegorical of the human body itself and reduction to the vehicle of closure in these films represents the reduction to the body that is a fundamental dimension of the end of temporality or the reduction to the present.

But why bring allegory into the process at all? It is necessary in order to conceal the phenomenological limits of film as such, whose attempts at some literal “reduction to the body”—the close-ups in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, for example, or even the corpses in Sokurov—take us in an utterly different direction, while remaining equally unrealizable. Film can only furnish kinetic images, but what is really at stake here is not the limits of film as a medium but rather those of phenomenology, which promised the existential body a corporeal plenitude on which it could not deliver.²² Not only is such immediacy impossible philosophically (the work of both Hegel and Derrida constitute exhaustive if quite different demonstrations of the impossibility of such immediate experience), but we must also affirm that phenomenological plenitude is itself impossible on any level, let alone those of the body and of the present of time. So it is that the appeal to a reduction to those things is constantly undermined by fragmentation, and by a fragmentation bound to function allegorically insofar as it remains intent on telling us that each of its body parts is really the whole after all, just as it wants us to believe that its successive instants in time are really, each of them, “time’s livid final flame.”

But now the project of reduction fans out into a host of separate allegorical messages. The bus has momentum but, as has already been said, that is not really time or temporality; on the contrary, it is the representation of

temporality, threatened at every moment with some ultimate present of the bomb blast that can never take place. It has a driver; those are the eyes and the visuality of this dangerous journey. It even has fingers, the fingers of the specialist, engaged in that most delicate of all procedures, defusing the bomb. These scattered allegorical senses are enough to show that we will never reach the goal of this formal tendency, the reduction to the ultimate present of the body.

Yet until now we have examined the allegorical body, as it were, the object of this narrative process; what about the mind or its subject pole? Here also, seeking immediacy and the eclipse of the temporal mind in physical terror, we only find a host of mediations. No one is quite so intent on engineering plans and their execution than the driver and her policeman assistant, but the allegorical clue is to be found elsewhere, in the epistemology of the process, for the madman watches all this on television by way of the even more fragmented and totalizing cameras on the news media helicopters circling overhead, and at the end we discover that he has had his own projected vision improbably built into the bus in the shape of a secret closed-circuit camera. All the communication, meanwhile, and the negotiations are carried on by cellphone, that seeming apotheosis of synchronous immediacy than which few technologies are more reliant on mediations of all kinds. The subject is therefore as bereft of plenitude as the object; the mind/body problem remains intact; immediacy is no more available on the side of perception than on that of corporeality. It would seem that the film has successfully managed to outwit its own form problem, thereby fortunately evading the only ultimate reduction to the body remaining to the medium, namely, the explosion of the movie theater itself. But why are the subway tracks unfinished; why is the freeway itself uncompleted in one crucial area of fifty feet? Are we to understand from this that space, like temporality, can also come to an end?

At any rate, it would seem that I have deconstructed my own argument, and far from demonstrating the end of temporality I have been able only to show the impossibility of such a demonstration. To be sure, the aesthetic virtue of any form problem, and in particular one so acutely limiting as this one, is to allow the exercise of ingenuity and even artfulness in its unexpected resolution and under the constraints of narrow and even impossible limits. But I suspect that the conclusion to be drawn lies elsewhere, for if, in this illustration, "the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes," what that shows is not that there is no last instance, but rather that, like the drive in psychoanalysis, it is ultimately never representable as such.²³

And this is the conclusion I should like to reach here; we have been throughout evoking a historical tendency, but a tendency is by definition never fully reached or it would already have folded back into actuality itself. Let's follow the psychoanalytic model even further; the tendency also

summons up complex patterns of resistance, such that what we are forced to observe in the form of its symptoms are precisely those patterns and not the unknowable tendency itself. This is what we are obliged to posit here: the historical tendency of late capitalism—what we have called the reduction to the present and the reduction to the body—is in any case unrealizable; human beings cannot revert to the immediacy of the animal kingdom (assuming indeed the animals themselves enjoy such phenomenological immediacy). There is a resistance to this pressure, which I hesitate to call natural for political as well as philosophical reasons, for the identification of such a tendency and the organization of resistance to it are not matters to be entrusted to any confidence in humanist reflexes.

But one might also conclude on a rather different note, which has to do with moralizing judgments. To speak, as I have done in passing, of violence pornography is to use language that is not only conventionally moralizing but also conjures up the political positions of people with whom most of us would probably not wish to find ourselves identified. What was to have been proven was the very opposite of the moralizing culture critique, namely, that these cultural tendencies and symptoms are not ethical matters at all but rather the reflex of our social system and its economic structure. Violence pornography, in other words, grasped from the perspective outlined here as a reduction to the present and to the body, is not to be seen as a form of immorality at all but rather as a structural effect of the temporality of our socioeconomic system or, in other words, of postmodernity as such, of late capitalism. It is the system that generates a specific temporality and that then expresses that temporality through the cultural forms and symptoms in question. Moralizing is not a very effective way of dealing with those symptoms, nor indeed with the end of temporality itself.

2003

Notes

- 1 See, for the history and analysis of the concept, Perry Anderson, "The Ends of History," *A Zone of Engagement*, London: Verso, 1992, 279–375.
- 2 Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain: A Novel*, trans. John E. Woods, New York: Knopf, 1995, 339. Future references to this work are denoted *MM*.
- 3 Some five thousand volumes in the last three years, according to WorldCat.org.
- 4 Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, 850.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris: Minuit, 1972, 47 ("D'une certaine manière, il est toujours trop tard pour poser la question du temps").
- 6 See also Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice, Oeuvres*, ed. André Robinet, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991, 753.

- 7 See Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, New York: Pantheon, 1981.
- 8 I use the word *recognition* in the strong Hegelian sense of the famous master-slave dialectic or as what Sartre would call the recognition of another freedom. For a recent discussion, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson, Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995.
- 9 Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press, 1965, 7.
- 10 The breakthrough argument for an inclusion of colonial labor as an essential, and not merely incidental, component of capitalism's "primitive accumulation" is of course that of Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild, New York: Monthly Review, 1968.
- 11 I take my understanding of contemporary finance capital from the pathbreaking discussion in Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, London: Verso, 1994. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*, New York: Verso, 1998, 138–143.
- 12 See my definition of late modernism in Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, New York: Verso, 2002, which develops at greater length many of the themes of the present essay.
- 13 The telltale slogan of "intersubjectivity" (invented by the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz) is the giveaway clue to the humanist character of these ideologies. My critique of them is not particularly inspired by any defensive preemption of language-based critiques of Marxism, for the Habermassians demonstrated long ago that class struggle was itself a communicational structure; see Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro, Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, 283.
- 14 Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review, 1970, 99. It is important to add that for Althusser a mode of production has no single temporality but rather a system of distinct and interlocking times.
- 15 Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe," *Poésies*, ed. Lloyd James Austin, Paris: Flammarion, 1989, 99.
- 16 Sophocles, *King Oedipus*, in *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. V. Rieu, New York: Penguin, 1986, 68.
- 17 See note 8, above.
- 18 This is the central theme of Deleuze's philosophy (and is presupposed, perhaps in a slightly different way, by Jean-François Lyotard's work). Both acknowledge the priority of Sartre's early *Transcendence of the Ego*.
- 19 See the posthumously broadcast television interviews, *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*.
- 20 But see, on the "anarchist" tendencies of the Deleuze/Guattari books, Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96, Summer 1997, 393–416.

- 21 See Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, trans. Ruth Crowley, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, as well as *Das absolute Präsens*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994, and *Die Aesthetik des Schreckens*, Munich: Hanser, 1978, on Jünger.
- 22 I refer here to Merleau-Ponty.
- 23 Althusser's famous inversion of Engels's even more famous dictum. Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1969, 113.

Index

- 1960s, the, 60, 67, 82, 105, 113, 191–192, 194, 292, 300, 356, 373, 375, 376–378, 382, 386–388, 435, 483–515, 607, 614–615, 624
- Absolute Spirit, 383, 399, 460, 463
- absurd, the, 228, 492
- Adams, Henry, 456
- Adorno, Theodor W., 23, 81, 112, 119n7, 134, 140, 143n7, 176, 194, 210, 221n14, 225, 242n7, 245, 258, 259–261, 264, 265, 266, 274, 289, 300, 347, 348–350, 352, 354, 363, 365, 375, 434, 435, 443–445, 447, 449n9, 504, 577, 599, 650
- advertising, 374, 565, 626
- aesthetics, 37, 71–72, 123n43, 142, 149, 163, 184–186, 243–244, 253, 258–259, 290, 368–369, 382, 434–435, 440–449, 650–651
- AFL-CIO, 486
- AIDS, 619–621
- Alexander, Christopher, 370n10
- Algeria, 485, 488, 493
- alienation, 67, 140, 157–158, 160n5, 207, 228, 273, 310, 339, 353, 378, 447, 452, 477, 492, 496
in Lacan, 89–91, 94–96, 100, 101, 112
- allegory, 5, 44–45, 52, 134–135, 393, 426–429, 430, 615, 654
- Althusser, Louis, 111–112, 119n10, 121n21, 124n46, 147, 160n5, 166, 200, 239–240, 255n1, 256, 287, 346–348, 368, 401, 405, 441, 451, 456, 458, 463–467, 474–475, 477, 481n1, 483, 485, 496–498, 500, 503, 506, 585, 611, 613, 646–647, 657n14, 658n23
- American exceptionalism, 628–630
- anarchism, 59, 105, 117, 135, 157, 291, 444, 611, 628, 649, 657n20
- Anderson, Perry, 264, 302n3, 482n24, 634n7, 635n9, 656n1
- Angenot, Marc, 577–597
- anthropology, 21, 137, 202–204, 268, 388, 425, 446, 460, 462–463, 469, 482n23, 534, 604–605, 616, 620–621
see also Lévi-Strauss, Claude
- anti-intellectualism, 8, 131, 291, 296, 375, 611, 623
- anti-Semitism, 68, 310, 584
- Anzieu, Didier, 180
- apocalypse, 66–67, 527, 543, 548, 573
- Aquinas, Thomas, 313–314
- archetypes, 132–133, 162, 175, 373, 419–420, 426, 452, 522, 533
- architecture, 70, 224–225, 252–253, 255n7, 344–371, 504, 555–562, 563–571, 636–637
- Ardrey, Robert, 463
- Aristotle, 8, 66, 189–193, 315, 482n12
- Arnold, Matthew, 129, 510

- Aronowitz, Stanley, 449n10
 Arrighi, Giovanni, 657n11
 Artaud, Antonin, 424, 498
 Ashbery, John, 505
 Asor Rosa, Alberto, 349
 Attali, Jacques, 256–263
 Auerbach, Erich, 35, 127, 256, 420–421, 428, 456, 460, 469, 481n4
 Augustine, 89, 534–554
 Austen, Jane, 192
 Austin, J. L., 244, 246, 413n9
auteur, 70, 223, 362, 492, 500, 563, 569, 601, 608
autosurveillance, 262
 avant-garde, 250–251, 263n3, 303n19, 364–365, 433n5, 497, 557, 561
- Babbitt, Irving, 154
 Bachelard, Gaston, 11, 24, 32, 122n33, 155, 441
 Bachofen, Johann Jakob, 457–458, 478
Baghavad-Gita, 318
 Bahro, Rudolf, 373, 493
 Bakhtin, Mikhail, 106, 123n39, 133, 143n4, 155, 585, 587, 608, 638
 Balibar, Étienne, 123n40, 477, 634n7, 635n10, 657n14
 Ballard, J. G., 527, 573
 Balzac, Honoré de, 23, 24–25, 27–28, 31, 32, 33, 38–39, 45–76, 78, 128, 146, 327, 420, 579, 580
 Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe), 78
 Barrès, Maurice, 581, 595
 Barthelme, Donald, 43
 Barthes, Roland, 19, 23–40, 47–52, 57–76, 106, 122n29–30, 123n36, 145, 161, 169, 220n9, 231, 239, 303n18, 349, 350, 352–354, 365–366, 368, 375–383, 436, 451, 577, 580–581, 591, 617
 Bataille, Georges, 44, 155, 572, 650
 Baudelaire, Charles, 68, 225, 230, 235–236, 265, 270–271, 366, 381, 465
 Baudrillard, Jean, 261, 303n18, 449n7, 451, 471, 475, 482n23, 500, 566, 570, 610
- de Beauvoir, Simone, 542
 Becker, Gary, 300
 Beckett, Samuel, 185, 421, 424, 445
 Beethoven, 164, 239, 258, 260, 372, 377
 Belinsky, V. G., 440
 Bell, Daniel, 243, 248–249, 254, 261, 355–356,
 Bellamy, Edward, 386, 396
 Benedict, Ruth, 469
 Bennett, Tony, 611–612, 627
 Bénichou, Paul, 141, 404
 Benjamin, Walter, 122n31, 125, 145, 194–195, 209, 222–241, 264–274, 284, 366, 434, 441, 443–444, 468, 565–567, 580, 610, 651
 Benveniste, Émile, 73, 105
 Berger, John, 147
 Bergman, Ingmar, 70
 Bergson, Henri, 269–270, 272, 275, 581, 593, 636, 650–651
 Berland, Jody, 602–603, 628, 630, 633
 Bernays, Edward, 565
 Bernstein, Basil, 215
 Bhabha, Homi, 605, 608
 Birmingham School, the, 603, 609, 610, 613, 628, 629, 634n7
 Blake, Peter, 370n10
 Blanchot, Maurice, 498
 Bloch, Ernst, 8, 133, 342n2, 381, 388, 434, 438, 442, 444–446, 468, 479
 Bloom, Harold, 569
 Blumenberg, Hans, 289
 Boas, Franz, 174n11, 460, 460, 469, 481n7
 Boccaccio, Giovanni, 55
 body, the, 32, 50, 86, 90, 204, 215, 218, 344, 372, 381–384, 536–537, 539, 541, 543, 545, 547, 552–553, 569, 586–587, 604–605, 612, 620, 626–627, 651–656
 without organs, 372, 463–464, 652
 Bohrer, Karl Heinz, 649–651
 Book-of-the-Month Club, the, 600, 625
 Booth, Wayne, 42–43
 Borges, Jorge Luis, 502

- Boudon, P., 370n10
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 204, 211, 215, 296–303, 345, 587, 593–594, 620–621, 623, 626
- bourgeoisie, 62, 113, 129, 140–141, 210, 257–258, 331–335, 340, 408, 422–423, 427, 430, 507, 580, 587–589
- Bowie, Andrew, 201
- Braverman, Harry, 207
- Brecht, Bertolt, 24, 36, 63, 66–67, 105, 125, 147, 162, 185–186, 194, 209, 225–232, 235–237, 241, 301, 381, 417, 434–450, 480, 534, 610
and *Verfremdung* effect, 24, 36, 63, 147, 227, 417, 442–443
- Breton, André, 224–225, 229, 435
- Brombert, Victor, 43–44
- Brown, Peter, 536–554
- Buchanan, Pat, 618
- Bühler, Charlotte, 87
- Burckhardt, Jacob, 164, 528–530, 600
- bureaucracy, 81, 191, 243, 248–249, 260, 301, 310, 316, 319–323, 327, 333, 336–337, 340–341, 356, 365, 409–410, 444, 454, 494, 497, 537, 625–627, 632, 642
- Burke, Edmund, 290, 370, 380, 382–383
- Burke, Kenneth, 144–160, 164–165, 174n3, 522
- Butler, Samuel, 393
- Byron, Lord George Gordon, 312, 573
- Cabet, Étienne, 386
- Cacciari, Massimo, 347
- Calvin, John, 326–331
- Cambridge School, the, 155, 416, 454
- Camus, Albert, 228, 379, 492
- capitalism, 28, 46, 55, 71–73, 75, 110, 112–113, 138, 140, 153, 155–156, 170, 174n11, 184, 192, 207, 210–211, 237, 247–255, 276, 278, 287–289, 310, 324–326, 331, 346, 353–357, 400–401, 404–405, 408–409, 417, 422–427, 435, 458–459, 469, 475–480, 564, 618, 650, 652, 656–657
- consumer, 72, 98, 156, 316, 353–355, 362–363, 373–375, 394, 496, 549, 565, 568, 575
- industrial, 22
- late, 71, 81, 112–113, 203, 214, 249, 251–252, 261, 264, 289, 293–294, 299–300, 349, 356, 362–363, 367, 369, 370n6, 373–375, 382, 386, 391, 443–448, 497–498, 506, 511–515, 532, 534, 560, 573–575, 627, 632–633, 642–645, 652, 656
- monopoly 20, 136, 261, 432, 434
- see also* mode of production; post-industrial society; société de consommation
- Carnap, Rudolf, 15
- Cartesian method, 29, 32, 37, 80–81, 268, 295
- Castro, Américo, 460
- Castro, Fidel, 117
- Céline, Louis-Ferdinand, 42
- cellphones, 646, 655
- De Certeau, Michel, 267, 414
- Cervantes, Miguel de, 9, 55, 222, 326, 428
- Cézanne, Paul, 37
- Chandler, James, 580
- Channing, William E., 338
- Chaplin, Charlie, 581
- charisma, 310, 319, 321–322, 332–333, 339, 341, 440
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, 453
- Chateaubriand, François Auguste René, 318
- Chekhov, Anton, 57, 62
- Chernyshevsky, Nikolai, 440
- Chilean coup of 1973, the, 376, 488, 509
- China, 197, 227, 477, 490, 494, 507, 564
see also Mao Tse-tung; Deng Xiaoping

662 THE IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY

- Chomsky, Noam, 22
- Christianity, 291, 534–554
see also Protestantism
- Christie, Agatha, 29
- Cinderella, 389
- city, the, 266–267, 270–273, 282, 316–317, 344–345, 351, 364–366, 384, 399–402
see also urbanism
- civilization, versus barbarism and savagery, 425–427
- class consciousness, 297, 377, 405, 539, 618, 620,
- class struggle, 51, 104, 110, 129, 140, 142–143, 211, 248–249, 352, 448, 452, 477, 486, 507, 514, 618–619, 622, 657n13
- Clifford, James, 604–605, 608, 630, 631
- closure, *see* enclosure
- Cocteau, Jean, 581
- Cold War, 20, 139, 185, 223, 327, 444, 453, 457, 536
- Coleridge, Samuel, 253
- Colletti, Lucio, 160n5, 441
- collectivity, 17, 84, 133, 155, 202, 207, 218, 401, 447, 469
- Collingwood, R. G., 21, 165, 460
- colonialism, 104, 139, 177, 181–187, 325, 485, 489–490, 495, 512, 602, 606, 608, 640, 642, 657n10
- combinatoire*, 163, 168, 174n5, 330, 455, 468, 471–472, 477
- comedy, 82–83, 132, 162, 416, 435, 530–531
- commodity, 28, 38, 56, 69, 113, 140, 171, 188, 198, 206, 214, 225, 250–251, 261, 267, 292, 300, 310, 316, 356, 362, 374–375, 391, 394, 422, 424, 444–445, 448, 467, 479, 482, 501, 506, 512–513, 565, 574–575, 584, 633
- communicationality, 645
- communism, 67, 74, 170, 190, 283, 292–293, 298, 370n10, 422–423, 442, 449, 476, 486–488, 510, 564, 631
- community, 84, 131, 133, 164, 166, 189–190, 193, 203–204, 246, 253, 410, 543, 552–553, 605
see also *Gemeinschaft*
- computers, 20, 248, 262, 384, 403, 512, 572, 650
- Conrad, Joseph, 128
- content, manifest vs. latent, 15–16
- Corneille, Pierre, 137, 141–143
- corporations, 184, 255n3, 261, 440, 444, 510, 566, 626–628, 632
- counterculture, 20, 66, 72, 74, 113, 185, 362, 375, 485, 510
- Crimp, Douglas, 619, 626
- Croce, Benedetto, 162, 164, 172, 460, 486, 529
- Cuban Revolution, 487, 507–508
- Cubism, 186–187
- Culler, Jonathan, 39–45, 61–75
- culture industry, 250, 374, 444, 513
- cultural studies, 191, 290, 563, 581, 598–635, 642
- Curtis, Edward, 239–240, 624
- Dali, Salvador, 135
- Danto, Arthur, 474
- Darwin, Charles, 311, 458, 465, 587
- Daumier, Honoré, 235
- Debord, Guy, 243, 250, 414n11, 500, 575
- Debray, Régis, 494, 507–508, 515
- decadence, 187, 232, 241, 404, 438–439, 585, 587, 589
- decolonization, 485, 489–490, 640, 648
see also colonialism
- deconstruction, *see* Derrida, Jacques;
structuralism, post-
- Deleuze, Gilles, 65–66, 73–75, 91, 104, 106, 176, 201, 214–217, 222, 245, 253, 269, 287, 370n10, 372, 375, 423–428, 433, 436, 451, 456, 475, 481, 492, 500, 566, 591, 606, 610, 614, 649–652, 657n18–20

- demystification, 7, 63, 118, 125, 131,
 133, 157–158, 160n6, 178, 180–
 181, 231–233, 288, 428, 452,
 523, 557, 621, 626–627
- Deng Xiaoping, 555, 564, 575
- Denning, Michael, 610
- Derrida, Jacques, 45, 69, 98, 101, 106–
 107, 122n29–30, 179, 287, 293,
 295, 298–299, 302n4, 302n6,
 436, 451, 492, 610, 638, 654
- detective stories, 54, 386
- deterritorialization, 584
- Dewey, Thomas, 156
- Dick, Philip K., 123n37, 571, 573,
- Dickens, Charles, 400, 420
- difference, and identity, 13, 229, 453,
 588,
- Dilthey, Wilhelm, 119n7, 459, 468–469
- Disney, Walt, 403, 565, 568, 574, 641
- DNA, 21, 645
- domination, 104, 182, 260, 351, 364–
 365, 381, 447, 454, 479, 489,
 513, 627
see also power
- Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, 388, 420
- Doubrovsky, Serge, 126
- doxa*, 49–50, 67, 200, 242n7, 267, 269,
 536, 538, 541, 575, 581, 588,
 591, 595–596, 626
- Durkheim, Émile, 78, 81, 132
- dystopia, 255, 260, 262, 388, 400, 406,
 449n7, 557, 573
- Eagleton, Terry, 160n2, 287, 293–295,
 299, 303n19, 631
- eBay, 567
- Eco, Umberto, 75n5, 526,
- ecology, 269, 378, 395, 535, 547, 565,
 569, 641
- écriture*, 27, 45, 178, 180, 414
- Ehrmann, Jacques, 137, 141
- Eichenbaum, Boris, 8
- Eigensinn*, 201–202, 212
- Eisenhower, Dwight, 355
- Eisenstein, Sergei, 228
- ekphrasis*, 40
- Eliot, George, 130–131, 420
- Eliot, T. S., 503, 636
- empiricism, 161, 264, 267, 287, 289,
 300, 317, 456, 477
- Empson, William, 145
- enclave, 55, 191–192, 214, 249, 257,
 330, 356, 359–360, 367, 374,
 454, 490, 627
see also Utopia
- enclosure, 346, 349, 357, 361, 386,
 487, 490, 582, 595–596
- Engels, Friedrich, 173, 174n11, 260,
 295, 310, 342, 343n15, 386–387,
 409, 423, 425, 427, 445, 490,
 658n23
- Enlightenment, the, 59, 172, 217, 233,
 239, 286, 351, 364–365, 380,
 427, 456, 635, 651
- ennui, 8, 312–316, 333
- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, 444
- episteme, 21, 149, 289, 294, 299, 401,
 408, 417
- epistemic break, 244, 401
- epistemology, 21, 71, 84, 107, 109, 123,
 146, 213 238, 244, 247, 255n1,
 260, 278, 388, 420, 441, 457,
 492, 505, 519, 602, 621, 628,
 640–642
- epistolary narrative, 53–54
- epoché*, 287–288, 295
- Erikson, Erik 80
- essentialism, 196, 269
- estrangement, *see* Brecht
- ethics, 60, 62, 65–66, 89, 98, 115, 129–
 131, 134, 139, 143, 170, 189–
 193, 219, 253, 279, 286, 291,
 299, 317–320, 349, 452, 470–
 471, 534–535, 538–541, 593,
 649, 656
- Eurocentrism, 354, 629
- exchange, 12, 19n5, 34, 55–56, 86,
 137–138, 141–142, 149, 151,
 157–158, 170–171, 200, 208,
 276–279, 331, 335, 391, 408,
 425, 428, 434, 436, 485, 521–
 522, 574–575, 644–645

- Existentialism, 5, 123n43, 181, 267,
282, 334, 452, 491–493, 648–649
- fairy tales, 12, 195, 207, 212, 221, 405
- false consciousness, 27, 108, 133, 147,
214, 216, 258, 367, 374, 375,
418, 423, 438, 459, 574–575
- fan communities, 614, 624–625
- Fanon, Frantz, 104, 160n1, 493–495,
507
- fantastic literature, 46
and the uncanny, 53–54
- Farmer, Philip José, 120n17
- fascism, 214, 225, 381, 438, 440, 465,
572, 595, 649
- Faulkner, William, 127, 146, 223, 431,
530
- Faust, 9, 57, 259, 349, 353, 455
- Fellini, Federico, 70
- feminism, 351, 378, 466, 489, 498,
565, 569, 606–610, 624, 630,
634n2, 635n11, 651
see also women's movement
- Ferry, Jules, 583
- Ferry, Luc, 290
- feudalism, 55–56, 62, 66, 129, 137–
138, 141–143, 170, 204–207,
209–211, 325, 365, 400, 404–
405, 408–410, 412, 422, 429,
458, 461, 469, 476, 513, 619,
627, 631, 639
- Feyerabend, Paul, 243–244, 255
- film, 53–54, 67, 70, 75n6, 91, 122n27,
135, 194–195, 203, 214, 218–
219, 239, 378, 435, 449n10, 480,
497, 509, 517, 557, 607, 652–655
- fin de siècle*, 251, 584–585, 587, 589
- finitude, 231–232, 534–535, 648
- Fischer, Ernst, 416
- Fish, Stanley, 294, 413n9
- Fiske, John, 604–605, 623
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 439
- Flaubert, Gustave, 8, 25–33, 39–45,
57–76, 80–81, 195, 220n9, 222,
311–313, 327, 334, 420, 583,
595, 626
- Fletcher, Angus, 438
- foco*, 487, 507–508
- Fontane, Robert, 313
- Ford, Ford Maddox, 128
- Ford, Henry, 366, 579, 642
- Foucault, Michel, 21, 59, 64, 67, 76,
104, 113, 171–173, 254, 256,
287, 291, 295, 401, 436, 451,
458, 465, 473, 489, 492, 538–
542, 546, 554, 582–583, 586,
588, 626–628
- Fourier, Charles, 167, 36, 387, 445
- Franck, Sebastian, 328
- Frankfurt School, the, 81–82, 111–113,
123n43, 175, 178, 185, 213, 245,
251, 258–259, 356, 374–375,
400, 435, 492, 513
see also Adorno, Theodor W.;
Marcuse, Herbert
- Frege, Gottlob, 15, 59
- French Revolution of 1789, 51, 331–
332, 400, 461, 466, 494, 589
- French Revolution of 1848, 43, 129,
311, 331–332, 387, 466, 494, 589
- Freud, Sigmund, 7, 14, 19n7, 51–53,
78–79, 81, 85–86, 90, 95, 99,
100, 109, 119n10, 120n11, 134,
135, 158, 177, 213, 237, 272,
312, 338, 342, 364, 405, 424,
454, 535, 539
- Freudian criticism, 12, 15, 24, 77, 79–
81, 85–86, 90–91, 94, 99, 110,
115, 120, 120n17, 121n26,
123n40, 126, 133–135, 144, 164,
177, 179, 182, 201, 279, 311,
377, 452, 464, 500, 614
- Freudo-Marxism, 77–84, 108–110, 126,
133–134, 144, 213, 418, 614
see also Lacan, Jacques; Oedipus
- Frith, Simon, 601, 621, 625, 635n14
- Frye, Northrop, 82, 132–133, 145,
162–167, 426, 522, 528
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 419
- Gallop, Jane, 120n10, 634n2
- García Márquez, Gabriel, 582

- Geertz, Clifford, 75n1, 604
- Gemeinschaft, 131–132, 135, 140, 459
see also community
- gender, 50, 233, 291, 356, 378, 431, 486, 534, 607, 611, 613–614, 618–621, 640, 652
- Genet, Jean, 80–81, 104, 106
- Genette, Gérard, 32, 61, 169, 174
- genre, 9, 15, 60, 68, 70, 223, 348–349, 86–388, 393, 408, 412, 415–416, 435, 440, 567, 573, 577–580, 582, 592–594, 652–653
- Gestalt*, 29, 34, 37, 46, 50, 52–53, 144
- Gibbon, Edward, 161
- Gide, André, 12, 24, 90, 199–178, 291, 335
- Giedion, Siegfried, 224, 354, 563, 638
- Gilroy, Paul, 607, 630–631
- Girard, René, 315
- globalization, 264, 290, 301, 558, 565–568, 638–642
see also late capitalism
- Godard, Jean-Luc, 185, 196, 435, 494, 497
- Gödel, Kurt, 298
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 122, 234, 455
- Goffman, Erving, 615
- Gogol, Nikolai, 8–9
- Goldmann, Lucien, 141, 149, 166, 176, 183, 522
- Gombrich, E. H., 34–36, 72–73, 436
- Gorki, Maxim, 372
- Goux, Jean-Joseph, 171
- Gramsci, Antonio, 159, 160n1, 202, 264, 291, 358–362, 369, 380, 488, 493, 506, 588, 606, 610–611, 616–618, 622, 634
- Graves, Michael, 252, 528
- Greece, Ancient, 49, 72, 170, 190, 192, 197, 207–208, 212, 253, 259, 285n7, 314, 454, 482n12, 537–538, 542, 580, 608, 634, 647
- Green Revolution, 356, 490–491, 512
- Greenblatt, Stephen, 538
- Greimas, A. J., 22, 28, 49, 103, 105, 161, 166, 168, 174, 176, 183, 319–324, 329, 340, 342, 389, 396, 402, 413, 471, 481, 516–524, 531–533, 610
 semiotic rectangle of, the, 319–324, 340–341, 389, 396, 402, 471, 518, 522–531
- Grivel, Charles, 590
- Grossberg, Lawrence, 598
- Gruen, Victory, 569
- Guattari, Félix, 65, 73–75, 91, 106, 201, 214–217, 222, 253, 370, 372, 375, 423–428, 451, 456, 481, 566, 614, 649, 657n20
see also Deleuze, Gilles
- Guevara, Che, 484, 507–508
- Guillen, Claudio, 578, 597n1
- Guys, Constantin, 235
- Habermas, Jürgen, 123n41, 185, 198–199, 213, 218, 221, 243–253, 255n3, 258, 363, 403, 449n6, 492, 501, 557, 645, 657n13
- Hall, Catherine, 599–600
- Hall, Stuart, 606, 609, 613–614, 622–633, 627–628
- Hansen, Miriam, 201, 200n6
- Hardy, Thomas, 311
- Haraway, Donna, 629, 633
- Harris, Marvin, 174n11, 481n7
- Harvey, David, 631
- Hebdige, Dick, 601, 634n3
- Hegel, G. W. F., 68, 72, 87, 89–91, 94–95, 100, 104, 106–107, 111–114, 117, 118n1, 123n35, 125–126, 140, 144, 160n5, 162, 164, 170, 172, 175, 189, 212, 238, 242n7, 245, 253–254, 256, 259, 268, 281–282, 296, 298–301, 303, 317, 350–351, 355, 364, 368, 383, 399–402, 427, 437, 460, 463, 482n24, 486, 489, 492, 495–496, 508, 517, 527–529, 531, 538, 555, 569, 622, 624, 626, 638, 640, 644, 654, 657n8

- master/slave dialectic of, 95, 104,
 303n15, 492–493, 495, 657n8
 hegemony, 187, 358–362, 581, 588–90,
 618
 Heidegger, Martin, 59, 106, 197, 267,
 313, 352, 381, 416, 419, 517,
 535, 550, 581, 636, 648
 Heimann, Moritz, 232
 Helms, Jesse, 559
 Hemingway, Ernest, 431
 hermeneutics, 7–8, 12, 15, 29, 33, 37–
 39, 44–84, 52, 67, 102, 133, 152,
 158, 160n6, 164–165, 179, 209,
 288–289, 294, 418–419, 441,
 451–452, 479–481, 500, 541,
 550, 632 *see also* interpretation
 Hexter, J. H., 481n6, 481n3
 Hilberseimer, Ludwig, 365
 Hill, Christopher, 481n3
 Hindess, Barry, 475, 497, 613
 Hirsch, E. D., 15, 19n2
 Hirst, Paul, 475, 497, 613
 historicism, 62, 172, 256, 259–261,
 369, 451–483, 532, 647, 651
 New Historicism, 265, 600, 604
 historiography, 27, 123n40, 138–143,
 161–174, 202, 213, 232, 247,
 256, 309, 348–351, 355, 359,
 367, 388, 401, 441, 455–460,
 466, 474–476, 485, 528–529,
 533n3, 540–541, 577–578, 582,
 584
 history, 7, 15, 45–76, 101, 104–112,
 123n43, 125–143, 158–159, 161–
 174, 200–219, 220n5, 222, 225,
 233–239, 246–248, 256, 263,
 286–303, 310, 323–327, 334–
 335, 342n2, 348–355, 360–364,
 373, 379–381, 395, 417, 422–
 424, 433, 448, 451–465, 468–
 482, 483–515, 567–580, 590,
 596, 600–602, 636–657
 end of, 354, 359, 457, 636–657
 and “master narratives,” 58, 139,
 239–240, 247, 254, 257, 264,
 452
 nightmare of, 239, 352, 379, 465
 Hitchcock, Alfred, 70
 Hjelmslev, Louis, 24, 26, 48, 63, 533
 Hobbes, Thomas, 382, 434, 463, 587
 Hoffman, E. T. A., 45, 53–56, 100
 Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, 136
 Hölderlin, Freidrich, 464
 Holland, Norman, 79, 120n34, 392
 Hollywood, 70, 375, 445, 590
 Homer, 7, 317, 638
 homologies, 141–142, 149, 166, 272,
 297, 337, 339, 484, 507, 614
 Honneth, Axel, 657
 Horkheimer, Max, 81, 119n8, 221, 375,
 444
 see also Adorno, Theodor W.
 Horowitz, Donald, 618
 Hudson, W. H., 393
 Hughes, H. Stuart, 311
 humanism, 11, 172, 180, 265, 286,
 347, 452, 457, 463, 487, 496,
 516, 554–555, 559, 646, 656,
 657n13
 Renaissance, 409–411
 humanities, the, 222, 293, 297, 607
 Humboldt, Wilhelm von, 93, 390, 462
 Hume, David, 172, 434, 473, 475
 Hunter, Ian, 286–300, 625
 Husserl, Edmund, 8, 103, 267, 287–
 288, 293–294, 302n6, 637
Hustler, 620, 626
 Huxley, Aldous, 411
 Huysmans, Joris-Karl, 311
 hyperrealism, 446
 Hyppolite, Jean, 90
 hysteria, in Lacan, *see* Lacan, Jacques

 Ibsen, Henrik, 144, 311
 idealism, 112, 159, 168–169, 286–289,
 293–294, 303n15, 332, 338, 351,
 360, 380–381, 401, 438, 488, 610
 identity, and difference, 13, 229, 453,
 588
 ideologeme, 51–52, 54–55, 509, 545, 586
 ideology, 5, 7, 20–76, 77, 84, 101, 104,
 101, 113–114, 119n7, 120n12,

- 120n17, 120n26, 125, 129, 133, 141–142, 144–160, 162–168, 171–173, 175–188, 196, 198–199, 214–215, 225, 230–234, 239–240, 258, 260, 271–272, 298–301, 327, 344–371, 373–380, 390–393, 399–403, 405, 408–409, 413, 415–433, 436–439, 442–448, 455–476, 485–500, 502–507, 523–533, 536–554, 565, 574–575, 581–582, 585, 587–590, 595, 599, 602, 607, 609–615, 620, 623, 626, 628, 633, 643, 645, 650–652
critique, 76n16, 144–160, 209, 214, 231–235, 347, 266, 403, 438–439, 500, 565, 585 end of, 355, 363, 457, 494
imperialism, 71, 177, 183, 220n10, 249, 356, 263, 417, 489, 583, 60, 639–641
see also colonialism
intellectuals, 50, 67, 74, 90, 118, 156, 175, 206, 223, 248–249, 254, 287–298, 314, 351, 354, 384–385, 410, 438, 483, 487, 508–510, 598, 605–606, 621–635
interdisciplinarity, 149, 601–604, 609
International Style, the, 70, 252, 344, 359–363, 367, 504
interpretation, 5–18, 21–22, 28, 39–40, 42–48, 52–53, 68–70, 75n5, 82, 92, 99, 104, 126–127, 134–135, 140, 145, 152, 155–156, 177–181, 288–289, 333–334, 374, 419, 451–454, 476–477, 585–586
intersubjectivity, 77, 152, 645, 657n13
intertextuality, 69, 326, 329
Ionesco, Eugene, 6
Irigaray, Luce, 498
irony, 5, 39–43, 56, 59, 68, 166, 170, 173, 235–236, 501, 529–531, 647
islands, 386–413, *see* Utopia
Jack the Ripper, 581,
Jacobins, 164, 331, 370, 585, 588
Jacobs, Jane, 569
Jacoby, Russell, 290–291
Jakobson, Roman, 14, 34, 165, 169, 177, 428, 470–471
Jameson, Fredric, 300, 634–635
Marxism and Form, 123n39, 174n6, 433n4, 481n2
Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 300, 303n21
Prison-House of Language, The, 76n14, 101, 121n22, 188n4, 342n10
Political Unconscious, The, 122n27, 533n4
Singular Modernity, A, 303n19, 657n12
James, Henry, 42, 56, 313, 420
James, William, 548
Jaspers, Karl, 311
jazz, 261, 354
Jensen, Wilhem, 311
Jerde, Jon, 569
Johnson, Philip, 357
Johnson, Samuel, 73
Jolles, André, 416
Jones, Ernest, 48, 120n1
jouissance, 96, 159, 352, 376, 379–384
Joyce, James, 7, 26, 57–58, 177, 367, 421, 579, 582, 596
July Uprising of 1830, the, 45, 51, 129
Jung, Carl, 133, 419, 452
Jünger, Ernst, 650
junk space, 238, 252, 506, 565, 570–576, 579
Kafka, 136, 225–229, 237–238, 429–431, 596, 601
Kahn, Louis, 367
Kandinsky, Wassily, 367
Kant, Immanuel, 15, 17, 98–99, 109, 191, 195–196, 212, 288, 298, 399, 434, 458, 498, 523, 555, 591–593, 638
Kautsky, Karl, 343n15
Keats, John, 151–155

- Kennedy, John F., 488, 490
kerygma, 462, 481n9
 Keynes, John Maynard, 353, 364
 Khrushchev, Nikita, 487, 490
 Kierkegaard, Søren, 232
 Kipnis, Laura, 620–621, 626
 Klein, Melanie, 86, 88, 91–92, 97
 Kleist, Heinrich von, 209, 212
 Kluge, Alexander, 194–221, 501, 566
 Kondratiev waves, 511–512, 643
 Konrád, György, 627
 Koolhaas, Rem, 355–562, 370n10, 563–576
 Korsch, Karl, 439
 Koyré, Alexander, 66, 441
 Kraus, Karl, 227, 230–236, 241n1, 241n4, 423
 Kris, Ernst, 122n34,
 Kristeva, Julia, 22, 222, 379, 391, 443
 Kuhn, Thomas, 21, 243–244, 291, 441
 Kurosawa, Akira, 70
- labor, 113, 140, 157, 162, 171, 185, 196, 200–211, 216–217, 250, 282, 325, 338, 356, 410, 438, 441–442, 447, 466–467, 476, 479, 482n12, 484, 490, 508, 517–518, 550, 574, 587, 647, 649, 657n10
- Lacan, Jacques, 14, 19n7, 24, 32, 48, 50–51, 72–74, 77–124, 182, 223, 279, 296, 378, 472, 491, 506, 610, 652
 hysteria in, 115–117
see also Freudian criticism
- Laclau, Ernesto, 611, 634n7
- language, 11–18, 22–23, 27, 31–36, 43, 48, 54, 60, 63–65, 73–76, 77–79, 85, 89–124, 127–129, 131, 136–138, 144–152, 158, 168, 170, 175–180, 196–221, 224, 233–235, 246, 251, 258, 265, 345, 358, 390–391, 416–418, 425–436, 452, 454, 498–506, 517–520, 523–524
see also semiotics
- Latin America, 496, 508–509, 629–630
 Lattimore, Owen, 498
 Lautréamont, Comte de, 27, 443
 law, 17, 84, 91, 93–94, 98–100, 219, 244, 332, 388
 Lawrence, D. H., 223
 Leavis, F. R., 159
Lebensphilosophie, 266, 460
 Leclair, Serge, 102, 119n10
 Le Corbusier, 224, 229, 238, 252, 359, 360, 364–365, 368, 370n10, 559, 563, 637
 Leenhardt, Jacques, 176–189
 Le Guin, Ursula, 190, 394, 403
 Lefebvre, Henri, 238, 243, 346–347, 369, 532, 575
 legitimization, 156, 185, 243–247, 251, 254, 255n3, 297–298, 346, 400, 454, 466, 488, 534, 582
 Leiris, Michel, 121n27
 Lem, Stanislaw, 43
 Lenin, V. I., 5, 71, 117, 119n10, 192, 245, 249, 357–358, 365, 372, 376–377, 434, 442, 474, 487, 493, 507–508, 611
 Lentricchia, Frank, 160n.1, 503
 Leong, Sze Tsung, 566, 574
 Leskov, Nikolai, 229–236
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, 437
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 13–14, 28, 31, 35, 91, 137–138, 176, 223, 254, 297, 324–330, 338–339, 388–389, 399, 405, 413, 419, 425, 454, 491, 519, 521
 Levinas, Emmanuel, 534
 liberalism, 139, 162, 164, 175, 310, 363, 394, 620
 literature, 5, 7, 23, 26, 37–38, 43, 52, 60–61, 67, 69, 73, 77–79, 102, 129–133, 141–143, 144–150, 154, 155, 163, 182, 184, 186, 203, 209, 229, 293, 309, 340, 349, 352, 379, 394, 413–420, 423, 425–433, 434–438, 447, 544, 583, 585, 594–596, 636

- Lodge, David, 127
- Lotman, Yuri, 22, 169, 468–473, 476, 482n15
- Luhmann, Niklas, 299
- Lukács, Georg, 23, 60, 111–112, 124n48, 159, 162, 203, 222, 226, 230, 244–245, 252, 266, 268–269, 284n4, 305, 349, 387, 416–422, 430–431, 434–450, 486, 574, 589
- Luther, Martin, 80–81, 212, 326–331
- Luxemburg, Rosa, 434
- Lyotard, Jean-François, 98, 176, 243–255, 261, 436, 451, 475, 610, 657n.18
- Macherey, Pierre, 405
- Machiavelli, Niccolò, 191
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, 189–193, 219
- Mahler, Gustav, 274, 297, 637
- malls, shopping, 565–570, 574
- Mallarmé, Stéphane, 6, 9, 41, 246, 311, 443, 585, 595, 647
- Malraux, André, 7, 228, 318, 637
- de Man, Paul, 22, 68, 198, 264, 448n1
- Mandel, Ernest, 7, 249, 261, 373, 511–513, 515
- Mani, Lata, 600
- Manichaeism, 183, 495, 536–527, 546, 551–552
- manifestos, 38, 74, 107, 165, 211, 225, 237, 254, 346, 354, 364, 376, 423, 490, 540, 555, 557, 560
- Mann, Thomas, 135, 274, 312, 335, 340, 349, 353, 636
- Mannheim, Karl, 162–165, 468, 481n4, 528
- Manzoni, Alessandro, 400
- Mao Tse-tung, 111, 117, 217, 417, 494, 497, 513
- Marcus, George, 604
- Marcuse, Herbert, 17, 67, 81, 100, 112, 123n43, 160n1, 175, 319, 342n1, 347, 365, 373–375, 381, 387, 435, 486, 501–03, 506, 572
see also Frankfurt School
- Marin, Louis, 388–414
- Marinetti, Filippo, 384
- market system, the, 56, 71, 113, 133, 138, 141, 149, 156–157, 181, 190, 206, 208, 249, 261–262, 278, 287, 296, 300, 315, 318, 326, 329, 332, 356, 391, 400, 404, 408, 411–413n1, 422, 425, 427, 451, 484, 501, 512, 535, 556, 564, 568–569, 574, 619, 627, 639, 642–645
see also capitalism
- Marx, Karl, 7, 56, 71–72, 100, 111–112, 117, 125, 140, 157–158, 160n5, 162, 164, 166, 170–174, 177, 189, 191, 193, 195, 197, 200, 201, 203–206, 210–211, 213–215, 253–254, 262, 278, 287, 294, 295, 310, 331, 332, 342n2, 350, 355, 357–358, 361, 369, 386–387, 31, 409, 423–424, 427, 434, 437, 445, 458, 462–463, 467, 477, 479, 490, 494, 496–497, 512, 517, 528–529, 531, 574–575, 577, 589, 612–613, 618, 623, 634n7, 651
- Marxism, 8, 15, 24, 62–67, 77, 81–82, 106–124, 125–126, 129, 139–142, 144, 150, 152, 157–160, 173–174, 175–176, 183–188, 189–193, 196, 200, 203, 210, 223, 245, 248–255, 261–262, 284, 286–287, 292–293, 295–296, 303, 310, 317, 326–332, 343, 347, 350–351, 355, 357–358, 376–378, 380, 384, 387, 296, 401, 418, 422, 433–447, 451–482, 487–488, 492, 494, 496–497, 511–514, 522, 574, 599–600, 607–611, 614, 618, 621–622, 628, 631, 634
- anti-Marxism, 249, 261, 310, 481n7, 494, 497, 628
- post-Marxism, 136, 192, 245, 262, 347, 350, 358, 434, 452, 456, 512
- vulgar Marxism, 125, 140, 310, 331

670 THE IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY

- mass culture, 69, 230, 354, 356, 362,
501, 509, 511, 569, 600, 602,
606, 615, 624, 635n12, 646, 652–
654
- master narratives, 58, 139, 239–240,
247, 254, 257, 264, 452
- materialism, 107–110, 123, 133, 149,
152, 155, 160, 169, 260, 270,
275, 293, 310–312, 326–327,
350–352, 360, 380–381, 396,
499, 610, 626, 651
- Mauron, Charles, 82–84
- Mauss, Marcel, 19n5
- May 1968, 67, 74, 387–388, 488, 492,
497, 560
- Mayer, Arno, 225, 639
- McCarthyism, 145, 245, 251, 486–487
- McGinn, Colin, 295
- McLuhan, Marshall, 20, 403, 602,
612
- McRobbie, Angela, 608
- mechanization, 250, 490, 512
- Medawar, P. B., 244
- Mehlman, Jeffrey, 121n27, 123n35
- Meinecke, Friedrich, 311, 481n4
- melodrama, 10–11, 23, 38–39, 585
- Mendelssohn, Moses, 437
- Mercer, Kobena, 607, 614, 632
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 104
- metabolism, 612
- metacommentary, 5–19, 39, 48, 70
- Metz, Christian, 75, 122n27, 517
- Michelet, Jules, 24–25, 161, 164, 461–
467, 528, 530
- microgroups, 493, 495, 506–606, 609,
633
- Middle Ages, the, 257, 278, 330, 400,
461
- middlebrow, 625
- Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig, 252, 353–
354, 361, 558
- Milton, John, 382
- Mitzman, Arthur, 311, 334, 336
- mode of production, 52, 55, 62, 204–
210, 227, 240, 248–250, 252,
260–261, 273, 293–295, 347,
351, 358, 380–381, 452, 469,
476–480, 626
- modernism, 6, 18–20, 24, 27–28, 34,
37, 45, 58, 60–62, 65, 67–75,
105, 129, 140, 163, 175–188,
222–242, 299, 300, 344–369,
377, 382, 415–433, 434–450,
474, 485, 496, 500–506, 532,
556–562, 563, 569, 572, 582,
590, 596, 609, 636–644, 650, 657
- realism, 420–433, 434–450, 501,
628, 641
- see also* postmodernism
- Molière, 83
- monasticism, 257, 314, 328, 330–331,
537, 554
- money, 17, 46, 55–56, 72, 171, 181,
266–267, 272–284, 391, 404,
408, 412, 425, 427–428, 431,
490, 501, 642–644
- Moore, Charles, 252
- moralizing, 5, 42, 59, 63, 89, 252, 274,
369, 376, 491, 656
- Morazé, Charles, 334
- More, Thomas, 386–414
- Morgan, Lewis, 423, 425, 458
- Morris, Williams, 396
- Morris, Meaghan, 625, 629–631
- Mulvey, Laura, 378
- Mumford, Lewis, 424, 426, 498
- Murdoch, Iris, 415
- music, 23–24, 39, 33, 81, 101, 119n7,
164, 235, 256–263, 318, 338,
349–354, 365, 372, 381, 420,
445, 447, 516, 577, 581, 601,
621, 630, 636–638, 641–642
- Musil, Robert, 596, 654
- Musset, Alfred de, 50
- myth, 9, 12–15, 19, 35, 102, 126, 132–
133, 138, 155, 172, 174n11, 208,
233, 324–325, 338–339, 388–
390, 399, 405, 419–420, 426,
452, 454, 493, 521
- narrative, 12, 17, 22, 25–75, 100–110,
136–139, 146–147, 159, 161–

- 165, 172–174, 178–180, 191,
208–209, 227–228, 232–257,
273, 287–288, 319, 321–333,
337–339, 347–348, 353–354,
386–414, 420, 423, 427–431,
435–436, 440, 447, 452–462,
472, 474, 481n9, 483–485, 489,
501, 503, 516–530, 576–578,
585, 587, 589–591, 601, 643,
644, 653–655
- Nato, 430, 603, 629
- naturalism, 434, 437–439, 501, 592
- Nature, 14, 230–233, 249, 316, 339,
356, 374, 378, 381, 406, 513, 564
- Nazism, 113, 217, 440, 443–444, 648
négritude, 181
- Negt, Oskar, 194–221, 449n6, 501, 566
- Nelson, Cary, 598, 634–635
- neoclassicism, 252, 454, 470–471
- New Age movement, 604–605, 625
- New Criticism, 5, 59, 137, 153–154,
163, 167, 175, 393, 503
- New Deal, 156, 292, 363
- New Historicism, 265, 600, 604
- New Left, 20, 373, 485, 488, 510
- Newton, Isaac, 110, 244
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 7, 58, 89, 109,
120n19, 139, 158, 162, 164, 172,
176, 181, 190, 196, 240, 247,
273, 290–291, 313–319, 358,
364, 382–383, 434, 454–455,
458, 463, 464–466, 473, 475,
497, 528–531, 592, 596, 599,
645, 650–651
- nihilism, 68, 298, 366, 496, 530, 534
- Nizan, Paul, 67
- nomads, 215, 425, 649–650
- nostalgia, 20, 39, 44, 115, 132, 203,
273, 341, 393, 404, 425, 500,
561, 580, 606, 627, 631
- nouveau roman*, 67, 176–178, 180, 379,
503
- nouvelle vague*, 67, 435
- novel, the, 5, 9–12, 58, 68–69, 128–
132, 161–163, 176–188, 233,
326–327, 348, 354, 358, 415,
420, 428–431, 435, 437, 440–
441, 445–446, 584–585, 590–592
- Oedipus, 13–14, 82–84, 90–94, 99,
110, 134, 179, 311, 325, 336–
339, 372, 389, 423–424, 454,
476, 629, 649
see also Freudian criticism; Deleuze,
Gilles
- O'Hara, John, 431
- Olson, Tillie, 466
- ontology, 269, 303, 618
- Orff, Karl, 454
- Orientalism, 454–455
- Ortigue, Edmond and Marie-Cécile,
83, 91, 102, 119, 122
- Orwell, George, 388
- Other, the, 51, 54–55, 62, 89, 94–98,
104, 134, 208, 334, 351, 353,
354–355, 351, 373, 395, 413,
418, 453, 489–493, 615–619,
625–626, 632–634
- overdetermination, 39, 79, 257, 658
- Owen, Robert, 445
- Palestine, 289, 508
- Panofsky, Erwin, 460
- Paris Commune, 191, 262, 370n10
- Park, Robert, 266
- Parsons, Talcott, 319, 342
- pastiche, 23, 62, 76n18, 252, 362, 447,
500
- patriarchy, 17, 312, 335, 478
- Paulhan, Jean, 197
- peasantry, 204–211, 221n14, 233, 273,
296, 314, 325, 357, 404, 417,
445, 507–508, 511–512, 639–640
- Peirce, C. S., 75n5, 281, 526
- Penley, Constance, 614, 625, 635
- pensée sauvage*, 31, 138, 426, 455, 468,
504, 521
- Pepper, Stephen, 162, 164–165, 169,
528, 533n5
- Petitot-Cocorda, Jean, 519
- phenomenology, 8, 112, 121n25, 155,
344, 452, 476, 491, 636, 654

672 THE IDEOLOGIES OF THEORY

- Piaget, Jean, 90, 213
Picasso, Pablo, 417
Picard, Raymond, 47
Plato, 66, 197, 374, 415, 432–433, 436, 475, 500, 547, 557
plumpes Denken, 125, 438
pluralism, 63, 102, 104, 156, 211, 317, 609
Poe, Edgar Allan, 100–101, 106–107, 122n30
poetry, 137, 146, 153, 159, 236, 270, 435, 484, 503–505, 591–594, 637
Poglioli, Renato, 433n5
point of view, 11–12, 19n3, 43, 53–54, 56, 80, 87, 105, 135, 208, 463
political correctness, 598, 613
Ponge, Francis, 519
Popper, Karl, 191
pornography, 179, 501, 620, 626, 653, 656
Portzamparc, Christian de, 252
positivism, 5, 20–21, 65, 175, 176, 264, 267, 289, 293–295, 300, 309, 311, 316–317, 351, 363, 380, 427, 587
postindustrial society, 20, 243, 248–249, 251, 262, 355, 356, 373, 425, 444, 512, 579
postmodernism, 20, 70–71, 243, 250–255, 300, 344, 347, 362, 366–369, 382, 435, 446, 453, 474, 500–506, 569, 572, 609, 641, 643
Poulantzas, Nicos, 497
Pound, Ezra, 28–29, 194, 222–223, 442, 503, 579, 582
power, 59, 202, 248, 288, 297, 365, 378–379, 488–491, 494, 497, 499, 508–509, 513, 537, 542, 551, 616–617, 626–628
pragmatism, 5, 109, 287, 292, 492
praxis, 73, 110–11, 145, 148, 150–151, 158–159, 188, 204–205, 216, 230, 232, 249, 254, 262–263, 299, 313, 316, 350, 352, 380, 388–399, 402, 436, 441–445, 460–461, 466, 489, 493, 496, 509, 527, 554, 626
primitive accumulation, 181, 203, 208, 458, 657
Probyn, Elspeth, 607
proletariat, 112, 129, 194, 199–200, 214–215, 220n5, 247, 249, 357, 379, 404, 434, 446, 454, 490, 494, 507, 512, 514, 621, 644
Prometheanism, 534–535
Propp, Vladimir, 28, 34, 105, 161, 519, 521, 523
Protestantism, 225, 231, 291, 294, 310, 312, 324–336, 341–342, 478
Proust, Marcel, 27, 45, 61, 70, 195, 237, 271, 596, 636
public sphere, 156, 194, 198–200, 202, 214–215, 218, 267, 501
quantity, versus quality, 250, 278, 427, 435, 505, 555, 647
Quebec, 495, 630
Rabelais, François, 127
race, 104, 139, 177, 236, 356, 360, 457, 527, 539, 583–584, 613–619, 640, 648
Radway, Janice, 600, 615, 625
Rand, Ayn, 556–557
Ranke, Leopold von, 163–164, 167, 459, 528, 530
rationalization, 181, 257–260, 325–333, 339–340, 363, 426, 561, 615
Rawls, John, 298
Readings, Bill, 302n9
realism, 22, 24–27, 34–35, 55, 57, 60–73, 127, 163, 172, 184, 188, 194, 216, 231, 244, 252, 327, 420–433, 434–450, 501, 628, 641
Realpolitik, 318–319
recognition, *see* Hegel, master/slave dialectic of
Reich, Charles, 386–387
Reich, Wilhelm, 82, 100, 108, 160n1, 209, 217, 377, 439, 493, 634
reification, 58–59, 136, 186–188, 190–

- 191, 198, 216, 226, 239, 245,
280, 293, 296, 391, 394, 437,
447–448, 466, 479, 503, 505,
519–521, 574
- relationality, 202–203, 207, 213, 218–
219, 631
- relativism, 163, 170, 173, 238, 259,
276–277, 281, 292
- religion, 132, 173, 224, 237, 287–291,
317–318, 321–333, 338, 340–
341, 369, 378, 381, 427, 438,
454, 538–554, 568, 615
- representation, 24, 28, 30, 34–36, 47,
55–57, 62–76, 83–84, 92–95,
106–109, 148, 186–187, 201,
205, 223, 238–240, 244, 283,
290, 294, 330, 348, 376, 384,
390–403, 421–422, 427, 436–
437, 440–443, 447, 451–459,
473–474, 485, 499–503, 516,
526, 530, 539, 582–583, 589,
601, 607, 614, 620, 624, 631,
641–645, 654
- repression, 15, 27–28, 52–55, 58, 65,
72, 79–82, 85–86, 91–94, 100,
102, 108, 111, 114–115, 125,
128, 133–135, 151, 172, 175–
188, 201, 211–212, 215, 235,
239, 253–254, 287, 354, 380,
386, 396, 399, 406, 418–419,
434, 438–439, 446, 465, 500,
534, 541, 545, 551, 572, 602,
618–623, 625, 629
- revolution, 43, 82, 100, 185–187, 216–
219, 237, 248–255, 258–264,
288–291, 317, 346–347, 356–
369, 373–380, 384–385, 386–
414, 440–448, 483–513, 546
- Rey, Pierre-Philippe, 613
- Ricardou, Jean, 178–180
- Ricoeur, 7, 133, 158, 191, 246, 481n9
- Riffaterre, Michael, 127
- Rivera, Diego, 384, 442, 569
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain, 175–188, 430–
431, 503
- Rolfe, Frederick (Baron Corvo), 79
- Romanticism, 7, 24–25, 55, 67, 85–86,
102, 153–154, 172, 195, 312–
315, 327, 382, 414n13, 529, 650
- Rorty, Richard, 255n1, 290–293, 492
- Rose, Jacqueline, 116
- Ross, Andrew, 604, 624–625, 634n7
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 91, 154, 425,
475
- Rousset, Jean, 12
- Rushdie, Salman, 605
- Ruskin, John, 273
- Russian Formalism, 8, 17, 32, 44, 57,
69, 233, 258, 395, 412, 442, 465,
653
- Sade, Marquis de, 98–99, 222, 373,
486, 498,
- Said, Edward, 220n10, 458,
- Saint-Simon, Henri de, 365, 445, 588–
589
- Sanchez-Tranquilino, Marcos, 607, 610
- Sarraute, Nathalie, 43, 433n5
- Sartre, 24, 38, 67, 79–80, 82, 86, 89,
104, 106, 119n6, 119n8, 120n19,
123n35, 150, 159, 160n1, 173,
180–181, 186, 190, 196, 199,
204, 206, 232, 267, 282, 291,
313, 333–334, 343, 349, 352,
379–381, 435, 453, 480, 486–
487, 491–496, 505, 535, 581,
589, 592, 609, 612, 622, 640,
647–658, 657n8
- satire, 51, 162, 416, 531, 573, 580, 596
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 111, 256, 390,
457, 459, 492, 502
- Schiller, Friedrich von, 248, 253–253,
462
- schizophrenia, 65, 73–74, 91, 177, 214,
424, 506, 632, 649–650
- Schmidt, Herr Jakob, 373, 582
- Schmitt, Carl, 286
- Schoenberg, Aaron, 23, 259–260, 297,
349, 352, 365, 445, 504
- science fiction, 16–18, 195, 394–395,
400, 454, 596
- Scott, Sir Walter, 46, 51, 400

- Screen*, 70, 251, 391, 590
- Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), 488, 510
- Searle, John, 413n9
- semiotics, 22–27, 33, 49, 72, 75, 93, 103, 105, 118n4, 151, 175–177, 182, 246, 342n10, 348, 388–391, 396, 402, 405, 429, 438, 468, 472–473, 492, 502, 516–533, 620, 645
see also language
- semiotic rectangle, *see* Greimas, A. J.
- Senghor, Leopold, 181
- serial killers, 653–654
- Serres, Michel, 591
- sexuality, 50, 90, 96, 100, 108, 134, 171, 213, 254, 374, 378, 381, 418, 454, 535–554, 586, 614, 620
- Shakespeare, William, 9, 209, 600, 608
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 154
- Shklovsky, Viktor, 9, 19n3, 145
- Silverberg, Robert, 398
- Simmel, Georg, 266–285, 364
- simulacrum, 53, 382–383, 500, 506
- situationism, 497, 575
see also, Debord, Guy; society of the spectacle
- situationisme*, *see* situationism
- Skinner, B. F., 388
- skyscrapers, 558–560, 569
- Sloterdijk, Peter, 300
- Smith, Adam, 301
- Snow, C. P., 17
- société de consommation*, 81, 113, 185, 243, 445, 453, 459
- society of the spectacle, 243, 382
see also Debord, Guy; situationism
- socialism, 191, 245, 249, 292, 311, 338, 350, 357, 386–388, 394, 409, 422, 445–446, 489, 575, 589, 631
- sociology, 21, 33, 69, 137, 141, 142, 189, 267–268, 294, 298, 309, 317, 321, 341, 540, 549, 563, 593, 601, 603, 607, 621–622, 645
- Sollers, Philippe, 27, 69, 505
- Sontag, Susan, 5, 6, 16
- Sophocles, 185
- Sorel, Georges, 168
- Spencer, Herbert, 587
- Spenser, Edmund, 455
- Spengler, Oswald, 256, 259, 468, 484, 584, 647
- Spinoza, Baruch, 295, 390, 437, 477, 482
- Spitzer, Leo, 127, 460
- Spivak, Gayatri, 624
- Stalinism, 111, 145, 162, 245, 291, 361, 437–440, 454, 478, 487, 494–497, 555, 622
- Stallybrass, Peter, 600
- Star Trek*, 614, 625
- Steedman, Catherine, 600
- Stein, Gertrude, 5–6, 188, 637
- Stendhal, 46, 315
- Stevens, Wallace, 223, 484, 503–505
- Stirling, James, 367
- Stockhausen, Karlheinz, 354
- Stravinsky, 23, 119, 447
- Strindberg, August, 185
- structuralism, 5, 12–15, 20, 24, 24–35, 65–67, 91, 94, 100–101, 107, 109, 126, 136–137, 141, 149, 155, 162, 166, 174–177, 196–199, 222, 246, 253, 261–262, 345, 348, 351, 375, 403, 423, 435–437, 451–453, 463, 471–473, 474, 477, 481n4, 485, 489, 491–504, 516, 518, 532, 590, 601, 609, 613, 626, 639, 645–646, 649, 650
- poststructuralism, 24, 65–67, 176–177, 196, 253, 262, 348, 375, 436–437, 451–453, 463, 468–478, 486, 489, 492, 500–501, 516–518, 590, 601, 650
- student movements, 104, 485, 514
- subaltern, the, 377, 493, 624
- subject, the, 12, 21, 27, 31, 35, 64–66, 70, 77, 80–81, 84, 87–117, 134–135, 152, 156–158, 177–181, 201, 204, 214–217, 223–225, 228, 244, 283, 315, 365–366,

- 372, 375, 382, 421, 462–463,
464, 468, 479, 492, 500, 505,
520, 534–553, 598–599, 620,
638, 642, 645–649, 657
- sublime, the, 40, 382–383, 555, 594
- suburbs, 72, 375, 566–568, 640
- subversion, 31, 65, 94, 106, 345, 447,
595, 624
- surrealism, 102, 231, 435
- Suvin, Darko, 438, 449n9
- Sterne, Laurence, 36
- Swift, Jonathan, 8, 19n3, 167, 393
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 154
- systems theory, 357, 403
- Tafuri, Manfredo, 344–370
- Tagg, John, 607, 610
- Tanner, Alain, 480
- Taylor, Frederick Winslow, 203, 207,
226, 366
- Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich, 297
- Tel Quel*, 24, 38–39, 66, 101, 136, 171,
222, 379, 391, 435, 442, 451, 466
- teleology, 58, 247–254, 286, 317, 456–
460, 467, 472, 476, 590
- temporality, 70, 205, 247, 276–277,
279, 500–502, 532, 572, 636–657
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 311
- terrorism, 444, 497, 509
- textuality, 21–28, 38, 500, 536, 600
- Thackeray, William, 45
- Theory, 5–18, 60, 70, 125–143, 144–
160, 176–177, 286–303, 390,
498–500
- Third World, 104, 249, 261, 325, 354–
356, 374, 395, 484–491, 507–514
- Thompson, E. P., 199, 290–291, 481n1
- Thompson, George, 453
- Timpanaro, Sebastino, 123n43, 158,
377
- Tocqueville, Alex de, 164, 166, 528
- Todorov, Tzvetan, 19, 101, 121, 167,
174
- Tolkien, J. R. R., 386
- Tolstoy, Leo, 9, 19n3, 311, 465–466,
481n11
- Tönnies, Ferdinand, 140
- Treichler, Paula, 598
- Treitschke, Heinrich Gotthard von,
310–311
- Trilling, Lionel, 185, 376, 510
- Troeltsch, Ernst, 481n4
- tropes, 22, 92, 144, 164–173, 358–359,
457–459, 470–472, 528, 642
- Trotsky, Leon, 487, 508, 536
- Truffaut, François, 91
- Turner, Graeme, 604, 628
- Twain, Mark, 8, 311
- Tynianov, Yuriy, 438
- typology, 96–97, 113, 158, 162, 165,
168–169, 275, 309, 321, 423–
424, 455, 468–478, 528, 549, 572
- uncanny, the, 47–57, 537
- unconscious, the, 14–15, 18, 22, 78–80,
93–97, 119n5, 134, 158, 160n6,
186, 201, 213, 218, 225, 239,
249, 356, 375, 378, 399–400,
476, 513, 586
- Universal Product Code, 568
- university, the, 116, 125, 286, 291–298,
316, 503, 514, 598, 628
- urbanism, 353, 357, 358, 361, 365,
414n14, 556–559, 563, 565, 568
see also the city
- Uspensky, Boris, 483n15
- utilitarianism, 190
- Utopia and Utopianism, 67, 81, 91,
100, 113–117, 132–133, 190–
192, 196, 200, 205, 207, 209,
213–214, 217, 220n8, 225, 233,
252, 259, 262–263, 266, 292,
298, 300–301, 344–348, 352–
354, 359–369, 377–385, 386–
414, 442–446, 457, 468, 473,
479–480, 501, 504, 508, 525,
534, 539, 546, 551–552, 557,
561, 564–568, 574–574, 587–
589, 599, 606, 617, 622, 627,
632–634, 644
see also More, Thomas

- value, 34, 56, 170–171, 200, 245–250, 257–260, 275–280, 309–341, 391, 514, 585–191, 604–605, 642–646
see also aesthetics *and* exchange
- value-rationality, 320–321
- Veblen, Thorstein, 621
- Velázquez, Diego, 64–65
- Velikovskiy, Immanuel, 244
- Venturi, Robert, 253, 367–368, 371n11, 504, 569
- Verfremdung*, *see* Brecht, Bertolt
- Verlaine, Paul, 594
- Verne, Jules, 71, 405
- verwaltete Welt*, 81
- Vico, Giovanni Battista, 168, 172–173, 425, 529
- Victorianism, 5, 20, 312–313, 316, 334–335, 393, 420, 431, 501, 587
- Vietnam, 488, 495, 510
- Virilio, Paul, 582, 610
- violence, 17–18, 190, 201, 204, 208, 213, 217, 291, 352, 372, 379, 411–412, 418, 424, 465, 490, 493, 534, 551, 616, 626, 640, 647–656
- vitalism, 176, 269–270
- Voltaire, 172, 178, 222
- Wallace, Michele, 607, 624
- Warhol, Andy, 421
- Weber, Max, 59, 192, 257–260, 297–298, 303, 309–343, 349, 364, 409, 465, 468, 478, 489, 539, 549, 584, 593, 621, 628
- Weinrich, Harold, 73
- Wells, H. G., 325, 456
- Weltanschauungen, 66, 120n17, 142, 162, 165, 167, 318, 417, 522, 551, 585
- Wertfreiheit*, 309–311, 316–318, 341
- West, Cornel, 601, 624, 630, 635n12
- White, Hayden, 22, 68, 161–174, 472, 482, 526, 528–531, 533n3
- Whitman, Walt, 292, 313, 637, 643
- Whorf, Benjamin Lee, 35, 71, 73, 258
- Williams, Raymond, 199, 220n8, 222, 349, 483, 601, 603, 610, 626, 647
- Williams, William Carlos, 5
- Willis, Paul, 603
- Winters, Yvor, 159
- wishfulfillment, 17, 78–79, 118, 142, 209, 341
see also Utopia
- Wittfogel, Karl, 454
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 190, 519
- Wolf, Eric, 491
- Wolfe, Tom, 252, 363
- women's movement, 488, 495, 498, 514
see also feminism
- Woolf, Virginia, 51, 636
- World War II, 24, 71, 160n1, 183, 185, 212, 223, 251, 357, 362, 491, 563, 575, 631, 639, 648
- Wright, Frank Lloyd, 70, 252, 371n11
- Wylie, Philip, 120n17, 375
- Xenakis, Iannis, 398–403, 414n14
- Yippie movement, 497
- zeitgeist, 222, 226, 626
- Zhdanovism, 439
- Zola, Émile, 33, 557, 567, 581, 585, 591, 596

Acknowledgements

The following chapters are reprinted with permission from the publications in which they first appeared.

Part I: Situations of Theory

Chapter 1, "Metacommentary," *PMLA* 86: 1, January 1971, 9–18, copyright © 1971 by the Modern Language Association of America. An earlier version of Part I, Chapter 2, "The Ideology of the Text," appeared in *Salmagundi* 31/32, Fall 1975–Winter 1976, 204–46, copyright © 1975–76 by Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. Chapter 3, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," *Yale French Studies* 55/56, 1977, 338–95. Chapter 4, "Criticism in History," *Weapons of Criticism*, ed. Norman Rudich, Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1976, 31–50. Chapter 5, "Symbolic Inference; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis," *Critical Inquiry* 4, Spring 1978, 507–23, copyright © 1978 by the University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6, "Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography," *diacritics* 6: 1, Spring 1976, 2–9, copyright © 1976 by the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD. Chapter 7, "Modernism and Its Repressed; or Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist," *diacritics* 6: 2, Summer 1976, 7–14, copyright © 1976 by Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 8, "Morality Versus Ethical Substance; or, Aristotelian Marxism in Alasdair MacIntyre," *Social Text* 8, Winter 1983–84, 151–54, copyright © 1983 by Social Text. Chapter 9, "On Negt and Kluge," *October* 46, 1988, 151–77, copyright © 1988 by MIT Press. Chapter 10, "Benjamin's Readings," *diacritics* 22: 3/4, 1992, 19–34, copyright © 1976 by Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 11, "Forward to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*," Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, vii–xxi. Chapter 12, "Forward to Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*," Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1985, vii–xiv. Chapter 13, "The Theoretical Hesitation: Benjamin's Sociological

Predecessor," *Critical Inquiry* 25: 2, Winter 1999, 267–88, copyright © 1999 by the University of Chicago Press. Chapter 14, "How Not to Historicize Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 34: 3, Spring 2008, 563–82, copyright © 2008 by the University of Chicago Press.

Part II: Syntax of History

Chapter 1, "The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller," *New German Critique* 1, Winter 1973, 52–89, copyright © 1973 by New German Critique. Chapter 2, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology*, ed. J. Ockham, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985 and *Revisions*, 1985; an earlier version of Part II, Chapter 2 was first given at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (March 1982) at the symposium "Architecture and Ideology," sponsored by *Revisions*. Chapter 3, "Pleasure: A Political Issue," *Formations of Pleasure*, Formation Series, vol. 1, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, copyright © 1983 by Formations Editorial Collective, reprinted with permission of Associated Book Publishers (UK). Chapter 4, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," *diacritics* 7: 2, June 1977, 2–21, copyright © 1977 by the Johns Hopkins University Press; four diagrams in Chapter 4 from Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1984, 43, 46, 47, 127. Chapter 5, "Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism," *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8: 1, 1975, 1–20, copyright © 1975 by The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, originally delivered as a lecture at the 1974 meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association. Chapter 6, "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate," *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: New Left Books, 1977, 196–213. Chapter 7, "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History* 1, Autumn 1979, 41–72, copyright © 1979 by New Literary History, The University of Virginia, Charlottesville, reprinted with permission of the Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 8, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text* 9/10, 1984, 178–209, copyright © 1984 by Social Text, New York. Chapter 9, "Forward to A. J. Greimas' *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*," Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, vi–xxii. Chapter 10, "On the Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity," *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, 154–78. Chapter 11, "Space and Congestion: Rem Koolhaas and *S, M, L, XL*," *The Village Voice* 41: 19, 1996, 17–19, copyright © 1996 by Village Voice LLC, New York. Chapter 12, "Future City," *New Left Review* 2: 21, May/June 2003, 65–79, copyright © 2003 by New Left Review. Chapter 13, "Marc

Angenot and the Literary History of a Year," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 17: 2, 2004, 233–53, copyright © 2004 by the Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 14, "On Cultural Studies," *Social Text* 34, 1993, 17–52, copyright © 1993 by Social Text, New York. Chapter 14, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29: 4, Summer 2003, 695–718, copyright © 2003 by the University of Chicago Press.