CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARDS DIALECTICAL CRITICISM

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL description of dialectical criticism? The contradiction is not so great as it might at first glance appear. The peculiar difficulty of dialectical writing lies indeed in its holistic, "totalizing" character: as though you could not say any one thing until you had first said everything; as though with each new idea you were bound to recapitulate the entire system. So it is that the attempt to do justice to the most random observation of Hegel ends up drawing the whole tangled, dripping mass of the Hegelian sequence of forms out into the light with it. So it is also that at some point or other books or essays on Marx dutifully end up as rehearsals of historical materialism as a whole. There is no content, for dialectical thought, but total content; and it is for this reason that phenomenology (like the other great contemporary philosophical systems not a discovery of new *content*, but an innovation in *form*) seems to have an answer to what would otherwise, for us, be an organizational dilemma. For phenomenology is precisely the attempt to tell not what a thought is, so much as what it feels like. It aims not at making statements about content (that being momentarily placed between parentheses), but at describing the mental operations which correspond to that content in all their temporal specificity. Its mode of proof, for the reader, consists not in logical argumentation, but rather in the shock, or the failure, of recognition.

In the preceding chapters we have given an account of contemporary work in the dialectic from a number of different points of view, the implication being that these "systems" or partial systems—Adorno on dialectical evolution

in time; Benjamin, Marcuse, and Bloch on the essentially hermeneutic, or demystifying and at the same time restorative, nature of dialectical thinking; Lukács on the symptomatic relationship between the artistic construct and the underlying realities of social life itself; Sartre on the disguised and undisguisable nature of those realities as class antagonism—all ultimately complete each other, their apparent inconsistencies dissolved in some vaster dialectical synthesis. It is not the task of the present book to bring such a synthesis to ordered, philosophical, *systematic* exposition: yet, always provided we keep in mind the descriptive, phenomenological, deliberately subjective orientation of the following pages, there would seem to be room, alongside such local studies, for an evocation of dialectical literary criticism, and beyond it of dialectical thinking in general, as a form in time, as process, as a lived experience of a peculiar and determinate structure.

It is, of course, thought to the second power: an intensification of the normal thought processes such that a renewal of light washes over the object of their exasperation, as though in the midst of its immediate perplexities the mind had attempted, by willpower, by fiat, to lift itself mightily up by its own bootstraps. Faced with the operative procedures of the nonreflective thinking mind (whether grappling with philosophical or artistic, political or scientific problems and objects), dialectical thought tries not so much to complete and perfect the application of such procedures as to widen its own attention to include them in its awareness as well: it aims, in other words, not so much at solving the particular dilemmas in question, as at converting those problems into their own solutions on a higher level, and making the fact and the existence of the problem itself the starting point for new research. This is indeed the most sensitive moment in the dialectical process: that in which an entire complex of thought is hoisted through a kind of

inner leverage one floor higher, in which the mind, in a kind of shifting of gears, now finds itself willing to take what had been a question for an answer, standing outside its previous exertions in such a way that it reckons itself into the problem, understanding the dilemma not as a resistance of the object alone, but also as the result of a subject-pole deployed and disposed against it in a strategic fashion—in short, as the function of a determinate subject-object relationship.

There is a breathlessness about this shift from the normal object-oriented activity of the mind to such dialectical self-consciousness—something of the sickening shudder we feel in an elevator's fall or in the sudden dip in an airliner. That recalls us to our bodies much as this recalls us to our mental positions as thinkers and observers. The shock indeed is basic, and constitutive of the dialectic as such: without this transformational moment, without this initial conscious transcendence of an older, more naïve position, there can be no question of any genuinely dialectical coming to consciousness.

But precisely because dialectical thinking depends so closely on the habitual everyday mode of thought which it is called on to transcend, it can take a number of different and apparently contradictory forms. So it is that when common sense predominates and characterizes our normal everyday mental atmosphere, dialectical thinking presents itself as the perversely hairsplitting, as the overelaborate and the oversubtle, reminding us that the simple is in reality only a simplification, and that the self-evident draws its force from hosts of buried presuppositions. When, on the other hand, after the fashion of intellectuals, we begin to work our way up through a series of abstractions, each one progressively further and further away from the real itself, pervaded as we do so by an uneasy suspicion that the whole teetering construction stands as a monument not to new

laws of nature, but rather to the rules of some private mental hobby, then dialectical thought comes as a brutal rupture, as a cutting of the knots that restores us suddenly to the grossest truths, to facts as unpleasantly common as common sense itself. Indeed, these two apparently antithetical effects of dialectical awareness largely correspond, as we shall see later, to the respective dialectics of Hegelianism and Marxism.

What follows is a description of a few of the most characteristic features of dialectical thought, particularly as it grapples with the specific problems of literary form. The description cannot, of course, be complete, but will try to deal with the problem of completeness; and in another sense the ever-widening nets of the exposition, in which each topic seems to recapitulate the previous one in a different context and on a higher plane, should bring us closer and closer to that ultimate object of all dialectical thought which is the concrete itself.

I. Hegelian Literary Criticism: The Diachronic Construct

The basic story which the dialectic has to tell is no doubt that of the dialectical *reversal*, that paradoxical turning around of a phenomenon into its opposite of which the transformation of quantity into quality is only one of the better known manifestations. It can be described as a kind of leap-frogging affair in time, in which the drawbacks of a given historical situation turn out in reality to be its secret advantages, in which what looked like built-in superiorities suddenly prove to set the most ironclad limits on its future development. It is a matter, indeed, of the reversal of limits, of the transformation from negative to positive and from positive to negative; and is basically a diachronic process.

To give a conveniently objective and external illustration,

we may recall the technological situation at the end of World War II, when both the United States and the Soviet Union were the inheritors of German research in missile development. At that time, of course, the inequality was in the field of atomic power; and it was precisely toward reducing the size of the bomb and increasing its destructiveness that American experimentation aimed. The first Soviet bombs, several years later, were still relatively cumbersome affairs. Thus, in order to deliver these large and primitive devices, Soviet technology was obliged to develop missiles capable of orbiting enormous payloads, which were then used to put the first sputniks aloft. American superiority in weaponry, however, is translated into an American lag in missile development to the degree to which the missiles had been evolved for the purpose of conveying their own relatively small atomic warheads. In further development, of course, this situation is once again reversed: the Americans, precisely because their missiles are not so powerful, find themselves forced to develop smaller and more sophisticated packages of transistorized instruments for projection aloft; while the less refined machinery of the Soviets, who are under no such pressure, transmits back relatively smaller quantities of information. And so forth. We have of course omitted a number of factors from this picture, in particular that of airpower, which would have led us back to the history of strategic bombing and thence to the opposition between a land and a sea power, and thus ultimately to the geographical, historical, and economic discrepancies between the two superpowers as a whole—which is to say that a complete picture of this particular set of dialectical reversals would ultimately have involved a reimmersion in the very element of concrete history itself.

Such a model—as abstract in its own way perhaps, as simplified and removed from the complexities of everyday social reality, as the musical illustrations of an earlier chap-

ter—permits us to make a certain number of essential points about dialectical analysis in general. First, such analysis clearly presupposes the initial isolation of a limited group of factors from the historical totality or the historical continuum: such factors here were missile development and atomic research as such. In the literary realm, however, it will become apparent that the initial choice of such key factors, or dominant *categories* of the work, as we shall call them there, is a strategic moment in any dialectical criticism.

Such categories are then seen as entertaining relationships with each other such that an alteration in the one involves a corresponding shift in the proportions of the other as well; this is, of course, the most basic sense in which we speak of a dialectical interrelationship of phenomena, or, to reverse the terms, of a dialectical understanding of such relationships. What is perhaps less often realized is the way in which such an awareness of dialectical relationships involves or implies a diachronic framework as a necessary condition of their articulation.

The example proposed above was marked by the structural peculiarity of parallel sequences, which overtly called attention to each other in a point by point comparison of every stage; thus the American imbalance underlined the nature of the Soviet counterpoise, and vice versa. In most dialectical analyses this profoundly comparative character of the dialectical work is operative, as it were, underground, implicit only, in the form of the differential perception, which, as we shall see, allows us to see what something is through the simultaneous awareness of what it is not. Thus the dialectical articulation of a phenomenon into a certain ratio of forces or categories at one and the same time implies a sense of the other logically possible dispositions of such categories against each other; and these other forms, which allow the full specificity of the object of study

to be measured, are disposed according to a sequence, which may either be a real temporal or historical continuum, or, as in Hegel, a series of possibilities working themselves out in a succession which is no less diachronic in structure for being of an ideal type only.

Indeed, it may be claimed that no matter how genuinely temporal or historical in character, such a diachronic sequence is bound to remain an abstraction, inasmuch as it is nothing but an ideal cross section of the existential density of concrete history itself—the isolation of a single plane or level of reality, where the latter is understood both as the ideal sum of all such levels and as that ultimate, unthinkable totality which can never be thus additively reconstructed through the operation of pure thought alone. Hence the final moment in the process of dialectical analysis, in which the model strains to return to that concrete element from which it initially came, to abolish itself as an illusion of autonomy, and to redissolve into history, offering as it does so some momentary glimpse of reality as a concrete whole.

Thus the dialectical model allows a given phenomenon to be perceived as a moment or single interlocking section in a single articulated process. Yet such a moment is to be distinguished from the historical *instant* itself, as the sum total of all of its moments, as the "sequence of sequences," or in Fernand Braudel's sense the massive coexistence of a host of time schemes of varying structures and varying durations. When we turn, however, to the literary realm, we find that it is never the concept of the historical here and now which offers the most stubborn resistance to dialectical thinking: there is indeed a kind of antinomy for the mind in the notion that a book "comes into being" at a fixed date, even though the same mind can deal meaningfully with the time scheme in which the work is under preparation, or with that in which it henceforth exists as a presence influential or neglected, as an existent among other existents.

Rather, it seems to me that the initial problem which a dialectical theory of literature has to face is that of the unity of the literary work itself, its existence as a complete thing, as an autonomous whole, which, indeed, resists assimilation to the totality of the historical here and now (in what sense can *Ulysses* be said to be part of the events which took place in 1922?) just as stubbornly as it refuses dissolution in some supraindividual history of forms. And no doubt our first loyalty as critics is to the wholeness of the work itself, provided it is realized that that autonomy is itself a dialectical phenomenon. For the Russian Formalists showed us that every work of art is perceived against a generic background (which may itself, to be sure, alter from moment to moment and generation to generation): it is read as work *in* a given form, or *against* a given form, in a context in which the various genres are felt to coexist at fixed distances from each other in relatively systematic complexes which can themselves form the object of study in their historical coexistence or succession.[1] It is clear, therefore, that even the self-sufficiency of the work of art varies, depending on whether it deliberately invites comparison with the whole of what already exists in the form, as with the Renaissance sonnet or the Japanese haiku, or, like *Ulysses* and *The Divine Comedy*, aims at replacing all of culture by summing it up in a single book of the world, where, however, the idea of the Book remains itself a fact of culture and an element in the generic background against which the work is perceived.

The implicit model here is of course that of Gestalt psychology, with its dialectic of form and background; but it is not the only way in which to think of the relationship between the individual whole and the totality of the other literary works, let alone the other levels of historical and

[1] See Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 383-405.

social reality with which it may be juxtaposed. "The existing monuments," says T. S. Eliot in a well-known page, "form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted."[2] It is of course a profoundly dialectical concept. Indeed, the rhetorical seductiveness of the passage derives in large measure from the way in which the unnamed dialectical character of the notion is passed off on the reader as a new and more dynamic way of seeing things; nor is it any longer necessary at the present time, perhaps, to take inventory of the very precise functions—both literary and ideological—which it was designed to fulfill. For us, however, for whom the word "order" no longer has the value of a fetish, the concept of a global totality is not as methodologically useful as the smaller idea of limited sequences which are modified by the addition of a new term, itself perceived against the continuum of which it is a part. Such limited sequences furnished the context or framework for literary understanding at least as long ago as the Greek tragedians; in modern times we have only to think of Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne in the English novel; Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola in the French; Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé in the development of modern poetry, to realize the degree to which our understanding of any one of these authors is a function of a differential perception in which his position in the sequence determines the way in which his specificity is measured. That Flaubert is *sui generis* is to say nothing; but that he is no longer Balzac, that he is not yet Zola, and this in a host of determinate ways, is to articulate the struc-

[2] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York, 1950), p. 5.

tures inherent in and constitutive of the novel of Flaubert. The latter is not, of course, a host of other things as well: and to spell out those determinate negations, to show how Flaubert is not the English or Russian novelist of the same period, or how he rewrites and thus negates in his own manner *Don Quixote* or *Candide*, is to enrich our knowledge of Flaubert by seeing him as a term in wholly different types of diachronic sequences. Yet the comparative or differential mode of such literary perception remains a constant: the monographic study of an individual writer—no matter how adroitly pursued—imposes an inevitable falsification through its very structure, an optical illusion of totality projected by what is in reality only an artificial isolation. That modern writers have solicited this kind of isolation, this thoroughgoing "conversion" of the critic to their works as to a kind of "world," is not an excuse for the critical procedure, but rather a phenomenon of interest to be studied in its own right.

Such sequences, and such comparisons, largely transcend traditional questions of the personal influence of one writer upon another. We are, I think, for the most part agreed to see the individual writer as the locus or working out of a certain set of techniques, as the development and exhaustion of a certain limited set of possibilities inherent in the available raw material itself. Yet the word technique is a figure of speech: we will have occasion to reconsider the essentially artisanal model of production which it implies and presupposes. What interests us at the present moment is that gesture by which an element—call it technique or structure, component, or if you will *category*—is isolated from the work in question in order to set this work in a sequential relationship with others. This is the moment, in other words, of the choice of that around which we will construct a diachronic sequence, that of which we will write the history, that which is seen as having an internal development

or dialectical history to tell. So it is, for instance, that we may lay stress on the importance of physical sensation in nineteenth-century poetry, beginning with some such observation on the social origins of Romantic sensibility in this respect: "In literature and art there was a crisis similar to that which occurred in morals after the Reign of Terror—a veritable crisis of the senses. People had been living in a condition of perpetual fear. When their fear was over, they abandoned themselves to the pleasures of life. Their attention was entirely engrossed in external appearances, in outward forms. The blue heaven, the splendor of sunlight, the beauty of women, sumptuous velvets, iridescent silks, the sheen of gold, the sparkle of diamonds—these were the things that filled them with delight. People lived only with the eyes, and had given up thinking."[3]

Yet to "give up thinking" is a more complex and contradictory undertaking than might at first appear. For a little closer examination shows that physical sensation—no matter how hypnotically or oppressively experienced—can never enter language in isolation. Hegel accounted for this when at the opening of the *Phenomenology* he showed how the most intense experience of the here and now emerges as the verbally abstract, as the emptiest of all genuine content. So it is that the most intense rendering of the physiological dimension is able to be registered only at the moment at which the entire sensory system sinks ominously toward oblivion: *a drowsy numbness pains/ My sense. . . .*

For taken individually the various sensations collected by the Romantics fade and wither, and what was the freshest and most vivid in them (felt against the conventional rhetoric of eighteenth-century poetry) comes across the generations to us as the very epitome of the *insipid*, a dialectical reversal in which pure sensation turns around into its own

[3] Ernest Chesneau, quoted in Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (London, 1929), pp. 74-75n.

opposite, its own absence. In this situation, it was the originality of Baudelaire to have conceived of a new way of articulating the various sensory experiences against each other:

> Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
> Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
> —Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
>
> Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
> Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
> Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

For the point about synesthesia is that you cannot mingle the senses until they have first been clearly separated from each other, and disentangled each according to its own timbre and aroma: indeed, synesthesia is in the present context not so much a way of mingling sensations as rather of *distinguishing* them. The lines from "Correspondances" establish two simultaneous but different sets of oppositions: within the fresh, clear sensations, the various senses against each other (touch, sound, sight), each sense making the other stand out sharply by the contrast; then the larger opposition of clear sensation itself to that rich, mingled, corrupt sensory experience which is primarily odor and hallucinatory ecstasy. All of Baudelaire's work, on a thematic and ethical level, can be seen as the reduplication on ever higher planes of this initial and paradoxical mingling of contraries in order to distinguish them: dandyism, sadomasochism, blasphemy: so many attempts, on the psychological plane, to flee the insipidity of pastel, of harmonic consonance or sentimental effusion, by soiling it with its dialectical opposite. The work as a whole is generated out of a series of progressively enlarged identifications: thus the proposition, "only the spiritually vile and debased can know what purity really is," derives its force from the initial

premise that the pure sensation can only be rendered through a mingling with its opposites in language.

After Baudelaire, this perceptual tension is taken as a sensation in its own right in Swinburne, with a kind of sensory monotony as a consequence. In Rimbaud the perceptual system splits apart into physical languor and debilitated yearning on the one hand, and a kind of disembodied hallucinatory phantasmagoria on the other. In Surrealism, finally, the well-nigh physiological plenitude of dream fulfillment veers into the dialectical opposite of a purely verbal and what might be called paper decoration. The diachronic sequence or construct may of course be extended to whatever dimensions are desired.

It may also be *interpreted*: and it is at this point that the relatively simplistic idea which we chose as a starting point may be corrected and more adequately grounded in concrete history. Here we might rightly begin to speak—following hints of Sartre touched on in the previous chapter—of the historically new and distinct attitude of middle-class man toward his own body and toward nature in its internal manifestation in the body itself: an attitude which serves ideologically as a weapon against feudal privilege (the superiority of blood and race), and which must then be readapted (in the complex fashion described by Sartre) as a defense mechanism against the new threat of the "classes laborieuses, classes dangereuses" of the nineteenth-century factory universe, but which in any case projects a new sensory mode of being-in-the-world. Here also we would replace the limited poetic phenomenon in question within the larger context of the "reduction to the body" in modern literature in general—a literary phenomenon which reflects the increasingly guilty conscience of middle-class groups after their assumption of power (but particularly after the revolt of June 1848), and the increasing anxiousness of writers to dissociate themselves from their publics as social in-

stitutions, substituting for the "signs" of social affiliation that deeper presocial reality of the physiological itself (so that the "reduction to the body" takes its place alongside Barthes' "white writing" as an attempt on the level of literary form as such to flee the guilt and complicity of being-in-society). Such an interpretation would eventually have to come to terms with the immensely influential investigations of Bachelard into the role of sensory "rêverie," correcting them theoretically on the one hand by an account of the relationship between such raw material and the inner dialectics of literary language itself, and on the other by a more genuinely historical understanding of "rêverie" as a psychic development of the middle-class world. Yet at this point the moment is at hand in which the diachronic sequence veers about under its own momentum, announcing its own ultimate abolition and its return to the concrete itself.

Such an extended illustration should serve to underline the inseparable link between what we have called the isolation of the category (the definition of the object of study, whether it be image, style, point of view, character, or those more transitory and unnamed literary phenomena which are the very substance of modern literature itself) and that articulation into a succession of alternative structural realizations which we have called the diachronic sequence or construct, and which, always implied in the very intuition of the category itself, constitutes the concrete working out of the latter by the critic. Thus these two moments stand together as the inaugural gesture of a genuinely dialectical literary criticism, of what we will call its Hegelian mode, to be distinguished later on from the specifically Marxist.

We would not, however, want to be understood as claiming that this kind of historical and dialectical articulation has never before been practiced, or only insufficiently so. On the contrary: the modern age has been marked by a

proliferation of such diachronic models offering themselves under the various guises of "theories of history." We have only to think of the systems of Toynbee or Spengler, of the cultural history of Egon Friedell or Lewis Mumford, of the spectacular art syntheses of Siegfried Giedion or Malraux, of more recent novelties in the history of ideas as practiced by MacLuhan or by Michel Foucault, even of such apparently specialized sociological theses as Weber's vision of the bureaucratization of society or the well-known "inner direction/other direction" of David Riesman, of such apocalyptic visions of moral and artistic collapse as those of Yvor Winters or Wyndham Lewis—to measure the degree to which our intellectual life in general has been characterized by a ceaseless attempt to design and perfect the most streamlined model possible of the "theory of history," and then to market it. "Chacun y va," sneered Breton, "de sa petite 'observation.'" He was thinking of the novel, and the way in which the most minimal psychological "insight" has sometimes seemed to justify the elaboration of yet another novelistic "world." The multiplication of "theories of history" strikes me, however, as the symptom of an even deeper cultural illness: an attempt to outsmart the present, first of all, to think your way behind history to the point where even the present itself can be seen as a completed historical instant (as the birth of some new sensibility, the mark of some ultimate and decisive cultural mutation, at first visible only to initiates; or as the first signs of an eschatological cataclysm, if not merely the first straws in the wind of a new fashion or the first indices of a new depression); to name and label the moment you are standing in even before it reaches its ultimate consecration *sub specie aeternitatis* in the history books themselves. Such a mode of thought springs from a profound horror of time and fear of change; it is a very different kind of mental operation from the Marxist sensitivity to the present as history, which wel-

comes and rejoices in an ever more intense existential awareness of the historicity of life.

Indeed, it is tempting to quote against such theories of history (and against those of T. S. Eliot himself) the latter's well-known remarks on William Blake: "We have the same respect for Blake's philosophy . . . that we have for an ingenious piece of homemade furniture: we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house. England has produced a fair number of these resourceful Robinson Crusoes; but we are not really so remote from the Continent, or from our own past, as to be deprived of the advantages of culture if we wish them. . . . What [Blake's] genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet."[4] But it will have been clear to the reader already that from our point of view Eliot's own theological vision of history is no less "homemade" than Blake's; nor would I wish to defend Marxism in the terms suggested above, as the most suitable and all-embracing orthodoxy in which to go about our proper business as poets or literary critics—although I think that such a defense might well be made and is indeed implicit in the hermeneutic chapters of the present work. The point is rather that Marxism is not just one more theory of history, but on the contrary the "end" or abolition of theories of history as such. The fact is that from a descriptive point of view, even the most conservative "theories of history," such as those of Taine or Babbitt, or MacLuhan or Wyndham Lewis, merely offer alternate ways to "punctuate" the rise of the middle-class world itself and the various cultural and psychic metamorphoses or "coupures épistémologiques" which accompanied it. To dwell on the invention of printing or on the

[4] Eliot, *Selected Essays*, pp. 279-280.

rise of the nature cult or the time cult or of the "esprit classique" is only to fetishize a single moment in a total process. So it is that when we move from the "theory of history" in question to concrete history itself, we find general agreement as to the object of study itself, as to the shape of change as a whole: for as we shall see later it is a mistake to think that Marxism is simply a type of interpretation which takes the economic "sequence" as that ultimately privileged code into which the other sequences are to be translated. Rather, for Marxism the emergence of the economic, the coming into view of the infrastructure itself, is simply the sign of the approach of the concrete. The middle-class world is therefore the common object of all historical meditation, irrespective of the width or narrowness of the focus, of the generality or precision of ultimate concrete detail (that is, the lower economic reaches of reality) which is thus registered. Yet to realize that we all share a common object is only the more brutally to be brought face to face with the most painful awareness of the very sources of class judgment and ideological choice, and to find oneself inextricably "engaged" and as it were ontologically involved in that very socio-economic situation which it was one of the deeper functions of "ideology" to conceal in the first place.

The characteristic strengths and weaknesses of the "theory of history" as such may perhaps be most clearly demonstrated where the latter deliberately limits itself to a single cultural sphere or level of the superstructure. Thus it has been art history, and in particular Wölfflin's "art history without names," which has long seemed to offer a paradigm for other cultural cross sections such as the history of literary form.[5] The attractiveness of such models lies of course in the way in which they are able to work with the history and evolution of such relatively objective phe-

[5] See in particular Chap. IV of Arnold Hauser's *Philosophy of Art History* (New York, 1958).

nomena as artistic techniques and the raw materials of the visual arts. Media, theories of perspective, the relationship between line and color, iconography: such topics mark out a kind of lost innocence of purely formal content for which the literary critic, faced with the more ambiguous phenomena of linguistic significance and of forms in time, yearns in vain. The methodological limits of such models are equally symptomatic, for they stem in large part from those problems of "punctuation" evoked above. For what is it in the long run that is so profoundly problematical about the concept of the Baroque or of Mannerism (not to speak of the infinitely more elastic notion of the modern itself), if not the effort to locate real beginnings and endings in what can never be seized as anything but a continuity? Thus we may speak of a kind of ultimate vanity of art history which oppresses us whenever we feel too strongly that it is the art historian himself who wields a free shaping power over his historical data—raw materials which, elements of the superstructure with no inner resistance or reality of their own, are at one with his own substance.

Yet it is abundantly clear that the same process has gone on more or less unconsciously in the realm of literary criticism itself. Thus the New Critics—long thought by themselves as well as by others to be resolutely ahistorical—in reality devoted significant energies to the construction of historical paradigms: the dissociation of sensibility from Donne to Shelley, the reconquest of style and image from Swinburne to Yeats; such characteristic frameworks for analysis amount to Hegelian models of literary change, diachronic sequences of the type described above. Indeed, to the degree to which as we have already demonstrated the individual analysis inevitably projects its own diachronic framework, it could not have been otherwise. Only this model now tries to pass itself off as a theory of history in its own right, and at once the characteristic marks of

pseudohistory reappear: the obsession with historical rise and decline, the never-ending search for the date of the fall and the name of the serpent. Was it Rousseau who was responsible, or his enemies the *philosophes*? The Romantics or the Positivists? Which was worse, Protestantism or the French Revolution? Such false problems arise from a misconception of what the diachronic sequence can do, but are in turn pressed into ideological service, in which an eschatological framework helps conservative politics masquerade as ethics in an ostensibly aesthetic enterprise.

Such is the structure of what we might call the diachronic version of the theory of history; yet it has a synchronic manifestation as well, in what are perhaps the most impressive and influential productions of the species: I am referring to those works which, from Taine to Spengler, and with perhaps less boundless methodological self-assurance at the present day, aim at giving an account of the total *style* of a culture and of the profound unity of each of the moments of cultural history as they succeed each other. Such a model is suggestive to the degree that it can be applied either to individual or to social reality, and can serve as a means of unifying quantities of otherwise disparate materials, of linking otherwise discontinuous levels of being. Thus Taine's notion of the "faculté maîtresse" is that which unites and informs all the diverse qualities of a given author: "a particular kind of taste and of talent, a particular mental or spiritual disposition, a particular complex of preferences and dislikes, of faculties and weaknesses, in short, a particular predominant and persistent *psychological state* which is that of its author."[6] Yet the same unity exists in a culture, so that the spirit of classicism, for instance, is that style or mode which mediates "between a hedge at Versailles, a philosophical and theological argument of Malebranche, a

[6] Hippolyte Taine, *Essais de critique et d'histoire* (Paris, 1887), p. ix.

prosodic rule prescribed by Boileau, a law of Colbert on mortgages, a compliment in the waiting room of the king at Marly, a statement of Bossuet about the kingship of God."[7] Such a model has of course been used to support organic theories of society or culture, yet in the present context such ideological content may be seen simply as the framework or organizational pretext for the practice of analogy in general, or for the exercise of a sensibility of what have come to be called "homologies" between the various levels of reality. And in that dialectic of identity and difference which comes into play when we increase or decrease our distance from a given moment in the past, the "morphological" preoccupations of Spengler, who aimed at finding "the language of the forms of history" and at demonstrating the unity of a cultural style as it envelops everything from engineering techniques and mathematical thinking to religious dogma and literary convention, have much justification as a propaedeutic to the study of concrete history. In the long run the most telling objection to such global analogy remains its inability to project diachrony or to operate successfully in anything but a single *instant* or vertical cross section of time. Indeed, the culture pessimism of both Taine and Spengler ultimately stems from that optical illusion of continuity projected by the mere juxtaposition in sequence of the various sealed and unrejoinable instants: in such a model, we are tempted to say, time can never run anywhere but down. So it is that, unable to identify the economic substratum of genuine historical change, Taine and Spengler find themselves reduced to evoking the latter metaphorically, in the classic images of organic decay or of disease or infection by such "false principles" as the "esprit classique."

Ultimately, however much work is permitted by all such

[7] Taine, quoted in René Wellek, *History of Criticism*, 5 vols. (New Haven, 1955-), IV, 37.

models, they are falsified by the misconception that their object is genuinely historical in nature. The Hegelian theoretical model which we have proposed to substitute for them distinguishes itself by that structural transparency of its diachronic sequences, which are thus clearly identified not as empirical realities but as ideal *constructs* only. For as a famous passage of *The German Ideology* reminds us, elements of the superstructure, having no genuine autonomy of their own, can have no genuine history of their own either: "We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, 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 [*Supplemente*] 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 the semblance of independence. *They have no history, no developments*; it is rather men who, developing their material production and their material intercourse, 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."[8]

Thus, as we have described it, the Hegelian sequence, while permitting work in time, is distinguished by that ultimate and inevitable, structurally inherent movement toward its own dissolution, in which it projects the Marxist model out of itself as its own concrete realization and fulfillment.

[8] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. Roy Pascal (New York, 1947), pp. 14-15. Italics mine.

II. Literary Categories: The Logic of Content

> This attitude on the part of Marx toward aesthetic values is clearly related to his discovery of commodity fetishism, as well as to his solution of the problem of the subjective and the objective in economic life. . . . While working on *Capital* Marx was interested in categories and forms bordering on the aesthetic because of their analogy to the contradictory vicissitudes of the categories of capitalist economy.
>
> —Mikhail Lifshitz, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*

What we have examined above in terms of a temporal or diachronic sequence, we might also have expressed as a contradiction between a form and its content: for the new is to the old as latent content working its way to the surface to displace a form henceforth obsolete. This distinction, in which, among other things, the reader will recognize Marx's model of revolutionary change,[9] is no doubt the central operative mechanism of both the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, and in the long run the most momentous of Hegel's conceptual innovations. For the new opposition is to be sharply distinguished from that older idea of form which dominates philosophical thinking from Aristotle to Kant and for which the conjugate term is not content but *matter*, inert materials, filling, the passive. Nor is the new Hegelian duality to be seen as simply one more version of the more primal dialectical reality of the relationship between subject and object. Rather, the distinction between form and content is precisely that which lends the notion of a subject-object relationship its secret dynamics, which

[9] "At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution" (Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone [Chicago, 1904], p. 12).

permits Hegel to see the various logical combinations of the latter as an emergence, as a generation out of each other, and which permits him to construct a ladder of forms out of what would remain at any point a simple empirical measurement of an existing ratio of forces. Finally, it is this dynamic mechanism in dialectical thought which accounts for what we may call the predictive value of the latter, even though, as we shall see shortly, such predictions may be said to take place only after the fact.

In the present context, what is most striking about the distinction between form and content is that despite the enormous range of phenomena to which it will be applied, the concept is essentially aesthetic in origin, for it was evolved from Hegel's studies in theology and in the history of philosophy, not to speak of art itself, or in other words from materials which belong essentially to the superstructure. This is, indeed, the secret of its enormous force in Marx's hands: for what is relatively transparent and demonstrable in the cultural realm, namely that change is essentially a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form, is precisely what is unclear in the reified world of political, social, and economic realities, where the notion that the underlying social or economic "raw material" develops according to a logic of its own comes with an explosive and liberating effect. History is a product of human labor just like the work of art itself, and obeys analogous dynamics: such is the force of this metaphorical transfer, which at the same time goes a long way toward accounting for that profound affinity between literary criticism and dialectical thinking in general which we have underlined in the thought of Lukács.

For dialectical thought may in this respect be seen as a reversal of the form-dominated, artisanally derived model developed by Aristotle: here form is regarded not as the initial pattern or mold, as that from which we start, but

rather as that with which we end up, as but the final articulation of the deeper logic of the content itself. "It is the nature of the content, and that alone, which lives and progresses in philosophic cognition, and at the same time it is the inner reflection of the content which posits and originates its determinations."[10] These words of Hegel on the history of philosophy are no less valid for art itself, and may serve to underscore the profound impersonality of the logic of artistic content, for which the artist is himself merely an instrument, and which works itself out through him, using the accidents of his personal life as the very element of its own formal research, developing through him, as through his predecessors and successors, according to its own intrinsic laws.

This is why our judgments on the individual work of art are ultimately social and historical in character. The adequation of content to form there realized, or not realized, or realized according to determinate proportions, is in the long run one of the most precious indices to its realization in the historical moment itself, and indeed form is itself but the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure. "The insufficiency of a work of art is not at all to be seen as the result of individual clumsiness," Hegel tells us in the *Aesthetics*, "rather, the *insufficiency of the form* derives from the *insufficiency of the content.* Thus the Chinese, Hindus, Egyptians, in their forms, images of divinity, and idols, remained formless, or subject to bad and untrue formal determinations, and unable to master true beauty, because their mythological systems, the content and thought of their art works, was indeterminate in itself or of poor determination, and not content absolute in itself. The more perfect works of art become in this sense, to that degree does their content and thought have deeper inner truth. This is, however, not only a question of the greater

[10] Quoted in Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p. 121.

or lesser technical skill with which the images of nature, as they appear in external reality, have been observed and imitated. For at certain stages of the development of artistic consciousness and practice, the abandonment and distortion of the natural image is not at all the result of accidental technical incompetence and clumsiness, but rather a deliberate transformation resulting from and motivated by the content in consciousness itself. Thus there exist in this sense incomplete types of art which in technical and other respects may be wholly complete *in their own* realm, and still seem deficient in the light of the notion of art and of the ideal. Only in the highest art are idea and representation adequate to each other, so that the shape of the idea is true in and for itself because the content of the idea, which that shape expresses, is itself the true content. Related to this is what we have already indicated, namely that the idea is determined in and through itself as a concrete totality, and thus carries within itself the principle and standard of its own individuation and of the determinacy of its appearance."[11] Hegel thus subsumes intrinsic and extrinsic criticism within a single all-enveloping movement, so that we are able at one and the same time to keep faith with the work of art on its own terms (those works "complete in their own realm") and yet replace it in that larger external context in which the very formal presuppositions of the work are themselves called into question and found "deficient in the light of the notion of art and of the ideal." The latter is no longer a question of art in the narrow sense: the Hegelian Idea is here to be understood as a total life form, as the concrete mode of social life itself (or what we have referred to above as the logic of content). Thus Hegel recapitulates in this passage the essential movement of all dialectical criticism, which is to reconcile the inner and the outer, the intrinsic and the extrinsic, the existential and the

[11] *Aesthetik*, I, 81-82.

historical, to allow us to feel our way within a single determinate form or moment of history at the same time that we stand outside of it, in judgment on it as well, transcending that sterile and static opposition between formalism and a sociological or historical use of literature between which we have so often been asked to choose.

It is interesting to note in this respect that for both Hegel and Marx alike, and in spite of that reverence for Greek art which they shared, the perfect work of art, that is to say, one in which form is wholly adequate to content, cannot theoretically yet have come into being. But in Hegel's scheme of things this is so because art ultimately tends to transcend itself by becoming theology and philosophy, and abolishes itself as sensuous play as it grows increasingly nearer to that full self-consciousness which is Absolute Spirit. For Marxism, on the contrary, it is rather philosophy that abolishes itself as thought grows increasingly concrete, and the example of Lukács has shown us the degree to which art as such presents solid credentials for replacing the former discipline. But for Marxism the adequation of object to subject or of form to content can exist as an imaginative possibility only where in some way or another it has been concretely realized in social life itself, so that formal realizations, as well as formal defects, are taken as the signs of some deeper corresponding social and historical configuration which it is the task of criticism to explore.

The logic of content is *in the long run*, we have said, social and historical in character. For it is clear that to articulate the relationship between the artistic fact as such and the larger social and historical reality to which it corresponds requires a gradual enlargement of critical focus, a widening of the scope of the critic's reflection, which not every critic is prepared to effect, nor is it indeed required for every job of critical analysis. Yet to omit this enlargement, this movement from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, is itself an ideo-

logical act, to the degree to which it encourages belief in some ahistorical essence of art and of cultural activity in general. Thus, in a classic essay, R. H. Pearce has shown how the New Criticism was able to come to ideological terms with the historical dimension of literature by driving the latter back (I am tempted to say "repressing" it) into the notion of Language or medium, which is then as it were sealed off from the outside, so that the New Critics are able to stop their work at its boundaries while still seeming to have given a complete (and a nonhistorical) account of the work of art.[12]

For it is clear that the judgments of the New Criticism, whether they isolate examples of stylistic failure as in Crashaw or Shelley or early Yeats, or moments of stylistic density as in Dante or the Elizabethans, involve a meditation on a relationship between form and content of the kind described here. Indeed, we have already shown that the perceptions of the New Critics were differential in a dialectical sense—in that they never forgot Donne while reading Swinburne, nor indeed while reading Hardy or T. S. Eliot either—and that, implicitly or explicitly, they projected the kinds of diachronic sequences described above. Yet by eternalizing their "touchstones"—Dante, late Shakespeare, Donne—and by fetishizing language and making of it the source of a kind of ahistorical plenitude, they were able to contain their discussion of the logic of content within purely ethical limits, without being obliged to translate those ethical categories themselves into social and historical terms. Thus, despite an acute sense of what dialectical thinking will call the concrete (particularly in its verbal manifestation in lyric poetry or dramatic verse), they were unwilling to venture beyond a purely idealistic understanding of the source of such concrete language in the content

[12] In "Historicism Once More," in the volume of the same name (Princeton, 1970), pp. 10-13.

of the poetry, which strategic and self-imposed methodological limitations permitted them to see as a function of the "moral" or religious attitudes of the poet.

Yet with an irony properly dialectical in character, the ultimate price for such ideological limitations is exacted not on the historical, but rather on the intrinsically literary level itself. For without that profound relativism and respect for the specificity of each concrete situation which characterizes historical thinking, the categories of the New Criticism tend to solidify and are henceforth rigidly applied to every kind of text irrespective of its inner coherence.

For a genuinely dialectical criticism, indeed, there can be no preestablished categories of analysis: to the degree that each work is the end result of a kind of inner logic or development in its own content, it evolves its own categories and dictates the specific terms of its own interpretation. Thus dialectical criticism is at the other extreme from all single-shot or univalent aesthetic theories which seek the same structure in all works of art and prescribe for them a single type of interpretive technique or a single mode of explanation. Nor can it be reconciled with the specialized disciplines which have been erected on such bases: thus, for instance, from the dialectical point of view the whole concept of *stylistics* as a separate field is a profoundly contradictory one, for it implies that style, or language perceived as style, is everywhere an essential and constitutive component of the literary work of art. Indeed, it would seem at first glance to go without saying that all literary works are first and foremost linguistic constructions. Yet in reality what we call style is a relatively recent phenomenon and comes into being along with the middle-class world itself. It may be thought of as a consequence of the abandonment of that classical system of education which was built around Latin and Greek texts; for style is essentially that which in modern middle-class culture replaces the *rhetoric* of the

classical period. The two categories may be most usefully distinguished through the value and role they assign to the individual personality: for rhetoric is in this sense that ensemble of techniques through which a writer or orator may achieve expressiveness or high style, conceived of as a relatively fixed class standard, as an institution in which the most diverse temperaments are able to participate. Style, on the other hand, is the very element of individuality itself, that mode through which the individual consciousness seeks to distinguish itself, to affirm its incomparable originality. Its ultimate expression is therefore that stress on the physiological uniqueness of the body and of bodily sensation which we have already seen at work as a formal category in modern poetry. Hence Roland Barthes' characterization, which goes far toward exposing the latent contradiction between the linguistic and the extralinguistic at the very heart of style as a phenomenon, insofar as the latter constitutes "something like a vertical and solitary dimension of thought. Its references are on the level of biology or of the past, rather than of history: it is the 'object' of the writer, his splendor and his prison, it is his solitude . . . its secret is a memory buried in the writer's body; the allusive virtue of style is not a phenomenon of speed as in speech, where what has not been said remains as a kind of linguistic interim, but rather a phenomenon of density, for what persists in solidity and depth beneath the style, harshly or tenderly assembled in its figures, are the fragments of a reality absolutely alien to language."[13]

It will no doubt be objected that we are playing on words, and that style as an object of research and as a literary category is not to be confused with what we have above described as the historical phenomenon of style in the modernistic sense. Yet such "wordplay," inadmissible as it may seem to the older analytical type of logical reason-

[13] Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, pp. 58-59.

ing, is the very essence of the dialectical method itself: as a scandal for static rationality, its inner movement dramatizes the irresistible link between a formal concept and that historical reality in which it originated. Thus, the abstract idea of style in general retains traces of that concrete historical phenomenon of style in modern times which it was first designed to express; and it is because style is a historical phenomenon that an absolute science of style is impossible.

We may put all this in another way by pointing out that works come into being at varying distances from the verbal, and that to say that a work is made of words is not the same as saying that "style" in the modern sense is one of its dominant categories. In much of the novelistic production of the nineteenth century, for instance, style is a relatively less significant element (think of the way in which we secretly modernize Dickens, for example, by thinking of him as a stylist), while the stylistic dimension of a writer such as Racine is inconsequential when compared to the rhetorical one. To define style, however, as language which deliberately calls attention to itself, and "foregrounds" itself as a key element in the work, is to reassert, as over against stylistics, the profoundly historical nature of the phenomenon.

The most striking model of the way in which content, through its own inner logic, generates those categories in terms of which it organizes itself in a formal structure, and in terms of which it is therefore best studied, is perhaps that furnished us by Marx's economic research, where he was obliged at one and the same time to invent the appropriate categories of investigation and to justify such categories on historical grounds. Thus the opening chapter of *Das Kapital*, with its establishment of the intellectual category of the commodity and its description of the relationship between the idea of the commodity and that reality of commodity

production which it both reflects and attempts to comprehend, is a classic demonstration of dialectical thinking as a ceaseless generation and dissolution of intellectual categories. From the very beginning Marx was obliged to come to terms with the traditional economic categories evolved by the middle-class economists, who saw the operation of the economy as a mechanical and ahistorical interaction of such components as production, distribution, exchange, consumption, wages, ground rent, property, industry, agriculture, and so forth. But the point is that at any given moment of social and historical development these various "components" stand in different and quite specific ratios to each other, so that as their proportions change, the nature of the whole process is transformed as well. Thus agriculture cannot be seen as something like a Platonic essence or Idea: there is no fixed category such as land-ownership which remains the same under capitalism and in precapitalist pastoral societies alike. Rather the parts are relational, and evolve along with the evolution of the whole itself: "The sharp line of demarcation (abstract precision) which so clearly distinguished the trading nations of antiquity, such as the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, was due to the very predominance of agriculture. Capital as trading or money capital appears in that abstraction, where capital does not constitute as yet the predominant element of society."[14] Thus dialectical thinking is doubly historical: not only are the phenomena with which it works historical in character, but it must unfreeze the very concepts with which they have been understood, and interpret the very immobility of the latter as historical phenomena in their own right.

This is why a genuinely dialectical criticism must always include a commentary on its own intellectual instruments as part of its own working structure. Thus Plekhanov's clas-

[14] Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 304.

sic analysis of symbolism transcends a mere interpretation of those symbolic elements, such as the wild duck, which are structurally projected by Ibsen's work. What is significant for him is not the meaning of the individual symbols but rather the significance of the phenomenon of symbolism as such: "The history of literature shows that man has always used one or the other of these means [symbolism or realism] to transcend a particular reality. He employs the first (i.e., symbols) when he is unable to grasp the meaning of that particular reality, or when he cannot accept the conclusion to which the development of that reality leads. He resorts to symbols when he cannot solve difficult, sometimes insoluble problems; when (to use Hegel's happy expression) he is not able to utter those magic words which bring to life a picture of the future. Thus the ability to utter those magic words is a sign of power, while the inability to do so is a sign of weakness. And so in art, when an artist leans toward symbolism it is an infallible sign that his thinking—or the thinking of the class which he represents, in the sense of its social development—does not dare penetrate the reality which lies before his eyes."[15] The reader will recognize in this passage that characteristic hostility toward modernism and what we have come to call stylization, that instinctive bias toward the realistic work, which was later to be worked out only too programmatically by Lukács; he will also, perhaps, in the present context, glimpse the Hegelian origins of such a value judgment, in which the return to symbolic modes is felt to be a historical regression. Yet it is not the basic insight of Plekhanov which is at issue, but rather the transformation into a single-shot formula of what was at the time a fresh concept, evolved to do justice to the peculiar structure of a given work; such analysis is dialectical to the degree that it stresses the dynamic interaction and interdependency between symbolism and the other ele-

[15] In *Ibsen*, ed. Angel Flores (New York, 1966).

ments of the work and articulates, the way in which the overdevelopment of one element (in this case a visual object) relates vitally to the underdevelopment of others. Thus dialectical criticism replaces the older absolutes of truth or beauty with a judgment in which the insistence on the preeminence of the historical situation underlines the inseparability of strengths and weaknesses within the work of art itself or in the philosophical system, and stands as a concrete object lesson in the way in which the very strengths themselves, in all their specificity, require the existence of determinate and correlative weaknesses in order to come into being at all.

We may perhaps drive home this sense of the relativity of literary categories, of the primacy of the internal contradictions specific to the individual work itself, by reexamining the present enterprise in their light. For it is clear that up to this point our description has been essentially undialectical to the degree to which it has taken dialectical thought as its *object* only, and has failed to underscore its own self-consciousness as thought to the second power. That this is the case may be judged from the dominant category of the present essay, which is that of the *example*: for only where thought is imperfectly realized is it necessary to offer examples as such. The latter are always the mark of abstraction or distance from the thought process: they are additive and analytical, whereas in genuine dialectical thinking the whole process would be implicit in any given object. Here, on the contrary, concrete thinking has been torn asunder, into two wholly separate operations: on the one hand, not genuine thinking, but presentation of a *method*, and on the other not the attachment to a genuine object, but only a series of *examples* of objects. Yet the very essence of dialectical thinking lay in the inseparability of thought from content or from the object itself. This was the burden of Hegel's Preface to the *Phenomenology*, where he

denies that one can characterize philosophy from the outside, or speak about it genuinely in any other way but through the actual practice of philosophy itself: "the demand for such explanations [i.e., external statements about the philosophic process, presentations of its aim and methods, illustrations and examples, etc.], as also the attempts to satisfy this demand, very easily pass for the essential business philosophy has to undertake. Where could the inmost truth of a philosophic work be found better expressed than in its purposes and results? and in what way could these be more definitely known than through their distinction from what is produced during the same period by others working in the same field? If, however, such procedure is to pass for more than the beginning of knowledge, if it is to pass for actually knowing, then we must, in point of fact, look on it as a device for avoiding the real business at hand, an attempt to combine the appearance of being in earnest and taking trouble about the subject with an actual neglect of the subject altogether. For the real subject-matter is not exhausted in its purpose, but in working the matter out; nor is the mere result attained the concrete whole itself, but the result along with the process of arriving at it. The purpose by itself is a lifeless universal, just as the general drift is a mere activity in a certain direction, which is still without its concrete realization; and the naked result is the corpse of a system which has left its guiding tendency behind it."[16]

Thus the only genuinely concrete presentation of dialectical criticism is the practice of such criticism itself, which from the descent into a given object ultimately works its way through to literature itself. So that it is only with our example of the *example* that our presentation is raised to a higher dialectical plane and attains a more adequate con-

[16] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London, 1949), pp. 68-69.

sciousness of its own activity, through commentary on its own commentary reaching out for a glimpse of what a genuinely concrete criticism might be.

III. Tautology as the Mediation Between Form and Content

Thus dialectical thought is in its very structure self-consciousness and may be described as the attempt to think about a given object on one level, and at the same time to observe our own thought processes as we do so: or to use a more scientific figure, to reckon the position of the observer into the experiment itself. In this light, the difference between the Hegelian and the Marxist dialectics can be defined in terms of the type of self-consciousness involved. For Hegel this is a relatively logical one, and involves a sense of the interrelationship of such purely intellectual categories as subject and object, quality and quantity, limitation and infinity, and so forth; here the thinker comes to understand the way in which his own determinate thought processes, and indeed the very forms of the problems from which he sets forth, limit the results of his thinking. For the Marxist dialectic, on the other hand, the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by his class position—in short of the ideological and situational nature of all thought and of the initial invention of the problems themselves. Thus, it is clear that these two forms of the dialectic in no way contradict each other, even though their precise relationship remains to be worked out.

Yet self-consciousness does not mean introspection, and dialectical thinking is by no means a personal thought, but rather a way in which a certain type of material lifts itself to awareness, not only as the object of our thought, but also

as a set of mental operations proposed by the intrinsic nature of that particular object. Dialectical thinking is therefore not only thought to the second power, thought about preexisting thought, but also the latter's fulfillment, its realization and abolition in a sense yet to be described. For to the degree to which it places the older mental operation or problem-solving in a new and larger context, it converts the problem itself into a solution, no longer attempting to solve the dilemma head on, according to its own terms, but rather coming to understand the dilemma itself as the mark of the profound contradictions latent in the very mode of posing the problem. Thus, faced with obscure poetry, the naïve reader attempts at once to *interpret*, to resolve the immediate difficulties back into the transparency of rational thought; whereas for a dialectically trained reader, it is the obscurity itself which is the object of his reading, and its specific quality and structure that which he attempts to define and to compare with other forms of verbal opacity. Thus our thought no longer takes official problems at face value, but walks behind the screen to assess the very origin of the subject-object relationship in the first place. But this type of self-consciousness, which phenomenology defined as the *epoche* or the putting between parentheses, receives its own dialectical evaluation through its place in the historical process.

Thus at its extreme limit thought tends somehow to unravel itself, and it is this more than anything else that justifies the description of dialectical thought as tautological—tautological in the ontological sense, as part of a dawning realization of the profound tautology of all thought. What is meant goes deeper than mere logical tautology, even though the basic temporal form is the same: there, where a proposition had seemed to link two separate, independent entities, they suddenly turn out to have been the same thing all along, and the very act of thinking dissolves away. Here

the identity is not that between two words or two concepts, but rather between subject and object itself, between the process of thinking and the very reality on which it is exercised, which it attempts to apprehend. Nondialectical thought establishes an initial separation, an initial dualism, naïvely imagining itself to be a subjectivity at work upon an objectivity wholly different and distinct from itself. Dialectical thinking comes as an enlargement upon and an abolition of this initial dualism, for it realizes that it is itself the source of that external objectivity it had imagined to be something separate; and this must now be understood in a twofold way, both in the sense of the Hegelian "objective idealism," in which all experience is a function of a subject-object structure of a determinate kind, and in the Marxist sense in which the external world is the product of human labor and human history so completely that the human producer is himself the product of that history.

It was precisely this dependency of thought on its own content or object which was responsible for that dialectical "wordplay" or punning glimpsed at work in the preceding section and indeed profoundly characteristic of dialectical thinking in general. Thus the reader of such an essay as Adorno's "Society" may too rapidly conclude that the writer has unjustifiably mingled two different types of considerations, two wholly different objects of research—that he frequently, and indeed deliberately, confuses social theory or the history of the various *concepts* of society with sociology or the empirical study of the various existing societies themselves. And it is certainly true that Adorno's is an incessant shifting of reference back and forth between the two levels: for as we have already seen above, he aims precisely at demonstrating that the difficulties inherent in the *concept* of society (insofar as it can be thought of neither as a hyperorganism nor an empirical object in the world) result not from imperfect theorization, which greater ingenuity

or more accurate data might be expected to rectify, but rather from the objective condition of society itself as a real object, undefinable at any point and yet omnipresent, whose control over individuals is reflected in the very contradictions of the idea itself: "while the notion of society may not be deduced from any individual facts, nor on the other hand be apprehended as an individual fact itself, there is nonetheless no social fact which is not determined by society as a whole."[17]

There is, no doubt, something scandalous for analytical thought in this notion that not only the theories, but the very problems and categories of thought themselves—whether they be such entities as money, violence, society, style, or point of view—are themselves in constant historical change and have no fixed and objective reality. Yet even the physical sciences themselves are beginning to take into account the profoundly disturbing possibility that the very laws underlying the universe may be in a state of evolution, so that the very concept of physical law, of a fixed and changeless order of nature, is called into question.[18]

The most recent logical analyses of historical thought and historical propositions have confirmed this notion of its tautological structure. Michael Scriven, for instance, has shown how all apparent explanations in historiography, whether they claim to establish laws or merely causes, turn out in reality to be simply "truisms" in disguise: they are, in other words, already presupposed to begin with in the initial phenomenon to be accounted for, and what we took to be explanation was nothing more than an articulation of that initial "postulate," as in geometry, an analysis reducing it to its various implied propositions. Yet in a sense,

[17] Adorno, "Society," *Salmagundi*, Nos. 10-11 (Fall 1969-Winter 1970), p. 145.

[18] See Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York, 1965). This is, incidentally, a dialectic of nature rather different from that proposed by Engels.

this circularity was already present in the explanations of the physical sciences as well: "When scientists were asked to explain the variations in apparent brightness of the orbiting second-stage rocket that launched the first of our artificial satellites, they replied that it was due to its axial rotation and its asymmetry. This explanation, perhaps illustrated by moving a pencil through the air while turning it, was perfectly adequate even for newsmen. Yet it contains no laws. . . . It is perfectly true that the apparent brightness of the rocket varies because a varying number of photons is passing into the retina of the observer; but this would also be true if the rocket were symmetrical and being illuminated by a light source of variable brightness, etc., and our interest lies in having one of these states *of the particular object* of enquiry selected out for us as the explanation, i.e., in being told whether it is the shape and motion of the rocket or the varying illumination of it that is responsible for what we see."[19] The explanation, in other words, is inherent in the initial description of the event, just as the geometrical theorem is inherent in the initial definition. Understanding in history does not, therefore, derive from the combination of two wholly different items, such as a law and its manifestation, or the premises of a syllogism, but rather simply from the enlargement of the description of the basic event itself, and the rearticulation of its parts into cause and effect, or problem and explanation. Such understanding is therefore something on the order of a form moving in time, but as a separate thought process it collapses into tautology when we become aware of the real nature of the mental operation performed.

Thus, to return to an illustration from an earlier chapter, the Gironde no doubt represented the interests of a particular mercantile class in Bordeaux, and their activities acquire

[19] *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (Glencoe, 1959), pp. 445, 447.

a kind of transparency for the mind when so understood. Yet the idea that the event in question (the Gironde itself) and its explanation (the class to which they belong) are related as an effect to a cause is in the long run not a very coherent one. If we examine our own mental operations carefully, we find that we have begun with a fairly limited vision of the Gironde (the various parliamentary personalities, the anecdotal material, their official political philosophies and speeches, their program), which is then abruptly expanded to include the social experience of their place of origin, their pasts, their family connections, and so forth. The only way the latter could take on the function of an *explanation* would be if it were understood to be an implicit negation of such senseless propositions as: the Gironde were peasants, the Gironde were nineteenth-century liberals, the Gironde were Austrian aristocrats, etc. That the Gironde were what they were is therefore a truism, and in the long run our understanding of history dissolves back into the operation of the law of noncontradiction, into the ultimate realization that all events carry their own logic, their own "interpretations," within themselves: an interpretation which we then articulate into a logical succession.

In the realm of the history of ideas, this illusion of causality is stronger because in the course of time the concrete situations have vanished, while the ideas have remained behind all by themselves. The original relationship between thought and its object was not an external but an internal one, and the best dialectical analyses show not so much that external social reality *causes* a particular type of thought, as that it imposes basic inner limitations upon it, in an almost a priori fashion. This was, of course, the thesis of Lukàcs' *History and Class Consciousness* on a very abstract level: that the social situation of the bourgeoisie set a priori limits to its speculative thought, or, to use our own termi-

nology, that the forms of middle-class thought are dependent on the deep inner logic of the content of middle-class life. Thus Herbert Marcuse shows how the ideological distortions of Hegel's system (the Absolute Idea, the political conservatism, the idealistic basis of the system in general) are at one with the content of his social and historical situation. They are not external defects, but are rather part and parcel of Hegel's recognition of the nature of social reality at that particular moment of development: "He gives the state the supreme position because he sees the inevitable effects of the antagonisms within modern society. The competing individual interests are incapable of generating a system that would guarantee the continuance of the whole, hence an incontrovertible authority must be imposed on them . . . the rational order that Hegel is here discussing . . . now indicates for him the furthest limits within which this society can be reasonable without being negated in principle. He holds up the revolutionary terror of 1793 as brutal warning that the existing order must be protected with all available means."[20] Thus Hegel's "conservatism" is also a recognition of the moral anarchy inherent in capitalism. His defense of the Prussian state results from his inability, at his particular moment in history, to see clearly any form of genuine social change and reorganization which is not simply the explosion of the Terror. The only concrete correction of Hegel's system is therefore the passage of time, the development of the socio-economic situation beyond those limits, which is to say that the only adequate critique of Hegel is the philosophy of Marx. Thus philosophical thinking, if pursued far enough, turns into historical thinking, and the understanding of abstract thought ultimately resolves itself back into an awareness of the content of that thought, which is to say, of the basic historical situation in which it took place.

[20] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 175, 177.

When we come to our own time, however, this notion of the internal limits of thought becomes at once more drastic in its implications. It takes the form of a leap between two discontinuous zones of being, the inner and the outer, the psychological and the sociological, the qualitative, lived reality of individual experience, and the quantitative, external, collective conditions of existence. The shock of such a leap is that of external judgment, of finding oneself uprooted from one's own mind, now looking back inside the monad with the eyes of others, or of history: we have already described Sartre's *Critique* as the deliberate realization of such a process. Yet if we examine Sartre's earlier philosophy (taking it as an illustration of one of the most thoroughgoing descriptions of existence from the *inside*, and the most thoroughgoing methodological defense of such a description as well), we find that it is possible at one and the same time to recognize our own experience in such a description and to admit Marcuse's argument that what are there offered as the ontological structure of the existence of consciousness in the world, and of its concrete relationships to other people, are no more than forms of historical alienation, with their characteristic language of possession and reification.[21] Yet with such an analysis, where the ontological turns out to be the historical in disguise, it is not just Sartre's system, but we ourselves who are in a sense turned inside out like a glove, obliged to see ourselves from the outside in larger terms, and to recognize the familiar inner conditions of our experience as the very structure of alienation itself. Such an operation is far more complex than the conventional critique of philosophical positions on their own terms: an example of the latter would be the way in which Merleau-Ponty, positing too radical a separation of subject from object in the initial pre-

[21] See Marcuse, "Existentialismus," *Kultur und Gesellschaft*, II, 49-84.

suppositions of *Being and Nothingness*, reconstructs the system of the latter on a new and for him more adequate experiential basis in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. The Marcuse essay, on the other hand, no longer seeks to distinguish between the true and the false elements in Sartre's thought, but rather to isolate and to identify that concrete historical experience or situation to which Sartre's system as a conceptual whole corresponds: this type of dialectical critique therefore involves a leap from the purely conceptual to the historical level, from idea to that corresponding lived experience which is then "judged" insofar as it is put in historical perspective for us. This is, indeed, the hermeneutic dimension of dialectical thinking, which is called upon to restore to the abstract cultural fact, isolated on the level of the superstructure, its concrete context or situation; the latter has, of course, vanished when we have to do with cultural objects from the past. But when we have to do with products of contemporary culture, this concrete situation becomes the object of repression to the degree that we wish to ignore the socio-economic situation in which we are really involved. Thus such dialectical judgments enable us to realize a momentary synthesis of the inside and the outside, of intrinsic and extrinsic, of existence and history: but it is a synthesis which we pay for by an objective historical judgment on ourselves.

In the purely literary realm, this is nowhere so strikingly evident as in precisely that literary form which takes history for its object, namely in the historical novel itself. Here if anywhere the primacy of the logic of the raw material over the form is absolute, and the process through which the contradictions of the historical object are transformed into the contradictions of the form can be observed openly, as in a laboratory experiment. This is the substance of a remarkable letter from Adorno to Thomas Mann on the subject of Mann's novella *The Black Swan (Die Betrogene)*:

"The figure of Ken, if I'm not mistaken, bears all the earmarks of an American from the forties or fifties rather than from the decade after the *First* World War; you are yourself obviously far more keenly aware of this than I am. Now one might claim [such transposition] as the legitimate freedom of artistic creation, and maintain that requirements of chronological accuracy must be subordinate to the latter, even where it is a question of precision in characterization. Yet I wonder if such a self-evident argument really has much force. If you place a work in the twenties and have it unfold after the First rather than the Second World War, you have your own good reasons for doing so—the most obvious being that an existence such as that of Frau von Tümmler is inconceivable today; and on some deeper level this is tied in with an attempt to put distance between us and such immediate reality, to transform it magically into an earlier moment in history, at precisely that period whose patina *Krull* also rendered. Yet when one begins to transpose decades in this fashion, one becomes involved in obligations not unlike those set by the opening bars of a musical composition, from whose *desiderata* one is not free until the final notes, which reestablish the balance. I'm not talking about some obligation to an external fidelity in the temporal palette, but rather of the obligation to illuminate the images conjured up by art with a historical lighting as well, one which for the obvious immanent-aesthetic reasons can scarcely dispense with using those first, rather external, attributes also. For unless I'm mistaken, one finds oneself here in that paradoxical situation in which the evocation of such images, or in other words the genuine magic of the work of art itself, is more fully achieved to the degree to which it is composed of authentic materials. One might almost think that the suffusion of the work with subjectivity stands not at all—as our traditional formation might make us think—in simple opposition to that precept of realism

that sounds throughout your work, but rather that spiritualization, the world of the imago, is achieved in proportion to the exactness with which one remains true to the historical, and this in character types also. . . . At the moment, it strikes me that this precision is by way of being penance for the sin under which all artistic fiction labors, trying to cure itself by means of exactness in fantasy."[22]

Yet if everything in the historical moment coheres, then ultimately the historical novel itself must dissolve as a form, for in its gradual straining for the concrete totality it bursts the existential limits of art itself. The emergence of the historical novel was itself only a symptom of the increasing historicism of the novel in general, and in our own time it is generally agreed that all novels are historical, in that in keeping faith with the present their object is just as profoundly historical as any moment from the distant past. The implication is that the novel of the present has become as contradictory as the historical novel, and as impossible to realize; and indeed, over and above the displacement of the novel by journalism and sociology, the formal crisis of the novel today has its roots in the historical situation, which seems too complex for presentation in a narrative model. This is how Simone de Beauvoir in *The Mandarins* describes the dilemma of her character Henri Perron, as he tries to do justice to the historical content of the postwar period: "He spread his notes in front of him—almost a hundred pages. It was good to have put them away for a month; now he would be able to reread them with a fresh eye. He plunged into them joyfully, happy to rediscover memories and impressions formed into careful and smooth-flowing sentences. But after a while he began to worry. What was he going to do with all this stuff? These scribblings had neither head nor tail, even though they did have

[22] T. W. Adorno, "Aus einem Brief über *Die Betrogene* an Thomas Mann," *Akzente*, II, No. 3 (1955), 286-287.

something in common—a certain feeling, a climate, the climate of the prewar era. And that suddenly bothered him. He had thought vaguely, 'I shall try to give the flavor of my life.' As if such a thing were a perfume, labeled, trademark-registered, always the same year after year. But the things he had to say about traveling, for example, were all in terms of a young man of twenty-five, the young man he had been in 1935; they had nothing at all to do with what he had experienced in Portugal [after the liberation of Paris]. The story of his affair with Paula was equally dated; neither Lambert, nor Vincent, nor any of the boys he knew would have any similar reactions today. And besides, with five years of living under the German occupation behind her, a young woman of twenty-seven would be very different from Paula. There was one solution: deliberately to place the book around 1935. But he had no desire to write a 'period' novel, recreating a world that no longer was. On the contrary, what he hoped for in jotting down those lines was to throw himself live and whole onto paper. Well then, he would have to write the story in the present, transposing the characters and events. 'Transpose—what an annoying word! what a stupid word!' he said to himself. 'It's preposterous, the liberties one takes with the characters in a novel. They're transported from one century to the next, pulled out of one country and pushed into another, the present of one person is glued to the past of a second. And all of it is larded with personal fantasies. If you look closely enough, every character in a novel is a monster, and all art consists in preventing the reader from looking too closely. . . .' "[23] No doubt an American account of this abolition of art, this abdication of the storytelling gesture in guilt before its own fictionality, would find more room for the role of the advertising system in the distortion of events by

[23] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, trans. L. M. Friedman (New York, 1956), pp. 131-132.

a kind of omnipresent false consciousness; it would also, as we shall see shortly, link narrative difficulties with a determinate configuration in the political structure, with the unique structure of the present historical moment itself. Yet Simone de Beauvoir here underlines the threat to the artistic process itself of a temporal experience ever more strongly marked by historicity and dominated by an increasingly urgent political awareness. The gravity of the evocation is by no means diminished if we add that it is precisely in novelistic form that she does so, and that it is thus in some sense dialectically that the novel regenerates itself out of its own impossibility, taking the latter as the content of narration renewed.

Thus in the long run the tautological movement which we have described within the work of art, in which from a certain elevation intrinsically formal considerations suddenly dissolve into problems of content, is reproduced outside the work in the relationship between the content and its historical context. It is a forgotten truism to say that forms such as the epic, the costume tragedy, the epistolary novel are inherently dependent for their existence on possibilities in their content, or in other words on the structure of the social experience which they use as raw material and from which they spring as artifacts. Hegel's is still perhaps the most exhaustive description of the way in which, with a transformation in concrete social life, the whole system of the arts is abruptly displaced, and the practice of whole forms falls into oblivion: such is for him, for instance, the passing of the epic world, with its organization of life as a totality of experience, and the coming into existence of that world of middle-class individualism which he calls the "world of prose," where "the individual human being must repeatedly, in order to preserve his own individuality, make himself a means for other people, serve their limited ends, and transform them into means in order to satisfy his own

narrow interests. The individual, therefore, as he appears in this world of daily life and of prose, does not draw his principle of activity from himself as a totality, is not comprehensible in himself, but only in relationship to other people. For he finds himself dependent on external influences, laws, political structures, domestic relationships which preceded him and to which he must yield, whether he has been able to interiorize them or not. Furthermore, the individual subject is no totality for other people, but appears from their point of view only in the context of their own immediate and isolated interests in his actions, wishes and opinions. What immediately interests people is only the relationship to their own aims and intentions.—Even the greatest actions and undertakings to which a collectivity can rouse itself prove in this area of relative appearances to be little more than a multitude of individual efforts. . . . [Thus] in this realm the individual is no longer able to maintain that appearance of autonomous and complete vitality and freedom which is the very foundation of the notion of beauty. It is true that neither system nor a totality of activities are lacking in the immediate human reality [of the world of prose] and in the undertakings and institutions of the latter; yet that whole is but an aggregate of individualities, its occupations and activities are split and fragmented into innumerable parts, so that only tiny particles of the whole fall to the various individuals. . . . This is the prose of the world, as it appears both to our own consciousness and to that of other people, a finite world, one of mutability, of relativization, a world under the rule of a necessity which the individual is unable to escape. For the individual being is caught in a contradiction in which he sees himself as a sealed unity, while being all the while wholly dependent on other people, and the struggle to resolve this contradiction lasts as long as the attempt and as long as the battle lasts."[24] Hegel thus

[24] *Aesthetik*, I, 150-152.

distinguishes the structural peculiarity of capitalism in terms of the dilemma it poses as potential content for the work of art: to constitute a collective totality which fails to have any existential equivalent in individual experience, to determine individual reality while remaining structurally inaccessible to the categories of the latter's understanding or image-making power.

From our present methodological point of view, however, this description may serve to illustrate that moment which mediates between literary criticism and sociology, in which the former begins to pass over insensibly into the latter under its own momentum: for the key terms of such a description—totality and individuality—are common both to the analysis of concrete social life and to that of the work of art, so that with a slight enlargement of the historical focus what seemed a statement about the work of art proves to retain its validity in the social and historical dimension. What is implied here, in other words, is the notion that at a certain level of concreteness the *thing itself*—or what we will later call its existential reality—may be formulated in any one of a number of alternate codes, may be rearticulated in any one of a number of different dimensions: as literary structure, as the lived truth of a determinate social organization, as a certain type of subject-object relationship, as a certain distance of language from its object, as a determinate mode of specialization or of the division of labor, as an implied relationship between classes. This is truly the place of the concrete, in which alone we may mediate between one level and another of reality, and translate technical analysis of the idea into its truth in the lived reality of social history. It is clearly the most urgent task of a genuinely dialectical criticism to regain, on the occasion of a given work of art, this ultimate reality to which it corresponds; and we will return at the end of the

present work to a fuller examination of the implications of such a view for literary method.

Yet we cannot leave behind the subject of the transition from form to content without adding that what holds true for the form of the work of art itself also holds for the categories of literary criticism: they too are profoundly dependent on a situation of a changing and historical character, and we cannot illustrate this better than by reference to the concept of the point of view as it has been presented in an influential and characteristic work of American criticism, Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction.* Booth's position, in the spirit of neo-Aristotelian criticism, is that the novel must never be understood as a statement about realities, but rather as a structure of illusions designed to produce certain effects (just as sentences themselves were designed to do within the narrower confines of traditional "rhetoric"). Thus, although he is of course post-Jamesian and deeply influenced by James' formulation of the concept of point of view, he remains profoundly ambivalent about the ultimate implications of the Jamesian doctrine. For with all James' attention to construction and method, his teaching ultimately aimed at a kind of novelistic *truth*: point of view is for him the basic category of novelistic practice not so much because of the illusions and effects it permits the novelist to achieve, but rather because it corresponds to our lived experience, in which we always remain in situation, seeing life from the relatively restricted vision of our own monad. This idea, in Booth's opinion, is pernicious on two counts, which in the long run amount to the same thing: first, the mechanical application of point of view tends to ruin subjects which a nineteenth-century omniscient narrator would have been able to handle to far greater effect (Fitzgerald's uncertainty in the two versions of *Tender is the Night* may here serve as the *locus classicus*). Second, pure point of

view ushers in a kind of total relativism, in which we are obliged to accept any narrator on his own terms, and which results in the destruction of all absolute values and standards of judgment, and consequently, of the very source of literary effects as well.

For Booth's book is a defense of the omniscient narrator, the implied author or reliable commentator, who unobtrusively but strategically makes his presence between reader and characters felt in such a way that the former is provided with the standards by which to judge the latter appropriately. The implied author is of course not the real author either, but rather the absolute embodiment of positive cultural values: "when we read [*Emma*] we accept ['Jane Austen,' the dramatized author] as representing everything we admire most. She is as generous and wise as Knightley; in fact, she is a shade more penetrating in her judgment. She is as subtle and witty as Emma would like to think herself. Without being sentimental she is in favor of tenderness. She is able to put an adequate but not excessive value on wealth and rank. She recognizes a fool when she sees one, but unlike Emma she knows that it is both immoral and foolish to be rude to fools. She is, in short, a perfect human being, within the concept of perfection established by the book she writes; she even recognizes that human perfection of the kind *she* exemplifies is not quite attainable in real life. The process of her domination is of course circular; her character establishes the values for us according to which her character is then found to be perfect. . . . It is a choice of the moral, not merely the technical, angle from which the story is to be told."[25]

In the absence of such a figure, and of such absolute standards of moral judgment, the modern novel for Booth ends up in a relativistic subjectivism, the ultimate symbol

[25] Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 264-265.

of which he finds in the nihilism of Céline. The modern concept of irony was of course just such a rudderless absence of value, a gratuitous ambiguity turning on itself and hypostasized as a value in its own right; and it is one of the great merits of Booth's work to have taken the hammer to those plaster idols of modern criticism which are irony and point of view.

Yet the return to the omniscient narrator is in the long run no more attractive as a "solution" for the contemporary novelist than is the scarcely veiled defense of middle-class ethical norms and values for the contemporary reader. Both recommendations mark the basically ahistorical approach of the critic, who does not seem to have grasped the irreversibility of literary history any more than he has understood the way in which in our time the political has taken precedence over the ethical in the old-fashioned sense of the word. The fact is that the implied or reliable narrator described by Booth is possible only in a situation of relative class homogeneity, and indeed reflects a basic community of values shared by a fairly restricted class of readers: and such a situation is not brought back into the world by fiat. Céline's nihilism, on the other hand, and modern subjectivistic relativism in general, reflect an increasing atomization of middle-class society, a fragmentation and decay of the larger social units and institutions. Indeed, it would not be difficult to show this process at work in the development of the novel as a form from Henry James on. Such a demonstration would bring out the relationship between point of view as a literary technique and monadic isolation as a social fact; it would find confirmation in the creation of artificial totalities (such as Gide's concept of the *roman* as a kind of additive sum of the various *récits* of individual existences) and in the premium placed on epistemology as a theme and on the irony of reality and appearance in a relativistic universe, an irony of which Pirandello is the

dramatist, Conrad and Ford the novelists, and Fernando Pessoa, perhaps, the poet laureate.

This is the point at which the tautological paradox intervenes: for surely it is paradoxical to speak of point of view as a historical phenomenon when *all* stories and anecdotes, from earliest times, have of necessity involved the choice of a narrative viewpoint of one kind or another? This is, however, precisely the point. To the degree that point of view as a category reflects the historical situation of the middle classes in modern times, it is an unsuitable concept for dealing with historically different forms, and cannot without a contradiction in terms be applied to such works as medieval narrative or folk epic. I will go even further and say that in the same way the solution to the dilemma described by Booth can itself be conceived only as a result of social and historical change, and would imply the transcendence of individualistic point of view in general by more genuinely collective forms, by new modes of narration which correspond formally to the realities of a postindividual world; and indeed the beginnings of such new forms may be seen everywhere in modern literature.

Thus the ultimate value of Booth's work is that of the conservative position in general: useful as diagnosis, and as a means of disengaging everything that is problematical in the existing state of things, its practical recommendations turn out to be nothing but regression and sterile nostalgia for the past. Indeed, the very attempt to think through a noncontradictory, universally valid (and thereby ahistorical, nondialectical) reformulation of the concept of point of view is itself historically symptomatic. Mr. Booth has thus something in common with the object of his criticism: for James also attempted to arrive at the universal laws governing the proper composition of the novel in general, and showed as little awareness of the historically conditioned nature of form. The difference is that James in do-

ing so reflected his moment in history, whereas Mr. Booth does not.

IV. Idealism, Realism, Materialism

> All good Marxists ought, *ex officio*, to constitute a "Société des amis matérialistes de la dialectique hegelienne."
>
> —Lenin

So it is that the vexed question of historical determinism slowly comes into view before us, even in what seemed to be a purely literary context. It is no doubt a false problem, to the degree to which it amounts to a covert application of the model of the physical sciences to history: for there is no common denominator between the unique events of the latter and laboratory experiments which one is able to *repeat*. There can be no concept of law, in other words, or scientific prediction, unless one is able to see the elements involved in succeeding experiments as being the *same*; but in history the hypothesis of identical or recurrent factors in different events is possible only at the price of increasing generalization, a movement away from the unique historical fact which permits us to see similarities as from over a great distance.

This is the kind of generalizing movement which is responsible for such statements as those of Plekhanov, in his well-known essay "The Role of the Individual in History": "Owing to the specific qualities of their minds and characters, influential individuals can change the *individual features of events and some of their particular consequences*, but they cannot change their general *trend*, which is determined by other forces."[26] It is not hard to object philosophically to such a statement, whether from the empiricist point of view of professional historians or from the existential position of a Sartre; yet it certainly corresponds to a

[26] *Theories of History*, ed. Gardiner, pp. 159-160.

common-sense feeling about the past and deserves a little closer examination.

For one thing, if there is anything that distinguishes history as such from other modes or objects of study, it would seem to be precisely this indeterminacy of distance, which permits us to change focus and to see the same event anew, either close up, from a relatively documentary viewpoint, or else from across a longer range in which it comes before us as the mere detail of a larger movement or pattern. Historical understanding is a process of *specification*, said Michelet: but it would seem more accurate to include both movements in the description, and to see such understanding as a constant process of *rectifying* the received images we already have of historical events, specifying them, no doubt, correcting them with a mass of detail when the images are vague, yet on the other hand moving away, and replacing them in larger contexts when we have become so absorbed in the empirical complexity of an event as to have forgotten that it can also have a meaning. If historical truth, as opposed to historical accuracy, can be said to have any validity as a philosophical concept, it is hard to see how it could be formulated in any other way than as just such a process of determinate negation.

Such is the context in which Plekhanov's claim may be justified as a statement about history. When we come, however, to the intention behind it, it becomes clear that Plekhanov is evoking not so much determinism as the historical *necessity* of events. It is perhaps more a question of a feeling than of a concept; and I am tempted to say that the feeling of necessity or historical inevitability is simply the emotion characteristic of historical understanding as such, that feeling which accompanies the mental process by which, through that movement of specification or rectification which we have described, we now as for the first time suddenly comprehend a historical event, which is to say

that we understand for the first time how it had to happen *that way and no other*. The notion of historical necessity is therefore something like a historical trope, the very temporal figure of the process of historical understanding, and presupposes an ever closer approximation of the concrete, an ever greater enlargement of the context of the historical meditation, such that the alternative feeling of chance is not so much disproven as it is rendered inconceivable and meaningless.

The concept of historical necessity or inevitability is therefore operative exclusively *after the fact*; and this characteristic of Marxism as a conceptual operation has been insufficiently understood and has significant implications. They are, no doubt, implications of a primarily philosophical or historical nature, and concern literature directly only in the way in which they exclude literary prescription of the socialist-realist type. Yet to the degree that the method proposed in the present work represents a coordination of Hegelian and Marxist conceptual operations, it is necessary to sketch out, however briefly, a justification against the attacks upon Hegelian "idealism" which have often been made in the name of orthodox Marxism; and such a justification is implied in the concept of Marxism as a *critical* philosophy.

For the attempt to predict is but one of the symptoms of a failure to think in a situational way; and as a mode of philosophical thought, we may say that Marxism itself operates primarily after the fact with respect to other philosophical positions. It is in this sense also, then, that Marxism may be seen as the "end" of philosophy, in that in its very structure it refuses system, or what amounts to the same thing, metaphysical content. The latter results from a hypostasis of the mental processes, an attempt to hold something aside from the concrete operation of the mind upon its determinate object, something which can then be treated

in absolute fashion, as the universally valid. And no doubt, to the degree to which it is painful to remain in situation and to eschew system or dogma, the emotional motivation behind the metaphysical impulse is self-evident.

It is this critical structure of dialectical thought, this anti-systematic thrust, which makes its formulation such a complicated matter. For if Marxism as a mental operation is to be characterized as a kind of inner "permanent revolution," then it is clear that every systematic presentation of it falsifies it in the moment in which it freezes over into a system. This is indeed the profound formal objection to such otherwise estimable summaries of Marxism as those of Bukharin: the notion of a "scientific socialism" encourages the misconception that Marxism is an objective and systematic body of ideas rather than a form moving in time, and thereby contributes to the transformation into one more ideology of that which was in its very structure a refusal of all ideology as such.

Initially, however, it is certain that those who understood Marxism as a critical philosophy had in mind its emergence from and consequent repudiation of the Hegelian system and the Hegelian metaphysics. In reaction, they insist on historical materialism as a method, and it is instructive to see such incongruously associated philosophers as Benedetto Croce and Karl Korsch reach much the same conclusions in this context. Thus Croce retained from his Marxist period the conclusion that historical materialism was "neither a new *a priori* notion of the philosophy of history, nor a new method of historical thought; it must be simply a *canon* of historical interpretation. This canon recommends that attention be directed to the so-called economic basis of society, in order that the forms and mutations of the latter may be better understood. The concept canon ought not to raise difficulty, especially when it is remembered that *it*

implies no anticipation of results, but only an aid in seeking for them; and is entirely of empirical origin."[27]

Croce, of course, speaks as a non-Marxist, and the terminology of Karl Korsch will perhaps be more familiar: "Even where Marx departs from that purely critical position, he does not lay down any general propositions as to the essential nature of all society but merely describes the particular conditions and developmental tendencies inherent in the historical form of contemporary bourgeois society. The critical principle of Marx's *social science* was during the subsequent development of Marxism converted into a general *social philosophy*. From this first misconception, it was only a step further to the idea that the historical and economic science of Marx must be based on the broader foundation not only of a social philosophy but even of an all-comprehensive 'materialistic philosophy' embracing both nature and society, or a general philosophical interpretation of the universe. Thus the definitely scientific forms which the real kernel of the philosophical materialism of the 18th century had assumed in the historical materialism of Marx were ultimately carried back to what Marx himself had once unmistakably repudiated as 'the philosophical phrases of the Materialists about matter.' "[28]

Actually, the similarity between Croce's and Korsch's positions ceases to be quite so surprising when one remembers that in this case both idealist and materialist set out from a basic denial of the relationship between Marx and Hegel: Croce because he is himself a Hegelian and not a Marxist, Korsch because he believes that genuine Marxism involves the thoroughgoing eradication of Hegelian dialectical elements, which for him are still speculative.

[27] Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx*, trans. C. M. Meredith (New York, 1966), pp. 77-78.
[28] Korsch, *Karl Marx*, p. 168.

Yet paradoxically enough, the ultimate justification for considering the dialectic as a critical rather than a speculative instrument comes from Hegel himself, who describes it thus in a famous page of the Preface to the *Philosophy of Law*: "A word on preaching about how the world should be. For that, philosophy always arrives too late. As the *thought* of the world, it only makes its appearance after actuality has finished its process of development and is over. What the conception teaches, history also shows to be necessary. Only in the maturation of actuality does the ideal appear to confront the real. Then the ideal reconstructs this world for itself in the form of an intellectual realm comprehending it in its substance. When philosophy paints its grey in grey then the form of life has grown old, and this grey in grey is not capable of rejuvenating it, merely of understanding it. The owl of Minerva only begins its flight when the twilight falls."[29] Hegel's notion of the Absolute Idea, of that "Sunday of life" when history stops, is clearly the ultimate working out of the contradiction present in this passage, of which Marx's work is an explicit correction. One is reminded a little of Freud's earliest conception of the psychoanalytic process, in which, he thought, the patient would suspend his life and his most essential decisions in order to work out his problems in a relatively closed experimental situation, returning to life after the completion of the cure. As soon, however, as one is able to feel one's own thought as a historical action on equal terms with the objects studied, as soon as one is able to reckon one's own position as an observer into the critical thinking in process, then the Hegelian contradiction is overcome, and one no longer has to posit an end to history in order for historical thought to take place. In the apprehension of all events, mental or otherwise, as profoundly historical and situational in char-

[29] Quoted in Frank Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 298-299.

acter, Marx's thought represents an advance over that of Hegel, who reserved a single position outside of history for the philosopher of history himself, and was to that extent unable to grasp the notion of being-in-situation in its most paradoxical dimensions.

It is therefore this particular aspect of Hegel's philosophy which is rejected by Marxism, and not the content of that philosophy as a whole. Yet Croce and Korsch are far from being the only thinkers to feel that Hegel's "idealism" is irreconcilable with Marx's "materialism," and we would do well to examine the relationship of these two positions at this point.

Insofar as Marxism is a critical rather than a systematic philosophy, however, we would expect the materialism of Marx to be not a coherent position in itself but rather a correction of other positions—a rectification in dialectical fashion of some preexisting phenomenon, rather than a doctrine of a positivistic variety existing in its own right. This is to say that we cannot really understand Marx's materialism until we understand that which it is directed *against*, that which it is designed to *correct*;[30] and it is worth pointing

[30] Compare also Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (New York, 1933): "Marx came to critical self-consciousness by settling accounts with the varied intellectual traditions and attitudes of his day. . . . None of his works can therefore be understood without a comprehension of the opposing positions to which he makes explicit or implicit reference. Against the idealism of Bruno Bauer and his Young-Hegelian associates, Marx presents the argument for materialism. Against the passive materialism of Feuerbach, Marx defends the principles of activity and reciprocity which were central to Hegel's dialectic. Against the fatalism of both absolute idealism and 'vulgar' (reductive) mechanism, Marx proclaims that human beings make their own history. As opposed to the revolutionists of the phrase, however, he adds that history is not made out of whole cloth but under definite, limiting conditions. . . . The critics who made so much of Marx's contradictory positions never made an attempt to find a point of view from which these alleged contradictions turned out to be applications of the same principles and purposes to different historical situations" (pp. 65-67). Hook's

out that the materialistic dialectic has not one basic philosophical enemy but two, and that besides *idealism*, philosophical *realism* (in the classic sense of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas) furnishes the other prototype of nondialectical thought, with its common-sense epistemology of the adequation of the concept to external reality, its mechanical and "objective" distinction between subject and object. We cannot, in other words, fully understand the relationship between Marx and Hegel unless we see that there are in reality three basic positions involved; so that although Marx rejects the idealistic spirit of Hegel's dialectic, he is at one with Hegel in repudiating the essentially analytical, antidialectical thinking of philosophical realism as such. The whole problem therefore turns on the relative structures of these two alternatives to the Marxist dialectic, and ultimately resolves itself into the social and historical, or in other words ideological, functions of realism and idealism respectively. The question becomes one of deciding which of these two philosophical attitudes is to be understood as the principal ideological instrument of the middle classes, which of them is the source of that mystification which then becomes the object of the specifically Marxist critique.

Thus formulated, it seems to me that the question contains its own answer, and that if the word idealism is to retain any kind of precise philosophical content, it is preposterous to claim that Hegelian idealism could in any way constitute the dominant ideology of the Western middle classes. Breton, in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, offers a particularly striking evocation of the relative thrust of its twin adversaries: "It becomes necessary to open the *dossier* of the realistic attitude, after that of the materialistic. The latter, besides being more poetic, implies on the part of man a monstrous form of pride, no doubt, but not some new and

later work, *From Hegel to Marx* (Ann Arbor, 1962), is a valuable presentation of just those historical and philosophical situations.

more complete degradation. We may best understand it as a happy reaction against some of the more ludicrous tendencies of spiritualism. It is, lastly, not incompatible with a certain nobility of thought. In contrast, the realistic attitude from Saint Thomas to Anatole France, inspired by positivism, seems to me utterly antagonistic to any kind of upward intellectual or moral impulse. I loathe it, for that combination of mediocrity, resentment, and base conceit which makes it up."[31] Materialism is in other words a reaction against religion, whereas realism is primarily a reaction against *enthusiasm*, or in more general terms against speculation itself, against any intellectual transcendence of the empirical present itself.

We may therefore conclude that the materialistic strategy of Marxism grows more pronounced whenever the ideology of the dominant classes takes on a religious or spiritualistic form, whenever religion is the principal weapon in the struggle against change and social revolution; and no doubt there are still areas in the Western countries, not to speak of the Third World, in which this is still the case.

But on the whole it must be said that for the essentially feudal and reactionary world view of religion, with its doctrine of hierarchy, submission to suffering, and insistence on the primacy of the spiritual, more indigenous middle-class thought patterns have been substituted which have proved equally capable of holding the line. For the dominant ideology of the Western countries is clearly that Anglo-American empirical realism for which all dialectical thinking represents a threat, and whose mission is essentially to serve as a check on social consciousness: allowing legal and ethical answers to be given to economic questions, substituting the language of political equality for that of economic inequality and considerations about freedom for doubts about capitalism itself. The method of such thinking,

[31] *Manifestes du surréalisme*, p. 9.

in its various forms and guises, consists in separating reality into airtight compartments, carefully distinguishing the political from the economic, the legal from the political, the sociological from the historical, so that the full implications of any given problem can never come into view; and in limiting all statements to the discrete and the immediately verifiable, in order to rule out any speculative and totalizing thought which might lead to a vision of social life as a whole. I might add that when in the opening chapter of the *Anti-Duehring* Engels attacks "metaphysical" thinking, it is precisely empiricist thought of the tradition of Bacon and Locke, rather than the school of German idealism, that he has in mind.[32]

If therefore *this* is what is meant by that idealism which it is the task of historical materialism to refute, then we will have to find another name for idealism of the Hegelian and Germanic variety, whose ideological distortions are of another type altogether. For it is clear that for Marxism Anglo-American empiricism is a class ideology, while the idealism of the Hegelian variety presents distortions of a more psychological kind. The illusions of Hegelian idealism are not so much the result of social and political mystification as they are of that permanent danger of unconscious egocentrism that hangs over the human mind at all times. This optical illusion of our own centrality is an inevitable and recurrent fact of our conscious life, a structural delusion which is projected by the contradiction between thought as a universalizing process and the nature of the mind as an individual existent. Yet this "idealism," as a perpetual temptation, is part and parcel of our very being and strikes "idealist" and "materialist" alike, for it is nothing more than the forgetfulness of our own position as observers. In such a situation prephilosophical naïveté and dog-

[32] Friedrich Engels, *Herr Eugen Duehring's Revolution in Science* (New York, 1966), pp. 27-29.

matism meet, for both come to stare at their own concepts as though they were things; yet at the other end of the philosophical spectrum Hegel's ingenious and sophisticated solution to the dilemma is no less wrong, positing in Absolute Spirit, as we have seen, a term in which somehow universality and the existence of the individual consciousness are reconciled. It is the psychological function of the materialistic doctrine to rebuke such illusions, in its hygienic downgrading of the pretensions of spirit as such and of the individual mind's claim to universality, in its regrounding of our beings and our bodies in the physical and sociohistorical universe.

A characteristic complex of images marks the development of this theme throughout the works of Marx and Engels: that of ocular inversion as a figure for the seeming autonomy and self-sufficiency of the intellectual and cultural realm. "If in all ideology," they tell us in a famous passage of *The German Ideology*, "men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process."[33] The figure is paradoxical to the degree to which in it a socially conditioned and historically determined mystification is described in terms of a permanent natural process: at this stage both class ideology and that inherent and more natural tendency of consciousness toward a kind of unconscious idealism are still identified.

It is through this same image that the whole complex relationship of Marx to idealizing tendencies in Hegel is evoked in the well-known remarks from the Preface to the second edition of *Das Kapital*: "The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working

[33] *The German Ideology*, p. 14.

in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."[34] The image is, however, not that of a man standing on his head, but rather that of a whole world reversed and inverted as on the retina of the eye.

What has less often been realized is that the image has its origin in Hegel himself, in that chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that deals with "Force and Understanding," that is to say, with the scientific interpretation of the sensible world. For Hegel, indeed, the evolution from sensory perception of the external world to a scientific investigation of its inner laws is characterized by the creation of an "inverted world" which is precisely the realm of physical law itself. Scientific thinking, in other words, involves the projection of elements from the "real" or sensory universe into that suprasensible realm "inside" or "beyond" phenomena which is the place of abstract natural law in general, and constitutes thereby a kind of optical inversion of the empirical world of which it is at once the reflection and the explanation. But for Hegel such consciousness, scientific though it may be, is naïve insofar as the scientist thinks of that inverted world as a reality in its own right, insofar as he imagines that laws exist somehow "within" the objects of the world and fails to achieve consciousness of his own mind as the very origin of such theoretical models or constructs.

It was the achievement of Marx and Engels to have transferred this analysis of the self-perpetuation of theory, of that inner momentum through which the process of abstraction tends to substitute itself for its object in reality, to the domain of our everyday understanding of the social and cultural world in which we are involved. The concept of the fetishism of commodities is of course the definitive formu-

[34] *Capital*, p. 25.

lation of this perceptual opacity as it is determined by the structure of our own historical society. But it is Engels who in his old age returns to the imagery of inversion to work out its fullest implications for a theory of culture: "Economic, political and other reflections are just like those in the human eye: they pass through a condensing lens and therefore appear upside down, standing on their heads. Only the nervous apparatus which would put them on their feet again for presentation to us is lacking. The money-market man sees the movement of industry and of the world market only in the inverted reflection of the money and stock market, and so effect becomes cause to him. . . . Where there is division of labor on a social scale, there the separate labor processes become independent of each other. In the last instance production is the decisive factor. But as soon as trade in products becomes independent of production proper it follows a movement of its own, which, while governed as a whole by that of production, still in particulars and within this general dependence again follows laws of its own inherent in the nature of this new factor; this movement has phases of its own and in its turn reacts on the movement of production. . . . The reflection of economic relations as legal principles is necessarily also a topsy-turvy one: it goes on without the person who is acting being conscious of it; the jurist imagines he is operating with a priori propositions, whereas they are really only economic reflexes, so everything is upside down. And it seems to me obvious that this inversion, which, so long as it remains unrecognized, forms what we call *ideological outlook*, reacts in its turn upon the economic basis and may, within certain limits, modify it."[35] In the long run, therefore, what we have called the idealizing tendency inherent in abstract thought reflects the establishment of the various specialized

[35] Letter to Conrad Schmidt, 27 October 1890 (Basic Writings, ed. Feuer, pp. 400-401, 404). The whole letter is of the greatest interest.

disciplines, or in other words the division of labor itself; it is because thought has become a specialized domain, and the property of specialists, that it tends thus to hypostasize itself. In this sense the anti-idealistic thrust of Marxism simply aims at breaking the spell of the "inverted world" of conceptual thought. The dialectic is designed to eject us from this illusory order, to project us in spite of ourselves out of our concepts into the world of genuine realities to which those concepts were supposed to apply. We cannot, of course, ever really get outside our own subjectivities: to think so is the illusion of positivism; but, every time they begin to freeze over, to spring us outside our own hardened ideas into a new and more vivid apprehension of reality itself is the task of genuine dialectical thinking.

Such thought is therefore essentially process: it never attains some ultimate place of systematic truth in which it can henceforth rest, because it is as it were dialectically linked to untruth, to that mystification of which it is the determinate negation and against which it is perpetually forced to reclaim a fitful apprehension of reality, itself perpetually in danger of losing contact with the real in its turn.[36] In the context of our present description, which limited itself to an account of the dialectic as a mental operation, dialectical thinking thus proves to be a moment in which thought rectifies itself, in which the mind, suddenly drawing back and including itself in its new and widened apprehension, doubly restores and *regrounds* its earlier notions in a new glimpse of reality: first, through a coming to consciousness of the way in which our conceptual instruments themselves determine the shape and limits of the results arrived at (the Hegelian dialectic); and thereafter,

[36] Georges Gurvitch has named his own, analogous concept of the dialectic "dialectical hyperempiricism" (see *Dialectique et sociologie* [Paris, 1962]). He considers, however, that Marxism is itself another such "dogmatic philosophy of history" which genuine dialectical thinking is called on to "correct."

in that second and more concrete movement of reflection which is the specifically Marxist form, in a consciousness of ourselves as at once the product and the producer of history, and of the profoundly historical character of our socio-economic situation as it informs both solutions and the problems which gave rise to them equally.

If now, to revive a distinction of an earlier chapter, we take a point of view not so much *philosophical* as *hermeneutic*, it becomes possible to see much in modern thought as a kind of unconscious movement and striving toward this ultimate dialectical position. Thus, I am tempted to see even that profound formalism of all the great schools of modern philosophy (whether those of pragmatism or phenomenology, logical positivism, existentialism, or structuralism) as an attempt to dispense with the baggage of system or metaphysical content: such an attempt, pursued to its ultimate consequences, veers about, in a kind of dialectical reversal, into what we may in the present context call the "absolute formalism" of Marxism itself, whose unique concept of dialectical and historical self-consciousness allows it to square the circle and to hold the absolute wholly within the utter relativity of the individual consciousness or the individual observer. To take another aspect of dialectical thinking, I am inclined to understand such paradoxical and self-implicating concepts as Sartrean authenticity, with its perpetual correction of a perpetually reforming *mauvaise foi*; but also Wittgenstein's "therapeutic positivism" (Ferıater Mora); Nietzsche's genealogies; indeed the very Freudian analytical situation itself; as relatively specialized and distorted versions of what we have here described as dialectical self-consciousness. To go even further afield, it seems to me that even such aesthetic concepts as the *ostranenie* or "making-strange" of Russian Formalism (as well as its American version, "make it new"), indeed the profound drive everywhere in modern art toward a re-

newal of our perception of the world, are but manifestations, in aesthetic form and on the aesthetic level, of the movement of dialectical consciousness as an assault on our conventionalized life patterns, a whole battery of shocks administered to our routine vision of things, an implicit critique and restructuration of our habitual consciousness. What distinguishes such concepts *philosophically* from genuine dialectical thinking is of course their failure to account for the initial numbness of our perception in the first place, their inability to furnish a sufficiently historical explanation for that ontological deficiency which they can only understand in ethical and aesthetic terms. Yet such intellectual distortion, such structural repression of an essential element in the situation, is amply accounted for by the Marxist theory of ideology, which posits a kind of resistance or *mauvaise foi* that grows ever stronger as we draw closer and closer to that truth of the socio-economic which, were it realized in all its transparency, would immediately obligate us to praxis.

Hegel's *Logic* stands as the supreme monument to the transformation of a system of fixed concepts into that fluidity of process from which they ultimately came, their return and reimmersion in the very shaping and unshaping power of mind to which their rigidity as absolute law blinded us. In the same way, one might imagine a dialectical *Rhetoric*, in which the various mental operations are understood not absolutely, but as moments and figures, tropes, syntactical paradigms, of our relationship to the real itself, as, altering irrevocably in time, it nonetheless obeys a logic that like the logic of language can never be fully distinguished from its object. Such a fancy would be useful, I think, to the degree to which it might suggest the profound vocation of dialectical thinking to reopen the approaches to time and to history itself, and to reconstruct a truth in process upon the ruins of a never-ending ideological formation.

V. Marxism Versus Sociology: The Regrounding of the Work

In this light, it becomes clear that even what we have called a Hegelian literary criticism includes an essentially critical, negative, rectifying moment, one which forces upon us an abrupt self-consciousness with respect to our own critical instruments and literary categories. When we turn now to a properly Marxist literary criticism, it will be through a similar epistemological shock that we will be able to identify its presence: for such a shock is constitutive of and inseparable from dialectical thinking, as the mark of an abrupt shift to a higher level of consciousness, to a larger context of being.

The absence of such shock is indeed the telltale symptom of the nondialectical character of much of what passes for Marxist criticism. For the sorting out of literary history into the classic periodization—primitive accumulation, triumph of middle-class revolution, age of imperialism—described by Marxist economic theory remains a static enterprise, whether practiced by Christopher Caudwell or under the more sophisticated guise of Lucien Goldmann's "homologies." To read the former is indeed to acquire the gradual impression of a figure named Poetry, which, not unlike the Orlando of Virginia Woolf, alters its shape in the course of its successive adventures down through the ages of modern history. The secret vice of such parallelisms, and the all-informing flaw of vulgar Marxism as such, may be traced to a misconception of the so-called economic level itself: for to the degree that the economic schema is diachronic, and purports to furnish a continuous model of economic development over a long period, to that degree it is itself an ideal and indeed often an unconsciously idealistic construct. To the economic sequence applies everything we have shown about the characteristically Hegelian operation of creating

an artificial model of continuity in order intellectually to grasp the otherwise inconceivable reality of diachrony as such. Thus it is only an apparent paradox to claim that in the sequence feudalism-capitalism-socialism Marxist economic theory projects an essentially Hegelian model. And if this is so, then it is equally clear that the positing of homologies between the various levels of reality, between cultural and ideological history, the evolution of political institutions, and ultimately the development of the economy itself can never be anything but a more complex version of those static cultural models discussed in connection with Taine and Spengler in an earlier section, and serving more as a propaedeutic to the concrete than as its genuine realization.

For the apprehension of the concrete, the characteristic gesture of a genuinely Marxist literary criticism, takes place in the realm of the *synchronic*, and it is at this point that the problem of the distinction between the Marxist conceptual operation and that of sociological criticism in general poses itself most acutely. For the sociological approach also implies the juxtaposition of a given literary or cultural fact with some more fundamental "ground" in the realities of a given society or culture; and like Marxist thinking also, sociology frequently expresses itself in terms of groups or social classes. Thus the problem of a sociological literary criticism poses itself most insistently in the context of what we have in the preceding chapter called the *subjective* dimension of Marxism, that is, that alternative code or language of which Marxism disposes to express and reformulate the ambiguous reality of economic institutions in terms of class.

We may perhaps suggest the essentials of the problem in the context of the particularly rich literature about Jansenism in recent French criticism, whose most significant achievements are Paul Bénichou's *Les Morales du grand*

siècle, Henri Lefèbvre's *Pascal*, and Lucien Goldmann's *Dieu caché*. In particular Lefèbvre's study, one of the first (1949) and still one of the most striking realizations of French Marxism in the critical domain, replaces the question of the class affiliation of Jansenism squarely within a detailed and suggestive evocation of the historical period itself, with all its contradictory tendencies and archaic survivals: already such a reconstruction of the concrete context of Pascal's work is tantamount to a kind of regrounding of it in the infrastructure. It is a question, perhaps, of something both a little more and a little less than that historical background with which literature is so often supplied, and which is at the same time felt to be something extraneous or extrinsic to the most genuine and formal literary analysis. For the latter, indeed, the work is to its context as a piece of furniture is to its setting; and at the best there can come into play between the two terms, the object and the background, an exchange of stylistic affinities, the practice of that stylistic or cultural analogy of which we have spoken above.

But for a Marxist criticism, the work is precisely not complete in itself but is handed down to us as a kind of gesture or verbal thrust incomprehensible unless we are able to understand the situation in which the gesture was first made, and the interlocutors to whom it was a reply. This is to say that for Marxism, the passage from the literary to the socio-economic or to the historical is not the passage from one specialized discipline to another, but rather the movement from specialization to the concrete itself. We have already shown that for Marx political economy is not just one type of research among others, it is rather that on which the others are founded, and its artificial subdivision in our time into the various branches of the social sciences, its fragmentation into sociology, economics, history, political science, and anthropology, is already an implied commentary

on its subversiveness as a unified mode of apprehending social life. When, therefore, the Marxist study of literature appears to shift gears from the literary to the socio-economic, when Engels' commentary on Ibsen turns into a disquisition on the differences between the German and Norwegian petite bourgeoisie ("The Norwegian peasant has never known serfdom, and this fact gives an altogether different background to the whole development of the country, as it did in Castile. The Norwegian petty bourgeois is the son of a free peasant and for this reason he is a *man* compared to the miserable German philistine");[37] when Henri Lefèbvre prefaces his examination of Rabelais with a lengthy essay on the state of the peasantry in the sixteenth century, the progressive nature of the crown, and the evolution of the legal structure of marriage and of women's property rights; when, indeed, lesser Marxist criticism seems obligated to a kind of ritual gesture of the schematic economic or class background sketch—this is to be understood, not as the introduction of material which could have been dispensed with had the historians taught it properly (although I believe it is true that the historians do not generally provide us with these materials in an adequate way), but rather as an enlargement structurally inherent in such criticism, as an intrinsic and indispensable moment in Marxist literary criticism seen as a *form* of understanding.

Thus we do not replace a discussion of Pascal by a discussion of some other thing when we resituate his work within the larger social context of a Jansenism seen as the oppositional ideology of the *noblesse de robe*: rather, we thus restore to it its concrete richness as a complex, contradictory, polyvalent historical act. The pessimism of the Jansenistic world view thus becomes something a little more historical in content than a simple metaphysical option. It now proves

[37] *Ibsen*, ed. Flores, pp. 23-24.

to be the renunciation of life by men whose class has missed its historical opportunity, caught between the rebellious nobility and the crown with its new middle-class bureaucracy, facing the blank wall of an "end" of history in its fate as an influential and relatively independent social group. Or perhaps it would be more fitting to say that in such an analysis, the metaphysical option itself recovers something of its concrete character as a total human response to a historical situation; and it is of course Lucien Goldmann who has gone the farthest in articulating the relationship of the tragic sense of Pascal and of Racine to the religious refusal of the world by the "extremists" in the Port-Royal group, and thus ultimately to the sense of failure of the *noblesse de robe* as a class.

Yet paradoxically, the most vigorous and suggestive model of a Marxist correlation between class and ideology is furnished by Paul Bénichou, who deliberately leaves aside the semiobligatory excursions into the economic and social history of the period and restricts his discussion to the level of the history of ideas. Indeed, he appeals as a precursor to none other than Sainte-Beuve himself, who had already formulated thus the thesis of a class origin of Jansenism: "Port Royal was the religious enterprise of the middle-class aristocracy in France."[38] Yet the contrast between this essentially *sociological* observation and Bénichou's own practice is revealing and instructive: for Bénichou shows us in some detail that the philosophical, artistic, and religious practice of Port Royal is always to be understood in a double sense, not only as a coherent system or world view in its own right, but also as an offensive arm against its class enemies and particularly against the heroic feudal ethic as it is embodied, for example, in Corneille. Indeed, this second or offensive aim is the informing motive behind the construction of the system as such, which only

[38] Paul Bénichou, *Les Morales du grand siècle* (Paris, 1948), p. 114.

comes down to us as a kind of metaphysical vision because we are no longer aware of the concrete context in which it was first and foremost an act. Thus the return in Jansenism to a renewed sense of sin and of self-loathing ("le moi est haïssable") is at one with that strategic and aggressive operation which Bénichou calls the "demolition of the hero." The Other—feudal grandee with all his ostentatious dramatization of a profound inner sense of caste and worth —is drawn into the annihilation of the Self and obliterated with it in its own ruin.

Such an analysis differs from the purely sociological kind in that it describes not simply the affiliation between a doctrine and a class but also the functional role of that doctrine in *class struggle.* It is an often-taught and often-forgotten lesson that ideology is designed to promote the human dignity and clear conscience of a given class at the same time that it discredits their adversaries; indeed, these two operations are one and the same, and as a cultural or intellectual object ideology may be defined as just such a reversible structure, a complex of ideas which appears either systematic or functional depending on the side from which it is approached. Thus, the feudal code of "honor" discredits those classes unable to defend themselves (or in Marc Bloch's formulation, too poor to own a horse); the Protestant work ethic holds up the idleness and conspicuous waste of the nobility to shame; the nineteenth-century notion of middle-class "distinction," as we have seen in the previous chapter, separates middle classes from workers in their way of living their own body. We may therefore say that what distinguishes the Marxist from the sociological notion of class is that, for the former, class is precisely a *differential* concept, that each class is at once a way of relating to and of refusing the others. Whatever its philosophical presuppositions, the sociological view is *formally* wrong to the degree that it allows us to think of the individual classes

in a kind of isolation from each other, with the almost physical separation of social groups in city or countryside, or as "cultures" somehow self-developing and independent from each other: for the notion of the isolated class or social group is just as surely a hypostasis as the notion of the solitary individual in eighteenth-century philosophy. In history also there are no substances tranquilly persevering in their own essence, but rather a relationality and struggle of every instant, in which the class is no more free than the individual not to be engaged. So it is that each class implies the existence of all the others in its very being, for it defines itself against them and survives and perpetuates itself only insofar as it succeeds in humilating its adversaries. Thus, to use the convenient but of course very abstract tripartite formula, the bourgeois defines himself as a nonnoble and a nonworker at the same time, or better still, as an antinoble and an antiworker all in one. And with such a relational concept of class, the criterion of a genuinely Marxist analysis is given also: it will necessarily imply the shock of demystification in its very structure, it will always in one way or another presuppose a movement from an apparently systematic and intellectually coherent, self-contained surface to that historical situation behind it, in terms of which the ideological product under examination suddenly proves to have had a functional and strategic value as a weapon of a determinate kind in a concrete and local struggle. The truth of such an analysis may, then, be measured by the degree to which this translation has been realized, by the completeness with which the cultural fact has been reexpressed in terms of the code of the life and death struggle of groups.

Thus, to use the well-known terminology, the work of art or the cultural fact certainly reflects something, but what it reflects is not so much the class in itself as some autonomous cultural configuration, as rather the situation of that

class, or, in short, class conflict. To put it this way, however, is to become aware that the model proposed allows for a fairly wide range of possibilities in the mode of reflection itself. Within the analyses of Jansenism described above, for instance, there would seem to be an essential difference between the way in which, for Goldmann, Jansenism as a philosophy "reflects" its tragic social situation and Bénichou's concept of it as a deliberate, if desperate, ideological strategy. This disparity may be most usefully understood, it seems to me, not as an empirical difference in interpretation but as a shift or rearrangement within the model itself: as the substitution, for a relatively passive conception of the way in which "reflection" takes place, of a relatively active one where the ingenuity and creative power of the writer or ideologue are more strongly insisted on. Such a shift is essentially a function of historical distance itself, of the focus on historical events: from far away, cultural objects seem to reflect their situation or infrastructure in a relatively passive way, and this is neither true nor false but rather simply the formal implication of the medium itself. As we move closer and closer to such phenomena, on the other hand, the individual actors begin to emerge and we grow oppressively aware of the unique existential situations in which each of their acts springs into being; in such a focus, close up, classes are no longer even visible, and we find ourselves slowly being forced to the conclusion that if the notion of reflection is to mean anything at all, it must at least be reformulated in such a way that it is the individual writer who *makes himself* over into an instrument for such reflection. But, of course, this formulation also is simply a function of our distance from history, or rather, of our too great proximity to it.

So it is that for Sartre Flaubert's work can be said to reflect the social contradictions of his period, but on condition that we understand it to do so on the mode of attempting

to resolve, in the imaginary, what is socially irreconcilable. We have already seen how for Sartre class affiliation is not given, but rather learned through the mediation of the family in childhood, and as it were reinvented as though for the first time. In the case of Flaubert, however, such affiliation is problematical: the bourgeois is for him the object of a repugnance of very much the same order as self-loathing. Hence the work itself, which Sartre shows to be an imaginary synthesis between Voltairean irony and religious devotion. These two terms correspond on the level of Flaubert's childhood experience to the dispositions of his father and mother, and beyond them, in the larger world of social class, to the ideology of a rising bourgeoisie still only a generation or two away from the soil, on the one hand, and on the other to that of the petty nobility from which the mother came. Thus, even the formal level of Flaubert's work reflects an impossible attempt to combine these two irreconcilables; and the work becomes a kind of emblematic transfer of concrete social phenomena into the characteristic mode of being of literature itself, where they are embodied in that peculiar Flaubertian combination of a religion of art and a corrosive social pessimism, of a formal unction and a kind of revulsion in the content, ennui being so to speak the empty passage of time in an attitude of prayer for someone who does not believe and cannot pray.

We find a similar view of art as imaginary resolution, this time to be sure in the context of a primitive or preclass society, in the remarkable pages consecrated by Lévi-Strauss to the peculiar decorative art of the Caduveo Indians. On the formal or purely stylistic level he sees the specificity of this art as a kind of dialectical interaction between symmetry and asymmetry, "a complex situation corresponding to two contradictory forms of duality, which results in a compromise realized by a secondary opposition between the ideal axis of the object and that of the figure

it represents." This purely formal structure Lévi-Strauss now reads as a reflection of the contradictions within the social organization of the Caduveos, which discloses an uneasy hesitation between binary and ternary institutions. Thus an abstract formal pattern proves to have been the attempt to "solve" a real social contradiction on an imaginary mode: "since they were unable to come to consciousness [of this contradiction] and to live it, they began to dream it."[39]

At this point, no doubt, the problem arises of the more generally representative character of such imaginary solutions: or in other words, and particularly for a sophisticated and individualistic art, of the discrepancy between a sociology of the artist, with his individual psychology and situation, and that of his *public*. The apparent dilemma can however be avoided if with Sidney Hook we reformulate it in terms of the "distinction between the *origin* of any cultural fact and its *acceptance*. In art, for example, all sorts of stylistic variations or mutants appear in any period. The social and political environment acts as a *selective* agency upon them."[40] Indeed, in the present context we are tempted to see such a shift from consideration of the writer to consideration of his public as the key moment of a dialectical reversal in which, with a whirring of gears, our model readjusts from an *active* to a *passive* conception of the way in which art reflects its social ground. What is here lost in the way of attention to the artistic process itself as an act may be regained in the precision with which, in such works as Sartre's *What Is Literature*?, the class uses of artistic form are described. And with respect to the work itself, I am tempted to see this active-passive axis as roughly coinciding with a general shift from considerations of form to

[39] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris, 1955), pp. 199, 203.

[40] *Towards an Understanding of Karl Marx*, p. 160.

considerations of content: or rather—since the range of possibilities is here to be considered a continuum in which an increasingly detailed or increasingly general inspection of the phenomenon slowly causes a dialectical reversal in the manner in which it is described—as the translation of what were before expressed as formal phenomena into what now proves to be the terminology of content. Thus Flaubert "solves" a contradiction through formal innovation, while it is the pessimism of Jansenism that expresses the hopelessness of the cause of the *noblesse de robe*. Yet, refocusing these phenomena in a different way, one would no doubt be able to describe the formal specificity of Pascal's work as a symbolic act in its own right, just as one would be able to correlate the emotional content of Flaubert's novels with the social and political climate of France after the failure of the Revolution of 1848.

At the same time, the hypothesis of "imaginary" solutions brings forward a new and somewhat different set of problems which we have not yet directly touched on and which have nonetheless been paramount for Marxist literary criticism in the past. For if the *noblesse de robe* failed to make its revolution, if there exist social contradictions which are structurally insoluble, at the same time we must remember the fact of successful revolutions as well, and make a place for an art which might be prophetic rather than fantasy-oriented, one which might portend genuine solutions underway rather than projecting formal substitutes for impossible ones. The Marxist concept of class, in other words, involves a diachronic dimension as well as the synchronic, differential one we have emphasized up to this point: a class is defined no less by its place in the historical process, by its participation in a given and determinate stage in historical evolution, than by its antagonistic relationship to the other classes contemporaneous with it. This temporal destiny of a class is, however, measured not so much from without, on

some external graph or chart of the overall course of economic history, as rather from within, in a kind of rising or falling internal temperature, as a confident feeling of open possibilities and of riding with the flood tide of historical opportunity or a kind of morose turning back upon the self, a sense of stagnation and futility, of the closing of doors, of deteriorating talents and wasted energies. This altered mood of a class as it passes from the great days of its rise to those of its decline Marxism now characterizes by the well-known political language of *progressive* or *reactionary.*

Such expansion or contraction of historical limits has of course the most momentous consequences for artistic production, both in content and in form; and it seems to me that Plekhanov's classic statement, in *Art and Social Life,* is no less true today than when it was written: "The tendency of artists, and of those who have a lively interest in art, toward art for art's sake, arises when they are in hopeless disaccord with the social environment in which they live. Nor is this all. The example of the Russian 'men of the sixties' who firmly believed in the approaching triumph of reason, and the example also of [the Jacobin painter Jacques Louis] David and his friends, who were no less firmly of the same opinion, show us that the so-called utilitarian view of art, that is to say, the inclination to attribute to works of art the significance of judgment on the phenomena of life, and its constant accompaniment of glad readiness to participate in social struggles, arises and becomes stronger wherever a mutual sympathy exists between individuals more or less actively interested in artistic creation and some considerable part of society."[41] For the most part, no doubt, Marxist critics have discussed this renewal of the sources of artistic production in collective life as one form or another of *realism;* and have tended to associate the

[41] Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life,* trans. A. Rothstein (London, 1953), p. 177.

arts of the various rising classes of the past (with chief emphasis, of course, on the great middle-class realism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but with references to the naturalistic rejuvenation of Egyptian art under Ikhnaton, to the archetypal stylistic evolution of classical Athens, to the rise of Gothic art and to the Renaissance as well) in a kind of cyclical revival of which the latest manifestation was seen as socialist realism. We will be less inclined to dwell on the inherent difficulties of the concept of realism, however, if we understand that it has for the most part involved a focus on the content of art rather than essentially formal phenomena. When the problem of realism is posed in a formal way, as we have seen in our discussion of Lukács, criteria of representationality and verisimilitude tend to be replaced by others of a wholly different kind, by such formal judgments as are implied in the concepts of totality and the concrete, and of narration versus description.

Yet Plekhanov's discussion of the eighteenth-century *drame bourgeois* already showed that the relationship of art to a rising class did not have to be analyzed in the simplistic terms of realistic content. The historical and artistic phenomenon under analysis is indeed the paradoxical fact that as the French middle classes drew closer to their moment of truth, the realistic and sentimental drama in prose which had seemed in the 1750's to be their most characteristic production, and of which Diderot was the theoretician, fell into disfavor before the renewed popularity of the heroic costume drama, with its origins in the taste of an upper-class public. In the long run, of course, this apparent revival turned out to have heralded the birth of an art movement which *was* essentially middle class: that of neoclassicism, to which the costume paintings of David are a monument. Yet Plekhanov's analysis is a shrewd one, and—using a model not unlike that of Bénichou for Jansenism—regrounds what is now an essentially *stylistic* phenomenon

in the concrete situation of class antagonism: "bourgeois drama," he tells us, "was born of the *opposition* temper of the French bourgeoisie and was no longer of any use in expressing its *revolutionary* aspirations."[42] The *drame bourgeois*, in other words, helped the middle classes to an awareness of themselves as a class distinct from the others, a class with its own life-style, ideology, and self-respect; yet when that class felt strong enough to enter in direct and aggressive confrontation with the nobility, it needed to draw on the more stimulating images of the Roman Republic, of Brutus and the great tribunes, of the heroic gestures of classical antiquity.

Such an analysis might, of course, be completed with Sartre's discussion of the Roman masquerade of the Gironde, outlined in the previous chapter; for it is clear enough that the appeal to costume drama involves an element of self-mystification just as much as an element of praxis. Yet in our present context such a modulation in historical judgment has a rather different theoretical significance: it emphasizes the essential *relativity* of the class descriptions we have been using, of the assessment of the rising or declining destinies of a class, of its progressive or reactionary characteristics. For the eighteenth-century middle classes are from our point of view *both* progressive and reactionary, in that they represent the rising fortunes of a class nonetheless in the long run historically doomed. And they are both these things at once: that heroic and universalizing ideology which was theirs may be seen at one and the same time as a part of the patrimony of mankind as a whole, with its logic of political liberation which has remained active in the Third World of our own day, and as an example of special class pleading. We are thus reconfirmed in our impression that our relationship to a historical fact is not a fixed, static one, but rather one that constantly

[42] *Art and Social Life*, p. 151.

expands and contracts according to a dialectical readjustment of our own distance and of the point of view we take on our own situation. We may thus understand such judgments not as a series of mutually exclusive positions, in which we decide once and for all whether Jansenism was progressive (because of what it was against) or reactionary (because of what it was for), but rather as positions along a kind of sliding scale that spans the twin polemic extremes of complete refusal and complete identification, in such a way that a work or movement can be relocated at a relatively more negative or relatively more positive position along the continuum.

A Marxist class analysis therefore proves to involve two distinct axes of judgment, depending on whether we stress the nature of the relationship between the cultural object and the class which it "reflects" or whether we focus on the historic destiny of the class itself. We may then articulate the possibilities inherent in such a model as follows:

	NEGATIVE: (reactionary)	POSITIVE: (progressive)
PASSIVE REFLECTION: (content)	Jansenism (ideology)	Realism (political consciousness)
ACTIVE RESOLUTION: (form)	Flaubert, Caduveo art (artistic formalisms)	David's paintings (open or prophetic form?)

Such a chart is however worse than misleading unless it is clearly understood that under the right circumstances, the same cultural fact may be seen as occupying *any* of these positions, or, indeed, as accomplishing a rotation through all of the available positions in succession. Thus the novels of Balzac, normally understood as a "realism" in the sense indicated above, may be seen as reflecting the reactionary ideology of a dying class, as evolving what are essentially personal and formal wish-fulfillments out of his own per-

sonal situation, or as anticipating, through the complex interpersonal structure of *La Comédie humaine*, some new postindividualistic collective formal organization. In much the same way, I believe that it would not be difficult to articulate Lenin's various assessments of Tolstoy—reactionary and progressive alike, both a religious ideologue and a revolutionary prophet—according to some such combinational scheme. What this implies is that such apparent contradictions in judgment are in reality to be seen as variations on a common model, rather than as "opinions" which we are called upon to adopt or to repudiate. History is indeed precisely this obligation to multiply the horizons in which the object is maintained, to multiply the perspectives from which it is seen; and I believe that to see differing judgments or evaluations in this fashion is not to speak out for some theoretical objectivity or neutrality, but rather to replace us at the very source of value itself and of such structural permutation, and to translate apparently literary disagreements back into the ultimate reality of conflicting groups in the historical world.

Such is the form taken by Marxist literary or cultural criticism insofar as it seeks to reunite its object with the reality of class as such, insofar as it sees in its object a relatively transparent form of class practice. But what of the reality, rather than the illusion, of fetishization? What happens when we consider the work not so much as a relatively disguised relationship but rather as a form of density in its own right, as something produced, as consciousness quite deliberately reified? When we recall, in short, the two possible codes or languages of a Marxist analysis, we may begin to suspect that everything we have hitherto described in terms of class may also be developed in a quite different way, and indeed with quite different, although no less revealing, results.

Here we have evidently to do with a setting of the work

in contact with economic, rather than social, reality: the coordinates of such analysis will therefore no longer be those of ideological formation, but rather of the forms of commodity production. Yet any thoroughgoing description of an object qua object has an obligation to come to terms in one way or another with the Aristotelian four causes—formal, material, efficient, and final—as an inventory of the various points of view from which an object may be understood: "in one of these we mean the substance, i.e., the essence (for the 'why' is reducible finally to the definition, and the ultimate 'why' is a cause and principle); in another the matter or substratum, in a third the source of the change, and in a fourth the cause opposed to this, the purpose and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change)."[43] But Aristotle's model derives from the world of artisanal production and handicraft; it projects a process in which an agent, imitating a given pattern, forms a certain material in order to create an object which then has some determinate use, such as a cooking pot, an article of clothing, a piece of jewelry, or a spear. It is clear that to the degree that the work of art is itself just such a handmade product, there is a preestablished harmony between the Aristotelian model and the aesthetic object which (among other things) it has been called upon to illuminate.

Such preestablished harmony is likely to hold for the process of perception as well as for that of the making of the object. We have already touched on Heidegger's essential doctrine of the priority of objects-in-use over objects-in-rest: so it is that the dominant category of substance through which we view the outside world is itself conditioned and governed by the types and the structure of the practical objects or implements which surround us. Yet Heidegger's model derives from a peasant world, in which

[43] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 3 (*Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon [New York, 1941], p. 693); and see also *Physics*, II, 3 (pp. 240-241).

the cup and the plow, the axe and the staff mold the natural world that comes into sight behind them.

A Marxist criticism must therefore readapt the insights of these two models—the insistence on the making process and the priority of the instruments or objects characteristic of the environment—to the modern world of the industrial production of consumers' goods. Following Heidegger's formula, it will stress the way in which the commodity form conditions all more contemplative and theoretical perceptions of objects, including of course the aesthetic mode of perception. And in a world in which exchange value takes precedence over use value (such is, essentially, the definition of a commodity) it is not surprising that the making of works of art should also be governed by this dominant structure, which reaches down to influence everything in our daily world, our relationships with other people just as much as our relationships with objects. Thus the Aristotelian model, based on a simpler world in which use value was predominant, requires a complete overhaul and readjustment if it is to do justice to the structural mystifications of the advertising universe. We would therefore expect a profound modification and expansion in the Aristotelian final cause, as well as in the formal one. Moreover, to the degree that the paradigm of modern creation has become factory and institutional work rather than the skills of the individual craftsman, we would expect to think henceforth in *collective* rather than in *individual* terms, so that the efficient cause refracts into a class of workmen before an established process, and implies the class for which they work as well. So it is that an adequate vision of the Aristotelian model for the realities of capitalism would see the work of art as a *product* rather than as a made object; it would deal not only with the mode of production, but also with those of distribution and consumption. It would imply study of the consumer as well as of the producer, and

might even, indeed, find itself touching on the problems of supply and of the sources of raw materials.

Such a regrounding of the work of art in the world of commodities would first be understood in as literal a fashion as possible. For it is a sobering and salutary experience for professional intellectuals to be reminded that the objects of their study and manipulation have a whole material infrastructure as well, which has traditionally been the realm of the sociology of literature. The investigations thereby implied—of the publishing industry and its gradual economic concentration, of the literary market, of the role of the older forms of distribution as well as the newer media —are external to literature only in the sense that the public world is external to private life. Yet since in America private middle-class consumption has increasingly been replaced by that of the university system, which seems destined to play as crucial a role in the culture of postindustrial capitalism as did the monastery for medieval times, it seems appropriate to quote as an example of such analysis one of the most characteristic pages of the late C. Wright Mills on the commodity structure of academic intellectual life: "The *producer* is the man who creates ideas, first sets them forth, possibly tests them, or at any rate makes them available in writing to those portions of the market capable of understanding them. Among producers there are individual entrepreneurs—still the predominant type—and corporation executives in research institutions of various kinds who are in fact administrators over production units. Then there are the *wholesalers*, who while they do not produce ideas do distribute them in textbooks to other academic men, who in turn sell them directly to student consumers. In so far as men teach, and only teach, they are *retailers* of ideas and materials, the better of them being serviced by original producers, the lesser, by wholesalers. All academic men, regardless of type, are also *consumers* of the products

of others, of producers and wholesalers through books, and of retailers to some extent through personal conversation on local markets. But it is possible for some to specialize in consumption: these become great *comprehenders*, rather than *users*, of books, and they are great on bibliographies."[44]

Such a passage may serve as a transition from a relatively external consideration of the literary infrastructure—a kind of mechanical materialism, so to speak, on the level of literary criticism—to the relatively more internal questions of literary consumption. For what we consume is always to a certain extent an *idea* rather than a material thing: this is the very essence of the distinction between use and exchange values, that the object no longer exists primarily to satisfy a need, understood by analogy with the needs of the body, but rather as a kind of abstract and emblematic value in which we can no longer clearly distinguish between need-satisfaction and artificial stimuli. We may measure the distance between these two states, the relatively natural precapitalist relationship to objects and our own, by attention to the whole notion of aesthetic *pleasure*. For Aristotle, the emotional satisfaction of tragedy is easily divided into its functional components of pity and fear, which attach to the fate witnessed and thereby purge individual and community alike of their own social and existential anxiety. Such a final cause of tragedy is therefore able to serve a so-

[44] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York, 1956), p. 132. A survey of the more traditional, non-Marxist sociology of literature would want to take note of Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (New York, 1965); of the research of Ian Watt and Pierre Bourdieu; of Robert Escarpit, *Sociologie de la littérature* (Paris, 1964) and *The Book Revolution* (London, 1966); as well as the useful *Hauptrichtungen der Literatursoziologie und ihre Methoden* of Hans Norbert Fügen (Bonn, 1964). But it is worth observing how in the context of MacLuhanism or of Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (Paris, 1967) all of those hitherto extrinsic questions of public and of physical book production now find themselves, as in Eric A. Havelock's remarkable *Preface to Plato* (Oxford, 1963), drawn back inside the work itself and interiorized, being now seen as aspects of the work's thematics or inner structure.

cial function in its very nature. In contrast, pleasure under capitalism is simply the sign of the consumption of an object: it is thus relatively extraneous to the object's structure or use, since it can attach to any kind of object, and is at the same time gratuitous to the degree that it serves no collective function beyond that of encouraging further consumption and making the system operate at top capacity.

At this point, then, we begin to glimpse what is the profound vocation of the work of art in a commodity society: *not* to be a commodity, *not* to be consumed, to be *unpleasurable* in the commodity sense. And we may now return to Adorno's musical analyses as perhaps the most fully worked out application of this principle, which constitutes, indeed, the most genuinely Marxist part of his work, in contrast to an otherwise relatively Hegelian practice. For in the present context, it becomes clear that the history of musical development which Adorno has given us, and which serves as the framework and vital situation for the twin dramas of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, is none other than the struggle between music and the commodity form itself. That new and quickened evolutionary logic which enters musical history around the time of the French Revolution is but an emanation of capitalism itself—yet capitalism not as some parallel evolution on the level of the economic system, not as homology, but rather at work *within* the musical material, as the intrinsic distortion of it by the commodity form, which draws the various musical elements, theme, instrumentation, harmony, indeed the length of development and the overall form itself, into its orbit. This is what explains the simplified, prepackaged, and easily consumed leitmotifs of Wagner, what accounts for the prodigious energy with which Schoenberg attempted to stem the dissolution of the work into easy melody and to restore some of the earlier total organization of the work, with its henceforth intolerable demands on the attention and powers of

concentration of the consumer; this is what accounts for the innovations of Stravinsky as well, who, remaining within the commodity universe, evolves the newest production techniques to restore a little of the emotional shock for his easily jaded public, with its increasingly rapid exhaustion of new products.

If it should prove possible to do for the literary work what Adorno has thus done for musical analysis, then we should find ourselves in the presence of a kind of "intrinsic" Marxist criticism, a kind of Marxist philology or systematic investigation of the inner, social forms of art in general. Such a discipline would demand the prolongation of the various kinds of local critical studies (themselves already enlarged to the more adequate dimensions of the Hegelian model described above) to the point where, intersecting either with the realities of class or those of commodity production, they find themselves once more regrounded in concrete social history. We cannot, of course, make the kind of systematic inventory of such local studies which the old-fashioned aesthetics (and indeed such newer "systems" as the Wellek and Warren *Theory of Literature*) claimed to have achieved: such systematizing is ruled out by the priority of history itself, which alone dictates the dominant categories and configurations of the works that, ever new, rise from out of its own perpetual renewal.

Yet such regrounding may be observed at work in the observations of Plekhanov and Lukács on symbolism, for instance, which may essentially be thought of as laying the foundations for a Marxist theory of the *image*. A slightly different formulation of the same phenomenon may be found in Sartre's theory of the "imaginary" as well, which he sees as a reorganization of the object in such a way that it is withdrawn from the time of praxis, as a transformation of an *act* into a *gesture*.[45] Such analyses have in common a

[45] See my "Three Methods," in *Modern French Criticism*.

situational and historicizing logic: they do not imply a structure of the image which holds for all time and in all situations, but rather see the specific literary phenomenon as something which draws attention to its own peculiar structural characteristics, which identifies itself as a process of *symbolizing*, which is conscious of itself as "irrealizing" the world.

In much the same way, if we have shown above that a general science of stylistics is a contradiction in terms, then at least we may for style in modern times project something like a Marxist stylistics, in which the art-sentence itself, as it has been so variously cultivated and practiced in modern times from Flaubert to Hemingway, may be seen alternatively as a type of work or mode of production, and as a type of commodity as well. For nowhere, perhaps, is the peculiar influence of the commodity structure greater than in that ambiguous reality which is language, and which can be consumed as a rich object just as easily as it can attempt to efface itself in that socially motivated transparency which Barthes has called "white writing." In modern literature, indeed, the production of the sentence becomes itself a new kind of event *within* the work, and generates a whole new kind of form.

In the same spirit, a Marxist theory of plot might be elaborated: indeed, Lukács has already gone a long way toward doing so. Yet for such a theory, the restrictions indicated above would hold in even stronger measure: for insofar as in the narrative work plot is the very ground of the concrete itself, there can be no independent analysis of it. It simply coincides with the work itself, as do the functional "descriptions" which normally supply the bulk of what are analyzed as "images." Plot becomes susceptible of analysis only to the degree that it somehow attracts attention to itself as something to be consumed in its own right, as something "foregrounded," standing out in relief from the work as a whole.

Thus the *well-made* plot is certainly a distinct literary and historical phenomenon, which has significant things to show us both about how contemporaries saw the social life in which they participated and how they wanted to see it. But plot in general has nothing of the kind to show, because it is a mere hypostasis.

So it is with the other elements of the work as well, and in particular with a theory of characters, which would no doubt find itself developing most closely in connection with an analysis of the prevalance of otherness as a category and a judgment in the concrete social life of a period; it would also have something to say about the way in which the very presentation of the other is for the novelist a sign of his acquisition of *knowledge* about his society and about reality. At the same time, as with the other kinds of studies sketched out above, such a theory would be an intermittent one, recognizing that the omnipresence of "characters" in literary works is not the same as the dominance of the literary character as a category; and this is no doubt the moment to say something about one of the most familiar kinds of Marxist critical practice, which has to do precisely with character as such.

For many readers, indeed, this, in which character is interpreted as typical of social class or as representative of a given class position, will have been the classical form of the Marxist approach to literature. Was it not the typicality of his characters which attracted Marx and Engels to Balzac? And has not the concept of the typical remained a fetish of Marxist criticism down to our own time? The vices of such criticism have of course often been pointed out, the gravest of them being that such schematic notions of class are a priori ones which end up being able to take no more out of the work of art than they originally put into it in the first place. Such a method is most properly described as an allegorical one; and to say so is only to show the way in

which any genuinely dialectical criticism must ultimately turn about and question the sources of its own instruments as well. For it is clear that class consciousness itself—in those societies in which it exists as an existential fact—is an allegorical mode of thought to the degree to which for it individuals are seen as types and manifestations of the social groups to which they belong. Thus a work such as Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, in which the various levels of the apartment house correspond to the various social classes, from the wealthy inhabitants of the first floor all the way up to the maids and workers in the garret, is allegorical because class consciousness still functions structurally within the society as such: it is carried within as a kind of map or chart of society as a whole, as a differential feeling whereby I locate myself with respect to the other classes.

The profound value of such social "typicality" for the production of literature itself may be negatively assessed by considering the situation of the United States today, where it no longer exists. For if there is something unique in the American class situation, it has to do with a kind of overflowing of national limits in such a way that the older national experience, a microcosm in which the truth of the individual coincides with the socio-economic structure, is no longer available. In the age of American imperialism, indeed, as has often been pointed out, we have our lower classes *outside* the national borders: even our working classes are as a bourgeoisie to the alien peasantry or proletariat of the Third World.[46] American literature has there-

[46] "Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called the 'cities of the world,' then Asia, African, and Latin America constitute the 'rural areas of the world.' Since World War II, the proletarian revolutionary movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in the North American and West European capitalist countries, while the people's revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has been growing vigorously. In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by the rural area . . ." (Lin Piao, "Long

fore become problematical, not to say impossible, because if it limits itself to the traditional language and form of a national literature it misses the basic truths about itself, while if it attempts to tell those truths it abolishes itself as literature.

If the allegorical interpretation of character seems more convincing when applied to a single *persona* than to a whole array of characters as in a Chekhov play, then I believe this is because the latter merely offers itself as a homology between a set of characters and a set of classes, whereas the former involves in the best of cases something like the shock of a genuine enlargement or regrounding, that brutal passage from some inner "truth of existence" to the external world of history that we have seen as the most essential feature of Marxism as a mental operation. So it is that when, in one of the most famous of all Marxist analyses, Lukács interprets the story of *Death in Venice* in political terms, he seems to have reversed the very inner logic of the work itself, whose subject is indeed the breakthrough of the unconscious itself, with its characteristic welling up of the repressed and of the symbolically invested into Aschenbach's conscious mind. The shock involved in the notion that the fate of the biographer of Frederick the Great is emblematic of the disintegration of Prussia itself, with its mixture of the repressive-authoritarian and the decadent—an interpretation which won the endorsement of Thomas Mann himself—is an essential structural component of Marxist analysis, and is designed to turn the reader, as well as the work, inside out. Yet Thomas Mann is essentially an allegorical writer, so that even this interpretation ultimately finds its justification within the historic structure of the work itself.

Live the Victory of the People's War!"; speech of 3 September 1965, quoted in *Monthly Review*, XVII, No. 6 [November 1965], pp. 5-6).

VI. Marxism and Inner Form

> Ich bin wenigstens überzeugt, dass die Schönheit nur die Form einer Form ist, und dass das, was man ihren Stoff nennt, schlechterdings ein geformter Stoff sein muss.
>
> —Schiller, *Kallias-Briefe*

The preceding description of dialectical criticism as critical rather than systematic, as an operation of rectification, of an almost ontological restitution, should not be understood as precluding some more unified critical approach. It should, however, be kept in mind that in proposing one such approach, the pages which follow have become more speculative than descriptive, and that there are certainly alternative ways of coordinating the essentials of a Marxist criticism. In particular, if the emphasis on class is not strong, this is because the class model has never been worked out as satisfactorily as it should be for American social reality with its racial and ethnic groupings. The task is all the more urgent today, in the context of that new and unparalleled global class situation alluded to above.

The concept of an "inner form," as it was developed by Goethe and Wilhelm von Humboldt out of Plotinus, recommends itself to us in several ways. It is, first of all, a *hermeneutic* concept, that is, it does not imply a truth of a positivistic kind somehow timelessly associated with its object, like the laws of the natural sciences; rather, it emphasizes the operation of interpretation itself, as it moves in time from outer to inner form as from one moment to another in a dialectical process. Thus the critic is recalled to his own procedures, as a form unfolding in time but also reflecting his own concrete social and historical situation.

Moreover, its model of an ordered sequence of levels within the work (or, what amounts to the same thing, of a consecutive series of moments in the interpretive process) corresponds particularly well to a number of key joints or

transitions which we have described above. The overall movement of a Marxist criticism is, of course, just such a passage from a surface to an underlying reality, from an apparently autonomous object to a vaster ground of which this object proves a part or articulation. Yet we have seen that such a movement can take a number of different forms: in one, as in a kind of *Vexierbild*, an apparently systematic ideology is abruptly refocused into a class polemic. In another, Humboldt's essentially linguistic distinction between the external forms of a language and its inner capacity for meaning is more closely followed, and the work of art, always in one sense an external object produced for a public, is seen from within to be a kind of commodity as well, reflecting either directly or through the force of its negation the state of commodity production in its historical period.

Such interpretation may be incomplete but it can scarcely be described as arbitrary: indeed, I believe it can be said that the only philosophically coherent alternative to such an interpretation out of the social substance is one organized on a religious or theological basis, of which Northrop Frye's system is only the most recent example. We may therefore define religion as that set of imaginary propositions which must be believed to be true if the theoretical consequences of Marxism are to be avoided.

In the long run, however, there is no need to justify the socio-economic "translation" which Marxism sees as the ultimate explanatory code for literary and cultural phenomena. Such justification is already implicit in the dialectical notion of the relationship between form and content, which as we noted above is something quite different from the older Aristotelian notion of form and matter. For the essential characteristic of literary raw material or latent content is precisely that it never really is initially formless, never (unlike the unshaped substances of the other arts) initially contingent, but is rather already meaningful from the outset,

being neither more nor less than the very components of our concrete social life itself: words, thoughts, objects, desires, people, places, activities. The work of art does not confer meaning on these elements, but rather transforms their initial meanings into some new and heightened construction of meaning; for that very reason neither the creation nor the interpretation of the work can ever be an arbitrary process. (I do not mean to imply by this that the work necessarily has to be realistic, but only that any stylization or abstraction in its form must ultimately express some profound inner logic in its content, and is itself ultimately dependent for its existence on the structures of the social raw materials themselves.)

This is, I believe, the "materialistic kernel" of Schiller's remark, which serves as the epigraph of this section: "As far as I am concerned, I am convinced that beauty is only the form of a form, and that what is ordinarily called its content must necessarily be thought of as content already formed." Indeed, the first methodological consequence of the dialectical notion of form and content is that, depending on the progress of the interpretive work and the stage at which it has arrived, either term can be translated into the other: thus every layer of content proves, as Schiller implies, to the but a form in disguise. But we have seen above that it is just as true to say that form is really only the projection of content and of the inner logic of the latter. In fact, this essential distinction is useful only on condition that it ultimately reabolish itself in the ambiguity of the artistic substance itself, which can be seen alternately as either all content or all form.

What we have called interpretation is therefore a misnomer: content does not need to be treated or interpreted, precisely because it is essentially and immediately meaningful in itself, meaningful as gestures in situation are meaningful, or sentences in a conversation. Content is already

concrete, in that it is essentially social and historical experience, and we may say of our own interpretive or hermeneutic work what the sculptor 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, beneath the distortions of the various kinds of censorship that have been at work upon it; and this revelation takes the form of an explanation of why the content was so distorted and is thus inseparable from a description of the mechanisms of this censorship itself.

And since I will speak of Susan Sontag shortly, let me take as a demonstration of this process her remarkable 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."[47] 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 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 during the period of their heyday after the war and in the 1950's, rather openly express the mystique of the scientist: and by that I refer not

[47] *Against Interpretation,* p. 220.

so much to external prestige or social function as rather to a kind of collective folk-dream about the life-style of the scientist himself: he doesn't do *real* work (yet power is his and social status as well), 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 to institutional dimensions, a combination of factory and clinic), about the way he works nights (he isn't bound by routine or the eight-hour day), his very intellectual operations themselves are caricatures of what the non-intellectual 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 elaborated. What I want to convey is that ultimately none of this has anything to do with science itself, but is rather a distorted reflection of our own feelings and dreams about *work* alienated and nonalienated: it is a wish-fulfillment that takes as its object a vision of ideal or what Marcuse would call "libidinally gratifying" work. But it is of course a wish-fulfillment of a peculiar type, and it is this structure that it is important to analyze.

For we do not have to do here with the kind of direct and open psychic identification and wish-fulfillment that might be illustrated (for the subject matter of scientists) by the works of a C. P. Snow, for instance. Rather, this is a symbolic gratification that wishes to conceal its own presence: thus the identification with the scientist is not here the mainspring of the plot, but rather its precondition only, and it is as though, in a rather Kantian way, 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) without which the story could not have come into being in the first place. In this perspective all the cataclysmic violence of the science fiction narrative—the toppling buildings, the state of siege, the monsters rising out of Tokyo bay—is nothing but a pretext, serving both to divert the mind from its deepest operations and fantasies, and to motivate those fantasies as well.

No doubt we could go on and show that alongside this fantasy about work, there is present yet another kind 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: the drawing together of the survivors of planetary catastrophe is thus 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 through the routine boredom of middle-class life; while in either event, the violence in the disguise may be understood as the expression of rage at the nonrealization of the unconscious fantasies thus aroused.

The inner form of such an apparently negative and anxiety-ridden type of work is therefore a positive fantasy, one which we have expressed in the language of work satisfaction. The terms in which we describe this inner form or *Erlebnis* are however less important than the movement itself, by which we reemerge into that *place of the concrete* which has been described in a previous section as the mediation between private and public, between individual and socio-economic realities, between the existential and history itself. The task of a dialectical criticism is not indeed to *relate* these two dimensions: they always are related, both in our own life experience and in any genuine work of art. Rather, such criticism is called upon to articulate the work

and its content in such a way that this relationship stands revealed, and is once more visible.

For we have to do with a relationship of identity which nonetheless requires a complete translation from one set of terms into the other: the two dimensions are one, and indeed the propaedeutic value of art lies in the way in which it permits us to grasp the essentially historical and social value of what we had otherwise taken to be a question of individual experience. Yet this is done by shifting levels or points of view, by moving from the experience to its ground or concrete situation, as from a form to a content or from a content to a form. The terms in which the socio-economic dimension of experience are described are however by no means limited to those of work, as the production of value and the transformation of the world. Indeed the essential content of such experience can never be determined in advance, and varies from the most substantial kinds of grappling with the world to the smallest and most minute specialized perceptions. Such authenticity is indeed more easily described in a negative way, as being that which escapes the emptiness of routine existence, or of some dull marking time: it is therefore that which restores us to some fitful contact with genuine experience, and the form which such contact takes is at one with the historical possibilities of the socio-economic organization itself.

Yet the terminology of work satisfaction is useful because it fulfills one function for which any other description of such inner form must account in one way or another: it explains the *censorship* of the work itself, it makes us understand why such an impulse had to be disguised in order to come to artistic satisfaction in the first place. For, particularly in middle-class society, the fact of work and of production—the very key to genuine historical thinking—is also a secret as carefully concealed as anything else in our culture. This is indeed the very meaning of the commodity

as a form, to obliterate the signs of work on the product in order to make it easier for us to forget the class structure which is its organizational framework. It would indeed be surprising if such an occultation of work did not leave its mark upon artistic production as well, both in the form and in the content, as Adorno shows us: "Works of art owe their existence to the social division of labor, to the separation of mental and physical work. In such a situation, however, they appear under the guise of independent existence; for their medium is not that of pure and autonomous spirit, but rather that of a spirit which having become object now claims to have surmounted the opposition between the two. Such contradiction obliges the work of art to conceal the fact that it is itself a human construction: its very pretension to meaning, and indeed that of human existence in general along with it, is the more convincingly maintained the less anything in it reminds us of its character as a product, and of the fact that it owes its own existence to spirit as to something outside itself. Art which can no longer in good conscience put up with this deception—its innermost principle—has already dissolved the only element in which it can realize itself. . . . And if the autonomy of art in general is unthinkable without this concealment of work, the latter nonetheless becomes problematical, itself now a program, in late capitalism, under the domination of the exchange value and the increasing contradictions of such domination."[48] There is thus given within the very concept of work —either in the form of the division of labor in general or in the more specialized types of production characteristic of capitalism—the principle of a censorship of the work process itself, of a repression of the traces of labor on the product.

When we turn now from popular culture to the more sophisticated artifacts of official literature, we find that the

[48] *Versuch über Wagner*, p. 88.

fact of artistic *elaboration* adds a new complexity to the structure of the work without essentially altering the model we have given. In particular, art-literature can be said to reckon the whole value of its own creation itself into the process, so that the inner form of literary works, at least in modern times, can be said to have as their subject either production as such or *literary* production as well—both being in any case distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the work.

Thus it is a mistake to think, for instance, that the books of Hemingway deal essentially with such things as courage, love, and death; in reality, their deepest subject is simply the writing of a certain type of sentence, the practice of a determinate style. This is indeed the most "concrete" experience in Hemingway, yet to understand its relationship to the other, more dramatic experiences we must reformulate our notion of inner form after the more complex model of a *hierarchy of motivations*, in which the various elements of the work are ordered at various levels from the surface, and serve so to speak as pretexts each for the existence of a deeper one, so that in the long run everything in the work exists in order to bring to expression that deepest level of the work which is the concrete itself; or, reversing the model after the fashion of the Prague School, to *foreground* the work's most essential content.[49]

Thus the enormous influence of Hemingway as a kind of life model would seem to derive first from a kind of ethical content, not a "philosophy of life" so much as an instinctive and intransigent refusal of what suddenly turns out to have ceased to be real living. "It isn't fun any more": such is the

[49] This is perhaps the moment to say that I do not regard Formalism—either Czech or Russian—as being at all irreconcilable with Marxism: indeed, I think of the analysis of Hemingway that follows as being essentially a Formalist one; but will reserve a fuller discussion of the Formalist literary model, as well as of structuralism, for another place.

irrevocable boundary line between euphoria and ill humor, between real life and a kind of failure to live which exasperates and poisons the existence of the hero and everyone else around him. Such are the two poles of Hemingway's creation: those incomparable moments of plenitude in nature on the one hand, and on the other, bitching and sudden moods, sudden fits of envy or temper. Both are present indeed almost emblematically in those luminous opening pages of *Across the River and Into the Trees*, where the sullen boatman comes before Colonel Cantwell as the very harbinger of death itself. It is not too much to say that this opposition corresponds to a more general one between life among things and life with other people, between nature and society; indeed, Hemingway often said so himself: "People were always the limiters of happiness except for the very few who were as good as spring itself."[50]

Yet this, which would seem to be first and foremost a life experience, is in reality merely a projection of the style itself. Hemingway's great discovery was that there was possible a kind of return to the very sources of verbal productivity if you forgot about words entirely and merely concentrated on prearranging the objects that the words were supposed to describe. So the following, which has always struck me as being the very prototype of the Hemingway sentence: "From Smith's back door Liz could see ore barges way out in the lake going toward Boyne City. When she looked at them they didn't seem to be moving at all but if she went in and dried some more dishes and then came out again they would be out of sight beyond the point."[51] Something is left out: both the actual movement itself and that full style or *parole pleine* which would have somehow "rendered" it; and Hemingway has spoken in other connec-

[50] *A Moveable Feast* (New York, 1964), p. 49.

[51] "Up in Michigan," in *The First Forty-Nine Stories* (London, 1962), p. 80.

tions as well of the importance of omission as a literary procedure.[52] Yet in the portrayals of ill humor something is omitted also: the space between the remarks, as it were, and it is this prearrangement, now practiced on human material, which gives the Hemingway dialogue its electrical effect. Thus one is wrong to say that Hemingway began by wishing to express or convey certain basic experiences; rather, he began by wishing to write a certain type of sentence, a kind of neutral *compte rendu* of external displacements, and very quickly he found that such a sentence could do two kinds of things well: register movement in the external world, and suggest the tension and fitful resentment between people which is intermittently expressed in their spoken comment.

So we return to our initial contention that what really happens in a Hemingway novel, the most essential event, the dominant category of experience for both writer and reader alike, is the process of writing; and this is perhaps clearest in a simpler work like the *Green Hills of Africa*, where the shooting of the animal in the content is but the pretext for the *description* of the shooting in the form. The reader is not so much interested in observing the kill as he is in whether Hemingway's language will be able to rise to the occasion: "A little beyond there a flock of guineas quick-legged across the road running steady-headed with the motion of trotters. As I jumped from the car and sprinted after them they rocketed up, their legs tucked close beneath them, heavy-bodied, short wings drumming, cackling, to go over the trees ahead. I dropped two that thumped hard when they fell and as they lay, wings beating, Abdullah cut

[52] See, for instance, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York, 1932), p. 192: "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them." And see also *A Moveable Feast*, p. 75.

their heads off so they would be legal eating."[53] The real "pursuit" involved is thus the pursuit of the sentence itself.

From this central point in Hemingway's creation all the rest can be deduced: the experience of sentence-production is the form taken in Hemingway's world by nonalienated work. Writing, now conceived as a *skill*, is then assimilated to the other skills of hunting and bullfighting, of fishing and warfare, which project a total image of man's active and all-absorbing technical participation in the outside world. Such an ideology of technique clearly reflects the more general American work situation, where, in the context of the open frontier and the blurring of class structure, the American male is conventionally evaluated according to the number of different jobs he has had, and skills he possesses. The Hemingway cult of *machismo* is just this attempt to come to terms with the great industrial transformation of America after World War I: it satisfies the Protestant work ethic at the same time that it glorifies leisure; it reconciles the deepest and most life-giving impulses toward wholeness with a status quo in which only sports allow you to feel alive and undamaged.

As for the human environment of Hemingway's books, expatriation is itself a kind of device or pretext for them. For the immense and complex fabric of American social reality itself is clearly inaccessible to the careful and selective type of sentence which he practices: so it is useful to have to do with a reality thinned out, the reality of foreign cultures and of foreign languages, where the individual beings come before us not in the density of a concrete social situation in which we also are involved, but rather with the cleanness of objects which can be verbally circumscribed. And when at the end of his life the world began to change, and the Cuban Revolution made a retreat back within the borders of the United States in order, it does not seem too

[53] *The Green Hills of Africa* (New York, 1935), pp. 35-36.

farfetched to speculate that it was the resistance of such American reality, which as a writer he had never practiced, that brought him to stylistic impotence and ultimate suicide.

If this suggests something of the way in which a Marxist criticism would reconstruct the inner form of a literary work, as both disguise and revelation of the concrete, it remains for us to say a word about the implications of such a theory for judgment or literary evaluations as they are currently practiced. For to claim that the task of the critic is to reveal this censored dimension of the work implies precisely that, at least in art as it is practiced today, in the society in which it is practiced, the surface of the work is a kind of mystification in its structure. This is the point, in other words, at which a Marxist criticism must once again come to terms with modernism in the arts, and I have already implied that the antimodernism of a Lukács (and of the more traditional Soviet critics) is at least partly a matter of taste and of cultural conditioning.

Nonetheless it seems to me that something more must be said in the face of such articulate defenses of modernism as Susan Sontag's "new sensibility" or Ihab Hassan's *Literature of Silence*. These theories reflect a coherent culture with which we are all familiar: John Cage's music, Andy Warhol's movies, novels by Burroughs, plays by Beckett, Godard, camp, Norman O. Brown, psychedelic experiences; and no critique can have any binding force which does not begin by submitting to the fascination of all these things as stylizations of reality.

It should be pointed out, however, that this new modernism differs from the older, classical one of the turn of the century in at least one very essential way: that older modernism was in its essence profoundly antisocial, and reckoned with the instinctive hostility of the middle-class public of which it stood as a negation and a refusal. What characterizes the new modernism is however precisely that it is

popular: maybe not in small mid-Western towns, but in the dominant world of fashion and the mass media. That can only mean, to my mind, that there has come to be something socially useful about such art from the point of view of the existing socio-economic structure; or something deeply suspect about it, if your point of view is a revolutionary one.

Yet, it will be said, such art *expresses* American reality; and there, indeed, the ambiguity lies. Insofar as we are Americans, none of us can fail to react to such things as pop art which admirably express the tangible and material realities, the specificity of that American life which is ours. It should be clear, therefore, that a critique of the new modernism cannot be an external but only an internal affair, that it is part and parcel of an increasing self-consciousness (in the heightened, dialectical sense we have given to that term), and that it involves a judgment on ourselves fully as much as a judgment on the works of art to which we react. The ambiguity, in other words, is as much in the revolutionary's own position as it is in the art object: insofar as he is himself a product of the society he condemns, his revolutionary attitude is bound to presuppose a negation of himself, an initial subjective dissociation that has to precede the objective, political one. This is why the drama of the new art involves a more complicated cast of characters than the older struggle between the philistine and the modernist: these two, in the persons of the consumer and of the art salesman and stager of happenings, have begun to merge, and to them may be added a third character, in the form of the revolutionary unhappy consciousness we have described, which in our culture finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between real and imaginary negation, or indeed between imaginary negation and the promotion of the positive itself.

The most telling criticism of the ideology of the new

sensibility or the new mysticism still remains the comment of Marx on Hegel's notion of religion in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.* For just as the spokesmen for the new modernism claim that it *expresses* our society, so Hegel showed that religion was an expression of the human spirit, its *objectification,* with all the ambiguous hesitation between embodiment and alienation which that word implies. Thus, Hegel's system "implies that self-conscious man, insofar as he has recognized and superseded the spiritual world (or the universal spiritual mode of existence of his 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.* Thus, for example, after superseding religion, when he has recognized religion as a product of self-alienation, he then finds a confirmation of himself in *religion as religion.* . . . Thus reason is at home in unreason as such. Man, who has recognized that he leads an alienated life in law, politics, etc., leads his true human life in this alienated life as such."[54] So it is that from the recognition of a work of art as a disguised expression and an alienation of reality, to making your peace with the very necessity of such disguises and such alienation, it is but a step.

In this situation the function of literary criticism grows clear. Even if ours is a critical age, it does not seem to me very becoming in critics to exalt their activity to the level of literary creation, as is loosely done in France today. It is more honest and more dialectical to point out that the scope and relevance of criticism varies with the historical and ideological moment itself. Thus, it has been said that literary criticism was a privileged instrument in the struggle against nineteenth-century despotism (particularly in Czarist Russia), because it was the only way one could smuggle ideas and covert political commentary past the censor. This

[54] Marx, *Early Writings,* ed. Bottomore, p. 210.

is now to be understood, not in an external, but in an inner and allegorical sense. The works of culture come to us as signs in an all-but-forgotten code, as symptoms of diseases no longer even recognized as such, as fragments of a totality we have long since lost the organs to see. In the older culture, the kinds of works which a Lukács called realistic were essentially those which carried their own interpretation built into them, which were at one and the same time fact and commentary on the fact. Now the two are once again sundered from each other, and the literary fact, like the other objects that make up our social reality, cries out for commentary, for interpretation, for decipherment, for diagnosis. It appeals to the other disciplines in vain: Anglo-American philosophy has long since been shorn of its dangerous speculative capacities, and as for political science, it suffices only to think of its distance from the great political and Utopian theories of the past to realize to what degree thought asphyxiates in our culture, with its absolute inability to imagine anything other than what is. It therefore falls to literary criticism to continue to compare the inside and the outside, existence and history, to continue to pass judgment on the abstract quality of life in the present, and to keep alive the idea of a concrete future. May it prove equal to the task!