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ON INTERPRETATION: *Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act*

This book will argue the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts. It conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today—the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural—but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.

This is evidently a much more extreme position than the modest claim, surely acceptable to everyone, that certain texts have social and historical—sometimes even political—resonance. Traditional literary history has, of course, never prohibited the investigation of such topics as the Florentine political background in Dante, Milton's relationship to the schismatics, or Irish historical allusions in Joyce. I would argue, however, that such information—even where it is not recontained, as it is in most instances, by an idealistic conception of the history of ideas—does not yield interpretation as such, but rather at best its (indispensable) preconditions.

Today this properly antiquarian relationship to the cultural past has a dialectical counterpart which is ultimately no more satisfactory; I mean the tendency of much contemporary theory to rewrite selected texts from the past in terms of its own aesthetic and, in particular, in terms of a modernist (or more properly post-modernist) conception of language. I have shown elsewhere[1] the ways in which

1. See "The Ideology of the Text," *Salmagundi*, No. 31–32 (Fall 1975/Winter 1976), pp. 204–246.

such "ideologies of the text" construct a straw man or inessential term—variously called the "readerly" or the "realistic" or the "referential" text—over against which the essential term—the "writerly" or modernist or "open" text, *écriture* or textual productivity—is defined and with which it is seen as a decisive break. But Croce's great dictum that "all history is contemporary history" does not mean that all history is *our* contemporary history; and the problems begin when your epistemological break begins to displace itself in time according to your own current interests, so that Balzac may stand for unenlightened representationality when you are concerned to bring out everything that is "textual" and modern in Flaubert, but turns into something else when, with Roland Barthes in *S/Z,* you have decided to rewrite Balzac as Philippe Sollers, as sheer text and *écriture.*

This unacceptable option, or ideological double bind, between antiquarianism and modernizing "relevance" or projection demonstrates that the old dilemmas of historicism—and in particular, the question of the claims of monuments from distant and even archaic moments of the cultural past on a culturally different present[2]—do not go away just because we choose to ignore them. Our presupposition, in the analyses that follow, will be that only a genuine philosophy of history is capable of respecting the specificity and radical difference of the social and cultural past while disclosing the solidarity of its polemics and passions, its forms, structures, experiences, and struggles, with those of the present day.

But genuine philosophies of history have never been numerous, and few survive in workable, usable form in the contemporary world of consumer capitalism and the multinational system. We will have enough occasion, in the pages that follow, to emphasize the methodological interest of Christian historicism and the theological origins of the first great hermeneutic system in the Western tradition, to be permitted the additional observation that the Christian philosophy of history which emerges full blown in Augustine's *City of God* (A.D. 413–426) can no longer be particularly binding on us. As for the philosophy of history of a heroic bourgeoisie, its two principal variants—the vision of progress that

2. This is to my mind the relevance of a theory of "modes of production" for literary and cultural criticism; see, for further reflections on this issue and a more explicit statement on the "historicist" tendencies of Marxism, my "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History,* 11 (Autumn, 1979), 41–73.

emerges from the ideological struggles of the French Enlightenment, and that organic populism or nationalism which articulated the rather different historicity of the central and Eastern European peoples and which is generally associated with the name of Herder—are neither of them extinct, certainly, but are at the very least both discredited under their hegemonic embodiments in positivism and classical liberalism, and in nationalism respectively.

My position here is that only Marxism offers a philosophically coherent and ideologically compelling resolution to the dilemma of historicism evoked above. Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it. This mystery can be reenacted only if the human adventure is one; only thus—and not through the hobbies of antiquarianism or the projections of the modernists—can we glimpse the vital claims upon us of such long-dead issues as the seasonal alternation of the economy of a primitive tribe, the passionate disputes about the nature of the Trinity, the conflicting models of the *polis* or the universal Empire, or, apparently closer to us in time, the dusty parliamentary and journalistic polemics of the nineteenth-century nation states. These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme—for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity[3]; only if they are

3. "The realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is in fact determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized men, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis." Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), III, 820.

grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed—stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes."[4] It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity.

From this perspective the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life. Such a distinction reconfirms that structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between the public and the private, between the social and the psychological, or the political and the poetic, between history or society and the "individual," which—the tendential law of social life under capitalism—maims our existence as individual subjects and paralyzes our thinking about time and change just as surely as it alienates us from our speech itself. To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there already exists a realm of freedom—whether it be that of the microscopic experience of words in a text or the ecstasies and intensities of the various private religions—is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation. The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed, that everything is "in the last analysis" political.

The assertion of a political unconscious proposes that we undertake just such a final analysis and explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts.

4. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in K. Marx, *On Revolution,* ed. and trans. S. K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 81.

It projects a rival hermeneutic to those already enumerated; but it does so, as we shall see, not so much by repudiating their findings as by arguing its ultimate philosophical and methodological priority over more specialized interpretive codes whose insights are strategically limited as much by their own situational origins as by the narrow or local ways in which they construe or construct their objects of study.

Still, to describe the readings and analyses contained in the present work as so many *interpretations,* to present them as so many exhibits in the construction of a new *hermeneutic,* is already to announce a whole polemic program, which must necessarily come to terms with a critical and theoretical climate variously hostile to these slogans.[5] It is, for instance, increasingly clear that hermeneutic or interpretive activity has become one of the basic polemic targets of contemporary post-structuralism in France, which—powerfully buttressed by the authority of Nietzsche—has tended to identify such operations with historicism, and in particular with the dialectic and its valorization of absence and the negative, its assertion of the necessity and priority of totalizing thought. I will agree with this identification, with this description of the ideological affinities and implications of the ideal of the interpretive or hermeneutic act; but I will argue that the critique is misplaced.

Indeed, one of the most dramatic of such recent attacks on interpretation—*The Anti-Oedipus,* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—quite properly takes as its object not Marxian, but rather Freudian, interpretation, which is characterized as a reduction and

5. See Michel Foucault, "The Retreat and Return of the Origin," chap. 9, part 6, of *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 328–335; as well as the same author's *Archeology of Knowledge,* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), in particular, the introduction and the chapter on the "history of ideas"; Jacques Derrida, "The Exorbitant. Question of Method," in *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 157–164; as well as his "Hors livre," in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 9
signe," in *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); along with his *Mirror of Production,* trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos, 1975); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977), pp. 25–28, 109–113, 305–308; Jean-François Lyotard, *Economie libidinale* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), especially "Le Désir nommé Marx," pp. 117–188; and last but not least, Louis Althusser, et al., *Reading Capital,* trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), especially "Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution," pp. 182–193.

a rewriting of the whole rich and random multiple realities of concrete everyday experience into the contained, strategically prelimited terms of the family narrative—whether this be seen as myth, Greek tragedy, "family romance," or even the Lacanian structural version of the Oedipus complex. What is denounced is therefore a system of allegorical interpretation in which the data of one narrative line are radically impoverished by their rewriting according to the paradigm of another narrative, which is taken as the former's master code or Ur-narrative and proposed as the ultimate hidden or unconscious *meaning* of the first one. The thrust of the argument of the *Anti-Oedipus* is, to be sure, very much in the spirit of the present work, for the concern of its authors is to reassert the specificity of the political content of everyday life and of individual fantasy-experience and to reclaim it from that reduction to the merely subjective and to the status of psychological projection which is even more characteristic of American cultural and ideological life today than it is of a still politicized France. My point in mentioning this example is to observe that the repudiation of an older interpretive system—Freudian rewriting, overhastily assimilated to hermeneutics in general and as such—is in *The Anti-Oedipus* coupled with the projection of a whole new method for the reading of texts:

> The unconscious poses no problem of meaning, solely problems of use. The question posed by desire is not "What does it mean?" but rather "*How does it work?*" . . . [The unconscious] represents nothing, but it produces. It means nothing, but it works. Desire makes its entry with the general collapse of the question "What does it mean?" No one has been able to pose the problem of language except to the extent that linguists and logicians have first eliminated meaning; and the greatest force of language was only discovered once a *work* was viewed as a machine, producing certain effects, amenable to a certain use. Malcolm Lowry says of his work: it's anything you want it to be, so long as it works—"It works too, believe me, as I have found out"—a machinery. But on condition that meaning be nothing other than use, that it become a firm principle only if we have at our disposal *immanent criteria* capable of determining the legitimate uses, as opposed to the illegitimate ones that relate use instead to a hypothetical meaning and re-establish a kind of transcendence.[6]

6. Deleuze/Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 109.

From our present standpoint, however, the ideal of an immanent analysis of the text, of a dismantling or deconstruction of its parts and a description of its functioning and malfunctioning, amounts less to a wholesale nullification of all interpretive activity than to a demand for the construction of some new and more adequate, immanent or antitranscendent hermeneutic model, which it will be the task of the following pages to propose.[7]

I

This Nietzschean and antiinterpretive current is, however, not without its equivalent in a certain contemporary Marxism: the enterprise of constructing a properly Marxist hermeneutic must necessarily confront the powerful objections to traditional models of interpretation raised by the influential school of so-called structural or Althusserian Marxism.[8] Althusser's own position on the subject is spelled out in his theory of the three historical forms of causality (or "effectivity"), in a document so significant for contemporary theory that it is worth quoting at some length:

> The epistemological problem posed by Marx's radical modification of Political Economy can be expressed as follows: by means of what concept is it possible to think the new type of determination which has just been identified as the determination of the phenomena of a given region by the structure of that region? . . . In other words, how is it possible to define the concept of a structural causality? . . .
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> Very schematically, we can say that classical philosophy . . . had

7. From the present perspective, in other words, Deleuze and Guattari's proposal for an *anti*interpretive method (which they call schizo-analysis) can equally well be grasped as a new hermeneutic in its own right. It is striking and noteworthy that most of the antiinterpretive positions enumerated in note 5 above have felt the need to project new "methods" of this kind: thus, the archeology of knowledge, but also, more recently, the "political technology of the body" (Foucault), "grammatology" and deconstruction (Derrida), "symbolic exchange" (Baudrillard), libidinal economy (Lyotard), and "sémanalyse" (Julia Kristeva).

8. The issues raised in this section, unavoidable ones for any serious discussion of the nature of interpretation, are also unavoidably technical, involving a terminology and a "problematic" which largely transcends literary criticism. As they will inevitably strike certain readers as scholastic exercises within the philosophically alien tradition of Marxism, such readers may be advised to pass at once to the next section (below, p. 58), in which we return to a discussion of the various current schools of literary criticism proper. It should be added that not all the writers described as "Althusserians," at the level of historical generality which is ours in the present section, would accept that characterization.

two and only two systems of concepts with which to think effectivity. The mechanistic system, Cartesian in origin, which reduced causality to a *transitive* and analytical effectivity, could not be made to think the effectivity of a whole on its elements, except at the cost of extraordinary distortions (such as those in Descartes' "psychology" and biology). But a second system was available, one conceived precisely in order to deal with the effectivity of a whole on its elements: the Leibnitzian concept of *expression.* This is the model that dominates all Hegel's thought. But it presupposes in principle that the whole in question be reducible to an *inner essence,* of which the elements of the whole are then no more than the phenomenal forms of expression, the inner principle of the essence being present at each point in the whole, such that at each moment it is possible to write the immediately adequate equation: such and such an element (economic, political, legal, literary, religious, etc., in Hegel) = the inner essence of the whole. Here was a model which made it possible to think the effectivity of the whole on each of its elements, but if this category—inner essence/outer phenomenon—was to be applicable everywhere and at every moment to each of the phenomena arising in the totality in question, it presupposed that the whole had a certain nature, precisely the nature of a "spiritual" whole in which each element was expressive of the entire totality as a "pars totalis". In other words, Leibnitz and Hegel did have a category for the effectivity of the whole on its elements or parts, but on the absolute condition that the whole was not a structure. . . .

[The third concept of effectivity, that of structural causality,] can be entirely summed up in the concept of "Darstellung", the key epistemological concept of the whole Marxist theory of value, the concept whose object is precisely to designate the mode of *presence* of the structure in its *effects,* and therefore to designate structural causality itself. . . . The structure is not an essence outside the economic phenomena which comes and alters their aspect, forms and relations and which is effective on them as an absent cause, absent because it is outside them. The absence of the cause in the structure's "metonymic causality" on its effects is not the fault of the exteriority of the structure with respect to the economic phenomena; on the contrary, it is the very form of the interiority of the structure, as a structure, in its effects. This implies therefore that the effects are not outside the structure, are not a pre-existing object, element or space in which the structure arrives to imprint its mark: on the contrary, it implies that the structure is immanent in its effects, a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects, in short, that the structure, which is

merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects.[9]

Althusser's first type of effectivity, that of mechanistic or mechanical causality, exemplified in the billiard-ball model of cause and effect, has long been a familiar exhibit in the history of ideas and in particular in the history of science, where it is associated with the Galilean and Newtonian world-view, and is assumed to have been outmoded by the indeterminacy principle of modern physics. This type of causality is generally the target of the loose contemporary consensus on the "outmoded" character of the category of causality as such; yet even this type of causal analysis is by no means everywhere discredited in cultural studies today. Its continuing influence may be observed, for instance, in that technological determinism of which MacLuhanism remains the most interesting contemporary expression, but of which certain more properly Marxist studies like Walter Benjamin's ambiguous *Baudelaire* are also variants. Indeed, the Marxist tradition includes models which have so often been denounced as mechanical or mechanistic—most notably the familiar (or notorious) concept of "base" (infrastructure and "superstructure"—for it to have no small stake in the reexamination of this type of causality.

I would want to argue that the category of mechanical effectivity retains a purely local validity in cultural analysis where it can be shown that billiard-ball causality remains one of the (nonsynchronous) laws of our particular fallen social reality. It does little good, in other words, to banish "extrinsic" categories from our thinking, when the latter continue to have a hold on the objective realities about which we plan to think. There seems, for instance, to have been an unquestionable causal relationship between the admittedly extrinsic fact of the crisis in late nineteenth-century publishing, during which the dominant three-decker lending library novel was replaced by a cheaper one-volume format, and the modification of the "inner form" of the novel itself.[10] The resultant transformation of the novelistic production of a writer such as Gissing must thus necessarily be mystified by attempts of literary scholars to interpret

9. Althusser et al., *Reading Capital,* pp. 186–189.

10. Frank Kermode, "Buyers' Market," *New York Review of Books,* October 31, 1974, p. 3.

the new form in terms of personal evolution or of the internal dynamics of purely formal change. That a material and contingent "accident" should leave its trace as a formal "break" and "cause" modification in Gissing's narrative categories as well as in the very "structure of feeling" of his novels—this is no doubt a scandalous assertion. Yet what is scandalous is not this way of thinking about a given formal change, but rather the objective event itself, the very nature of cultural change in a world in which separation of use value from exchange value generates discontinuities of precisely this "scandalous" and extrinsic type, rifts and actions at distance which cannot ultimately be grasped "from the inside" or phenomenologically, but which must be reconstructed as symptoms whose cause is of another order of phenomenon from its effects. Mechanical causality is thus less a concept which might be evaluated on its own terms, than one of the various laws and subsystems of our peculiarly reified social and cultural life. Nor is its occasional experience without benefit for the cultural critic, for whom the scandal of the extrinsic comes as a salutary reminder of the ultimately material base of cultural production, and of the "determination of consciousness by social being."[11]

It must therefore be objected, to Althusser's ideological analysis of the "concept" of mechanical causality, that this unsatisfactory category is not merely a form of false consciousness or error, but also a symptom of objective contradictions that are still with us. This said, it is also clear that it is the second form of efficacity Althusser enumerates, so-called "expressive causality," which is the polemic heart of his argument as well as the more vital issue (and burning temptation) in cultural criticism today. The counter-slogan of "totalization" cannot be the immediate response to Althusser's critique of "expressive causality," if for no other reason that totalization is itself numbered among the approaches stigmatized by this term, which range from the various conceptions of the world-views or period styles of a given historical moment (Taine, Riegl, Spengler, Goldmann) all the way to contemporary structural or post-

11. The problem of mechanical causality imposes itself most vividly, perhaps, in film criticism, as a tension between the study of technological innovation and that of "intrinsically" filmic languages; but it can be expected to be an issue in most other areas of mass culture as well.

structural efforts at modeling the dominant episteme or sign-system of this or that historical period, as in Foucault, Deleuze-Guattari, Yurii Lotman, or the theorists of consumer society (most notably Jean Baudrillard). Such a catalogue suggests, not merely that Althusser's critique may be construed much more widely than the work of Hegel, which is its central exhibit (and may find application in thinkers who are expressly non- or anti-Hegelian), but also that what is at stake here would seem significantly related to problems of cultural periodization in general and to that of the category of a historical "period" in particular. However, the more properly Marxist models of "expressive causality" denounced by Althusser are strictured from a rather different perspective as involving the practice of mediation and as dramatizing still relatively idealistic conceptions of both individual and collective praxis: we will return to these two reproaches later in the present chapter.

As for periodization, its practice is clearly enveloped by that basic Althusserian conceptual target designated as "historicism";[12] and it can be admitted that any rewarding use of the notion of a historical or cultural period tends in spite of itself to give the impression of a facile totalization, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, "expresses" some unified inner truth—a world-view or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length and breadth of the "period" in question. Yet such an impression is fatally reductive, in the sense in which we have seen Deleuze and Guattari denounce the unifying operation of the Freudian familial reduction. On its own terms, therefore, the Althusserian critique is quite unanswerable, which demonstrates the way in which the construction of a historical totality necessarily involves

12. Whatever the theoretical content of the debate on historicism, it should be understood that this term is *also* a political code word in the Althusserian corpus, and designates various Marxist theories of so-called "stages" in the transition to socialism: these range from Lenin's theory of imperialism and Stalin's distinctions between "socialism" and "communism" all the way to Kautsky and social democratic schemas of historical development. On this level, then, the polemic against "historicism" is part of the more general Althusserian offensive within the French Communist Party against Stalinism, and involves very real practical, political, and strategic consequences. (The classical structuralist and semiotic arguments against historicism are to be found in the concluding chapter ["History and Dialectic"] of Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), and A. J. Greimas, "Structure et histoire," in *Du sens* [Paris: Seuil, 1970]).

the isolation and the privileging of one of the elements *within* that totality (a kind of thought habit, a predilection for specific forms, a certain type of belief, a "characteristic" political structure or form of domination) such that the element in question becomes a master code or "inner essence" capable of explicating the other elements or features of the "whole" in question. Such a theme or "inner essence" can thus be seen as the implicit or explicit answer to the now impermissible interpretive question, "what does it mean?" (The practice of "mediation" is then, as we shall see, understood as a more seemingly dialectical but no less idealistic mechanism for moving or modulating from one level or feature of the whole to another: a mechanism which, however, as in bourgeois periodization, has no less the effect of unifying a whole social field around a theme or an idea.)

Above and beyond the problem of periodization and its categories, which are certainly in crisis today, but which would seem to be as indispensable as they are unsatisfactory for any kind of work in cultural study, the larger issue is that of the representation of History itself. There is in other words a synchronic version of the problem: that of the status of an individual "period" in which everything becomes so seamlessly interrelated that we confront either a total system or an idealistic "concept" of a period; and a diachronic one, in which history is seen in some "linear" way as the succession of such periods, stages, or moments. I believe that this second problem is the prior one, and that individual period formulations always secretly imply or project narratives or "stories"—narrative representations—of the historical sequence in which such individual periods take their place and from which they derive their significance.

The fullest form of what Althusser calls "expressive causality" (and of what he calls "historicism") will thus prove to be a vast interpretive allegory in which a sequence of historical events or texts and artifacts is rewritten in terms of some deeper, underlying, and more "fundamental" narrative, of a hidden master narrative which is the allegorical key or figural content of the first sequence of empirical materials. This kind of allegorical master narrative would then include providential histories (such as those of Hegel or Marx), catastrophic visions of history (such as that of Spengler),

and cyclical or Viconian visions of history alike. I read the Althusserian dictum, "History is a process without a *telos* or a subject,"[13] in this spirit, as a repudiation of such master narratives and their twin categories of narrative closure (*telos*) and of character (subject of history). As such historical allegories are also often characterized as being "theological" and as we will have occasion shortly to return to that striking and elaborate hermeneutic which is the patristic and medieval system of the four levels of scripture, it may be useful to illustrate the structure of the master narrative with reference to that now archaic and cumbersome allegorical framework in which its operation is most clearly visible.

The medieval system may perhaps most conveniently be approached through its practical function in late antiquity, its ideological mission as a strategy for assimilating the Old Testament to the New, for rewriting the Jewish textual and cultural heritage in a form usable for Gentiles. The originality of the new allegorical system may be judged by its insistence on preserving the literality of the original texts: it is not here a matter of dissolving them into mere symbolism, as a rationalistic Hellenism did when, confronted with the archaic and polytheistic letter of the Homeric epic, it rewrote the latter in terms of the struggle of the physical elements with one another, or of the battle of vices and virtues.[14] On the contrary, the Old Testament is here taken as historical fact. At the same time, its availability as a system of figures, above and beyond this literal historical reference, is grounded in the conception of history itself as God's book, which we may study and gloss for signs and traces of the prophetic message the Author is supposed to have inscribed within it.

So it is that the life of Christ, the text of the New Testament, which comes as the fulfillment of the hidden prophecies and annunciatory signs of the Old, constitutes a second, properly allegorical level, in terms of which the latter may be rewritten. Allegory is here the opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels

13. *Réponse à John Lewis* (Paris: Maspéro, 1973), pp. 91–98.

14. I here draw heavily on Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse mediévale* (Paris: Aubier, 1959–1964, 4 vols.); for the distinction between a tripartite and a quadripartite system of levels, see in particular Vol. I, pp. 139–169, and also pp. 200–207.

and as so many supplementary interpretations. So the interpretation of a particular Old Testament passage in terms of the life of Christ—a familiar, even hackneyed, illustration is the rewriting of the bondage of the people of Israel in Egypt as the descent of Christ into hell after his death on the cross[15]—comes less as a technique for closing the text off and for repressing aleatory or aberrant readings and senses, than as a mechanism for preparing such a text for further ideological investment, if we take the term *ideology* here in Althusser's sense as a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History.

In the present instance, the movement is from a particular collective history—that of the people of Israel, or in other words a history culturally alien to the Mediterranean and Germanic clientele of early Christianity—to the destiny of a particular individual: the transindividual dimensions of the first narrative are then drastically "reduced" to the second, purely biographical narrative, the life of Christ, and such reduction is not without its analogies with that attributed by Deleuze and Guattari to the repressive simplification the Freudian family triangle brings to the lived richness of daily life. But the results are quite different: in the case of the four levels, it is precisely this reduction of the alien collective to the valorized individual biography which then permits the generation of two further interpretive levels, and it is precisely in these that the individual believer is able to "insert" himself or herself (to use the Althusserian formula), it is precisely by way of the *moral* and *anagogical* interpretations that the textual apparatus is transformed into a "libidinal apparatus," a machinery for ideological investment. On the third or moral level, for example, the literal and historical fact of the bondage of the people of Israel in Egypt can be rewritten as the thralldom of the believer-to-be to sin and to the preoccupations of this world ("the fleshpots of Egypt"): a bondage from which personal conversion will release him or her (an event figured doubly as the deliverance from Egypt and the resurrection of Christ). But this third level of the individual soul is clearly insufficient by itself, and

15. For further examples of such allegorical topoi, see Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulston Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates, 1960).

at once generates the fourth or anagogical sense, in which the text undergoes its ultimate rewriting in terms of the destiny of the human race as a whole, Egypt then coming to prefigure that long purgatorial suffering of earthly history from which the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment come as the final release. The historical or collective dimension is thus attained once again, by way of the detour of the sacrifice of Christ and the drama of the individual believer; but from the story of a particular earthly people it has been transformed into universal history and the destiny of humankind as a whole—precisely the functional and ideological transformation which the system of the four levels was designed to achieve in the first place:

ANAGOGICAL	political reading (collective "meaning" of history)
MORAL	psychological reading (individual subject)
ALLEGORICAL	allegorical key or interpretive code
LITERAL	historical or textual referent

The system of the four levels or senses is particularly suggestive in the solution it provides for an interpretive dilemma which in a privatized world we must live far more intensely than did its Alexandrian and medieval recipients: namely that incommensurability referred to above between the private and the public, the psychological and the social, the poetic and the political. While the relationship the Christian scheme projects between anagogical and moral is not available to us today, the closure of the scheme as a whole is instructive, particularly in the ideological climate of a contemporary American "pluralism," with its unexamined valorization of the open ("freedom") versus its inevitable binary opposition, the closed ("totalitarianism"). Pluralism means one thing when it stands for the coexistence of methods and interpretations in the intellectual and academic marketplace, but quite another when it is taken as a proposition about the infinity of possible meanings and methods and their ultimate equivalence with and substitutability for one another. As a matter of practical criticism, it must be clear to anyone who has experimented with various approaches to a given text that the mind is not content until it puts some order in these findings and invents a hierarchical relationship among its various interpretations. I suspect, indeed, that there are only a finite

number of interpretive possibilities in any given textual situation, and that the program to which the various contemporary ideologies of pluralism are most passionately attached is a largely negative one: namely to forestall that systematic articulation and totalization of interpretive results which can only lead to embarrassing questions about the relationship between them and in particular the place of history and the ultimate ground of narrative and textual production. At any rate, it was clear to the medieval theorists that their four levels constituted a methodological upper limit and a virtual exhaustion of interpretive possibilities.[16]

Taken at its most wide-ranging, then, the Althusserian critique of expressive causality may be seen to strike beyond its immediate target in so-called Hegelian idealism, at the implicit or explicit theodicy that must emerge from interpretations that assimilate levels to one another and affirm their ultimate identity. Yet Althusser's work cannot be properly evaluated unless it is understood that it has—like so many philosophical systems before it—an esoteric and an exoteric sense, and addresses two distinct publics at once. We will return later to the coding system by where an ostensibly abstract philosophical proposition includes a specific polemic position taken on issues within Marxism itself: in the present instance, the more general attack on allegorical master codes also implies a specific critique of the vulgar Marxist theory of levels, whose conception of base and superstructure, with the related notion of the "ultimately determining instance" of the economic, can be shown, when diagrammed in the following way, to have some deeper kinship with the allegorical systems described above:

Superstructures		CULTURE IDEOLOGY (philosophy, religion, etc.) THE LEGAL SYSTEM POLITICAL SUPERSTRUCTURES AND THE STATE
Base or infrastructure	THE ECONOMIC, OR MODE OF PRODUCTION	RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION (classes) FORCES OF PRODUCTION (technology, ecology, population)

16. Thus, even the mystically tempting alternative of *seven* levels of meaning was found in practice to reduce itself to mere variations on the original four: e.g., the interpretive identification of the people of Israel with the church—the allegorical rewriting of the Old Testament in terms of church history—was judged in practice to

That this orthodox schema is still essentially an allegorical one becomes clear whenever it is prolonged into interpretation. Here Lukács' essays on realism may serve as a central example of the way in which the cultural text is taken as an essentially allegorical model of society as a whole, its tokens and elements, such as the literary "character," being read as "typifications" of elements on other levels, and in particular as figures for the various social classes and class fractions. But in other kinds of analysis as well—the orthodox "ideological analyses" of philosophical positions or legal measures, or the demystification of the structure of the state in class terms—a movement of allegorical decipherment takes place in which the conception of class interest supplies the functional or link between a superstructural symptom or category and its "ultimately determining" reality in the base.

What our preceding discussion of the medieval levels suggests, however, is that this is by no means the whole story, and that to grasp the full degree to which this schema projects an essentially allegorical operation, we must enlarge its master code or allegorical key to the point at which the latter becomes a master narrative in its own right; and this point is reached when we become aware that any individual mode of production projects and implies a whole sequence of such modes of production—from primitive communism to capitalism and communism proper—which constitute the narrative of some properly Marxian "philosophy of history." Yet this is a paradoxical discovery: for the very work of the Althusserian school, which has so effectively discredited the Marxian versions of a properly teleological history, is also that which has done most, in our time, to restore the problematic of the mode of production as the central organizing category of Marxism.[17]

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be a variant on the second or allegorical level, insofar as the life of Christ was also, secondarily, an allegory of the history of the church (De Lubac, Vol. II, pp. 501–502).

17. See in particular Etienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital,* pp. 199–308; Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies,* trans. Mary Klopper (New York: Monthly Review, 1972); and Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975). The classical Marxist discussions are to be found in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse,* trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 471–514; and Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Moscow: Progress, 1968). I discuss the relevance of the concept of mode of production for cultural study in my forthcoming *Poetics of Social Forms.*

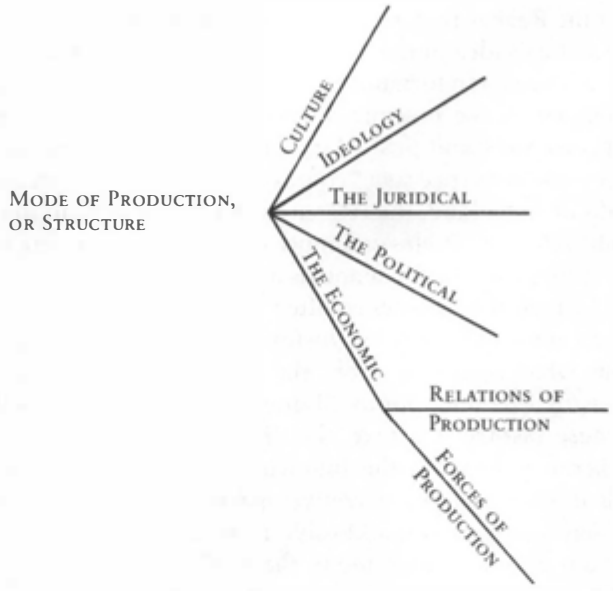
The conception of the political unconscious outlined in this book is an attempt to cut through this particular dilemma by relocating it within the object. A minimal defense of the procedures of expressive causality will then take much the same form as did our previous discussion of mechanical causality: we can view both as local laws within our historical reality. The idea is, in other words, that if interpretation in terms of expressive causality or of allegorical master narratives remains a constant temptation, this is because such master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them; such allegorical narrative signifieds are a persistent dimension of literary and cultural texts precisely because they reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality. To such a dimension correspond not only those cobwebs of topical allusion which the ahistorical and formalizing reader attempts desperately to brush away—that dry and intolerable chitinous murmur of footnotes reminding us of the implied references to long-dead contemporary events and political situations in Milton or Swift, in Spenser or Hawthorne; if the modern reader is bored or scandalized by the roots such texts send down into the contingent circumstances of their own historical time, this is surely testimony as to his resistance to his own political unconscious and to his denial (in the United States, the denial of a whole generation) of the reading and the writing of the text of history within himself. An exhibit like Balzac's *Vieille Fille* then implies a significant mutation in such political allegory in the literature of the capitalist period, and show the virtual assimilation of the footnote-subtext of an older web of political allusion into the mechanism of narrative, where the meditation on social classes and political regimes becomes the very *pensée sauvage* of a whole narrative production (see below, Chapter 3). But if this is where the study of "expressive causality" leads, then to switch it off at the source entails the virtual repression of the text of history and the political unconscious in our own cultural and practical experience, just at the moment when increasing privatization has made that dimension so faint as to be virtually inaudible.

This analysis of the function of expressive causality suggests a provisional qualification of Althusser's antiteleological formula for history (neither a subject nor a telos), based as it is on Lacan's

notion of the Real as that which "resists symbolization absolutely"[18] and on Spinoza's idea of the "absent cause." The sweeping negativity of the Althusserian formula is misleading insofar as it can readily be assimilated to the polemic themes of a host of contemporary post-structuralisms and post-Marxisms, for which History, in the bad sense—the reference to a "context" or a "ground," an external real world of some kind, the reference, in other words, to the much maligned "referent" itself—is simply one more text among others, something found in history manuals and that chronological presentation of historical sequences so often called "linear history." What Althusser's own insistence on history as an absent cause makes clear, but what is missing from the formula as it is canonically worded, is that he does not at all draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the "referent" does not exist. We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.

Such a reformulation acknowledges the powerful Althusserian objections to expressive causality and to interpretation generally, while making a local place for such operations. What we have not yet considered is whether Althusser's position is anything more than a negative and second-degree critical one, a kind of correction of the ever-possible illusions of the Hegelian code, or whether his concept of a properly "structural causality" has content in its own right and implies specific interpretive possibilities distinct from those already outlined. We may perhaps best convey the originality of his model by restructuring the traditional Marxist conception of levels (represented above) in a different way (see following page). This diagram will have served its purpose if it immediately brings out one striking and fundamental difference between Althusser's conception of "levels" and that of traditional Marxism: where the

18. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre I: Les Ecrits techniques de Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 80; and compare this other remark, on Newton's laws: "Il y a des formules qu'on n'imagine pas; au moins pour un temps, elles font assemblée avec le réel" ("Radiophonie," *Scilicet*, No. 2–3 [1970], p. 75).



latter either conceived, or in the absence of rigorous conceptualization perpetuated the impression, of the "ultimately determining instance" or mode of production as the narrowly economic—that is, as one level within the social system which, however, "determines" the others—the Althusserian conception of mode of production identifies this concept with the structure as a whole. For Althusser, then, the more narrowly economic—the forces of production, the labor process, technical development, or relations of production, such as the functional interrelation of social classes—is, however privileged, not identical with the mode of production as a whole, which assigns this narrowly "economic" level its particular function and efficiency as it does all the others. If therefore one wishes to characterize Althusser's Marxism as a structuralism, one must complete the characterization with the essential proviso that it is a structuralism for which only *one* structure exists: namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole. This is the sense in which this "structure" is an absent cause, since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of *relationships* among those levels.

This conception of structure should make it possible to understand the otherwise incomprehensible prestige and influence of the Althusserian revolution—which has produced powerful and challenging oppositional currents in a host of disciplines, from philosophy proper to political science, anthropology, legal studies, economics, and cultural studies—as well as to restore its political content, easily lost in translation and disguised by the coded fashion in which its battles have been fought. The insistence on the "semi-autonomy" of these various levels—which can so easily strike the unwary as a scholastic quibble, but which we have now been able to grasp as the correlative of the attack on Hegelian expressive causality in which all those levels are somehow "the same" and so many expressions and modulations of one another—may now be understood as a coded battle waged within the framework of the French Communist Party against Stalinism. As paradoxical as it may seem, therefore, "Hegel" here is a secret code word for Stalin (just as in Lukács' work, "naturalism" is a code word for "socialist realism"); Stalin's "expressive causality" can be detected, to take one example, in the productionist ideology of Soviet Marxism, as an insistence on the primacy of the forces of production. In other words, if all the levels are "expressively" the same, then the infrastructural change in forces of production—nationalization and the elimination of private property relations, as well as industrialization and modernization—will be enough "more or less rapidly to transform the whole superstructure," and cultural revolution is unnecessary, as is the collective attempt to invent new forms of the labor process.[19] Another crucial example can be found in the theory of the state: if the state is a mere epiphenomenon of the economy, then the repressive apparatus of certain socialist revolutions needs no par-

19. See, for a discussion of the ideological consequences of "expressive causality" in the Stalin period, Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR,* Vol. II, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review, 1978), esp. pp. 500–566. Commenting on "the affirmation made in [Stalin's] *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* that changes in production '*always* begin with changes and developments in the productive forces, and in the first place, with changes and development of the *instruments of production,*'" Bettelheim observes that such formulations "make the totality of social relations and practices the 'expression' of the 'productive forces.' 'Society' is here presented as an 'expressive totality,' which is not contradictory, and the changes in which seem to depend upon 'development in production.' The central role played by the revolutionary struggle of the masses in the process of social change does not appear here" (Bettelheim, pp. 516, 514).

ticular attention and can be expected to begin to "wither" when the appropriate stage of productivity is reached. The current Marxist emphasis on the "semi-autonomy" of the state and its apparatuses, which we owe to the Althusserians, is intended to cast the gravest doubts on these interpretations of the "text" of the state (seen as simply replicating other levels), and to encourage attention both to the semi-autonomous dynamics of bureaucracy and the state apparatus in the Soviet system, and to the new and enlarged apparatus of the state under capitalism as a locus for class struggle and political action, rather than a mere obstacle which one "smashes."[20] These illustrations should make clear that, in all the disciplinary fields enumerated above, a dilemma emerges analogous to that of cultural studies proper: is the text a free-floating object in its own right, or does it "reflect" some context or ground, and in that case does it simply replicate the latter ideologically, or does it possess some autonomous force in which it could also be seen as negating that context? It is only because we are all so irredeemably locked in our disciplinary specializations that we fail to see the similarity of these issues; and the obvious place for Marxism to reassert its claim to being an interdisciplinary and a universal science lies within this particular problematic. Indeed, the privileged status of cultural studies might be conveyed by the way in which such textual and interpretive problems are in them more immediately visible and available for study and reflection than in more apparently empirical sciences.

On the other hand, the issue of the academic disciplines serves to dramatize the ambiguity of the Althusserian position. For in its insistence on the semi-autonomy of the levels or instances—and in particular in its notorious and self-serving attempt to reinvent a privileged place for philosophy proper, in a tradition in which the latter was supposed to have been overcome and subsumed by the "unity of theory and practice"—the Althusserian conception of structure has often seemed to its adversaries to constitute a renewed defense of the reified specialization of the bourgeois academic dis-

20. Here, the form taken by "expressive causality" is "the conception of the state as agent of the monopolies in state monopoly capitalism"; see in particular Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, trans. Timothy O'Hagan (London: New Left Books, 1973), esp. pp. 273–274.

ciplines, and thereby an essentially antipolitical alibi.[21] It is true that a somewhat different Althusser has himself (in the seminal essay "Ideological State Apparatuses") taught us that in this society what look like ideas require vigilant demystification as the messages of so many institutional or bureaucratic infrastructures (for example, the University). But his critics turn this view against him by reading his own system of semi-autonomous levels as a legitimation of the French Communist Party, henceforth one more inert institution among others within the bourgeois state. It would be frivolous to try to choose between these antithetical evaluations of the Althusserian operation (anti-Stalinist or Stalinist); rather, they mark out a space in which that operation is objectively and functionally ambiguous.

We can, however, locate the source of this ambiguity. It is to be found in an area strategic for any literary or cultural analysis, namely in the concept of *mediation:* that is, the relationship between the levels or instances, and the possibility of adapting analyses and findings from one level to another. Mediation is the classical dialectical term for the establishment of relationships between, say, the formal analysis of a work of art and its social ground, or between the internal dynamics of the political state and its economic base. It should be understood from the outset that Althusser himself assimilates the concept of "mediation" to expressive causality in the Hegelian sense; that is, he grasps the process of mediation exclusively as the establishment of symbolic *identities* between the various levels, as a process whereby each level is folded into the next, thereby losing its constitutive autonomy and functioning as an expression of its homologues. Thus, state power is seen as the mere expression of the economic system that underlies it, as is the juridical apparatus in a somewhat different way; culture is seen as the expression of the underlying political, juridical and economic instances, and so forth. Starting from this point, the analysis of mediations aims to demonstrate what is not evident in the appearance of things, but rather in their underlying reality, namely that *the same* essence is at work in the specific languages of

21. Jacques Rancière, *La Leçon d'Althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), chap. 2; and E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1978), pp. 374–379.

culture as in the organization of the relations of production. This Althusserian attack on mediation is central, insofar as its targets are no longer limited to Hegel and the Lukácsean tradition, but also include thinkers such as Sartre and (more guardedly) Gramsci.

But the concept of mediation has traditionally been the way in which dialectical philosophy and Marxism itself have formulated their vocation to break out of the specialized compartments of the (bourgeois) disciplines and to make connections among the seemingly disparate phenomena of social life generally. If a more modern characterization of mediation is wanted, we will say that this operation is understood as a process of *transcoding:* as the invention of a set of terms, the strategic choice of a particular code or language, such that the same terminology can be used to analyze and articulate two quite distinct types of objects or "texts," or two very different structural levels of reality. Mediations are thus a device of the analyst, whereby the fragmentation and autonomization, the compartmentalization and specialization of the various regions of social life (the separation, in other words, of the ideological from the political, the religious from the economic, the gap between daily life and the practice of the academic disciplines) is at least locally overcome, on the occasion of a particular analysis. Such momentary reunification would remain purely symbolic, a mere methodological fiction, were it not understood that social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another. The realm of separation, of fragmentation, of the explosion of codes and the multiplicity of disciplines is merely the reality of the appearance: it exists, as Hegel would put it, not so much *in itself* as rather *for us,* as the basic logic and fundamental law of our daily life and existential experience in late capitalism. The appeal to some ultimate underlying unity of the various "levels" is therefore a merely formal and empty one, except insofar as it supplies the rationale and the philosophical justification for that more concrete and local practice of mediations with which we are here concerned.

Now what must be said about the Althusserian conception of

structure in this respect is that the notion of "semi-autonomy" necessarily has to *relate* as much as it *separates*. Otherwise the levels will simply become autonomous *tout court*, and break into the reified space of the bourgeois disciplines; and we have seen that for some readers this last is precisely the thrust of Althusserianism. But in that case it is hard to see why Althusser would insist on a determination by the structural totality: it is clear that he means to underscore some ultimate structural interdependency of the levels, but that he grasps this interdependency in terms of a mediation that passes through the structure, rather than a more *immediate* mediation in which one level folds into another directly. This suggests that the philosophical thrust of the Althusserian notion of structural causality strikes less at the concept of mediation as such, than at what the dialectical tradition would call unreflected immediacy: and in that case, Althusser's real polemic target is at one with that of Hegel, whose whole work is one long critique of premature immediacy and the establishment of unreflected unities. This can perhaps be said in a less technical way by observing that Althusserian structure, like all Marxisms, necessarily insists on the interrelatedness of all elements in a social formation; only it relates them by way of their structural *difference* and distance from one another, rather than by their ultimate identity, as he understands expressive causality to do. Difference is then here understood as a relational concept, rather than as the mere inert inventory of unrelated diversity.

The practice of expressive causality, in which similar processes are observed in two distinct regions of social life, is one of the forms mediation can take, but it is surely not the only one. The point that must be made against Althusser's own formulation of the problem is that the distinguishing of two phenomena from each other, their structural separation, the affirmation that they are not the same, and that in quite specific and determinate ways, is *also* a form of mediation. Althusserian structural causality is therefore just as fundamentally a practice of mediation as is the "expressive causality" to which it is opposed. To describe mediation as the strategic and local invention of a code which can be used about two distinct phenomena does not imply any obligation for the same message to be transmitted in the two cases; to put it another way, one cannot

enumerate the differences between things except against the background of some more general identity. Mediation undertakes to establish this initial identity, against which then—but only then—local identification or differentiation can be registered.

These interpretive possibilities explain why the practice of mediation is particularly crucial for any literary or cultural criticism which seeks to avoid imprisonment in the windless closure of the formalisms, which aims at inventing ways of opening the text onto its *hors-texte* or extratextual relationships in less brutal and purely contingent fashion than was the case with the mechanical causality touched on above. To invent (as we will frequently do in these pages) a terminology of reification, of fragmentation and monadization, which can be used alternately to characterize social relations in late capitalism and formal relations and verbal structures within the latter's cultural and literary products, is not necessarily to affirm the identity of both these things (expressive causality) and thereby to conclude that the latter, the superstructural phenomena, are mere reflexes, epiphenomenal projections of infrastructural realities. At some level this is certainly true, and modernism and reification are parts of the same immense process which expresses the contradictory inner logic and dynamics of late capitalism. Yet even if our aim, as literary analysts, is rather to demonstrate the ways in which modernism—far from being a mere reflection of the reification of late nineteenth-century social life—is also a revolt against that reification and a symbolic act which involves a whole Utopian compensation for increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life, we are first obliged to establish a continuity between these two regional zones or sectors—the practice of language in the literary work, and the experience of *anomie*, standardization, rationalizing desacralization in the *Umwelt* or world of daily life—such that the latter can be grasped as that determinate situation, dilemma, contradiction, or subtext, to which the former comes as a symbolic resolution or solution.

We must therefore repudiate a conception of the process of mediation which fails to register its capacity for differentiation and for revealing structural oppositions and contradictions through some overemphasis on its related vocation to establish identities. Even in the practice of Sartre, whom Althusser denounces, along with Gramsci, as the very "prototype of the philosopher of mediations,"

the characteristic account[22] of the institution of the family as the basic mediation between the experience of the child (object of psychoanalysis) and the class structure of the society at large (object of a Marxist analysis) by no means has the result of reducing these three distinct realities to a common denominator or assimilating them in such a way as to lose the quite different specificities of the destiny of the individual subject, the history of the bourgeois cellular family, and the "conjuncture" of class relations obtaining at that particular moment in the development of the national capitalism in question. On the contrary, the very force of this mediation presupposes your sense of the relative autonomy of each of the sectors or regions in question: it is an identificatory transcoding which requires you at one and the same time to maintain these three "levels" at some absolute structural distance from one another.

This lengthy discussion of mediation should not be taken to mean that Althusser's critique of expressive causality is wholly unjustified; rather, it has been displaced, and its genuine power can be recovered only when its appropriate object is determined. The true target of the Althusserian critique would seem to me not the practice of mediation, but something else, which presents superficial similarities to it but is in reality a very different kind of concept, namely the structural notion of *homology* (or isomorphism, or structural parallelism)—a term currently in wide use in a variety of literary and cultural analyses. Here the Althusserian strictures provide the occasion for a reevaluation of this particular interpretive mechanism, introduced to the critical public by Lucien Goldmann, whose *Hidden God* posited homologies between class situations, world views, and artistic forms (the object of study was Jansenism, with its social origins in the *noblesse de robe,* and its cultural emanation in the new ideology of the *Augustinus,* as well as in the *Pensées* of Pascal and the tragedies of Racine). What is unsatisfactory about this work of Goldmann's is not the establishment of a historical relationship among these three zones or sectors, but rather the simplistic and mechanical model which is constructed in order to articulate that relationship, and in which it is affirmed that

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method,* trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 38: "It is, then, inside the particularity of a history, through the peculiar contradictions of *this* family, that Gustave Flaubert unwittingly served his class apprenticeship."

at some level of abstraction the "structure" of the three quite different realities of social situation, philosophical or ideological position, and verbal and theatrical practice are "the same." Even more glaring, in this respect, is Goldmann's suggestion, in his later *Sociology of the Novel,* of a "rigorous homology" between the novel as a form and the "daily life of an individualistic society born of market production."[23] Here, if anywhere, the Althusserian reminder of the need to respect the relative autonomy of the various structural levels is timely; and it would seem to me that the related injunction to build a hierarchical model in which the various levels stand in determinate relations of domination or subordination to one another can best be fulfilled, in the area of literary and cultural analysis, by a kind of fiction of the process whereby they are generated. So the Russian Formalists showed us how to construct a picture of the emergence of a given complex form in which a certain feature is seen as being generated in order to compensate for and rectify a structural lack at some lower or earlier level of production. To anticipate the example of Conrad developed in Chapter 5, it would certainly be possible to posit some static homology or parallelism between the three levels of social reification, stylistic invention, and narrative or diegetic categories; but it seems more interesting to grasp the mutual relationships between these three dimensions of the text and its social subtext in the more active terms of production, projection, compensation, repression, displacement, and the like. In the case of Conrad, for instance, we will suggest that the stylistic mannerisms have the function of symbolically resolving the contradiction in the subtext, while at the same time actively generating or projecting their narrative pretext (the Formalists called this the "motivation of the device") in the form of a specific category of event to be narrated.

The practice of homologies may, however, be observed in far more sophisticated contexts than that of Goldmann's work: for instance, in current ideologies of production whose interpretive practice it is useful to distinguish from the model of formal genera-

23. Lucien Goldmann, "Sociology of the Novel," *Telos,* No. 18 (Winter, 1973–74), p. 127. These critical observations should be accompanied by a reminder of the historic and indeed incomparable role played by Lucien Goldmann in the reawakening of Marxist theory in contemporary France, and of Marxist cultural theory generally.

tion or projective construction outlined above. Whatever the value of current efforts to fashion a "materialist theory of language,"[24] it is clear that most such efforts are based on a tacit homology between the "production" of language in writing and speech, and economic production (sometimes a secondary homology is also asserted, between the "economic" topology in Freud and "economics" itself). These assertions strike me as misguided in two different ways. Certainly, insofar as the idea of textual production helps us break the reifying habit of thinking of a given narrative as an object, or as a unified whole, or as a static structure, its effect has been positive; but the active center of this idea is in reality a conception of the text as *process,* and the notion of productivity is a metaphorical overlay which adds little enough to the methodological suggestivity of the idea of process, but a great deal to its potential for use or misappropriation by a new ideology. One cannot without intellectual dishonesty assimilate the "production" of texts (or in Althusser's version of this homology, the "production" of new and more scientific concepts) to the production of goods by factory workers: writing and thinking are not alienated labor in that sense, and it is surely fatuous for intellectuals to seek to glamorize their tasks—which can for the most part be subsumed under the rubric of the elaboration, reproduction, or critique of ideology—by assimilating them to real work on the assembly line and to the experience of the resistance of matter in genuine manual labor.

The term *matter* suggests a second misconception at work in such theories, in which the Lacanian notion of a "material signifier" (in Lacan the phallus) and a few feeble allusions to the sonorous vibration of language in air and space are appealed to as a grounding for some genuinely materialistic view. Marxism is, however, not a mechanical but a historical materialism: it does not assert the primacy of matter so much as it insists on an ultimate determination by the mode of production. Indeed, if one likes to brandish epithets, it must be remarked that the grounding of materialism in one or another conception of matter is rather the hallmark of bourgeois ideology from the eighteenth-century mate-

24. Most notably in Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977). A similar homology ultimately limits the rich and suggestive work of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, which turns explicitly on the exploration of language production.

rialisms all the way to nineteenth-century positivism and determinism (itself a bourgeois rather than a Marxian term and concept). The assertion of homologies is at fault here at least in so far as it encourages the most comfortable solutions (the production of language is "the same" as the production of goods), and forestalls the laborious—but surely alone productive—detour of a theory of language through the mode of production as a whole, or, in Althusser's language, through structure, as an ultimate cause only visible in its effects or structural elements, of which linguistic practice is one.

Given its methodological importance in the present volume, I must make a preliminary observation here on the semiotics of A. J. Greimas, in which homology plays an important part, and which will surely appear to some readers as being far more static and ahistorical than the analyses of Goldmann criticized above. I would not disagree with this view, provided it is understood that in Greimas, the conception of levels and their homology is posited as a methodological starting point, as a set of categories to be explored, rather than as a forecast of the shape of the results of analysis. Thus, to take the terms of his fundamental essay "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints."[25] the various superposed and homologous quadrants—e.g., for sexual relations, the four logical possibilities of marital relations, normal relations, abnormal relations and extramarital relations; for rule systems, those of prescriptions, taboos, nonprescriptions, nontaboos—far from designating the concrete kinship or legal systems of any specific and historical human community, on the contrary constitute the empty slots and logical possibilities necessarily obtaining in all of them, against which the content of a given social text is to be measured and sorted out. In this sense, the semantic or semiotic structures articulated in Greimas' scheme seem to map out what he takes to be the logical structure of reality itself, and stand as the fundamental categories of that reality, whatever its particular historical form; if this is the case, then his would be what Umberto Eco has termed an "ontological structuralism," one for which structure is transhistorical and endowed with at least the being and the permanence of the categories of logic or mathematical thought. The "levels" are then

25. *Yale French Studies*, No. 41 (1968); or in *Du Sens*, pp. 135–155.

in Greimas homologous because they are all crisscrossed and organized by the same fundamental conceptual or semiotic categories, those of his "elementary structure of signification" or semiotic rectangle (or hexagon).

One of the essential themes of this book will be the contention that Marxism subsumes other interpretive modes or systems; or, to put it in methodological terms, that the limits of the latter can always be overcome, and their more positive findings retained, by a radical historicizing of their mental operations, such that not only the content of the analysis, but the very method itself, along with the analyst, then comes to be reckoned into the "text" or phenomenon to be explained. In the case of Greimas, we will show[26] how this apparently static analytical scheme, organized around binary oppositions rather than dialectical ones, and continuing to posit the relationship between levels in terms of homology, can be reappropriated for a historicizing and dialectical criticism by designating it as the very locus and model of ideological closure. Seen in this way, the semiotic rectangle becomes a vital instrument for exploring the semantic and ideological intricacies of the text—not so much because, as in Greimas' own work, it yields the objective possibilities according to which landscape and the physical elements, say, must necessarily be perceived, as rather because it maps the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate. This is the perspective in which, in Chapter 3, we will examine the vision of history which

26. See below pp. 82–83, and also pp. 165–169, and 253–257. The position argued here—on the distinction as well as the possible coordination between a static or semiotic method and a dialectical one—is consistent with Sartre's interesting critique of structuralism generally: "Althusser, like Foucault, limits himself to the analysis of structure. From the epistemological point of view, that amounts to privileging the *concept* over against the *notion.* [Sartre is here alluding to the variously translated Hegelian opposition of *Begriff* and *Idee,* respectively.] The concept is atemporal. One can study how concepts are engendered one after the other within determined categories. But neither time itself nor, consequently, history, can be made the object of a concept. There is a contradiction in terms. When you introduce temporality, you come to see that within a temporal development the concept modifies itself. *Notion,* on the contrary, can be defined as the synthetic effort to produce an idea which develops itself by contradiction and its successive overcoming, and therefore is homogeneous to the development of things" ("Replies to Structuralism," trans. R. D'Amico, *Telos,* No. 9 [Fall, 1971], p. 114, or *L'Arc,* No. 30 [1966], p. 94).

informs *La Vieille Fille*—a binary opposition between aristocratic elegance and Napoleonic energy, which the political imagination seeks desperately to transcend, generating the contradictories of each of these terms, mechanically generating all the syntheses logically available to it, while remaining locked into the terms of the original double bind. Such a vision is not to be taken as the logical articulation of all the political positions or ideological possibilities objectively present in the situation of the Restoration, but rather as the structure of a particular political fantasy, as the mapping of that particular "libidinal apparatus" in which Balzac's political thinking becomes invested—it being understood that we are not here distinguishing between fantasy and some objective reality onto which it would be "projected," but rather, with Deleuze or with J.-F. Lyotard, asserting such fantasy or protonarrative structure as the vehicle for our experience of the real.[27] When Greimas' system is used in this fashion, its closure ceases to pose the problems traditionally raised for a more dialectical position by static and analytic thought; on the contrary, it furnishes the graphic embodiment of ideological closure as such, and allows us to map out the inner limits of a given ideological formation and to construct the basic terms of this particular libidinal apparatus or "desiring machine" which is Balzac's commitment to history. More than this, the very closure of the "semiotic rectangle" now affords a way into the text, not by positing mere logical possibilities and permutations, but rather through its diagnostic revelation of terms or nodal points implicit in the ideological system which have, however, remained unrealized in the surface of the text, which have failed to become manifest in the logic of the narrative, and which we can therefore read as what the text represses. Thus appropriated, or perhaps indeed misappropriated, by a dialectical criticism, Greimas' scheme, constructed by means of purely logical or analytical negations, by its very exhaustiveness opens a place for the practice of a more genuinely dialectical negation in the tension between the realized and the unrealized terms; what for Greimas is to be formulated as a structural homology between the various levels on which the semiotic rectangle reproduces itself, for us on the contrary be-

27. A fuller demonstration of the critical uses of the concept of a "libidinal apparatus" may be found in my *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

comes powerfully restructured into a relationship of tension between presence and absence, a relationship that can be mapped according to the various dynamic possibilities (generation, projection, compensation, repression, displacement) indicated above. So the literary structure, far from being completely realized on any one of its levels tilts powerfully into the underside or *impensé* or *non-dit,* in short, into the very political unconscious, of the text, such that the latter's dispersed semes—when reconstructed according to this model of ideological closure—themselves then insistently direct us to the informing power of forces or contradictions which the text seeks in vain wholly to control or master (or *manage,* to use Norman Holland's suggestive term). Thus, by means of a radically historicizing reappropriation, the ideal of logical closure which initially seemed imcompatible with dialectical thinking, now proves to be an indispensable instrument for revealing those logical and ideological centers a particular historical text fails to realize, or on the contrary seeks desperately to repress.

These qualifications tend to suggest that Althusser's program for a structural Marxism must be understood as a modification within the dialectical tradition, rather than a complete break with it, a kind of genetic mutation in which some wholly new Marxism emerges that has no relationship at all to the classical categories in which dialectical philosophy has been couched. But they by no means exhaust the issues and problems of what may be called the Althusser-Lukács debate; nor can we fully do so here. At best, a checklist of those issues can be suggested, in order to prevent the impression that some easy synthesis is readily available. Six major themes come to mind, some of which have already been touched on: (1) the problem of representation, and most particularly of the representation of History: as has already been suggested, this is essentially a narrative problem, a question of the adequacy of any storytelling framework in which History might be represented; (2) the related problem of the "characters" of historical narrative, or more precisely, that of the status of the concept of social class, and its availability as a "subject of history" or prime actor in such a collective historical narrative; (3) the relationship of praxis to structure, and the possible contamination of the first of these concepts by categories of purely individual action, as opposed to the possible

imprisonment of the second of these concepts in an ultimately static and reified vision of some "total system"; (4) the more general problem, issuing from this last one, of the status of the synchronic, and its adequacy as a framework for analysis; or, correlatively, of the adequacy of the older dialectical vision of diachronic transformation and periodization, most notably in the account to be given of *transition* from one mode of production to another; (5) the related issue of the status of a category no less central to the classical dialectic than mediation, namely that of *contradiction,* and its formulation within the new structural or synchronic framework (a category about which we must insist that it be radically distinguished from the semiotic categories of opposition, antinomy, or aporia); (6) and finally the notion of a totality, a term which Althusser continues to use, all the while seeking radically to differentiate his concept of a properly structural totality from the older expressive totality alleged to be the organizing category of Hegelian idealism and Hegelian Marxism (Lukács, Sartre) alike. As this term is the most dramatic battleground of the confrontation between Hegelian and structural Marxisms, we must conclude this section with a few brief remarks about the issues it raises.

Lukács' notion of totality (outlined in *History and Class Consciousness*) and Sartre's methodological ideal of totalization (described in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*) have generally been condemned by association with Hegel's Absolute Spirit, a space in which all contradictions are presumably annulled, the gap between subject and object abolished, and some ultimate and manifestly idealistic form of Identity is established. The attack on so-called identity theory, then—a theory attributed to Lukács, Sartre, and other so-called Hegelian Marxists—takes its inspiration from Marx's critique of Hegel in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx there argued that Hegel mistakenly assimilated objectification, a universal human process, with its unique historical form under capitalism, which is rather to be designated as alienation: given this assimilation, the Hegelian ideal of Absolute Spirit then seeks to overcome alienation by projecting a clearly idealistic vision of the end of objectification as such, the return of all externalizing relations back into the indistinction of Spirit. In its contemporary form, the critique of such identity theory argues not merely that the concept of "totality" is here a code word for Abso-

lute Spirit, but that a whole vision of history is herein perpetuated, in which Utopia (read: communism) is understood as achieving its ultimate identity by the obliteration of difference through sheer force; or, in the memorable words of the *nouveaux philosophes*, in which a direct line runs from Hegel's Absolute Spirit to Stalin's Gulag. This fashionable polemic stereotype has, of course, no historical or textual justification whatsoever. The two major Marxian studies of Hegel have for one thing argued convincingly that Hegel's "conception" of Absolute Spirit is little more than a symptom of a historical situation in which his thinking could go no further[28]: less an idea in its own right than an attempt to resolve an impossible historical contradiction, and to project some impossible third term beyond the alternatives of romantic reaction and bourgeois utilitarianism. Rather than diagnosing some irremediable vice of "idealism" in Hegel's thought, we must more modestly accuse him of not having been able, in his historical moment, to become Marx. The content of Absolute Spirit may better be understood in the for us far more local context of a projection of the mind of the historian and his relationship to the past; yet even this retroactive account of the dialectical vision as the "Sunday of life" and as the Rememoration (*Er-innerung*) of a history already terminated (the owl of Minerva taking her flight at dusk) must be grasped in the historical context of the failure of the Napoleonic revolution, and of Hegel's discouragement at what was to him in a very real way the end of the history on which he placed his own political and visionary hopes.

The philosophical evolution of Hegel himself makes it clear that the Hegelian dialectic emerges precisely from his own assault on "identity theory," in the form of Schelling's system, which he stigmatized in the famous remark about "the night in which all cows are gray": a "reconciliation" of subject with object in which both are obliterated, and ultimately a philosophical orientation that ends in a mystical vision of Identity. From this very polemic emerges the central mechanism of the dialectic, the notion of objectification, without which neither the historical content of Hegel's own work nor the Marxian dialectic is conceivable. It is thus inaccurate or

28. See Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976); and Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon, 1960).

dishonest to associate Hegel himself with what is attacked under the term "identity theory."[29]

As far as Lukács is concerned, the conception of totality outlined in *History and Class Consciousness* must be read, not as some positive vision of the end of history in the sense of Schelling's Absolute, but as something quite different, namely a methodological standard. It has not been sufficiently grasped, indeed, that Lukács' method of ideological critique—like the Hegelian dialectic itself and its Sartrean variant, in the methodological imperative of totalization proposed in the *Critique*—is an essentially critical and negative, demystifying operation. Lukács' central analysis of the ideological character of classical German philosophy may from this perspective be seen as a creative and original variant on Marx's theory of ideology, which is not, as is widely thought, one of false consciousness, but rather one of structural limitation and ideological closure. Nor is Marx's seminal analysis of petty-bourgeois ideology in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* predicated on class affiliation or origins: "What makes [petty-bourgeois intellectuals] the representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter politically. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent."[30]

We will suggest that such an approach posits ideology in terms of

29. Thus, I must feel that Martin Jay's valuable history of the Frankfurt School to 1950, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), by overstressing the leitmotif of non-identity theory, ends up conveying the misleading impression that the fundamental target of "critical theory" was Marxism rather than capitalism. The non-identity between subject and object often means little more than a materialist and "decentering" approach to knowledge. Meanwhile, unless one grasps "negative dialectics" as an essentially aesthetic ideal, as I do, it would be best to seek Adorno's most authentic practice of the dialectic in *Philosophy of Modern Music* (trans. A. G. Mitchell and W. V. Blomster [New York: Seabury, 1973]), rather than in the philosophical works (see, on the tension between the musical and the philosophical analyses, Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* [New York: Free Press, 1977], pp. 33–49). But compare Martin Jay, "The Concept of Totality," in *Telos* No. 32 (Summer, 1977).

30. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International, 1963), pp. 50–51.

strategies of containment, whether intellectual or (in the case of narratives) formal. Lukács' achievement was to have understood that such strategies of containment—which Marx himself described principally in his critiques of classical political economy and the ingenious frames the latter constructed in order to avoid the ultimate consequences of such insights as the relationship between labor and value—can be unmasked only by confrontation with the ideal of totality which they at once imply and repress. From this perspective, Hegel's notion of Absolute Spirit is seen as just such a strategy of containment, which allows what can be thought to seem internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable (in this case, the very possibility of collective praxis) which lies beyond its boundaries. Here Marxism is no doubt implied as that thinking which knows no boundaries of this kind, and which is infinitely totalizable, but the ideological critique does not depend on some dogmatic or "positive" conception of Marxism as a system. Rather, it is simply the place of an imperative to totalize, and the various historical forms of Marxism can themselves equally effectively be submitted to just such a critique of their own local ideological limits or strategies of containment. In this sense, Hegel's great dictum, "the true is the whole," is less an affirmation of some place of truth which Hegel himself (or others) might occupy, than it is a perspective and a method whereby the "false" and the ideological can be unmasked and made visible.

This negative and methodological status of the concept of "totality" may also be shown at work in those very post-structural philosophies which explicitly repudiate such "totalizations" in the name of difference, flux, dissemination, and heterogeneity; Deleuze's conception of the schizophrenic text and Derridean deconstruction come to mind. If such perceptions are to be celebrated in their intensity, they must be accompanied by some initial appearance of continuity, some ideology of unification already in place, which it is their mission to rebuke and to shatter. The value of the molecular in Deleuze, for instance, depends structurally on the preexisting molar or unifying impulse against which its truth is read. We will therefore suggest that these are second-degree or critical philosophies, which reconfirm the status of the concept of totality by their very reaction against it; such a movement is worked

out even more explicitly in Adorno's "negative dialectic," with its counteraffirmation—"the whole is the untrue"—in which the classical dialectic seeks, by biting its own tail, to deconstruct itself.

Thus understood, Lukács' critical conception of the "totality" may immediately be transformed into an instrument of narrative analysis, by way of attention to those narrative frames or containment strategies which seek to endow their objects of representation with formal unity. Indeed, the overfamiliar essays on realism of Lukács' middle period—often simply read as exercises in "reflection theory"—recover their interest if they are rewritten in this way, as studies of those privileged narrative instances (the so-called "great realists") in which the elaborate frames and strategies of containment of a later modernism did for whatever reason not yet seem necessary.[31]

Indeed, in some paradoxical or dialectical fashion, Lukács' con-

31. We must add a final comment about the coded political resonance of this debate, which the critics of "totalization" have so often construed as an attack on a monolithic or totalitarian ideology. Such instant "ideological analysis" may profitably be juxtaposed with a social reading of the debate, as a symbolic index of the distinct situations faced by the Left in the structurally different national contexts of France and the United States. The critique of totalization in France goes hand in hand with a call for a "molecular" or local, nonglobal, nonparty politics: and this repudiation of the traditional forms of class and party action evidently reflects the historic weight of French centralization (at work both in the institutions and in the forces that oppose them), as well as the belated emergence of what can very loosely be called a "countercultural" movement, with the breakup of the old cellular family apparatus and a proliferation of subgroups and alternate "life-styles." In the United States, on the other hand, it is precisely the intensity of social fragmentation of this latter kind that has made it historically difficult to unify Left or "antisystemic" forces in any durable and effective organizational way. Ethnic groups, neighborhood movements, feminism, various "countercultural" or alternative life-style groups, rank-and-file labor dissidence, student movements, single-issue movements—all have in the United States seemed to project demands and strategies which were theoretically incompatible with each other and impossible to coordinate on any practical political basis. The privileged form in which the American Left can develop today must therefore necessarily be that of an *alliance politics;* and such a politics is the strict practical equivalent of the concept of totalization on the theoretical level. In practice, then, the attack on the concept of "totality" in the American framework means the undermining and the repudiation of the only realistic perspective in which a genuine Left could come into being in this country. There is therefore a real problem about the importation and translation of theoretical polemics which have a quite different semantic content in the national situation in which they originate, as in that of France, where the various nascent movements for regional autonomy, women's liberation and neighborhood organization are perceived as being repressed, or at least hampered in their development, by the global or "molar" perspectives of the traditional Left mass parties.

ception of totality may here be said to rejoin the Althusserian notion of History or the Real as an "absent cause." Totality is not available for representation, any more than it is accessible in the form of some ultimate truth (or moment of Absolute Spirit). And since Sartre has figured in this discussion, we can do no better to illustrate the complex process whereby the "whole" is kept faith with and "represented" in its very absence, than to quote an agonized and self-canceling passage from *Les Chemins de la liberté,* in which totality is affirmed in the very movement whereby it is denied, and represented in the same language that denies it all possible representation:

> A vast entity, a planet, in a space of a hundred million dimensions; three-dimensional beings could not so much as imagine it. And yet each dimension was an autonomous consciousness. Try to look directly at that planet, it would disintegrate into tiny fragments, and nothing but consciousnesses would be left. A hundred million free consciousnesses, each aware of walls, the glowing stump of a cigar, familiar faces, and each constructing its destiny on its own responsibility. And yet each of those consciousnesses, by imperceptible contacts and insensible changes, realizes its existence as a cell in a gigantic and invisible coral. War: everyone is free, and yet the die is cast. It is there, it is everywhere, it is the totality of all my thoughts, of all Hitler's words, of all Gomez's acts; but no one is there to add it up. It exists solely for God. But God does not exist. And yet the war exists.[32]

If it is overhasty to characterize the traditional concept of a totality as organic, and even less adequate to characterize its opposite number, the concept of structure, as mechanical, what can at least be stressed is the significance of the areas of aesthetics and linguistics in which these concepts were initially adapted[33] and prepared for their later, more immediately figural uses in fields such as social theory. It would therefore seem legitimate to conclude this provisional juxtaposition of the two in terms of the *aesthetic* that each projects. We are now, in the midst of a post-structuralist culture, in a better

32. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Reprieve,* trans. Eric Sutton (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 326.

33. See, for a discussion of the aesthetic origins of the dialectic, Georg Lukács, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Aesthetik,* and in particular the essay on Schiller's aesthetics, in *Probleme der Aesthetik* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969).

position to see that the expressive totality associated here with Hegel and Lukács implies the value of what is sometimes called organic form, and projects the notion of a work of art as an ordered whole: the critic's business—the task of interpretation viewed from the standpoint of expressive causality—is accordingly to seek a unified meaning to which the various levels and components of the work contribute in a hierarchical way.

It follows, then, that the interpretive mission of a properly structural causality will on the contrary find its privileged content in rifts and discontinuities within the work, and ultimately in a conception of the former "work of art" as a heterogeneous and (to use the most dramatic recent slogan) a schizophrenic text. In the case of Althusserian literary criticism proper, then, the appropriate object of study emerges only when the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or an ideological mirage. The authentic function of the cultural text is then staged rather as an *interference* between levels, as a subversion of one level by another; and for Althusser and Pierre Macherey the privileged form of this disunity or dissonance is the objectification of the ideological by the work of aesthetic production.[34] The aim of a properly structural interpretation or exegesis thus becomes the explosion of the seemingly unified text into a host of clashing and contradictory elements. Unlike canonical post-structuralism, however, whose emblematic gesture is that by which Barthes, in *S/Z,* shatters a Balzac novella into a random operation of multiple codes, the Althusserian/Marxist conception of culture requires this multiplicity to be reunified, if not at the level of the work itself, then at the level of its process of production, which is not random but can be described as a coherent functional operation in its own right. The current post-structural celebration of discontinuity and heterogeneity is therefore only an initial moment in Althusserian exegesis, which then requires the fragments, the incommensurable levels, the heterogeneous impulses, of the text to be once again related, but in the mode of structural difference and determinate contradiction. In the interpretive chapters of the following work, I have found it possible without

34. These positions are enunciated in Althusser's "Letter on Art," in *Lenin and Philosophy,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), pp. 221–227; and in Pierre Macherey, *Pour une théorie de la production litteraire* (Paris: Maspéro, 1970), most notably in the chapter on Jules Verne.

any great inconsistency to respect both the methodological imperative implicit in the concept of totality or totalization, and the quite different attention of a "symptomal" analysis to discontinuities, rifts, actions at distance, within a merely apparently unified cultural text.

But these distinct aesthetics—which we have just characterized in terms of continuity and discontinuity, homogeneity and heterogeneity, unification and dispersal—can also be grasped and differentiated according to the immanent or transcendent nature of the interpretations they propose. Rightly or wrongly, a totalizing criticism has been felt to be transcendent in the bad sense, or in other words to make appeal, for its interpretive content, to spheres and levels outside the text proper. We have seen that such apparently extrinsic operations are then drawn back into the dialectical framework as the latter expands and is systematically totalized. Thus, it can be argued that this type of interpretation, while containing a transcendent moment, foresees that moment as merely *provisionally* extrinsic, and requires for its completion a movement to the point at which that apparently external content (political attitudes, ideological materials, juridical categories, the raw materials of history, the economic processes) is then at length drawn back within the process of reading.

The ideal of a purely immanent criticism is clearly not unique to post-structuralism but dominates a host of critical methods from the older New Criticism on. We will argue in subsequent sections that an immanent criticism in this sense is a mirage. But the originality of Althusserian interpretation, particularly as it is developed in Macherey's work, may be formulated in a quite different way, and may be understood as a deductive operation. From this point of view, the work or the text is not inserted into a genetic process in which it is understood as emerging from this or that prior moment of form or style; nor is it "extrinsically" related to some ground or context which is at least initially given as something lying beyond it. Rather, the data of the work are interrogated in terms of their formal and logical and, most particularly, their *semantic* conditions of possibility. Such analysis thus involves the hypothetical *reconstruction* of the materials—content, narrative paradigms, stylistic and linguistic practices—which had to have been given in advance in order for that particular text to be produced in its unique histori-

cal specificity. We will demonstrate what is at stake in such an operation in subsequent chapters; what we have been concerned to argue here is that this is also, but in some new and unexpected sense, an interpretive or hermeneutic act: and with this assertion—that a mode of interpretation exists which is specific to Althusser's third or structural form of causality—this lengthy digression is complete.

II

Nonetheless, the distinction argued by Deleuze and Guattari, between "old-fashioned" interpretation and contemporary "deconstruction," suggests a useful means for sorting out the various critical or interpretive methods with which we must now come to terms. Leaving aside for the moment the possibility of any genuinely immanent criticism, we will assume that a criticism which asks the question "What does it mean?" constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master code or "ultimately determining instance." On this view, then, all "interpretation" in the narrower sense demands the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a given text into an allegory of its particular master code or "transcendental signified": the discredit into which interpretation has fallen is thus at one with the disrepute visited on allegory itself.

Yet to see interpretation this way is to acquire the instruments by which we can force a given interpretive practice to stand and yield up its name, to blurt out its master code and thereby reveal its metaphysical and ideological underpinnings. It should not, in the present intellectual atmosphere, be necessary laboriously to argue the position that every form of practice, including the literary-critical kind, implies and presupposes a form of theory; that empiricism, the mirage of an utterly nontheoretical practice, is a contradiction in terms; that even the most formalizing kinds of literary or textual analysis carry a theoretical charge whose denial unmasks it as ideological. Unfortunately, such a position, which we will take for granted in what follows, must always be reargued and refought. We will now, however, move on to the even more outrageous assertion that the working theoretical framework or presuppositions of a given method are in general the ideology which that method seeks to perpetuate. Thus, in another place, I have suggested that even so

apparently ahistorical a "method" as the older New Criticism presupposes a specific "vision" or "theory" of history.[35] I will here go much further than this, and argue that even the most innocently formalizing readings of the New Criticism have as their essential and ultimate function the propagation of this particular view of what history is. Indeed, no working model of the functioning of language, the nature of communication or of the speech act, and the dynamics of formal and stylistic change is conceivable which does not imply a whole philosophy of history.

In the present work, we will be less concerned with those modes of formal or stylistic, purely textual, analysis which are generally strategically limited to lyric poetry than with the various types of "strong" rewritings implied by interpretations that identify themselves as such and wear a particular label. Yet we must make some initial place for what is still the predominant form of literary and cultural criticism today, in spite of its repudiation by every successive generation of literary theorists (each for a different reason). This is what we will call *ethical* criticism, and it constitutes the predominant code in terms of which the question "What does it mean?" tends to be answered. Ethical analysis is a vaster category than two other currently stigmatized types of thinking that it includes and subsumes: metaphysical thought, which presupposes the possibility of questions about the "meaning" of life (even where these questions are answered in the negative, by the various existentialisms), and so-called humanism, which is always grounded on a certain conception of "human nature."[36] In its narrowest sense, ethical thought projects as permanent features of human "experience," and thus as a kind of "wisdom" about personal life and interpersonal relations, what are in reality the historical and institutional specifics of a determinate type of group solidarity or class cohesion. We will return at some length, in the next chapter, to the

35. See *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 323, 331–333.

36. "Metaphysics" and "humanism" are the negative critical categories of the Derridean and Althusserian groups respectively, explicitly ranged by each under the more global materialist category of "idealism." To my mind, such philosophical categories are useful when they are taken to refer, as literally as possible, to the most banal everyday attitudes and presuppositions: it would seem "idealistic" to absolutize any historical category of idealism and to thematize any form of error or false consciousness as a transhistorical category.

way in which all ethics lives by exclusion and predicates certain types of Otherness or evil; that these must ultimately have political consequences is obvious, and one of the subthemes of the present work will indeed be the temptation of ethics to recontain itself by assigning hostile and more properly political impulses to the ultimate negative category of *ressentiment*.

Still, it may strike the reader as paradoxical or even perverse to characterize the bulk of garden-variety literary criticism today as "ethical," by which we normally understand a moralizing, or moralistic, didactic gesture of the type presumably extinct with the *Scrutiny* group if not with the Victorian age. This is to misrecognize the dominant form taken by ethics in our own situation, which is essentially psychological and psychologizing, even where it appeals for its authority to this or that version of psychoanalysis. Here notions of personal identity, myths of the reunification of the psyche, and the mirage of some Jungian "self" or "ego" stand in for the older themes of moral sensibility and ethical awareness and reconfirm the aptness of that other contemporary continental theme which, as we shall see further in the Chapter 3, turns upon the critique of the "center" and the "centered" self. Still, these various post-structural motifs should not be understood as a wholesale endorsement of post-structuralism, the anti-Marxist character of which is increasingly evident in France today. On the contrary, I will argue that only the dialectic provides a way for "decentering" the subject concretely, and for transcending the "ethical" in the direction of the political and the collective.

Interpretation proper—what we have called "strong" rewriting, in distinction from the weak rewriting of ethical codes, which all in one way or another project various notions of the unity and the coherence of consciousness—always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code. This is perhaps the place to answer the objection of the ordinary reader, when confronted with elaborate and ingenious interpretations, that the text means just what it says. Unfortunately, no society has ever been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own, saturated as it is with messages and

information, the very vehicles of mystification (language, as Talleyrand put it, having been given us in order to conceal our thoughts). If everything were transparent, then no ideology would be possible, and no domination either: evidently that is not our case. But above and beyond the sheer fact of mystification, we must point to the supplementary problem involved in the study of cultural or literary texts, or in other words, essentially, of narratives: for even if discursive language were to be taken literally, there is always, and constitutively, a problem about the "meaning" of narrative as such; and the problem about the assessment and subsequent formulation of the "meaning" of this or that narrative is the hermeneutic question, which leaves us as deeply involved in our present inquiry as we were when the objection was raised.

It can be argued that all of the original philosophical systems or positions in recent times have in one way or another projected a hermeneutic which is specific to them. Thus, I have argued in another place that most classical structuralisms practice a hermeneutic whose master code or interpretive key is simply Language itself.[37] Similarly, one could point to other local attempts to construct a universal hermeneutic, as in the short-lived interpretive system of the classical period of Sartrean existentialism, according to which it was possible to read literary styles, the structure of imagery, characterological traits, and ideological values in terms of anxiety and the fear of freedom.[38] Meanwhile, a phenomenological criticism not unrelated to the various existentialisms found a master code in the experience and thematics of temporality: a thematics which seems oddly dated, an experience which no longer seems particularly obsessive, in the post-modernist world of today.

But it is clear that the most influential and elaborate interpretive system of recent times is that of psychoanalysis, which may indeed lay claim to the distinction of being the only really new and original hermeneutic developed since the great patristic and medieval system of the four senses of scripture. So great has been the suggestiveness

37. See *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 195–205.

38. See my "Three Methods in Jean-Paul Sartre's Literary Criticism," in John K. Simon, ed., *Modern French Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Press, 1972), pp. 9–27. We will return to the ideological functions of existentialism, as well as to the possibility of a sociological analysis of this philosophy, in Chapter 5.

of the Freudian model that terms and secondary mechanisms drawn from it are to be found strewn at great distance from their original source, pressed into the service of quite unrelated systems, and not least in the following pages.

To come to some ultimate reckoning with psychoanalysis would require us radically to historicize Freudianism itself, and to reach a reflexive vantage point from which the historical and social conditions of possibility both of Freudian method and of its objects of study came into view. This is not achieved simply by resituating Freud in the Vienna and the Central Europe of his period, although such material is clearly of the greatest interest.[39] Nor is it even achieved when we stress the dependency of the psychoanalytic master code but also of its raw materials—childhood traumas, primal scene fantasies, Oedipal conflicts, "period" illnesses such as hysteria—on the historical institution of the nuclear family.[40] The conditions of possibility of psychoanalysis become visible, one would imagine, only when you begin to appreciate the extent of psychic fragmentation since the beginnings of capitalism, with its systematic quantification and rationalization of experience, its instrumental reorganization of the subject just as much as of the outside world. That the structure of the psyche is historical, and has a history, is, however, as difficult for us to grasp as that the senses are not themselves natural organs but rather the results of a long process of differentiation even within human history.[41] For the dynamic of *rationalization*—Weber's term, which Lukács will

39. See, for example, Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), pp. 419–435; and Stephen Toulmin and A. Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).

40. Jacques Lacan has suggestively underscored the relationship between emergent psychoanalysis and its historical raw material: hysteria as the "desire to desire." (See Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* [Paris: Seuil, 1973], p. 16: "hysteria puts us, so to speak, on the track of a certain original sin of psychoanalysis," by which he evidently means the relationship of this "science" to its historical situation and conditions of possibility. Hysteria in this sense may be understood as a historically new feature of the more general phenomenon of reification discussed in Chapter 5.)

41. "The *senses* have therefore become *theoreticians* in their immediate praxis. They relate to the *thing* for its own sake, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice-versa" (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Second Manuscript, "Private Property and Communism," section 4, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton [London: Penguin/NLB, 1975], p. 352. The whole section is of the greatest interest).

strategically retranslate as *reification* in *History and Class Consciousness*—is a complex one in which the traditional or "natural" [*naturwüchsige*] unities, social forms, human relations, cultural events, even religious systems, are systematically broken up in order to be reconstructed more efficiently, in the form of new post-natural processes or mechanisms; but in which, at the same time, these now isolated broken bits and pieces of the older unities acquire a certain autonomy of their own, a semi-autonomous coherence which, not merely a reflex of capitalist reification and rationalization, also in some measure serves to compensate for the dehumanization of experience reification brings with it, and to rectify the otherwise intolerable effects of the new process. So, to take an obvious example, as sight becomes a separate activity in its own right, it acquires new objects that are themselves the products of a process of abstraction and rationalization which strips the experience of the concrete of such attributes as color, spatial depth, texture, and the like, which in their turn undergo reification. The history of forms evidently reflects this process, by which the visual features of ritual, or those practices of imagery still functional in religious ceremonies, are secularized and reorganized into ends in themselves, in easel painting and new genres like landscape, then more openly in the perceptual revolution of the impressionists, with the autonomy of the visual finally triumphantly proclaimed in abstract expressionism. So Lukács is not wrong to associate the emergence of this modernism with the reification which is its precondition; but he oversimplifies and deproblematizes a complicated and interesting situation by ignoring the Utopian vocation of the newly reified sense, the mission of this heightened and autonomous language of color to restore at least a symbolic experience of libidinal gratification to a world drained of it, a world of extension, gray and merely quantifiable. Much the same might be said of the heightened experience of language in the modern world; and it would be desirable for those who celebrate the discovery of the Symbolic to reflect on the historical conditions of possibility of this new and specifically modern sense of the linguistic, semiotic, textual construction of reality. The "discovery" of Language is at one with its structural abstraction from concrete experience, with its hypostasis as an autonomous object, power, or activity (the work of the later Wittgenstein, who is so often numbered among the

ideologues of the Symbolic, may also be read in the very different sense of a critique of just this conceptualization of language as a thing in itself).[42]

To return to that new event which was the emergence of psychoanalysis, it should be clear that the autonomization of the family as a private space within the nascent public sphere of bourgeois society, and as the "specialization" by which childhood and the family situation are qualitatively differentiated from other biographical experiences, are only features of a far more general process of social development, which also includes the autonomization of sexuality. Freud's object of study is, to be sure, less sexuality as such than desire and its dynamics as a whole; but once again, the precondition for the articulation and analysis of the mechanisms of desire according to such key themes or signifiers as the phallus, castration, the primal scene, the psychosexual stages, narcissism, repression, Eros vs. Thanatos, and the like—which can be taken as the thematics of the Freudian hermeneutic—lies in the preliminary isolation of sexual experience, which enables its constitutive features to carry a wider symbolic meaning. The psychoanalytic demonstration of the sexual dimensions of overtly nonsexual conscious experience and behavior is possible only when the sexual "dispositif" or apparatus has by a process of isolation, autonomization, specialization, developed into an independent sign system or symbolic dimension in its own right; as long as sexuality remains as integrated into social life in general as, say, eating, its possibilities of symbolic extension are to that degree limited, and the sexual retains its status as a banal inner-worldly event and bodily function. Its symbolic possibilities are dependent on its preliminary exclusion from the social field. As for primitive sexuality, if we were able imaginatively to grasp the symbolic trajectory that leads from tattoos and ritual mutilation to the constitution of erogenous zones in modern men and women,[43] we would have gone a long way toward sensing the historicity of the sexual phenomenon.

42. E.g.: "The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1958], para. 304, p. 102). And see also Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, "Per un uso marxiano di Wittgenstein," in *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (Milan: Bompiani, 1968), pp. 11–60.

43. See Serge Leclerc, "La Mi-prise de la lettre," in *Démasquer le réel* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), pp. 63–69.

As I have suggested above, however, the sexual and its thematics are to be considered as the occasion for the Freudian hermeneutic, and as the source of its particular semiotic or symbolic system, rather than its fundamental mechanism. Indeed, this structural rift in the psychoanalytic hermeneutic between its interpretive code and its basic functioning model (or models, for Freud proposed a whole series of them throughout his career[44]) may explain the paradoxical situation of Freudian criticism today, about which we may affirm that the only people still seriously interested in it are the Freudians themselves, at the same time that the prestige and influence of the Freudian oeuvre and of psychoanalysis as a method and a model has never been so immense at any moment of its history. Having learned the Freudian lesson about sexual symbolism, in other words, our interest has been satisfied in this specialized area and can be displaced onto the more general but also more burning question of interpretation itself, and the contribution that such fundamental hermeneutic manuals as *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Jokes and the Unconscious* have made to it.

The center around which the Freudian interpretive system turns is not sexual experience but rather wish-fulfillment, or its more metaphysical variant, "desire," posited as the very dynamic of our being as individual subjects. Is it necessary to stress the dependence of this "discovery" on the increasing abstraction of experience in modern society? Yet the same might be said of other interpretive themes developed during this period, and in particular the meditation, from Nietzsche to Weber, on the nature of value as such. The Nietzschean "transvaluation of all values" and also Weber's own notion of "value-free science" (commonly misconstrued as neutral scientific "objectivity"[45]) constitute so many attempts to project some Archimedean standpoint outside of social life, from which the inner-worldly values of the latter might be abstracted and studied in a kind of experimental or laboratory isolation. Like the rather different Freudian abstractions, then, such conceptions of value are subjectively possible only on the basis of some preliminary objective dissociation within action or behavior itself; and in a later chapter

44. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 65–157.

45. See Eugène Fleischmann, "De Nietzsche à Weber," *Archives européennes de sociologie,* 5 (1964), 190–238; and also my "Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber," *New German Critique*, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), 52–89.

we will see how strongly Joseph Conrad's work is marked by the dialectic of value, which unexpectedly reveals him to be the contemporary of both Nietzsche and Weber.

For with the coming of secular society and the desacralization of life paths and of the various rituals of traditional activity, with the new mobility of the market and the freedom of hesitation before a whole range of professions as well as the even more fundamental and increasingly universal commodification of labor power (on which the central discovery of the labor theory of value was itself dependent), it became possible for the first time to separate the unique quality and concrete content of a particular activity from its abstract organization or end, and to study the latter in isolation. To claim that Freud's conception of wish-fulfillment is a late stage in this process of abstraction (and that it has as epistemological predecessors the Marxian theory of labor power, and the subsequent Nietzschean and Weberian conceptions of value) is simply to observe that you cannot talk about wish-fulfillment or desire except by way of a powerful abstraction performed on a host of concrete and irreducible wishes or desires; and the possibility of performing such a conceptual abstraction subjectively is dependent on the preliminary objective realization of such a process within the raw materials or objects of study. We can think abstractly about the world only to the degree to which the world itself has already become abstract.

From the point of view of a political hermeneutic, measured against the requirements of a "political unconscious," we must conclude that the conception of wish-fulfillment remains locked in a problematic of the individual subject and the individual psychobiography which is only indirectly useful to us. The Lacanian rewriting of Freud should not be read as a mere variant on that Freudian hermeneutic, but rather a substantial and reflexive shift from the Freudian proposition about the nature of the dynamics of the subject (wish-fulfillment) to the interrogation of that problematic itself, foregrounding the category of the subject and studying the process whereby this psychic reality (consciousness)—as well as its buttressing ideologies and illusions (the feeling of personal identity, the myth of the ego or the self, and so forth)—become rigorous and self-imposed limitations on Freud's notion of individual wish-fulfillment. But the ideology of desire in its most fully realized forms

is less an interpretive mode than a whole world-view, a genuine metaphysic, at its most resonant and attractive in its most extreme and grandiose versions, such as that, rich with death and the archaic, of Freud's own late metapsychology, with its vision of the immortal struggle between Eros and Thanatos. Such "theories" certainly rewrite the work; in the various ideologies of desire that have been proposed from Georges Bataille to Deleuze, and passing through such American variants as Norman O. Brown, the object of commentary is effectively transformed into an allegory whose master narrative is the story of desire itself, as it struggles against a repressive reality, convulsively breaking through the grids that were designed to hold it in place or, on the contrary, succumbing to repression and leaving the dreary wasteland of *aphanasis* behind it. At this level, it is to be wondered whether we have to do with a mere interpretation any longer, whether it is not a question here of the production of a whole new aesthetic object, a whole new mythic narrative. It is clear at least that such allegories of desire (generally the products of the Freudian Left) have a great deal more in common with Jungianism and myth criticism proper than they do with the older orthodox Freudian analyses. To such allegories of desire, indeed, may be applied Norman Holland's powerful critique of myth criticism as a whole, about which he observes that it works only if we have been told the work is mythic ahead of time, the unquestionable "resonance" of the mythic rewriting presupposing not the operation of some mythic unconscious but rather our own preliminary conscious "set" toward the reading in question.[46]

Yet, it will be observed, even if the theory of desire is a metaphysic and a myth, it is one whose great narrative events—repression and revolt—ought to be congenial to a Marxist perspective, one whose ultimate Utopian vision of the liberation of desire and of libidinal transfiguration was an essential feature of the great mass revolts of the 1960s in Eastern and Western Europe as well as in China and the United States. But precisely because of this, and more particularly on account of the theoretical as well as political difficulties encountered by the sequels to these movements as they tried to adapt to the very different circumstances of the present

46. Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford, 1968), pp. 243–261, 331–332.

period, such myths must be carefully reexamined. If they have affinities with Marxism, they have even greater ones with anarchism, with whose vital renewal today a contemporary Marxism must also come to terms.

The theoretical objection to the theory of desire has for the most part taken the form of a critique of the notion of transgression on which such theories are inevitably based. It is as though "genuine" desire needed repression in order for us to come to consciousness of it as such: but then in that case desire must always be transgressive, must always have a repressive norm or law through which to burst and against which to define itself. Yet it is a commonplace that transgressions, presupposing the laws or norms or taboos against which they function, thereby end up precisely reconfirming such laws. (For example, blasphemy not only requires you to have a strong sense of the sacred quality of the divine name, but may even be seen as a kind of ritual by which that strength is reawakened and revitalized.) From the point of view of interpretation, what this means is that desire is always outside of time, outside of narrative: it has no content, it is always the same in its cyclical moments of emergence, and the event in question takes on historicity only to the degree that the context of the explosion, the nature of that particular and historical repressive apparatus, knows specification.

What is more damaging, from the present perspective, is that desire, like its paler and more well behaved predecessor, wish-fulfillment, remains locked into the category of the individual subject, even if the form taken by the individual in it is no longer the ego or self, but rather the individual body. We must now argue this objective more consequently, since the need to transcend individualistic categories and modes of interpretation is in many ways the fundamental issue for any doctrine of the political unconscious, of interpretation in terms of the collective or associative. We will do so, however, by shifting from the Freudian hermeneutic to a quite different interpretive system, comparable only to the psychoanalytic one in the persistence of just such a valorization of desire. This is the archetypal system of Northrop Frye, which has the additional interest for us of conceiving of the function of culture explicitly in social terms.

I have suggested elsewhere that ideology leaves its mark on myth criticism insofar as the latter proposes an unbroken continuity be-

tween the social relations and narrative forms of primitive society and the cultural objects of our own.[47] For Marxism, on the contrary, it is the radical break between the two social formations which must be stressed, if we are to begin to grasp the degree to which capitalism has effectively dissolved all the older forms of collective relations, leaving their cultural expressions and their myths as incomprehensible to us as so many dead languages or undecipherable codices. In the present context, however, Frye's work comes before us as a virtual contemporary reinvention of the four-fold hermeneutic associated with the theological tradition.

Indeed, in this sense the trajectory of our discussion, from Freud to Northrop Frye, is an emblematic one: for any contemporary reevaluation of the problem of interpretation, the most vital exchange of energies inevitably takes place between the two poles of the psychoanalytic and the theological, between the rich and concrete practice of interpretation contained in the Freudian texts and dramatized in the diagnostic genius of Freud himself, and the millenary theoretical reflection on the problems and dynamics of interpretation, commentary, allegory, and multiple meanings, which, primarily organized around the central text of the Bible, is preserved in the religious tradition.[48]

The greatness of Frye, and the radical difference between his work and that of the great bulk of garden-variety myth criticism, lies in his willingness to raise the issue of community and to draw basic, essentially social, interpretive consequences from the nature of religion as collective representation. In so doing, Frye rejoins, although he would probably not enjoy the association, that more positive approach to religious symbolism which in the nineteenth century succeeded the essentially negative and destructive stance

47. "Criticism in History," in Norman Rudich, ed., *The Weapons of Criticism* (Palo Alto: Ramparts, 1976), pp. 38–40.

48. This, rather than any lingering or residual "religious" content, explains the strategic function of theological language in Walter Benjamin: to suggest that the "automaton" called "historical materialism" needs to harbor the "wizened dwarf" called theology within it in order to win every chess game it plays ("Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* trans. H. Zohn, [New York: Schocken, 1969], p. 253) is to note, in coded language, the unnatural divorce between Stalinism and the tradition of a more properly hermeneutic Marxism, driven underground in the 1920s and 1930s. See below, Conclusion.

toward it of the Enlightenment, whose sapping of the ideological foundations of the *ancien régime* involved a systematic demystification and debunking of religious phenomena and a clear perception of the legitimizing relationship between what the philosophes conceived as "error" and "superstition" and the arbitrary power of hierarchical political institutions. But for thinkers as diverse as Feuerbach and Durkheim—the one emerging from the radicalism of pre-1848 Germany, the other within a still unstable Third Republic anxiously and in a conservative spirit meditating on the sources of social stability in general—the "illusions" of religion were to be read as the complement of a positive social functionality, and decoded as the figure and the projection of an essentially human energy—whether the latter is grasped as that full and nonalienated development of the human personality and of human potentialities which was the supreme value of German idealism, or, in the case of Durkheim, as a symbol for and confirmation of the organic human community. To be sure, any doctrine of figurality must necessarily be ambiguous: a symbolic expression of a truth is also, at the same time, a distorted and disguised expression, and a theory of figural expression is also a theory of mystification or false consciousness. Religion is thus here the distorted or symbolic coming to consciousness of itself, of the human community, and the critic's distance from religious figures will vary depending on whether, as is the case with Feuerbach (and with Hegel), stress is laid on its symbolic and alienating function, or whether, as in Durkheim's far more retrospective and anthropological account, its vocation as the locus of group identity is foregrounded.[49] The religious figures then become the symbolic space in which the collectivity thinks itself and celebrates its own unity; so that it does not seem a very difficult next step, if, with Frye, we see literature as a weaker form of myth or a later stage of ritual, to conclude that in that sense all literature, no matter how weakly, must be informed by what we have called a political unconscious, that all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community.

Yet it is precisely this second step which Frye, on the one hand

49. See the sections on religion in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as Feuerbach's *Kleine Schriften* (translated as *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach* by Zawar Hanfi [New York: Anchor, 1972]), and the "Conclusion" to Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

powerfully arguing it, then in a curious afterthought seems once more to withdraw; and this movement of recontainment, this impulse to stem the possibilities of collective and social interpretation which his hermeneutic had seemed to open, will serve us as a strategic occasion on which to interrogate religious hermeneutics in general. In this respect, Frye's restructuring of the traditional medieval four levels of meaning is instructive and symptomatic: it will be recalled that his "Theory of Symbols" rewrites the older fourfold scheme as four "phases": the Literal and Descriptive; the Formal; the Mythical or Archetypal; and the Anagogic. By phase, Frye means to designate not so much an interpretive code of a distinct type, as a certain type of attention—what we will shortly term the "horizon" or the "set" of the reading mind toward one particular order of textual phenomena, "a sequence of contexts or relationships in which the whole work of literary art can be placed"[50] such that this particular context determines a particular type of interpretation. His first two phases, the Literal and the Formal, remain essentially particular modalities of the attention of the reading mind, the first an attention to verbal organization and to the order of language, the second marking the shift to something like a phenomenological awareness of content as image, of the work's vocation to convey a symbolic structure or symbolic world by way of the first-level verbal constructions.

It is only at the third level, the Mythical or Archetypal, on which the concepts of both desire and society make their appearance that we reach interpretation proper. As in the medieval system, however, these have been somehow liberated or generated by the first two levels (which are for Frye the enabling institution of literature):

> The archetypal critic studies the poem as part of poetry, and poetry as part of the total human imitation of nature that we call civilization. Civilization is not merely an imitation of nature, and it is impelled by the force that we have just called desire. . . . [Desire] is neither limited to nor satisfied by objects, but is the energy that leads human society to develop its own form. Desire in this sense is the social aspect of what we met on the literal level as emotion, an impulse towards expression which would have remained amorphous if the poem had

50. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 73.

> not liberated it by providing the form of its expression [or in other words, the Second or Formal Phase]. The form of desire, similarly, is liberated and made apparent by civilization. The efficient cause of civilization is work, and poetry in its social aspect has the function of expressing, as a verbal hypothesis, a vision of the goal of work and the forms of desire.[51]

And Frye goes on to enumerate some of the privileged archetypes, "the city, the garden, the farm, the sheep-fold, and the like, as well as human society itself,"[52] through which a symbolic or a heightened consciousness of the collective expresses itself.

Yet paradoxically this level—which the medieval theorists called the anagogic level, and in which the ultimate allegorical coding in terms of the destiny of the human race was achieved—is not yet for Frye the outer limit of what the literary text can do, not yet the final form of "what once, what each time, was *said,* when meaning appeared new, when meaning was at its fullest."[53] For Frye, this final level of meaning begins to emerge only when beyond the natural or inner-wordly archetypes of community we glimpse the human body itself, when in Joycean fashion the landscape slowly turns into a sleeping giant and with allegorical literality the various "members" of society knit themselves together into a genuine organism:

> When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate. "The desire of man being infinite," said Blake, "the possession is infinite and himself infinite."[54]

51. Ibid., pp. 105–106.
52. Ibid., p. 113.
53. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy,* p. 27.
54. Frye, *Anatomy,* p. 119. The fundamental work on the body as a symbol of the organic community is Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

Thus, not only does Frye's Blakean anagogy rejoin by a paradoxical movement that whole metaphysic of desire of which we spoke above; the very concept of apocalypse as the end of history and the culminating struggle of the collectivity is here curiously redirected, rechanneled and indeed recontained, by the image of Blakean absolute "man" and transfigured body projected out upon the universe. Yet equally paradoxically, the association lends Frye's metaphysic of desire a kind of collective and Utopian resonance which the more purely Freudian versions of the metaphysic lacked: when we come to it from the more purely anarchistic and individualizing limits of the left Freudians, this transfigured libidinal body glows and expands with all the political energies of a Blake engraving, and makes it clear that the program of libidinal revolution is political only to the degree that it is itself the figure for social revolution. Yet this movement of figurality is precisely what from the other point of view the arrangement of Frye's allegorical levels recontains: for, being the final "phase" of the allegory, the image of the cosmic body cannot stand for anything further, for anything other than itself. Its figural and political momentum is broken, and the collective content of the image has been reprivatized in the henceforth purely individual terms of the isolated body and the merely personal ecstasy.

This is not to suggest that a Marxian hermeneutic can do without the symbolism and the impulse of libidinal transfiguration. Indeed, radical politics has traditionally alternated between these two classical options or "levels," between the image of the triumph of the collectivity and that of the liberation of the "soul" or "spiritual body"; between a Saint-Simonian vision of social and collective engineering and a Fourieresque Utopia of libidinal gratification; between a 1920s Leninist formulation of communism as "the soviets plus electrification" and some more properly Marcusean 1960s celebration of an instinctual "body politic." The problem is not merely that of the respective priorities of these two "levels," not merely interpretive and hermeneutic, but also practical and political, as the fate of the countercultural movement of the 1960s demonstrates.

As far as Frye's own allegorical method is concerned, its terminological uncertainties may stand as something like an implicit self-critique. We have seen above that in the system of the medieval

four levels of scripture, the third, that of the individual soul is designated as the *moral* level, while it is the fourth or last level—which embraces the whole history of the human race and the last judgment—that is termed the *anagogical* one. In Frye's appropriation of this system, the terms have been reversed: what Frye calls the Mythical or Archetypal level is that of the community—what the medieval exegetes called the *anagogical*—and is now positioned as a third level or phase subsumed under the final one, that of the libidinal body (which Frye, however, designates as the *Anagogical* level[55]). This terminological shift is thus a significant strategic and ideological move, in which political and collective imagery is transformed into a mere relay in some ultimately privatizing celebration of the category of individual experience. The essentially historical interpretive system of the church fathers has here been recontained, and its political elements turned back into the merest figures for the Utopian realities of the individual subject.

A social hermeneutic will, on the contrary, wish to keep faith with its medieval precursor in just this respect, and must necessarily restore a perspective in which the imagery of libidinal revolution and of bodily transfiguration once again becomes a figure for the perfected community. The unity of the body must once again prefigure the renewed organic identity of associative or collective life, rather than, as for Frye, the reverse. Only the community, indeed, can dramatize that self-sufficient intelligible unity (or "structure") of which the individual body, like the individual "subject," is a decentered "effect," and to which the individual organism, caught in the ceaseless chain of the generations and the species, cannot, even in the most desperate Renaissance or Neoplatonic visions of hermaphroditism (or in their contemporary counterpart, the Deleuze-Guattari "bachelor machine"), lay claim.

III

At this point it might seem appropriate to juxtapose a Marxist method of literary and cultural interpretation with those just outlined, and to document its claims to greater adequacy and validity. For better or for worse, however, as I warned in the Preface, this

55. "Our fourth level, the study of myths, and of poetry as a technique of social communication, is the third medieval level of moral and tropological meaning" (*Anatomy*, p. 116).

obvious next step is not the strategy projected by the present book, which rather seeks to argue the perspectives of Marxism as necessary preconditions for adequate literary comprehension. Marxist critical insights will therefore here be defended as something like an ultimate *semantic* precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts. Even this argument, however, needs a certain specification: in particular we will suggest that such semantic enrichment and enlargement of the inert givens and materials of a particular text must take place within three concentric frameworks, which mark a widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chroniclelike sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and, ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us.[56]

These distinct semantic horizons are, to be sure, also distinct moments of the process of interpretation, and may in that sense be understood as dialectical equivalents of what Frye has called the successive "phases" in our reinterpretation—our rereading and rewriting—of the literary text. What we must also note, however, is that each phase or horizon governs a distinct reconstruction of its

56. A useful discussion of the phenomenological concept of "horizon" may be found in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 216–220, 267–274. It will become clear in the course of my subsequent discussion that a Marxian conception of our relationship to the past requires a sense of our radical difference from earlier cultures which is not adequately allowed for in Gadamer's influential notion of *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons). This is perhaps also the moment to add that from the perspective of Marxism as an "absolute historicism," the stark antithesis proposed by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., between Gadamer's historicist "relativism" and Hirsch's own conception of a more absolute interpretive validity, will no longer seem particularly irreconcilable. Hirsch's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, between the scientific analysis of a text's intrinsic "meaning" and what he is pleased to call our "ethical" evaluation of its "significance" for us (see, for example, *The Aims of Interpretation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976]), corresponds to the traditional Marxist distinction between science and ideology, particularly as it has been retheorized by the Althusserians. It is surely a useful working distinction, although in the light of current revisions of the idea of science one should probably make no larger theoretical claims for it than this operative one.

object, and construes the very structure of what can now only in a general sense be called "the text" in a different way.

Thus, within the narrower limits of our first, narrowly political or historical, horizon, the "text," the object of study, is still more or less construed as coinciding with the individual literary work or utterance. The difference between the perspective enforced and enabled by this horizon, however, and that of ordinary *explication de texte,* or individual exegesis, is that here the individual work is grasped essentially as a *symbolic act.*

When we pass into the second phase, and find that the semantic horizon within which we grasp a cultural object has widened to include the social order, we will find that the very object of our analysis has itself been thereby dialectically transformed, and that it is no longer construed as an individual "text" or work in the narrow sense, but has been reconstituted in the form of the great collective and class discourses of which a text is little more than an individual *parole* or utterance. Within this new horizon, then, our object of study will prove to be the *ideologeme,* that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.

When finally, even the passions and values of a particular social formation find themselves placed in a new and seemingly relativized perspective by the ultimate horizon of human history as a whole, and by their respective positions in the whole complex sequence of the modes of production, both the individual text and its ideologemes know a final transformation, and must be read in terms of what I will call the *ideology of form,* that is, the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production.

The general movement through these three progressively wider horizons will largely coincide with the shifts in focus of the final chapters in this book, and will be felt, although not narrowly and programmatically underscored, in the methodological transformations determined by the historical transformations of their textual objects, from Balzac to Gissing to Conrad.

We must now briefly characterize each of these semantic or interpretive horizons. We have suggested that it is only in the first narrowly political horizon—in which history is reduced to a series

of punctual events and crises in time, to the diachronic agitation of the year-to-year, the chroniclelike annals of the rise and fall of political regimes and social fashions, and the passionate immediacy of struggles between historical individuals—that the "text" or object of study will tend to coincide with the individual literary work or cultural artifact. Yet to specify this individual text as a symbolic act is already fundamentally to transform the categories with which traditional *explication de texte* (whether narrative or poetic) operated and largely still operates.

The model for such an interpretive operation remains the readings of myth and aesthetic structure of Claude Lévi-Strauss as they are codified in his fundamental essay "The Structural Study of Myth."[57] These suggestive, often sheerly occasional, readings and speculative glosses immediately impose a basic analytical or interpretive principle: the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction. Thus, to take only the most dramatic of Lévi-Strauss's analyses—the "interpretation" of the unique facial decorations of the Caduveo Indians—the starting point will be an immanent description of the formal and structural peculiarities of this body art; yet it must be a description already pre-prepared and oriented toward transcending the purely formalistic, a movement which is achieved not by abandoning the formal level for something extrinsic to it—such as some inertly social "content"—but rather immanently, by construing purely formal patterns as a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic. Such symbolic functions are, however, rarely found by an aimless enumeration of random formal and stylistic features; our discovery of a text's symbolic efficacity must be oriented by a formal description which seeks to grasp it as a determinate structure of still properly formal *contradictions.* Thus, Lévi-Strauss orients his still purely visual analysis

57. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology,* trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (New York: Basic, 1963), pp. 206–231. The later four-volume *Mythologiques* reverse the perspective of this analysis: where the earlier essay focused on the individual mythic *parole* or utterance, the later series models the entire system or *langue* in terms of which the various individual myths are related to each other. *Mythologiques* should therefore rather be used as suggestive material on the historical difference between the narrative mode of production of primitive societies and that of our own: in this sense, the later work would find its place in the third and final horizon of interpretation.

of Caduveo facial decorations toward this climactic account of their contradictory dynamic: "the use of a design which is symmetrical but yet lies across an oblique axis . . . a complicated situation based upon two contradictory forms of duality, and resulting in a compromise brought about by a secondary opposition between the ideal axis of the object itself [the human face] and the ideal axis of the figure which it represents."[58] Already on the purely formal level, then, this visual text has been grasped as a contradiction by way of the curiously provisional and asymmetrical resolution it proposes for that contradiction.

Lévi-Strauss's "interpretation" of this formal phenomenon may now, perhaps overhastily, be specified. Caduveo are a hierarchical society, organized in three endogamous groups or castes. In their social development, as in that of their neighbors, this nascent hierarchy is already the place of the emergence, if not of political power in the strict sense, then at least of relations of domination: the inferior status of women, the subordination of youth to elders, and the development of a hereditary aristocracy. Yet whereas this latent power structure is, among the neighboring Guana and Bororo, masked by a division into moieties which cuts across the three castes, and whose exogamous exchange appears to function in a nonhierarchical, essentially egalitarian way, it is openly present in Caduveo life, as surface inequality and conflict. The social institutions of the Guana and Bororo, on the other hand, provide a realm of appearance, in which real hierarchy and inequality are dissimulated by the reciprocity of the moieties, and in which, therefore, "asymmetry of class is balanced . . . by symmetry of 'moieties.'"

As for the Caduveo,

> they were never lucky enough to resolve their contradictions, or to disguise them with the help of institutions artfully devised for that purpose. On the social level, the remedy was lacking . . . but it was never completely out of their grasp. It was within them, never objectively formulated, but present as a source of confusion and disquiet. Yet since they were unable to conceptualize or to live this solution directly, they began to dream it, to project it into the imaginary. . . . We must therefore interpret the graphic art of Caduveo

58. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques,* trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1971), p. 176.

> women, and explain its mysterious charm as well as its apparently gratuitous complication, as the fantasy production of a society seeking passionately to give symbolic expression to the institutions it might have had in reality, had not interest and superstition stood in the way.[59]

In this fashion, then, the visual text of Caduveo facial art constitutes a symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm.

This interpretive model thus allows us a first specification of the relationship between ideology and cultural texts or artifacts: a specification still conditioned by the limits of the first, narrowly historical or political horizon in which it is made. We may suggest that from this perspective, ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions.

Lévi-Strauss's work also suggests a more general defense of the proposition of a political unconscious than we have hitherto been able to present, insofar as it offers the spectacle of so-called primitive peoples perplexed enough by the dynamics and contradictions of their still relatively simple forms of tribal organization to project decorative or mythic resolutions of issues that they are unable to articulate conceptually. But if this is the case for precapitalist and even pre-political societies, then how much more must it be true for the citizen of the modern *Gesellschaft,* faced with the great constitutional options of the revolutionary period, and with the corrosive and tradition-annihilating effects of the spread of a money and market economy, with the changing cast of collective characters which oppose the bourgeoisie, now to an embattled aristocracy, now to an urban proletariat, with the great fantasms of the various nationalisms, now themselves virtual "subjects of history" of a rather different kind, with the social homogenization and psychic constriction of the rise of the industrial city and its "masses," the sudden appearance of the great

59. Ibid., pp. 179–180.

transnational forces of communism and fascism, followed by the advent of the superstates and the onset of that great ideological rivalry between capitalism and communism, which, no less passionate and obsessive than that which, at the dawn of modern times, seethed through the wars of religion, marks the final tension of our now global village? It does not, indeed, seem particularly farfetched to suggest that these texts of history, with their fantasmatic collective "actants," their narrative organization, and their immense charge of anxiety and libidinal investment, are lived by the contemporary subject as a genuine politico-historical *pensée sauvage* which necessarily informs all of our cultural artifacts, from the literary institutions of high modernism all the way to the products of mass culture. Under these circumstances, Lévi-Strauss's work suggests that the proposition whereby all cultural artifacts are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions deserves serious exploration and systematic experimental verification. It will become clear in later chapters of this book that the most readily accessible formal articulation of the operations of a political *pensée sauvage* of this kind will be found in what we will call the structure of a properly political *allegory,* as it develops from networks of topical allusion in Spenser or Milton or Swift to the symbolic narratives of class representatives or "types" in novels like those of Balzac. With political allegory, then, a sometimes repressed ur-narrative or master fantasy about the interaction of collective subjects, we have moved to the very borders of our second horizon, in which what we formerly regarded as individual texts are grasped as "utterances" in an essentially collective or class discourse.

We cannot cross those borders, however, without some final account of the critical operations involved in our first interpretive phase. We have implied that in order to be consequent, the will to read literary or cultural texts as symbolic acts must necessarily grasp them as resolutions of determinate contradictions; and it is clear that the notion of contradiction is central to any Marxist cultural analysis, just as it will remain central in our two subsequent horizons, although it will there take rather different forms. The methodological requirement to articulate a text's fundamental contradiction may then be seen as a test of the completeness of the analysis: this is why, for example, the conventional sociology of literature or culture, which modestly limits itself to the identifica-

tion of class motifs or values in a given text, and feels that its work is done when it shows how a given artifact "reflects" its social background, is utterly unacceptable. Meanwhile, Kenneth Burke's play of emphases, in which a symbolic act is on the one hand affirmed as a genuine *act*, albeit on the symbolic level, while on the other it is registered as an act which is "merely" symbolic, its resolutions imaginary ones that leave the real untouched, suitably dramatizes the ambiguous status of art and culture.

Still, we need to say a little more about the status of this external reality, of which it will otherwise be thought that it is little more than the traditional notion of "context" familiar in older social or historical criticism. The type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*, it being always understood that that "subtext" is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, nor even the conventional narratives of history manuals, but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact. The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow "reality" to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are to be traced back to this process, whereby language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext. Insofar, in other words, as symbolic action—what Burke will map as "dream," "prayer," or "chart"[60]—is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling "world" must inhere within it, as the content it has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form. The symbolic act therefore begins by generating and producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back from it, taking its measure with a view toward its own projects of transformation. The whole paradox of what we have here called the

60. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 5–6; and see also my "Symbolic Inference; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis," *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (Spring, 1978), 507–523.

subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it, thereby encouraging and perpetuating the illusion that the situation itself did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra- or con-textual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of a mirage. One does not have to argue the reality of history: necessity, like Dr. Johnson's stone, does that for us. That history—Althusser's "absent cause," Lacan's "Real"—is *not* a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization. Thus, to insist on either of the two inseparable yet incommensurable dimensions of the symbolic act without the other: to overemphasize the active way in which the text reorganizes its subtext (in order, presumably, to reach the triumphant conclusion that the "referent" does not exist); or on the other hand to stress the imaginary status of the symbolic act so completely as to reify its social ground, now no longer understood as a subtext but merely as some inert given that the text passively or fantasmatically "reflects"—to overstress either of these functions of the symbolic act at the expense of the other is surely to produce sheer ideology, whether it be, as in the first alternative, the ideology of structuralism, or, in the second, that of vulgar materialism.

Still, this view of the place of the "referent" will be neither complete nor methodologically usable unless we specify a supplementary distinction between several types of subtext to be (re)constructed. We have implied, indeed, that the social contradiction addressed and "resolved" by the formal prestidigitation of narrative must, however reconstructed, remain an absent cause, which cannot be directly or immediately conceptualized by the text. It seems useful, therefore, to distinguish, from this ultimate subtext which is the place of social *contradiction,* a secondary one, which is more properly the place of ideology, and which takes the form of the *aporia* or the *antinomy:* what can in the former be resolved only through the intervention of praxis here comes before the purely contemplative mind as logical scandal or double bind, the

unthinkable and the conceptually paradoxical, that which cannot be unknotted by the operation of pure thought, and which must therefore generate a whole more properly narrative apparatus—the text itself—to square its circles and to dispel, through narrative movement, its intolerable closure. Such a distinction, positing a system of antinomies as the symptomatic expression and conceptual reflex of something quite different, namely a social contradiction, will now allow us to reformulate that coordination between a semiotic and a dialectical method, which was evoked in the preceding section. The operational validity of semiotic analysis, and in particular of the Greimassian semiotic rectangle,[61] derives, as was suggested there, not from its adequacy to nature or being, nor even from its capacity to map all forms of thinking or language, but rather from its vocation specifically to model ideological closure and to articulate the workings of binary oppositions, here the privileged form of what we have called the antinomy. A dialectical reevaluation of the findings of semiotics intervenes, however, at the moment in which this entire system of ideological closure is taken as the symptomatic projection of something quite different, namely of social contradiction.

We may now leave this first textual or interpretive model behind, and pass over into the second horizon, that of the social. The latter becomes visible, and individual phenomena are revealed as social facts and institutions, only at the moment in which the organizing categories of analysis become those of social class. I have in another place described the dynamics of ideology in its constituted form as a function of social class:[62] suffice it only to recall here that for Marxism classes must always be apprehended relationally, and that the ultimate (or ideal) form of class relationship and class struggle is always dichotomous. The constitutive form of class relationships is always that between a dominant and a laboring class: and it is only in terms of this axis that class fractions (for example, the petty

61. See Chapter 3, note 13, and above, pp. 46–49.

62. *Marxism and Form,* pp. 376–382; and see below, pp. 288–291. The most authoritative contemporary Marxist statement of this view of social class is to be found in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Classes* (New York: Vintage, 1966), pp. 9–11; in *The Poverty of Theory,* Thompson has argued that his view of classes is incompatible with "structural" Marxism, for which classes are not "subjects" but rather "positions" within the social totality (see, for the Althusserian position, Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*).

bourgeoisie) or ec-centric or dependent classes (such as the peasantry) are positioned. To define class in this way is sharply to differentiate the Marxian model of classes from the conventional sociological analysis of society into strata, subgroups, professional elites and the like, each of which can presumably be studied in isolation from one another in such a way that the analysis of their "values" or their "cultural space" folds back into separate and independent *Weltanschauungen,* each of which inertly reflects its particular "stratum." For Marxism, however, the very content of a class ideology is relational, in the sense that its "values" are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant "value system."

This is the sense in which we will say, following Mikhail Bakhtin, that within this horizon class discourse—the categories in terms of which individual texts and cultural phenomena are now rewritten—is essentially *dialogical* in its structure.[63] As Bakhtin's (and Voloshinov's) own work in this field is relatively specialized, focusing primarily on the heterogeneous and explosive pluralism of moments of carnival or festival (moments, for example, such as the immense resurfacing of the whole spectrum of the religious or political sects in the English 1640s or the Soviet 1920s) it will be necessary to add the qualification that the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one, and that the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code. Thus, for instance, the shared master code of religion becomes in the 1640s in England the place in which the dominant formulations of a hegemonic theology are reappropriated and polemically modified.[64]

63. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics,* trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), pp. 153–169. See also Bakhtin's important book on linguistics, written under the name of V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* trans. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), pp. 83–98; and Bakhtin's posthumous collection, *Esthétique et théorie du roman,* trans. Daria Olivier (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), esp. pp. 152–182.

64. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Temple Smith, 1972).

Within this new horizon, then, the basic formal requirement of dialectical analysis is maintained, and its elements are still restructured in terms of *contradiction* (this is essentially, as we have said, what distinguishes the relationality of a Marxist class analysis from static analysis of the sociological type). Where the contradiction of the earlier horizon was univocal, however, and limited to the situation of the individual text, to the place of a purely individual symbolic resolution, contradiction here appears in the form of the dialogical as the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes. Here again, then, the requirement to prolong interpretation to the point at which this ultimate contradiction begins to appear offers a criterion for the completeness or insufficiency of the analysis.

Yet to rewrite the individual text, the individual cultural artifact, in terms of the antagonistic dialogue of class voices is to perform a rather different operation from the one we have ascribed to our first horizon. Now the individual text will be refocused as a *parole,* or individual utterance, of that vaster system, or *langue,* of class discourse. The individual text retains its formal structure as a symbolic act: yet the value and character of such symbolic action are now significantly modified and enlarged. On this rewriting, the individual utterance or text is grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes, and to describe it in these terms (or to reveal it in this form) demands a whole set of different instruments.

For one thing, the illusion or appearance of isolation or autonomy which a printed text projects must now be systematically undermined. Indeed, since by definition the cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of a hegemonic class, they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture.

This is the framework in which the reconstruction of so-called popular cultures must properly take place—most notably, from the fragments of essentially peasant cultures: folk songs, fairy tales,

popular festivals, occult or oppositional systems of belief such as magic and witchcraft. Such reconstruction is of a piece with the reaffirmation of the existence of marginalized or oppositional cultures in our own time, and the reaudition of the oppositional voices of black or ethnic cultures, women's and gay literature, "naive" or marginalized folk art, and the like. But once again, the affirmation of such nonhegemonic cultural voices remains ineffective if it is limited to the merely "sociological" perspective of the pluralistic rediscovery of other isolated social groups: only an ultimate rewriting of these utterances in terms of their essentially polemic and subversive strategies restores them to their proper place in the dialogical system of the social classes. Thus, for instance, Bloch's reading of the fairy tale, with its magical wish-fulfillments and its Utopian fantasies of plenty and the *pays de Cocagne,*[65] restores the dialogical and antagonistic content of this "form" by exhibiting it as a systematic deconstruction and undermining of the hegemonic aristocratic form of the epic, with its somber ideology of heroism and baleful destiny; thus also the work of Eugene Genovese on black religion restores the vitality of these utterances by reading them, not as the replication of imposed beliefs, but rather as a process whereby the hegemonic Christianity of the slave-owners is appropriated, secretly emptied of its content and subverted to the transmission of quite different oppositional and coded messages.[66]

Moreover, the stress on the dialogical then allows us to reread or rewrite the hegemonic forms themselves; they also can be grasped as a process of the reappropriation and neutralization, the cooptation and class transformation, the cultural universalization, of forms which originally expressed the situation of "popular," subordinate, or dominated groups. So the slave religion of Christianity is transformed into the hegemonic ideological apparatus of the medieval system; while folk music and peasant dance find themselves transmuted into the forms of aristocratic or court festivity and into the cultural visions of the pastoral; and popular narrative from time immemorial—romance, adventure story, melodrama, and the like—is ceaselessly drawn on to restore vitality to an enfeebled and

65. Ernst Bloch, "Zerstörung, Rettung des Mythos durch Licht," in *Verfremdungen* I (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 152–162.

66. Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll* (New York: Vintage, 1976), pp. 161–284.

asphyxiating "high culture." Just so, in our own time, the vernacular and its still vital sources of production (as in black language) are reappropriated by the exhausted and media-standardized speech of a hegemonic middle class. In the aesthetic realm, indeed, the process of cultural "universalization" (which implies the repression of the oppositional voice, and the illusion that there is only one genuine "culture") is the specific form taken by what can be called the process of legitimation in the realm of ideology and conceptual systems.

Still, this operation of rewriting and of the restoration of an essentially dialogical or class horizon will not be complete until we specify the "units" of this larger system. The linguistic metaphor (rewriting texts in terms of the opposition of a *parole* to a *langue*) cannot, in other words, be particularly fruitful until we are able to convey something of the dynamics proper to a class *langue* itself, which is evidently, in Saussure's sense, something like an ideal construct that is never wholly visible and never fully present in any one of its individual utterances. This larger class discourse can be said to be organized around minimal "units" which we will call *ideologemes.* The advantage of this formulation lies in its capacity to mediate between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion, class value, and the like, and the narrative materials with which we will be working here. The ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea—a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice—or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are the classes in opposition. This duality means that the basic requirement for the full description of the ideologeme is already given in advance: as a construct it must be susceptible to both a conceptual description and a narrative manifestation all at once. The ideologeme can of course be elaborated in either of these directions, taking on the finished appearance of a philosophical system on the one hand, or that of a cultural text on the other; but the ideological analysis of these finished cultural products requires us to demonstrate each one as a complex work of transformation on that ultimate raw material which is the ideologeme in question. The analyst's work is thus first that of the identification of the ideologeme, and, in many cases, of its initial

naming in instances where for whatever reason it had not yet been registered as such. The immense preparatory task of identifying and inventorying such ideologemes has scarcely even begun, and to it the present book will make but the most modest contribution: most notably in its isolation of that fundamental nineteenth-century ideologeme which is the "theory" of *ressentiment*, and in its "unmasking" of ethics and the ethical binary opposition of good and evil as one of the fundamental forms of ideological thought in Western culture. However, our stress here and throughout on the fundamentally narrative character of such ideologemes (even where they seem to be articulated only as abstract conceptual beliefs or values) will offer the advantage of restoring the complexity of the transactions between opinion and protonarrative or libidinal fantasy. Thus we will observe, in the case of Balzac, the generation of an overt and constituted ideological and political "value system" out of the operation of an essentially narrative and fantasy dynamic; the chapter on Gissing, on the other hand, will show how an already constituted "narrative paradigm" emits an ideological message in its own right without the mediation of authorial intervention.

This focus or horizon, that of class struggle and its antagonistic discourses, is, as we have already suggested, not the ultimate form a Marxist analysis of culture can take. The example just alluded to—that of the seventeenth-century English revolution, in which the various classes and class fractions found themselves obliged to articulate their ideological struggles through the shared medium of a religious master code—can serve to dramatize the shift whereby these objects of study are reconstituted into a structurally distinct "text" specific to this final enlargement of the analytical frame. For the possibility of a displacement in emphasis is already given in this example: we have suggested that within the apparent unity of the theological code, the fundamental difference of antagonistic class positions can be made to emerge. In that case, the inverse move is also possible, and such concrete semantic differences can on the contrary be focused in such a way that what emerges is rather the all-embracing unity of a single code which they must share and which thus characterizes the larger unity of the social system. This new object—code, sign system, or system of the production of signs

and codes—thus becomes an index of an entity of study which greatly transcends those earlier ones of the narrowly political (the symbolic act), and the social (class discourse and the ideologeme), and which we have proposed to term the historical in the larger sense of this word. Here the organizing unity will be what the Marxian tradition designates as a *mode of production.*

I have already observed that the "problematic" of modes of production is the most vital new area of Marxist theory in all the disciplines today; not paradoxically, it is also one of the most traditional, and we must therefore, in a brief preliminary way, sketch in the "sequence" of modes of production as classical Marxism, from Marx and Engels to Stalin, tended to enumerate them.[67] These modes, or "stages" of human society, have traditionally included the following: primitive communism or tribal society (the horde), the *gens* or hierarchical kinship societies (neolithic society), the Asiatic mode of production (so-called Oriental despotism), the *polis* or an oligarchical slaveholding society (the ancient mode of production), feudalism, capitalism, and communism (with a good deal of debate as to whether the "transitional" stage between these last—sometimes called "socialism"—is a genuine mode of production in its own right or not). What is more significant in the present context is that even this schematic or mechanical conception of historical "stages" (what the Althusserians have systematically criticized under the term "historicism") includes the notion of a cultural dominant or form of ideological coding specific to each mode of production. Following the same order these have generally been conceived as magic and mythic narrative, kinship, religion or the sacred, "politics" according to the narrower category of citi-

67. The "classical" texts on modes of production, besides Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), are Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations,* a section of the *Grundrisse* (1857–58) published separately by Eric Hobsbawm (New York: International, 1965), and Friedrich Engels, *The Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). Important recent contributions to the mode of production "debate" include Etienne Balibar's contribution to Althusser's collective volume, *Reading Capital;* Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies,* trans. M. Klopper (New York: Monthly Review, 1972); Maurice Godelier, *Horizon: trajets marxistes en anthropologie* (Paris: Maspéro, 1973); J. Chesneaux, ed., *Sur le "mode de production asiatique"* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1969); and Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

zenship in the ancient city state, relations of personal domination, commodity reification, and (presumably) original and as yet nowhere fully developed forms of collective or communal association.

Before we can determine the cultural "text" or object of study specific to the horizon of modes of production, however, we must make two preliminary remarks about the methodological problems it raises. The first will bear on whether the concept of "mode of production" is a synchronic one, while the second will address the temptation to use the various modes of production for a classifying or typologizing operation, in which cultural texts are simply dropped into so many separate compartments.

Indeed, a number of theorists have been disturbed by the apparent convergence between the properly Marxian notion of an all-embracing and all-structuring mode of production (which assigns everything within itself—culture, ideological production, class articulation, technology—a specific and unique place), and non-Marxist visions of a "total system" in which the various elements or levels of social life are programmed in some increasingly constricting way. Weber's dramatic notion of the "iron cage" of an increasingly bureaucratic society,[68] Foucault's image of the gridwork of an ever more pervasive "political technology of the body,"[69] but also more traditional "synchronic" accounts of the cultural programming of a given historical "moment," such as those that have variously been proposed from Vico and Hegel to Spengler and Deleuze—all such monolithic models of the cultural unity of a given historical period have tended to confirm the suspicions of a dialecti-

68. "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the saint 'like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage." *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1958), p. 181.

69. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 27–28 and passim.

cal tradition about the dangers of an emergent "synchronic" thought, in which change and development are relegated to the marginalized category of the merely "diachronic," the contingent or the rigorously nonmeaningful (and this, even where, as with Althusser, such models of cultural unity are attacked as forms of a more properly Hegelian and idealistic "expressive causality"). This theoretical foreboding about the limits of synchronic thought can perhaps be most immediately grasped in the political area, where the model of the "total system" would seem slowly and inexorably to eliminate any possibility of the *negative* as such, and to reintegrate the place of an oppositional or even merely "critical" practice and resistance back into the system as the latter's mere inversion. In particular, everything about class struggle that was anticipatory in the older dialectical framework, and seen as an emergent space for radically new social relations, would seem, in the synchronic model, to reduce itself to practices that in fact tend to reinforce the very system that foresaw and dictated their specific limits. This is the sense in which Jean Baudrillard has suggested that the "total-system" view of contemporary society reduces the options of resistance to anarchist gestures, to the sole remaining ultimate protests of the wildcat strike, terrorism, and death. Meanwhile, in the framework of the analysis of culture also, the latter's integration into a synchronic model would seem to empty cultural production of all its antisystemic capacities, and to "unmask" even the works of an overtly oppositional or political stance as instruments ultimately programmed by the system itself.

It is, however, precisely the notion of a series of enlarging theoretical horizons proposed here that can assign these disturbing synchronic frameworks their appropriate analytical places and dictate their proper use. This notion projects a long view of history which is inconsistent with concrete political action and class struggle only if the specificity of the horizons is not respected; thus, even if the concept of a mode of production is to be considered a synchronic one (and we will see in a moment that things are somewhat more complicated than this), at the level of historical abstraction at which such a concept is properly to be used, the lesson of the "vision" of a total system is for the short run one of the structural limits imposed on praxis rather than the latter's impossibility.

The theoretical problem with the synchronic systems enumerated

above lies elsewhere, and less in their analytical framework than in what in a Marxist perspective might be called their infrastructural regrounding. Historically, such systems have tended to fall into two general groups, which one might term respectively the hard and soft visions of the total system. The first group projects a fantasy future of a "totalitarian" type in which the mechanisms of domination—whether these are understood as part of the more general process of bureaucratization, or on the other hand derive more immediately from the deployment of physical and ideological force—are grasped as irrevocable and increasingly pervasive tendencies whose mission is to colonize the last remnants and survivals of human freedom—to occupy and organize, in other words, what still persists of Nature objectively and subjectively (very schematically, the Third World and the Unconscious).

This group of theories can perhaps hastily be associated with the central names of Weber and Foucault; the second group may then be associated with names such as those of Jean Baudrillard and the American theorists of a "post-industrial society."[70] For this second group, the characteristics of the total system of contemporary world society are less those of political domination than those of cultural programming and penetration: not the iron cage, but rather the *société de consommation* with its consumption of images and simulacra, its free-floating signifiers and its effacement of the older structures of social class and traditional ideological hegemony. For both groups, world capitalism is in evolution toward a system which is not socialist in any classical sense, on the one hand the nightmare of total control and on the other the polymorphous or schizophrenic intensities of some ultimate counterculture (which may be no less disturbing for some than the overtly threatening characteristics of the first vision). What one must add is that neither kind of analysis respects the Marxian injunction of the "ultimately determining instance" of economic organization and tendencies: for both, indeed, economics (or political economy) of that type is in the new total system of the contemporary world at an end, and the economic finds itself in

70. Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968); *La Société de consommation* (Paris: Denöel, 1970); *Pour une économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). The most influential statement of the American version of this "end of ideology"/consumer society position is, of course, that of Daniel Bell: see his *Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic, 1973) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic, 1976).

both reassigned to a secondary and nondeterminant position beneath the new dominant of political power or of cultural production respectively.

There exist, however, within Marxism itself precise equivalents to these two non-Marxian visions of the contemporary total system: rewritings, if one likes, of both in specifically Marxian and "economic" terms. These are the analyses of late capitalism in terms of *capitalogic*[71] and of *disaccumulation,*[72] respectively; and while this book is clearly not the place to discuss such theories at any length, it must be observed here that both, seeing the originality of the contemporary situation in terms of systemic tendencies *within* capitalism, reassert the theoretical priority of the organizing concept of the mode of production which we have been concerned to argue.

We must therefore now turn to the second related problem about this third and ultimate horizon, and deal briefly with the objection that cultural analysis pursued within it will tend toward a purely typological or classificatory operation, in which we are called upon to "decide" such issues as whether Milton is to be read within a "precapitalist" or a nascent capitalist context, and so forth. I have insisted elsewhere on the sterility of such classificatory procedures, which may always, it seems to me, be taken as symptoms and indices of the repression of a more genuinely dialectical or historical practice

71. See, for a review and critique of the basic literature, Stanley Aronowitz, "Marx, Braverman, and the Logic of Capital," *Insurgent Sociologist,* VIII, No. 2/3 (Fall, 1978), pp. 126–146; and see also Hans-Georg Backhaus, "Zur Dialektik der Wertform," in A. Schmidt, ed., *Beiträge zur marxistischen Erkenntnistheorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), pp. 128–152; and Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1970). For the Capitalogicians, the "materialist kernel" of Hegel is revealed by grasping the concrete or objective reality of Absolute Spirit (the Notion in-and-for-itself) as none other than capital (Reichelt, pp. 77–78). This tends, however, to force them into the post-Marxist position for which the dialectic is seen as the thought-mode proper only to capitalism (Backhaus, pp. 140–141): in that case, of course, the dialectic would become unnecessary and anachronistic in a society that had abolished the commodity form.

72. The basic texts on "disaccumulation theory" are Martin J. Sklar, "On the Proletarian Revolution and the End of Political-Economic Society," *Radical America,* III, No. 3 (May-June, 1969), pp. 1–41; Jim O'Connor, "Productive and Unproductive Labor," *Politics and Society,* 5 (1975), pp. 297–336; Fred Block and Larry Hirschhorn, "New Productive Forces and the Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism," *Theory and Society,* 7 (1979), 363–395; and Stanley Aronowitz, "The End of Political Economy," *Social Text,* No. 2 (1980), pp. 3–52.

of cultural analysis. This diagnosis may now be expanded to cover all three horizons at issue here, where the practice of homology, that of a merely "sociological" search for some social or class equivalent, and that, finally, of the use of some typology of social and cultural systems, respectively, may stand as examples of the misuse of these three frameworks. Furthermore, just as in our discussion of the first two we have stressed the centrality of the category of contradiction for any Marxist analysis (seen, within the first horizon, as that which the cultural and ideological artifact tries to "resolve," and in the second as the nature of the social and class conflict within which a given work is one act or gesture), so too here we can effectively validate the horizon of the mode of production by showing the form contradiction takes on this level, and the relationship of the cultural object to it.

Before we do so, we must take note of more recent objections to the very concept of the mode of production. The traditional schema of the various modes of production as so many historical "stages" has generally been felt to be unsatisfactory, not least because it encourages the kind of typologizing criticized above, in political quite as much as in cultural analysis. (The form taken in political analysis is evidently the procedure which consists in "deciding" whether a given conjuncture is to be assigned to a moment within feudalism—the result being a demand for bourgeois and parliamentary rights—or within capitalism—with the accompanying "reformist" strategy—or, on the contrary, a genuine "revolutionary" moment—in which case the appropriate revolutionary strategy is then deduced.)

On the other hand, it has become increasingly clear to a number of contemporary theorists that such classification of "empirical" materials within this or that abstract category is impermissible in large part because of the level of abstraction of the concept of a mode of production: no historical society has ever "embodied" a mode of production in any pure state (nor is *Capital* the description of a historical society, but rather the construction of the abstract concept of capitalism). This has led certain contemporary theorists, most notably Nicos Poulantzas,[73] to insist on the distinction between a "mode of production" as a purely theoretical construction

73. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, pp. 13–16.

and a "social formation" that would involve the description of some historical society at a certain moment of its development. This distinction seems inadequate and even misleading, to the degree that it encourages the very empirical thinking which it was concerned to denounce, in other words, subsuming a particular or an empirical "fact" under this or that corresponding "abstraction." Yet one feature of Poulantzas' discussion of the "social formation" may be retained: his suggestion that every social formation or historically existing society has in fact consisted in the overlay and structural coexistence of *several* modes of production all at once, including vestiges and survivals of older modes of production, now relegated to structurally dependent positions within the new, as well as anticipatory tendencies which are potentially inconsistent with the existing system but have not yet generated an autonomous space of their own.

But if this suggestion is valid, then the problems of the "synchronic" system and of the typological temptation are both solved at one stroke. What is synchronic is the "concept" of the mode of production; the moment of the historical coexistence of several modes of production is not synchronic in this sense, but open to history in a dialectical way. The temptation to classify texts according to the appropriate mode of production is thereby removed, since the texts emerge in a space in which we may expect them to be crisscrossed and intersected by a variety of impulses from contradictory modes of cultural production all at once.

Yet we have still not characterized the specific object of study which is constructed by this new and final horizon. It cannot, as we have shown, consist in the concept of an individual mode of production (any more than, in our second horizon, the specific object of study could consist in a particular social class in isolation from the others). We will therefore suggest that this new and ultimate object may be designated, drawing on recent historical experience, as *cultural revolution,* that moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social, and historical life. The incomplete Chinese experiment with a "proletarian" cultural revolution may be invoked in support of the proposition that previous history has known a whole range of equivalents for similar processes to which the term may legitimately be extended. So the

Western Enlightenment may be grasped as part of a properly bourgeois cultural revolution, in which the values and the discourses, the habits and the daily space, of the *ancien régime* were systematically dismantled so that in their place could be set the new conceptualities, habits and life forms, and value systems of a capitalist market society. This process clearly involved a vaster historical rhythm than such punctual historical events as the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution, and includes in its *longue durée* such phenomena as those described by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—a work that can now in its turn be read as a contribution to the study of the bourgeois cultural revolution, just as the corpus of work on romanticism is now repositioned as the study of a significant and ambiguous moment in the resistance to this particular "great transformation," alongside the more specifically "popular" (precapitalist as well as working-class) forms of cultural resistance.

But if this is the case, then we must go further and suggest that all previous modes of production have been accompanied by cultural revolutions specific to them of which the neolithic "cultural revolution," say, the triumph of patriarchy over the older matriarchal or tribal forms, or the victory of Hellenic "justice" and the new legality of the *polis* over the vendetta system are only the most dramatic manifestations. The concept of cultural revolution, then—or more precisely, the reconstruction of the materials of cultural and literary history in the form of this new "text" or object of study which is cultural revolution—may be expected to project a whole new framework for the humanities, in which the study of culture in the widest sense could be placed on a materialist basis.

This description is, however, misleading to the degree to which it suggests that "cultural revolution" is a phenomenon limited to so-called "transitional" periods, during which social formations dominated by one mode of production undergo a radical restructuration in the course of which a different "dominant" emerges. The problem of such "transitions" is a traditional crux of the Marxian problematic of modes of production, nor can it be said that any of the solutions proposed, from Marx's own fragmentary discussions to the recent model of Etienne Balibar, are altogether satisfactory, since in all of them the inconsistency between a "synchronic" description of a given system and a "diachronic" account of the pas-

sage from one system to another seems to return with undiminished intensity. But our own discussion began with the idea that a given social formation consisted in the coexistence of various synchronic systems or modes of production, each with its own dynamic or time scheme—a kind of metasynchronicity, if one likes—while we have now shifted to a description of cultural revolution which has been couched in the more diachronic language of systemic transformation. I will therefore suggest that these two apparently inconsistent accounts are simply the twin perspectives which our thinking (and our presentation or *Darstellung* of that thinking) can take on this same vast historical object. Just as overt revolution is no punctual event either, but brings to the surface the innumerable daily struggles and forms of class polarization which are at work in the whole course of social life that precedes it, and which are therefore latent and implicit in "prerevolutionary" social experience, made visible as the latter's deep structure only in such "moments of truth"—so also the overtly "transitional" moments of cultural revolution are themselves but the passage to the surface of a permanent process in human societies, of a permanent struggle between the various coexisting modes of production. The triumphant moment in which a new systemic dominant gains ascendency is therefore only the diachronic manifestation of a constant struggle for the perpetuation and reproduction of its dominance, a struggle which must continue throughout its life course, accompanied at all moments by the systemic or structural antagonism of those older and newer modes of production that resist assimilation or seek deliverance from it. The task of cultural and social analysis thus construed within this final horizon will then clearly be the rewriting of its materials in such a way that this perpetual cultural revolution can be apprehended and read as the deeper and more permanent constitutive structure in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility.

Cultural revolution thus conceived may be said to be beyond the opposition between synchrony and diachrony, and to correspond roughly to what Ernst Bloch has called the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (or "nonsynchronous development") of cultural and social life.[74] Such

74. Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and Dialectics," *New German Critique,* No. 11 (Spring, 1977), pp. 22–38; or *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973). The "nonsynchronous" use of the concept of mode of production outlined above is in my opinion the only way to fulfill Marx's well-known program for

a view imposes a new use of concepts of periodization, and in particular of that older schema of the "linear" stages which is here preserved and canceled all at once. We will deal more fully with the specific problems of periodization in the next chapter: suffice it to say at this point that such categories are produced within an initial diachronic or narrative framework, but become usable only when that initial framework has been annulled, allowing us now to coordinate or articulate categories of diachronic origin (the various distinct modes of production) in what is now a synchronic or metasynchronic way.

We have, however, not yet specified the nature of the textual object which is constructed by this third horizon of cultural revolution, and which would be the equivalent within this dialectically new framework of the objects of our first two horizons—the symbolic act, and the ideologeme or dialogical organization of class discourse. I will suggest that within this final horizon the individual text or cultural artifact (with its appearance of autonomy which was dissolved in specific and original ways within the first two horizons as well) is here restructured as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended. These dynamics—the newly constituted "text" of our third horizon—make up what can be termed *the ideology of form,* that is, the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which

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dialectical knowledge "of rising from the abstract to the concrete" (1857 Introduction, *Grundrisse,* p. 101). Marx there distinguished three stages of knowledge: (1) the notation of the particular (this would correspond to something like empirical history, the collection of data and descriptive materials on the variety of human societies); (2) the conquest of abstraction, the coming into being of a properly "bourgeois" science or of what Hegel called the categories of the Understanding (this moment, that of the construction of a static and purely classificatory concept of "modes of production," is what Hindess and Hirst quite properly criticize in *Precapitalist Modes of Production*); (3) the transcendence of abstraction by the dialectic, the "rise to the concrete," the setting in motion of hitherto static and typologizing categories by their reinsertion in a concrete historical situation (in the present context, this is achieved by moving from a classificatory use of the categories of modes of production to a perception of their dynamic and contradictory coexistence in a given cultural moment). Althusser's own epistemology, incidentally—Generalities I, II, and III (*Pour Marx* [Paris: Maspéro, 1965], pp. 187–190)—is a gloss on this same fundamental passage of the 1857 Introduction, but one which succeeds only too well in eliminating its dialectical spirit.

coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.

What must now be stressed is that at this level "form" is apprehended as content. The study of the ideology of form is no doubt grounded on a technical and formalistic analysis in the narrower sense, even though, unlike much traditional formal analysis, it seeks to reveal the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes. But at the level of analysis in question here, a dialectical reversal has taken place in which it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works; it has become possible, in other words, to display such formal operations from the standpoint of what Louis Hjelmslev will call the "content of form" rather than the latter's "expression," which is generally the object of the various more narrowly formalizing approaches. The simplest and most accessible demonstration of this reversal may be found in the area of literary genre. Our next chapter, indeed, will model the process whereby generic specification and description can, in a given historical text, be transformed into the detection of a host of distinct generic messages—some of them objectified survivals from older modes of cultural production, some anticipatory, but all together projecting a formal conjuncture through which the "conjuncture" of coexisting modes of production at a given historical moment can be detected and allegorically articulated.

Meanwhile, that what we have called the ideology of form is something other than a retreat from social and historical questions into the more narrowly formal may be suggested by the relevance of this final perspective to more overtly political and theoretical concerns; we may take the much debated relation of Marxism to feminism as a particularly revealing illustration. The notion of overlapping modes of production outlined above has indeed the advantage of allowing us to short-circuit the false problem of the priority of the economic over the sexual, or of sexual oppression over that of social class. In our present perspective, it becomes clear that sexism and the patriarchal are to be grasped as the sedimentation and the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest

mode of production of human history, with its division of labor between men and women, and its division of power between youth and elder. The analysis of the ideology of form, properly completed, should reveal the formal persistence of such archaic structures of alienation—and the sign systems specific to them—beneath the overlay of all the more recent and historically original types of alienation—such as political domination and commodity reification—which have become the dominants of that most complex of all cultural revolutions, late capitalism, in which all the earlier modes of production in one way or another structurally coexist. The affirmation of radical feminism, therefore, that to annul the patriarchal is the most *radical* political act—insofar as it includes and subsumes more partial demands, such as the liberation from the commodity form—is thus perfectly consistent with an expanded Marxian framework, for which the transformation of our own dominant mode of production must be accompanied and completed by an equally radical restructuration of all the more archaic modes of production with which it structurally coexists.

With this final horizon, then, we emerge into a space in which History itself becomes the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular. This is, of course, also the moment in which the whole problem of interpretive priorities returns with a vengeance, and in which the practitioners of alternate or rival interpretive codes—far from having been persuaded that History is an interpretive code that includes and transcends all the others—will again assert "History" as simply one more code among others, with no particularly privileged status. This is most succinctly achieved when the critics of Marxist interpretation, borrowing its own traditional terminology, suggest that the Marxian interpretive operation involves a thematization and a reification of "History" which is not markedly different from the process whereby the other interpretive codes produce their own forms of thematic closure and offer themselves as absolute methods.

It should by now be clear that nothing is to be gained by opposing one reified theme—History—by another—Language—in a polemic debate as to ultimate priority of one over the other. The influential forms this debate has taken in recent years—as in Jürgen Habermas' attempt to subsume the "Marxist" model of production

beneath a more all-embracing model of "communication" or intersubjectivity,[75] or in Umberto Eco's assertion of the priority of the Symbolic in general over the technological and productive systems which it must organize as *signs* before they can be used as *tools*[76]—are based on the misconception that the Marxian category of a "mode of production" is a form of technological or "productionist" determinism.

It would seem therefore more useful to ask ourselves, in conclusion, how History as a ground and as an absent cause can be conceived in such a way as to resist such thematization or reification, such transformation back into one optional code among others. We may suggest such a possibility obliquely by attention to what the Aristotelians would call the generic satisfaction specific to the form of the great monuments of historiography, or what the semioticians might call the "history-effect" of such narrative texts. Whatever the raw material on which historiographic form works (and we will here only touch on that most widespread type of material which is the sheer chronology of fact as it is produced by the rote-drill of the history manual), the "emotion" of great historiographic form can then always be seen as the radical restructuration of that inert material, in this instance the powerful reorganization of otherwise inert chronological and "linear" data in the form of Necessity: why what happened (at first received as "empirical" fact) had to happen the way it did. From this perspective, then, causality is only one of the possible tropes by which this formal restructuration can be achieved, although it has obviously been a privileged and historically significant one. Meanwhile, should it be objected that Marxism is rather a "comic" or "romance" paradigm, one which sees history in the salvational perspective of some ultimate liberation, we must observe that the most powerful realizations of a Marxist historiography—from Marx's own narratives of the 1848 revolution through the rich and varied canonical studies of the dynamics of the Revolution of 1789 all the way to Charles Bettelheim's study of the Soviet revolutionary experience—remain visions of historical Necessity in the sense

75. See Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests,* trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971), esp. Part I.

76. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 21–26.

evoked above. But Necessity is here represented in the form of the inexorable logic involved in the determinate failure of all the revolutions that have taken place in human history: the ultimate Marxian presupposition—that socialist revolution can only be a total and worldwide process (and that this in turn presupposes the completion of the capitalist "revolution" and of the process of commodification on a global scale)—is the perspective in which the failure or the blockage, the contradictory reversal or functional inversion, of this or that local revolutionary process is grasped as "inevitable," and as the operation of objective limits.

History is therefore the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone which can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others. Necessity is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable *form* of events; it is therefore a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious which has been argued here, a retextualization of History which does not propose the latter as some new representation or "vision," some new content, but as the formal effects of what Althusser, following Spinoza, calls an "absent cause." Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them.