Chapter 1

The Three Names of the Dialectic

Innumerable introductions to the dialectic have been written, although the tempo seems to be slowing down today. The sheer numbers of traditional "presentations," along with the historical changes that have taken place since their flood tide, suggest that a new attempt might be useful, particularly if it takes into consideration all the new thoughts about thinking that have been pioneered since the critique of representation (Heidegger) and since structuralism. In addition, the Hegel revival, which seems as vigorous today as it will ever be, promises to ensure the inclusion of many indispensable "theological niceties" that a Marxism unschooled in Hegel left out or even censored.

Traditional presentations have tended to stage the dialectic either as a system on the one hand, or as a method on the other—a division that faintly recalls the shift of emphasis from Hegel to Marx. Both alternatives have been seriously discredited by contemporary, and even modern, thought: for while the ideal of the philosophical system has been seriously called into question since Nietzsche—how to go on claiming some unified system when even the self or subject is structurally disunified or dispersed?—that of method is no less disgraced by its obvious instrumentalization and by the radical opposition it necessarily carries within itself between means and ends. If the dialectic is nothing but a means, what can be its ends? If it is a metaphysical system, what possible interest can it claim after the end of metaphysics?

However, we will want to return to these two temptations, which hint at some deeper properties of the dialectic itself; and we will want to add a few more options, such as its relationship to temporality. For did not the dialectic, even in its Hegelian form, set out to inscribe time and change in our concepts themselves, and to show how some all-too-human longing for timelessness obscured the inadequacy of our mental categories and filtered out the glare of contradictions as such (a diagnosis Marx will recapitulate at the level of the everyday with the various doctrines of ideology)? Indeed, the omission of temporality in non-dialectical philosophy may well serve to

identify what characterizes the latter as the most "natural" form of the ideology of daily life, and as that common sense which it is the vocation of the dialectic most often to rebuke (Aristotle and Kant then constituting the great summas of common-sense thinking and subject-object empiricism).

This un-naturality of the dialectic, its provocative and perverse challenge to common sense as such, might then itself be generalized into a kind of definition, by way of its natural enemies. For are these not, alongside ordinary, unphilosophical common sense, dogmatism on the one hand and empiricism on the other? The belief in solid concepts, on the one hand, and the certainty of real things, on the other—such are the sources of the most inveterate anti-dialectical positions, and of the various idealisms as well as the various positivisms, which Hegel will combat as so many forms of *Verstand*, while the Marxian diagnosis of reification comes at them from a different yet related direction (neither one presuming that *Verstand*, or common sense, or even reification itself, can ever permanently be dissipated, as though they were mere illusions of some kind).

Yet have we not here begun to replicate the commonplaces with which we began, and to approximate something like a dialectical system with the suggestion of a content identified with temporality and contradiction, while the formal task of undermining non-dialectical attitudes and philosophies slowly begins to turn into a newer version of dialectical method? In fact, what has inevitably to be said is that this very opposition is itself dialectical: to resolve it one way or another is the non-dialectical temptation; while the deconstruction of each side of this alternative, rather than leading to the self-destruction of the dialectic as such, ought to offer a perspective in which the problem becomes its own solution.

Indeed, this is the perspective in which we might well attempt to turn our own current problem—the presentation of the dialectic—into a solution in its own right, namely, by dwelling on the various words with which we seek ritualistically to identify and to analyze something whose existence we have not yet even demonstrated. For the parts of speech offer so many camera angles from which unsuspected functions and implications might be seized and inspected; if they do not, indeed, bring with them their own metaphysical implications, in the shape of inevitable structural distortion.

So it is that to speak of the dialectic with the definite article cannot but reinforce the more universalistic claims of this philosophy, as well as its unity. At the same time this identification enhances its singularity, after the fashion of a proper name; and indeed, it is rare for the dialectic as such to be evoked in reference to any thinkers other than Hegel and Marx and people seeking to develop lines of thought affiliated with them.

But an indefinite article changes all this; and it is mostly in this form that dialectical moments are discovered and identified in other writers, such as Kant or Deleuze, Wittgenstein or Bergson, that is to say in non- or even

anti-dialectical philosophies. Such identifications come before us as the laws of specific or isolated zones, within universes of an altogether different character; and tend retroactively to confirm our impression that the definite article (in the previous acceptation) seeks to convey some unified field theory and to project well-nigh scientific regularities. The indefinite article, however, generally seems to involve the discovery of multiple local patterns, and indeed, as we shall see shortly, of binary oppositions.

Finally there is the adjective dialectical, which is generally used to clarify moments of non-dialectical perplexity and to rebuke established thought processes (such as an inveterate confidence in the law of non-contradiction). To identify a phenomenon or a formulation as dialectical is implicitly or explicitly to accuse the interlocutor of the lazy habits of common sense, and to startle us into a distinction between at least two kinds of thinking.

These three versions of the word may be enough to organize a more substantial account of the thing itself.

I. The Dialectic

To speak of the dialectic, with a definite article or a capital letter, as you prefer, is to subsume all the varieties of dialectical thinking under a single philosophical system, and probably, in the process, to affirm that this system is the truth, and ultimately the only viable philosophy—something like that "untranscendable horizon of thought" Sartre claimed for Marxism in our time.[1] I sometimes think this too; but nothing is *indépassable* and for the moment I merely want us to be aware of the problems such a position entails.

It first of all presupposes the unassailability of philosophy as such, something already questionable since Nietzsche and certainly exceedingly dubious since the emergence of what we call theory. If Hegel's was the last great traditional philosophy, the last philosophical system (to use one of his favorite words), then the omnipresence only yesterday of attacks on Hegel and of various strident anti-Hegelianisms may have as much to do with a disbelief in philosophy and in system as they did with the dialectic. (They also had much to do with the question of idealism, to which I will return later on.)

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, New York: Knopf, 1963, xxxiv. Hazel E. Barnes translates "indépassable" as "which we cannot go beyond." See "Question de méthode," in *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985, 14. Future references to *Critique de la raison dialectique* are denoted *CRD*.

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As for Marxism, there have clearly been any number of attempts to endow it with a philosophy of its own, and those range from positivism to religion, from pragmatism to structuralism, and passing through historicism and existentialism on their way to a Marxian analytic philosophy and a Marxian sociobiology. But the predominant form taken by Marxism as a philosophical system is surely that official philosophy so often in the West referred to as orthodox Marxism or even vulgar Marxism or Stalinism, and which Annette Michelson has aptly termed demotic Marxism; but whose official name, in the old socialist countries, was in fact dialectical materialism.

It will be useful at this point to recall the three fundamental points on which so-called Western Marxism[2] distinguished itself from this ideological relative which had come to power as an official state philosophy in one-third of the world. First of all, the various Western Marxisms reaffirmed themselves as historical materialisms, that is to say, as worldviews which did not posit the dialectical character of science or of nature. Then too, they were willing to embrace psychoanalysis, something to which dialectical materialism had been unremittingly hostile (and in a way, this inclusion of psychoanalysis not only modified and enriched the conceptions of ideology developed by the Western Marxism, but also underwrote their claim to place culture and the superstructures on an equal plane of significance and determination as the economic—even though from another perspective their inclination was to denounce and abandon the base/superstructure distinction altogether). Finally, the Western Marxisms voiced healthy doubts about the productive role of Engels in the development of the Marxist tradition, even though they acknowledged his achievements, particularly in his familiarity with the scientific writings of the period as well as with military theory.

I want to emphasize what the first and third points imply about dialectical materialism as such. The notion of the dialectic, with a definite article—of dialectics as a philosophical system, or indeed as the only philosophical system—obviously commits you to the position that the dialectic is applicable to everything and anything, and I use the ugly word apply advisedly. In order to qualify as a real philosophy, in other words, this one will also have to have a metaphysics of its own, that is to say, a philosophy of nature, something that necessarily includes an epistemology or in other words, a dialectical

[2] Perry Anderson names and crystallizes this tendency in his influential *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1976. The Viconian agnosticism observed by Western Marxism about nature and natural science is, however, vigorously criticized, from a dialectical viewpoint, by John Bellamy Foster, in his pathbreaking *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000, which argues for a materialism in the lineage of Epicurus.

philosophy of science. And here I would like to distinguish between a dialectics of scientific concepts of research and a dialectics of nature itself, the former seeming to me a good deal more plausible than the latter. Western Marxism, indeed, stakes out what may be called a Viconian position, in the spirit of the "*verum factum*" of the *Scienza Nuova*; we can only understand what we have made, and therefore we are only in a position to claim knowledge of history but not of Nature itself, which is the doing of God.

Ironically, the appropriation of science and nature by dialectical materialism—which was of course pioneered by Engels—can ultimately be traced back to Hegel himself, whose philosophy was never promoted by Soviet state philosophy, despite Lenin's enthusiasm for the *Logic*. Indeed, it can be argued that the very conception of a dialectic of nature is an idealist one, an argument that demands a moment's reflection in its own right, particularly owing to the critiques of Hegel and of idealism mounted in recent times by Althusser and others. It probably will not do to remind ourselves of the recurrently activist politics of so many idealisms from Plato on down; better to take on the problem of idealism from two distinct perspectives, the first of which is that of the philosophical problem of consciousness itself.

It is a problem which must be sharply distinguished from those of the so-called centered self and of personal identity and individuality; as well as from those of the psyche and its structure (the question of psychoanalysis); or indeed from that of self-consciousness or reflexivity (issues relating to the ideology of modernity as such); or finally from the various spiritualisms. The seeming ineradicability of idealism then in this sense results from the fact that human beings are incapable of imagining anything other than this element of consciousness in which we are eternally submerged (even in sleep); incapable therefore of theorizing this phenomenon in the light of what it is not—by virtue of the law that identifies determination with negation (Spinoza). Such agnosticism is not a defense of idealism as a philosophy, but rather an acknowledgement of the limit under which it must necessarily place all philosophy.

But what of that materialism in whose name the critique of idealism is most often waged? This is our second perspective on the problem of idealism, and here the idealists celebrate their conceptual triumphs, making it clear that the idealist position is not a substantive one in its own right, but rather draws its real power and finds its true vocation reactively, as a critique of materialism as such. For as thinkers from Berkeley on demonstrated, the concept of matter as such is an incoherent one, what Deleuze would call a "bad concept": it follows that, however intolerable the idealist position in philosophy may be, the materialist one is an untenable alternative. We might add to this Berkeley's interesting (well-nigh Deleuzian) observation that materialism robs our existential life and our bodily sensations and perceptions of their freshness and intensity by substituting for them just such a

formless and non-immediate, sensorily unverifiable substratum as matter itself.[3]

The easiest solution to the problem is clearly the one which identifies the alternative between idealism and materialism as a binary opposition, and which thereby encourages the conclusion that the urge to decide between materialism and idealism is motivated by the "law of non-contradiction" and can therefore itself be ruled undialectical. The fact is that the choice between these alternatives is only imposed on thought which aspires to become a system or a philosophy as such: and with this we turn to the third feature of so-called Western Marxism to be elucidated, not only about Hegel, but also about Marx himself. I want to argue that neither is to be associated with the construction of a philosophy as such. In the case of Marx, this is historically obvious enough: for it was not Marx but Engels who invented Marxism and constructed this system in such a way that it could seem to be a philosophy in its own right or at least to demand completion by this or that philosophy.

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The assertion seems a good deal more perverse when it is a question of a thinker so philosophically voluminous as Hegel, and so obsessively systematic in the construction of his various complementary subfields (logic, science, anthropology, law and politics, history, aesthetics, religion, the history of philosophy itself, and so forth). But in Hegel's case I will merely claim that, after the *Phenomenology*, it is Hegel himself who turns his own thought into a philosophy and a system; in other words, who, with the later collaboration of his disciplines, produces something we may call Hegelianism, in contrast to that rich practice of dialectical thinking we find in the first great 1807 masterpiece. Such a distinction will help us understand that virtually all the varied contemporary attacks on Hegel are in reality so many indictments of Hegelianism as a philosophy, or, what amounts to the same thing, as an ideology. Indeed, the suffix "ism" always designates both, besides betraying the operations of what Lacan called the "discourse of the university,"[4] which is to say the irrepressible urge to identify all thoughts with a named source (as when we speak of the Hegelian dialectic or, indeed of Marxism).

All of which is complicitous with the institutional self-perpetuation of philosophy itself. It is no doubt always amusing to observe the compulsion

[3] George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *The Works of George Berkeley*, eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, London: Thomas Nelson, 1949, 27–3,142, 72–74.

[4] Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Seuil, 1991.

offered by professional philosophers from Hegel to Althusser or Deleuze to waste their vital energies in the philosophical defense and apologia of philosophy as such. No doubt—and the work of Pierre Bourdieu is there to remind us of it—those of us in other institutional disciplines are driven in much the same way to our own analogous institutional self-justifications; but the emergence of Theory in the last years has seemed to offer a space outside the institutions and outside the rehearsal of such compulsory rationalizations, and it is the claims of theory (if not its achieved realities) which allow us to grasp the limits of philosophy as such, very much including dialectical philosophy. I believe that theory is to be grasped as the perpetual and impossible attempt to dereify the language of thought, and to preempt all the systems and ideologies which inevitably result from the establishment of this or that fixed terminology. Deconstruction is thus the very paradigm of a theoretical process of undoing terminologies which, by virtue of the elaboration of the terminology that very process requires, becomes a philosophy and an ideology in its own turn and congeals into the very type of system it sought to undermine. The persistence of the proper name in theory, indeed—as when we identify various texts as Derridean, Althusserian, or Habermassian—only serves to betray the hopelessness of the nonetheless unavoidable aim of theoretical writing to escape the reifications of philosophy as well as the commodifications of the intellectual marketplace today.

Yet theory offers the vantage point from which the commodification of the philosophical system becomes visible and inescapable. This "end of philosophy" may be argued in another way as well, in terms of its aspiration to closure and its exemplification of one of the currently fashionable pop-scientific formulae, the one called Gödel's Law, which is supposed to exclude the possibility for any system to ground itself or to include its own foundation within its own axiomatic. I will in fact argue (in the next section of this book) that Hegel's is not a closed or circular teleological system; and that we are not to take Absolute Spirit as a historical moment, let alone any "end of history," just as we are not to take the ethical individual of civil society and constitutional monarchy as the culmination of social development for Hegel. Hegel is therefore not to be read as projecting a closed system, even though Hegelianism may be: but we also need to refuse the old ideological paradigm of closed versus open systems, a Cold War invention if there ever was one, part and parcel of the equally spurious concept of "totalitarianism."

One may very well welcome the current slogans of anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism—and reread Marx himself as well as Hegel in the light of the demands they make on us—without ignoring the obvious, namely that these preeminently theoretical slogans and programs have already themselves become thematized and reified—in other words, have

themselves begun to turn into foundationalisms and philosophical systems in their own right.

When it comes to philosophical and theoretical critiques of this kind, indeed, I think it is always best to assess their political content and to reevaluate them in terms of the situation for which they were designed. The attacks on Hegel, for example, have a very different significance for European left, in which they functioned as critiques of communism and dialectical materialism, than in the United States, where anti-communism is a Cold War theme, and where "Hegel"—along with what we call theory itself in general—has the very different function of an onslaught on the whole Anglo-American tradition of empiricism and common sense. The philosophical attempt to undermine that tradition has of course its own political significance, but it is a radical one and quite different from the anti-communisms of the various European extra-parliamentary lefts, however one may evaluate the latter.

I've said enough to suggest that it will be unwise to identify the dialectic as a unified philosophical system, and this, not merely because we are unlikely to want to endorse a philosophy of nature at this point in the development of the sciences, but also because we are no longer tempted, in the age of theory, by the traditional rhetoric of philosophy itself and its philosophical self-justifications. It is now time to explore some other possibilities—the notion of a multiplicity of local dialectics on the one hand, and also some conception of the radical break constituted by dialectical thinking as such.

But before moving on to those two other possibilities, it may be worthwhile proposing, not a further description of contemporary theory, nor even a more comprehensive theory of the dialectic as such, but rather some more local characterization of the distinctiveness of both Freud and Marx, psychoanalysis and historical materialism, as specifically differentiated from philosophy as such. I'm not particularly tempted by Alain Badiou's notion of anti-philosophy, a term he deploys for Lacan, as well as for seemingly non-systematic or fragmentary thinkers like Pascal or Nietzsche. One sees what he means, but the formulation tends to restore a certain centrality to that very philosophy of which such thinking was alleged to have been the critique or the negation.

But there exists, at least in the Marxist tradition, an old formula which does not yet propose a new concept even though it stakes out the ways in which both psychoanalysis and Marxism transcend the systematic closures of philosophy. This formulation is that of the unity of theory and practice; and while it does not yet use the word theory in a contemporary sense, it conveys rather vividly the way in which, for these two kinds of concept formation, concepts can never exist on their own, autonomously, but must always remain open to the completion of realities external to themselves:

thus the conceptualities of psychoanalysis are ultimately fully meaningful only by way of the analytic situation itself, of the pole of the Other, the analyst, outside individual consciousness: while in Marxism significance is finally only achieved by way of our concrete class situation and the act—individual or collective—within class history itself. These unities-of-theory-and-practice are therefore distinct from the implied autonomy of the philosophical concept and cannot in any sense be completed by philosophy but only by praxis.

3.

As for Marx, and whatever his own responsibility for the transformation of his thinking into a philosophy (or a method) may be, we cannot undialectically abandon the claims of Marxism to be a system in quite so cavalier or relativistic a fashion, which would tend to reduce the quarrels between the dialectic and other philosophies to mere verbal epiphenomena. The rivalry between the various isms opens such debates to ideological analysis, and to the suspicion that each has some relationship to the dynamics of a group and its specific practices. In that case, the self-identification of Marxism is clearly a choice of group affiliation and a political act (just as the avoidance of such overt language might also be a political strategy). Just as clearly, the term is to be welcomed as a rallying point and as one of the possible signifiers around which new groups and collectivities might organize, just as the historical associations this word has accumulated might well, in specific national situations, turn people away.

Meanwhile, the organization of this signifier around a proper name is no longer, in consumer society, so peculiar a development as it might once have been: displacing the affiliation of the various isms but now implying commodification rather than Weltanschauung. Indeed, the thing called Marxism seems to stand uneasily between these two historical tendencies: it presents the appearance of the named theory (such as Derrideanism or Althusserianism), but at the same time evidently seeks to avoid the implication of the intellectual or quasi-religious sect conveyed by modern aesthetic or theoretical commodification and by the niche fragmentation of the modern consumer publics. Still, the ideological struggles within Marxism itself have generated their own named tendencies (Trotskyism, Maoism), Lukács and Althusser only being the most prominent philosophers to have lent their names to distinct theoretical movements which still claim to represent Marxism as such. Such struggle would seem to recapitulate an older religious schismatics; the complex substitutions of Lacan for Marx in Žižek's thought, meanwhile, also reflect the problem of the big Other or the central charismatic leader in revolutionary politics, and raise questions of collective organization alongside those of ideological content.

In any case, the presence of the proper name in the word Marxism may be taken to be the equivalent of the use of the definite article in this first acceptation of the word dialectic; and before leaving this first perspective, a final justification of this practice needs to be considered. In effect, this locution stands as a barrier to transcoding as such; to any attempt to restate the essentials in a more palatable vocabulary and in terms less historically and ideologically charged: a barrier, in other words, to attempt to "pass," and to smuggle the philosophical or political essentials through without attracting attention. Sartre once wisely observed that an analysis is not dialectical unless you say so and identify it as such.[5] On a political level, James Weinstein has pointed out that, however else they differed, the three great moments of the American left—Debsian socialism before World War I, the Communist Party in the 1930s, the New Left in the 1960s—all shared one fatal characteristic, namely the conviction that you could not talk socialism and revolution openly to the American people; a conviction not exactly calculated to promote either of those things.[6]

On the other hand, as far as words go, it can be argued that the word socialism is as historically tainted as the word democracy in capitalism: socialism then bears the weight of everything oppressive or unproductive associated with the Soviet Union (if not, for communists, with all the betrayals of social democracy). To name this word, then, is at once to arouse suspicion and to awaken all the historical objections which it may not be fair to associate with the ideal, but which cannot practically be done away with for all that. This places us squarely in a contradiction in which not to use the word is inevitably to fail politically, while to use the word is to preclude success in advance. Does this not constitute an argument for changing the political and ideological language and substituting another one, effectively transcoding an older Marxism into something new? There is, however, I would argue yet a third possibility, and that is to deploy a language whose inner logic is precisely the suspension of the name and the holding open of the place for possibility, and that is the language of Utopia, which neither rules out the eventual return of the vocabulary of socialism nor does it offer a positive alternative (such as that of "radical democracy") which might then be appropriated in an altogether different and manipulative way.

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[5] Sartre, "la connaissance dialectique est en fait connaissance de la dialectique," in *CRD*, 139–140.

[6] James Weinstein, *Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics*, New York: New Viewpoints, 1974.

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The productive side of the scientific or metaphysical pretensions of "the dialectic" or of "Marxism" lies, however, not in their claim to constitute an absolute philosophical system, but rather in the negative function of both these versions—namely, the insistence on what cannot be omitted from the doctrine without transforming it altogether and losing its originality and its most radical implications. A lower-level example may be given in the case of that still scandalous notion which is the concept of ideology: the attempt in the 1960s and 70s to substitute the more acceptable notion of "practices" can only be evaluated by enumerating what is gained and what is lost in the transfer (and most notably what happens to the idea of social class in the process). Gramsci's substitution of "hegemony" for "ideology" is an even more complicated matter, whose exploration usefully enriches the whole problematic.

As far as "the dialectic" is concerned, it would seem that what is at stake in the most general way in its polemic effects is the belief in common sense or non-dialectical thought: *Verstand*, which in Marxism becomes that far more specialized and limited phenomenon called reification. But in Marxism the range of exclusions is much wider: summed up, no doubt, in phrases like bourgeois ideology, the identification of the central non- or anti-Marxist themes is a crucial operation, which can pass from the lack of historicity of the classic political economists to the occultation of social class.

Still, neither one is thematized as such in Engels's famous recapitulation of the three laws of the dialectic, which it is now worth quoting in their entirety, for a definition of dialectical materialism which is far from outmoded:

> The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa;
> The law of the interpenetration of opposites;
> The law of the negation of the negation.[7]

To be sure, these laws of Engels are not themselves wholly without content (that is to say, they bear the traces of a situation in which their formation was meant to be a political act). The Hegelian language and conceptuality is designed to include reminiscences of various moments in Marx's economic analyses; that is, it is meant to signal a kind of general applicability of Hegelianism to the economic sphere, as well as to suggest the philosophical credentials and respectability of that Marxism qua philosophy which Engels is promoting here. At the same time, these "laws" are also meant to suggest

[7] Friedrich Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature*, New York: International Publishers, 1940, Chap. 2.

an immediate relevance to the science of Engels's time (Helmholtz and others), and thus to add in a formidable pedigree derived from the prestige of science and its applicability to, if not its derivation from, nature itself. As for history and politics, that is the area to which all this is to be applied: a third terrain we are then asked to scan for glimpses of the same regularities at work. And there are many ways of systematizing these "laws" even further[8]: indeed, just as Kant reduced Aristotle's categories to his four groups of triads, so any ambitious philosopher might be expected to demonstrate the unity of these three and to propound an even more general unitary abstraction under which they might fall (actually we will try to do something like this in the next section).

But it is with the category of "law" that the most serious questions arise, as any careful reading of the relevant sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology* might suggest.[9] Law is predicated on a notion of inner and outer worlds, of a world of appearances or phenomena corresponding to an inner essence which subsumes them. A law notoriously covers a multitude of instances and thus calls for a casuistry (which constitutes legal studies and the legal tradition) which in the "casus"[10] is supposed to adjust the empirical contingency of the facts to the abstract universality of law—something even more problematic when it has to do with psychological or subjective laws, even those of historical decision—the "law of the heart," an inner frenzy having to do with individuality and universality, or worse yet, the ruse of reason, in which the world-historical individual is little more than a pawn in the hands of a suprahistorical Law that seems more like a big other or transcendental subject. At any rate, Hegel's own analysis would seem to show that the dialectic is out to destroy the concept of law rather than to offer the chance of formulating some new ones. (But then in that case, what is the status of Hegel's own sequence of forms, does it not betray some lawful regularities in the way in which one of these forms eventually yields to another one?)

At any rate, however practical this checklist of Engels may be philosophically, it is worth noting that it fails to include any of the themes Marxists might want to include in their fundamental definition of Marxism, namely social class, contradiction, or the base/superstructure distinction. To be sure, how people wishing to describe themselves as Marxists formulate what

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[8] See Bertell Ollman on the various "categories" in terms of which the dialectic has been staged: "for Lukács, it was the concept of totality that played this role; for Mao, it was 'contradiction'; for Raya Dunayevskaya, it was the 'negation of the negation'; for Scott Meikle, it was 'essence'; for the Ollman of *Alienation* it was 'internal relations,' and so on." *Dialectical Investigations*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 26–27.

[9] G. W. F. Hegel, "Force and Understanding," in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Future references to this work are denoted *PoS*.

[10] Andre Jolles, "Kasus," in *Einfache Formen*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1982, 171–199.

they take to be the core "beliefs" of the doctrine is an indispensable way of sorting out the possible varieties of Marxism (it probably would not any longer include historical inevitability). Would it include revolution (or does the absence of that concept designate revisionism or heresy)? We have already touched on ideology; what about modes of production? And so forth. The enumeration concerns the sine qua non: that without which a political or economic ideology could not really be considered to be Marxist. The rearrangement of all these indispensable themes into a system or a philosophy (or even a coherent system of "beliefs") is another task entirely, one for specialists or ideologists: yet it is on the conviction that such a system exists that the exclusionary moves, the anathemata and excommunications, are necessarily based.

As for the implied projection of a philosophical system in the dialectic, it can be taken as a distorted expression of a rather different dialectical requirement, namely that of totality. In other words, the philosophical claim of unity turns out to be a symptomal transformation of the deeper claim or aspiration to totality itself, about which any number of misconceptions need to be addressed. Right now, it is enough to say that totality is not something one ends with, but something one begins with; and also that it is capitalism as a now global system which is the totality and the unifying force (so that we can also say that the dialectic itself does not become visible historically until capitalism's emergence).

Our unexpected conclusion must therefore be that the notion of the dialectic as system has its uses as well as its disadvantages; and that it would therefore be profoundly undialectical to exclude this patently undialectical description of the dialectic (along with its opposite number, the dialectic as method, as will perhaps be corroborated in the next section) from any truly dialectical account of the dialectic as such.

II. Many Dialectics

The logical sequel to the definite article is the indefinite one: and it is clear enough that when we isolate dialectical moments in the work of non- or anti-dialectical thinkers, such as Nietzsche or Deleuze, Bergson or Wittgenstein, it is of a local dialectic we are speaking. In any case, this makes for multiple dialectics, of whatever dimensions or significance, and it is this plurality which cancels the claim of the dialectic to articulate the laws of a universe governed by some unified field theory or "theory of everything." The analogy with physics is in that case rather to be found in the way in which Newtonian law becomes a mere local system within an Einsteinian cosmos, as a set of properties valid for the human scale of our own everyday perceptual world, but irrelevant for the twin infinities (Pascal) which bound

it on either side (the microcosm and the macrocosm). At that point the dialectic, which formerly reigned supreme, is reduced to a local law of this or that corner of the universe, a set of regularities observable here or there, within a cosmos which may well not be dialectical at all, but rather one of sheerest chance, of virtualities, say, or chaos theory, when not some altogether untotalizable and non-theorizable noumenon.[11] In fact, the dialectic itself claimed to do something of this subsuming when (in Hegel) it asserted its more universal superiority to common sense or *Verstand* (understanding) posited as the local law of our everyday life in a physical world of objects and extension.

The notion of a local dialectic, or of many dialectics, can however take this metaphysical humiliation in stride, and now poses a rather different conceptual problem than the complexities of philosophical unity posed in the last section. For now we will be concerned to abstract a form of thinking sufficiently empty of content to persist throughout the multiple local dialectics we just posited; and to retain a recognizable and identifiable shape through a variety of materials, from the economic to the aesthetic, from the political to the psychoanalytic or even the natural sciences. But we will not want this form to have anything of the content of Engels's three laws, nor even of the Hegelian logical "moments"; indeed, we will want this abstract pattern to be as innocent of philosophical or ideological presuppositions as possible, even though we will eventually have to deal with the way in which its acknowledgement ultimately brings a whole commitment to Marxism with it in its train. The identification of such an empty form will no doubt have to build on the Hegelian groundwork, even though it need no longer struggle with the unrewarding starting point the latter had to navigate in its initial struggles with identity and with being as such.

For it now seems possible to abstract an emptier mechanism from the stages of Hegelian logic, one formalistic enough to claim application to an impressive variety of material and disciplinary, social and ideological contents. In fact, that was exactly what structuralism achieved with the binary opposition[12] and this is perhaps the moment to celebrate that breakthrough,

[11] The model is that of Newton's laws as a local feature of some vaster Einsteinian cosmos. See Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*, New York: Bantam, 1984, chaps. 1 and 2.

[12] See Gilles Deleuze, "A quoi reconnâit-on le structuralisme?" in *L'île déserte et autres textes*, Paris: Minuit, 2002, 238–269; and François Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme*, Paris: LGF, 1995. But already in his first book Hegel speaks of *Entzweiung* (translated "dichotomy" or "bifurcation"): "Dichotomy is the source of the need of philosophy … Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living energy is only possible through its own reestablishment out of the deepest fission. What Reason opposes, rather, is just the absolute fixity which the intellect gives to the dichotomy; and it does so all the more if the absolute

with which, in my opinion, and unbeknownst to the structuralists themselves, dialectical thought was able to reinvent itself in our time. To be sure, the seemingly purer formalism of the binary opposition had its own specific content; its linguistic origins in phonology seemed already to mark a fundamental distance from semantics and thus already from that conceptuality to which it was at once "applied." Meanwhile, the anthropological sources in Malinowski's exchange and Mauss' gift, although ambiguously mined for various political and psychological purposes, also retained their appearance as extrapolations after the fact: the various structuralist ideologies developed out of them can by now be omitted.

Even the primal production of meaning as such, which was the burden of Saussure's extraordinary formulation—"differences without positive terms"[13] —is easily transferable to problems of the emergence of ideologies and indeed to social constructivism itself. Meanwhile, the doctrine of the binary opposition could serve as a fundamental weapon in the battle of a whole range of modern philosophical tendencies against an older Aristotelian common sense: and in particular against the notion of things and concepts as positive entities, as free-standing autonomous substances, with their own properties or accidents and their own isolated definitions, substances only later inserted into relationships and larger networks and structures. But in process-oriented thought it is the relationships that come first; while in the doctrine of the binary opposition, concepts are necessarily defined against each other, and come in constellations, of which the binary pair is only the simplest and most rudimentary form.

In Hegel, to be sure, this discovery is a historical one; that is, it is calibrated on the development of philosophy and takes place as an event when we pass over from simple externalizing thought (*Verstand*) to the more internal complications of reflection. At that point, identity begins to emerge as something that can only be distinguished from what it is not. It therefore not only signals the looming into view of the fullest constructional function of the negative, but also the appearance of difference as such, as something strangely inseparable from the identity from which it was supposed to be different: "the different is not confronted by *any* other but by *its* other…the

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oppositions themselves originated in Reason." *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977, 89, 91. An excellent account of the binarism of structuralism's founder is to be found in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Lévi-Strauss musicien*, Arles-Paris, Actes sub, 2008. And see, for a different kind of defense of the heuristic value of binary oppositions, Michael McKeon's dialectical masterwork *Origins of the Novel*, Baltimore: Hopkins, 1987, xiii–xv (and see also his remarks on Levi-Strauss, 4–8).

[13] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Lausanne-Paris: Payot, 1916, 166.

other's *own* other."[14] But this now at once fully dialectical process was already germinal within the binary opposition itself. (Meanwhile, Marx's analysis of the commodity form, in the famous opening chapter of *Capital*, volume 1, offers a textbook exercise in binary oppositions which is at one and the same time their deconstruction and their critique: a demonstration of the necessary asymmetry of the equation and of equivalence as such, now unmasked as the "objective appearance" of non-identity.)

At this point a cascade of historical forms pours out: the dialectic of good and evil, but also that of subject and object; the dialectic of rich and poor and also that of male and female or black and white; the dialectic of Right and Left, but also of poetry and prose, high culture and mass culture, science and ideology, materialism and idealism, harmony and counterpoint, color and line, self and other, and so on virtually from the beginnings of history to its far future, if it has one (but let's not omit future versus past). We can imagine several ways of dealing with this unwanted empirical profusion of oppositions. They might, for example, all be folded back and assimilated into one great primal binary: that of gender for some feminist philosophers, that of power for Nietzscheans, and so forth. I would myself be tempted to assign this generative role to the ethical binary (good and evil); but it is also necessary that social class not be reduced in this way, no matter how fundamental its mechanism in historical change as such.

Meanwhile, we must also take note of the proposition, which developed rapidly in the period following the first structuralist discoveries, that the binary opposition is the paradigmatic form of all ideology, and that therefore, far from being celebrated as the elementary structure of all meaning, it is rather to be tracked down and eradicated as the fundamental mechanism of all false consciousness and social and political error. The methodological result of this view is, however, to make the binary opposition even more important than it was for the structuralist ideologues, and to encourage an unremitting confrontation with it as the privileged object of philosophical and theoretical study; and this is all we need to secure agreement on at present.

We must, however, now begin to generate the varieties of opposition enabled by this simple form, for it does not always express itself as a dualism, even though metaphysical dualisms (such as some of the ideological oppositions listed above) seem to stand as the strong form if not indeed the inner truth of the binary opposition as such. But dualistic oppositions posit absolute equals or equivalents, turning Hegel's minimal dialectic into an eternal alternation between identical forces which it is finally impossible to adjudicate: turning ceaselessly into one another in such a way that, as with

[14] G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic: Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [1830], 172.

Manichaeism, the forces of light become indistinguishable from those of darkness or good from evil. The fundamental problem of such mythic dualisms—their secret conceptual and even dialectical weakness, as it were—lies in the implication that each term or force is fully positive, and wholly autonomous in its own right. Yet as each is the opposite of the other one despite everything, it is hard to see where in that case that portion of negativity could come from which is presumably required of each term in order that it also be an opposite in the first place.

What will become apparent is that a variety of distinct oppositions can be identified, depending on the degree of autonomy claimed for each term of the initial opposition. Indeed, even the inaugural dead end of metaphysical dualism may well turn out to generate more productive developments than we have first suspected; while half a dozen other oppositional shapes also offer distinct lines of development in which a given dialectic proves to have far from predictable or stereotypical results for us. Our only rule, in the examples and illustrations that follow, will be a strict avoidance of the old pseudo-Hegelian caricature of the thesis/antithesis/synthesis; while our only presupposition will be the assumption that any opposition can be the starting point for a dialectic in its own right.

1.

We may begin with the inevitable degradation of a sheerly metaphysical dualism or Manichaeism into the conventional opposition in which one term turns out to be more defective than the other one, or in other words in which that second term radiates a kind of essentiality or plenitude which cannot be ascribed to its alleged opposite. Sun-words and moon-words as the old Arabic grammars have it; and the situation seems to be one in which the moon-term is the opposite of its other, while that other in its autonomy is the opposite of nothing. This then seems to constitute a peculiar opposition in which only one genuine opposite exists: it shares the sorry fate of Evil, which once upon a time, in the original mythic dualism, shone with its own absolute brightness (or darkness, as the case may be); but which is now reduced to mere reflection of its other.

The new form will in any case be an asymmetrical one, in which we can identify a center and a margin, an essential and an inessential term. Here clearly we glimpse the fundamental structure of racisms and xenophobias, of sexism and ethnocentrism, of law and crime. It was probably Sartre who first denounced the structural oppression inherent in all such oppositions, which he so extensively identified in works like *Saint Genet*; but Foucault's subsequent analyses generalized and popularized these diagnoses, which probably extend through the entire range of conventional ideological binaries, from the metaphysical ones, such as good and evil, or subject and

object, all the way through to seemingly more innocent conventional ones, such as North and South, up and down, arts and sciences, or first and third worlds. Race and gender categories are those which today most often trigger the alarm systems of ideological suspicion; and yet they also seem to return in the more philosophical forms of the opposition of race and gender to class (or to each other). Meanwhile the phenomenological opposition of left and right hands reminds us that something of the ineradicability of such asymmetrical oppositions lies in the biological centrality of the human body and in the existential singularity of its experience of space as such.[15]

Meanwhile, a rather different philosophical problem is raised by the logical objection that the instances we have enumerated are in fact not really binary oppositions at all, inasmuch as the subordinate term ought in principle to be able to be subsumed under the dominant one, thus offering at least a caricature of the pseudo-Hegelian synthesis we have been denouncing. Thus, the slave is not the opposite of the master, but rather, along with him, an equally integral component of the larger system called slavery or domination; and it is only with the reintroduction of individual existence that the two "aspects" become individual terms in their own right. This reintroduction is then a political intervention, and only then does the asymmetrical opposition take its place in ideology, as has already been suggested. Its "resolution" then presumably lies in the obliteration of both terms, or in other words the effacement of the opposition as such: this is classically what happens when, for example, Marx shows us that the only way in which class struggle can be eliminated lies in the effacement of the very category of social class as such (and of the system of value which produces it). Yet not only the more notorious "dictatorships of the proletariat" in recent socialist history, but also the interminable political arguments between assimilationists and secessionists in the realms of race, gender and ethnicity, remind us that such "solutions" are far from being merely logical matters.

These asymmetrical dualisms also raise the issue of the negative and the negativity—a crucial one indeed in contemporary philosophy's critique of the dialectic as such. The Sartrean analysis of subject and other remains a dialectical one; while Foucault's subsumption of both terms under "power" should seem to generate a situation in which power has no opposite (or is its own opposite). I believe that this seeming impasse can at least be clarified by the suggestion that this particular type of opposition is to be grasped as the superposition of at least two binary systems: a purely logical opposition (in other words one in which we merely have to do with two equivalents) on which has been superimposed the quite different form of an opposition between essential and inessential or center and margin. Here the "negation" lies in the differentiation between the initial equivalents,

[15] See Rodney Needham, *Right and Left,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

while its ideological investment—the very content of domination itself—derives from the way in which this second opposition reappropriates the first one. The force of negation is then transferred from the latter to the former.

Yet the elimination of the opposition as such is not always desirable in situations in which it is somehow the dysymmetry itself which is productive and which is to be preserved. We may still think of these arrested asymmetrical oppositions as dialectical despite their immobilization, inasmuch as they solicit a puzzlement which alternates between separation and conflation, between the analytic work of the negative and the temptation of synthesis.

In the realm of aesthetics such a perpetual asymmetrical dualism can, for example, be found in Coleridge's opposition between Imagination and Fancy. The two functions can to be sure be read historically or chronologically, in which case Fancy designates the decorative work of eighteenth-century rhetoric, while Imagination names the new organic and natural powers of Romanticism which are called upon to supplant it. This reading emphasizes the contrast between the way in which Fancy operates through wit and detail, through "fixities and definites," as Coleridge puts it; and that force of Nature expressed in some vision or overall "act of creation," whose function is "to idealize and to unify."[16] At this level, the distinction is very much an implicit Romantic manifesto, which pits a neoclassical sensibility against the new Wordsworthian sublime. And it is this identification of the two modes which also authorizes their larger generalization to historical periods and in particular to the cultural logic of the Enlightenment period as it is denounced by the younger generation of the Romantics themselves. Here not only does the one term eclipse the other, but an ethical and even a political binary makes its firm choices and decisively rejects the poetics of the ancien regime in favor of the new and proto-modernist mode.

Leaving aside the explicit identification of Fancy with eighteenth-century association theory and that of Imagination with a far more Germanic tradition of objective idealism, Coleridge himself also often dramatizes his opposition in terms of thought modes, as though the summoning of Imagination were a call to the awakening (or reawakening) of a whole new kind of poetic power, of a type radically distinct from the mechanical shuffling around of Fancy's pre-given "counters," which require no creativity.

Clearly, it is an account framed by the perspective of the Imagination, very much to the detriment of Fancy; and not nearly so even-handed as that Kantian distinction between Beauty and the Sublime to which it is distantly related. Yet it is enough to think of the anti-Romantic positions of the New

[16] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, London: J. M. Dent and Company, 1906, 145–146.

Criticism on such Fancy-oriented phenomena as wit or paradox to see how this particular bias could be corrected in the other direction.

Still if these two forces are grasped as corresponding to functions of the mind—Imagination to the architectonics of larger form, say, or plot; Fancy to the execution of the work and its individual detail—then not only will the ratio between them remain permanently in force and determine the bandwidth or vanishing points of that variable scanning process inherent in reading; but the concrete text itself will also now be able to be seen as something of a unique or singular "synthesis" of the two axes. Yet this scarcely yields any permanent solution to the "contradiction," save perhaps for the perpetuation of certain generic stereotypes. Despite its grounding in some properly metaphysical gaps—between unity and multiplicity, or the sublime and the beautiful, between the metaphysical absolute itself, perhaps, and its empirical counterpart in physical time and space—it is hard to see how this opposition could be received in any non- or anti-dialectical way.

A related literary dualism on which I have often insisted has the function, on the contrary, of enlarging the gap between incommensurables and of staging their opposition as something approaching a contradiction. Clearly enough, it is this sense of crisis which the term incommensurable itself implies, namely the attempt to unify by way of translation and the coming up short against the absolute impossibility of doing so.[17] The outcome would then be similar to that static or arrested dialectic we have rehearsed above, in which no third term seems to propose itself beyond the unity of the negative opposites; except that here it is a fissure in being itself that seems to bring the process of unification to a halt.

An exemplification of this kind of dialectic might then be the incommensurability of plot and style in the novel, in which neither the macro-level of the narrative nor the micro-level of the language can be reduced to the other. It is an incommensurability which is less visible when, as in the early novel, language seems essentially to stand in the service of storytelling as such; or on the contrary in the modernist period when the narrative function seems to have been effaced by the foregrounding of language and style as such. But practical criticism faces an insurmountable dilemma when these two levels take on equal weight (or when, as with Dickens, a modernist sensibility rediscovers the realistic novelist's style as a value in its own right). This is not to say that critics and readers do not in practice invent solutions to this impossible and insurmountable difficulty: indeed, it is the very vocation of criticism to do just that, and the "solutions" vary from the positing of homologies between style and narrative to the detection of minute or garish

[17] Most strongly affirmed in Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity. See Arkady Plotnitsky, *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology after Bohr and Derrida*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994.

ways in which they contradict or undermine each other. But these "solutions," which posit the essential organic unity of the work, in reality presuppose the existence of the fundamental dilemma in advance, thereby cutting themselves off from any theoretical or philosophical solution insofar as they already confront two separate entities which can only be reunified in some additive way, or by mechanical homologies.

This kind of dialectic is therefore not so much dualistic as it is revelatory of some ontological rift or gap in the world itself, or in other words, of incommensurables in Being itself. The opposition then has as its function not the dialectical identification of two seemingly distinct existential items as being in reality the same, so much as the detection, where common sense presumed a continuous field of uninterrupted phenomena in an unproblematical real world, of strange rifts or multiple dimensions, in which different laws and dynamics obtain (as with gravity and electromagnetism).

Approaches to such ontological discontinuities can be found in all the disciplines. Leaving aside the only too well-known case of waves and particles in physics, there would figure prominently the irresolvable tension in social interpretation between history and sociology—or indeed between sociology and psychology (see below)—or event and structure, diachrony and synchrony, as such methodological antagonisms play themselves out in multiple forms and with multiple consequences.

More immediately dramatic, however, and full of lessons for the dialectic as such, will be the theory of the three orders in Lacanian psychoanalysis, which begins with an unabashed dualism, only slowly to evolve into a triad of centers (dramatized by Lacan in his image of the Borromean interlocking rings) and finally disintegrating or drifting apart under the latter's internal pressure. As is well known Lacan's three orders are identified as the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real; yet as Žižek has so often suggested it is less misleading to see Lacan's notions in their historical evolution than to grasp them as a static system.[18] Readers of the first Seminars will indeed appreciate the emphasis on the initial theorization of the Imaginary as a semi-autonomous zone of psychic reality, only at once to grasp the way it is called into question and repositioned by a critique in the name of the Symbolic. Yet the Imaginary is a good starting point in our present context, insofar as it is the very element in which dualism itself flourishes: the so-called mirror stage itself situates the Imaginary in the binary opposition between self and other, all the while deeply rooting it in the visual as such. The subsequent discovery of the Symbolic—although riddled with threes (as in the allegories of Irma's Dream and later on of "the Purloined Letter")[19] and redolent of the

[18] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 1989, 73–75.

[19] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 4, London: Hogarth Press, 1958, Chap.2.

linguistic ideologies of a then dominant structuralism—does not so much constitute the mere addition of a third term as it signals a shift in registers altogether, and a wholly new dynamic.

Yet that dynamic will continue to play itself out dialectically, insofar as its strong form continues to lie in the intersection between the asymmetrical dimensions of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, or in other words in the "critique" of the former (or of the overemphasis of the former) by the latter. When that tension disappears, and the theoretical triumph of the Symbolic threatens to turn into some more orthodox celebration of a structuralist philosophy of language as such, Lacan resists; and this is the moment when his third term, the enigmatic Real, makes its appearance, as what cannot be assimilated to language. From being a shadowy horizon against the background of which the older dualism played itself out, this new term now comes to offer a field of investigation in its own right, one which, from Seminar XI on, will tend to displace the other two orders altogether, in its emphasis on drives and part-objects, on "sinthomes" and gender, on knots (the latter then standing as something of a distant and allegorical memory of the system of the three orders with which Lacan had begun his prodigious theoretical journey).

We do not have to pursue the Lacanian adventure any further here (we might also have mentioned the theory of the four discourses as another illustration of Lacan's virtuosity as a thinker of incommensurables and discontinuities[20]); suffice it to underscore the new vocation this trajectory has opened for the dialectic itself. Now we may begin to hazard the guess that something like the dialectic will always begin to appear when thinking approaches the dilemma of incommensurability, in whatever form; and that the dialectic henceforth seems to be the shift of thinking on to a new and unaccustomed plane in an effort to deal with the fact of distinct and autonomous realities that seem to offer no contact with each other.

But this particular opposition (and others like it) is clearly not to be "solved" by a mere identification of the unity of such opposites: indeed, it is probably not to be solved at all, but rather approached in a different way, which remains dialectical but which illustrates another face of the dialectic altogether from the one just described. Indeed, these two versions of the dialectic (of "a dialectic of…") may well be considered as the two extremes of binary possibility: on the one hand the identification of the opposites with each other, and on the other their greatest possible dissociation from each

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See also Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre II*, Paris: Seuil, 1978, chaps.13 and 14. For a comprehensive discussion of the range of interpretations of this, the object of Freud's first dream analysis, see Mladen Dolar's essay in *Maska*, vol. 16 num. 1–2, Winter 2001, 58–65.

[20] Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre XVII*, 99–135.

other while remaining within some minimal relationship which makes it possible to speak of both together as participating in an opposition in the first place.

The incommensurability thesis thus holds that each pole of the specific dualism posited by this version of the dialectic is governed by distinct laws and dynamics, which cannot be made to apply to or to govern the opposite term. Yet here again we must invoke the methodological caution already hinted at above, which draws the consequences from Hegel's distinction between difference and diversity as categories. The two distinctions might indeed be said to presuppose that proposed by Sartre (and following him by Bertell Ollman) between internal and external negations.[21] In other words, if the relationship between the two constitutive terms of the binary opposition breaks down into a mere external negation between two radically different items, the opposition passes over into an inert multiplicity of various things, all different from each other but entertaining no particular relationship.

It is clear enough that the formulation of the (internal) dialectic strongly emphasizes the interrelationship of the two phenomena, thus avoiding the problem of heterogeneous multiplicity, only to be confronted by a second danger, namely the possibility that difference might vanish altogether in some premature identity. In the case of the dialectic of incommensurables, however, the problem is the reverse: radical difference is certainly very strongly underscored in the concept of incommensurability but with the risk that the two phenomena thus contrasted may simply drift away from each other into the teeming variety of inert multiples. Here then powerful reasons must be invoked for positing any kind of relationship between the incommensurables, which is to say that some form of internal negation between the two must be theorized (something which also implies that while external negation can be relatively simply defined, internal negation will take a bewilderingly dialectical variety of forms).

It remained for Derrida to propose a temporalization of this non- or anti-dialectic—this blocking of the dialectic by incommensurability or the limitation of internal negation by external negation—or in other words a reincorporation of the dialectically inassimilable back into some new and enlarged dialectic as such:

> In the end everything we have said about the system comes down to a question of the "third." This third term can be taken as the mediator that permits synthesis, reconciliation, participation; in which case that which is neither this nor that

[21] Sartre, "Critique de l'expérience critique," in *CRD*, 159–180. Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

> permits the synthesis of this and that. But this function is not limited to the form it has taken in Hegelian dialectic, and the third of neither-this-nor-that and this-and-that can indeed also be interpreted as that whose absolute heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system, thus designating the place where the system does not close. It is, at the same time, the place where the system constitutes itself, and where this constitution is threatened by the heterogeneous, and by a fiction no longer at the service of truth. What particularly interests me here is that which participates in participation and non-participation.[22]

Yet what is suggestive is precisely the formulation of a closing and an opening, a participation and a non-participation. For we might equally well argue that the dialectic is on the contrary that very moment in which the system confirms its structure as a closure—or in other words, it re-identifies itself as a philosophy (and thus necessarily a closed system)—it also reopens itself and begins all over again.

As philosophy or system, the dialectic—"the conventional one, of totalization, reconciliation and reappropriation through the work of the negative, etc."—is closed and indicted by the very opposition or irreducibility and heterogeneity which lies outside it and is inassimilable to it. Yet this excess or inassimilability itself constitutes a dialectic—"between the non-dialectizable and the dialectizable"—which potentially renews the dynamics of the process and opens up the possibility of a new and enlarged dialectic in its turn, the clock of dialectical temporality once again beginning to tick.[23]

The interpretation of Derrida's insight may also shed fresh light on the differences between deconstruction and the dialectic, at the same time that it (as a consequence) reconfirms their family likeness, that is to say that kinship which allows the differences to be articulated and perceptible in the first place.

For it is as though the dialectic moved jerkily from moment to moment like a slide show, where deconstruction dizzily fast-forwards like a film by Dziga Vertov. I intend both of these comparisons to carry their negative or critical note, which marks the inevitable debility of all thinking.

The dialectic proceeds by standing outside a specific thought—that is to say a conceptual conclusion about a problem (which might range from object to subject, from ethics or politics to philosophy, from the pragmatic to the epistemological, art to science, etc., etc.)—in order to show that the alleged conclusions in fact harbor the workings of unstable categorical oppositions. The paradoxes, antimonies and ultimately contradictions which then historicize the previous moment of "conclusion" and enable a new

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[22] Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, Cambridge: Polity, 2001, 5.

[23] Ibid., 33.

dialectical "solution" then in some sense reincorporate this last back into "philosophy" or "system" and come as a new—more properly dialectical—conclusion in their own right.

So far, dialectics and deconstruction are consonant with each other: both work to bring up into the light the structural incoherencies of the "idea" or conceptual "positions" or interpretations which are their object of critique. But where the dialectic pauses, waiting for the new "dialectical" solution to freeze over in its turn and become an idea or an ideology to which the dialectic can again be "applied" (as it were from the outside of the newly reformed system), deconstruction races forward, undoing the very incoherence it has just been denouncing and showing that seeming analytic result to be itself a new incoherency and a new "contradiction" to be unraveled in its turn. Whence the sense that deconstruction is a kind of nihilism (see the attacks on Paul de Man), that like Foucauldian madness, *elle ne compose pas*, it results in no result, no tangible outcome, but simply devours its own tail, and thus itself in the process. One of the outcomes thus devoured and unraveled is of course the dialectic itself, which paused too long, and became another ideology in its own right, yet another object of deconstruction.

2.

The next of our logical possibilities will significantly put this first one in perspective, for it brings before us a binary opposition which cannot be considered asymmetrical to the degree that both of its terms are what can be considered negative ones, privative phenomena, which, in contrast to the fully positive forces of mythic dualism or of incommensurables alike, can neither one assume a central or dominant role. Here it is not a matter of restoring the marginal term to wholeness, or of incorporating it in the positive or central term in which it was the flaw or crack, but rather of disclosing an equal fissure in its opposite, the hitherto positive term. Indeed, the language (and opposition) of positivity and negation is here subjected to a good deal of logical and metaphysical stress, to the degree to which it seems difficult to retain the qualification of negation in a situation in which there is nothing positive for the alleged negative to negate. Yet it is perhaps this very paradox which is expressed in that originary Saussurean paradox of a pure relationship "without positive terms," and in which identity or meaning are both defined by sheer difference.

It seems more appropriate at this point to insist on the diagnostic function of this kind of opposition, whose dialectic is certainly present in various places in Marx, but which does not know its full polemic deployment until we get to Lenin. For in this first set of examples the "unity of opposites" will be a classification of polemic targets, of the political strategies of those opponents which Lenin considers to be seriously flawed and ineffective.

Nonetheless, the argument, in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), is startling and paradoxical. For here Lenin sends economism and terrorism off back to back, as it were, and mounts a powerful critique which envelops a gradualist social-democracy (and a workerism based on the trade unions) as well as the "extraparliamentary" activities of extreme left activists; both of them characterized by what he calls a "subservience to spontaneity":

> At first sight, our assertion may appear paradoxical, for the difference between these two appears to be so enormous: one stresses the "drab every-day struggle" and the other calls for the most self-sacrificing struggle of individuals. But this is not a paradox. The Economists and terrorists merely bow to different poles of spontaneity: the Economists bow to the spontaneity of the "pure and simple" labor movement, while the terrorists bow to the spontaneity of the passionate indignation of the intellectuals, who are either incapable of linking up the revolutionary struggle with the labor movement, or lack the opportunity to do so.[24]

It should be said that the polemic is not to be grasped as a dismissal of the content of either group: Lenin did not underestimate the significance of workplace issues or union organizing, any more than he dismissed the heroism of the dramatic acts of the students and intellectuals (his own brother, it will be recalled, was executed for planning the assassination of Czar Alexander III). But it is the extrapolation of both of these social dynamics into a politics and a political strategy which he here stigmatizes as a union of bad opposites. We may see this dialectical procedure as the diagnosis of two distinct symptoms united in a single cause, namely "spontaneity"; or, following the Aristotelian method, we can see these two political flaws or deviations as the two extremes which can be avoided by adhering to that golden mean which is here the Leninist conception of the party (uniting intellectuals and the working class). The former, to be sure, has a greater resemblance to that moment of synthesis posited by the old thesis-antithesis-synthesis model, while the Aristotelian procedure is no less tired and stereotypical. What is more seriously dialectical in these analyses remains the "paradoxical" proposition that the two positions under indictment are somehow "the same." But this is not only a union of opposites but also a union of negative terms.

We may observe another version of this same local dialectic in Louis Althusser's analysis of modern socialist history. Althusser also focuses on what is ostensibly a crucial opposition within left history, namely that between Socialists and Communists, and one which has taken the form, at various junctures, of a seeming incompatibility between Social Democracy

[24] V. I. Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry M. Christman, New York: Bantam, 1966, 109.

and Stalinism (or in ideological terms, between humanism and dogmatism[25]). These two poles, like Lenin, he sends off back to back as unacceptable sides of the same coin, on the grounds that both are secretly nourished by the ideological conviction of gradualism (or of what Walter Benjamin called progress). Social Democracy, in its pre-World War I heyday, believed in a gradual and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism on the basis of the voting strength of their party; and later on, in the possibility of a gradual reform of capitalism from the inside and its transformation into a welfare state which would more or less constitute socialism. Stalin meanwhile believed in a continuous progress, via heavy industrialization, in which socialism could be achieved incrementally. For Althusser, both these positions, and the politics they project, are politically and intellectually pernicious owing to a single great flaw they share, namely the omission of class struggle. And although he seems to have had misgivings about the word, we may say that it is class struggle that restores a dialectical reading of history insofar as it necessarily proceeds by breaks and discontinuities, and not the uninterrupted (or "homogeneous") temporality of progress or inevitability. We may therefore speak of a dialectic of bad opposites here, which is less obviously overcome than in the positive strategy Lenin theorizes in *What Is to Be Done?*, but which can probably be identified in Althusser's situation as the promise of Maoism.

But it is time to give a literary or cultural illustration of this dialectic, which opposes both ideologies and practices (or at the least, political programs and platforms), and which is thus an already partially superstructural one. Indeed, Georg Lukács's analysis of modernism (in literature) also links faulty ideological convictions with practical failure (in the production of bad books or poor art).[26] What is striking is that modernism is seen as having its own internal dialectic and taking two seemingly antithetical forms, naturalism and *symbolisme*. The historical contemporaneity of these two literary movements lends the analysis an attractive plausibility, and the effect of the identification is once again startling and dialectical. Lukács wishes to stigmatize naturalism as a mechanical aesthetic in which a premium is placed on description and on raw unprocessed data which are offered as objectivity and reality (he goes so far as to include the documentary materials and collage productions of the Dos Passos type in this category).[27] It is worth adding that the political function of this diagnosis lies in its veiled

[25] Louis Althusser, *Réponse à John Lewis*, Paris: Maspero, 1973, 85–88.

[26] Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

[27] But now see Barbara Foley's discussion of Dos Passos in her extraordinary *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

attack on Stalinist socialist realism fully as much as in some call to Western radical writers to incorporate the "great bourgeois tradition" in something of a literary popular front (thereby offering the Soviets an alibi in their crackdown on "experimentation").

How is *symbolisme* (and its various later modernist poetic avatars) then to be assimilated to this diagnosis (and leaving aside corroborating evidence such as Mallarmé's admiration for Zola, along with the more obviously symbolic and poetic moments of that latter's production)? The analysis of *symbolisme* indeed makes much clearer what is being objected to in naturalism: for the procedures of symbolism in general result in the endowment of seemingly lifeless object with all kinds of superimposed and "symbolic" meanings. A meaningless object world is here posited which requires the supplement of subjective meaning in order to constitute suitable artistic material. But what Lukács deplores is less to be seen as symbolism's subjectivism than its very starting point, namely the experience of the external world as somehow dead and meaningless, lifeless and inert, without any internal dynamic of its own.

But it was precisely to have posited this same ideology of the external world that gave naturalism its literary originality: to have embraced this world of lifeless extension and to have reproduced it in the only way possibly, namely the additive process of description and mechanical enumeration. This renewal of the analysis of naturalism, however, now gives us a key to the missing third term of the diagnosis, and to that norm against which Lukács finds both aesthetic movements wanting. It is indeed given in the title of one of the philosopher's most important essays "*Erzählen oder Beschreiben*?" ("Narrate or Describe?"[28])— and the recommendation of narration then returns us to that realism with which the name of Lukács seems, for good or ill, indissociable. For the very possibility the "great realists" had of narrating (rather than of describing) is inherent in their view of the outside world as historical process, as a world of tendencies variously working themselves out in such a way that the putative object itself can never be "described" in the textbook sense of the world insofar as it is never static and will not sit for its portrait: it is already an implicit narrative and thereby holds a narrative meaning within itself that does not have to be imposed from the outside by subjective fiat or by symbolist transformation. The external world, however ugly or depressing, can never be inert or meaningless, if only because it has been historically produced and already has its meaning in historical production. Indeed, if seen in this way, Lukács may be said dialectically to rejoin his antagonist Brecht, for whom the very function of the so-called estrangement effect was to show how things considered

[28] Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur D. Kahn, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1970, 110–148.

natural (and thus inevitable or eternal) were in fact the results of human action (and could therefore be changed by other human beings). The presupposition of both aesthetics is in the narratability of human action and human production.

At any rate, in Lukács we see something of a replay, on the aesthetic level, of the old polemics against mechanical materialism on the one hand and idealism on the other. The dialectical feature of these polemics lies, not in the fight on two fronts which is characteristic of so many conceptual arguments, but rather in the way in which the bad opposites are identified by way of a single underlying flaw or ideological error which they share. Thus the alleged moment of synthesis, in which the two distinct and dissonant phenomena are somehow reunited, precedes their separation rather than following and triumphantly overcoming it. But it would be equally mistaken to suppose that this local kind of dialectic posits some initial moment of unity which then breaks down into two distinct and seemingly antithetical results (and thus nostalgically posits an earlier unity to which we are encouraged to return): for what is at issue here is a union of negative opposites rather than positive ones, and their reidentification does not give us any new and positive value, but only an enlarged target of critique at a higher and more comprehensive level.

3.

This is the point, however, at which we must again confront the pseudo-Hegelian triad and ask again, more insistently, whether it is not by way of the allegedly synthesizing third term that both Lenin and Lukács "solve" their problems. In the case of Lenin, it is well known that it is the institution of the revolutionary party which overcomes the collective paralysis of union activity and the individual futility of the anarchist "deeds" alike. And as for Lukács, has it not always been apparent that his doctrine of "realism" was meant to overcome both the mechanical materialism with which naturalism received its object and the narcissistic and solipsistic excess with which symbolism or modernism indulged its subjectivity? Realism then seemed to take the positive elements of both of these pathological deformations and to unite them in a new kind of art; just as intellectuals and workers found a more productive combination and synthesis within the form of the Leninist party. The problem with such conventional formulations is that they omit Hegel's famous "labor of the negative," that is to say, they overleap the work of the so-called synthesis itself and the process whereby we reach the "progressive" from the earlier stage diagnosed by both theorists.

The proof is that in both cases the gap is papered over by sheer willpower: Lukács asks his writers to convert to critical realism by adopting the Marxian standpoint on reality, while Lenin, as is well known, relies on his

formidable powers of argumentation and polemic, neither one acknowledging the deeper unconscious roots of ideology as the individual subject—writer or militant—sinks and disperses, by way of Freud's navel of the unconscious, into the multiple interrelationships of historical reality itself.

That process will be one, I want to argue, of neutralization,[29] and it will only be by way of a kind of negative work on the negative itself—do we really want to identify this as the famous "negation of the negation"?—that the new forms are to be produced. For Lenin's diagnosis, I will use the example of the Cuban revolution as a clearer small-scale and perhaps more successful process of neutralization.

For in the case of the Cuban revolution, a spatial or geographic "experimental laboratory" will be present which allows us to witness this process at first hand (via the theorization of Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?*[30]). Indeed, the revolutionary *foco*—the isolated mountain camp from which guerrilla warfare is waged and in which a true revolutionary party is forged—will be a space in which both intellectuals and workers—these two essential components of the revolutionary party according to Lenin—lose their social determinations and become truly classless in the new revolutionary sense. Intellectuals are then physically removed from the specializations of academic work and the ideological temptations of the ivory tower and of purely intellectual labor; while the former factory workers and peasants who join the great movement in the Sierra Maestra will have abandoned factory alienation, the division of labor, and the subordinations of the workplace, the subalternity with respect to management or overseer, the professional habits of obedience and of Taylorism alike. In both cases, a powerful neutralization burns away everything that Lenin has diagnosed in his program-essay; the negative itself, we may say, has reduced all these individuals, not to their most elementary essence as commodity and labor power (as Lukács argued in *History and Class Consciousness*), but precisely to their elemental power as negation and revolutionary refusal, as agency, as a pure form of revolt in which they are all equal and from which new post-revolutionary forms can be expected to emerge.

As for art, it does not seem particularly rewarding to follow Lukács along a path which has not reached the aesthetic realizations he called for in the anti-fascist period (or later in the then socialist countries); and I will therefore limit this demonstration of neutralization in the arts to a unique trajectory within modernism itself. It may well be possible to argue that, from a formal perspective, modernism itself is dialectical to the degree to

[29] See for a fuller discussion my *Archaeologies of the Future*, London: Verso, 2005, 170–181.

[30] Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1967.

which it is obliged to posit its own formal oppositions and to navigate them by way of invention and differentiation. Still, in that dismantling of convention we call modernism, certain artists have been more keenly aware of the dialectical nature of the process than others, thereby producing what it does not seem abusive to call a properly dialectical aesthetic program, even though it seems preferable to emphasize the role of the historical process in this development, rather than the consciousness of the artist and his or her intention. The issue is not whether Piet Mondrian—preeminent among such dialectical artists—was or was not Hegelian (whatever the verb "to be" might mean in this context), or whether his writings do or do not adequately articulate the philosophical dialectic as such (they do!)—but rather the objective moment in which the process of abstraction has gone far enough to reveal dialectical oppositions at work, and at work in a dynamic rather than a static fashion.

What Mondrian realized[31] was that cubism had stopped halfway in its move towards abstraction and that it had left an intact and central a figure, a sculptural object, which continued to function as a representation and a mimesis, no matter how multiple its faces and dimensions. He resolved to dissolve even this figure itself, all the while realizing that the very concept or experience of the figure depended on a fundamental binary opposition, that between figure and ground: it was therefore necessary, not merely to eliminate the figure but also to eliminate the ground against which it was perceived, or in other words space itself—a ground still persisting within the frame of the painting as a kind of three-dimensional illusion, a perceptual fiction or mirage. At the same time, Mondrian realized that it was not merely by eliminating ground, but only by disabling this basic opposition itself that he would be able to do away with the centrality of the figure as well as to abolish the background of space itself, along with its planes.

It is indeed well known that the history of painting has been marked by aesthetic quarrels which were inevitably organized by binary oppositions (that between line and color is only the most famous of these); and it will be clear enough that several distinct positions or choices are logically possible when faced with such an alternative. One can make a stand on one or the other, and invent a practice whose aesthetic theory promotes one of these poles over the other one: Ingres or David versus Delacroix! One can however also attempt to invent a style in which the two are given equal prominence and somehow harmonized: this would be the famous "synthesis" of the pseudo-Hegelian triad. But one can finally also attempt to destroy the

[31] Here and in what follows I draw on the extraordinary readings of Yves-Alain Bois in *Painting as Model*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, and in the Mondrian chapters of *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004.

opposition and by neutralizing their tension: this is presumably what Mondrian's deployment of straight lines of color attempts to do.

Even before that, however, we confront, without necessarily realizing it, an opposition between vertical and horizontal: for the human being who contemplates a picture on the wall is vertical and reads it vertically, even when—as in Mondrian—the canvas itself seeks to escape those coordinates and to exist in a world in which verticality and horizontality no longer constitute a meaningful opposition. When Jackson Pollock (whose early genius Mondrian himself was among the first to recognize) lays the canvas out flat on the floor and walks around it, he completes precisely this neutralization of the two-dimensional coordinates Mondrian sought to realize.

Yves-Alain Bois explores a number of such oppositions in Mondrian, whose fundamental doctrine—"all relationship is governed by one prime relationship; that of extreme opposites"[32]—is both profoundly Hegelian and structuralist *avant la lettre*. All of Mondrian's solutions aim to divest the painted surface of any possible optical center, any single place or element on which the eye might dwell for a moment at rest, reestablishing a hierarchy of features and in effect turning a process back into an object in space.

We may think, indeed, of Schoenberg's invention of the twelve-tone system, expressly designed in order to forestall the return of what might correspond in music to centrality and hierarchy, namely tonality as such. The idea was that if one emphasized any single note over the others, however fleetingly, a tonal center would begin to reform in a kind of local field around it: whence the injunction not to repeat any note of the scale before passing through all the others in the row. Whether this horror of centrality has any equivalents in the philosophical realm is something we will want to consider later on in this discussion.

But this story (as Bois tells it) has an extraordinary twist ending: Mondrian had already gone through several systems in his pursuit of the truly abstract (and I hasten to add that his thinking was not only profoundly stimulated by Hegel, but was also encouraged and justified by the ideological attractions of theosophy and spiritualism). At the end however—and it is a destiny Bois compares to the ultimate fate of Balzac's painter Frenhofer, in *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*—he understands that if one succeeds

[32] Piet Mondrian, *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writing of Piet Mondrian*, eds. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986, 30. The evolution of Mondrian's theoretical formulations may be described as a gradual realization that his initial language of equilibrium or harmony needed to be supplemented, if not replaced altogether, by a more negative sense of an "annihilation of form" (160), of an "equilibrium that neutralizes" (214). It is this difference between synthesis and neutralization, which I have tried to theorize in Part I, Chapter 11, of *Archaeologies of the Future*, referenced here in note 29 above.

in neutralizing these basic oppositions, one ends up with harmony and with a static equilibrium from which all opposition has disappeared (a path that will be taken by Malevich in the suprematist *Black Square*). One has not succeeded in neutralizing an opposition aesthetically unless one continues to keep that opposition and that tension alive: the very paradox of the aesthetic resolution of contradiction in the first place. So in his final canvas, *Victory Boogie Woogie*, the painter paints and repaints the extraordinary finished work, eliminating his own solutions one after another precisely because they have become solutions and have brought the process to a halt, and leaving the canvas unfinished at his death, as a tragic relic of the insatiability of the dialectic, which here ends up destroying itself.

It is interesting in this context to add that for Mondrian the vertical—the world, external human life—was essentially tragic[33] and that the vocation of the abstract non-dimensional non-space of the painting was very precisely to destroy the tragic in the name of something else. Yet that destruction now seemed to interiorize the tragic within its own seemingly interminable process. The paradox will indeed pose a properly Utopian question for us in the final section of this discussion.

4.

Yet even dialectics are dialectical, and we cannot escape a fundamental problem in our presentation of the binary opposition and in the primacy of relationship it implies. The content of the binary may well be contradiction, a notion then somewhat attenuated by the formalistic mode in which this presentation has been cast (but to which we will return). Yet the absence of another relational concept normally associated with dialectics is somewhat more surprising: it is the failure of the word (or the concept) of mediation to appear as such.

Mediation is not only the "black box" through which one state passes, on its mysterious metamorphosis into a radically different one. It also names relationship itself, the very inner link of the binary opposition, the equal sign which can signify either identity or difference, or indeed both at the same time. It is also a logical relationship which can itself be transformed into a temporal one. Meanwhile, as a term it clearly derives from a different philosophical family than the linguistic concepts of structuralism, raising doubts as to whether its baggage of Germanic overtones and undertones (no doubt of a theological nature) can ever sit comfortably with the Franco-Slavic derivations; whether "mediation" itself does not require mediation; whether we do not here confront yet another tension between time and space.

[33] Bois, *Painting as Model*, 181.

For it was never clear whether mediation designated what was to have been explained or itself constituted the explanation. Did it do away with the need for a third term, or stand itself, as Hegel sometimes seems to imply, as that third term from which the two extremes or opposites derive, as that one which becomes two? Nonetheless, (we will return to the problem in Part 3 of this essay) the very history of the concept of mediation—that is, the fact that it already has a history and a past, that it is itself historical—ensures an analytic dissatisfaction with it, and the inevitability of the splitting of its atom by modern logic, which wants to find ever smaller and more elementary constituent parts (the same is true of negation, as Deleuze's work testifies[34]).

Still, we here approach a phenomenon as ultimate and as mysterious as the event itself, as change in time. It is all very well to evoke Engels's dialectic of quantity and to point to the moment when that final feather or speck of dust changes everything: change is not for all that explained or even grasped, it is simply named and observed. So also with sheer relationship; when two phenomena are juxtaposed, at what point do they cease to be two separate items and become united in that very unity called juxtaposition? At what point does difference begin to relate, and in the name of what can we deny the right to call the juxtaposition of incommensurables an opposition?

For it is with the incommensurables of modern science and philosophy that we again have to do here, those of nuclear physics or of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The concept of the incommensurable is at the very heart of contemporary philosophies of difference;[35] and we would need to know whether the dialectic is not powerful enough to transform this affirmation of radical difference into a new form of relationship; whether thinking is not dialectical enough to stretch and expand in order to include the unthinkable (Hegel's old reply to Kant, namely, that the setting of a boundary or a limit already exceeds and incorporates it). And we would need to know whether this is a decision we can ourselves somehow make, and in the name of what such a decision could possibly be made.

The binary opposition, meanwhile, is clearly a spatial concept or category, which can to be sure be called upon to take on temporal form and shape. It is also a horizontal one, somehow, and we may now raise the issue of its possible verticalities. What has seemed lacking in the dialectic for modern tastes (let's keep it at first on the aesthetic level) is something extraordinarily paradoxical, namely its negativity. How can one accuse a philosophical system or method of lacking negativity when it is wholly constructed around the negative and negation as such, and ceaselessly sings the latter's praises as the angelic choirs celebrate the godhead? Still, it might not

[34] Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, Paris: PUF, 1968.

[35] See above, note 19; and also Jean-François Lyotard, *Le différend*, Paris: Minuit, 1983.

be altogether undialectical to suggest that in some peculiar way the dialectic manages, over and over again, to turn the negative into a positivity (I take it that this is the burden of Deleuze's attack on negation in *Difference and Repetition*). If so, it is a serious matter, indeed, which demands an answer.

The objection is itself a profoundly historical one: and is not only (not even) primarily concerned with refuting the misuses of negativity in relation to absence, say, or to opposition. To be sure, nature (or being) is as full as an egg, there are no absences in it, and no oppositions either; how could nature possibly be dialectical when it does not even include such a thing as the negative? Such was Kant's argument long ago, and Sartre's only yesterday.[36]

But it seems to me that current anti-dialectical arguments have as much to do with positivity as with its opposite (if that is what the negative is), and reflect the obscure feeling that the dialectical conception of negation also makes positivity altogether too positive, and renders reality or being a

[36] See on this, for example Kant's essay on negative quantity ("Versuch, den Begriff der negativen Grössen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen" [1763]) as well as Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Etre et le néant*, Paris: Gallimard, 1943, Introduction vi, 30–34. It will be observed that the need for a dialectical dereification would be obviated by avoiding reified terms in the first place; and this is essentially one of the deeper motivations of contemporary critiques of the dialectic. But this is easier said than done, and poses extraordinarily difficult writing problems, which are probably best solved by the multiplication of terms rather than their suppression. Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, is one of the rare examples of such an achievement, and it is predicated on the speed with which each new term is negated and replaced by yet a newer one. He justifies this procedure as follows (in a discussion of the representation of change as such): "It may seem odd to insist that a relation has an ontological status separate from the terms of the relation. But, as the work of Gilles Deleuze repeatedly emphasizes, it is in fact an indispensable step toward conceptualizing change as anything more or other than a negation, deviation, rupture, or subversion. The terms of a relation are normally assumed to precede their interrelating, to be already-constituted. This begs the question of change, because everything is given in advance. The interrelating simply realizes external configurations already implicit as possibilities in the form of the preexisting terms. You can rearrange the furniture, even move it to a new location, but you still have the same old furniture, assuming the precedence of terms in the relation is common to approaches characterized as empirical. Taking pregiven terms, extracting a permutational system of implicit positionings from their form, projecting that system to metaphysical point before the givenness of the terms, and developing the projection as a generative a priori mapping—these moves are common, in varying ways, to phenomenological, structuralist, and many poststructuralist approaches. They back-project a stencil of the already-constituted to explain its constitution, thus setting up a logical time-slip, a vicious hermeneutic circle. What is given the slip, once again, is change" (70).

massive element which is either there or not, and in which there are no degrees or gradations. It does not register, in other words, those qualitative ebbs or flows which an older psychology characterized as a drop in *niveau*, a still too subjective characterization, perhaps, of the waxing and waning of positivity itself. An enlarged conception of reality, it is argued, will be necessary to take account of these fluctuations (in which case the terms positive or empirical can be restricted to specific modes of appearance of that reality, and not identified with everything that is as such).

It is enough to confront an older dialectic with some of these newer levels or degrees of reality to appreciate the enlargement the dialectic is also called upon to make. From one direction, innumerable theories of virtuality reflect an increasingly informational cosmos and its technologies and at the very least confront a Hegelian tradition with the palpable need for new logical categories beyond those of the possible or the probable. From another level of reality, the peculiar new originalities of an image society pose problems not even Lacan's notion of the Imaginary is capable of solving and tend at their outer limit to substitute themselves for a traditional reality they seem capable of doing altogether without. But how can the simulacrum be said to be negative, and in what way do the seemingly untheorizable temporalities of photography—where the past is still present, even though long dead—offer any kind of handle to the dialectic?

Indeed, as far as time is concerned, a peculiarly contemporary temporal paradox seemed to confront the "teleology" with which the dialectic was always taxed: namely that Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*,[37] in which, "always already," an effect turned out to be its own cause. Very different from all the skeptical paradoxes of ancient sophistry, this one seemed not only to express a permanent present, but to carry the shock of feeling the results of a time become space itself. But in this case—space versus time—the dialectic would presumably still have something to say, as also in that other possibility that this paradox uses the notion of causality to undermine causality itself. In any case, however, such temporal paradoxes have known little attention in the dialectical literature, save perhaps in Althusserian analysis of revolutionary temporality.

Indeed, it is worth wondering to what degree the whole immense Heideggerian problematization of representation has impacted modern dialectical thought; yet surely the question of representation has marked the fundamental break with traditional philosophy, and constituted the source of all the multiple philosophical modernisms (if not, in another way, of the postmodernisms that followed them). Many of these problems and paradoxes were already registered concretely in the analysis of *Capital* and its

[37] See Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse,* Paris: PUF, 1971, "Après-coup," 33–36.

causalities and temporalities, its modes of representation and derealization; but they were not thematized in the philosophies of Marxism that followed. We will see, particularly in the paradoxes of objective appearance, that Hegel himself was not altogether innocent of such realities, but the social system that developed after his death made them more unavoidable for us than for him.

5.

I come back, then, to the dialectic of the horizontal and the vertical in dialectics which is most strikingly developed in the doctrine of immanence. Does the success turn into a failure, in other words, as a chronological—that is to say, a horizontal—sequence of opposites; or is it already immanently inscribed as failure in and of itself? Does the opposite have to follow on its own opposite in order to generate the dialectical figures we have been considering; or is it possible that being and its negation may already coexist, may be superimposed, as it were vertically, in such a way that it suffices for us to contemplate a positivity with dialectical intensity for it to turn out to be a negativity under our very gaze? And if so, is this not simply yet another Gestalt alternation, or can it correspond to some deeper union of opposites within being itself?

Unexpectedly, the most dramatic illustration of this dialectical ontology is to be found in a literary work whose fuller analysis will be reserved until our final chapter, only its conclusions being noted here. The work itself is, however, one of the most famous in the Western canon, and debates about its literary qualities are only matched by the appropriation of those same qualities in the service of propaganda about the Greco-Roman/Christian "tradition" of Western Europe (a proto-political "value" associated with conservatives like T. S. Eliot). Indeed, the relative indifference of many modern generations to the elegiac mood of Virgil's Tennysonian verse has long been chastened by its standing as a classic, which brooks little levity (one thinks of Pound's joke about the sailor, who, referred to the noble poem's protagonist Aeneas, exclaims, "Him a hero? Begob, I thought he was a priest").

David Quint's reading of the *Aeneid*[38] now changes all this, and, in a painstaking review of the ways in which the episodes of the epic pointedly recapitulate the relevant sections of the *Odyssey* (in the search for Rome) and the *Iliad* (in the overcoming of the Italic tribes), demonstrates that such elaborate overtracings are not to be dismissed as archival aestheticism or mere literary allusion, but make a decisive political point which is itself extraordinarily daring in the historical situation of the nascent empire and

[38] David Quint, *Epic and Empire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

indeed the presence of Augustus himself over the poet's shoulder. The Homeric poems are indeed "superimposed by a constant process of doubling and surcharge in which the victors of the *Iliad* are at one and the same time also the losers of the *Odyssey*, and even more, that Aeneas is called upon to assume both roles simultaneously. This simultaneity of victory and defeat also complicates the purely sequential understanding of peripateia; for if on the level of the Trojans' long voyage the defeat in Troy turns around into the triumphant foundation of the Italian settlement which will eventually and providentially become Rome itself, the victory of the Trojans over the neighboring tribes recapitulates in a ghostly way their own grisly fate at the hand of the triumphant Greeks … the transformation of negative into positive becomes an ambivalent simultaneity, turning from negative to positive and back accordingly as we rotate the episodes semiotically."[39]

The *Aeneid* thereby emerges, not merely as the melodic and complacent epic celebration of the triumph of the last great "world power" and of the empire in all the glory of its own "end of history," tinged with the appropriate melancholy of the Virgilian "tears of things"; it also looms, in a kind of exact double and simulacrum of itself, through the appearance of its triumphalist verses, as the bitter critique of empire itself, as the implicit denunciation of the latter's brutality and carnage, as well as the prophetic warning of retribution to come.

Virgil therefore would seem to offer a quintessential case, not so much of dialectical ambiguity, as rather of the way in which the specification of the dialectic at work here, and the identification of the unity of opposites, allow us to read a subversive message delivered under the emperor's very eyes, and through the elegiac music of this verse. Now suddenly the poem seems to address its readers as follows: "you Roman victors, never forget that you are also the miserable losers and refugees of defeat and of the loss of your city and country!" It is as though, as in the Roman triumphs, an American writer of great quality had the courage to whisper in the ear of his public: "American warriors and conquerors of empire and business alike, never forget that you are also the cowardly migrants from a tyrannical old regime you preferred to flee rather than to transform!"[40]

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[39] I here quote myself in advance, see below, 0000.

[40] This is essentially Marx's response to Cabet's Icaria, denouncing the emigration of potential revolutionaries: "If those honest people who struggle for a better future leave, they will leave the arena completely open to the obscurants and the rogues … Brothers, stay at the battlefront of Europe. Work and struggle here, because only Europe has all the elements of communal wealth. This type of community will be established here, or nowhere." Quoted in Louis Marin, *Utopics: A Spatial Play*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1984, 273–279.

In history, indeed, the negative and the positive seem fatally to assume the form of success and failure, triumph and defeat, as though these categories, above and beyond the superficial, allegedly Hegelian illusions of teleology, offered the only ways in which biological human individuals could imagine the destiny of their collectivities. The dialectical union of these opposites is then a social rebuke as well as a political lesson. It reminds us, not only that "success" was never really on the cards for mortal beings in the first place, but also that history progresses, not by way of victory but by way of defeat: and that if our eyes are trained to see it, we can find this dialectic at work everywhere in the record of our collective existences.[41]

I select, as another and final document in this particular file, Thomas Friedman's popular and starry-eyed celebration of the wonders of globalization, and in particular his truly dialectical narrative of the fate of India in the new dispensation. Friedman is reflecting on the way in which one of the fundamental forces at work in globalization, the informational-technological industries at the very height of their commercial success, suddenly came to a sorry end in the bursting of the so-called "dot-com bubble" on March 10, 2000. Indeed, a stock market collapse may well be a better paradigm for defeat today when wars do not seem able to be won or lost. An any rate, the Nasdaq collapse left a good deal of unused expansion behind it, in particular an ambitious fiber-optic cable designed to make its investors "endlessly rich in an endlessly expanding digital universe."[42]

The dialectical identity of failure and success here turns on the relationship between America (which can be identified with globalization as such) and India (which in this instance plays a role of a subordinate space of cheap outsourcing). We may already detect the phantom presence of earlier dialectical reversals behind this historical present: for one thing, the inheritance of the English language (positive) from the history of British colonization (negative); for another, the decision of Nehru, with his "preference for pro-Soviet, Socialist economics" (negative), to fund a number of Soviet-style institutes of science and technology (positive). Nonetheless, Nehru's system, according to one native informant, "produced people with quality and by quantity. But many of them rotted on the docks of India like cabbages. Only a relative few could get on ships and get out" (*WiF*, 105) namely to work in America.

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[41] Although it is not a stylistic matter, I am indebted to Steven Helmling's discovery of this thematics in my own work, in his interesting book *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2001.

[42] Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005, 103. Future references to this work are denoted *WiF*.

Suddenly, in a classic dialectical reversal, "the overcapacity in fiber optics … meant that [the Indians] and their American clients got to use all that cable practically for free" (*WiF*, 104), with the legendary result we all know —the development of Bangalore, the outsourcing of American business calls and files of all kinds to unknown locations on the sub-continent, the great leap forward of India into the very center of globalization itself (and of modern capitalism).

Friedman's conclusions on the matter are predictably couched in terms of irony:

> India didn't benefit only from the dot-com boom; it benefited even more from the dot-com bust! That is the real irony. The boom laid the cable that connected India to the world, and the bust made the cost of using it virtually free and also vastly increased the number of American companies that would want to use that fiber-optic cable to outsource knowledge work to India. (*WiF*, 110)

For irony is the way in which a single side of the exchange views the dialectical reversal in which it changes places with its rival—the irony of defeat, the irony of victory: irony is in this sense an incomplete dialectic, and one whose only opposite is the non-ironic, the dumbfounded mesmerization by the empirical state of things, the stubborn belief—against all odds—in that law of non-contradiction which decrees that negative and positive, failure and success, are two distinct dispensations, separated from each other by reality itself, and to be kept that way!

6.

Is it possible, then, that this distinction between horizontal and vertical oppositions simply leads us back again to the old "incommensurability" between history and sociology, between event and structure, and finally between time and space? The question is probably not so much one of the nature of the object, for events bring out the structure, historical developments necessarily articulate features of the social in time, in the form of antagonism or tension. Rather our leading thread has here been the inquiry into the character of the oppositional relationship—so intimate as to fold it back into unity, so distant or external as to break apart into two distinct zones or fields, two different objects. We will see in another place what role the Hegelian formulation (embraced by Mao Tse-tung) plays in all this: the One becomes the Two.[43] It is at any rate clear that the ambiguous no man's

[43] See below, 0000; and also Hegel, *PoS*, 350–351; Mao Zedong, "A Dialectical Approach to Inner-Party Unity," *Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. V*, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1977, 514–516; Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*,

land between them, between internal and external relations, or unity and incommensurability, identity and difference, must be named contradiction if one or the other of these results is not to harden over and become permanent or substantial; equally clear that if contradiction is to be the name we give this problem it will always nudge us in the direction of negation rather than of identification. In fact, to foreground the term contradiction is to discover a splendid opportunity to kick the ladder away and to expunge the last traces of that structuralism which offered us a starting point here. For the structuralist perspective always grasps contradiction in the form of the antinomy: that is to say, a logical impasse in which thought is paralyzed and can neither move forward nor back, in which an absolute structural limit is reached, either in thought or reality. This deconcealment of the antinomies at the root of practical or theoretical dilemmas can serve as a powerful instrument of ideological analysis (as in deconstruction), but it should not be confused with that more dynamic and productive act of setting the antinomy itself in motion, that is to say, revealing it to have in reality been the form of a contradiction: for it is the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such.

But what is contradiction in that case? It is not that which blocks and suspends movement but within which movement itself takes place, as Marx suggests in a luminous passage (he is discussing the structure of commodities):

> The further development of the commodity does not abolish these contradictions, but rather provides the form within which they have room to move. This is, in general, the way in which real contradictions are resolved. For instance, it is a contradiction to depict one body as constantly falling towards another and at the same time consistently flying away from it. The ellipse is a form of motion within which this contradiction is both realized and resolved.[44]

Yet we must now take our vertical oppositions through yet another rehearsal, and replay yet another opposition, the most debatable yet unavoidable one in the traditional Marxian arsenal, which remains unmentioned in Engels's enumeration, and is indeed only articulated once in Marx's entire corpus: I mean the "opposition," if it is one, between base and superstructure. But indeed, what kind of opposition is it? Does not Benjamin tell us, in a formula which he must have taken great satisfaction in proposing, that "the superstructure *expresses* the base"?[45] Is this a contradiction that he is here able

Detroit: Black and Red, 1983, Chapter 3; Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, Paris: Seuil, 1982, 61–62, 131, 228–229.

[44] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin, 1976, 198.

[45] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999, 460.

to "express"? Is it any clearer when the church fathers decree that the superstructure *reflects* the base? And are we not at that point simply back in an opposition of the familiar asymmetrical type, in which we confront a dominant term and a subordinate one? It would be stimulating to attempt a dialectical reversal here, and to argue that, on the contrary, the base reflects the superstructure: something Jacques Attali outrageously posits, in *Bruits*, when he asserts that the music of one era anticipates the economic system of the next one to come.[46] Yet on this scholastic debate, whose 150-year futility has exhausted most of its participants, matters of great significance still depend. Indeed, Marxism would seem to stand or fall with it, for a system in which culture were utterly independent of the economic would spell the end of most Marxisms, while one in which they were undifferentiated from one another would constitute a Foucauldian dystopia, if not a truly archaic life well before even tribal organization or *pensée sauvage*.

The first peculiarity to note about the opposition between base and superstructure is that it already appears within the base itself. This is the distinction between forces of production and relations of production, which has generally been interpreted in the sense of a differentiation between a given technology of production and the labor process that expresses, reflects, or corresponds to it. It is as though, borrowing a Lacanian method, the fraction constituted by inscribing superstructure over base redoubled itself by including yet another fraction in its denominator, namely this earlier or more primordial fraction one gets by writing relations above forces. One hesitates to propose the mathematical solution, however, in which, in one way or another, the second denominator is dialectically flung up into the numerator, thus leaving us with a superstructure now fully tainted by the base if not multiplied by it (what the cultural enemies of Marxism have always accused its conception of culture as being).

I would rather wish to point out analogous but non-symmetrical developments on the other side of the fraction, in the numerator or place of the superstructure: in which the latter find themselves multiplied into a variety of levels all more or less homologous with one another ("art, ideology, the law, religion, etc."[47]). Not only does this seem to dissolve the state, state power and the political back into one more epiphenomenal "superstructure" among others (for it can certainly not be assigned to the base), the functional relationship of the opposition forces/relations has here somehow given way to a multiplicity of cultural levels all parallel (and/or

[46] See Jacques Attali, *Bruits: essai sur léconomie politique de la musique*, Paris: PUF, 1977.

[47] "Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence; they have no history, no development …" etc., Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, 42.

homologous) with each other, yet in no particular working relationship to each other at all. The Hegelians might point out, then, at this stage, that we are here dealing with an opposition between relationship and parallelism, or even between opposition and replication: it seems comparable to what obtains when we juxtapose the idea of the dichotomous classes, in a Marxian conception of class struggle, with the idea of social strata in bourgeois sociology.[48] Yet those conceptions are ideologically distinct from one another and belong to different conceptual systems; whereas the oppositions with which we are confronted here are parts of the same concept or system, and form the two separated but related sides of a single theoretical fraction. The problem is therefore dialectical, rather than ideological: and indeed, it reminds us of the very vocation of the dialectic itself to hold two distinct dynamics, two distinct systems of law or well-nigh scientific regularities, together within the unity of a single thought. Yet we named that "single thought" a contradiction, and it is not yet clear that the base-superstructure distinction we have been elaborating here is in fact a contradiction: that is, we have not yet worked our way through to the point at which it can be identified as one, the point at which tension and negativity divide as much as they relate, or relate as much as they divide.

Let's return to the denominator, the "first" opposition between forces of production and relations of production. From one perspective, the opposition would appear to reproduce the old ideological or metaphysical one between body and mind, thereby strengthening an interpretation of the forces/relations distinction as a fundamentally materialist operation. (It is an interpretive temptation reinforced by the far more overt opposition in the first chapter of *Capital*, in which use value is specifically characterized as being material, while the exchange value of the commodity—"objective appearance"—is famously described as spiritual, as having metaphysical or theological overtones.) The forces of production are thus the material technology, that is, the state of the machinery, the tools, the raw material (itself available owing to the development of a certain technology) and so forth. The concept of relations would seem more ambiguous, insofar as it first seems to direct our attention to the relationship of implements and raw material to each other, and only then reveals itself to be the concrete labor process itself, how the tools are used and how the workers need to be positioned in order to do justice to this particular stage of production. (For example, Marx insists on one fundamental historical change in the development of capitalism, namely that from "manufacture," in which the various tools prolong and enhance human labor, and "industry," in which human labor is organized around, and in the service of, the machinery itself.)

[48] See the interesting discussion of these two perspectives in Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959.

Yet these two terms of the opposition—material technology and human agency—stage two distinct perspectives—that of technological determinism and that of humanism—which are each of them clearly unsatisfactory. Given the extensive role played in *Capital* by accounts of machinery and so-called constant capital, it is very hard to ward off impressions of Marx as a technological determinist (and this in spite of his repeated insistency that value comes from human labor and not from machinery). Indeed, it is worth noting that the word "revolution" is used in *Capital* almost exclusively to describe technological change. On the other hand, an emphasis on the centrality of the labor process itself risks encouraging a voluntarism in which the democratic reorganization of the shop floor and the introduction of self-management are in themselves enough to transform the system.

Each of these perspectives—they would be criticized and attacked as materialism ("bad" materialism, of course, mechanical materialism) and idealism respectively, and also as determinism and voluntarism—is evidently an ideology in its own right. What Marx's opposition now does is not only to analyze a unified phenomenon (a One) into two distinct dimensions; it also requires each perspective to demystify the other one, and to perform an operation of ideological critique which is internal to the conceptualization itself. Thus, it would be wrong to imagine that the forces/relations distinction only operates in the direction of some materialist critique and regrounding in which we are brought up short against the material history of the various modes of production: the insistence on relations, indeed, precludes that illusion of a purely technological determinism to which we have referred as well, and obliges us to dissolve the seemingly massive and impenetrable materiality of machinery back into its reality as human action (the introduction of new machines as a solution to the power of workers or to economic crisis, the very invention of technology itself, its human meaning as a specific form of exploitation or of discarding of redundant human beings).

Thus this first opposition not only brings into visibility two distinct ways of reading or representing production itself: it posits each as the indispensable correction of the other, in a situation in which neither is the essential term in some asymmetrical opposition and which thereby demands a constant dialectical movement back and forth which must not be allowed to harden into a static sociological model of some kind. The proposal, indeed, casts new light on Karl Korsch's arresting observation that Marxism disposes of two distinct codes—that of production, value and commodification and that of agency or class struggle—which offer alternate yet finally equally satisfactory ways of describing its objects.[49] The structure of production can, in other words, be translated or transcoded into the language of

[49] Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx*, New York: Humanities Press International, 1963.

class struggle, and vice versa. To this proposition we can now add the imperative that the two codes must criticize each other, must systematically be translated back and forth into one another in a ceaseless alternation, which foregrounds what each code cannot say fully as much as what it can.

I will argue that it is this dynamic that is then transferred from that base or infrastructure (whose internal truth it is) to what are called the superstructures and seemed to stand in some indeterminate parallelism to it. In that form, the new and larger opposition clearly reproduces the mind/body, the matter/spirit opposition on a larger collective and socially more comprehensive scale. And yet we have already seen that the base is not to be considered a purely materialist phenomenon: its relationship to any particular superstructure will then not only be revealed in some materialist correction of the idealistic illusions of the superstructure in question, as when we evoke some economic basis of philosophy or art, or of the law, or of the seemingly autonomous state structure. This is to be sure the standard reading of the base/superstructure relationship, a reading which is then itself the excuse for hand-wringing denunciations of Marxist reductionism and of vulgar materialist hostility to the autonomous histories and structures of the superstructures in question.

Rather, what is being proposed here is that it is the inner self-correcting dynamic of the base or infrastructure which is transferred to each superstructure, when it is isolated from the social totality in a specific moment of analysis or articulation. The superstructure, then, endowed not only with the material dimension of a base in the form of the "forces of production" level, but also with its interaction with a level of the "relations of production," is then obliged to reconstitute itself into just such a dynamic process in which, having produced itself as a quasi-material object, it is then at once dereified into a complex set of human acts, which are then themselves regrounded in material processes, in a set of linked operations of self-constitution and deconstruction which is potentially interminable.

I will only give a single example of the process, in Althusser's well-known theory of ideology, which clearly deals with an area that has always been considered to be a superstructure in the Marxist tradition.[50] But the two halves of this essay—the first on the state ideological apparatuses—church, family, school, etc.—and the appended afterthought on "interpellation"—have never been sufficiently interrogated in their disjunction (comparable perhaps in form to the eruption of the theory of the sublime as Kant's supplemental afterthought to his more official theory of beauty). In fact, the two Althusserian theories of institution and subjectivity very precisely replicate the back and forth movement of the forces/relations distinction we

[50] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy,* trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

have been presenting here. "Institutions"—the so-called apparatuses—are something like the base or infrastructure of ideology as a superstructure; while the latter—the quasi-Lacanian structure of ideological subjectivity—is the cultural or superstructural form which "expresses" that base, to return to Benjamin's interpretation, and which articulates the material institutions in their social, relational, existential realities.

Two points need to be emphasized in conclusion here: it is that there can be no static structural or sociological theories or models of base and superstructure. Each analysis is ad hoc and punctual; it sets out from a specific event or text and constitutes an interpretive act rather than a theory of structure. There can thus be no theory of superstructures; and there is therefore no point in objecting, for example, that the state is or is not a superstructure, that it is not sufficiently distinguished from ideological superstructures such as philosophy or art, and so forth.

Indeed, in the spirit of our *Darstellung* in this chapter, we might propose a new and unwieldy modification of the way in which base-and-superstructure are themselves to be designated. For it is as though the "theory" itself, whether the object of criticism or of promotion, is here still conceptualized in terms of the definite article. It is always the base-and-superstructure, the base, the superstructure, which are discussed: it now seems appropriate to suggest that we rather evoke an indefinite relationship: a base-and-superstructure, or indeed many of them, depending on the circumstances and on the occasion. And in fact, this is the moment to go even further and to observe that our former binary oppositions now seem to have modulated into so many effects: so that, were it felicitous, we might even be tempted to speak of a given phenomenon as "base-and-superstructural" (but see section III, below).

8.

We can also speak of such reversals as a changing of the valences on a given phenomenon, where the transformation of value and function in an altered context or system may be said to constitute a changing of its valences, from negative to positive, or the other way round, as the case may be. It is clear that for Marx many of the features of capitalism—the division of labor ("cooperation"), the expansion of firms in the direction of monopoly—constitute what one may characterize as negative, yet potentially positive phenomena. They are now in this system places of exploitation, yet in the revolutionary change in system they become positive: thus, the division of labor stunts individuals and deforms them in the direction of their own specialization (or in the case of deskilling, the removal of the division of labor does not negate it but makes it worse); and yet in its form as cooperation this tendency replaces the individual with a functioning collective and is the

potential source of new social initiatives and new social organization. Much the same can be said for the factory system itself (and, for Lenin, monopoly—in the case of the great banks—was not an evil but rather the possibility of a new step towards popular and collective control of the economy).

We may also think of the change in valences as a form of potentiation, as when a given quantity is squared or generally raised to a higher power: if anything, this is the teleology inherent in Marx's dialectic: things cannot go backwards (at least according to their own inner logic; they can certainly decay or fall apart, cease to be what they were)—there is an inevitable increase in complexity and productivity at work which cannot be reversed. On the other hand, negative potentiation—to follow Hegel's example of imaginary numbers—is not a vision of the collapse of the thing but rather the very space of the imaginary, and thus of the future or in our sense, of Utopia, as yet unrealized although a conceptualized possibility. This is the sense, finally, in which changing the valences on a given phenomenon can be a visionary act which allows the Utopian imagination to break through, as in my own reading of Walmart as a Utopian phenomenon.[51] This does not mean that Walmart is positive or that anything progressive can come out of it, nor any new system: yet to apprehend it for a moment in positive or progressive terms is to open up the current system in the direction of something else.

III. It's dialectical!

Despite all these examples, indeed, there would seem to be something fundamentally self-defeating about the presentation of the dialectic in a non-dialectic way. We have already argued that the conception of the dialectic as a system, and indeed as a philosophy as such—along with the very idea of philosophy itself—is undialectical. Yet despite similar warnings about method as an instrumental and non-dialectical idea, the likelihood of the search for binary oppositions turning into a definition, and of the practice of oppositions as such slipping into a version of method (however newfangled and structuralist), seems well-nigh fatal. Perhaps in that case the very effort to remain vigilantly formalistic and to abstract the dialectic from the impurities of content and context was itself a mistake, from which only "method" as such could reemerge.

Meanwhile the accumulation of examples accuses itself from the other side of this practice: for the example is very precisely that bad contingency which is the complement of the bad notion of law denounced in the first

[51] " 'History and Class Consciousness' as an Unfinished Project," below, Chapter 17.

section of this chapter. Examples are the arbitrary cases that rattle around inside the impossible abstraction called a law; and although it would be amusing to return upon this seemingly random lot—politics, aesthetics, big business, history, etc.—and to demonstrate how all this varied content merely articulated a fundamental opposition, subject versus object, say, in the multiplicity of its modes—the exercise might well itself simply demonstrate the deficiencies of the starting point and the one-sidedness of what turned out, not to be a form, but rather a theme in disguise, namely Opposition as such.

Contingency in fact calls up its own opposite in that once popular literary-critical Hegelianism, the concrete universal (something Hegel preferred to call "the thing itself," "die Sache selbst," as we will see in another part of this book): but this is not a place one arrives at by deciding to. Perhaps, if Marxism is to be identified as a unity of theory and practice, the same needs to be said about the dialectic, namely that it will always be its own illustration or example; that any exercise of it will already be its own presentation; that, as Sartre put it, you do not think dialectically without saying so and calling it that: all of which is to say that you have to be grappling with a dialectical reality already in order to be able to show what the dialectic is.

This suggests, not only that our next step needs to replace the noun, singular and plural alike, definite as well as indefinite, with the adjective, but also that we need to attend to "examples" of a somewhat different kind: to those mental events that take place when someone says, rebuking your perplexity before a particularly perverse interpretation or turn of events, "It's dialectical!" This is not only to accuse the worrier of heavy-handed common sense and hidebound conventional logic; it is to propose a startling new perspective from which to rethink the novelty in question, to defamiliarize our ordinary habits of mind and to make us suddenly conscious not only of our own non-dialectical obtuseness but also of the strangeness of reality as such.

I will suggest (here and in the next chapters of this book) that the older common sense empirical thought overturned in such moments—the law of non-contradiction—is what Hegel called *Verstand* (or "understanding") and what Marx called reification. But for the present it is the contagion of the dialectic, rather than its structure, that we are out to catch a glimpse of: some essential restlessness or negativity that fastens on our thinking at those moments in which we seem arrested and paralyzed by an antinomy—for, as has been observed above, the relationship between antinomy and dialectic is a crucial one in the contemporary period, where the antinomy has taken the place of the contradiction, expressing intractability rather than energy and construction (or indeed incommensurability rather than relationship).

What happens in moments like these—at least when the dialectic unexpectedly proposes itself, and when it suddenly crosses our minds that "it's dialectical!"—is that the problem itself becomes the solution, and that the opposition in which we are immobilized like a ship in the ice must itself now become the object of our thinking; that to be thus caught in an irresolvable binary opposition is in reality to have been thrown back to the very origins of dialectics itself, a welcome regression which is the very condition of progress itself.

We must therefore shift our perspective from sender to receiver, and approach "the dialectical" from the shock of its effects on reader or listener, in order to appreciate the force of its originality. Here too we will need to accumulate some examples; but this time the contingency of the examples will be proportional to the contingency of our own discoveries rather than to some ontological condition of the world itself; and their discontinuities will ensure us against system and method alike. Still, it will not seem altogether contingent that the contemporary world has thrown up two of the most brilliant dialecticians in the history of philosophy: and it seems only appropriate to scan each one for the dialectical effects with which their pages so often electrify us. Indeed, if we are still intent on oppositions, we may well wish to theorize these two practitioners—T. W. Adorno on the one hand, Žižek on the other—as votaries of the tragic and the comic muse, respectively. But just as we previously warned against the temptation of the concepts of irony or antinomy, so here we need to take our precautions against a similar category mistake, namely the identification of their effects as so many paradoxes.

I will therefore preface this discussion with a remark about the paradoxes of Michel Foucault in a hypothetical Foucauldianism. Suppose we observed[52] that one of the extensions of Enlightenment thought is to be found in nature itself, and in particular with an intensification of concern today with animals: it is a concern which goes well beyond the historical programs of vegetarian movements and has now been articulated in the concept of animal rights, an ideal certainly to be welcomed when one thinks of the immemorial suffering of animals at the hands of human beings—a suffering not less great than that inflicted by human beings on each other.

But now we are abruptly called upon to rehearse the classic Foucauldian accounts of "capillary power": the way in which in the modern age power refines and extends its networks through bodies by way of the effects of what Foucault called "bio-power": such that the old brutality on bodies was now, beginning with the bourgeois era, transformed into ever more subtle forms

[52] I am indebted, for this example, to a paper on animal rights by Laura Hudson, delivered at the summer 2007 conference of the Marxist Literary Group.

of knowledge and control that penetrate ever more unexplored zones of the physical and of natural life.

It is a nightmarish (or dystopian) vision which will now with one stroke suddenly transform our admiration for the animal rights movement itself: for we suddenly grasp the fact that "rights" are a human concept, and that by extending their sway into hitherto uncolonized and untheorized zones of nature and of the animal world, we are preparing an intervention into non-human life and an appropriation of nature by human bio-power far more all-engulfing than anything the planet has hitherto known. "Animal rights" thus becomes the vanguard of bio-power's totalitarian sway over the earth; and hitherto specialized philosophical minutiae such as the problem of whether a given virus should be made utterly extinct by human intervention are now cast in an altogether different and more sinister light.

This hypothetical example is consistent with Foucault's anti-Enlightenment positions, particularly in his books on medicine, insanity and punishment, where the era of early nineteenth-century bourgeois reform—which traditional histories have narrated in the form of a humane revolution in the treatment of patients and prisoners—is implicitly mocked and ironized as a subtler imperialism of power and control—that famously epitomized by the "panopticon", the regime of universal surveillance and of a total knowledge identified with total power.

It has indeed already been observed above that Foucault's powerful reinterpretation of these transformations is utterly undialectical, and that the perplexity of readers with the very concept of bio-power—negative or positive? a locus of state domination or a new source of resistance?—can be largely attributed to the fact that in Foucault's thought this term lacks an opposite.

Such a criticism is in my opinion correct, yet we must now pronounce it to be utterly misplaced. The problem with the turn of thought now inextricably linked to and as it were signed by Foucault's name is not that it is non- or anti-dialectical, but rather that it is too dialectical: or better still, that it is a dialectic that has ignored its own name and powers and has, in an excess of dialectical energies, short-circuited itself. For what is left out in the characteristic Foucauldian narrative here is the passage from positive to negative which very precisely characterizes the dialectic as such, or in other words, the unity of opposites. Foucault attributes the positive valorization of Enlightenment to his deluded bourgeois readers and positions it as an error which the new narrative of paranoia and conspiracy is to correct: whereas from a dialectical perspective both narratives are correct and both narratives are equally in error—and it is this double vision which we find exercised in Adorno's "negative" thinking, which it would probably be better not to reify as a separate species of dialectic, as that "negative dialectic" that stands as the title of one of his most famous books: but which it will

also be crucial to rescue from a first impression as misleading as the Foucauldian short-circuit, and which is called, as has already been suggested above, the paradox.

For surely, particularly at his musically organized beginnings and endings—onsets and final flourishes—Adornian thought tends to embrace the literary and linguistic "simple form" of the paradox. Thus *Aesthetic Theory* (a draft to be sure, published posthumously) begins like this: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident any more"[53]: a sentence which threatens to undermine the very project of writing an aesthetic before it even gets started. Or perhaps it simply designates philosophy's perpetual problem with beginnings: nothing can be presupposed, not even the idea of presupposition. We are left dangerously in a place in which it may not be possible to say anything (whence Adorno's fascination with Beckett).

Or take the even more famous beginning of *Negative Dialectics*: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because it missed the moment of its realization."[54] Here, to be sure, the paradox carries another paradox within itself, namely Marx's injunction to philosophy to realize itself, or in other words not only to understand the world but to go on to change it. Still, the very paradox of obsolescence shimmers over this swift orchestral onset: living on as a form of outliving itself, an actuality which is no longer actual, a present that is now past.

In both these cases, what is indicted is the very discipline itself, the field of thinking or consciousness which had evolved historically into a whole autonomous area of culture, before suddenly itself being called into question. The form of the paradox indeed harbors the very play of oppositions we have discussed in our previous moment, and it is that inner antithesis which endows the single word for two opposites—in these instances, "art" or "philosophy"—with its startling and uncanny effect.

A further discussion will then expand this simultaneity into the possession, by the object itself, of two distinct and incompatible attributes. Thus, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno goes on to dwell for a moment on the much celebrated freedoms of the art we call modernism (he might have selected any number of other starting points). At once, however, this freedom—from convention, tradition, perspective, figuration, representation itself—turns around into its opposite: "the process that was unleashed consumed the categories in the name of that for which it [the process] was undertaken. More was constantly pulled into the vortex of the newly taboo" (*AT*, 1). The

[53] T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 1. Future references to this work are denoted *AT*.

[54] T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Continuum, 1973.

conquest of aesthetic freedom becomes in a dialectical reversal the invention and imposition of ever more stringent prohibitions; and thus that hitherto seemingly unified thing for which we used the single name of art proves to be a dialectical space in which the unity of opposites—freedom and taboo—plays itself out in the most unsettling and destructive fashion, threatening to do away with any common sense or unified everyday conception of art altogether. (Indeed, I would say that years after this prophetic diagnosis it is just such an explosive disunification which results in the condition of what we used to call art under postmodernity.)

Still, this remains a diagnosis and as such Adorno supplies an explanation: but the explanation is an external one, it stands outside this unity of opposites and indeed outside of art altogether. He answers the question of the freedoms of modernism in this way: "absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole" (*AT*, 1). In an unfree society, in other words, art cannot itself be truly free: so far this seems to be a sociological analysis. But the unfreedom of society is implied to be the contradiction between the particular and the universal, as well as the impossibility of totality ("the whole," Adorno famously remarked elsewhere, "is the untrue"[55]). So if the explanation is a social one, it is scarcely causal in any vulgar sense, but rather highly mediated. And in any case the lesson is a warning against premature synthesis, against the illusions of unity (and indeed against the very unification glibly suggested by the third term of the pseudo-Hegelian triad).

I now want to illustrate this process in a final example from Adorno, which now begins, not with a single term like art or philosophy, which was assumed to have been unified but turned out to be itself the result of a dialectical opposition. The new illustration will thus begin with that opposition itself, grasped as two fields which ought to be unified but cannot be, namely those of "Sociology and Psychology" (the title of the essay). Here we confront a modern disciplinary form of one of the oldest, most archaic oppositions on the books of human history, namely the opposition between subject and object, mind and body, individual and society, self and other—the permutations of this seemingly incommensurable combination or amalgamation are as multiple as the schools of philosophy itself, each one acknowledging that we have to do with an already unified phenomenon whose unity cannot be grasped by the human mind in any plausible way.

The attempts to unify psychology and sociology (most notably by Talcott Parsons) are then yet another seemingly promising starting point, if not for any unified field theory of the matter, then at least for an account of the

[55] T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London: New Left Books, 1974, 50. ("Unwahre" in "Das Ganze ist das Unwahre" is curiously translated as "false" in Jephcott's rendition.)

reasons it may be impossible. And in a way that account is precisely what Adorno offers us, but in the form of a preemptive rejection of the whole project:

> An ideal of conceptual unification taken from the natural sciences cannot, however, be indiscriminately applied to a society whose unity resides in its not being unified. Sociology and psychology, in so far as they function in isolation from one another, often succumb to the temptation to project the intellectual division of labour on to the object of their study. The separation of society and psyche is false consciousness; it perpetuates conceptually the split between the living subject and the objectivity that governs the subjects and yet derives from them. But the basis of this false consciousness cannot be removed by a mere methodological dictum. People are incapable of recognizing themselves in society and society in themselves because they are alienated from each other and the totality. Their reified social relations necessarily appear to them as an "in itself." What compartmentalized disciplines project on to reality merely reflects back what has taken place in reality. False consciousness is also true: inner and outer life are torn apart. Only through the articulation of their difference, not by stretching concepts, can their relation be adequately expressed. The truth of the whole sides with one-sidedness, not pluralistic synthesis: a psychology that turns its back on society and idiosyncratically concentrates on the individual and his archaic heritage says more about the hapless state of society than one which seeks by its "wholistic approach" or an inclusion of social "factors" to join the ranks of a no longer existent *universitas literarum*.[56]

More paradoxes: but this time they are the paradoxes of capitalism itself, whose structural uniqueness in human history lies in the fact that it is a group organized by individuality and separation or atomization rather than by any of the traditional modes of group unification.

What is then the consequence for the two disciplines in question? Their very differentiation—the "separation of society and psyche"—"is false consciousness; it perpetuates conceptually the split between the living subject and the objectivity that governs the subjects and yet derives from them." Why not, then, attempt to overcome this separation by a new interdisciplinary program (as we sometimes call these solutions)? "The basis of this false consciousness cannot be removed by a mere methodological dictum." In other words, contradiction cannot be solved or eliminated by the taking of a thought (the very principle referred to earlier as the unity of theory and practice).

But now we come to the most startling feature of Adorno's dialectic, which seemed to have arrived at the point of unmasking and denouncing

[56] T. W. Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology," *New Left Review* I/46, November-December, 1967 and I/47, January-February, 1968, 69–70.

false consciousness. Far from it: "The truth of the whole sides with one-sidedness," he tells us. "False consciousness is also true: inner and outer life are torn apart." Truth lies in holding to this falsehood, in keeping faith with this contradiction. Yet the formula is less reassuring than it ought to be: for in these situations, Adorno undermines one position on the question, only to turn abruptly and to undermine its alternative, thereby leaving us with nothing but the impossibility of concluding anything.

It is evidently this which he chose to call negative dialectics, a movement of negation that can never reach a synthesis, a negativity that ceaselessly undermines all the available positivities until it has only its own destructive energy to promote. It is a process with its own striking family resemblance to that ancient skepticism so important for Hegel himself, in which the key operation—called equipollence—consists in "setting into opposition equally strong propositions or arguments on both sides of an issue that arises and thereby producing an equal balance of justification on both sides of the issue."[57] Or, we might add, producing an equal balance of negativity and the subversion of both alternatives. As with the ancient skeptics, however, the dialectical process is meant to do something to our very sense of reality itself, along with that reality's former truths.

Indeed, Adorno has himself characterized this movement as "mediation" as such, in an extraordinary passage that sheds a whole new light on the problems of this concept as we have staged above:

> Kant's antithetical poles—form and content, nature and spirit, theory and practice, freedom and necessity, noumenon and phenomenon—have been so completely suffused by reflexion that none of these determinations can stand as a final one. Each one, in order to be thought and indeed to exist, requires the production out of itself of that other moment that Kant set in opposition to it. Mediation is therefore in Hegel never—as any number of fateful misunderstandings since Kierkegaard would have it—a midpoint between the extremes; rather mediation takes place within the extremes themselves: and this is the radical feature of Hegel which is irreconcilable with any moderate or intermediate position. What traditional philosophy hoped to achieve as an ontological foundation turns out to be, not distinct ideas set off discretely against each other, but ideas each of which requires its opposite, and the relation of all of them together is process itself.[58]

Now perhaps we can grasp the nature of the dialectical effect—indeed the dialectical shock—more clearly as we follow the process whereby we are led to a critical and negative position then brutally cancelled in a second moment to which we are less likely to lend our absolute credence, having

[57] Michael N. Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, 10.

[58] T. W. Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1997, 257.

now learned the experience of the linguistic and conceptual untrustworthiness of such positions in general. To be sure, this ought to have been a lesson taught by the doctrine of ideology, but the latter still seems to promise a truth ("science"), a final correction, a moment of resolution, or knowledge, for which there is little place in Adorno's implacably negative dialectic.

The latter does not, for all that, leave us in the midst of that postmodern relativism so terrifying to believers of any number of philosophical "old schools." The negative dialectic still seems to retain something of the Absolute that figured so powerfully in the Hegelian version, and even in the Marxian "absolute historicism." But can there be an absolute—or even a truth, or a referent—which is neither linguistic nor conceptual? It is about this possibility that Žižek's version of the dialectic will have something to say.

Here too, to be sure, we begin with the denunciation of that stupid old stereotype according to which Hegel works, according to a tripartite and cut-and-dried progression from thesis through antithesis to synthesis. But this is completely erroneous, as there are no real syntheses in Hegel and the dialectical operation is to be seen in an utterly different way (a variety of examples are adduced). Still…that stupid first impression was not altogether wrong, there is a tripartite movement in the Hegelian dialectic, and in fact I have just illustrated it: stupid first impression as the appearance; ingenious correction in the name of some underlying reality or "essence"; but finally, after all return to the reality of the appearance, it was the appearance that was "true" after all.

What can this possibly have to do with "popular culture"? Let's take a Hollywood product, say, Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Window* (1944). (Well, maybe now Fritz Lang is high culture rather than mass culture, but anyway …) Edward G. Robinson is a mild-mannered professor, who leaving his peaceful club one night gets involved in a desperate web of love and murder. We think we are watching a thriller. At length, he takes refuge in his club again, falls asleep out of exhaustion, and wakes up: it was all a dream. The movie has done the interpretation for us, by way of Lang's capitulation to the cheap Hollywood insistence on happy endings (Zhuangzi is not a butterfly after all!). But in reality—which is to say in the true appearance—Edward G. Robinson "is not a quiet, kind, decent, bourgeois professor dreaming that he is a murderer, but a murderer dreaming, in his everyday life, that he is a quiet, kind, decent, bourgeois professor." Hollywood's censorship is therefore not some puritanical uptight middle-class mechanism for repressing the obscene, nasty, antisocial, violent underside of life, it is rather the technique for revealing it. The literal first version was true—the dream we first took for reality was real, and not the waking from it.[59]

[59] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, 16–17.

We might give a few more examples from other categories. Thus, on some public occasion, Slavoj Žižek is denounced for frivolously discussing Hitchcock while the Bosnian population, and in particular Sarajevo, is suffering through siege and ethnic cleansing. He has indeed often analyzed the West's interest in seeing the Bosnians as victims in that conflict (for if they were not victims, they would at once be transformed into Islamic terrorists, in a classic dialectical reversal). The third position here is the reminder that the Bosnians are not Other to us, but rather the same; that what is astonishing is that during the siege they pursue their daily lives just as we do, and so forth.[60] Thus we go from a first image of daily life as usual (Americans listening to a lecture in peacetime), to an "othered" and melodramatic representation of victims in wartime, back to the first representation which now includes the wartime city and its population itself in the larger picture of daily life as usual. To be sure, this return to the surface, to the stupid first impression, is accompanied by a new knowledge of the errors involved in the second moment, the moment of interpretation; but nonetheless still reaffirms the truth of the starting point.

Another example—which can be as grisly as Stalin's great purge trials or as benign as the Brezhnevite or post-Tito communism of the final years—is that of the three-fold movement of the party's self-justification. In a first moment, the party asserts that many of the old Bolsheviks, the original leaders of the revolution, were in reality traitors and spies for the Nazis. The West, then—for these dialectical transformations most often take the form of dramatic exchanges between subject positions—interprets such claims as deliberate lies and staged falsehoods, and asks how anyone could believe that figures of this integrity could possibly have betrayed their own revolution, while Stalin's own essential deceitfulness seems only too probable. The West's interpretation is of course correct; but it is also false—third position—insofar as no one believes in the betrayal in the first place; they merely pretend to do so "in order to save the appearance (of the Master's or Leader's omnipotence and knowledge)—to prevent the Master's impotence from becoming visible to all the world."[61] "Saving the appearances," Žižek calls this process, and indeed its philosophical content turns very precisely on Hegel's notion of the objectivity of appearance as such: appearance is not subjective or arbitrary, not to be replaced by some underlying essence, or at the very least the essence must be sought in the appearance itself. The obedient subject does not submit to the omnipotent totalitarian Other, but rather feels sorry for this Big Other whose power he then pretends to acknowledge, thereby confirming it.

[60] Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, London: Verso, 1994, 1–2.

[61] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997, 158.

Žižek's interpretive work, from page to page, seems to revel in these paradoxes: but that is only itself some "stupid first impression" (one of his favorite phrases). In reality, the paradox effect is designed to undo that second moment of ingenuity which is that of interpretation (it looks like this to you, but in reality what is going on is this…): the paradox is of the second order, what looked like a paradox was in reality simply a return to the first impression itself.

Or perhaps we might rather say: this is not a paradox, this is perversity. And indeed, the dialectic is just that inveterate infuriating perversity whereby a common-sense empiricist view of reality is repudiated and undermined: but it is undermined together with its own accompanying interpretations of that reality, which look so much more astute and ingenious than the common-sense empiricist reality itself, until we understand that the interpretations are themselves also part of precisely that "first impression." This is why the dialectic belongs to theory rather than philosophy: the latter is always haunted by the dream of some foolproof self-sufficient autonomous system, a set of interlocking concepts which are their own cause. This mirage is of course the afterimage of philosophy as an institution in the world, as a profession complicit with everything else in the status quo, in the fallen ontic realm of "what is." Theory, on the other hand, has no vested interests inasmuch as it never lays claim to an absolute system, a non-ideological formulation of itself and its "truths"; indeed, always itself complicit in the being of current language, it has only the never-ending, never-finished task and vocation of undermining philosophy as such, of unraveling affirmative statements and propositions of all kinds. We have already put this another way by asserting that the two great bodies of post-philosophical thought, marked by the names of Marx and Freud, are better to be characterized as unities-of-theory-and-practice, that is to say, that the practical component in them always interrupts the "unity of theory" and prevents it from coming together in some satisfying philosophical system.

Still, what can be the theoretical, if not indeed the philosophical, content of those little interpretive tricks we have enumerated above? Let's first take on that supremely unclassifiable figure who somehow, in ways that remain to be defined, presides over all of Žižek's work. A late seminar of Jacques Lacan, indeed, bears the enigmatic title, *Les non-dupes errent*: the joke lies in the homophony of this weird proposition ("the undeceived are mistaken") with the oldest formula in the Lacanian book, namely "le nom du Père," the "Name-of-the-Father" or in other words, the Oedipus complex. However, the later variant has nothing to do with this, but rather with the structure of deception. Indeed, as everyone knows, the truth is itself the best disguise, as when the spy tells his acquaintances, "What do I do in life? Why, I'm a spy!"— a truth invariably greeted with hearty laughter. This peculiarity of truth, to express itself most fully in deception or falsehood, plays a crucial

role in analysis, as one might expect. And as one might also expect, it is in that great non- or anti-philosopher Hegel that we find the most elaborate deployment of the dialectic of the necessity of error and that of what he called appearance and essence, the most thoroughgoing affirmation of the objectivity of appearance (one of the deeper subjects of Žižek's work *The Parallax View*). Indeed, that other great modern dialectician T. W. Adorno was fond of observing that nowhere was Hegel closer to his heroic contemporary Beethoven than in the great thunderchord of the *Logic*, the assertion that "Essence must appear!"

Yet if essence appears today, it is through the mesmerizing veils of objective appearance, whose tantalizing "error" retains its power even when cognitively dispelled. For an older dialectic, the dispelling of ideology was to lead, not merely to truth, but also to change as such (Marx's final thesis on Feuerbach). To this degree, the Enlightenment belief in pedagogy and persuasion, its faith in demystification and the power of correct analysis, remained intact throughout the modern period. Adorno's desperate attempt to avoid positivities, which he instinctively felt always to be ideological, by embracing a resolutely negative equipollence, is a prophetic but unsatisfying response to our historical situation, which might better be characterized by varying Žižek's famous title, "they know what they are doing (but they do it anyway)." This situation, which is the realm of what has also usefully been termed cynical reason, calls for a reinvention of the dialectic as part and parcel of the reinvention of politics itself (and, clearly enough, of Marxism): while the difference between the "solutions" of Adorno and Žižek might from another perspective be characterized as the distinction between modernist anti-narrative as such (Beckett!) and a kind of non-figurative play with multiple narrative centers (as in more properly postmodern literature).

As if this were not enough, however, a final dilemma must be mentioned which has to do with the dialectic's relationship to Utopia. For the language of error and rectification we have been exercising here retains a fundamental Utopian presupposition within itself like a mirage (an objective mirage, if we may refer back to the previous discussion), insofar as it seems to promise a condition without all error, a life in the truth, which was very precisely the Utopian illusion denounced by Althusser in his proposition that ideology will continue to exist in all societies, no matter how "perfect."

Yet on the face of it, nothing could seem more Utopian than the dialectic, which indicts our every day consciousness in the reified world of late capitalism and aims at replacing it with a transfigured subjectivity for which the world is a process of construction in which there are no reified or metaphysical "foundations," and from which the old stable essences and essentialisms have disappeared.

Yet it must also be clear from our description that insofar as it is critical, the dialectic is also what must be called reactive thought. That is, it depends

for its operation on the normativity of a pre-existing thought mode, to which it is called upon to react: or to use a once popular theoretical expression, it is parasitic on *Verstand* itself, on the externalized thinking of a material world of objects, for its own operations of correction and subversion, of negation and critique.

But this means, from a Utopian perspective, that if the dialectic succeeds, it disappears as such. If dialectical thinking ever fully supercedes undialectical thinking and establishes itself in its place, if everyone then comes to think dialectically, then for all intents and purposes the dialectic will have ceased to exist, and something else, something as yet unidentified, some hitherto unknown species of Utopian consciousness, will have taken its place.

To put all this in a more pedestrian way, it is clear enough that Hegel never expected *Verstand*—the everyday commerce with material objects and identities—ever to disappear: it will always, along with our own bodies, continue to exist and to accompany whatever has been achieved of some dialectically higher consciousness or awareness. As for Marx, it is more probable that with the disappearance of the commodity form, reified consciousness can be expected to disappear; and yet, as Althusser tried to remind us, ideology—as the instinctive cognitive mapping of biological individuals—will always exist in whatever future society can be imagined. Nor can theory today expect to supplant the multitudinous forms of reified thinking and named and commodified thoughts and products on the intellectual market today, but only to wage persistent and local guerilla warfare against their hegemony.

Still, the characteristic anxieties about postmodern relativism, about the status of the referent and the wholesale discrediting of representation and indeed of "truth" as such attributed to this or that postmodernism, intervene here to make this a less than satisfactory solution. In particular, the status of Marxist forms of knowledge and of the Marxian code itself, whether substantive or critical, would seem to this situation to share the fate of the more traditional philosophies, and to find its own specific dialectic following them into optionality and sheerly personal ideological choice (of the free market variety). The kind of equipollent conceptual critique we have attributed to these dialecticians then becomes very difficult to distinguish from deconstruction, tout court.

Indeed, for an older modernism the unrepresentable was still an object to be conquered and subdued, articulated and modeled, expressed and revealed or disclosed, by the invention of wholly new languages, the development of hitherto nonexistent theoretical and representational equipment, the ruthless abandonment of the old traditions and their habits and terminologies, and the confidence in the capacity of innovation and the Novum at least asymptotically to approach the Absolute, if not to give it any

definitive and universally binding voice. Gramsci's "absolute historicism" promised as much, about a future we could not yet theorize, let alone imagine.

The postmodern, however, seems joyously to have abandoned all these efforts, after a repeated experience of their failures and a disabused conviction of the ideological nature of all such alleged novelties, inventions, experiments, certainties, and truths new or old. Even "absolute relativism" seems merely to offer a revamped form of absolute skepticism, rather than a squaring of the circle.

This is then the situation in which Žižek's own provisional solution, conveyed in the very title of *The Parallax View*, proposes the possibility of ontological convictions without any accompanying linguistic or philosophical, representational, expression: locating the "truth" would then be something like a symptomal operation on the order of the Freudian primal desire which precedes all representation, all translation into the figural codes as such. The formula of a parallax would then compare the process to the determination of a planetary body beyond the capacity of our registering apparatus to record, even though we can approximate its existence hypothetically: and this affirmation of a content beyond all form is clearly very foreign indeed to the spirit of deconstruction and indeed of postmodern relativism in general.

But it is also worth examining the procedures of Marx himself, who was on the face of it never reluctant to denounce the errors of others or to propose his own solutions as self-evident. Yet that those "solutions" were dialectical also becomes apparent. We may leave aside paradoxes which result from the dialectic of whole and part (or the circulation of multiple systems): as in the case of the piece-wage which "has a tendency, while raising the wages of individuals above the average, to lower this average itself" (*Cap*, 697). Rather, it is the deeper paradoxes of modernization itself which need to be translated into the dialectical idiom of contradiction. Thus, one would think that the modernization of agriculture—that is, the draining of the marshes and the reclaiming of unproductive terrain for agriculture—was to be considered a positive development and a benefit for society in general (stupid first impression): "But the inquiry showed the very opposite, namely "that the same cause which drove away malaria, the conversion of the land from a morass in winter and a scanty pasture in summer into fruitful corn land, created the exceptional death-rate of the infants" (*Cap*, 521–522).[62] As for modern machinery in general, its historically unparalleled productivity was responsible for a,

[62] Quoted from the 1864 Public Health Report.

> remarkable phenomenon in the history of modern industry, that machinery sweeps away every moral and natural restriction on the length of the working day…[and results in] the economic paradox that the most powerful instrument for reducing labour-time suffers a dialectical inversion and becomes the most unfailing means for turning the whole lifetime of the worker and his family into labour-time at capital's disposal for its own valorization. (*Cap*, 532)

Yet this is a dialectical "paradox" in which the new interpretation by a vulgar left (Proudhon, Weitling, etc.) is just as wrong as the obstinacies of bourgeois economists mired in their "stupid first impression" and singing the praises of the new improvements. We are here at the very center of the argument of *Capital*, and of the contradiction at the heart of this system between productivity and the value form. The first casualty of this dialectic is of course any moralizing or ethical approach to the matter (exhibited by the left critics of capitalist exploitation, and implicit in the bourgeois economists' celebration of its benefits for humankind). Marx will frequently attribute some of these "mistakes" to the omission of "the historical element" (*Cap*, 493); but he will also point out the illusions that result from the repression, by the empiricist, of the totality as such, the immense system of circulation of values which constitutes capitalism as a whole. He will also from time to time denounce the attempt to formulate the dynamic of the labor theory of value as a law. "Such a self-destructive contradiction cannot be in any way even enunciated or formulated as a law" (*Cap*, 676)— a proposition which cuts to the very heart of all representation and all philosophical systems.

Yet the fundamental dilemma at the center of such paradoxes, and indeed of the Marxian dialectic as such (if not even the Hegelian one), is the phenomenon of objective appearance to which we have already referred. Marx calls it the *Erscheinungsformen* or "form of appearance," a translation which would seem to minimize or trivialize the grave problem appearance constitutes as such. Thus Marx says, "the general and necessary tendencies of capital must be distinguished from their forms of appearance" (*Cap*, 433). It seems a mild enough epistemological warning, and is indeed followed by some remarks on knowledge and science as such: "a scientific analysis of competition is possible only if we can grasp the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are intelligible only to someone who is acquainted with their real motions, which are not perceptible to the senses" (*Cap*, 433). We are here apparently back in a discourse of external appearances and internal laws, whereas in fact Marx's dialectic is calculated to undermine this opposition altogether.

Consider the following remark: "In the expression 'value of labour,' the concept of value is not only completely extinguished, but inverted, so that it becomes its contrary. It is an expression as imaginary as the value of the

earth. These imaginary expressions arise, nevertheless, from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the forms of appearance of essential relations. That in their appearance things are often presented in an inverted way is something fairly familiar in every science, apart from political economy" (*Cap*, 677). It should be added that the very figure of inversion (to which Marx and Engels frequently recurred, particularly in their discussion of ideology as a camera obscura) comes from Hegel's discussion of the "inverted world" of laws, about which it is not clear whether the latter is a philosophical appropriation of the figure in question or on the contrary a critique and a deconstruction of it.

The same is true here, and it is significant that at this point (in the related footnote) Marx recalls his own devastating critique of Proudhon's "tropological" analysis of the evils of capitalism, in whose exploitation of labor "he sees nothing but a grammatical ellipsis. Thus the whole of existing society … is henceforth founded on a poetic license, a figurative expression."[63] At this point the dialectic parts company with a deconstruction based on tropology, and in effect denounces the latter as an illusion derived from the failure to grasp the dialectical "paradox" of objective appearance (it is worth recalling that money itself is one of the most basic forms of just such objective appearance):

> What is true of all forms of appearance and their hidden background is also true of the form of appearance "value and price of labour," or "wages," as contrasted with the essential relation manifested in it, namely the value and price of labour-power. The forms of appearance are reproduced directly and spontaneously, as current and usual modes of thought; the essential relation must first be discovered by science. Classical political economy stumbles approximately onto the true state of affairs, but without consciously formulating it. It is unable to do this as long as it stays within its bourgeois skin. (*Cap*, 682)

This "paradox" is virtually itself constitutive of the dialectic as such, or may at least be seen as the unique situation and dilemma from which the very need to invent such a thing as the dialectic arises in the first place. We may dramatize the problem this way: can a true idea about a false society or a false reality be true? Or is it necessarily false, despite its accuracy? Or do we not confront in this opposition between truth and falsity another one of those binary oppositions which it was the vocation of the dialectic (and its unity of opposites) to overcome and to transcend?

We might also have phrased this dilemma in terms of contradiction: if a concept accurately registers the reality of a contradiction, will it not itself necessarily be contradictory? At any rate, for all the reasons it was the

[63] Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, New York: International Publishers, 1963, 54.

purpose of *Capital* to enumerate and to dramatize, capitalism and its law of value are themselves profoundly contradictory; and their reality is a set of false appearances, which are, however, real and objective, and cannot be dissolved by mere analysis (and certainly not by moralizing denunciation). We cannot translate their structure into 'laws," all of which remain merely empirical observations, valid for this or that moment in the cycle and themselves invalidated by the inevitable crises and breakdowns in its operations. We might, to be sure, evoke the existential dimension, and argue that our lived experience of a capitalist world remains radically distinct (whatever its own kinds of truth) from the underlying structure or functioning of that world, as distinct as effects from causes. And in a sense, although Marx lacks the whole modern conceptuality of existentialism, this is where his own rhetorical figures tend, as in one of the most famous "bridge-passages" in *Capital*:

> Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice "No admittance except on business." (*Cap*, 279–280)

Elsewhere, and more philosophically, he rehearses the old Hegelian-dialectical opposition between appearance and essence (for example, to distinguish the realm of prices from that of value). But even the Hegelian opposition is misleading to the degree to which it suggests that one can substitute essence for appearance, as one substitutes truth for error, or that one can descend, following Marx, into that true underground realm in which production as such takes place (Wagner's image of the Nibelungen and their clattering forges beneath the earth; or indeed Wells's more carnivorous Morlocks).

Yet the very concept of "objective appearance" warns us that any such resolution of the contradiction in favor of either essence or appearance, truth or falsehood, is tantamount to doing away with the ambiguous reality itself. The dialectic stands as an imperative to hold the opposites together, and as it were to abolish the autonomy of either term in favor of a pure tension one must necessarily preserve. At this point, perhaps, we leave even the subjective effects of the dialectic behind us, and venture into speculations as to its relevance today: for it is not Marx's description of the "essence" of capitalism which has changed (nor Hegel's of the "determinations of reflection" generally), but rather very precisely that "objective appearance" of the world of global capitalism which seems far enough from the surface life of Marx's Victorian or nascent-modernist period.

IV. Towards a Spatial Dialectic

Towards the end of his path-breaking book, *The Production of Space*, Henry Lefebvre calls for a reconstruction of the dialectic along spatial lines.[64] His recommendation carries even greater weight when we reckon in a theory of postmodernity (which he himself did not accept) for which the dominant of the modern period was an essentially temporal one. The shifting of a temporal center of gravity to a spatial one will then not only involve a transformation of the features of our description here, but also presumably equip this thought mode, and the propositions of both a Hegelian and a Marxian nature which have been associated with it, for greater effectiveness in a contemporary situation characterized by globalization and an essentially spatial economics as well as politics.

Many features of postmodernity speak for the saliency of the spatial in its structure (which we may also designate as late- or third-stage capitalism). The displacement of production has not only meant a preponderance of service industries in the so-called advanced countries—that is to say, a restructuration around consumption and a subsequent development of advertising and image society, or in other words an emergence of commodification as a fundamental social and political issue. Globalization has above all meant the association of space and spatial distance in production itself, whether in terms of outsourcing, of the uneven development of producing and consuming nations, or the migration of labor, as well as the black holes of unemployment, famine and unspeakable violence into which whole surfaces of the current globe suddenly fall. The dominance of finance capital today is also a spatial phenomenon, in the sense in which its originalities derive from the suppression of more traditional temporalities of transmission and suggest all kinds of new spatial simultaneities. Much the same can be said for the eclipse of national autonomies and the omnipresence within the former national borders of international goods of all kinds, from food to culture. This omnipresence has been described in terms of a net of interdependence from which no single national space can escape and in which no one is any longer self-sustaining: but the nature of the new space this situation produces within the former national borders remains to be theorized, save for isolated symptoms such as tourism (and has mainly been erroneously characterized as the disappearance of the nation-state). The new kinds of cultural production generated by globalization have meanwhile often been enumerated, without attention to their functional role across the world system itself.

However this may be, the list does not yet argue for the necessity of a dialectical approach to the new global historical situation. Yet the rhythms of

[64] Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris: Anthropos, 1974, 382.

totality, of presence and absence in its effects, may be enough to convey the relevance of the dialectic. We witness today a play of reciprocal influences which go well beyond the old paradox whereby the center sneezes and the periphery catches the flu: for very often now this very relationship finds itself reversed, and storms at the center are generated by breezes on the outskirts of consumption and affluence. The much repeated dialectic of global and local is certainly just that, a dialectic, even though it has rarely been seriously analyzed in those terms, which involve the interrelationship between a totality and a set of empirical particulars. Global capitalism today is clearly not to be thought of in terms of a sum of positivities; and any number of disastrous political strategies and calculations testify to the folly of approaching it in terms of common sense and of empirical facts, even when it is acknowledged that the multiplicity of such facts demands something more complicated than individual reasoning (generally it is the computer which is appealed to in such cases). The permutation schemes of what is so often identified as structuralism have been more successful in this respect, precisely because they are dialectical without knowing it. Finally the apparently astonishing resurgence of religion as a worldwide political phenomenon demonstrates yet another non-dialectical blind spot; since the invocation of religion is most often a way of designating what we cannot by definition understand in the first place: namely some final "cause" or substance incomprehensible for empiricist thought but which has a long dialectical history of a relational or processual phenomenon.

One does not undertake to summarize or to present a thought mode that does not yet exist, and I will in conclusion only sketch in a few of the issues that seem to me important for its construction. It will, to be sure, be instructive to interrogate traditional dialectical figures—such as Hegel's insistent trope of the returning into itself and the exteriorization of what is interior—for their spatial content; many such figures are to be found in Marx as well (chiasmus!), and in the later dialecticians. Yet that spatiality is perhaps still to be grasped only as a code, and not as some metaphysical proof of the ontological priority of space as such.

Indeed, a more powerful argument for the replacement of temporality could be mounted on the basis of the discussions of *Darstellung* or mode of presentation to be found in both Hegel and Marx. The former observes, of the *Logic*, and indeed against his own historiographic practice, that "the moments, whose result is a further determined form [of the concept], precede it as determinations of the concept in the scientific development of the Idea, but do not come before it as shapes in its temporal development."[65] Marx's versions of the same distinction are resumed in the following

[65] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 61.

warning: "it would be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive."[66] Such observations about the form of presentation of the dialectic are then powerful evidence against translating the sequence of topics of categories in both works into any temporal version of narrativity.

They do not, however, yet settle the question; and the language I have proposed, in terms of which time or space are considered a "dominant" in this or that historical chronotope, or spatio-temporal continuum, is obviously not meant to suggest that one dimension somehow replaces the other but rather to convey the fact that their ratios have been modified, or in other words that there has been a shift in the structure of their "form of appearance."

The demonstration of the validity of any new spatial dialectic will then not merely stand or fall with its relevance to contemporary conditions of globalization and postmodernity; but also to the success and the extent to which the older temporal categories of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics alike have been able to be translated into the new spatial idiom. What is a spatial contradiction, in other words? What can be the spatial equivalent of the negative or of negation? How do Hegel's "determinations of reflection" fit into a spatial and eventually global scheme? It may be somewhat easier to grasp the complications of the simultaneous Marxian temporalities of production and distribution, of realization and reproduction, of circulations and flows, in terms of the rotations of global space; indeed, this is probably what much of current bourgeois economics has been trying to do without realizing it.

I will limit myself here to a specific problem which seems to me crucial for any such translation process; and that is the role of reflection or self-consciousness in the new system. Much of the scaffolding of traditional philosophy (and also, as I've tried to show elsewhere,[67] of the ideologies of modernism and the "modern") has been built on that equivalence of truth and a reflexivity in which consciousness is at one with itself and with its object. No matter that the philosophical classics, from Plato on, have argued against this notion of a lightning-flash simultaneity of self and world: it persists as an indispensable cornerstone of the various worldviews on which our system rests, and this on all levels, not least of the alibis which justify the privileges modern (or self-conscious, reflexive) peoples have over all the others. But we must here insist that there is no difference between consciousness and self-consciousness and reconstruct a new equality on that basis.

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[66] Quoted in Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's* Capital, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004, 4.

[67] See *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, London: Verso, 2002.

This is to be done, I believe, by insisting on the relationship between the ideologies of self-consciousness or reflection and their temporal thematics: it is as a unique moment of time, or of the suppression of time in a kind of absolute, that the essential vice of the concept of self-consciousness is to be grasped; and any viable proposal for a spatial dialectic will find itself obliged to offer a spatial account of what has traditionally passed for self-consciousness and has validated its uniqueness and its foundational privilege temporally. This is a program which might be executed in various ways: by insisting on the spatiality of the equation of identity itself, for example. Hegel notoriously expressed self-consciousness as the I = I, while the role of the equation in Marx's inaugural analysis of value is also well known. We must accustom ourselves to thinking of these equivalencies as temporal operations in which one specific spatial field is appropriated or annexed by another enlarged one. It is space which gives such operations their content, while it was time which encouraged the illusions of simultaneity: in other words, it is space which is the source of difference and time which is that of identity. And should it be argued that in reality this approach simply reinstates time as the very essence of what I have called the operation of equivalence, then I will respond that it has also established space as the secret truth of that time, whose own fundamental internal operation is the error of simultaneity. But it must be kept in mind that these are not ontological propositions but rather representational ones.

However such propositions play themselves out philosophically, I hope it will be more comprehensible to propose a view of that state formerly called self-consciousness as a mode of quasi-spatial enlargement: to the old non-reflexive I or ordinary consciousness there is added something else, which allows us to grasp that former non-reflexive self as itself an object within a larger field. The enlargement of the field of ordinary consciousness itself produces what we call the self or the sense of identity; and it is an operation structurally analogous to the way in which two distinct spatial objects are set

[68] To the degree to which this entire first chapter may serve as an introduction to the volume as a whole, it is now best to give a preview of the latter. The chapters on Hegel seek to establish a different case for his actuality than the one normally offered (or rejected). The second of those chapters, and the succeeding ones, examine some of the contemporary philosophical classics from a dialectical perspective (I hope to do something similar for Heidegger at a later date), and also to make a case for the renewed interest of Lukács and Sartre today. A series of shorter discussions then seek to clarify various themes in the Marxian tradition, from cultural revolution to the concept of ideology; followed by a series of political discussions, which, while documenting my personal opinions on topics ranging from the collapse of the Soviet Union to globalization, nonetheless claim to demonstrate the relevance of the dialectic for practical politics. In a long final section, which confronts Ricoeur's

in relationship to each other by perception as such (what I have called "difference relates"). When we add to this list of homologous structures of the spatial expansion implicit in the operations of capitalism, a more complete enumeration of the latter, from the conquest of markets to the spatial aggrandizements of imperialism and now globalization, we may then glimpse some of the advantages to be gained—on philosophical, aesthetic, and economic-political levels—from the substitution of a spatial dialectic for the old temporal ones.[68]

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monumental study of history and narrative, I supplement this work by supplying the dialectical and Marxian categories missing from it, without which History today can scarcely be experienced. To be sure, *Valences* is something of a *Hamlet* without the prince, insofar as it lacks the central chapter on Marx and his dialectic which was to have been expected. Two complementary volumes, commentaries of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Marx's *Capital* (volume 1), respectively, will therefore complete the project. Meanwhile its unexpected complications could scarcely have been faced without the help of many other people, of whom I can here gratefully name only Sebastian Budgen, Mark Martin, Koonyong Kim, Gopal Balakrishnan, Philip Wegner and Luka Arsenjuk.