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Volume 49. Fredric Jameson *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, 2.*
Volume 48. Fredric Jameson *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, 1.*
Volume 47. Eugene Vance *From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages*
Volume 46. Jean-François Lyotard *The Differend*
Volume 45. Manfred Frank *What is Neostructuralism?*
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Volume 37. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*
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Volume 24. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément *The Newly Born Woman*

For other books in this series, see p. x.

The Ideologies of Theory

Essays 1971-1986

Volume 2: The Syntax of History

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Chapter 8
Marxism and Historicism

I

The relationship of Marxism to historicism is part of a larger problem—that of a properly Marxist *hermeneutic*—which cannot fully be dealt with here. Let us merely observe that the two thematic paths along which this problem is generally approached—that of historicism and that of an interpretive master code—form, along with the third and more distantly related theme of *representation*, the three major polemic and ideological targets of most forms of poststructuralism today, even though full-dress philosophical onslaughts on these three concepts have rarely been mounted. Still, the work of the *Tel Quel* group, Barthes, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, and others, presupposes this polemic at the same time that it contributes locally to this or that aspect of it; whereas the most systematic statement of the repudiation of historicism has been made by Foucault (in *The Order of Things* [1966] and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969]), and the most systematic statement of the repudiation of interpretation is expressed in the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) of Deleuze and Guattari. All these statements, however, presuppose a more basic master text, namely, Althusser's *Reading Capital* (1968), which, owing to its explicitly Marxist framework, is probably less familiar to American readers than other texts in French theory today. Althusser's attacks on Marxist historicism and on classical hermeneutics (which he calls *expressive causality)* are therefore basic reference points in what follows, even if we cannot here engage Althusser's fundamental work directly.[1]

As for interpretation, I can only assert here what I will argue more

systematically in another place,[2] namely the semantic priority of Marxist interpretation over the other interpretive codes that are its rivals in the theoretical marketplace today. If indeed one construes interpretation as a rewriting operation, all the various critical methods or positions may be grasped as positing, either explicitly or implicitly, some ultimate privileged interpretive *code* in terms of which the cultural object is allegorically rewritten: such codes have taken the various forms of language or communication (in structuralism), desire (as for some Freudianisms but also some post-Marxisms), anxiety and freedom (in classical existentialism), temporality (for phenomenology), collective archetypes (in Jungianism or myth criticism), various forms of ethics or psychological "humanism" (in criticism whose dominant themes are the integration of the personality, the quest for identity, alienation and nonalienation, the reunification of the psyche, and so forth). Marxism also proposes a master code, but it is not, as is sometimes commonly thought, either that of economics or production in the narrow sense, or that of class struggle as a local conjuncture or event, but rather that very different category which is the "mode of production" itself, which we may therefore expect to make its appearance at the conclusion of the present argument. For the moment, suffice it to say that the concept of a mode of production projects a total synchronic structure in terms of which the themes and the concrete phenomena valorized by the other methods listed above necessarily find the appropriately subordinate structural position. This is to say that no intelligent contemporary Marxism will wish to exclude or repudiate any of the themes listed above, which all in their various ways designate objective zones in the fragmentation of contemporary life. Marxism's "transcendence" of these other methods therefore does not spell the abolition or dissolution of their privileged objects of study, but rather the demystification of the various frameworks or strategies of containment by means of which each could lay claim to being a total and self-sufficient interpretive system. To affirm the priority of Marxist analysis as that of some ultimate and untranscendable semantic horizon—namely the horizon of the *social*—thus implies that all other interpretive systems conceal a *seam* which strategically seals them off from the social totality of which they are a part and constitutes their object of study as an apparently closed phenomenon. Thus, for instance, the powerful closed hermeneutic of the Freudian psychic models is unexpectedly and dialectically reopened and transcended when it is understood that such models ultimately depend on the concrete social reality of the family as an institution. As to the final state, in all the poststructuralist critiques of interpretation, in which allegorical rewriting always presupposes some ultimately privileged form of *representation*—in the present instance, presumably, the representation of something called History itself—we can merely assert here that it is precisely in this respect that a Marxist hermeneutic can be radically distinguished from all the other types enumerated above, since its "master

code," or transcendental signified, is precisely not given as a representation but rather as an *absent cause*, as that which can never know full representation. I must here limit myself to a formula I have proposed elsewhere, namely that History is not in any sense itself a text or master text or master narrative, but that it is inaccessible to us except in textual or narrative form, or, in other words, that we approach it only by way of some prior textualization or narrative (re)construction.

These preliminary remarks about the problem of interpretation would therefore seem to have restructured in advance the other related problem that is our official subject here, namely that of historicism, to which we now turn. I will speak in a moment about the curious destiny of this term, which cannot today be pronounced without furtively turning up one's lapels and glancing over one's shoulder. Let us for the moment construe this problem in a more empirical or commonsense fashion as being simply that of our relationship to the past, and of our possibility of understanding the latter's monuments, artifacts, and traces.

The dilemma of any "historicism" can then be dramatized by the peculiar, unavoidable, yet seemingly unresolvable alternation between Identity and Difference. This is indeed the first arbitrary decision we are called on to make with respect to any form or object from out of the past, and it is a decision which founds that contact; so that on the one hand, as with Sartrean freedom, we cannot *not* opt for one or the other of these possibilities (even when for the most part we remain oblivious of a choice made in an unthematized and unreflexive way), while on the other, the decision itself, since it inaugurates the experience, is something like an absolute presupposition that is itself beyond any further philosophical argument (thus, we cannot appeal to any empirical findings about the past, since they are themselves grounded on this initial presupposition). That this is meanwhile an intolerable option may quickly be conveyed by an oversimplified demonstration: if we choose to affirm the Identity of the alien object with ourselves—if, in other words, we decide that Chaucer, say, or a steatopygous Venus, or the narratives of nineteenth-century Russian gentry, are more or less directly or intuitively accessible to us with our own cultural *moyens du bord*—then we have presupposed what was to have been demonstrated, and our apparent "comprehension" of these alien texts must be haunted by the nagging suspicion that we have all the while remained locked in our own present—the present of the *société de consommation* with its television sets and superhighways, its Cold War, and its postmodernisms and poststructuralisms—and that we have never really left home at all, that our feeling of *Verstehen* is little better than mere psychological projection, that we have somehow failed to touch the strangeness and the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own. Yet if, as a result of such hyperbolic doubt, we decide to reverse this initial

stance, and to affirm, instead and from the outset, the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of comprehension begin to swing closed and we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as Other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inaccessible.

The status of the classical world has long been paradigmatic of this dilemma. When Greek forms and Latin texts were considered classical for us, what was affirmed was not merely the Identity of these formal languages and sign systems with our own aesthetic values and ideals, but rather also, and through the symbolic medium of the aesthetic experience, a whole political analogy between two forms of social life. We are in a position to grasp this better today, when Greek forms—and the ideal of classical beauty that derives from them and of which the art of Raphael has generally been taken as the supreme embodiment—to come to be viewed as insipid and when the temptation arises to rewrite them more "strongly" in terms of Difference. Then the Nietzschean reassertion of the Dionysian and of the orgiastic counterreligion of the mysteries, the ritual studies of the Cambridge school, Freud himself (and Lévi-Strauss' rewriting of the Oedipus legend in terms of primitive myth), decisive reversals in classical scholarship (such as the work of George Thompson, Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational*, and the newer French classical scholarship), and above all, perhaps, contemporary aesthetic reinterpretations of the Greek fact (such as Karl Orff's opera *Antigone*)—all converge to produce an alternative Greece, not that of Pericles or the Parthenon, but something savage or barbaric, tribal or African, or Mediterranean-sexist—a culture of masks and death, ritual ecstasies, slavery, scapegoating, phallocratic homosexuality, an utterly non- or anticlassical culture to which something of the electrifying otherness and fascination, say, of the Aztec world, has been restored. That this powerful counterimage is no less conditioned by our own collective fantasies than the *edle Einfalt und still Grösse* of the Apollonian classicism which it replaced may be deduced from its kinship with other persistent historical motifs, such as the constellation of "totalitarian" fantasies expressed in *1984*, images of Wittvogel's *Oriental Despotism*, popular representations of Stalinist "bureaucracy" and of the cyclical return (particularly in science fiction) of various images of imperial domination and of archaic power systems. Nonetheless, the content of these new motifs allows us to reevaluate the older vision of the classical world, which now proves to be less a matter of individual taste than a whole social and collective mirror image, in which the production of a new artistic style—neoclassicism—comes to serve as the vehicle for political legitimation; now it is a whole dominant social class, the English aristocratic oligarchy as it persists as a privileged enclave within the hostile environment of industrialization and commerce and the alien element of a brutalized and men-

tally and corporeally alienated proletariat, which contemplates its own ideal image in and is validated by the culture of a slaveholding aristocratic polis from which only the cultural forms themselves triumphantly survive.

It is clear that these two images of the classical world—that of Identity and that of Difference, that of the harmonious polis and that of the "Orientalism" of a radically alien form of social life—float side by side as alternative worlds that can never intersect. That both are profoundly ideological visions should not encourage us too rapidly to conclude that a "value-free" and henceforth "scientific" historiography is capable of freeing us from the binary opposition of Identity and Difference, and of piercing such ideological representations in order to replace them with an "objective" account of the realities of the ancient world. Perhaps, on the contrary, we need to take into account the possibility that our contact with the past will always pass through the imaginary and through its ideologies, will always in one way or another be mediated by the codes and motifs of some deeper historical classification system or *pensée sauvage* of the historical imagination, some properly political unconscious. This is at any rate the hypothesis we now want to explore.

II

I begin by suggesting that the traditional "solutions" to the dilemma of historicism are fourfold, and indeed organize themselves into something like a *combinatoire* or structural permutation scheme. It is, however, sufficient to enumerate these possibilities—which I call antiquarianism, existential historicism, structural typology, and Nietzschean antihistoricism—to note that two of these positions amount essentially to refusals or repudiations of the problem itself.

This refusal may be observed most immediately in simple antiquarianism, for which the past does not have to justify its claim of interest on us, nor do its monuments have to present their credentials as proper "research subjects" or furnish appropriate reasons for a passionate commitment to *The Fairie Queene* or to nineteenth-century industrial novels, which now—validated as sheer historical facts with the irrevocable claim on us of all historical fact—lead a ghostly second existence as mere private hobbies. One is tempted to say that this position "solves" the problem of the relationship between present and past by the simple gesture of abolishing the present as such, and that its emblem might well be found in Melville's "late consumptive usher to a grammer school [who] loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality." The graduate school anxieties of the first scene of Goethe's *Faust* sufficiently express the asphyxiating distress of this position, to which Neitzsche's "Use and Abuse of History" then comes as a fairly predictable dialectical reaction and counterblast.

Yet it should not be thought that the antiquarian position is utterly

without theoretical justification, even though such justification may take the form of the repudiation of theory as such. It is in fact the cultural equivalent and afterimage of a far more powerful ideology in the realm of historiography itself, namely of empiricism proper. It should not be necessary today to rehearse the many powerful indictments that have been made by empirical and empiracist historiography, which can be resumed by the twin diagnosis that the repudiation of theory is itself a theory, and that the concept of the objective "fact" is itself a theoretical construct. I will therefore limit myself to observing that the empiricist position is essentially a second-degree, reactive, critical, or demystifying one, a form of what Deleuze and Guattari conveniently term the "decoding" of preexistent, conventionally received interpretive codes, whether they be those of folk and popular legend (as in ancient historiography), or essentially theological visions of history (as in Enlightenment historiography), of the naive chronicle narratives of the deeds and destinies of the great (as in the nascent social history of the nineteenth century), or of a hegemonic Marxian vision of history in the present day.[3] If this is so, however, then empirical historiography or antiquarianism is never a first-degree position in its own right, but rather presupposes for its own vitality as a stance the existence of those other visions of history which its mission lies in subverting.

III

The first theoretical stance toward the past that has genuine content will therefore be what we here call "existential historicism," a term which, now designating an ideological position in its own right and a whole theoretical program, rather than a conceptual dilemma, demands, owing to the well-nigh universal stigmatization of these words, some preliminary comment.[4] The postcontemporary reader can still sense something of the irony of this reversal by juxtaposing Auerbach's celebration of German historism with Althusser's canonical onslaught on what he understands this term to imply. It will then be seen that something quite different is meant by these two authors, but that the term has, for better or for worse, become an ideological and polemic battleground whose framework must, at least for the moment, be respected.

The poststructural attack on "historicism," which emerges from a no less problematic affirmation of the priority of "synchronic" thought, can best be resumed in my opinion as a repudiation of two related and essentially *narrative* forms of analysis which can be termed the *genetic* and the *teleological*, respectively. This second term may be resumed most rapidly, for it amounts to little more than the reappearance, within a Marxian (and also, today a post-Marxist framework, of that critique and repudiation of the idea of "progress" which for rather different reasons characterizes bourgeois thought as

well from Henry Adams and H. G. Wells down to the anti-Utopian "end of ideology" thinkers of our own Cold War Period. Teleology here designates the belief in any "positive" future or "end of history" in whose name you might be expected to be willing to sacrifice your own present. Salvational, "humanist," or Stalinist, such spurious images of the future are then denounced as symptoms of an essentially theological (and totalitarian) mode of thought. As desirable as it may be to rid Marxism of any vestiges of a properly bourgeois notion of "progress," it would seem a good deal less desirable nervously to abandon any Marxian vision of the future altogether (an operation in which Marxism itself is generally abandoned in the process). Meanwhile, if this is what "teleology" means, it will be possible to show that what we here call "existential historicism" does not presuppose it in the least.

As for "genetic" historicism, while it may well be ideologically linked to teleological thought, which can then be seen as the former's projection and its metaphysic, in its strict form this kind of analysis—which we will examine as a specific trope of a certain nineteenth-century thought—is not necessarily wedded to the idea of the future and of progress either, although there are narrative similarities between the two forms. What teleological thought reads as a narrative progression from a fallen present to a fully constituted future, genetic thought now displaces onto the past, constructing an imaginary past term as the evolutionary precursor of a fuller term that has historical existence. Because the example of nineteenth-century historical linguistics (and Saussure's revolutionary "synchronic" reaction against it) is well known, I will give the rather different illustration of Bachofen's reconstruction of some "original" matriarchy, which precedes the patriarchal classical culture evident to us in classical texts and artifacts, and which is, in Bachofen's hypothesis, affirmed as a genuine historical event or stage: "In all the myths relating to our object of study, we find inscribed the memory of real events which happened to the human race. These are not fictions but historical destinies which people really experienced."[5] Bachofen's theoretical defense of this hypothesis is the exemplary expression of the genetic or "evolutionary" method: "A genuinely scientific epistemology consists not merely in answering the question about the nature of the object. It finds its completion in discovering the source of the object's emergence and connecting the latter to its subsequent development. Knowledge is only then transformed into Understanding when it has been able to encompass origin, development and ultimate fate."[6]

The genetic trope should, however, not be consigned to the ash can of history without a few preliminary qualifications. For one thing, in spite of the unself-conscious use of the term "origin," this trope is quite distinct from the characteristically eighteenth-century fascination with absolute origins (as in the debates about the contractual origin of society, the origin of language, the creation of the universe, or pre-Darwinian evolutionism)—a kind of speculation to which Kant may be said to have put an end once and for all. Nineteenth-century "historicism," even of the genetic kind, is, in the sense of Edward Said's convenient distinction, less concerned with absolute origins than with beginnings, and its historical narratives—whatever their ideological inspirations—organize a world of facts from which the problem of origins has been excluded from the outset and in which we must deal instead with more properly Althusserian *toujours-déjà-données.*

On the other hand, it must also be observed that the genetic approach is quite different from the seemingly analogous dilemmas of a more properly structural historiography: the former works with a single term in order artificially to construct a merely hypothetical preliminary opposite term, as in Bachofen's notion of "matriarchy," Morgan's notion of "savagery" and promiscuous group marriage, and the linguistic hypothesis of proto-Indo-European. Structural historiography, on the other hand, works with two already fully constituted terms, such as "feudalism" and "capitalism"; it does not seek to reconstruct the former as an Ur-stage of the latter, but rather to build a model of the *transition* from one form to the other, and this is no longer then a genetic hypothesis but rather an investigation of structural transformations.

Finally, in order to forestall still further confusions, it seems important to affirm, with Althusser, that Marx's *Capital* is not a genetic construction of this kind but rather a synchronic model. Indeed, even though the reproach of evolutionism generally accompanies that of geneticism, it seems appropriate to observe that Darwin is also—in contrast to earlier evolutionisms or later Darwinianisms—synchronic in this sense, and that the whole scandalous force of the synchronic mechanism of natural selection, as a rigorously "meaningless" and nonteleological process, is lost when it is appropriated for the cornerstone of some vast divine master plan. What must be added to both these affirmations is that such synchronic models do not discredit History in any absolute sense as an object of study and representation, but rather determine a new and original form of historiography, a structural permutation in the latter's narrative form or trope. It is this new antigenetic form which Nietzche will then theorize as the *genealogy* (and Foucault as the *archaeology),* namely the narrative reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of any full synchronic form. Thus, to return to *Capital,* Marx's discussions of commerce and merchant capital, and his analysis of the "stage" of primitive accumulation, are reconstructions of what, once capital is fully emergent as such, can now be rewritten as the latter's preparatory requirements, it being understood that *within feudalism* these phenomena were not anticipatory of anything, since in that synchronic system capital as such did not yet exist.

With these qualifications, we are now perhaps in a better position to raise the more interesting problems posed by the genetic trope, which do not involve its "truth" or "falsity" but rather arise only after we have decided that

this form of thinking is ideological or inadequate. Saussure's own expression of impatience—"much against my own inclination all this will end up with a book in which I will explain without any passion or enthusiasm how there is not a single term used in linguistics today which has any meaning for me whatsoever"[7]—suggests a more satisfactory way of historicizing the genetic trope, namely to ask ourselves what this particular "meaning-effect" or "understanding-effect" must have been in the first place, and how it was that intelligent people felt satisfied with the kind of historical narrative it provided them. At that point, it might well prove possible to grasp the genetic trope as the conceptual hypostasis and phenomenological projection of a life experience unique to the industrializing nations of nineteenth-century capitalism, of the gradual dissolution of the older precapitalist *Gemeinschaften* of traditional village life and their replacement, within the unity of a single lifetime and a single biographical experience, by the nascent industrial city. For subjects whose life experience thus includes both these terms and spans two distinct social formations—unlike the inhabitants of relatively static precapitalist societies, and unlike those of the postnatural *société de consommation* of the present day—it would not seem farfetched to suppose that the empty form of the genetic trope might have provided a satisfying way of thinking the two terms together and thereby of resolving, by way of something like a conceptual narrative mechanism, the lived contradiction of "modernization" itself, as the bourgeois cultural revolution is often euphemistically termed today. However this may be, such regrounding of the "false consciousness" of the genetic trope in a concrete historical situation has the additional merit for us, in the present context, of suggesting a historicizing operation and a model of a different possible "historicism" which has nothing in common with the genetic approach itself.

IV

With such a model we may now leave genetic or teleological "historicism" behind and examine that quite different theoretical stance which is existential historicism proper. Its theoretical origins may no doubt be fixed in the work of Dilthey, and beyond it, perhaps, in Ranke's great dictum that "every age is immediate to God" (or, in other words, that every culture is immanently comprehensible in its own terms). The fundamental practitioners of existential historicism are then surely the cultural historians, linguists, and iconologists of the great and now virtually extinct tradition of German philology, of which Auerbach and Spitzer, and in the history of art, Panofsky and the work of the Warburg Institute, remain the most vital presences in English-language cultural study. But we must not forget to mention the original forms taken by this historicism in other national traditions, most

notably in the work of Croce, Collingwood, and the important Spanish variant expressed in that of Ortega and Americo Castro. Yet from an institutional point of view, the most powerful and authoritative monument to existential historicism is not to be found in the official "humanities," but rather in American anthropology, in the school of Franz Boas, explicitly antigenetic and antievolutionist, in which the range of historical experience open to existential historicism is broadened to include the whole range of "primitive" cultures as such.[8] This is perhaps also the place to observe that, however "teleological" the form in which Hegel's histories proper are narrated (as the realization in matter of World Spirit), the much maligned concept of Absolute Spirit cannot accurately be assimilated to some final stage of History, but rather is meant to describe the historian's mind as it contemplates the variety of human histories and cultural forms.

Such names—in particular that of Boas—should warn us then that existential historicism does not involve the construction of this or that linear or evolutionary or genetic history, but rather designates something like a transhistorical event: the experience, rather, by which *historicity* as such is manifested, by means of the contact between the historian's mind in the present and a given synchronic cultural complex from the past. This is to say that the methodological spirit of existential historicism may be described as a historical and cultural aestheticism. On the one hand, as in classical German aesthetics itself, all praxis is in this experience suspended (whence the well-known Hegelian formulas of the "Sunday of life," and the dusk in which Minerva's owl takes flight). Meanwhile, the quality of rapt attention that existential historicism brings to the objects of its study—texts as expressions of moments of the historical past, or of unique and distant cultures—is essentially that of aesthetic appreciation and recreation, and the diversity of cultures and historical moments becomes thereby for it a source of immense aesthetic excitement and gratification. These twin constitutive strengths of existential historicism are also, as we will see in a moment, the places of its theoretical and ideological flaws. Already, in the face of the well-nigh infinite variety of cultures, it is clear that existential historicism requires some principle of unity in order to prevent its vision from collapsing into the sheer mechanical and meaningless succession of facts of empiricist historiography (where History, as one expert remarked, is just "one damned thing after another"). This principle of unity, or, in other words, the ideological underpinning of existential historicism, is then derived from German *Lebensphilosophie,* in which the infinite multiplicity of human symbolic acts is the expression of the infinite potentialities of a nonalienated human nature. The experience of historicity then restores something of this richness to a present in which few enough of those potentialities are practically available to any of us.

For existential historicism, then, the past has vital urgency for us, and this

urgency, which distinguishes such a stance from that of simple antiquarianism, surely needs to be retained in any more adequate "solution" to the dilemma of historicism proper. In this sense, whatever its theoretical contradictions, existential historicism must be honored as an experience, indeed, as the fundamental inaugural experience of history itself, without which all work in culture must remain a dead letter. There can indeed be no cultural investigation worthy of the name, let alone any history proper, that does not breathe something of the spiritual enthusiasm of this tradition for the traces that life has left behind it, something of its visionary instinct for all the forms of living praxis preserved and still instinct within the monuments of the past.

Nor does the past itself remain unmodified by this experience. Rather, the historicist act revives the dead and reenacts the essential mystery of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak its mortal speech and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings unfamiliar to it. As I have mentioned the Germans and the Spaniards, the Italians and the English, it may be appropriate to dramatize this astonishing moment of the exchange of forces between present and past through the voice of its supreme French embodiment, and to reread the lines in which Michelet—arriving at the night of 4 August 1789, in his great narrative, at the sudden and irrevocable dissolution of the *ancien régime* and the feudal world, and the unexpected emergence of "modern times"—salutes a past become present once again:

> Que vous avez tardé, grand jour! combien de temps nos pères vous ont attendu et rêvé! . . . L'espoir que leurs fils vous verraient enfin a pu seul les soutenir; autrement ils n'auraient pas voulu vivre, ils seraient morts à la peine. . . . Moi-même, leur compagnon, labourant à côté d'eux dans le sillon de l'histoire, buvant à leur coupe amère, qui m'a permis de revivre le douloureux moyen âge, et pourtant de n'en pas mourir, n'est-ce pas vous, ô beau jour, premier jour de la délivrance? . . . J'ai vécu pour vous raconter!"[9]
>
> How late you are in coming, great day! How long our forefathers had to wait for you and dream about you!...Only the hope their sons would see you sustained them; otherwise they would have cursed life and died at hard labor....And I myself, their comrade, toiling beside them in the furrow of history and drinking from their bitter cup—what was it that allowed me to relive the agonizing Middle Ages and to emerge live, if not you, oh glorious day, first day of our freedom?...I lived but to tell your story!

Yet if the past is thus construed as a *Kerygma*,[10] as a voice and a message and an annunciation which it is the historian's vocation to sense and to preserve, there must also come a falling cadence as this supreme event begins to fade and normal time returns; so Michelet, evoking that other supreme moment of his history which is the Fête de la Fédération of July 1790—and finding its documents "burning, after sixty years, as though written yesterday...love letters"—now expresses the pathos of the downward slope and the withdrawal from his vision:

> "Ainsi finit le meilleur jour de notre vie." Ce mot que les fédérés d'un village écrivent le soir de la fête à la fin de leur récit, j'ai été tout près de l'écrire moi-même en terminant ce chapitre. Il est fini et rien de semblable ne reviendra pour moi. J'y laisse un irréparable moment de ma vie, une partie de moi-même, je le sens bien, qui restera là et ne me suivra plus; il me semble que je m'en vais appauvri et diminué.[11]
>
> "So ended the best day of our life." This sentence, inscribed at nightfall by the fédérés of a village at the close of their narrative—I almost wrote it again myself at the end of the present chapter. It is over, and nothing of the sort will ever happen to me again. I leave here an irreparable moment of my life, a part of myself, which must, I sense, remain behind and follow me no further; it seems to me that I am thereby impoverished and diminished.

Such dramatic outbursts, comparable only to the great trumpet call of *Fidelio* which signals the deliverance from the crypt of the *ancien régime* and the resurrection of the dead, ratify the vocation of the historian as custodian of the past and of the nameless generations of human life that have vanished without a trace. At the same time, there is already in Michelet something that inflects the stance of existential historicism in an unexpected direction, and which may allow us to sense a way out of its contradictions, which can now thereby be more accurately formulated.

For existential historicism, as we have suggested, the experience of history is a contact between an individual subject in the present and a cultural object in the past. Each pole of this experience is thereby at once open to complete relativization: to take up for the moment only the subjectivity of the historian, it is clear that given the tastes and receptivities of the individual subject, an infinity of possible histories is conceivable. It is this threat of infinite relativization which the more properly ideological presuppositions of existential historicism are then called upon to limit and to conjure. These consist, as we have said, in a certain psychology of human nature, or, better still, in a certain anthropology—the notion of some full development of human potentialities, as it is expressed diversely in Schiller, Humboldt, or the early Marx—which, as an ontological presupposition, cannot be satisfactory to us today, no matter how much sympathy we may have for its vision. Here the Althusserian critique of "humanism," and Althusser's systematic dissociation of the early—anthropological or "existential"—Marx from the later structural and synchronic model of *Capital*, is powerful and timely; we may

in our present context rewrite Althusser's thematics of "humanism" as a warning that any "anthropology," any statement about "human nature," is necessarily and irredeemably ideological. This position can perhaps be grasped most immediately and practically on the polemic level, where it is clear that to any given anthropology or presupposition about human nature, any other may with equally peremptory force be opposed (as, for instance, the Hobbesian view, revived by Robert Ardrey and others, of the innate aggressivity of the human animal).

It should not be thought, however, that this dilemma can be adequately solved by way of the poststructuralist critique of the centered subject: that existential historicism in its canonical form posits the historian as a centered subject of this type is evident (and were it not, the critiques of Hegelian Absolute Spirit from the most varied philosophical standpoints would be enough to demonstrate it). Yet as we have suggested, what is essential in this experience is less the construction of the subject itself than its enthusiasm, the spark of recognition, what would today be called its reception of unique intensities. Quite unexpectedly, therefore, we find, in the midst of the most powerful contemporary celebration of the decentered subject, a call for what can only be called a decentered, "schizophrenic" equivalent to existential historicism.

> Klossowski has admirably demonstrated in his commentary on Nietzsche the presence of the *Stimmung* as a material emotion, constitutive of the most lofty thought and the most acute perception. "The centrifugal forces do not flee the center forever, but approach it once again, only to retreat from it yet again: such is the nature of the violent oscillations that overwhelm an individual so long as he seeks only his own center and is incapable of seeing the circle of which he himself is a part; for if these oscillations overwhelm him, it is because each one of them corresponds to an individual other than the one he believes himself to be, from the point of view of the unlocatable center. As a result, an identity is essentially fortuitous, and a series of individualities must be undergone by each of these oscillations, so that as a consequence the fortuitousness of this or that particular individuality will render all of them necessary." The forces of attraction and repulsion, of soaring ascents and plunging falls, produce a series of intensive states based on the intensity = 0 that designates the body without organs ("but what is most unusual is that here again a new afflux is necessary, merely to signify this absence"). There is no Nietzsche-the-self, professor of philology, who suddenly loses his mind and supposedly identifies with all sorts of strange people; rather, there is the Nietzschean subject who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with history's various names: "I am all the names of History!" The subject spreads itself out along the entire circumference of the circle, the center of which has been abandoned by the ego. At the center is the desiring-machine, the celibate machine of the Eternal Return. A residual subject of the machine, Nietzsche-as-subject garners a euphoric reward (Voluptas) from everything that this machine turns out, a product that the reader had thought to be no more than the fragmented *oeuvre* by Nietzsche. "Nietzsche believes that he is now pursuing, not the realization of a system, but the application of a program...in the form of residues of the Nietzschean discourse, which have now become the repertory, so to speak, of his histrionics." It is not a matter of identifying with various historical personages, but rather identifying the names of history with zones of intensity on the body without organs; and each time Nietzsche-as-subject exclaims: "They're *me!* So it's me!" No one has ever been as deeply involved in history as the schizo, or dealt with it in this way. He consumes all of universal history in one fell swoop. We began by defining him as *Homo natura,* and lo and behold, he has turned out to be *Homo historia.* This long road that leads from the one to the other stretches from Hölderlin to Nietzsche, and the pace becomes faster and faster. "The euphoria could not be prolonged in Nietzsche for as long a time as the contemplative alienation of Hölderlin. . . . The vision of the world granted to Nietzsche does not inaugurate a more or less regular succession of landscapes or still lifes, extending over a period of forty years or so: it is, rather, a parody of the process of recollection of an event: a single actor will play the whole of it in pantomime in the course of a single solemn day—because the whole if it reaches expression and then disappears once again in the space of just one day—even though it may appear to have taken place between December 31 and January 6—in a realm above and beyond the usual rational calendar.[12]

Schizophrenic historicism does not change the basic terms of the historicist situation, for it still opposes an individual subject (here to be sure an indivdual "effect of subjectivity" rather than a fully constituted "bourgeois" centered subject) to an essentially collective object. Yet it now allows us to widen the range of effects or intensities that are thereby implied: now not merely enthusiasm of an aestheticizing type, or Nietzschean euphoria and exaltation, but also the whole gamut of quite different *Stimmungen*—dizziness, loathing, depression, nausea, and Freudian decathexis—are to be numbered among the possible modes of some "authentic" contact with the cultural past. In this sense, indeed, our contemporary distance from aesthetic historicism itself may be unexpectedly reevaluated; and the Althusserian exasperation with Michelet's rhetoric of the resurrection of the dead, the passionate repudiation of the *vecú* and of existential phenomenology as well as of Hegelian "expressive causality," indeed, the more general malaise and revulsion we may sometimes feel for the supreme and placeless sovereignty with which a (most often Germanic) bourgeois World Spirit dips into the cultures

of the past and organizes them into "imaginary museums" for its own delectation—all these feelings signal some electrifying and authentically historical—indeed properly *historicist*—contact with that present of existential historicism itself which has now become but another moment of our own past and which we live, in the no less vital mode of the negative, or of repulsion.

From this vaster perspective, then, it would seem that only indifference suspends a lived relationship to the past that can be registered in intensities of any conceivable quality; for even boredom, in its strong Baudelairean form, is a way of sensing and living the specificity of certain moments of the cultural past. If this is the case with boredom, however, as a resistance of the organism to culturally alien and asphyxiating forms, we may want to take into consideration the possibility that indifference is itself ultimately also a mode of relationship, something like a defense mechanism, a repression, a neurotic denial, a preventive shutting off of affect, which itself finally reconfirms the vital threat of its object. In that case, the "nightmare of history" becomes inescapable: we are everywhere in relation to it, even in its apparent absences, and the therapeutic Nietzschean "forgetfulness" of history is fully as reactive to the fact of history as is Michelet's "resurrection." How are we to understand this "absent cause" (Althusser), to which we cannot *not* react with the whole range of our affective intensities, and which at the same time would seem to be so charged with dread as to make the occasional prospect of its occultation—its repression or its amnesia—come before us like a momentary relief? It does not seem to me that the immemorial record of violence and the most brutal as well as the most intangible forms of domination are sufficient to motivate this mental flight, these ingenious subterfuges. Violence is a sheerly ideological category, as the popularity of this "concept" in American social criticism today testifies; and as for domination, social Darwinism and neofascism make it plain that under certain circumstances this phenomenon can also be contemplated with complacency or even a somber exhilaration. For Marxism, indeed, the categories of power are not the ultimate ones, and the trajectory of contemporary social theory (from Weber to Foucault) suggests that the appeal to it is often strategic and involves a systematic displacement of the Marxian problematic. No, the ultimate form of the "nightmare of history" is rather the fact of labor itself, and the intolerable spectacle of the backbreaking millennial toil of millions of people from the earliest moments of human history. The more existential versions of this dizzying and properly unthinkable, unimaginable spectacle—as in horror at the endless succession of "dying generations," at the ceaseless wheel of life, or at the irrevocable passage of Time itself—are themselves only disguises for this ultimately scandalous fact of mindless alienated work and of the irremediable loss and waste of human energies, a scandal to which no metaphysical categories can give a meaning. This scandal is everywhere known, everywhere repressed—*un secret de tous connu.* It is, for example, instructive that the text of Tolstoy upon

which the Russian Formalists founded their canonical theory of artistic defamiliarization should be a text about work—indeed, contemporary feminism makes the recognition of this labor as *housework,* women's work, the oldest form of the division of labor, quite unavoidable:

> I was cleaning a room and, meandering about, approached the sofa and couldn't remember whether or not I had dusted it. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I could not remember and felt that it was impossible to remember—so that if I had dusted it and forgot—that is, had acted unconsciously—then it was the same as if I had not. If some conscious person had been watching, then the fact could be established. If, however, no one was looking, or was looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.[13]

This waste of human life—what Tillie Olsen has called the *silences* into which such large parts of so many people's lives, and not merely women's lives, disappear—is evidently not rectified by the self-consciousness by which the Formalists (and perhaps Tolstoy himself) proposed to recuperate it. The whole classical doctrine of aesthetics as play and a nonfinalizable finality, and the persistent ideological valorization of handicraft production, are also desperate attempts to think away the unthinkable reality of alienated labor. The latter finally grounds the phenomenon of reification itself, described, for instance, by the *Tel Quel* group as the "effacement of the traces of production on the object": yet even here the category of "production" remains a still too tolerable and recuperable one, which in a pinch any modernist would be willing to salute. The deeper hold of reification lies in its promise to obliterate from the object world that surrounds us the dizzying and culpabilizing presence of the stored alien labor of other people.

Neither the complacent aestheticizing contemplation of existential historicism proper, nor the more manic and Nietzschean exaltation of schizophrenic historicism, resolves the fundamental imbalance of such views of historical experience, which oppose the response of an individual subject to the collective realities of any moment of the past. It is precisely at this point that Michelet's inflection of such historicism suggests a rather different solution: in Michelet, indeed, the present of the observer-historian, far from being placeless, is doubly inscribed in the text as a concrete situation. It is above all the present of 4 August 1789, the present of the Revolution, which resurrects the lost "silences" of medieval labor, not through any "objective" historiographic reconstruction, but by the vital *Novum* of praxis; meanwhile the politically committed stance of the historian Michelet during the legitimation crisis of the final years of the July Monarchy, the politically symbolic value of his own historiography which will earn him suspension from the Collège de France on the very eve of the Revolution of 1848, reduplicates this reinvention of the past by an active present and allows Michelet himself to resurrect that very

known *Patterns of Culture*—in spite of their ideological stress on the infinite diversity of human cultures, can be shown to be articulated by a cultural classification system that is far from innocent.

Lotman's work is exemplary for us in the present context because it would seem to have drawn the methodological consequences of this apparently unavoidable, yet generally unformulated, tendency toward typology in existential historicism, and to have projected the most self-conscious and ambitious program for cultural classification that we yet have. (In anthropology proper, such programs are generally hampered by the institutional restriction of ethnological materials to so-called cold or primitive societies; that is, they operate within an unreflected previous and far too global typology which is simply the division between "primitive" and "historical" social forms.) The work of Lotman and his group would appear to take its point of departure in the Marxian problematic of social reproduction; indeed, the initial definition of culture as the "nonhereditary memory of the collectivity"[19] suggests a perspective in which the various possible mechanisms of cultural "storage" will be analyzed in terms of their function to reproduce a mode of production of a determinate type. This is not the direction taken by Lotman's work, however, nor does the preliminary restriction of his studies to the field of Slavic or Russian cultural history compel this perspective, insofar as such materials thereby find themselves reduced to documents from only two modes of production: feudalism and capitalism (I do not know of any cultural-typological work of this school on artifacts from the socialist period proper). Thus, Lotman's initial definition of culture operates at once to bracket the whole question of the infrastructural function of culture and to determine a framework in which the various cultural mechanisms can be studied in isolation.

These prove essentially to be twofold and to generate a kind of dualistic vision of history. "It is possible to distinguish between cultures directed mainly towards expression and those directed chiefly towards content."[20] Both types of culture—they are explicitly correlated with the medieval-ritualistic and the modern-rationalistic or scientific, respectively—are organized around textual constructions, or better still, around processes of textualization. But the first type of culture—that organized around the plane of expression—posits a master text (scripture) to which the other texts of culture and social life are assimilated. The basic evaluative mechanism of such a cultural mechanism will be the distinction between "correct" and "incorrect," and the world will be articulated according to this binary opposition, in which the "true" text or true culture—the culture of belief—is opposed to the false texts and cultures of heresies, superstitions, and the like.

Meanwhile, a certain conception of textuality organizes modern or rationalistic culture as well; but in this case, the opposite of the equivalent "master text" (scientific rationality) is not another heretical text, but merely

the nontextualized, entropy, or disorder. Here the reproductive mechanism of culture is not directed toward the replication of the sacred text, but rather toward the imperializing transformation of everything that is as yet a nontext into the new master text of scientific rationality; and the evaluative system of such a mechanism is based on conceptions of rules and method, rather than conceptions of "correctness" or "incorrectness" (an opposition that might be reformulated in terms of the ethical binary of "good" and "evil").

It is apparent that this global opposition is a more complex expression of the classical linguistic or tropological distinction between metaphor and metonymy associated with the name of Roman Jakobson; the cultural production of a culture organized around a master text or scripture will then be a process of metaphorical ordering, whereas that of a culture of textualizing rules will reveal the mechanism of a kind of metonymic reclamation, in which ever greater quantities of content are drawn into the system. The obvious danger of such a stark opposition lies in its recuperation by this or that "natural" or "metaphysical" dualism; thus, in Jakobson himself, in the inaugural work on aphasia, the temptation is ever present to fold the opposition of these master tropes back into some more "fundamental" division of mental processes, into the analogical and the associative, and beyond that, into specific zones of the brain itself.

Yet tropological classification need not be a dualism, as the variety and multiplicity of tropes and figures in any manual of rhetoric might suggest. In the case of Lotman's own work, indeed, it will be observed that other types of cultural mechanism, touched on in passing, suggest that this particular tropological opposition need not constrict Lotman's fundamental project of a "description of cultural universals and the elaboration of a grammar of the 'languages' of culture [which] will furnish, it is to be hoped, the bases of that structural history which is one of our future tasks."[21] On the other hand, a closer inspection of the "exception" noted above—Lotman's account of neoclassicism—shows that this promise of variety may well be illusory.

Neoclassicism occupies something like an intermediary position between a culture based on a master text and one based on "scientific" rules. Ostensibly a culture of rules and canons, it nonetheless posits an ensemble of classical texts that have the authority of the older sacred master text: "The theoretical models were thought of as eternal and as preceding the actual act of creation. In art, only those texts considered 'correct,' that is, corresponding to the rules, were recognized as texts, i.e., having significance.... The bad in art is whatever breaks the rules. But even the violation of the rules can be described, in Boileau's opinion, as following certain 'incorrect' rules. Therefore, 'bad' texts can be classified; any unsatisfactory work of art serves as an example of some typical violation."[22] Thus, in Lotman's view, neoclassicism does not present us with some new and original form of cultural mechanism (or some new trope that would break us out of the dualism of

metaphor and metonymy); it is merely a structural permutation of the two older types in which the rationalistic mechanism of cultural and scientific production by rules finds itself organized around the true/false, correct/incorrect, good/bad system of evaluation of an older sacred culture. Nor is there anything particularly surprising in this. Greimas' semantic rectangle shows us that any initial binary opposition can, by the operation of negations and the appropriate syntheses, generate a much larger field of terms which, however, all necessarily remain locked in the closure of the initial system. The stark and mythical Jakobsonian dualism—as soon as it is articulated into semic variables of the type of Lotman's "truth" versus "rules"—becomes similarly capable of generating a more complex *combinatoire* or permutation scheme.

At this point, however, it becomes interesting to ask ourselves what further permutations the Lotmanian typology can produce, and in particular how we might describe the missing fourth term of this particular closed system. Very schematically, we may suppose that to a culture that organizes its rules according to ethical or "truth" categories, there might logically be opposed a culture that organized its "truth" categories and its ethics according to rules and methods, that is a culture that systematically rewrote what used to be ontological categories (being, meaning, goodness, and the like) in terms of the sheerly operational ones of rules of transformation, transcoding, infinite semiosis, and the like. The kinship Lotman has underscored with Foucault's enterprise, in *The Order of Things*,[23] confirms the suspicion that his fourth and still hypothetical type of culture can be none other than the "structuralist" moment celebrated in prophetic annunciation at the end of Foucault's work and sociologically unmasked by Jean Baudrillard as the very logic of consumer society itself—an autoproliferation of signifiers that have freed themselves from the myth and the ballast of all "natural" signifieds, the moment of metatheory, in which theories generate more theories, and of some new and postmodern, properly "textual" or schizophrenic aesthetic, in which sentences generate other sentences and texts still further texts.

The purpose of this hypothetical exercise is not to impute to Lotman a view of history that he might well not wish to endorse, but rather to demonstrate that underlying every such structural typology, whether it is grounded in the mechanism of linguistic tropes or in some other way, there can be found something from which the system was intended to free us, namely a narrative (and perhaps even teleological) "vision" or "philosophy" of history. As far as the tropes themselves are concerned, they are clearly unavailable for the construction of a typology or structural *combinatoire* unless their initial empirical multiplicity has been systematically reduced to some basic generative mechanism; this is indeed what we may observe in such contemporary rhetorical systems as those of the μ Group and in Hayden White's "tropics."[24] It will therefore come as no surprise to find that, whatever the

official terms of this second underlying "system," it must necessarily be of another order of abstraction than the multiplicity of forms that it is called upon to organize and to order. We must then suspect that, even if this underlying system is described in terms of "master" tropes which organize surface tropes or figures, the status of such master tropes must ultimately be sought in a wholly different system altogether. My own experience suggests that this second, or "deep," system can always be grasped and rewritten in terms of something like a narrative or teleological vision of history.

Thus the structural attempt to reduce the multiplicity of empirical moments of the past or of other cultures to some fundamental typology or system would seem to be a failure, insofar as the surface categories of such narrative history find themselves smuggled back into the typology to lend it a generally disguised content. Nonetheless, even this apparent failure takes us a step forward, for if such categories are unavoidable, one may at least make a virtue out of necessity and propose a structural system that articulates them explicitly for the first time. As we will see shortly, such a system is that which is projected by the Marxist concept of the "mode of production."

Meanwhile, we must conclude this discussion of the option of a properly structural typology of history or culture by observing the inevitable: that the emphasis of this position on the logic of the historical object determines an imbalance in that feature which was strongest in the counterposition of existential historicism, namely the position of the historian-subject. The very conception of science—whether it be the "science" of some semiotics-yet-to-be-constructed or another kind—depends for its constitution on the mirage of that placeless scientific subject of knowledge which Lacan has conveniently termed the *sujet supposé savior*. Nonetheless, a certain reflexivity is posited in Lotman's scheme, insofar as the place of the semiotician is presumably to be reckoned into the metonymic moment of a rationalizing and scientific culture. Yet far from being the structuralist equivalent of some properly dialectical self-consciousness, this kind of reflexivity would seem to confront us with the logical paradox of a class that is a member of itself. The Utopian fourth culture of Foucault—a properly structuralist culture beyond the conventional scientific-rationalistic one—is surely at least partly motivated by the attempt to break out of this bind; yet neither the problem of the historian's place or self-consciousness, nor that of the Utopian moment, can be adequately dealt with within these systems.

VI

We must now mention, *pour mémoire*, the final option—after antiquarianism, existential historicism, and structural typology—which we have termed the Nietzschean position. Like the first of this series, of which it is in effect the inversion, this final option "solves" the dilemma of historicism by refusing

the problem. In effect, for antiquarianism the problem of the relationship between past and present did not arise, since for it the present had no particularly privileged status. But was it not Hume who suggested that nothing but our own prejudices would be changed by the hypothesis that the world was created a mere instant ago, and that the whole archival and sedimented wealth of the "past's" traces—including Hume's complete works themselves, along with the documents that register this writer's historical "existence"—are nothing but an immense illusionary trompe l'oeil built into a synchronous present? Upon the foundation of Hume's paradox, then, there rises the ultimate "position" on the dilemmas of historicism, namely the view that the problem of the past is not a problem for the simple reason that the past does not exist:

> What is the object of history? It is quite simply, despite all the elaborations, equivocations, and qualifications of historians and philosophers, whatever is past...and yet, by definition, all that is past does not exist. To be accurate the object of history is whatever is *represented* as having hitherto existed. The essence of this representation is preserved records and documents. History's object, the hitherto existing, does not exist except in the modality of its current existence, as representations....What the past *is* is determined by the content of the various ideological forms which operate within the parameters of historical knowledge. The content of the past—its nature, its periods and problems—is determined by the character of a particular ideological form. The particular modes of writing history invest this or that body of representations with the status of a record. Artifacts, washing lists, court rolls, kitchen middens, memoirs, are converted into *texts*—representations through which the real may be read. The text, constituted as a text by its reading, is at the mercy of this reading. Far from working on the *past,* the ostensible object of history, historical knowledge works on a body of *texts.* These texts are a product of historical knowledge. The writing of history is the production of texts which interpret these texts.[25]

This position, which draws the ultimate conclusion from structuralism's inaugural perception of the incommensurability between synchrony and diachrony, is to the conventional practice of the historian as a modernist—or, better still, a postmodernist, properly *textual*—aesthetic is to the aesthetic of traditional realistic representation. Indeed, the introduction of the very theme of representation into the discussion throws its terms and givens into a fresh light, subsuming it under an even broader theoretical and philosophical problem. For these writers, for example, Lenin's one great historical work. *The Development of Capitalism in Russia,* is only apparently a work of historiographic representation. Nor does their argument turn on the economic and statistical content of Lenin's text (Arthur Danto demonstrated some time ago that nonnarrative types of historical writing can always be transformed into

essentially narrative or storytelling propositions).[26] Lenin's work does not aim in this sense to reconstitute a (more adequate) representation of the past; rather, such apparent representations are part of a theoretical (but also a political) practice in the present, and insert themselves into an ongoing polemic: "Lenin's book is a theoretical demolition of the arguments and evidence of Narodnism and evolutionism. 'Empirical' material—in fact, statistics and information, collected according to definite problems, by definite techniques, and within definite political and social purposes; Lenin had no illusions or fetishes about their purity—functions in this book as the object of criticism or as a source of illustration of a theoretical point."[27] To replace this interpretation of Lenin in a more familiar context, we may say that the older view according to which this particular textual signifier stands for and represents a particular signified or even a particular referent is here replaced by the view that the meaning of a signifier is generated by its work on previous signifiers alone. The classical view of this "textual" model of theory is, of course, Althusser's own: theoretical production is neither the representation of some real object nor direct work on the latter. Science "always works on 'generalized material' even when the latter takes on the form of a 'fact.'...It always works on preexistent concepts, on 'Vorstellungen.'...It does not 'work' on some pure and objective 'datum' which would be that of pure and absolute 'facts.' On the contrary, its business consists in *elaborating its own scientific facts* by means of the critique of *ideological 'facts'* elaborated by the more properly ideological theoretical practice that has preceded it."[28] Now, however, Hindess and Hirst draw the ultimate conclusion from this position—a conclusion Althusser has not been willing to take himself—and, thereby reproblematizing their own important book, provocatively close it with the following declaration: "The study of history is not only scientifically but also politically valueless. The object of history, the past, no matter how it is conceived, cannot affect present conditions. Historical events do not exist and can have no material effectivity in the present....It is...the 'current situation' which it is the object of Marxist theory to elucidate and of Marxist political practice to act upon. All Marxist theory, however abstract it may be, however, general its field of application, exists to make possible the analysis of the current situation."[29] But if this is what historiography does anyhow—without realizing it, or under the delusion that it is "representing" past realities—then perhaps we can go on writing history as we did before; and it is conceivable that the Humean paradox would change nothing whatsoever in our life in what has become something of a Potemkin present.

Much of the same conclusion can be drawn from more explicitly Nietzschean contemporary versions of this position. Let Jean-François Lyotard, in his attack on current reinventions of Rousseau, serve as the spokesman for this view. Confronted with the polemic appeal to the radical social and cultural *difference* of primitive or tribal society (expressed, in this case, in the work of

Jean Baudrillard), Lyotard is willing to take the ultimate step: there never *were* any primitive societies to begin with ("Non, décidément, il faut le dire clairement: *il n'y a pas* du tout de sociétés primitives ou sauvages, nous sommes tous des sauvages, tous les sauvages sont des capitalistes-capitalisés[30]). There has never been anything but capitalism as far as the eye can see in time and space; there has never been anything but the present. Yet Lyotard's own call for a new "paganism," for a political revival of the old heterogeneity of the pagan gods (or "intensities")[31]—as well as his strategic reaffirmation of the oppositional underside of hegemonic classical philosophy, his defense of the sophists and the cynics against the dominant Platonic or Aristotelian tradition—suggests much the same "libidinal" practice of the past, and of its "names of history," whose program, whose "schizophrenic historicism," we have already seen outlined in Deleuze.

VII

The reader will already have suspected that the Marxist "solution" to the dilemma of historicism outlined here will consist in squaring the circle we have already traced, in positing a mode of Identity that is also one of radical Difference, and in producing a kind of *structural historicism,* in which the vital and, if one likes, properly libidinal investment of existential historicism in the past is somehow derived from or positioned within a conception of the logic of historical and cultural forms more satisfactory than that proposed by structural typology. We have already suggested that such a conception is to be found in the Marxian notion of the mode of production, whose various forms are conventionally enumerated as follows: hunting and gathering (primitive communism or the horde), neolithic agriculture (or the gens), the Asiatic mode of production (or so-called oriental despotism), the polis, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. These distinct forms are no longer to be considered "states" in some linear or evolutionary narrative which would be the "story" of human history, nor are they "necessary" moments in some teleological historical process. The local and empirical "transition" from one of these forms to another—as in the two great *loci classici* of Marxist historiography, the transition from primitive communism to power societies, and the transition from feudalism to capitalism—demands reconstruction, not as a narrative of emergence, but rather, as we have already suggested above, as a genealogy. Meanwhile, each of these synchronic forms designates, not merely a specific type of economic "production" or labor process and technology, but also a specific and original form of cultural and linguistic (or sign) production (along with the determinate place of the other traditional Marxian superstructures of the political, the juridical, the ideological, and so forth). It thus subsumes models like that of Lotman which seek to deal with cultural mechanisms in isolation (leaving aside here the fact that Lotman's

is a model of cultural reproduction rather than of cultural production proper). Nor is there any reason that a contemporary Marxian model of social structure should not make a determinate place for the psychoanalytic "instance"—the construction of a particular "psychoanalytic" subject in this or that mode of production—and for the phenomenological—in particular the phenomenology of space and the organization of *Lebenswelt* or daily life in a given social formation. What needs to be stressed, however, is that all these various "instances" are dialectically modified according to the structural place assigned to them in the various modes of production; there cannot, therefore, be any question of the projection backward into radically different social formations of a concept of "production" drawn from capitalism,[32] any more than a dialectical perspective can accept the ahistorical assumption of certain psychoanalytic schools that the constituted subject, the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, desire, and the like—all theorized from modern or bourgeois psychic materials—remain constant throughout history.

As with my initial remarks on interpretation, I cannot do any more here than to assert answers to problems about the nature of a mode of production which I will argue in more detail elsewhere. Chief among such problems is the status of this concept itself, about which it has been observed—in a number of critiques of the formulations of this concept in Althusser and Balibar[33]—that it is something like Spinoza's "eternity," a timeless structure which must apparently effortlessly reproduce itself without change across the empirical vicissitudes of human history. Nor is the conventional Marxist appeal to the complementary concept of a "social formation"—the empirical historical society or culture in which a given mode of production realizes itself—any more satisfactory as theoretical solution, since it merely reintroduces that empiricism which it was the mission of a dialectical approach to discredit and to replace.

A solution to this problem can be sought in two directions. On the one hand, as we have already suggested, the Marxian concept of a mode of production is essentially a *differential* one, in which the formulation of a single mode of production (as, for instance, Marx's own model of capital) at once structurally projects the space of other possible modes of production by way of Difference, that is, by a systematic variation in the features or semes of any given initial mode. This is the sense in which each mode of production structurally *implies* all the others. What is important about this from our present standpoint is that the contemplation of any given mode of production (or the replacement of any cultural artifact within its specific mode of production) must always implicitly or explicitly involve a differential relationship to all the others.

But one can also argue this differential interrelationship in a nonstructuralizing way: from this second standpoint, the hypothesis of a structural *combinatoire* is unnecessary, since each "more advanced" mode of production includes the earlier ones, which it has had to suppress in its own emergence. These are therefore sedimented within a mode of production like capitalism, in which the

earlier forms, along with their own specific forms of alienation and productivity, persist in a layered, "canceled" fashion. But not only is it vanquished modes of production from the past that thus survive in the "nonsynchronicity"[34] of the present mode; it is also clear that future modes of production are also at work in the present and can be detected most visibly in the various local forms of class struggle. If this is so, however, it becomes evident not only that no mode of production exists in any pure state, but also that we need a concept of the same level of abstraction to designate this contradictory overlay and structural coexistence of several modes of production in tension with one another. I suggest that this concept has been made available to us by the Chinese experience, and that this larger form, which subsumes the individual modes of production, be called "cultural revolution," it being understood that the recent Chinese practice of cultural revolution is merely one distinct historical type of cultural revolution, of which one must assume that there have existed quite different structural embodiments at all moments of human history (thus, for instance, to draw only on familiar and traditional examples, Bachofen's hypothesis of the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchy is an attempt to thematize a properly *neolithic* cultural revolution; Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic is a contribution to the study of a properly *bourgeois* cultural revolution; and so forth). Let me add in passing that this new unifying category of historical study seems to me the only one in terms of which the so-called human sciences can be reorganized in a properly materialistic way.

Yet it would seem that this system of modes of production and cultural revolutions at best regrounds only one of the options discussed above—that of structural typology or of the logic of the historical *object*—in some more satisfactory and totalizing way, and that we have not yet shown how it is able to provide a more adequate formulation for the problem of the place of the historian-subject, or of the present, as this imposed itself in our counterdiscussion of existential historicism. We have already touched on the way in which Marxism, as an absolute historicism, grounds the possibility of a comprehensive theory of past societies and cultures in the structure of the present, or of capitalism itself. Yet this would seem at best to reinvent some "place of truth," some ethnocentric privilege of our present as inheritors of world culture and as practitioners of rationalism and science, which is not visibly different from the imperializing hubris of conventional bourgeois science, and which would tend at the same time to confirm the current line of the *nouveaux philosophes* on the innate or intrinsic "Stalinism" of the Marxian worldview.

This ultimate dilemma, which turns on the status of the present and the place of the subject in it, needs to be restructured in three ways. First, we must try to rid ourselves of the habit of thinking about our (aesthetic) relationship to culturally or temporally distant artifacts as being a relationship between individual subjects (as in my *personal* reading of an *individual* text written by a

biographical individual named Spenser or Juvenal, or even my personal attempt to invent an individual relationship to an oral story once told by an individual storyteller in a tribal society). It is not a question of dismissing the role of individual subjects in the reading process, but rather of grasping this obvious and concrete individual relationship as being itself a mediation for a nonindividual and more collective process: the confrontation of two distinct social forms or modes of production. We must try to accustom ourselves to a perspective in which every act of reading, every local interpretive practice, is grasped as the privileged vehicle through which two distinct modes of production confront and interrogate each other. Our individual reading thus becomes an allegorical figure for this essentially collective confrontation of two social forms.

If we can do this, I suggest that a second reformulation of the nature of this contact between present and past will gradually impose itself. We will no longer tend to see the past as some inert and dead object which we are called upon to resurrect, or to preserve, or to sustain, in our own living freedom; rather, the past will itself become an active agent in this process and will begin to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us on the social formation in which we exist. At that point, the very dynamics of the historical tribunal are unexpectedly and dialectically reversed: it is not we who sit in judgment on the past, but rather the past, the radical difference of other modes of production (and even of the immediate past of our own mode of production), which judges us, imposing the painful knowledge of what we are not, what we are no longer, what we are not yet. This is the sense in which the past speaks to us about our own virtual and unrealized "human potentialities," but it is not an edifying lesson or any leisure matter of personal or cultural "enrichment." Rather, it is a lesson of privation, which radically calls into question the commodified daily life, the reified spectacles, and the simulated experience of our own plastic-and-cellophane society; and this not merely on the level of content (as in Marx's familiar opposition of the object world of Greek epic to the contemporary world of the locomotive and the telegraph), but in the very experience of form and linguistic production itself, where the primacy of collective ritual, or the splendor of uncommodified value, or even the transparency of immediate personal relations of domination, at once stigmatizes the monadization, the privatized and instrumentalized speech, the commodity reification, of our own way of life. On this view, then, as for existential historicism, our concrete relationship with the past remains an existential experience, a galvanic and electrifying event, yet one that is far more disturbing and unsettling than in the comfortable aesthetic appreciation of the practitioners of late nineteenth-century historicism. Now, on the contrary, it is the past that sees us, and judges us remorselessly, without any sympathy for our complicity with the scraps of subjectivity we try to think of as our own fragmentary and authentic life experience.

Yet it is not only the past that thus judges us; and with this final rectification we touch at the originality of the Marxist position with respect to the other options that have been evoked above. For if the proper articulation of any concrete mode of production structurally implies the projection of all other conceivable modes, it follows that it implies the future as well and that the hermeneutic contact between present and past outlined here cannot fully be described without the articulation within it of what Ernst Bloch has called the Utopian impulse. Among the conditions of possibility of Marxism itself as a new type of dialectical thought was, as we have indicated above, the commodification of land and labor completed only by the emergence of capitalism; but if this were its only historical precondition, it could be argued that Marxism as such was merely a theoretical "reflection" of early or classical capitalism. It is, however, also the anticipatory expression of a future society, or, in the terms of our discussion above, the partisan commitment to that future or Utopian mode of production which seeks to emerge from the hegemonic mode of production of our own present. This is the final reason why Marxism is not, in the current sense, a "place of truth," why its subjects are not centered in some possession of dogma, but are rather very precisely historically decentered; only the Utopian future is a place of truth in this sense, and the privilege of contemporary life and of the present lies not in its possession, but at best in the rigorous judgment it may be felt to pass on us.

The fullest and most terrifying form of a Marxist hermeneutic act can therefore best be conveyed by those great moments in Sartre's *Condemned of Altona*, when the implacable gaze of the alien and incomprehensible inhabitants of the thirtieth century burns unanswerably upon a present steeped in torture, exploitation, and blood guilt: "Habitants masqués des plafonds . . . décapodes . . . siècles, voici mon siècle, solitaire et difforme, l'accusé. Mon client s'éventre de ses propres mains; ce que vous prenez pour une lymphe blanche, c'est du sang. . . . Répondez donc! Le trentième ne répond plus. Peut-être n'y aura-t-il plus de siècles après le nôtre. Peut-être qu'une bombe aura soufflé les lumières. Tout sera mort: les yeux, les juges, le temps. Nuit. O tribunal de la nuit, toi qui fus, qui seras, qui es, j'ai été! j'ai été" (Masked inhabitants of the ceilings . . . decapods . . . centuries, here is my own century, solitary, misbegotten, the accused. My client disembowels himself before your very eyes; what looks like lymph is really blood. . . . Answer me! The thirtieth century no longer answers. Maybe there are no centuries after this one. Maybe a bomb blew out all the lights. Everything will be dead: eyes, judges, time. Night. O great court of the night, you who were and always will be, who are—I have been! I have been).[35] Yet Franz's appeal to a silent and unimaginable posterity, with all its echoes of a more properly existentialist pathos, is not the only possible figure for this fullest relationship to history. Sartre's crabs are after all our own grandchildren or great grandchildren, Brecht's "Nachgeborenen"; and it is therefore fitting to conclude with the evocation of

a rather different type of political art—Alain Tanner's film *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*—with its play of postindividual collective relationships around the absent center of birth and of a new subject to come—to convey the sense of a hermeneutic relationship to the past which is able to grasp its own present as history only on condition it manages to keep the idea of the future, and of radical and Utopian transformation, alive.

Autumn 1979

Chapter 9
Periodizing the 60s

Nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the 60s and abject public confession of the decade's many failures and missed opportunities are two errors that cannot be avoided by some middle path that threads its way in between. The following sketch starts from the position that History is Necessity, that the 60s had to happen the way it did, and that its opportunities and failures were inextricably intertwined, marked by the objective constraints and openings of a determinate historical situation, of which I thus wish to offer a tentative and provisional model.

To speak of the "situation" of the 60s, however, is necessarily to think in terms of historical periods and to work with models of historical periodization, which are at the present moment theoretically unfashionable, to say the least. Leave aside the existential fact that the veterans of the decade, who have seen so many things change dramatically from year to year think more historically than their predecessors; the classification by generations has become as meaningful for us as it was for the Russians of the late nineteenth century, who sorted character types out with reference to specific decades. And intellectuals of a certain age now find it normal to justify their current positions by way of a historical narrative ("then the limits of Althusserianism began to be evident," etc.). Now, this is not the place for a theoretical justification of periodization in the writing of history, but to those who think that cultural periodization implies some massive kinship and homogeneity or identity within a given period, it may quickly be replied that it is surely only against a certain conception of what is historically dominant or hegemonic that the full value of the exceptional—what Raymond Williams calls the

"residual" or "emergent"—can be assessed. Here, in any case, the "period" in question is understood not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits.

Yet a whole range of rather different theoretical objections will also bear on the selectiveness of such a historical narrative: if the critique of periodization questions the possibilities of diachrony, these involve the problems of synchrony and in particular of the relationship to be established between the various "levels" of historical change singled out for attention. Indeed, the present narrative will claim to say something meaningful about the 60s by way of brief sketches of but four of those levels: the history of philosophy, revolutionary political theory and practice, cultural production, and economic cycles (and this in a context limited essentially to the United States, France, and the Third World). Such selectiveness seems not merely to give equal historical weight to base and superstructure indifferently, but also to raise the specter of a practice of homologies—the kind of analogical parallelism in which the poetic production of Wallace Stevens is somehow "the same" as the political practice of Che Guevara—which have been thought abusive at least as far back as Spengler.

There is of course no reason why specialized and elite phenomena, such as the writing of poetry, cannot reveal historical trends and tendencies as vividly as "real life"—or perhaps even more visibly, in their isolation and semi-autonomy which approximates a laboratory situation. In any case, there is a fundamental difference between the present narrative and those of an older organic history that sought "expressive" unification through analogies and homologies between widely distinct levels of social life. Where the latter proposed identities between the forms on such various levels, what will be argued here is a series of significant homologies between the *breaks* in those forms and their development. What is at stake, then, is not some proposition about the organic unity of the 60s on all its levels, but rather a hypothesis about the rhythm and dynamics of the fundamental situation in which those very different levels develop according to their own internal laws.

At that point, what looked like a weakness in this historical or narrative procedure turns out to be an unexpected strength, particularly in allowing for some sort of "verification" of the separate strands of the narrative. One sometimes believes—especially in the area of culture and cultural histories and critiques—that an infinite number of narrative interpretations of history are possible, limited only by the ingenuity of the practitioners whose claim to originality depends on the novelty of the new theory of history they bring to market. It is more reassuring, then, to find the regularities hypothetically proposed for one field of activity (e.g., the cognitive, or the aesthetic, or the revolutionary) dramatically and surprisingly "confirmed" by the reappearance

of just such regularities in a widely different and seemingly unrelated field, as will be the case with the economic in the present context.

At any rate, it will already have become clear that nothing like a history of the 60s in the traditional, narrative sense will be offered here. But historical representation is just as surely in crisis as its distant cousin, the linear novel, and for much the same reasons. The most intelligent "solution" to such a crisis does not consist in abandoning historiography altogether, as an impossible aim and an ideological category all at once, but rather—as in the modernist aesthetic itself—in reorganizing its traditional procedures on a different level. Althusser's proposal seems the wisest in this situation: as old-fashioned narrative or "realistic" historiography became problematical, the historian should reformulate her vocation—not any longer to produce some vivid representation of History "as it really happened," but rather to produce the *concept* of history. Such will at least be the gamble of the following pages.

1. Third World Beginnings

It does not seem particularly controversial to mark the beginnings of what will come to be called the 60s in the Third World with the great movement of decolonization in British and French Africa. It can be argued that the most characteristic expressions of a properly First World 60s are all later than this, whether they are understood in countercultural terms—drugs and rock—or in the political terms of a student New Left and a mass antiwar movement. Indeed, politically, a First World 60s owed much to Third-Worldism in terms of politicocultural models, as in a symbolic Maoism, and, moreover, found its mission in resistance to wars aimed precisely at stemming the new revolutionary forces in the Third World. Belden Fields has indeed suggested that the two First World nations in which the most powerful student mass movements emerged—the United States and France—became privileged political spaces precisely *because* these were two countries involved in colonial wars, although the French New Left appears after the resolution of the Algerian conflict. The one significant exception to all this is in many ways the most important First World political movement of all—the new black politics and the civil rights movement, which must be dated, not from the Supreme Court decision of 1954, but rather from the first sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February of 1960. Yet it might be argued that this was also a movement of decolonization, and in any case the constant exchange and mutual influences between the American black movements and the various African and Caribbean ones are continuous and incalculable throughout this period.

The independence of Ghana (1957), the agony of the Congo (Lumumba was murdered in January 1961), the independence of France's sub-Saharan colonies following the Gaullist referendum of 1959, finally the Algerian

Revolution (which might plausibly mark our schema here with its internal high point, the Battle of Algiers, in January-March 1957, as with its diplomatic resolution in 1962)—all of these signal the convulsive birth of what will come in time to be known as the 60s:

> Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million *men* and one thousand five hundred million *natives*. The former had the Word; the others merely had use of it.[1]

The 60s was, then, the period when all these "natives" became human beings, and this internally as well as externally: those inner colonized of the First World—"minorities," marginals, and women—fully as much as its external subjects and official "natives." The process can and has been described in a number of ways, each one of which implies a certain "vision of History" and a certain uniquely thematized reading of the 60s proper: it can be seen as a decisive and global chapter in Croce's conception of history as the history of human freedom; as a more classically Hegelian process of the coming to self-consciousness of subject peoples; as some post-Lukácsean or more Marcusean, New Left conception of the emergence of new "subjects of history" of a nonclass type (blacks, students, Third World peoples); or as some poststructuralist, Foucauldean notion (significantly anticipated by Sartre in the passage just quoted) of the conquest of the right to speak in a new collective voice, never before heard on the world stage—and of the concomitant dismissal of the intermediaries (liberals, First World intellectuals) who had hitherto claimed to talk in your name; not forgetting the more properly political rhetoric of self-determination or independence, or the more psychological and cultural rhetoric of new collective "identities."

It is, however, important to situate the emergence of these new collective "identities" or "subjects of history" in the historical situation which made that emergence possible, and in particular to relate the emergence of these new social and political categories (the colonized, race, marginality, gender, and the like) to something like a crisis in the more universal category that had hitherto seemed to subsume all the varieties of social resistance, namely the classical conception of social class. This is to be understood, however, not in some intellectual but rather in an institutional sense; it would be idealistic to suppose the deficiencies in the abstract idea of social class, and in particular in the Marxian conception of class struggle, can have been responsible for the emergence of what seem to be new nonclass forces. What can be noted, rather, is a crisis in the institutions through which a real class politics had however imperfectly been able to express itself. In this respect, the merge of the AFL and the CIO in 1955 can be seen as a fundamental "condition of possibility" for the unleashing of the new social and political dynamics of the 60s: that merger, a triumph of McCarthyism, secured the expulsion of the Communists from the

American labor movement, consolidated the new antipolitical "social contract" between American business and the American labor unions, and created a situation in which the privileges of a white male labor force take precedence over the demands of black and women workers and other minorities. These last have therefore no place in the classical institutions of an older working-class politics. They will thus be "liberated" from social class, in the charged and ambivalent sense that Marxism gives to that word (in the context of enclosure, for instance): they are separated from the older institutions and thus "released" to find new modes of social and political expression.

The virtual disappearance of the American Communist Party as a small but significant political force in American society in 1956 suggests another dimension to this general situation: the crisis of the American party is "overdetermined" by its repression under McCarthyism and by the "revolution" in the Soviet bloc unleashed by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, which will have analogous but distinct and specific equivalents for the European Communist parties. In France, in particular, after the brief moment of a Communist "humanism," developed essentially by philosophers in the eastern countries, and with the fall of Khrushchev himself and the definitive failure of his various experiments in 1964, an unparalleled situation emerges in which, virtually for the first time since the Congress of Tours in 1919, it becomes possible for radical intellectuals to conceive of revolutionary work outside and independent of the French Communist Party. (The older attitudes—"we know all about it, we don't like it much, but nothing is to be done politically without the CP"—are classically expressed in Sartre's own political journalism, in particular in *Les Communistes et la paix*.) Now Trotskyism gets a new lease on life, and the new Maoist forms, followed by a whole explosion of extraparliamentary formations of all ideological complexions, the so-called groupuscules, offer the promise of a new kind of politics equally "liberated" from the traditional class categories.

Two further key events need to be noted here before we go on. For many of us, indeed, the crucial detonator—a new Year I, the palpable demonstration that revolution was not merely a historical concept and a museum piece but real and achievable—was furnished by a people whose imperialist subjugation had developed among North Americans a sympathy and a sense of fraternity we could never have for other Third World peoples in their struggle, except in an abstract and intellectual way. Yet by January 1, 1959, the Cuban Revolution remained symbolically ambiguous. It could be read as a Third World revolution of a type different from either the classical Leninist one or the Maoist experience, for it had a revolutionary strategy entirely its own, the *foco* theory, which we will discuss later. This great event also announces the impending 60s as a period of unexpected political innovation rather than as the confirmation of older social and conceptual schemes.

Meanwhile, personal testimony seems to make it clear that for many white

American students—in particular for many of those later active in the New Left—the assassination of President Kennedy played a significant role in delegitimizing the state itself and in discrediting the parliamentary process, seeming to mark the decisive end of the well-known passing of the torch to a younger generation of leadership, as well as the dramatic defeat of some new spirit of public or civic idealism. As for the reality of the appearance, it does not much matter that, in hindsight, such a view of the Kennedy presidency may be wholly erroneous, considering his conservatism and anticommunism, the gruesome gamble of the "missle crisis," and his responsibility for the American engagement in Vietnam itself. More significant, the legacy of the Kennedy regime to the development of a 60s politics may well have been the rhetoric of youth and of the "generation gap" which he exploited, but which outlived him and dialectically offered itself as an expressive form through which the political discontent of American students and young people could articulate itself.

Such were some of the preconditions or "conditions of possibility"—both in traditional working-class political institutions and in the arena of the legitimation of state power—for the "new" social forces of the 60s to develop as they did. Returning to these new forces, there is a way in which their ultimate fate marks the close of the 60s as well: the end of "Third-Worldism" in the U.S. and Europe largely predates the Chinese Thermidor, and coincides with the awareness of increasing institutional corruption in many of the newly independent states of Africa and the almost complete militarization of the Latin American regimes after the Chilean coup of 1973 (the later revolutionary triumphs in the former Portuguese colonies are henceforth felt to be "Marxist" rather than "Third-Worldist," whereas Vietnam vanishes from American consciousness as completely after the ultimate American withdrawal as did Algeria from French consciousness after the Evian accords of 1963). In the First World of the late 60s, there is certainly a return to a more internal politics, as the antiwar movement in the United States and May 68 in France testify. Yet the American movement remains organically linked to its Third World "occasion" in the Vietnam War itself, as well as to the Maoist inspiration of the Progressive Labor-type groups which emerge from SDS, such that the movement as a whole will lose its momentum as the war winds down and the draft ceases. In France, the "common program" of the left (1972)—in which the current Socialist government finds its origins—marks a new turn toward Gramscian models and a new kind of "Eurocommunist" spirit which owes very little to Third World antecedents of any kind. Finally, the black movement in the U.S. enters into a crisis at much the same time, as its dominant ideology—cultural nationalism, an ideology profoundly linked to Third World models—is exhausted. The women's movement also owed something to this kind of Third World inspiration, but it too, in the period 1972-74, will know an increasing articula-

tion into relatively distinct ideological positions ("bourgeois" feminism, lesbian separatism, socialist feminism).

For reasons enumerated above, and others, it seems plausible to mark the end of the 60s around 1972-74; the problem of this general "break" will be returned to at the end of this sketch. For the moment we must complete our characterization of the overall dynamic of Third World history during this period, particularly if it is granted that this dynamic or "narrative line" entertains some privileged relationship of influence on the unfolding of a First World 60s (through direct intervention—wars of national liberation—or through the prestige of exotic political models—most obviously, the Maoist one—or finally, owing to some global dynamic which both worlds share and respond to in relatively distinct ways).

This is, of course, the moment to observe that the "liberation" of new forces in the Third World is as ambiguous as this term frequently tends to be (freedom as separation from older systems); to put it more sharply, it is the moment to recall the obvious, that decolonization historically went hand in hand with neocolonialism, and that the graceful, grudging, or violent end of an old-fashioned imperialism certainly meant the end of one kind of domination but evidently also the invention and construction of a new kind—symbolically, something like the replacement of the British Empire by the International Monetary Fund. This is, incidentally, why the currently fashionable rhetoric of power and domination (Foucault is the most influential of these rhetoricians, but the basic displacement from the economic to the political is already made by Max Weber) is ultimately unsatisfactory; it is of course politically important to "contest" the various forms of power and domination, but the latter cannot be understood unless their functional relationships to economic exploitation are articulated—that is, until the political is once again subsumed beneath the economic. (On the other hand—particularly in the historicizing perspective of the present essay—it will obviously be a significant historical and social *symptom* that, in the mid-60s, people felt it necessary to express their sense of the situation and their projected praxis in a reified political language of power, domination, authority and antiauthoritarianism, and so forth: here, Second and Third World developments—with their conceptions of a "primacy of the political" under socialism—offer an interesting and curious cross-lighting.) Meanwhile, something similar can be said of the conceptions of collective identity and in particular of the poststructuralist slogan of the conquest of speech, of the right to speak in your own voice, for yourself; but to articulate new demands, in your own voice, is not necessarily to satisfy them, and to speak is not necessarily to achieve a Hegelian recognition from the Other (or at least then only in the more somber and baleful sense that the Other now has to take you into consideration in a new way and to invent new methods for dealing with that new presence you have achieved). In hindsight, the "materialist kernel" of this

characteristic rhetoric or ideological vision of the 60s may be found in a more fundamental reflection on the nature of cultural revolution itself (now independent of its local and now historical Chinese manifestation).

The paradoxical, or dialectical, combination of decolonization and neocolonialism can perhaps best be grasped in economic terms by a reflection on the nature of another process whose beginning coincides with the general beginnings we have suggested for this period as a whole. This is a process generally described in the neutral but obviously ideological language of a technological "revolution" in agriculture: the so-called Green Revolution, with its new applications of chemical procedures to fertilization, its intensified strategies of mechanization, and its predictable celebration of progress and wonder-working technology, supposedly destined to free the world from hunger (the Green Revolution, incidentally, finds its Second World equivalent in Khrushchev's disastrous "virgin lands" experiment). But these are far from neutral achievements; nor is their export—essentially pioneered by the Kennedys—a benevolent and altruistic activity. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, capitalist penetration of the Third World did not necessarily mean a capitalist transformation of the latter's traditional modes of production. Rather, they were for the most part left intact, "merely" exploited by a more political and military structure. The very enclave nature of these older agricultural modes—in combination with the violence of the occupier and that other violence, the introduction of money—established a sort of tributary relation that was beneficial to the imperialist metropolis for a considerable period. The Green Revolution carries this penetration and expansion of the "logic of capital" into a new stage.

The older village structure and precapitalist forms of agriculture are now systematically destroyed, to be replaced by an industrial agriculture whose effects are fully as disastrous as, and analogous to, the moment of enclosure in the emergence of capital in what was to become the First World. The "organic" social relations of village societies are now shattered, an enormous landless preproletariat "produced," which migrates to the urban areas (as the tremendous growth of Mexico City can testify), while new, more proletarian, wage-working forms of agricultural labor replaced the older collective or traditional kinds. Such ambiguous "liberation" needs to be described with all the dialectical ambivalence with which Marx and Engels celebrate the dynamism of capital itself in the *Manifesto* or the historical progress achieved by the British occupation of India.

The conception of the Third World 60s as a moment when all over the world chains and shackles of a classical imperialist kind were thrown off in a stirring wave of "wars of national liberation" is an altogether mythical simplification. Such resistance is generated as much by the new penetration of the Green Revolution as it is by the ultimate impatience with the older imperialist structures, the latter itself overdetermined by the historical spectacle

of the supremacy of another former Third World entity, namely Japan, in its sweeping initial victories over the old imperial powers in World War II. Eric Wolf's indispensable *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (1969) underscores the relationship between possibilities of resistance, the development of a revolutionary ethos, and a certain constitutive distance from the more absolutely demoralizing social and economic logic of capital.

The final ambiguity with which we leave this topic is the following: the 60s, often imagined as a period when capital and First World power are in retreat all over the globe, can just as easily be conceptualized as a period when capital is in full dynamic and innovative expansion, equipped with a whole armature of fresh production techniques and new "means of production." It now remains to be seen whether this ambiguity, and the far greater specificity of the agricultural developments in the Third World, have any equivalent in the dynamics with which the 60s unfold in the advanced countries themselves.

2. The Politics of Otherness

If the history of philosophy is understood not as some sequence of timeless yet somehow finite positions in the eternal, but rather as the history of attempts to conceptualize a historical and social substance itself in constant dialectical transformation, whose aporias and contradictions mark all of those successive philosophies as determinate failures, yet failures from which we can read off something of the nature of the object on which they themselves came to grief—then it does not seem quite so farfetched to scan the more limited trajectory of that now highly specialized discipline for symptoms of the deeper rhythms of the "real" or "concrete" 60s itself.

As far as the history of philosophy during that period is concerned, one of the more influential versions of its story is told as follows: the gradual supersession of a hegemonic Sartrean existentialism (with its essentially phenomenological perspectives) by what is often loosely called "structuralism," namely, by a variety of new theoretical attempts which share at least a single fundamental "experience"—the discovery of the primacy of Language or the Symbolic (an area in which phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism remain relatively conventional or traditional). The moment of high structuralism—whose most influential monuments are seemingly not philosophical at all, but can be characterized, alongside the new linguistics itself, as linguistic transformations of anthropology and psychoanalysis by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan respectively—is, however, inherently unstable and has the vocation of becoming a new type of universal mathesis, under pain of vanishing as one more intellectual fad. The breakdown products of that moment of high structuralism can then be seen, on the one hand, as the reduction to a kind of scientism, to sheer method and analytical technique (in *semiotics);* and, on the other hand, as the transformation of structuralist approaches into active ideologies in which ethical, political, and historical consequences are drawn from the hitherto more epistemological "structuralist" positions; this last is of course the moment of what is now generally known as *poststructuralism,* associated with familiar names like those of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and so forth. That the paradigm, although obviously French in its references, is not merely local can be judged from an analogous mutation of the classical Frankfurt School via problems of communication, in the work of Habermas; or by the current revival or pragmatism in the work of Richard Rorty, which has a home-grown American "poststructuralist" feeling to it (Pierce after all having largely preceded and outclassed Saussure).

The crisis of the philosophical institution and the gradual extinction of the philosopher's classic political vocation, of which Sartre was for our time the supreme embodiment, can in some ways be said to be about the so-called death of the subject: the individual ego or personality, but also the supreme philosophical Subject, the cogito but also the *auteur* of the great philosophical *system.* It is certainly possible to see Sartre as one of the last great system builders of traditional philosophy (but then at least one dimension of classical existentialism must also be seen as an ideology or a metaphysic: that of the heroic pathos of existential choice and freedom in the void, and that of the "absurd," more particularly in Camus). Some of us also came to *Marxism* through dialectical elements in the early Sartre (he himself then turning to follow up this avenue in his own later, more Marxian work, such as the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* [1960]). But on balance the component of his work that underwent the richest practical elaboration at other people's hands as well as his own was his theory of interpersonal relations, his stunning rewrite of Hegel's Master/Slave chapter, his conception of the Look as the most concrete mode in which I relate to other subjects and struggle with them, the dimension of my alienation in my "being-for-other-people," in which each of us vainly attempts, by looking at the other, to turn the tables and transform the baleful alienating gaze of the Other into an object for my equally alienating gaze. Sartre will go on, in the *Critique,* to try to erect a more positive and political theory of group dynamics on this seemingly sterile territory; the struggle between two people now becoming dialectically transformed into the struggle between groups themselves. The *Critique* was an anticipatory work, however, whose import and significance would not finally be recognized until May 68 and beyond, whose rich consequences indeed have not even fully been drawn to this day. Suffice it to say, in the present context, that the *Critique* fails to reach its appointed terminus, and to complete the projected highway that was to have led from the individual subject of existential experience all the way to fully constituted social classes. It breaks down at the point of the constitution of small groups and is ultimately

usable principally for ideologies of small guerilla bands (in a later moment of the 60s) and of microgroups (at the period's end). The significance of this trajectory will soon be clear.

However, at the dawn of the 60s, the Sartrean paradigm of the Look and the struggle for recognition between individual subjects will also be appropriated dramatically for a very different model of political struggle, in Frantz Fanon's enormously influential vision *(The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]) of the struggle between Colonizer and Colonized, where the objectifying reversal of the Look is apocalyptically rewritten as the act of redemptive violence of Slave against Master, the moment when, in fear and the anxiety of death, the hierarchical positions of Self and Other, Center and Margin, are forcibly reversed, and when the subservient consciousness of the Colonized achieves collective identity and self-affirmation in the face of coloniziers in abject fight.

What is at once significant is the way in which what had been a technical philosophical subject (the "problem" of solipsism, the nature of relationships between individual subjects or "cogitos") has fallen into the world and become an explosive and scandalous political ideology: a piece of the old-fashioned technical philosophical system of high existentialism breaking off and migrating outside philosophy departments altogether, into a more frightening landscape of praxis and terror. Fanon's great myth could be read at the time, by those it appalled equally well as by those it energized, as an irresponsible call to mindless violence. In retrospect, and in the light of Fanon's other, clinical work (he was a psychiatrist working with victims of colonization and of the torture and terror of the Algerian war), it can more appropriately be read as a significant contribution to a whole theory of cultural revolution as the collective reeducation (or even collective psychoanalysis) of oppressed peoples or unrevolutionary working classes. Cultural revolution as a strategy for breaking the immemorial habits of subalternity and obedience which have become internalized as a kind of second nature in all the laborious and exploited classes in human history—such is the vaster problematic to which, today, Gramsci and Wilhelm Reich, Fanon and Rudolf Bahro, can be seen as contributing as richly as the more official practices of Maoism.

3. Digression on Maoism

But with this new and fateful reference, an awkward but unavoidable parenthetical digression is in order: Maoism, richest of all the great new ideologies of the 60s, will be a shadowy but central presence throughout this essay, yet owing to its very polyvalence it cannot be neatly inserted at any point or exhaustively confronted on its own. One understands, of course, why Left militants here and abroad, fatigued by Maoist dogmatisms, must have heaved a collective sigh of relief when the Chinese turn consigned "Maoism" itself to

the ashcan of history. Theories, however, are often liberated on their own terms when they are thus radically disjoined from the practical interests of state power. Meanwhile, as I have suggested above, the symbolic terrain of the present debate is fully as much chosen and dictated by the Right as by Left survivors; and the current propaganda campaign, everywhere in the world, to Stalinize and discredit Maoism and the experience of the Chinese cultural revolution—now rewritten as yet another Gulag to the East—all of this, make no mistake about it, is part and parcel of the larger attempt to trash the 60s generally. It would not be prudent to abandon rapidly and without thoughtful reconsideration any of this terrain to the "other side."

As for the more ludicrous features of Western Third-Worldism generally—a kind of modern exotic or orientalist version of Marx's revolutionaries of 1848, who "anxiously conjure up the spirits of (the Great Revolution of 1789) to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes"[2]—these are now widely understood in a more cynical light, as in Régis Debray's remark: "In France, the Columbuses of political modernity thought that following Godards's *La Chinoise* they were discovering China in Paris, when in fact they were landing in California."[3]

Most paradoxical and fascinating of all, however, is the unexpected and unpredictable sequel to the Sino-Soviet split itself: the new Chinese rhetoric, intent on castigating the Soviet bureaucracy as revisionistic and "bourgeois," will have the curious effect of evacuating the class content of these slogans. There is then an inevitable terminological slippage and displacement: the new binary opposite to the term "bourgeois" will no longer be "proletarian" but rather "revolutionary," and the new qualifications for political judgments of this kind are no longer made in terms of class or party affiliation but rather in terms of personal life—your relationship to special privileges, to middle-class luxuries and dachas and managerial incomes and other perks—Mao Zedong's own monthly "salary," we are told, was something in the neighborhood of a hundred American dollars. As with all forms of anticommunism, this rhetoric can of course be appropriated by the anti-Marxist thematics of "bureaucracy," of the end of ideology and social class, and so forth. But it is important to understand how for Western militants what began to emerge from this at first merely tactical and rhetorical shift was a whole new political space, a space which will come to be articulated by the slogan "the personal is the political," and into which—in one of the most stunning and unforeseeable of historical turns—the women's movement will triumphantly move at the end of the decade, building a Yenan of a new and unpredictable kind which is still impregnable at the present moment.

4. The Withering Away of Philosophy

The limit as well as the strength of the stark Fanonian model of struggle was set by the relative simplicity of the colonial situation; this can be shown in

two ways, first of all in the sequel to the "war of national independence." For with the Slave's symbolic and literal victory over the (now former) Master, the "politics of otherness" touches its limit as well; the rhetoric of a conquest of collective identity has then nowhere else to go but into a kind of secessionary logic of which black cultural nationalism and (later on) lesbian separatism are the most dramatic examples (the dialectic of cultural and linguistic independence in Quebec province would be yet another instructive one). But this result is also contradictory, insofar as the newly constituted group (we here pick up Sartre's account in the *Critique) needs* outside enemies to survive as a group, to produce and perpetuate a sense of collective cohesion and identity. Ultimately, in the absence of the clear-cut Manichean situation of the older imperialist period, this hard-won collective self-definition of a first moment of resistance will break up into the smaller and more comfortable unities of face-to-face microgroups (of which the official political sects are only one example).

The gradual waning of the Fanonian model can also be described from the perspective of what will shortly become its "structuralist" critique. On this view, it is still a model based on a conception of individual subjects, albeit mythical and collective ones. It is thereby both anthropomorphic and transparent, in the sense in which nothing intervenes between the great collective adversaries, between the Master and the Slave, between the Colonizer and the Colonized. Yet even in Hegel, there was always a third term, namely matter itself, the raw materials on which the Slave is made to labor and to work out a long and anonymous salvation through the rest of history. The "third term" of the 60s is, however, rather different from this. It was as though the protracted experiences of the earlier part of the decade gradually burned into the minds of the participants of specific lesson. In the United States, it was the experience of the interminable Vietnam War itself; in France, it was the astonishing and apparently invincible technocratic dynamism, and the seemingly unshakable inertia and resistance to de-Stalinization of the French Communist party; and everywhere, it was the tremendous expansion of the media apparatus and the culture of consumerism. This lesson might well be described as the discovery, within a hitherto antagonistic and "transparent" political praxis, of the opacity of the Institution itself as the radically transindividual, with its own inner dynamic and laws, which are not those of individual human action or intention, something which Sartre theorized in the *Critique* as the "practico-inert," and which will take the definitive form, in competing "structuralism," of "structure" or "synchronic system," a realm of impersonal logic in terms of which human consciousness is itself little more than an "effect of structure."

On this reading, then, the new philosophical turn will be interpreted less in the idealistic perspective of some discovery of a new scientific truth (the Symbolic) than as the symptom of an essentially protopolitical and social ex-

perience, the shock of some new, hard, unconceptualized, resistant object which the older conceptuality cannot process and which thus gradually generates a whole new problematic. The conceptualization of this new problematic in the coding of linguistics or information theory may then be attributed to the unexpected explosion of information and messages of all kinds in the media revolution, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Suffice it to remark at this point that there is some historical irony in the way in which this moment, essentially the Third Technological Revolution in the West (electronics, nuclear energy)—in other words, a whole new step in the conquest of nature by human praxis—is philosophically greeted and conceptually expressed in a kind of thought officially designated as "antihumanist" and concerned to think what transcends or escapes human consciousness and intention. Similarly, the Second Technological Revolution of the late nineteenth century—an unparalleled quantum leap in human power over nature—was the moment of expression of a whole range of nihilisms associated with "modernity" or with high modernism in culture.

In the present context, the Althusserian experiment of the mid- to late 60s is the most revealing and suggestive of the various "structuralisms," since it was the only one to be explicitly political and indeed to have very wide-ranging political effects in Europe and Latin America. The story of Althusserianism can be told only schematically here: its initial thrust is twofold, against the unliquidated Stalinist tradition (strategically designated by the code words "Hegel" and "expressive causality" in Althusser's own texts), and against the "transparence" of the Eastern attempts to reinvent a Marxist humanism on the basis of the theory of alienation in Marx's early manuscripts. That Althusserianism is essentially a meditation on the "institutional" and on the opacity of the "practico-inert" may be judged by the three successive formulations of this object by Althusser himself in the course of the 60s: that of a "structure in dominance" or *structure à dominante* (in *For Marx*), that of "structural causality" (in *Reading Capital*), and that of "ideological state apparatuses" (in the essay of that name). What is less often remembered, but what should be perfectly obvious from any rereading of *For Marx*, is the origin of this new problematic in Maoism itself, and particularly in Mao Zedong's essay "On Contradiction," in which the notion of the complex, already-given *overdetermined* conjuncture of various kinds of antagonistic and nonantagonistic contradictions is mapped out.

The modification that will emerge from Althusser's "process of theoretical production" as it works over its Maoist "raw materials" can be conveyed by the problem and slogan of the "semi-autonomy" of the levels of social life (a problem already invoked in our opening pages). This formula will involve a struggle on two fronts: on the one hand, against the monism or "expressive causality" of Stalinism, in which the "levels" are identified, conflated, and brutally collapsed into one another (changes in economic production will be

"the same" as political and cultural changes), and, on the other, against bourgeois avant-garde philosophy, which finds just such a denunciation of organic concepts of totality most congenial, but draws from it the consequence of a post- or anti-Marxist celebration of Nietzschean heterogeneity. The notion of a semi-autonomy of the various levels or instances, most notably of the political instance and of the dynamics of state power, will have enormous resonance (outstandingly in the work of Nicos Poulantzas), since it seems to reflect, and to offer a way of theorizing, the enormous growth of the state bureaucracy since the war, the "relative autonomy" of the state apparatus from any classical and reductive functionality in the service of big business, as well as the very active new terrain of political struggle presented by government or public sector workers. The theory could also be appealed to to justify a semi-autonomy in the cultural sphere, as well, and especially a semi-autonomous cultural politics, of a variety that ranges from Godard's films and *situationisme* to the "festival" of May 68 and the Yippie movement here (not excluding, perhaps, even those forms of so-called terrorism that aimed, not at any classical seizure of state power, but rather at essentially pedagogical or informational demonstrations, e.g., "forcing the state to reveal its fundamentally fascist nature").

Nonetheless, the attempt to open up a semi-autonomy of the levels on one hand, while holding them altogether in the ultimate unity of some "structural totality" (with its still classical Marxian ultimately determining instance of the economic), tends under its own momentum, in the centrifugal force of the critique of totality it had itself elaborated, to self-destruct (most dramatically so in the trajectory of Hindess and Hirst). What will emerge is not merely a heterogeneity of *levels*—henceforth, semi-autonomy will relax into autonomy *tout court*, and it will be conceivable that in the decentered and "schizophrenic" world of late capitalism the various instances may really have no organic relationship to one another at all—but, more important, the idea will emerge that the struggles appropriate to each of these levels (purely political struggles, purely economic struggles, purely cultural struggles, purely "theoretical" struggles) may have no necessary relationship to one another either. With this ultimate "meltdown" of the Althusserian apparatus, we are in the (still contemporary) world of microgroups and micropolitics—variously theorized as local or molecular politics, but clearly characterized, however different the various conceptions are, as a repudiation of old-fashioned class and party politics of a "totalizing" kind, and most obviously epitomized by the challenge of the women's movement, whose unique new strategies and concerns cut across (or in some cases undermine and discredit altogether) many classical inherited forms of "public" or "official" political action, including the electoral kind. The repudiation of "theory" itself as an essentially masculine enterprise of "power through knowledge" in French feminism (see in particular

the work of Luce Irigaray) may be taken as the final moment in this particular "withering away of philosophy."

Yet there is another way to read the density of Althusserianism, a way that will form the transition to our subsequent discussion of the transformation of the cultural sphere of the 60s; and this involves the significance of the slogan of "theory" itself as it comes to replace the older term "philosophy" throughout this period. The "discovery" of the Symbolic, the development of its linguistic-related thematics (as, e.g., in the notion of understanding as an essentially synchronic process, which influences the construction of relatively ahistorical "structures," such as the Althusserian one described above), is now to be correlated with a modification of the practice of the symbolic, of language itself in the "structuralist" texts, henceforth characterized as "theory," rather than work in a particular traditional discipline. Two features of this evolution, or mutation, must be stressed. The first is a consequence of the crisis in, or the disappearance of, classical *canon* of philosophical writings which necessarily results from the contestation of philosophy as a discipline and an institution. Henceforth, the new "philosophical" text will no longer draw its significance from an insertion into the issues and debates of the philosophical tradition, which means that its basic "intertextual" references become random, an *ad hoc* constellation that forms and dissolves on the occasion of each new text. The new text must necessarily be a commentary on other texts (indeed, that dependence on a body of texts to be glossed, rewritten, interconnected in fresh ways will now intensify if anything), yet those texts, drawn from the most wildly distant disciplines (anthropology, psychiatry, literature, history of science), will be selected in a seemingly arbitrary fashion: Mumford side by side with Antonin Artaud, Kant with Sade, pre-Socratic philosophy, President Schreber, a novel of Maurice Blanchot, Owen Lattimore on Mongolia, and a host of obscure Latin medical treatises from the eighteenth century. The vocation of what was formerly "philosophy" is thereby restructured and displaced: since there is no longer a tradition of philosophical problems in terms of which new positions and new statements can meaningfully be proposed, such works now tend toward what can be called metaphilosophy—the very different work of coordinating a series of pregiven, already constituted codes or systems of signifiers, of producing a discourse fashioned out of the already fashioned discourse of the constellation of *ad hoc* reference works. "Philosophy" thereby becomes radically occasional; one would want to call it disposable theory, the production of a *metabook*, to be replaced by a different one next season, rather than the ambition to express a proposition, a position, or a system with greater "truth" value. (The obvious analogy with the evolution of literary and cultural studies today, with the crisis and disappearance of the latter's own canon of great books—the last one having been augmented to include the

once recalcitrant "masterpieces" of high modernism—will be taken for granted in our next section.)

All of this can perhaps be grasped in a different way by tracing the effects of another significant feature of contemporary theory, namely its privileged theme in the so-called critique of representation. Traditional philosophy will now be grasped in those terms, as a practice of representation in which the philosophical text or system (misguidedly) attempts to express something other than itself, namely truth or meaning (which now stands as the "signified" to the "signifier" of the system). If, however, the whole aesthetic of representation is metaphysical and ideological, philosophical discourse can no longer entertain this vocation, and it must stand as the mere addition of another text to what is now conceived as an infinite chain of texts (not necessarily all verbal—daily life is a text, clothing is a text, state power is a text, that whole external world, about which "meaning" or "truth" were once asserted and which is now contemptuously characterized as the illusion of reference or the "referent," is an indeterminate superposition of texts of all kinds). Whence the significance of the currently fashionable slogan of "materialism," when sounded in the area of philosophy and theory: materialism here means the dissolution of any belief in "meaning" or in the "signified" conceived as ideas or concepts that are distinct from their linguistic expressions. However paradoxical a "materialist" philosophy may be in this respect, a "materialist theory of language" will clearly transform the very function and operation of "theory," since it opens up a dynamic in which it is no longer ideas, but rather texts, material texts, which struggle with one another. Theory so defined (and it will have become clear that the term now greatly transcends what used to be called philosophy and its specialized content) conceives of its vocation, not as the discovery of truth and the repudiation of error, but rather as a struggle about purely linguistic formulations, as the attempt to formulate verbal propositions (material language) in such a way that they are unable to imply unwanted or ideological consequences. Since this aim is evidently impossible to achieve, what emerges from the practice of theory—and this was most dramatic and visible during the high point of Althusserianism itself in 1967-68—is a violent and obsessive return to ideological critique in the new form of a perpetual guerrilla war among the material signifiers of textual formulations. With the transformation of philosophy into a material practice, however, we touch on a development that cannot fully be appreciated until it is replaced in the context of a general mutation of culture throughout this period, a context in which "theory" will come to be grasped as a specific (or semi-autonomous) form of what must be called postmodernism generally.

5. The Adventures of the Sign

Postmodernism is one significant framework in which to describe what happened to culture in the 60s, but a full discussion of this hotly contested concept is not possible here. Such a discussion would want to cover, among other things, the following features: that well-known poststructuralist theme, the "death" of the subject (including the creative subject, the *auteur* or the "genius"); the nature and function of a *culture of the simulacrum* (an idea developed out of Plato by Deleuze and Baudrillard to convey some specificity of a reproducible object world, not of copies or reproductions marked as such, but of a proliferation of trompe-l'oeil copies *without originals*); the relation of this last to media culture of the "society of the spectacle" (Debord), under two heads: (1) the peculiar new status of the image, the "material" or what might better be called the "literal," signifier: a materiality or literality from which the older sensory richness of the medium has been abstracted (just as on the other side of the dialectical relationship, the old individuality of the subject and his/her "brushstrokes" have equally been effaced); and (2) the emergence, in the work's temporality, of an aesthetic of *textuality* or what is often described as schizophrenic time; the eclipse, finally, of all depth, especially *historicity* itself, with the subsequent appearance of pastiche and nostalgia art (what the French call *la mode rétro*), and including the supersession of the accompanying models of depth-interpretation in philosophy (the various forms of hermeneutics, as well as the Freudian conception of "repression," of manifest and latent levels).

What is generally objected to in characterizations of this kind is the empirical observation that all these features can be abundantly located in this or that variety of high modernism; indeed, one of the difficulties in specifying postmodernism lies in its symbiotic or parasitical relationship to the latter. In effect, with the canonization of a hitherto scandalous, ugly, dissonant, amoral, antisocial, bohemian high modernism offensive to the middle classes, its promotion to the very figure of high culture generally, and perhaps most important, its enshrinement in the academic institution, postmodernism emerges as a way of making creative space for artists now oppressed by those henceforth hegemonic modernist categories of irony, complexity, ambiguity, dense temporality, and particularly, aesthetic and utopian monumentality. In some analogous way, it will be said, high modernism itself won its autonomy from the preceding hegemonic realism (the symbolic language or mode of representation of classical or market capitalism). But there is a difference in that realism itself underwent a significant mutation: it became *naturalism* and at once generated the representational forms of mass culture (the narrative apparatus of the contemporary best seller is an invention of naturalism and one of the most stunningly successful of French cultural exports). High modernism and mass culture then develop in dialectical opposition and interrelationship with one another. It is precisely the waning of their opposition, and some new conflation of the forms of high and mass culture, that characterizes postmodernism itself.

The historical specificity of postmodernism must therefore finally be argued in terms of the social functionality of culture itself. As stated above, high modernism, whatever its overt political content, was oppositional and marginal within a middle-class Victorian or philistine or gilded age culture. Although postmodernism is equally offensive in all the respects enumerated (think of punk rock or pornography), it is no longer at all "oppositional" in that sense; indeed, it constitutes the very dominant or hegemonic aesthetic of consumer society itself and significantly serves the latter's commodity production as a virtual laboratory of new forms and fashions. The argument for a conception of postmodernism as a periodizing category is thus based on the presupposition that, even if *all* the formal features enumerated above were already present in the older high modernism, the very significance of those features changes when they become a cultural *dominant*, with a precise socio-economic functionality.

At this point it may be well to shift the terms (or the "code") of our description to the seemingly more traditional one of a cultural "sphere," a conception developed by Herbert Marcuse in what is to my mind his single most important text, the great essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture" (1937). (It should be added that the conception of a "public sphere" generally is a very contemporary one in Germany in the works of Habermas and Negt and Kluge, where such a system of categories stands in interesting contrast to the code of "levels" or "instances" in French poststructuralism.) Marcuse there rehearses the paradoxical dialectic of the classical (German) aesthetic, which projects as play and "purposefulness without purpose" a Utopian realm of beauty and culture beyond the fallen empirical world of money and business activity, thereby winning a powerful critical and negative value through its capacity to condemn, by its own very existence, the totality of *what* is, at the same time forfeiting all ability to social or political intervention in what is, by virtue of its constitutive disjunction or autonomy from society and history.

The account therefore begins to concide in a suggestive way with the problematic of autonomous or semi-autonomous levels developed in the preceding section. To historicize Marcuse's dialectic, however, would demand that we take into account the possibility that in our time this very autonomy of the cultural sphere (or level or instance) may be in the process of modification; and that we develop the means to furnish a description of the process whereby such modification might take place, as well as of the prior process whereby culture became "autonomous" or "semi-autonomous" in the first place.

This requires recourse to yet another (unrelated) analytic code, one more generally familiar to us today, since it involves the now classical structural concept of the *sign*, with its two components, the signifier (the material vehicle or image—sound or printed word) and the signified (the mental image,

meaning, or "conceptual" content), and a third component—the external object of the sign, its reference or "referent"—henceforth expelled from the unity and yet haunting it as a ghostly residual aftereffect (illusion or ideology). The scientific value of this conception of the sign will be bracketed here since we are concerned, on the one hand, to historicize it, to interpret it as a conceptual symptom of developments in the period, and, on the other, to "set it in motion," to see whether changes in its inner structure can offer some adequate small-scale emblem or electrocardiogram of changes and permutation in the cultural sphere generally throughout this period.

Such changes are already suggested by the fate of the "referent" in the "conditions of possibility" of the new structural concept of the sign (a significant ambiguity must be noted, however: theorists of the sign notoriously glide from a conception of reference as designating a "real" object outside the unity of signifier and signified to a position in which the signified itself—or meaning, or the idea or the concept of a thing—becomes somehow identified with the referent and stigmatized along with it; we will return to this below). Saussure, at the dawn of the semiotic revolution, liked to describe the relationship of signifier to signified as that of the two sides, the recto and verso, of a sheet of paper. In what is then a logical sequel, and a text that naturally enough becomes equally canonical, Borges will push "representation" to the point of imagining a map so rigorous and referential that it becomes coterminous with its object. The stage is then set for the structuralist emblem par excellence, the Moebius Strip, which succeeds in peeling itself off its referent altogether and thus achieves a free-floating closure in the void, a kind of absolute self-referentiality and autocirculatory from which all remaining traces of reference, or of any externality, have triumphantly been effaced.

To be even more eclectic about it, I will suggest that this process, seemingly internal to the sign itself, requires a supplementary explanatory code, that of the more universal process of reification and fragmentation at one with the logic of capital itself. Nonetheless, taken on its own terms, the inner convulsions of the sign offer a useful initial figure of the process of transformation of culture generally, which must in some first moment (that described by Marcuse) separate itself from the "referent," the existing social and historical world itself, only in a subsequent stage of the 60s, in what is here termed "postmodernism," to develop further into some new and heightened, free-floating, self-referential "autonomy."

The problem now turns around this very term, "autonomy," with its paradoxical Althusserian modification, the concept of "semi-autonomy." The paradox is that the sign, as an "autonomous" unity in its own right, as a realm divorced from the referent, can preserve that initial autonomy, and the unity and coherence demanded by it, only at the price of keeping a phantom of reference alive, as the ghostly reminder of its own outside or exterior, since

this allows it closure, self-definition, and an essential boundary line. Marcuse's own tormented dialectic expresses this dramatically in the curious oscillation whereby his autonomous realm of beauty and culture returns upon some "real world" to judge and negate it, at the same time separating itself so radically from that real world as to become a place of mere illusion and impotent "ideals," the "infinite," and so on.

The first moment in the adventures of the sign is perplexing enough as to demand more concrete, if schematic, illustration in the most characteristic cultural productions themselves. It might well be demonstrated in the classical French *nouveau roman* (in particular the novels of Robbe-Grillet himself), which established its new language in the early 1960s, using systematic variations of narrative segments to "undermine" representation, yet in some sense confirming this last by teasing and stimulating an appetite for it.

Because an American illustration seems more appropriate, however, something similar may be seen in connection with the final and canonical form of high modernism in American poetry, namely the work of Wallace Stevens, which becomes, in the years following the poet's death in 1956, institutionalized in the university as a purer and more quintessential fulfillment of poetic language than the still impure (read: ideological and political) works of an Eliot or a Pound, and can therefore be numbered among the literary "events" of the early 60s. As Frank Lentricchia has shown, in *After the New Criticism*,[4] the serviceability of Stevens' poetic production for this normative and hegemonic role depends in large measure on the increasing conflation, in that work, of poetic practice and poetic theory:

> This endlessly elaborating poem
> Displays the theory of poetry
> As the life of poetry...

"Stevens" is therefore a locus and fulfillment of aesthetics and aesthetic theory fully as much as the latter's exemplar and privileged exegetical object; the theory or aesthetic ideology in question is very much an affirmation of the "autonomy" of the cultural sphere in the sense developed above, a valorization of the supreme power of the poetic imagination over the "reality" it produces. Stevens' work, therefore, offers an extraordinary laboratory situation in which to observe the autonomization of culture as a process: a detailed examination of his development (something for which we have no space here) would show how some initial "set toward" or "attention to" a kind of poetic *pensée sauvage*, the operation of great preconscious *stereotypes*, opens up a vast inner world in which little by little the images of things and their "ideas" begin to be substituted for the things themselves. Yet what distinguishes this experience in Stevens is the sense of a vast systematicity in all this, the operation of a whole set of cosmic oppositions far too complex to be reduced to the schemata of "structuralist" binary oppositions, yet akin to those in spirit, and somehow pregiven in the Symbolic Order of the mind, discoverable to the passive exploration of the "poetic imagination," that is, of some heightened and impersonal power of free asssociation in the realm of "objective spirit" or "objective culture." The examination would further show the strategic limitation of this process to landscape, the reduction of the ideas and images of things to the names for things, and finally to those irreducibles that are place names, among which the exotic has a privileged function (Key West, Oklahoma, Yucatan, Java). Here the poetic "totality" begins to trace a ghostly mimesis or *analogon* of the totality of the imperialist world system itself, with Third World materials in a similarly strategic, marginal, yet essential place (much as Adorno showed how Schoenberg's twelve-tone system unconsciously produced a formal imitation of the "total system" of capital). This very unconscious replication of the "real" totality of the world system in the mind is then what allows culture to separate itself as a closed and self-sufficient "system" in its own right: reduplication, and at the same time, floating above the real. It is an impulse shared by most of the great high modernisms, as has been shown most dramatically in the recent critiques of architectural modernism, in particular of the international style, whose great monumental objects constitute themselves, by protecting a protopolitical and utopian spirit of transformation *against* a fallen city fabric all around them and, as Venturi has demonstrated, end up necessarily displaying and speaking of themselves alone. Now, this also accounts for what must puzzle any serious reader of Stevens' verse, namely the extraordinary combination of verbal richness and experimental hollowness or impoverishment in it (the latter being attributable as well to the impersonality of the poetic imagination in Stevens, and to the essentially contemplative and epistemological stance of the subject in it, over and against the static object world of his landscapes).

The essential point here, however, is that this characteristic movement of the high modernist impulse needs to justify itself by way of an ideology, an ideological supplement which can generally be described as that of "existentialism" (the supreme fiction, the meaninglessness of a contingent object world unredeemed by the imagination, etc.). This is the most uninteresting and banal dimension of Stevens work, yet it betrays along with other existentialisms (e.g., Sartre's tree root in *Nausea*) that fatal seam or link that must be retained in order for the contingent, the "outside world," the meaningless referent, to be just present enough dramatically to be overcome within the language. Nowhere is this ultimate point so clearly deduced, over and over again, as in Stevens, in the eye of the blackbird, the angels, or the Sun itself—that last residual vanishing point of reference as distant as a dwarf star upon the horizon, yet which cannot disappear altogether without the whole vocation of poetry and the poetic imagination being called back into question. Stevens thus exemplifies for us the fundamental paradox of the "autonomy"

of the cultural sphere: the sign can become autonomous only by remaining semi-autonomous, and the realm of culture can absolutize itself over against the real world only at the price of retaining a final tenuous sense of that exterior or external world of which it is the replication and the imaginary double.

All of this can also be demonstrated by showing what happens when, in a second moment, the perfectly logical conclusion is drawn that the referent is itself a myth and does not exist, a second moment hitherto described as postmodernism. Its trajectory can be seen as a movement from the older *nouveau roman* to that of Sollers or of properly "schizophrenic" writing, or from the primacy of Stevens to that of John Ashbery. This new moment is a radical break (which can be localized around 1967 for reasons to be given later), but it is important to grasp it as dialectical, that is, as a passage from quantity to quality in which the *same* force, reaching a certain threshold of excess, in its prolongation now produces qualitatively distinct effects and seems to generate a whole new system.

That force has been described as reification, but we can now also begin to make some connections with another figural language used earlier: in a first moment, reification "liberated" the sign from its referent, but this is not a force to be released with impunity. Now, in a second moment, it continues its work of dissolution, penetrating the interior of the sign itself and liberating the signifier from the signified, or from meaning proper. This play, no longer of a realm of signs, but of pure or literal signifiers freed from the ballast of their signifieds, their former meanings, now generates a new kind of textuality in all the arts (and in philosophy as well, as we have seen above) and begins to project the mirage of some ultimate language of pure signifiers which is also frequently associated with schizophrenic discourse. (Indeed, the Lacanian theory of schizophrenia—a language disorder in which syntactical time breaks down and leaves a succession of empty signifiers, absolute moments of a perpetual present, behind itself—has offered one of the more influential explanations and ideological justifications for postmodernist textual practice.)

Such an account would have to be demonstrated in some detail by way of a concrete analysis of the postmodernist experience in all the arts today; but the present argument can be concluded by drawing the consequences of this second moment—the culture of the signifier or of the simulacrum—for the whole problematic of some "autonomy" of the cultural sphere which has concerned us here. For that autonomous realm is not itself spared by the intensified process by which the classical sign is dissolved; if its autonomy depended paradoxically on its possibility of remaining "semi-autonomous" (in an Althusserian sense) and of preserving the last tenuous link with some ultimate referent (or, in Althusserian language, of preserving the ultimate unity of a properly "structural totality"), then evidently in the new cultural moment culture will have ceased to be autonomous, and the realm of an autonomous play of signs becomes impossible, when that ultimate final

referent to which the balloon of the mind was moored is now definitively cut. The break-up of the sign in mid-air determines a fall back into a now absolutely fragmented and anarchic social reality; the broken pieces of language (the pure signifiers) now fall again into the world, as so many more pieces of material junk among all the other rusting and superannuated apparatuses and buildings that litter the commodity landscape and that strew the "collage city," the "delirious New York" of a postmodernist late capitalism in full crisis.

But, returning to a Marcusean terminology, all of this can also be said in a different way: with the eclipse of culture as an autonomous space or sphere, culture itself falls into the world, and the result is not its disappearance but its prodigious expansion, to the point where culture becomes coterminous with social life in general; now all the levels become "acculturated," and in the society of the spectacle, the image, or the simulacrum, everything has at length become cultural, from the superstructures down into the mechanisms of the infrastructure itself. If this development then places acutely on the agenda the neo-Gramscian problem of a new cultural politics today—in a social system in which the very status of both culture and politics have been profoundly, functionally, and structurally modified—it also renders problematic any further discussion of what used to be called "culture" proper, whose artifacts have become the random experiences of daily life itself.

6. In the Sierra Maestra

The preceding section will, however, have been little more than a lengthy excursion into a very specialized (or "elite") area, unless it can be shown that the dynamic therein visible, with something of the artificial simplification of the laboratory situation, finds striking analogies or homologies in very different and distant areas of social practice. It is precisely this replication of a common diachronic rhythm or "genetic code" which we will now observe in the very different realities of revolutionary practice and theory in the course of the 60s in the Third World.

From the beginning, the Cuban experience affirmed itself as an original one, as a new revolutionary model, to be radically distinguished from more traditional forms of revolutionary practice. *Foco* theory, indeed, as it was associated with Che Guevara and theorized in Régis Debray's influential handbook, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (1967), asserted itself (as the title of the book suggests) both against a more traditional Leninist conception of party practice and against the experience of the Chinese revolution in its first essential stage of the conquest of power (what will later come to be designated as "Maoism," China's own very different "revolution in the revolution," or Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, will not become visible to the outside world until the moment when the fate of the Cuban strategy has been sealed).

A reading of Debray's text shows that *foco* strategy, the strategy of the mobile guerrilla base or revolutionary *foyer,* is conceived as yet a third term, as something distinct from *either* the traditional model of class struggle (an essentially *urban* proletariat rising against a bourgeoisie or ruling class) *or* the Chinese experience of a mass peasant movement in the countryside (and also has little in common with a Fanonian struggle for recognition between Colonizer and Colonized). The *foco,* or guerrilla operation, is conceptualized as being neither "in" nor "of" either country or city; geographically, of course, it is positioned in the countryside, yet that location is not the permanently "liberated territory" of the Yenan region, well beyond the reach of the enemy forces of Chiang Kai-shek or of the Japanese occupier. It is not indeed located in the cultivated area of the peasant fields at all, but rather in that third or nonplace which is the wilderness of the Sierra Maestra, neither country nor city, but rather a whole new element in which the guerrilla band moves in perpetual displacement.

This peculiarity of the way in which the spatial coordinates of the Cuban strategy is conceived has, then, immediate consequences for the way in which the class elements of the revolutionary movement are theorized. Neither city nor country; by the same token, paradoxically, the guerrillas themselves are grasped as being neither workers nor peasants (still less, intellectuals), but rather something entirely new, for which the prerevolutionary class society has no categories: new revolutionary subjects, forged in the guerrilla struggle indifferently out of the social material of peasants, city workers, or intellectuals, yet now largely transcending those class categories (just as this moment of Cuban theory will claim largely to transcend the older revolutionary ideologies predicted on class catagories, whether those of Trotskyist workerism, Maoist populism and peasant consciousness, or of Leninist vanguard intellectualism).

What becomes clear in a text like Debray's is that the guerrilla *foco*—so mobile as to be beyond geography in the static sense—is in and of itself a *figure* for the transformed, revolutionary society to come. Its revolutionary militants are not simply "soldiers" to whose specialized role and function one would then have to "add" supplementary roles in the revolutionary division of labor, such as political commissars and the political vanguard party itself, both explicitly rejected here. Rather, in them is abolished all such prerevolutionary divisions and categories. This conception of a newly emergent revolutionary "space"—situated outside the "real" political, social, and geographical world of country and city, and of the historical social classes, yet at one and the same time a figure or small-scale image and prefiguration of the revolutionary transformation of that real world—may be designated as a properly Utopian space, a Hegelian "inverted world," an autonomous revolutionary sphere, in which the fallen real world over against it is itself set right and transformed into a new socialist society.

For all practical purposes, this powerful model is exhausted, even before Che's own tragic death in Bolivia in 1967, with the failure of the guerrilla movements in Peru and Venezuela in 1966; not uncoincidentally, that failure will be accompanied by something like a disinvestment of revolutionary libido and fascination on the part of a First World Left, the return (with some leavening of the newer Maoism) to its own "current situation", in the American antiwar movement and May 68. In Latin America, however, the radical strategy that effectively replaces *foco* theory is that of the so-called urban guerrilla movement, pioneered in Uruguay by the Tupamaros; it will have become clear that this break-up of the utopian space of the older guerrilla *foco*, the fall of politics back into the world in the form of a very different style of political practice indeed—one that seeks to dramatize features of state power, rather than, as in traditional revolutionary movements, to build toward some ultimate encounter with it—will be interpreted here as something of a structural equivalent to the final stage of the sign as characterized above.

Several qualifications must be made, however. For one thing, it is clear that this new form of political activity will be endowed, by association, with something of the tragic prestige of the Palestinian liberation movement, which comes into being in its contemporary form as a result of the Israeli seizure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, and which will thereafter become one of the dominant worldwide symbols of revolutionary praxis in the late 60s. Equally clearly, however, the struggle of this desperate and victimized people cannot be made to bear responsibility for the excesses of this kind of strategy elsewhere in the world, whose universal results (whether in Latin America, or with Cointelpro in the United States, or, belatedly, in West Germany and Italy) have been to legitimize an intensification of the repressive apparatus of state power.

This objective coincidence between a misguided assessment of the social and political situation on the part of Left militants (for the most part students and intellectuals eager to force a revolutionary conjuncture by voluntaristic acts) and a willing exploitation by the state of precisely those provocations suggests that what is often loosely called "terrorism" must be the object of complex and properly dialectical analysis. However rightly a responsible Left chooses to dissociate itself from such strategy (and the Marxian opposition to terrorism is an old and established tradition that goes back to the nineteenth century), it is important to remember that "terrorism," as a "concept," is also an ideologeme of the Right and must therefore be refused in that form. Along with the disaster films of the late 60s and early 70s, mass culture itself makes clear that "terrorism"—the image of the "terrorist"—is one of the privileged forms in which an ahistorical society imagines radical social change; meanwhile, an inspection of the content of the modern thriller or adventure story also makes it clear that the "otherness" of so-called terrorism has begun to replace older images of criminal "insanity" as an unexamined and seemingly

"natural" motivation in the construction of plots—yet another sign of the ideological nature of this particular pseudoconcept. Understood in this way, "terrorism" is a collective obsession, a symptomatic fantasy of the American political unconscious, which demands decoding and analysis in its own right.

As for the thing itself, for all practical purposes it comes to an end with the Chilean coup in 1973 and the fall of virtually all the Latin American countries to various forms of military dictatorship. The belated reemergence of this kind of political activity in West Germany and in Italy must surely at least in part be attributed to the fascist past of these two countries, to their failure to liquidate that past after the war, and to a violent moral revulsion against it on the part of a segment of the youth and intellectuals who grew up in the 60s.

7. Return of the "Ultimately Determining Instance"

The two "breaks" that have emerged in the preceding section—one in the general area around 1967, the other in the immediate neighborhood of 1973—will now serve as the framework for a more general hypothesis about the periodization of the 60s in general. Beginning with the second of these, a whole series of other, seemingly unrelated events in the general area of 1972–74 suggests that this moment is not merely a decisive one on the relatively specialized level of Third World or Latin American radical politics, but signals the definitive end of what is called the 60s in a far more global way. In the First World, for example, the end of the draft and the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam (in 1973) spell the end of the mass politics of the antiwar movement (the crisis of the New Left itself—which can be largely dated from the break-up of SDS in 1969—would seem related to the other break mentioned, to which we will return below), while the signing of the Common Program between the Communist party and the new Socialist party in France (as well as the wider currency of slogans associated with "Eurocommunism" at this time) would seem to mark a strategic turn away from the kinds of political activities associated with May 68 and its sequels. This is also the movement when as a result of the Yom Kippur war, the oil weapon emerges and administers a different kind of shock to the economies, the political strategies, and the daily life habits of the advanced countries. Concomitantly, on the more general cultural and ideological level, the intellectuals associated with the establishment itself (particularly in the United States) begin to recover from the fright and defensive posture that was theirs during the decade now ending, and again find their voices in a series of attacks on 60s culture and 60s politics, which, as was noted at the beginning, are not even yet at an end. One of the more influential documents was Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), an Arnoldian call to reverse the tide of 60s' countercultural "barbarism." (This will, of course, be followed by the equally influential diagnosis of some 60s concept of "authenticity" in terms of a "culture of narcissism.") Meanwhile, in July 1973, some rather different "intellectuals," representing various concrete forms of political and economic power, will begin to rethink the failure in Vietnam in terms of a new global strategy for American and First World interests; their establishment of the Trilateral Commission will at least symbolically be a significant marker in the recovery of momentum by what must be called "the ruling classes." The emergence of a widely accepted new popular concept and term at this same time, the notion of the "multinational corporation," is also another symptom, signifying, as the authors of *Global Reach* have suggested, the moment when private business finds itself obliged to emerge in public as a visible "subject of history" and a visible actor on the world stage—think of the role of ITT in Chile—when the American government, having been badly burned by the failure of the Vietnam intervention, is generally reluctant to undertake further ventures of this kind.

For all these reasons it seems appropriate to mark the definitive end of the "60s" in the general area of 1972-74. But we have omitted until now the decisive element in any argument for a periodization or "punctuation" of this kind, and this new kind of material will direct our attention to a "level" or "instance" which has hitherto significantly been absent from the present discussion, namely the economic itself. For 1973-74 is the moment of the onset of a worldwide economic crisis, whose dynamic is still with us today, and which put a decisive full stop to the economic expansion and prosperity characteristic of the postwar period generally and of the 60s in particular. When we add to this another key economic marker—the recession in West Germany in 1966 and that in the other advanced countries, in particular in the United States a year or so later—we may well thereby find ourselves in a better position more formally to conceptualize the sense of a secondary break around 1967-68 which has begun to surface on the philosophical, cultural, and political levels as they were analyzed or "narrated" above.

Such confirmation by the economic "level" itself of periodizing reading derived from other, sample levels or instances of social life during the 60s will now perhaps put us in a better position to answer the two theoretical issues raised at the beginning of this essay. The first had to do with the validity of Marxist analysis for a period whose active political categories no longer seemed to be those of social class, and in which in a more general way traditional forms of Marxist theory and practice seemed to have entered a "crisis." The second involved the problem of some "unified field theory" in terms of which such seemingly distant realities as Third World peasant movements and First World mass culture (or indeed, more abstractly, intellectual or superstructural levels like philosophy and culture generally, and those of mass resistance and political practice) might conceptually be related in some coherent way.

A pathbreaking synthesis of Ernest Mandel, in his book *Late Capitalism*,[5] will suggest a hypothetical answer to both these questions at once. The book

presents, among other things, an elaborate system of business cycles under capitalism, whose most familiar unit, the seven-to-ten-year alternation of boom, overproduction, recession, and economic recovery, adequately enough accounts for the midpoint break in the 60s suggested above.

Mandel's account of the worldwide crisis of 1974, however, draws on a far more controversial conception of vaster cycles of some thirty- to fifty-year periods each—cycles which are then obviously much more difficult to perceive experientially or "phenomenologically" insofar as they transcend the rhythms and limits of the biological life of individuals. These "Kondratiev waves" (named after the Soviet economist who hypothesized them) have, according to Mandel, been renewed four times since the eighteenth century, and are characterized by quantum leaps in the technology of production, which enable decisive increases in the rate of profit generally, until at length the advantages of the new production processes have been explored and exhausted and the cycle therewith comes to an end. The latest of these Kondratiev cycles is that marked by computer technology, nuclear energy, and the mechanization of agriculture (particularly in foodstuffs and also primary materials), which Mandel dates from 1940 in North America and the postwar period in the other imperialist countries; what is decisive in the present context is his notion that, with the worldwide recession of 1973-74, the dynamics of this latest "long wave" are spent.

The hypothesis is attractive, however, not only because of its abstract usefulness in confirming our periodization schemes, but also because of the actual analysis of this latest wave of capitalist expansion, and of the properly Marxian version he gives of a whole range of developments that have generally been thought to demonstrate the end of the "classical" capitalism theorized by Marx and to require this or that post-Marxist theory of social mutation (as in theories of consumer society, postindustrial society, and the like).

We have already described the way in which neocolonialism is characterized by the radically new technology (the so-called Green Revolution in agriculture: new machinery, new farming methods, and new types of chemical fertilizer and genetic experiments with hybrid plants and the like), with which capitalism transforms its relationship to its colonies from an old-fashioned imperialist control to market penetration, destroying the older village communities and creating a whole new wage-labor pool and lumpenproletariat. The militancy of the new social forces is at one and the same time a result of the "liberation" of peasants from the older self-sustaining village communities, and a movement of self-defense, generally originating in the stabler yet more isolated areas of a given Third World country, against what is rightly perceived as a far more thoroughgoing form of penetration and colonization than the older colonial armies.

It is now in terms of this process of "mechanization" that Mandel will make the link between the neocolonialist transformation of the Third World

during the 60s and the emergence of that seemingly very different thing in the First World, variously termed consumer society, postindustrial society, media society, and the like:

> Far from representing a postindustrial society, late capitalism... constitutes *generalized universal industrialization* for the first time in history. Mechanization, standardization, overspecialization and parcellization of labor, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate into all sectors of social life. It is characteristic of late capitalism that agriculture is step by step becoming just as industrialized as industry, the sphere of circulation [e.g., credit cards and the like] just as much as the sphere of production, and recreation just as much as the organization of work. (p. 387)

With this last, Mandel touches on what he elsewhere calls the mechanization of the superstructure, or, in other words, the penetration of culture itself by what the Frankfurt School called the culture industry, and of which the growth of the media is only a part. We may thus generalize his description as follows: late capitalism in general (and the 60s in particular) constitute a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism—the last vestiges of noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world—are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment when the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the Third World and the unconscious. The 60s will then have been the momentous transformational period when this systemic restructuring takes place on a global scale.

With such an account, our "unified field theory" of the 60s is given: the discovery of a single process at work in First and Third Worlds, in global economy, and in consciousness and culture, a properly *dialectical* process, in which "liberation" and domination are inextricably combined. We may now therefore proceed to a final characterization of the period as a whole.

The simplest yet most universal formulation surely remains the widely shared feeling that in the 60s, for a time, everything was possible; that this period, in other words, was a moment of a universal liberation, a global unbinding of energies. Mao Zedong's figure for this process is in this respect most revealing: "Our nation," he cried, "is like an atom. . . .When this atom's nucleus is smashed, the thermal energy released will have really tremendous power!"[6] The image evokes the emergence of a genuine mass democracy from the breakup of the older feudal and village structures, and from the therapeutic dissolution of the habits of those structures in cultural revolutions. Yet the effects of fission, the release of molecular energies, the unbinding of "material signifiers," can be a properly terrifying spectacle; and we now know that Mao Zedong himself drew back from the ultimate

consequences of the process he had set in motion, when, at the supreme moment of the Cultural Revolution, that of the founding of the Shanghai Commune, he called a halt to the dissolution of the party apparatus and effectively reversed the direction of this collective experiment as a whole (with consequences only too obvious at the present time). In the West, also, the great explosions of the 60s have led, in the worldwide economic crisis, to powerful restorations of the social order and a renewal of the repressive power of the various state apparatuses.

Yet the forces these must now confront, contain, and control are new ones, on which the older methods do not necessarily work. We have described the 60s as a moment when the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces: the ethnic forces of black and "minority," or Third World, movements everywhere, regionalisms, the development of new and militant bearers of "surplus consciousness" in the student and women's movements, as well as in a host of struggles of other kinds. Such newly released forces do not only not seem to compute in the dichotomous class model of traditional Marxism; they also seem to offer a realm of freedom and voluntarist possibility beyond the classical constraints of the economic infrastructure. Yet this sense of freedom and possibility—which is for the course of the 60s a momentarily objective reality, as well as (from the hindsight of the 80s) a historical illusion—can perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another. The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers. With the end of the 60s, with the world economic crisis, all the old infrastructural bills then slowly come due once more; and the 80s will be characterized by an effort, on a world scale, to proletarianize all those unbound social forces that gave the 60s their energy, by an extension of class struggle, in other words, into the farthest reaches of the globe as well as the most minute configurations of local institutions (such as the university system). The unifying force here is the new vocation of a henceforth global capitalism, which may also be expected to unify the unequal, fragmented, or local resistances to the process. And this is finally also the solution to the so-called crisis of Marxism and to the widely noted inapplicability of its forms of class analysis to the new social realities with which the 60s confronted us: "traditional" Marxism, if "untrue" during this period of a proliferation of new subjects of history, must necessarily become true again when the dreary realities of exploitation, extraction of surplus value, proletarianization, and the resistance to it in the form of class struggle, all slowly reassert themselves on a new and expanded world scale, as they seem currently in the process of doing.

1984

Notes

7. Gerald Prince, *A Grammar of Stories* (The Hague, 1973), p. 23.
8. See Umberto Eco, *Opera Aperta* (Milan, 1962).
9. *The Republic*, Book VII, trans. H. D. P. Lee (Baltimore, 1955), pp. 278–79.

Chapter 7. Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate

1. For a complementary analysis of the internal contradictions of the idea of modernism, see Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight*, second ed. (Minneapolis, 1983).

2. See Werner Mittenzwei, "Die Brecht-Lukács Debatte," *Das Argument, 46 (March 1968); Eugene Lunn, "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and* Lukács," *New German Critique*, 3 (Fall 1974), pp. 12–44; and, for the somewhat earlier period of the review *Die Linskskurve* (1928-32), Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie-Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (Neuweid, 1971).

3. See Lunn, "Marxism and Art," pp. 16–18.

4. See in particular "Narrate or Describe?" in Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic* (London, 1970).

5. For a persuasive yet self-critical statement of such a Brechtian modernism, see Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," in *Screen*, 15, no. 2 (Summer 1974), pp. 7–27.

6. "You say that you are communists, people intent on changing a world no longer fit for habitation.... Yet were you in reality the cultural servants of the ruling classes, it would be cunning strategy on your part to make material things unrecognizable, since the struggle concerns things and it is in the world of things that your masters have the most to answer for." "Uber gegenstandslose Malerei," in *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst* (Frankfurt, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 68–69.

7. See *Illuminations* (London, 1970) and "The Author as Producer," in *Understanding Brecht* (London, 1973); and for further developments in a radical theory of the media, see Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied, 1962); Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry* (New York, 1974); and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffenlichkeit und Erfahrung* (Frankfurt, 1973).

8. The more recent French variant on this position—as in the work of Jean Baudrillard—enlarges the model to include the "socialist bloc" within this new dystopian entente.

9. Thomas Adorno, "Commitment," in *Aesthetics and Politics* (New York, 1979), p. 194.

10. For a pathbreaking Marxian corrective to Adorno's reading of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, see Darko Suvin, "Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Marxist Figuration: Open Dramaturgy as Open History," in *The Weapons of Criticism*, ed. Norman Rudick (Palo Alto, Calif., 1976).

11. See, for example, the instructive comments of Stanley Aronowitz on the cinema. "Unlike the important efforts of Japanese and European film-makers to fix the camera directly on the action and permit the scene to work "itself" out, American films are characterized by rapid camera work and sharp editing whose effect is to segment the action into one- or two-minute time slots, paralleling the prevailing styles of television production. The American moviegoer, having become accustomed in TV watching to commercial breaks in the action of a dramatic presentation, is believed to have become incapable of sustaining longer and slower action. Therefore the prevailing modes of film production rely on conceptions of dramatic time inherited from the more crass forms of commercial culture. The film-maker who subordinates the action and the characters to this concept of dramatic time reveals a politics inside technique that is far more insidious than 'reactionary' content. When viewed from this perspective, the film-maker such as Howard Hawks, who refuses to subordinate art to the requirements of segmented time, becomes more resistant to authoritarianism than the liberal or left-wing film-makers who are concerned with the humanitarian content of film but have capitulated to techniques that totally reduce the audience to spectators." *False Promises* (New York, 1973), pp. 116–17.

Chapter 8. Marxism and Historicism

1. See in particular chaps. 5 and 9 of "The Object of *Capital*," in Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1970). The most systematic critique of "Althusserianism," including a powerful reaffirmation of the historicist character of Marxism, is that of E. P. Thompson, in *The Poverty of Theory* (London, 1978).

2. See *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981).

3. On this last, see the instructive exchange between J. H. Hexter and Christopher Hill in *The Times Literary Supplements* of 24 October and 7 November 1976.

4. The standard works on historicism are Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (Tübingen, 1922), and Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich, 1959). Enthusiastic and programmatic endorsements of historicism may be found in Karl Mannheim, "Historicism," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, 1952), pp. 84–133; and Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton, N.J., 1953), pp. 443–48, 473–80, 546–51. The basic structuralist critiques of historicism, besides that of Althusser himself (see n. 1), are surely those of Claude Lévi-Strauss, "History and Dialectic," in *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 245–69; and A. J. Greimas, "Structure et histoire," in *Du Sens* (Paris, 1970), pp. 103–16.

5. J. J. Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (Frankfurt, 1975), p. 103.

6. Ibid., p. 8.

7. Letter to Antoine Meillet, 4 January 1894, in *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*, 21 (1964), p. 93. And for a fuller discussion of Saussure's "synchronic" revolution, see my *Prison-House of Language* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 3–39.

8. On Boas' antievolutionism (and its relationship to his anti-Marxism), see Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York, 1968), chap. 10.

9. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française* (Paris, 1952), vol. 1, p. 203.

10. The *kerygma*, or "message," is the central category of Paul Ricoeur's narrative theology; see, for instance, his "Preface to Bultmann," in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 381–401.

11. Michelet, *Histoire*, vol. 1, p. 412.

12. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. R. Lane (Minneapolis, 1983), pp. 20–22.

13. Leo Tolstoy, *Journal*, 28 February 1897, quoted in Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *The Theory of Prose* (translated in L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism*, Lincoln, 1965, p. 12).

14. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, 1976), I, 274, n. 4. And compare the fundamental observation in which Aristotle's inability to conceptualize the labor theory of value is grounded in the limits of his own mode of production: "Aristotle himself was unable to extract this fact, that, in the form of commodity-values, all labor is expressed as equal human labor and therefore as labor of equal quality, by inspection from the form of value, because Greek society was founded on the labor of slaves, hence had as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labor-powers" *(Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 151–52). A more general historicist theory of the relationship between conceptual abstraction and commodification has been developed in Alfred Sohn-Rethel's important book, *Intellectual and Manual Labor* (London, 1978).

15. Maurice Godelier, *Horizon: Trajets marxists en anthropologie* (Paris, 1973), p. 303.

16. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (thesis 14), in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York, 1969), p. 261.

17. Ibid., pp. 255, 264 (theses 6 and 18 B).

18. See Y. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," *New Literary History*, 9, no. 2 (Winter 1978), pp. 211–32; and Lotman and Uspensky, *Tripologia della cultura* (Milan, 1975). The fundamental critique of Lotman's theory of culture from a Marxist standpoint is that of Stefan Zólkiewski, "Des principles de classement des texts de culture," *Semiotica*, 7, no. 1 (1973), pp. 1–18.
19. Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," p. 213.
20. Ibid., p. 217.
21. Y. M. Lotman, "Problèmes de la typologie des cultures," *Social Science Information*, 6, nos. 2-3 (April-June 1967), p. 33.
22. Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," pp. 218–19.
23. See ibid., p. 230, n. 5.
24. J. Dubois et al., *Rhétorique générale* (Paris, 1970); and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1979); and see my chapter 6 in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, vol. 1: *Situations of Theory*.
25. Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London, 1975), pp. 309, 311.
26. Arthur C. Danto, *The Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, 1968).
27. Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, p. 323.
28. Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris, 1965), p. 187.
29. Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, p. 312.
30. Jean-François Lyotard, *Économie libidinale* (Paris, 1974), p. 155.
31. See, for instance, his latest collection, *Rudiments paiens* (Paris, 1978).
32. This familiar objection to Marxist anthropology has been most recently expressed by Jean Baudrillard in *The Mirror of Production*, trans. M. Poster (St. Louis, 1975), esp. pp. 69–92.
33. See, for example, Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, 1976), pp. 64–66; and Hindess and Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes*, pp. 313–20; responses may be found in L. Althusser, *Éléments d'Autocritique* (Paris, 1974), and Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris, 1979).
34. Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and Dialectics," *New German Critique*, 11 (Spring 1977), pp. 22-38.
35. J. P. Sartre, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (Paris, 1960), pp. 222–23.

Chapter 9. Periodizing the 60s

1. J. P. Sartre, "Preface" to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1965).
2. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, 1969), p. 15.
3. Régis Debray, "A Modest Contribution," *New Literary Review*, 115 (May-June 1979), p. 58.
4. Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago, 1980), esp. pp. 31–35.
5. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London, 1978).
6. Mao Zedong, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, ed. S. Schram (New York, 1974), pp. 92–93.

Index