

contemporary ideologies (or even metaphysics) of communication such as that of Habermas also demands an original Marxian response (and meanwhile reminds us that the question of ideology has scarcely been raised in this outline, despite the fact that the theory of ideology in many ways offers an alternate and competing theoretical code to that of culture as such).

Chapter 11

Persistencies of the Dialectic: Three Sites

I have the feeling that for many people the dialectic (insofar as it means anything at all) means an adjunct or supplementary kind of thinking: a method, or mode of interpretation, which is only intermittently appealed to, and somehow only occasionally added on to our normal thought processes. This means that not many people are capable of thinking dialectically all the time: and it may also mean that the dialectic is not a form of thought generated by this particular kind of society, for which positivism, empiricism, and various other anti-theoretical traditions seem more congenial and appropriate. (It is of course a dialectical thought as such to suppose that the various social formations—or more precisely, modes of production—secrete forms of thinking and abstraction that are specific to them and functional within their own particular structures: a presupposition that does something to the “truth” of those various kinds of thinking that it would be best not to call relativistic, even though this dialectical or “absolute” relativism certainly has its kinship with other progressive contemporary relativisms.)

In that case, perhaps it would be plausible to conjecture that, despite ample pioneering exploration in the works of Hegel and Marx (and intermittently of many others), the dialectic is not a thing of the past, not some chapter in the history of philosophy, but rather a speculative account of some thinking of the future which has not yet been realized: an unfinished project, as Habermas might put it; a way of grasping situations and events that does not yet exist as a collective habit because the concrete form of social life to which it corresponds has not yet come into being. Perhaps we might try to imagine a society in which the antinomies of individual versus collective being, the indivisibility of the negative and the positive, the inevitable alienation of our productive acts, and the peculiar “Heisenberg principle” presented by the ideology of our point of view, are all commonplaces, as widely understood as the old-time religions or the current Western forms of scientific common sense. It is for a society like that that the rhetoric of “transparency” has often been deployed—not because everything in it would be immediately meaningful, and no longer obscured by the structures

required to legitimate capitalism (or precapitalist forms of power), as rather because of the paradoxes of the collective and the social will, which have long since been identified as such. Perhaps one should add that in a society of this kind, a henceforth dialectical society, what we call Marxism today, namely the science of capitalism, will also have disappeared in that form, giving way to the dialectical philosophy or ontology latent in it, but unable to be developed or codified in the present world: both Lukács and Gramsci have written suggestive pages on this "historicist" proposition,¹ which should probably be taken as a warning not to try to work out anything like a Marxian philosophical system or ontology in our own time.

Such a historicist view of the dialectical also demands that we account for the privileged positions of Hegel and Marx as moments in which anticipations of the dialectic were possible: both were indeed social-revolutionary periods of history, in which the window onto a radically different future was, however slightly, pushed open. Sympathy with the French Revolution allowed Hegel to form a very different concept of actuality and of history than the ones he inherited from the theology and philosophy of his own time; while for Marx, the universal commodification of labor power, or the universalization of wage labor, accompanied by the first forms of labor organization and militancy (from the 1848 revolutions all the way to the First International and the Paris Commune), enables a structural theorization of what would necessarily, until that time, have remained a visionary anticipation of a radically different society. But these "conditions of possibility" are what you work your way back to, after the fact: we cannot deduce in advance what new kinds of dialectical conceptions the current cybernetic revolution, along with the capitalist "end of history," may or may not have put us in a position to produce and to think.

I have found it useful to characterize the dialectic in three different ways, which surely do not exhaust the possibilities, but may at least clarify the discussion and also alert us to possible confusions or category mistakes, to interferences between them. The first of these directions involves reflexivity, or thinking itself: perhaps it can be described as a relatively synchronic form of the dialectic. The second raises problems of causality and historical narrative and explanation (and is thus more diachronic). Hegel and Marx are the obvious places in which these first two aspects of the dialectic are the most richly exercised, respectively.

The third feature or aspect of dialectical thinking does not seem to offer a model (as these first two might seem to do), as rather to isolate the fundamental feature of the operation itself: this is, indeed, the emphasis on

contradiction as such, and we may honor Brecht for his insistence on this requirement, and for his lesson, in a great variety of contexts and forms, that dialectical thinking begins with the contradiction, that it means finding the inevitable contradiction at the heart of things and seeing and reconstructing them in terms of contradictions, or (if you prefer) that the various forms of non-dialectical thinking can always be identified as so many strategies for containing, repressing, or naturalizing contradictions as such. This is a less exclusive formula than the first two, and (while not exactly a method) perhaps offers the most practical hints for the application and identification of the dialectic alike.

Turning first to reflexivity—to the originality of the dialectic as a recognition of the way in which we are mired in concepts of all kinds and a strategy for lifting ourselves above that situation, not for changing the concepts exactly but for getting a little distance from them—it is certain that today self-consciousness (as this is also sometimes called) has bad press; and that if we are tired enough of philosophies of consciousness, we are even more fatigued by their logical completion in reflexivities, self-knowing and self-aware lucidities, and ironies of all kinds. The current period has been a reconquest of the superficial over the obligatory depths; while all of modern philosophy and thought (Freud included) has been in therapeutic flight before older moralizing notions of the subjective and its cultivation. Perhaps consciousness and self-consciousness have been too closely allied with various forms of repression, with various class-bound notions of the self or the ego. Those were, Adorno might have said, fruits of the entrepreneurial period of bourgeois subjectivity; now that we are in full transition from the older entrepreneurs and patriarchal robber barons to the age of transnational monopolies and the new anonymous global collectivities, the glorification of the self comes to seem an historical curiosity and an outworn, impossibly expensive luxury of the past, like a private railroad car. But perhaps the reading of Hegel in such terms was itself a projection of that bygone modernist historical period; and just as Freud has come to be rewritten without the stoicism and without the mirage of the cure (in that sense, indeed, the supreme moment of self-consciousness or reflexivity as such), so also Absolute Spirit might perhaps be readapted to the more modest and schizophrenic tastes of the present age, as sheer historical overlaying and simultaneity.

The more serious question, however, turns on the use we may or may not still have for self-knowledge: for the deeper reason why this value seems to have been first reduced in price and put on sale, and then consigned to the ashcan of history outright, is that the self has also lived its time, and that multiple selves, multiple subject-positions, no longer seem to offer anything very interesting or tangible to know. Not much knowledge there any longer, let alone much wisdom.

¹ See Georg Lukács, "What Is Orthodox Marxism?" in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971, 1–26; and Antonio Gramsci, "The Revolution against *Das Kapital*," in *Pre-Prison Writings*, ed. R. Mellamy, trans. V. Cox, London: Cambridge University Press, 1949, 39–42.

Let me anticipate a little here and suggest that we may be looking in the wrong place: if subject-positions are not optional changes of clothing, whose possibilities finally depend on your pocketbook, then perhaps they ought to be seen as responses to situations. That means that their multiplicity and coexistence today correspond to the way in which postmodern people live within several coexisting situations all at once: the past seems to have been simpler in this respect, pre-urban and ordered by religious repression, but then one never knows about the past and it may well be, as the Nietzscheans among us are fond of asserting, that multiple subject-positions were always with us and that the village was no less complicated than California at its most feverish. The point is, however, that in that case, what has been called self-knowledge is not really a knowledge of the self, but rather a consciousness of its situations, a way of gaining and keeping awareness of precisely that multiplicity of situations in which the self finds and invents itself. That kind of knowledge need not have any of the old subjectivist, bourgeois-introspective connotations we used to endow it with (and you could reread Hegel, for that matter, as a series or sequence of situations, rather than of essentialist forms). I do not want to dwell on any of this any longer, but would like very rapidly to associate these first remarks on the dialectic with some of Derrida's early thoughts about cancellation or "rature" in the *Grammatology*, which warned us that we could scarcely modify the concepts in our head in some Utopian fashion and leap ahead to a wholly new philosophical outlook, without utterly changing the world in the first place, and producing new situations (not his formulation) in which the new concepts might somehow find some currency or use.

But this turn in the discussion of self-consciousness now reminds us to name its other, more Marxian variant, which is to be sure the concept of ideology itself, the last and most important conceptual achievement of the Enlightenment drive to banish the idols and the superstitions. It is above all in this that deconstruction, for example, is related to Marxism, as cross cousins in some extended kinship system; and that the best way to undertake the comparison would be to begin with an analysis of deconstruction as a form of *Ideologiekritik*, as they used to call Marxism in Germany now so many years ago. Here we must return, in a new way, to imagery from the previous version, that is, to the formulation in terms of reflexivity. For the point is the same: we are submerged in our ideologies (indeed, the self itself is just such an ideology, as the dialectician Lacan has shown us) and becoming aware of our own ideologies is rigorously the same as what was then called self-consciousness. For ideology-critique begins at home, with the so-called self and its baggage and furnishings, and can only thereafter be trained with some accuracy and precision on the doings of the outside world. In this respect, Hegel once said an instructive thing about his own period: our situation as philosophers, he observed, is radically different from

that of the Greeks, in that they had first of all to generate usable abstractions out of the immanence of empirical daily life; we are, however—the historical situation is clearly that of the first modernity of Hegel's day—drowning in abstractions, we have to find a way of getting out of them without precisely sinking back into the sheer instinctive traditional life of the pre-philosophical.² That way, clearly enough, he called the dialectic; but it is further illuminated by Marx's wonderful comment, which one is tempted to take as a gloss on this one of Hegel. Bourgeois philosophy, said Marx, rises from the particular to the general; we must now rise—note the persistence of the verb—from the general to the concrete.³ The concrete is no longer a tissue of generalities and abstractions, of universalities; but it is also no longer a mindless anti-theoretical empiricism; it is something else which we have yet to describe in any satisfactory way here, all the more so since this once so fashionable word "concrete" seems also to have run its course.

The link between Hegelian analysis and the "materialism" of *Ideologiekritik*, however, lies in the space and schematism of the philosophical "category": or in other words the mental forms that have from Aristotle to Kant been identified as intervening between us and the objects of our thought. In Aristotle and in Kant, the categories are inventoried and sorted out according to various classification schemes,⁴ but they cannot be said to have been interpreted, exactly, since they do not have meanings in and of themselves but rather govern and organize meanings and to that degree stand outside of meaning as such. The originality of Hegel was to have enabled an approach to some intrinsic meaning of the categories themselves by way of a sequence of forms (through which the "concept," the use of Hegelian language, gradually and historically becomes "equal to itself"). We are today rather far from the picking and choosing implied by Croce's famous title (*What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*);

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977: "The manner of study in ancient times differed from that of the modern age in that the former was the proper and complete formation of the natural consciousness. Putting itself to the test at every point of its existence, and philosophizing about everything it came across, it made itself into a universality that was active through and through. In modern times, however, the individual finds the abstract form ready-made; the effort to grasp and appropriate it is more the direct driving-forth of what is within and the truncated generation of the universal than it is the emergence of the latter from the concrete variety of existence" (19).

³ *Grundrisse*, in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 28 New York: International Publishers, 1986, 38.

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985: "The 'what,' quality, quantity, place, time and any similar meanings which 'being' may have; and again besides all these there is that which is potentially or actually" (Book VI, chapter 2).

still, if Hegel and his works have an actuality and a practical value for us today, those cannot but lie in just this dialectic of the categories, which incites us to invent a distance from our own thoughts in which their failure and insufficiencies can be diagnosed and identified in terms of those of the mental categories we have been able to deploy. Already in Hegel, the conditions of possibility of specific mental categories (and not other, more adequate ones, for example) were the object of a properly historical diagnosis: the dialectical flaws in a given category (the way in which, for example, it might impose a false dualism upon us) are already indices of our historical situation; and with that, the way towards a certain Marxism is thrown open.

The return to Hegel today, in a variety of forms, is thereby justified: less as a scholarly and antiquarian project (although such research into the documents themselves and the history of philosophy is invaluable), than rather as a renewed effort to think through and elaborate the multiple and suggestive connections between a Hegelian analysis of categories and a Marxian analysis of ideology. I remain convinced that one of the most fruitful efforts to stage those connections lay in the ill-fated *Kapitallogik* movement, in which the categories of Hegel's logic were experimentally juxtaposed with those of Marx's analysis of capital itself.⁵

The more frequent moves in this direction, however, lay in the attempt to bypass or neutralize a kind of form-content stereotype operative in the standard comparisons of Hegel and Marx: that is, provisionally to ignore the idea (probably encouraged by the preceding remarks) that in Hegel it is a question of the form of thoughts and attitudes, whereas in Marx we have to do with their concrete or empirical class content. *Capitallogik*, indeed, may be seen as attempting to give a concrete class content to Hegel's "forms," while in other Marxian developments—most notably in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*—the strategy has been to reveal the categorical forms implicit in seemingly empirical class and political positions and opinions. This remains a rich area for work today, and it may also be observed to take place within our philosophical terminologies: I think, for example, of the suggestive and exciting results of the elaboration by Slavoj Žižek and his associates of the dialectics of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which are deployed very specifically in the force field opened up between Marxism and German objective idealism.

Thus, it is not so much the incompatibility of some Hegelian idealism and this or that Marxian materialism which vitiates the development of the dialectic today: on the contrary, as I hope to have suggested, such "incompatibilities" are the space in which genuine philosophical innovation can

take place. The more urgent problem today is an historical and a social one, and, if it strikes at the Hegelian dialectic by way of an omnipresent positivism and revulsion against theory itself, its consequences for the Marxian theory of ideology itself are no less momentous. For there is a question whether, today, in postmodernity and globalization, in the universal reign of the market and of a cynical reason that knows and accepts everything about itself, ideology still takes on its once classical form, and ideology-critique serves any purpose any longer. For that was once a cultural-revolutionary purpose and a collective pedagogy: not merely and not even foremost to discredit and unmask the enemies, but rather to transform the intellectual and practical habits of the collectivity itself, formed in and still poisoned by this social system. Today, and for the moment, we need more modestly to ask ourselves how ideology functions in the new moment, how the market achieves its unquestioned sway. What is paradoxical is that the crudest forms of ideology seem to have returned, and that in our public life an older vulgar Marxism would have no need of the hypersubtleties of the Frankfurt School and of negative dialectics, let alone of deconstruction, to identify and unmask the simplest and most class-conscious motives and interests at work, from Reaganism and Thatcherism down to our own politicians: to lower taxes so rich people can keep more of their money, a simple principle about which what is surprising is that so few people find it surprising anymore, and what is scandalous, in the universality of market values, is the way it goes without saying and scarcely scandalizes anyone. Why did we need in the first place to invent the elaborate Geiger-counters of ideology-critique developed on the left during the modernist period if it was all so simple all along? The implication is that the Cold War shamed the various Western bourgeoisies into complicated intellectual disguises for these motivations, which had to be deconstructed in equally complicated ways, but which no longer need the cloak of altruism or of higher philosophical justifications, now that they have no enemies any longer.

Perhaps, however, we need to entertain the idea that ideology today takes rather different forms than in the past, and in particular that our two great dominant ideologies—that of the market; that of consumption or of consumerism—are not exactly ideas in the older sense. Adorno wondered somewhere very pertinently whether today the commodity might not be its own ideology: thereby seeming independently to confirm the general conceptual movement away from an overt theory of ideology to one of practices (as in Bourdieu's work, for example). That such an "end of ideology" could never mean an end of class struggle seems obvious enough, but it would certainly entail a dilemma in the articulations of class struggle and in the opening up of new discursive spaces in which to fight it out. Perhaps this sense of the becoming immanent of ideology in late capitalism explains the

⁵ See Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations*, New York: Routledge, 1993, especially parts 1 and 2; Tony Smith, *The Logic of Marx's "Capital"*, New York: SUNY Press, 1990.

renewed significance, on the left, of the theory of commodity fetishism, which was for Marx the undeveloped secret of any analysis of daily life in our social system. The renewal of a theoretical interest in religion may also have its relevance here as well (and not only in the empirical social world around us), since Marx's brief analysis is staged in religious terms. At any rate, contributions from psychoanalysis and colonial philology alike⁶ have converged on this interesting matter, which also surely holds a key to practical politics in the current scheme of things.

But now it is time to move to the second way in which the dialectic has often been understood and misunderstood, and that has to do with telos, narrative, and history: with the story of change, or in other words, with the diachronic, rather than with the structures of consciousness as such. Marx has often, along with Hegel, been accused of having a "philosophy of history" (which is evidently supposed to be a bad thing; and also of being somehow religious, replicating Christian historicism unconsciously, and projecting a salvational narrative of a movement of history towards some end of time—in short, of perpetuating the noxious doctrine of a telos); and in a lesser accusation, of being not only teleological but also a proponent of historical inevitability, whatever that may mean. No reader of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* can believe any of these things, to which I can only reply in abbreviated form. I certainly hope that Marxism projects a salvational history; why it should be Christian I cannot particularly understand, since Christian salvation remains essentially individual, and the Day of Judgment is a figure for the end of history altogether, rather than, as in Marx's own words, the end of "prehistory." This is perhaps also the moment to deal with the much stigmatized concept of totality: it is capitalism which totalizes, which constitutes a total system, not its critics. We have to think, however, in terms of a totalizing transformation of the social system precisely because this system is itself a total one (something Foucault teaches even better than Marx, by the way, and which is also implicit in Derrida's ideas of the closure of conceptuality in the *Grammatology*). Salvational is then that kind of transformation: that it is inevitable we are, chastened by the lessons of the last few years, no longer supposed to say. But here too it was never socialism that was inevitable, but the implosion of the contradictions of capitalism. Marx allows as much when he pointedly observes that some world-historical conflicts end "not with the reconstruction of society as a whole, but rather with the mutual ruin of contending classes."⁷ Indeed,

the two things are not "on all fours" as the philosophers like to say: capitalism is a system and a machine with irresolvable internal contradictions; socialism is a human and a collective act, a collective project. The fate of the former does not depend on us; that of the latter is at one with our collective praxis.

But these perspectives—sometimes supposed to be "grand narratives"—are not really narratives at all; they are axiology and Utopian vision. They enable the construction of this or that historical narrative, but are not themselves narrative as such. If we look for a moment at those texts in which we can speak of some genuinely dialectical narrative—I mentioned *The Eighteenth Brumaire* a moment ago—what we observe is indeed the very opposite of this allegedly pious rehearsal for longed-for truths, of history written as wish-fulfillment and as the simple-minded interaction of a few abstractions. Rather *The Eighteenth Brumaire* makes us witness to a narrative which is at every point a perpetual and dazzling, sometimes bewildering, cancellation of previously dominant narrative paradigms. Here the dialectic is a constant reversal of older stereotypes of causality, of historical or narrative efficacy and efficiency: it constantly underscores the absolutely unforeseeable consequence, the bitterly ironic reversal, the inversion of human (individual) intention, and the progress inherent in the worst rather than the best, in failure rather than victory. History puts its worst foot forward, as Henri Lefebvre liked to say, and not its best, as bourgeois or Whig, progress-oriented historiographies claim and try to demonstrate by their own narratives. To be sure, the great forefather of this historiographic practice was again Hegel (he had his own precursors in Adam Smith and Mandeville), and in particular his notion of the "ruse of reason" or the "ruse of history," the way in which a collective history uses the passions and intentions of individuals, and even of individual nations, behind their backs in order to produce some utterly unexpected result. But in that programmatic form, the dialectic is still too simple and itself becomes predictable: the dialectic of history in Marx wishes to escape just that predictability. But here we now draw closer to an understanding of the dialectic as a set of operations, in situation, rather than as some static "view" or even "philosophy"—in this case of history itself. Among our inner ideologies, in other words, are notions of what an event is, how things happen, what effective causes are, how change can best be influenced: the dialectic wishes ceaselessly to interrogate and undermine those narrative and historical ideologies, by allowing us to see and grasp historical change in a new and more complex way. But this is the difference with postmodern historiography in general: the dialectical one still does wish to give a provisional picture of historical change, a provisional narrative, with provisional interpretation of the events, and therefore still implies that those events are not altogether meaningless, and that historical narration is not an altogether ideological process.

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 1989; William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," in *Res*, Num. 9, Spring 1985.

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, 484.

Now at a certain point along the way, it seems to me that such dialectical narratives froze over and became codified; so that new narrative procedures had to be invented to undermine them in their turn. The two I would above all wish to single out for twentieth-century historiography are Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, his so-called retroactive effect, whereby the arrival of puberty, for example, triggers events that have in some sense already happened at the age of three, but in another sense have not yet happened at all; and alongside that, Derrida's notion of supplementarity, in which, following Jakobson's notion of the synchronic, a new moment in the system comes complete with its own brand-new past and (as in Husserl) reorders our perception around itself as a center (whose permanence is then projected back endlessly into time). I believe that both these historiographic forms have occasionally been understood as critiques of the dialectic, and I understand why; but I hope it will also be clear why I now perversely consider both as contributions to a dialectical rewriting of history rather than some newfangled post-dialectical inventions.

It all depends, you will say, on how we define the dialectic in the first place. No doubt; and the first Derrida we know, the Derrida of the recently published master's thesis of 1953, the dialectical (rather than anti-dialectical) Derrida, grasped dialectics as essentially a matter of mediation. The dialectic is what lets us think the unity of opposites, and (in that particular case, which was the critique of Husserl's philosophy) the identity of activity and passivity, of constituting and constituted, even of subject and object, and so forth. What of that particular version of the dialectic? This is the point at which we must touch on the third of our topics, namely contradiction; and in which we must bring in other, less philosophical names, and in particular that of Brecht, supposed to be the student, in dialectics, of Karl Korsch.

I will omit that obligatory digression, however, and simply repeat Brecht's stress that what defines the dialectic above all is the observation—everywhere and always—of contradictions as such. Wherever you find them, you can be said to be thinking dialectically; whenever you fail to see them, you can be sure that you have stopped doing so.

My reason for drawing Brecht into the discussion in so seemingly arbitrary a fashion (besides implicitly shedding a little crosslight on his adversary, Lukács) is to restore some of the forgotten prehistory of contemporary anti-dialectical positions, which we mostly lump under the designation "poststructuralist." I have come to believe, indeed, that much in the arsenal of attacks on the dialectic actually derives from the dialectical tradition itself, and specifically from Brecht, whose plays exploded like a thunderbolt in summer 1954, in a Parisian intellectual atmosphere dominated absolutely by so-called existential Marxism.

The body of critical writing that most vigilantly and intelligently transmitted the Brechtian ethos to France and to the French intellectual and

political climate of those years, which is to say to the nascent French sixties and nascent poststructuralism, is the work of Roland Barthes, whose *Mythologies* constitutes a splendid series of Brechtian estrangement-effects, including a theory of estrangement rewritten for French usages. I am, however, more interested in Barthes' attacks on identity, which seem to me faithfully yet creatively and imaginatively to transmit the Brechtian positions on this particular theme. In particular, what seems to be Barthes' semiological undoing of the individual "subject"⁸—its fragmentation into multiple semes, its x-raying into overlapping actants, the death of the author-subject as well, and finally the dissolution of the writing subject into the un-self-sufficient moments of textual production—this actually can be seen to derive from Brecht's dramaturgy; not only the reconstruction of the individual subject in *Mann ist Mann*, or the positive and negative personae of *The Good Person* (but of many other plays as well), but above all, the sense that subjectivity itself is in reality *gestus*, that we do wrong to try to empathize with this or that inner feeling of the character, and indeed that in any given gesture a multiplicity of motivations overlap. Barthes' further dismantling of the event, in his so-called proairetic code, is very reminiscent of the Brechtian staging of the *gestus*, and the insistence on showing the audience that any number of other versions of these gestures and reactions might have been possible in other frames and other situations. The practice of multiple subject-positions, therefore, is already present in Brecht (despite his lack of interest in what is still simply Freudian psychoanalysis); and the persistent undermining of the whole range of forms taken by an illusory identity is his most inveterate critical posture.

In Barthes as well (who however benefited from a double lesson on the subject, having also learned it from his other master, Sartre), we find the fundamental Brechtian insistence on the primacy of the situation, whether this has to do with political choices, subject-positions, or literary theories and forms. This insistence on the situation as such is what makes it so difficult to codify this dialectic, about which it becomes evident that its terms and emphases must vary according to the demands of circumstance and of strategy. Brecht is not the only modern thinker to have insisted on the relationship between strategy and thought, between strategy and dialectics: but his lesson has been enormously influential.⁹

Where, finally, do we find contradiction in all this? In the structure of the situation itself, first of all; but also in the relationship of the gesture or *gestus* to the situation it tries to change; and finally within the *gestus* and the subject-position itself, where the sheer multiplicity of elements itself constitutes a contradiction. The misunderstanding would lie in imagining

⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris: Seuil, 1970.

⁹ For a fuller discussion, see Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, London: Verso, 1998.

that Brecht desired this multiplicity and these contradictions to be done away with; that with him, as in those caricatures of the Hegel alongside whom he now lies buried, some "synthesis" must necessarily follow on the proverbial thesis and antithesis; or else, at the outside limit, we will find ourselves forced to evoke a "dialectic without a synthesis," as though that were not simply the nature of the dialectic *tout court*. Where, however, this distinction has been drawn in a programmatic way, and a perpetual movement back and forth between opposites or within a dualism contrasted with some alleged dialectical "totalization" in which the opposites and the contradictions are supposed to be laid to rest, then I think one can contrast the notion of the contradiction and that of the antinomy, which is the form taken by contradictors in so much anti-dialectical poststructuralist thought, and on which I have commented elsewhere.¹⁰

I want to add, returning to the beginning of this discussion, that I think notions of the mediation as a solution or bridge between contradictories are also something of a misunderstanding, and attribute to the dialectic philosophical and ontological ambitions it must not have: this notion of the mediation is redolent of the old Hegelian and dialectical-materialist notion of a dialectics of nature, for example; while the Brechtian position I have tried to outline here would I believe be more inclined to identify mediation and contradiction as such: where you can perceive a contradiction, there you already intuit the union of opposites, or the identity of identity and non-identity. Mediation is thus not some strange and fluid event in the world: it characterizes the way our spectatorship and our praxis alike construct portions of the world with a view towards changing them.

Chapter 12

Lenin as Political Thinker

On the night of June 25, 1935, Trotsky had a dream:

Last night, or rather early this morning, I dreamed I had a conversation with Lenin. Judging by the surroundings, it was on a ship, on the third class deck. Lenin was lying in a bunk; I was either standing or sitting near him. I am not sure which. He was questioning me anxiously about my illness. "You seem to have accumulated nervous fatigue, you must rest ..." I answered that I had always recovered from fatigue quickly, thanks to my native *Schwungkraft*, but that this time the trouble seemed to lie in some deeper processes ... "Then you should seriously (he emphasized the word) consult the doctors (several names) ..." I answered that I already had many consultations and began to tell him about my trip to Berlin; but looking at Lenin I recalled that he was dead. I immediately tried to drive away this thought, so as to finish the conversation. When I had finished telling him about my therapeutic trip to Berlin in 1926, I wanted to add, "This was after your death"; but I checked myself and said, "After you fell ill ..."

This "singularly moving dream," as he puts it, is analyzed by Lacan in his sixth seminar (on "desire and its interpretation") in the lecture of January 7, 1959. Readers of Lacan will recognize its affinity with themes with which Lacan was particularly fascinated, most notably Freud's own dream about his father ("he was dead, but he didn't know it"). The situation in question accumulates a number of Lacanian motifs: the big Other, barred, castrated, dead; God as dead (without knowing it); the unconscious as the place of this non-knowledge of death, very much like that noumenon which for Kant is the subject and which we can never know. I will rapidly summarize his observations: Lenin's non-knowledge in the dream is the projection of Trotsky's own non-knowledge, not only of his own death (he is beginning to feel the weight of illness and age, the diminution of his extraordinary energies), but also of the very meaning of his dream. He has also projected onto Lenin the fact and experience of pain itself, the pain of Lenin's last

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

¹ Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky's Diary in Exile, 1935*, trans. Elena Zarudnaia, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, 145-146.