

Chapter 3

Hegel's Contemporary Critics

Now we need briefly to consider external objections to Hegelianism, that is to say, to review the basic positions of the most eminent anti-Hegelians. They too will have much to teach us about our own secret presuppositions and about the longitude and latitude of the *Zeitgeist* itself. I choose three very eminent opponents of the dialectic—Derrida, Deleuze, and Blanchot (if not Foucault)—because it is better to see why the most original philosophers of our time have found the dialectic unproductive for their purposes (which must also, in part, be ours), rather than to parry stray thrusts by camp-followers of current doxa or to think of something to say to Anglo-American complaints about logical inconsistency. The three writers mentioned will then allow us to look again at three crucial problems: that of mediations, that of negativity, and that of exteriority.

1.

Is the dialectic wicked, or just incomprehensible? Theorists who follow the doxa (without realizing to what degree it has been fashioned by the Cold War itself) tend to take the first line, invoking that well-known concept of totality (of which it is precisely well known that it means totalitarianism). The second position seems more awkward, since no one likes to admit they can't understand something, particularly in an age when difficult texts (theoretically difficult ones having apparently taken the place of the literarily difficult) have offered so many Everests for the scaling of the ambitious. You can of course claim that it is the text itself which is unintelligible; but even this raises suspicions. You would have to be able to show that the text failed to deliver, that it was incapable of solving its problems or doing what it claimed it was about to do: something notoriously impossible for literary texts, whose intentions get reconstructed only after the fact, and which in any case never "know what they think till they see what they say." But perhaps philosophy is somewhat different in this regard.

Modern philosophy, in any case, places increasing weight on successful expression, as though it were not enough merely to think something through, one had also to invent the right language or representation for the newly successful thought. Perhaps indeed, as with literature, the difference between the thought and its expression in language has slowly been effaced. Yet some kind of abstract aim is still there, which precedes the thought and the language alike: Husserl wants to think, which is to say, to express and formulate, emergence. So if it can be shown that he failed in doing this, a critique has been achieved.

This is what Derrida set out to do in his 1954 "master's thesis"—*Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*—only published, with some reluctance it would seem, in 1990. The reluctance stemmed presumably from the way in which the youthful text reflected its moment and its milieu—the heyday of Sartrean existentialism—which is to say of existential Marxism and of the dialectic (as Western Marxism understood it). Derrida's is also a "dialectical" text, which pays due homage to Tran Duc Thao's supremely influential synthesis of Husserl and Marxism,¹ and concludes by wondering why—given the infinite regress in Husserl's successive onslaughts on emergence or origin, each new version only pushing the problem back a little further—he did not have recourse to the most obvious solution: the dialectical instrument called mediation.

In the thirteen years that elapse between this excellent study and Derrida's first published work (again on Husserl), the fifties have been replaced by the sixties, the Sartrean age has come to an end, and the evocation of "the dialectic" has vanished from Derrida's pages. Is it possible that during that period, Derrida slowly came to feel about the Hegelian categories that, like those of Husserl, they were not really forms of thinking but only served notice of the intent to think, without finally doing so? *Glas*² is the answer to this question, and a very substantial answer indeed, offering patient and detailed commentaries on a very wide range of Hegel's texts, from the early theological writings to the *Encyclopedia*, from the *Phenomenology* to the *Philosophy of Right*. These commentaries aim to show what really goes on inside the operation called *Aufhebung* (lifting up, preservation and cancellation, sublation, curiously translated by Derrida throughout as *relève*), which is so to speak the strong form of that operation called mediation and which he had recommended to Husserl only a decade earlier. Deconstruction could then here mean a therapeutic working through and dissolution of that, were it not that the texts remain.

To be sure, *Glas* seems to be doing a good many other things as well: its twin columns oppose the conformist and the rebel, Hegel and Genet, the

¹ See Tran Duc Thao, *Phénoménologie et matérialisme dialectique*, Paris: Minh-Tan, 1951.

familias and the homosexual, the government functionary and the criminal, philosophy and literature, thought and language—all entwined, as it were, around the twin motifs of flowers and phallic columns, of religion and camp. The texts do not directly reply to one another. Faulkner once combined two rejected story manuscripts into a single volume with alternating chapters; but it is unlikely Derrida faced this particular publishing problem. We have not yet mentioned the central issue: marriage (Genet was a foundling or at least an orphan, Hegel had an illegitimate son alongside two legitimate ones). The Hegel commentary will bear centrally on that section of the *Philosophy of Right* that deals with the family as the antechamber to civil society and, beyond it, the State. It will, in fact, affirm that *Aufhebung* and the family are related, indeed that the former is somehow a “familial” concept. What can this mean, except, in the most general sense, that the two ideas or motifs linked by sublation—the one in the process of being canceled and lifted up into the other—have no more relation to each other than the partners to a marriage (but no less either). They do not magically find themselves transformed, the one into the other; rather they remain linked by the copula, or in other words by copulation (his joke). This is then to say that *Aufhebung* is not really a thought, but at best a word naming a thought that has not been able to happen (and perhaps “family” is such a word as well).

To be sure, *Aufhebung* includes sublimation and spiritualization along with simple mediation; but there is no particular ideological urgency impelling us to denounce as an idealist a philosopher who everywhere openly boasts of his own idealism in the first place. The discussion of the concept of matter is illuminating. Spirit (*Geist*) and matter are not opposites: Spirit is infinite, matter is the unfree and the external, what weighs and falls.

But there is a law of gravity. If you analyze weight and the dispersal of matter into exteriority, you are obliged to recognize a tendency in this process: a strained effort towards unity and self-reassembling. But as a tendency towards the center and unity, matter is the opposite of spirit only insofar as it resists this tendency, insofar as it opposes its own tendency. But in order to oppose its own tendency, which defines it as matter, matter would have to be spirit in the first place. And if it yields to the same tendency, it is also spirit. It is spirit in either instance, its essence can only be spiritual: All essence is spiritual. (DG, 29–30)

It is a magnificent “deconstruction,” a demonstration of the way in which matter cannot be thought at all within an idealist system. But one of the disconcerting aspects of Derrida’s “method” has always been the way in which,

² Paris: Galilee, 1974. Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers provided in the text refer to this work. Future references to *Glas* are denoted DG in the text. All translations are the author’s own.

in his texts, the paraphrase always precedes the citation of the original text, rather than following it, as is customarily the case with commentary. Thus, reading on here for another moment, we come across Hegel’s original, which says exactly the same things. What we took to be a devastating analysis was not Derrida’s deconstruction of Hegel, but rather Hegel’s own deconstruction. Of what? Of the concept of matter itself. Are we to conclude that the dialectic is already deconstruction, *avant la lettre*? Or do we have to invoke some infinitesimal, barely perceptible modification by which the dialectic transforms a materialist deconstruction into an idealist sublimation? “Matter tends towards ideality, for in unity it is already ideal,” etc. (DG, 30). Or is this simply the difference between taking as one’s object of analysis a thought (as in Hegel) or a text (as in Derrida)?

So where do we begin with this strange operation called *Aufhebung*? It may well be a spiritualization, but we can evidently not begin with the matter that it transcends/sublimates/spiritualizes, since we have just found that the latter is also already Spirit, albeit secretly. Perhaps we can begin with precisely these three properties of the things: (1) “it is also”—we have to do with the copula or with the affirmation of identity. (2) “Secretly”—we have to do with a hermeneutic process, an appearance which conceals an essence. (3) “Already”—we have to do with an illicit temporality, with precisely those temporal particles (*déjà*—[DG, 18]; *zugleich*—[DG, 26]) which were the key to Derrida’s reading of the philosophies of time.³

In fact, *Aufhebung* is not an event but a repetition: “le *Geist* ne peut donc que se répéter” (DG, 31). Nothing happens; all *Aufhebungen* are the same. They all seem to involve the transcendence of nature; yet the latter is merely a name for whatever is transcended in any of these processes, it is purely formal, the name of a moment, it has no content in its own right: “Nature is not a determinate essence, a unique moment. It designates all possible forms of the ways in which spirit can be external to itself. It therefore appears—while in the process progressively disappearing as well—at every stage of the becoming of spirit” (DG, 45).

Yet on the other hand, these—the crucial moments of transition within the overall dialectic of Hegel’s system—the moments at which *Aufhebung* as the crucial transformational mechanism should offer the most dramatic demonstration or *Darstellung*—are singularly muddy not to say undecidable:

The most general question would now take on the following form: how is the *Aufhebung* of religion into philosophy produced? And on the other hand how is the *Aufhebung* into the structure of civil (bourgeois) society of the family structure produced? Or in other words how, within *Sittlichkeit* itself ... is effectuated the passage from the familial syllogism to that of bourgeois society? (DG, 108)

³ See the opening section of the chapter in this book “From Tragedy to the Dialectic.”

Derrida goes on to indicate the crucial text, which for him situates the gap in Hegel, not between the spiritual and the material, but between the spiritual and the political, in what is for him the final transition of the *Phenomenology* (from religion to philosophy, but see his discussion of other versions of this transition on page 244). Unfortunately his faithfulness to Hegel (*DG*, 244–260) is such that the discussion is as dense and as incomprehensible as Hegel's own: I will elsewhere propose a different position, namely that Absolute Spirit is not a concept or a phenomenon one can analyze, let alone understand; but that it is a formal moment that can be grasped only as ideology or as method. If you try to see it as a condition, state, thing, phenomenon, in its own right, you will necessarily produce a religious account, and thus defeat the very purpose of the transition which was to spell out a decisive transformation (*Aufhebung*) between the penultimate chapter of the *Phenomenology* on revealed religion and this one on philosophy itself in everything that distinguishes it from religion. (This would probably be the moment to quote Derrida's discussion of the interesting question of whether one can ever misread Hegel [*DG*, 258–259] ...)

But after all, one of the central concerns of Derrida's commentary—which goes back to the early theological texts—is the very traditional one of deciding whether Hegel is not just another religious thinker after all, and whether his dialectic is not simply yet another version of Christianity (that tradition will of course go on to say that Marxism is also in the same sense a “secularized” religion). Derrida, however, gives this traditional strategy (in which Hegel's enemies on the right and on the left can revel) a supplementary twist: for religion is here the Holy Family; and even if we wish to argue that *Aufhebung* and the Hegelian dialectic in general are secular disguises for Christian theology, we are obliged to go on and admit that Christian theology is itself little more than a secularized, or shall we say desexualized and empiricized, disguise for the more general social, public and private, institution of the family and marriage:

One can no longer rigorously distinguish between a finite and an infinite family. The human family is not *something other* than the divine family. The father-son relationship for man is not *something other* than the father-son relationship in God. Inasmuch as these two relationships cannot be distinguished, and can certainly not be opposed to one another, we cannot feign to take the one as the figure or metaphor for the other. We cannot even compare the one to the other, or pretend to know which of the two can be the term of the comparison. Outside of Christianity, we cannot know what the relationship of the father to his son *is* ... We cannot even know, and here is the point, what the *is* in general is outside of Christianity. Such is the Hegelian thesis on the spirit of Christianity, which is to say, on rhetoric as such. (*DG*, 76)

It is an extraordinary leap, scarcely disestranged by its attribution to Hegel himself, and forms the core of Derrida's critique of Hegel as an ontologist (he will later in *Specters of Marx* warn against the ontologizing of Marx himself). We can now prematurely summarize:

Being is *Aufhebung*. *Aufhebung* is being, not as any determinate state nor even as the determinable totality of existents, but as “active” essence, essence productive of being as such. It [the feminine pronoun, which one assumes to refer back to *Aufhebung*] can therefore never be the *object* of any determinate question. We are perpetually referred back to it but this referral never refers to anything determinable. (*DG*, 43)

This is perhaps the strongest statement on the un- or non-intelligibility of *Aufhebung* (and thereby also of mediation): it should be noted, however, that it positions the critique within the logic of Essence rather than the logic of the Notion:

The spirit of Christianity is ... the revelation of that essentiality of essence which in general enables [us] to copulate in *is*, to say *is*. (*DG*, 67)

Even the seemingly primal metaphoricity of the Last Supper (“this *is* my body, this *is* my blood”) is beyond all metaphor (Hegel has in fact just compared it to the process of the exteriorization of the interior in language and in the sign as well):

This whole analogon cannot take form, cannot hold up; cannot be grasped, except by way of the category of categories. It sublates itself all the time. It is an *Aufhebung*. (*DG*, 81)

This is a serious reproach when one recalls Derrida's savage attack on the “category of categories” in his critique of Émile Benveniste; even more serious for us, when we recall the complacent service the “category” was called upon to do here in the previous section. Nor does it stop there: the ideologeme of life (discussed above) is also drawn into the process as yet another conceptual emanation of this undecidable ontological center which is the family (holy or not) and the dialectic itself.

The rest of the analysis is less interesting. Who are the enemies of the dialectic (besides Kant)? The Jews, for as a long paraphrase of Hegel's early Christianity text shows us (*DG*, 46–66), they are the people of *Verstand*, and “when you know life from the inside, you know that it is metaphoricity, living and infinite bond of everything thought through all its parts. The language of the Jews has no access to it” (*DG*, 86, 61). My own account of the baleful effects of *Verstand*, above, is thus little more than an extensive indulgence in unconscious anti-Semitism.

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But what is the purpose of the dialectic? What is its motivation, secret or not so secret? It is the "strangling" of singularity: an odd figure, surely derived from Hegel himself somewhere in a place Derrida has neglected to cite, as which the passage from the singular to the universal is over and over again characterized (*DG*, 17, 19, 21, 27, 123, 127–128, 272). I think that this is something a little more than the two standard positions against reason: the classic existential one, in which conceptualization is grasped as a kind of repression of a more authentic lived experience, and that of Bataille, more Nietzschean perhaps, in which hyperconscious intellectuals long to rid themselves of the tyranny of thought and to return to an "acephalic" primitive life. For both of these positions, Hegel is the very symbol of the threat philosophy poses to life itself (and also, for others, to action). It has always seemed to me that Derrida was far less concerned with experience as such than with normality and its oppressions on the one hand, and the internal inconsistencies of thought on the other. Still, the loss of singularity is a fundamental theme in *Glau*, along with the identity and internal lack of articulation of *Aufhebung*, and it is of no little interest to enumerate the kinds of singularities that for Derrida elude the operation of the system.

The brother-sister relationship, for openers: nothing is indeed more moving, in this often arid exegetical context, than the juxtaposition of Hegel's special relationship with his troubled sister, Christiane (who committed suicide a year after his death), and the force of that tragedy exemplary over all others for Hegel which was the *Antigone* of Sophocles, where at the very heart of the *Phenomenology* the demands of the family—and the woman—come into headlong conflict with those of the State. The family—nuclear or holy—can seemingly be *aufgehoben* into "civil society," and both thence into the State itself; yet as Derrida points out, the mechanisms of such *Aufhebungen* are not made clear, and these are among those mysterious transitions which raise questions about change itself, and whether *Aufhebung* is not mere repetition. But in the *Antigone*, even that transition, that peaceful dissolution and absorption, is blocked by the singularity of the brother-sister relationship. This blockage is precisely the *tragic*, for Hegel; although the possibility cannot be excluded that this tragic destruction of two families is also a ruse of reason and of history that wipes the slate clean for the next moment (that of civil society).

Two other features of Derrida's account need to be mentioned here: the first is the seeming imminence and omnipresence of a seething violence one would not have attributed to the philosopher of Absolute Spirit with its universal reconciliations (although, once again, the philosopher of the struggle to the death of Master and Slave to be is certainly a mere plausible opponent for projects like Kant's perpetual peace). The second is a feminist perspective in which the absence of women in these archetypal patriarchal families is precisely denounced and foregrounded by the centrality of Antigone

herself, who cannot be absorbed into the system. (There is also a remark in passing about the inassimilability of bastards, although Hegel's illegitimate son, who died as a mercenary in Java in the very year of Hegel's own death, does not come in for any further discussion.)

Along with women, the "powerless, all-powerful arm, woman's inalienable trump card: *irony*" (*DG*, 209). When one realizes that irony is the spiritual private property of Hegel's deadliest enemies, the Romantics and above all Friedrich Schlegel, and when one reads its denunciation in the closing pages of the *Aesthetics*, it is a cruel association, determining an interpretation that can cut both ways. The singularity of women is then part of a more general denunciation of the Schlegels and their doctrine of free love (Schlegel's "scandalous" novel *Lucinde*); or the denunciation of irony is of a piece with some deeper exclusion of the feminine itself. It scarcely matters; the figure of Antigone stands out singularly in either case.

The phenomenon of the fetish (according to Freud, the mother's missing penis) is perhaps also distantly related to these feminist absences, and would determine the peculiar place of Africa as a kind of zero degree of figuration in the *Philosophy of History*: an exclusion which can also mean that "Africa" or the religion of the fetish, which is not yet a religion in Hegelian terms, is also a singularity the system cannot absorb. "A certain undecideability of the fetish leaves us oscillating between a dialectic (of the undecideable and the dialectic) and an undecideability (between the dialectic and the undecideable)" (*DG*, 232). In another place, but more prospectively, Derrida expresses the magnificent speculation that Hegel "could not think or conceptualize the functioning machine as such."⁴ Perhaps these two unique blind spots, the fetish and the machine, somehow come together in the point at which Hegel is *aufgehoben* by Marx.

A final singularity is worth mentioning, for it refers us to Derrida's own thought and implicitly to at least its difference from, if not its superiority to, the Hegelian dialectic: this is the thought, if one can call it that, or, better still and more neutrally, the phenomenon, of the *trace*, that which is presence and absence altogether, but in some non-dialectical way, and which Absolute Spirit can seemingly not even perceive or register, let alone tolerate (*DG*, 240). But in that sense, in hindsight, we can here glimpse the first spectral glimmerings of *spectrality* itself as that will propose a radically different theory of past and future, and of history, than the dialectical one (see the discussion of *Specters of Marx* in the next chapter).

But we cannot conclude this section without a few remarks on a reading which, however deconstructive, is also from time to time patently interpretative. *Aufhebung* is the place of the familial and of ontology (in the form of

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris: Minuit, 1972, 126; available in English as *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983, 107.

the Hegelian essence): in it, the analysis of Christianity, that of the family, that of transition in general and the subsumption of the particular under the universal in particular, are all somehow "the same." *Aufhebung* is also, oddly, the place of castration, we are told at one point (DG, 52), and of *refoulement* (Freudian repression) in another (DG, 214). But now, clearly, we are dealing not so much with an attack on Hegel (it would be rather crude and unphilosophical to call *Glas* that) as with what is assuredly an attack on Lacan and psychoanalysis (see also "Le facteur de la vérité"⁵). The psychoanalytic hermeneutic is here being assimilated to the Hegelian one, and condemned as dialectical. Circumcision becomes a substitute for castration: and Lacanian castration is notoriously an *Aufhebung*, in which what is lost is really gained. The physical event does not happen as such, but the threat—the *Aufhebung* of physical into spiritual—allows the phallus to come into being as such, and with it the virile function; just as primal repression is the precondition for the psychic system to function in the first place. Derrida wishes to "deconstruct" this novel logic and to show that it is in fact little more than our old friend *Aufhebung* itself:

To sublimate a limit is to preserve it but to preserve (a limit) is here to lose it. To keep what is lost is to lack. The logic of *Aufhebung* turns at every instant around into its absolute other. Absolute appropriation is absolute expropriation. The onto-logical can always be reread or rewritten as a logic of loss or as one of unchecked expense [*dépens sans réserve*]. (DG, 188)

It is finally a critique of interpretation which has a distant family likeness to the Deleuze-Guattari denunciation of Freudianism in the *Anti-Oedipus*: you are saying that one thing is really secretly—essentially, to use the Hegelian term which is absolutely relevant here—something else. One thing has an unconscious meaning, which is other than itself. The hermeneutic process—changing the one thing into its more essential meaning—is prepared and indeed imperiously summoned by the very movement of dialectical *Aufhebung* itself, which ensures the preservation of the canceled meaning which is to be revealed by interpretation in the first place. The question of priorities—causes and effects, temporal precedence, ontological superiority, foundational primacy—is less important and indeed need not arise at all, in the kind of indistinct identification in which *Aufhebung* holds its twin distinct, related, and finally indistinguishable forms.

The question to be raised at this point is then the embarrassing one of the status of Derrida's own interpretations: for he makes them too, and it is hard to see why they would not fall under the same strictures. Thus Absolute Spirit is finally the Immaculate Conception:

⁵ "Le facteur de la vérité," in Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale*, Paris: Flammarion, 1980.

This determination of sexual difference into opposition, and as an opposition at work in the whole process of opposition (*Entgegensetzung*) in general, and of objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) and of representation (*Vorstellen*), entertains an essential relationship—historical and systematic—with the Immaculate Conception: if not with the dogma concerning Mary's birth, at least with its premise or conclusion, the virginity of the mother. Indispensable to Hegel's whole argument, to the speculative dialectic and to absolute idealism, it commands what we may call the *approach* to Absolute Knowledge. As soon as you transform difference into opposition, you cannot escape the phantasm ... of Immaculate Conception: which is to say a phantasm of the infinite mastery of both sides of the oppositional relationship. (DG, 250)

The language here would seem to suggest some "causal" priority of the binary opposition as such (something further developed in Deleuze, as we shall see below); but in fact there is no such priority; or rather the "beginning" of the process is itself a kind of mystery of birth and origins (in this case of the birth of philosophy itself):

How to reconcile these two axioms: philosophy only proceeds out of itself and yet she is the daughter of a need or an interest which are not yet themselves philosophy? In its own position, philosophy *presupposes*. It precedes itself and replaces itself in its own thesis. It comes before itself and substitutes itself for itself. (DG, 110)

Still, this content of the "philosopheme" cannot be articulated without affirming a certain kind of interpretation. The following passage sums up as well as any other Derrida's fundamental theses about the dialectic:

Ideality, the product of *Aufhebung*, is thus an onto-economic "concept." The *eidōs*, philosophy's general form, is properly familial. It produces itself as *oikos*: house, habitation, apartment, room, residence, temple, tomb, hive, possessions, family, race, etc. If there is a common same in all this, it is the guardianship over the "proper": which retains and inhibits, consigns absolute loss or consumes it only the better to watch it return into self, even as the repetition of death. Spirit is the other name of this repetition. (DG, 152)

The *propre* is, as is well known, Derrida's term (or one of them) for normativity in general, which seeks to rule everything from thoughts and genres to subjectivities and the State. But such identification is perhaps as Hegelian as the denunciation of Hegelianism itself: everyone complains of the difficulty of breaking with Hegel.

No choice is possible: whenever you try to speak *against* the transcendental, some matrix—striction itself [the strangulation of the concept]—constrains your

discourse and forces it to place the non-transcendental, the outside of the transcendental field, what is excluded, in the structuring position. The matrix in question constitutes the excluded as a transcendental of the transcendental itself, as a simili-transcendental, as transcendental contraband. (DG, 272)

He goes on to express the hope that this new contraband can be prevented from turning into a dialectical contradiction: it is the hope on which deconstruction itself is founded, yet it is ominous enough that we have to go through the entire Hegelian dialectic to reach it.

2.

That empty repetition with which Derrida seems to tax the dialectic, and which seems to be the object of a kind of psychic horror for him, will on the other hand be welcomed by Deleuze as positive theme, and even as a joyous and life-giving force. It is a repetition that comes from Kierkegaard rather than from Freud: the repetitions of everyday life, the construction and acquisition of habits as those lend existence its charm, its strangeness as well as its familiarity. Yet to this must also be added the joyous and manic repetitions of Nietzsche's Eternal Return; and finally even Freud can be reintegrated here, insofar as he was also the inventor of a specific and unique, incomparable drive (*Trieb*) pushing us to repeat, namely the famous Thanatos or death drive. Needless to say, none of this has anything in common with the otherwise deathly repetitions Derrida attributes to Hegel, but which Deleuze associates with Identity and representation.

Comparing, or even juxtaposing, the two is less a matter of philosophical positions and content—the post-Heideggerian philosopher, for example, contrasted with the neo-Nietzschean—as it does with something I would be tempted to call aesthetics or style, did this last not fatally evoke the sandbox of art and ludic trivialization of thinking itself. Better then to talk about modes of reading (like modes of performance) in which a Stravinsky, say, is contrasted with a Schoenberg, as both, with historical mixed feelings and a vital and creative anxiety of influence, contemplate Beethoven, perhaps.⁶ Derrida's replay of long sections of Hegel might well stand comparison with Stravinsky's classical borrowings and deformations; while Deleuze—but now it seems appropriate to compare whole modes of the fine arts themselves, rather than composers as such—deals with each concept as though it were a new kind of color and indeed a new kind of space (indeed, the two philosophers seem to stand to each other as anti-narrative versus a kind of non-figurative play with multiple narrative centers, respectively).

⁶ The allusion is to Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music*.

For such is Deleuze's own idea about how philosophers innovate; and nothing is more profound in him than precisely this modernism which imperiously demands sheer invention of the new, even in the treatment of classical philosophers (we need to deal with them by way of the *collage*, he says, urging us to produce estrangements of the past, "a philosophically bearded Hegel, a philosophically clean-shaven Marx"). Even the most intricate and allusive, scholastic, reasonings of this *doctorus subtilis* are in reality sketches of a whole new space, evoking a kind of cinematographic philosophizing; as opposed to the philosophical cinematography outlined in the film books. So representation as such—"infinite representation" is his term for Hegel's Absolute Spirit—brings a whole new baleful and enveloping magic spell along with it:

When representation finds the infinite in itself, it appears as orgiastic rather than organic representation: it discovers within itself tumult, disquiet, and passion beneath the apparent calm, the limits of the organized. It rediscovers the monster. At that point it is no longer a matter of that happy instant that would match the entry and exit of determination into the concept in general, a relative minimum or maximum, the puncture proximum and the punctum remotum. On the contrary the eye must be myopic, hypermetropic, in order for the concept to take all the moments upon itself: the concept is now the All, whether it extends its benediction to all the parties or on the contrary grants a sort of absolution to their scission and misery as those are reflected back onto it. The concept thereby follows and unites with determination from one end to another, in all its metamorphoses, and represents it as pure difference by delivering it over to a grounding or foundation [*fondement*] in terms of which henceforth it makes no difference whether we decide we are confronting a relative minimum or maximum, a large or a small, a beginning or an end, since all those pairs coincide in the foundation as one and the same "total" moment which is at one and the same time the swooning away of difference and its production, its disappearance as well as its appearance. (DR, 61–62; 42)

Shades of Polanski! This morbid eye of representation into which all the objects of the world are drawn, swollen and elongated, projecting their shapes and shadows against the concave closure of the *Begriff* itself, conveys the "sublime of the infinitely great" (DR, 65; 45) in Hegel from the inside, with all that inventive and intelligent sympathy Deleuze brings to philosophers of the past even as he reinvents their very physiognomies. It is a

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, Paris: PUF, 1968, 4; available in English as *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Future references to this work are denoted DR, followed by page references to the French and then the English edition, divided by a semicolon. Note that the English translations give here are the author's, not those of the Columbia edition.

problem for him, since this is not a sympathy everywhere desired, and an omnipresent appreciation of texts, works, auteurs, styles, concepts—unique in Deleuze—is incompatible with that combative and aggressive dualism to which he is also committed. Hegel cannot be patiently waited out, and expected to deconstruct himself; he must be classed right away among the apologists of the State rather than the fellow-travelers of the nomads; the flaws in the dialectic are no mere errors, they are dangerous powers and contagions that need to be dispelled and banished by the high purifying wind of the Eternal Return.

Representation, identity, difference—so many themes which one would be tempted to attribute to Deleuze and Derrida alike, along with their mutual loathing of normativity and the Law; both are indeed surely the philosophers of Difference par excellence, whatever the spelling—yet with this fundamental “difference” between them, namely that in the long run Deleuze is an ontologist. His is, to be sure, an ontology of difference rather than identity, but he is certainly willing to celebrate a kind of metaphysics: “It is always the differences that resemble each other, which are analogous, opposed, or identical: difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing” (DR, 80; 57).

In a metaphysical or ontological sense, then, Difference is here Being itself; and when one remembers that for Deleuze repetition is time, the title of his great book modulates into that of *Sein and Zeit* itself, albeit in a Gallic version, inspired by Bergson and Gabriel Tarde far more than by Husserl. It should at any rate be clear enough that nothing is further from the philosophical ethos of Derrida than ontological, let alone metaphysical, assertions or propositions (indeed, his principal objection to “Marxism” later on will be its ontologizing tendencies, that is to say, its temptation to turn itself into Philosophy as such, into a philosophical system).

Thus Deleuze’s work marks a convulsive, yet also witty, effort to estrange the conventional meaning of words, wresting “repetition” over and over again away from its normal sense of the boring and the same and conferring on it rather the experience of the singular over against the generality: “repetition is a kind of behavior, but with respect to something unique or singular, which has no likeness or equivalent” (DR, 7; 1), and this is precisely why it escapes the generality or universality of the substitutable, of exchange, of mere likeness, etc. How Time itself then emerges from the “hooked atoms” of repetition is one of the great stories *Difference and Repetition* has to tell.

As for difference, it is somehow the primal monster, the moment of contact with sheer being itself:

Instead of one thing that distinguishes itself from another thing, let’s imagine something which does distinguish itself—and yet what it distinguishes itself from

is not distinguished from it. Lightning for example distinguishes itself from the night sky, yet must somehow draw that sky along with it, as though it distinguished itself from something which is not distinct. It is as if the background rises to the surface, without ceasing to be a background. There’s something cruel and even monstrous on both sides, in this struggle against an elusive imperceptible adversary, where what is distinct is opposed to something that cannot be distinguished from it and which continues to join with what separates itself from it. Difference is this state of determination as unilateral distinction. (DR, 43; 28)

The “monster” of difference reminds one of that shapeless and terrifying Lacanian “Ding” or “chose” that Renata Salecl sees in the broken mirror in Hitchcock’s *Wrong Man*⁸: the freshness and horror of the noumenon suddenly tearing through the veils of appearance without warning. Deluzian modernism is then this keeping faith with the freshness and the horror of the New and of sheer difference.

For our purposes, however, what is crucial is the attempt to stage “difference” as a univocal term, without an opposite, and it is the fundamental operation here. Identity must be dethroned as that primary position which it has in all traditional philosophy from Aristotle to Hegel: that which must first be present in order for any difference from this identity to emerge. Deleuze credits Spinoza with this fundamental reversal, which posits

that identity is not first, that it does exist as a principle, but only as second principle, as one that is produced [*comme principe devenu*]; that it hovers around the Different, such is the nature of that Copernican revolution that opens up for difference the possibility of having its own concept, rather than maintaining it under the domination of a general concept already posited as identical. (DR, 59; 41)

Three other features then join “identity” as what must be avoided if we are to establish and grasp a concept of Difference in its own right: analogy, resemblance, and opposition (DR, 44–45; 29–30). It is clearly this last which will be crucial in undermining the dialectic and substituting a radically different logic in its place.

Difference must indeed be prevented at all costs from being “identified” with opposition: it is clear that as soon as we reach the latter, we are in the powerful grip of a Hegelian dialectic that risks taking us the whole way to the end of the *Logic* with it. And in order to avoid the subsumption of some proud and pagan difference under the yoke of a relationship which would turn it back into an identity at the stroke of a magic wand, we must also avoid something else, namely the insidious Hegelian negative, that power of

⁸ Renata Salecl, “The Right Man and the Wrong Woman” in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (but Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, London: Verso, 1992, 185–194.

negation which is for Hegel the very motor of history—the “labor and suffering of the negative”—and the heart of contradiction itself: Hegel’s ontological principle, so to speak, which is the primal force of the world itself. Everything in Deleuze’s argument depends on this possibility of quarantining the negative, suspending the energy of the *Logic* in some immense power outage, glimpsing the possibility of what is already here the untouched freshness of the schizophrenic universe.

For one brief moment we were able to enter this de jure schizophrenia which characterizes thought’s highest power, and which opens Being directly onto difference, scornfully bypassing all the mediations and reconciliations of the concept. (*DR*, 82; 58)

It is a standard gambit of the anti-dialectical, anti-Hegelian offensive: there is no negative in Nature, we are told, only sheer being (or beings).⁹ Negation is what human reality brings to a seething world of existents: the flaw in the diamond of Being, as Sartre puts it. And obviously any such move sends us back to Kant and disqualifies the whole Hegelian effort, save as a kind of literary exercise or a mystical indulgence.

I’m not sure that the argument can be either acknowledged or refuted at this level. In Hegel, as we have seen, Identity necessarily produces Difference out of itself, and Difference necessarily turns back into Identity the longer we stare at it. Negativity as such emerges from these metamorphoses of the categories themselves, which we witness helplessly as it were. They are not our doing, not merely subjective; and if they are in thought alone, then we need some other word for that as well, a characterization that does not imply individual consciousness. I will try to say in a moment why I think we can just as easily accept this movement of the negative as repudiate it.

But first one must notice the emergence of a supplementary level on which Deleuze wages the argument against the negative, and against opposition. I think we can grant that if this last is successful, the entire dialectic, mediation, and all the rest of it “fall to the ground,” as Hegel liked to say, since they all presuppose negation. But at this point, having judiciously measured out what is at stake, and astutely reckoned up the consequences, Deleuze changes the terrain of the argument and shifts to what may be called a narrative mode. This actually is a mode with which he reproached Plato—myth (*DR*, 86; 61), which of course means nothing more than narrative itself anyway, and with which Derrida had already reproached Hegel himself in *Glas*. But in Deleuze this kind of proto-narrative, a sample of which we have already examined in the magic bewitched universe of our very first quote above, and which is the very space of what we have elsewhere

⁹ The canonical reference here is to Kant’s 1763 essay on negative quantities.

called his dualism (see below), brings philosophical credentials with it, and gets baptized with the name of a genuine philosophe, or philosophical theme, and that is Representation. To be sure, with Heidegger, the problem of representation and representational thought became one of the most urgent philosophical issues of modernity, and no one can doubt its significance and relevance. What seems at least more questionable is the association, on which henceforth all of Deleuze’s arguments against Hegel will rest, of the categorical and logical issue (does difference really presuppose identity or not?) with representation, as such. For the argument against opposition and the negative is really meant to be an argument against representation, which is finally marked as wedded to mediation (*DR*, 16; 8) and also to unification around a center (*DR*, 79; 56) and finally to the theological (*DR*, 81; 58).

The new “mythic” turn of the argument will depend on this prior identification, which allows it to cast both Identity and Representation in the role of the evil sorcerer, and to shed a properly Nietzschean scorn on the adherents of this dialectic, who like Zarathustra’s ass carry the weight of order and ethics on their backs (the very meaning of *Aufheben* [*DR*, 75–76; 53–54]):

As though Difference were evil and had already become the negative, which can produce affirmation only by expiation, that is to say, by taking up the burden both of what has been negated and of negation itself. Always that old curse that echoes down from the heights of the identity principle: that alone can be saved which is not merely represented but achieves infinite representation as such (the concept or *Begriff*) and which conserves all its power of negation in order finally to deliver over difference to the identical. (*DR*, 76; 53)

Only the Eternal Return can save us from this strange limbo in which the souls of the misguided wander as though they had never even lived:

Everything negative, everything that denies and negates, all these lukewarm affirmations that carry the negative within themselves, these pale misbegotten Yeses that come out of the No, everything which is incapable of standing the test of the eternal return, all of that is to be negated. Even if the eternal return is a wheel, it must be endowed with a centrifugal power that expels even everything which “can” be negated and which cannot stand the test. Nietzsche spells out a truly light punishment for those who fail to “believe” in the eternal return: they will feel nothing and will have a merely ephemeral life! They will feel themselves and know themselves for what they are: mere epiphenomena; such will be their Absolute Knowledge. (*DR*, 77–78; 55)

Representational thought removes us from the immediacy, indeed the reality of “real life”: did not Hegel admit as much when he took immediacy as the very target of his own philosophizing (nor is it an accident that

Deleuze should wish to baptize his counterposition a "hyperempiricism," despite all the misunderstandings to which such a slogan is bound to lead! Yet Deleuze's position is a little more complicated than the previous existential anti-Hegelianisms we have passed in review: its Nietzscheanism is also a modernism, in which "existential experience" is celebrated, not because it is "lived," nor because it is "authentic," but rather because it is *new*. There is for example an aesthetic satisfaction in this celebration of contemplation (*DR*, 101ff; 70ff) which gives it a different kind of energy and joyousness than more morose existentialisms. Is it "merely" aesthetic? Can it accommodate a properly philosophical position as well (in any traditional sense), and how might its dualistic aggressivity be political as well? A digressive reflection on the tasks of the "philosophy of difference" is revealing in this respect, if not conclusive:

In general there are two ways of evoking "necessary destructions": that of the poet, who speaks in the name of a creative power capable of overthrowing all the orders and representations in order to affirm Difference as the condition of the permanent revolution of the eternal return; that of the politician, concerned at first to negate what "differs" in order to conserve or prolong an order already established in history or to establish a historical order which already entreats the world for the forms of its representation. (*DR*, 75; 53)

Now that we know the affective charge of these various words, it is clear that the poet carries the day against the statesman and that "philosophies" will have to pick their sides and take their chances.

Still, if representation as a force and a phenomenon turns out to be more deeply akin to the aesthetic than Deleuze might wish, the reproach itself becomes a double-edged sword: perhaps it is not enough to dispel the representational as such, if the non- or anti-representational results (whether in art or philosophy itself) remain aesthetic in their innermost content.

Deleuze has already anticipated other objections in a disarming way: the affirmation of Difference will seem to some a tepid pluralism or liberalism.

The greatest danger would be to fall into the representations of the "beautiful soul" [Hegel's and Goethe's *schöne Seele!*]: nothing but differences, reconcilable, confederative, far from bloody conflicts ... And the notion of the problem, which we will find linked to that of difference, seems also apt to feed the favorite states of mind of the beautiful soul: only problems and questions count ... (*DR*, 2; xx)

We have already touched on this second theme above: as for the first, one would be tempted to agree that "difference" is not necessarily "diversity" in the liberal pluralist sense. Yet this too has become a political issue today ("is identity politics a politics of difference?") and can perhaps not be dismissed so quickly either.

But my own provisional reaction to Deleuze's powerful critique would be a little different, and it would recall praxis to the scene (perhaps momentarily to replace Deleuze's odd self-characterization in terms of contemplation). In Hegel, and in particular in the *Logic*, the question of the priority of Identity over Difference (or vice versa) does not seem to be as important as the inevitability, once one stares at one of them long enough, of their transformation into each other. Priority is perhaps a metaphysical issue; the Difference hidden away within Identity, the Identity hidden away within Difference, is perhaps something else. What comes of this strange sea-change, along with provisional alternatives—such as sheer "diversity"—that fail to be satisfying for any length of time, is the eruption of Opposition; the way in which at length this restless alternation back and forth is seized and grasped as a new figure in its own right. Deleuze dwells at some length on the attractiveness, for us today, of a chaotic worldview of sheer seething differences, of a dissolution of forms and a rising up to the surface of the formless and indeterminable—

a distribution we have to call nomadic, a nomadic *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measurement. There, no careful sharing out of what is distributed, but rather the falling out of those who distribute themselves into an open, illimitable space without frontiers. Nothing is the right of anybody or belongs to anybody, everybody is rather strewn about, all over, in order to fill the greatest space possible. Even when we have to do with the gravest things in life, it seems a space of play, a rule of the game, as opposed to sedentary space and sedentary law (*nomos*). (*DR*, 54; 36)

That both these evocations, the depths swimming up to the surface but even more here, the reorientation of the metaphors around a space to be filled and colonized, are spatial in character will be significant later on.

For the moment, it seems appropriate to say that alongside the evocation of some morose and subjective eye that would reabsorb all this aleatory and joyous randomness into the "sedentary" of an inwardness and a collection (or in Hegel's case a re-collection), other figures are possible; and it may even be possible to return this particular ball to Deleuze himself on the ground that it is he who wanted to stage the matter in terms of contemplation in the first place. But supposing the dialectic were not at all contemplative or subjectivizing in that sense? Supposing that on the contrary the reorganization of identity and difference into opposition were something like an active intervention into the flux and very precisely a kind of praxis in which the cosmological matter were reorganized into great loose forces, in order ultimately to drive them forward into the revolutionary class of Contradiction itself?

The dualism of a worldview is after all a static matter which reforms itself and returns over and over again without any of the joyousness of the Eternal

Return recommended here. Contradiction on the other hand is a clash in historical time and the seizure of a unique historical instant, whatever its outcome. Finally, the sense of intervention and praxis is more energizing and enabling than a heady Nietzschean euphoria which waxes and wanes.

3.

In a final moment, it may be worthwhile returning to the question of subjectivity and self-consciousness in Hegel. We may already object (mildly) to the constitutive move whereby Hegel insists on the identity of system and subject, and insists on reestablishing his immense processual unities in the framework of something like a subjectivity. That the moments could be reabsorbed by subjectivity, and become rather different kinds of moments—this is not particularly objectionable, and is indeed part and parcel of the speculative gamble of so-called speculative thought itself. But that the Notion finally becomes something like a concrete individual consciousness as its highest form, and that our old friend “bourgeois individuality” here wins the day, or at least spells out the outer limits of this adventurous thought, will strike a post-individualist society as worse than humanist, and as an ideological containment that vitiates the entire dialectic for a generation in thrall to the “death of the subject” and to Foucault’s famous “effacement of the human face upon the sands of the sea.”

Once again, as always, it is Deleuze who sounds this alarm beat:

In the great Hegelian synthesis, it is the infinite which is reintroduced into the operation of the finite Ego. You may well wonder about the significance of such changes ... Unicity and the identity of the divine substance are [however] in truth the only guarantors of an Ego one and identical, and God remains as long as the Ego remains. A synthetic finite Ego and an analytic divine substance are one and the same. This is why the permutations of Man/God are so disappointing and get us nowhere. Nietzsche seems to have been the first to notice that the death of God only becomes really effective with the dissolution of the Ego. What happens then is a being which is predicated of differences neither in a substance nor in a subject: so many subterranean affirmations. (*DR*, 81; 58)

I think that the crucial feature of all these discussions, however, tends to turn on the nature of self-consciousness, always the lynchpin of any philosophy organized around the subject, and a kind of strange misnomer in its own right, since “consciousness” when it is human and worth talking about—unlike whatever we might want to attribute to animals and plants—is always defined as self-consciousness in the first place.

But what could self-consciousness be consciousness of? Have you not already guaranteed yourself some stability in the self and the ego by even

venturing such a slogan which gradually takes on the stability of a name and a reference? I’ve argued elsewhere¹⁰ that our current malaise with the very idea of self-consciousness (let alone the knee-jerk evocation of “reflexivity” at every turn in which anything like “modernity” needs to be characterized) is the symptom of a representational dilemma which it is best and most convenient to evoke by declaring that subjectivity cannot be represented at all in the first place, and therefore, that its ostensible definitions and descriptions are all so much figural machinery.

Hegel has several machines of this kind: reflection itself, as he often calls what is more loosely termed self-consciousness, is literally described in terms of mirrors and light¹¹ while the moment of self-consciousness is famously evoked by the clash of two consciousnesses (who will become the Master and the Slave). Neither of these figures has anything particularly mystical about them: they do not even seem to suggest that identificatory indifferenciation with which Derrida taxed *Aufhebung*. Nonetheless the language of interiorization and interiority is everywhere very strong indeed, and would seem to call for some kind of contemporary replacement.

No one has more suggestively projected new possibilities here than Michel Foucault, whose 1966 essay “La Pensée du dehors”¹² (its title and indeed its subject matter indebted to Maurice Blanchot) takes up the challenge of “interiorization” on its own terms and its own terrain by reversing them and proposing the formula of a kind of external thinking, a thought of the outside rather than the inside. Blanchot’s own approaches to this new concept are as always provisional and eclectic, and probably indebted to Levinas’ notion of the Other: however, as Blanchot’s language moves towards *le neutre*—the radically depersonalized—it loses these associations which are now wholly absent from Foucault’s theorization. The latter, rather, starts not with thinking but with language, and with the strange floating lack of context of first-person statements which, far from returning us to the warmth of interiority and subjectivity, rather make visible around them a kind of infinite void. Such utterances (in Blanchot they are Nietzsche’s fragments) are no longer the meaningful acts and intentions of persons but rather an “étalement du langage en son être brut, pure extériorité déployée” (*DE*, 519). It is this which marks the terrain and the undiscovered continent of a properly modernist literature (not Foucault’s language, but certainly Blanchot’s object of theorization):

¹⁰ In *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, London: Verso, 2002.

¹¹ See Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, par. 112, par. 163; and see for a comprehensive history of this doctrine, Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 518–539; published in English as “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside,” trans. Brian Massumi, in *Foucault/Blanchot*, New York: Zone, 1987. Future references to this work are denoted *DE*.

Literature is not language pulling back on itself to the point of a burning manifestation, but rather language as far as possible from itself; and if, in this setting "outside of itself," it unveils its own being, it is a clarity that suddenly reveals a gap rather than a reversion, a dispersal rather than a return of signs upon themselves. (DE, 520)

One here certainly recalls Hegel's obsessive counterformulation of the return of the categories on themselves or into themselves, and the generation of their being-for-self as a set of formalized climaxes. Here, to be sure, Foucault has literature in mind, and indeed he recites the great modernist litany, the French modernist canon, for which Blanchot more than anyone else was responsible: Sade (and Hölderlin, naturalized following Laplanche), Mallarmé, Bataille, Klossowski, and of course Blanchot himself (the *Tel quel* group will later on add Lautréamont). The thinkers of exteriority are not enumerated (one assumes Foucault counts himself among them), but their enemies in the "humanist" tradition are: most notably Kant and Hegel, and then the later thinkers of alienation. Yet of the fictional enactments of exteriority, Foucault has this to say:

Fiction thus consists not in making visible the invisible but in making us see just how invisible that invisibility of the visible really is. Whence its deeper kinship with space as such, which thus grasped is to fiction what the negative is to reflection (it being understood that dialectical negation is linked to the fable of time). (DE, 524)

The spatialization of thought: one does not prematurely wish to class Foucault among the postmodernists (his evocations of the dark powers of literature and language in *The Order of Things* are profoundly modernist), but there is certainly something as prophetic and annunciatory in this idea as he himself would have wished.

But are Kant and Hegel quite so old-fashioned as all that? Kant's notion that the subject is unavailable to consciousness, and is in fact a noumenon, a thing-in-itself like the deeper reality of the world or God, would seem very precisely to banish self-consciousness in the hackneyed sense of the doxa, and to impose something closer to a "thought of the outside": a kind of groping blind palpation of the forms of what gets thought inside in order, symptomally, in order to detect what might be its truer external shape. As for Hegel, did not Henri Lefebvre¹³ call for a kind of spatial dialectic more suited to our own time and needs than the temporal "fable" as which Foucault characterizes the *Logic's* great procession of the categories—a true theoria in the etymological sense? But what if the categories of the *Logic*

¹³ Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris: Anthropos, 1974, 382.

were already just this neutral thought of the outside for which Foucault calls? So many strange shapes that appear precisely in the kind of void Foucault evokes for language ... this is then to invoke a related conception of Deleuze, namely that of the "image of thought,"¹⁴ of which we have already seen that it can lodge and express itself in the strange new spaces and colors of the individual concepts. A little like the Lacanian *écoute*, this is an audition of the patient's speech in terms of its rhythms and its pauses, its sonority and timbre, its externality, rather than the conscious ideas the patient thinks he is trying to express. I think we need to entertain the possibility that Hegel's way with the categories is of this kind: a palpation, an audition, of the shape of the individual categories, as it were from the outside, a kind of outer edge in which thought is not expressed but described. This is how one of his listeners characterized his language:

I can only account for Hegel's cumbersome delivery by the conjecture that he thought in nouns, so that in the contemplation of an object its relationships appeared to him as so many shapes that interacted with each other and whose acts he first had to translate into words. Certain favorite constructions figured notably in this process, such as those imitated from the French ... As a consequence Hegel had to pause occasionally, in order not to write in a grammatically incorrect way. Not that he did not know the rules of grammar, but because he first had to translate the content of his thoughts, so that every utterance must have appeared to him as though in a foreign language.¹⁵

¹⁴ Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchhandlung, 1969 (1844), 361, quoted from Professor Sietze.